

# The Irish Catholic

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## Govt must examine State's role in abuse at schools 'in interest of justice'

Ruadhán Jones

The Government must expand any further inquiries into abuse at schools to include the Department of Education and the education system as a whole to achieve "justice for all" religious have warned.

The call comes as a scoping inquiry into historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders moves forward, led by senior counsel Mary O'Toole.

The inquiry has been criticised by abuse survivors and victims for failing to take into account historical instances of abuse in other settings, such as Church of Ireland and secular schools.

At a meeting between Ms O'Toole and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious in Ireland (AMRI), Sr Mary Hanrahan PBVM called on the Government to examine the State's role in historical abuse.

The AMRI vice-president said it is "in the interests of fairness and justice" for all to expand the remit of further inquiries.

"The remit of any further inquiry in this regard should be broad enough to examine the education system as a whole, including the Department of

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## Together Towards Elimination



Ireland is now on track to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040. January 22-28 marks Cervical Cancer Prevention Week. Photo: Maxwell Photography

## Report casts doubt on abortion review

Staff reporter

An Oireachtas report on the controversial review of abortion legislation shows TDs and Senators have doubts about how the review was conducted.

While a majority of Oireachtas Health Committee supported the review's proposals – including doing away with the three-day wait and eroding freedom of conscience – some raised concerns about its "substantial departure" from what the public voted for in the 2018 referendum.

Additionally, members expressed concern that research "was not conducted or used" to justify removing the 'three-day waiting period'.

The report notes that no "women who availed of that period and opted to bring their pregnancies to term" were consulted by those conducting the review.

These are "significant concessions and a major crawl back from the draft report" leaked to the media in November 2023, Pro Life Campaign spokesperson Eilis Mulroy told *The Irish Catholic*.

"Anyone paying attention" knows "just how one-sided and inadequate the entire Review process has become", she said.

She credited the changes to a "strong grassroots campaign" ongoing since last summer that has seen

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# Irish lawyer: Resurrected Finnish 'hate speech' trial should trouble Ireland

**Jason Osborne**

Following the news that the Finnish state prosecutor will appeal against the second unanimous court decision which exonerated an MP of "hate speech" allegations for sharing faith-based beliefs, an Irish lawyer has said that it shows a "liberal, European" country is capable of "targeting and prosecuting" people over widely-held Christian beliefs.

Former MP Päivi Räsänen was cleared on November 14 by the Helsinki Court of Appeals of hate speech charges she faced for expressing the

Christian view that marriage is only between a man and a woman.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Lorcan Price of Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) said that the ongoing state prosecution of Ms Rasanen should serve as a warning to Ireland as it considers hate speech legislation.

"If the ideological view in the prosecution office is that they want to get somebody, they'll get them, and they'll certainly commence a prosecution. So even if you are hopefully acquitted and found not guilty at an early stage, all of this takes time, money, incon-

venience and stress from the individual citizen who finds themselves at the receiving end of a criminal prosecution and it's no small thing," Mr Price said.

"The tone from the [Irish] Government now is that Ireland has a major hate speech problem and it's going to be something that they prioritise in terms of policing in the future.

"We can expect to see people arrested, investigated, charged, prosecuted for speech-related offences. For possession of controversial material and so on as the emphasis shifts towards policing this," he warned.

While a Finnish court's ruling is not binding on Irish courts, if the Finnish supreme court hears the case, it could prove "influential" in other jurisdictions, Mr Price said.

"It dangerously shows that you have a liberal, European country that's prepared to target and prosecute a publicly known Christian figure in that country for holding a belief that the vast majority of Christian denominations formally hold.

"If that's the case in Finland, why not in Denmark or the Netherlands or, indeed, in Ireland?"

## COMECE calls for EU Migration Pact safeguards

**Staff reporter**

A spokesperson for the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) has welcomed the

recently agreed EU Pact on Migration and Asylum but cautioned that there is room for improvement.

Speaking at a high-level meeting between the European Commission and religious leaders on the theme 'The European

Way of Life in times of instability,' January 18, Dutch Bishop Theodorus Hoogenboom described the pact as a "positive sign," adding that it "represents a milestone on the road to solidarity and responsibility for EU countries".

Bishop Hoogenboom identified however a number of "aspects that could be improved," such as the potential abuse of detention, the lack of means to minimise suffering and the absence of an effective right to appeal a negative decision at the border.

"As Pope Francis highlighted in his last Message for the Word Day

of Migrants and Refugees the decision to leave one's native land should be free, and nobody should be forced to leave one's home country," Bishop Hoogenboom said.

"But, at the same time, we must 'be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone', opening new safe and legal channels to regular migration. The respect of human dignity and the promotion of the common good, that includes solidarity and responsibility, must be the guiding principles of migration and asylum policies."

## Govt must examine State's role in abuse at schools 'in interest of justice'

» Continued from Page 1

Education," she said in introductory remarks to the meeting with Ms O'Toole in All Hallows on January 9.

"Just looking at sexual abuse in religious run schools will not give a comprehensive picture of the whole situation," said Sr Hanrahan.

The Government has previously been accused of taking a "sectarian path" by excluding non-Catholic schools from the inquiry.

Several TDs have raised the issue of non-Catholic schools being left out of the inquiry, while Dr Niall Meehan warned the Government has "excluded abuse in a non-Roman Catholic setting. They are deliberately setting out on a sectarian path and they are trying to hide that fact".

In her address, Sr Hanrahan urged religious and missionary orders to continue cooperating with the current inquiry "in the hope that it will be another important step towards healing and justice for people who were sexually abused in our schools".

She stressed that AMRI has advocated cooperation from the outset.

"It is a source of great pain and regret for all of us that young people have been harmed in the past in some schools under religious management and patronage," Sr Hanrahan said.

She continued: "Many sisters, brothers, priests and laypeople feel a sense of betrayal and shame in the face of such abuse. While today there are stringent safeguarding policies and procedures in place; we need to continue to ask how this abuse of power was allowed to occur?"

Once the scoping inquiry is complete, Ms O'Toole as chairperson will submit a report to the Minister for Education with recommendations on next steps.

Her work will be informed by reports and inputs from experts across a range of areas including child protection, restorative justice and survivor engagement.

"Engagement with survivors is central to the work of the scoping inquiry," said Sr Hanrahan.

## Report casts doubt on abortion review

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TDs and senators lobbied to "shelve the extreme report".

"The fact that the Health Committee, despite skewing heavily towards those who favour reduced restrictions on abortion, failed to unanimously sign-off on all these recommendations indicates that trust in the review is slipping," she said.

The changes indicate that by consistently engaging with politicians, the pro-life movement is "keeping the abortion issue on the agenda", she said.

"Given that 2024 is an election year... efforts from pro-life advocates will be more important than ever. With continued commitment and resolve, we will see positive change," Ms Mulroy said.

See P18 for more.

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# St Brigid comes home – Relics return to Kildare for the first time in a thousand years



A detail of a 16th Century painting by Baldassarre Peruzzi depicting Mary holding the child Jesus alongside St Brigid of Ireland is seen in the Church of St Mary of Peace in Rome. Photo: CNS/Justin McLellan

## Ruadhán Jones

Relics of St Brigid are to return to her native Co. Kildare for the first time in centuries to mark the 1,500th anniversary of her death.

The relics will return to Kildare on Sunday, January 28, starting with a procession from the Solas Bhríde Centre run by the Brigidine Sisters to St Brigid's Parish Church in Kildare Town.

Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty will celebrate Mass at 11am to welcome the return of the relics for the first time in almost a thousand years.

"It is very exciting," said Brigidine Sr Rita Minehan, whose

order takes inspiration from St Brigid, one of Ireland's three patron saints.

"What I think is really good about it, it's not just the sisters, the people want it," she told *The Irish Catholic*.

"Bring Brigid home," was the rallying cry she said. "Now she's coming home."

The relics have taken a long, winding route around Europe before returning for the 1,500th anniversary of her death in 524.

St Brigid's remains were initially buried in the monastic church she founded in Co. Kildare. However, fears of Viking raids and other violence prompted them to be moved.

They were housed in a secret location alongside St Patrick and St Columba in Downpatrick in the 9th Century, only to be lost for hundreds of years.

They were rediscovered in the 12th Century, but then destroyed almost 400 years later by Lord Leonard Grey, an appointee of King Henry VIII.

According to legend three Irish knights took a bone fragment of St Brigid's head to the small town of Lumiar in Portugal.

A part of the relics were returned to the Brigidine community in Tullow in the 1930s, but haven't been seen publicly since then – nor have they returned to Co. Kildare until now, thanks to the hard work of David Mongey, Chairman of Kildare tourism board, said Sr Rita Minehan.

# Emmy-winning actress thanks baby daughter for success

## Jason Osborne

Australian actress Sarah Snook took the opportunity upon winning an Emmy for her role as Shiv Roy, the lead actress in the popular series, *Succession*, to thank her baby daughter for the award.

Born just as the show's final season was airing, Ms Snook said that her then-unborn daughter's "proximity" gave her the strength to perform as she did.

"The biggest thank you... is to someone who won't understand anything that I'm saying at the moment, but I carried her with me in this last season. And really, it was she who carried me," Ms Snook told the audience.

"It's very easy to act



Australian actress Sarah Snook. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

when you're pregnant because you've got hormones raging. It was more that the proximity of her life growing inside me gave me the strength to do this and this performance, and I love you so much. And it's all for you from here on out. Thank you."

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# Ideology must not drive faith from public life – bishop

**Chai Brady**

There is a move in the western world to “decry” faith-based schools, despite Catholic schools being successful and inclusive, according to the Chair of the bishops’ Council for Education.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Bishop Tom Deenihan of Meath warned against a growing ideology that faith must be excluded from public life.

He said: “Faith provides a certain hope, and in so doing,

Faith also provides a degree of resilience and I think in western culture, not just in education, we have seen an ideology emerging that Faith must be excluded from public life, be it in education or any other sector.”

Regarding Catholic schools in particular, he insisted that “in western culture there is a move to decry Catholic or faith-based schools. But I think it’s important to bear in mind that our schools are oversubscribed, and those who we provide a service are

very happy with that service by and large.

“I think we’ve become used to a narrative in terms of defining inclusion as being anti-denominational, or anti-faith, but inclusion is much broader in terms of ethnicity, ability, faith, socio-economic, nationality and so on and so forth. Our Catholic schools are inclusive on all those criteria,” Bishop Deenihan said.

In a homily to launch Catholic Schools Week delivered in the Cathedral of Christ the King in

Mullingar, Co. Westmeath on Monday, Bishop Deenihan said that “Faith is too important for our Church and our students to be diluted by ideology and political correctness”.

The bishop said that nowadays there can be “confusion” about a Catholic school’s purpose, with some seeing it “as indoctrination”.

“A Catholic school, and by extension, a Catholic education, is about people. Students come from different backgrounds, with

different personalities and have different experiences but, like everyone else, are made in God’s image, Bishop Deenihan said, adding: “Our students need a vision and the reassurance of a God who loves them, they need a sense of a compassionate Church, they need a way of expressing their faith and they need hope for the future. They need a sense that we are born for more than what this life can offer. That is the importance of a faith-based education.”

## Prize-winning missionary never worried about security despite death threats

**Staff reporter**

Kenya-based Kiltegan missionary Fr Gabriel Dolan SPS who has risked his life to support the poor and vulnerable was awarded a 2023 Presidential Distinguished Service Award by President Michael D. Higgins last week.

Following the award, Fr Dolan told *The Irish Catholic* he was “honoured” and that he believes “it’s a recognition that the Church still has a contribution to make in development work, in human rights work... That resonates and it touches the lives of people, it brings recognition, not so much to me, but to that work that still needs to be done in our world”.

For more than 40 years, Fr Dolan has lived and worked as a missionary in Kenya. Originally from Co. Fermanagh, Fr Dolan was ordained in 1982 and appointed to the east-African country. He was posted first to the remote arid northern region of Turkana (including during the severe famine years of 1979-1981), later to the West Pokot region and then on to Mombasa where he has stayed since 2008.

Fr Dolan set up Haki Yetu (‘Our Rights’ in Swahili) in Mombasa, a human rights NGO that advocates for vulnerable communities and helps mobilise citizens to campaign on their own behalf for social justice and change. He served

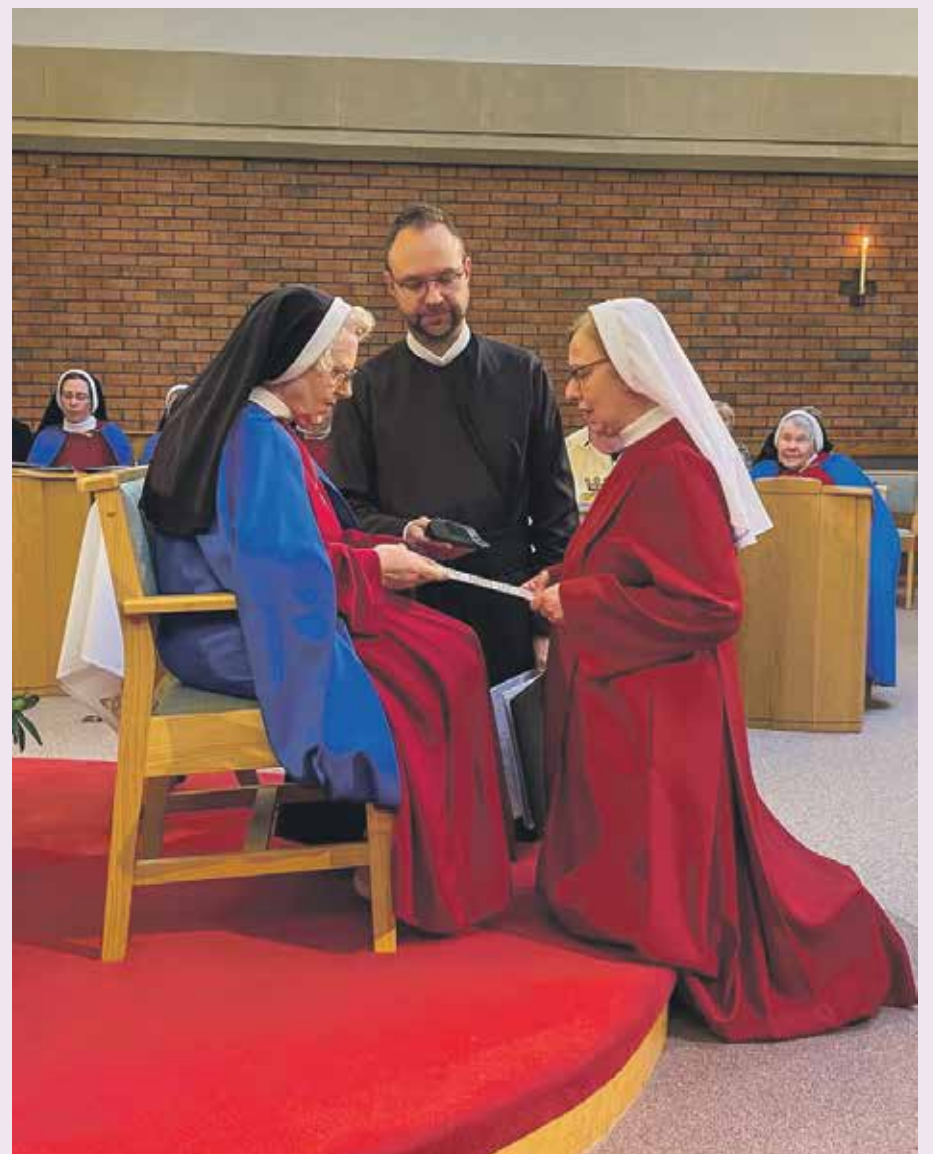
as Executive Director of Haki Yetu until the end of 2023. Supported by Misesan Cara since 2013, Haki Yetu has a built a strong reputation for defending vulnerable, landless people and victims of forced evictions and historical land injustices.

Asked about his security over the years, Fr Dolan said: “I’ve had them [death threats] in the past. And I think that people wouldn’t give you a threat anymore, they would just get it over with. So you have to have a light touch to this, I don’t stay awake worrying about my security, I never did, I might stay awake wondering what we should do next and thinking about what is the best strategy forward but I never worried.”



Fr Gabriel Dolan SPS is awarded a 2023 Presidential Distinguished Service Award by President Michael D. Higgins.

## ‘Into your hands...’



Sr Deirdra Mary makes her first profession to the Redemptoristine Sisters in Dublin, received by Prioress Sr Gabrielle, along with Fr Ryan Holovlasky CSsR who acted as master of ceremonies.

## Support Irish communities as well as refugees - Archbishop

**Staff reporter**

“As followers of Christ, we are called to speak up for the rights and dignity of asylum seekers and refugees ... they are not to be targeted or penalised, abused or frightened,” the Archbishop of

Dublin has said.

“In the last two years, this country and others have welcomed, vast numbers of people fleeing the cynical war in Ukraine, and other conflicts in so many troubled regions of the world.

“We are faced with respond-

ing to those who have come to seek sanctuary or build a new life among us,” he said in a recent homily.

“This is a challenge. It is a challenge which arises in the context of long-standing shortcomings in the provision of housing and other services for a

growing population” he said.

“We are called to speak up for the truth about migration and population change, not to deny that it is a serious challenge, but to rebut the misinformation that is spread to stir up suspicion and hatred.”

He said that solidarity must

also be given to Irish communities: “We are called to solidarity with our least fortunate brothers and sisters, to use our creativity, energy and resources to make life better. But we are also called to solidarity with those who are asked to accept into their community those who need shelter.”

# Why Paul went out of fashion (But why I think he's fascinating...)

**W**hat do the Scottish poet Robbie Burns and St Paul the Evangelist have in common? As I've only recently learned, they share January 25 as their special day.

The Scots eat haggis and drink whisky on 'Burns Night' to commemorate their national bard, who so memorably authored 'Auld Lang Syne', and 'To a Mouse'.

St Paul is liturgically honoured on June 29, with St Peter, but January 25 is marked as the feast of his conversion.

That amazing painting by Michelangelo da Caravaggio, *'The Conversion of St Paul on the Way to Damascus'* has truly earned its status as "iconic", and one of the most celebrated images of the art world. It vividly depicts Paul's fall from his horse as he sees a blinding light, and hears the voice of Jesus saying; "Saul, Saul – why persecutest thou me?"

## Conversion

This is how Christianity's most famous conversion came about, and "the road to Damascus" itself became a metaphor for a dramatic change of heart, as did the phrase "a Damascene conversion".

**“For now, we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known”**

**T**here's a row going on in England about whether cathedrals – which are hugely popular with tourists – should charge for entry. St Paul's Cathedral in London, so famously designed by Christopher Wren, charges £25 for an adult entry ticket. Great cathedrals need a lot of upkeep, so that's the argument for an entrance price.

A guide at York Minster cathedral, Graeme Robertson, feels more concerned with the attitude of the visiting public than with the entrance fee (£16 for non-residents of York.) One of the most frequent questions he hears from visitors is: "Is this place used for anything else?" They're astounded, he says, to discover that there are 1,600 religious services held each year – it's not just a museum.

By the way, sneaky tip: you can always enter any cathedral free of charge by stating that you have come to pray. But then, you really must kneel down and actually pray!



**Mary Kenny**

Saul, the persecutor of Christians, became Christianity's most ardent, and possibly most effective, evangelist.

Yet Paul has not had a good press in recent years. His views on women are considered to be disparaging, with his insistence that females cover their heads in church – and worse, obey their husbands.

**“Paul was a remarkable character, who, I believe, enabled Christianity to be universal and global, and open to all”**

He was a Hellenised Jew, and both traditions had a strong element of patriarchy. The Greeks never accepted women as full citizens.

He was also, quite evidently, opposed to any form of illicit sex – and was rather dismissive even of marital conjugality. He certainly thundered against fornication

and same-sex relationships. Paul is a tough sell for our time.

In the traditions of Peter and Paul, Peter is, naturally, seen as the 'Catholic' side of Christianity, while Paul seems better suited to the 'Protestant' side – with his emphasis on preaching 'The Word'.

Yet Paul was a remarkable character, who, I believe, enabled Christianity to be universal and global, and open to all.

## Wordsmith

And what draws me to St Paul was that he was evidently a brilliant writer and stunning wordsmith. A man who could write: "For now, we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known" is a poet and an artist. (I refer to the King James translation, being more poetic.)

Paul, who struggled with his "thorn in the flesh" – we never know what that was – had this in common with Robbie Burns: they won hearts and minds through the shining eloquence of words.

## Does China repent one-child policy?



Chinese president Xi Jinping kicks a Gaelic football as he visits the Croke Park in Dublin on February 19, 2012 – when he was still vice-president – to attend an exhibition of Gaelic football and hurling.

**T**he Chinese leader, Xi Jinping is reportedly dismayed at the news that the Chinese birthrate has suffered the most dramatic decline ever: the population has fallen by two million over the last year. Fertility now stands at 1.09 children per woman – well below replacement level. More people die in China than are born.

The Chinese care about trade and a declining birthrate means a slowdown of the economy (according to China expert James Pomeroy, of HSBC – that's the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank).

How sorrowful and bitter those Chinese mothers must feel who were forced into abortions and abandonment of infants because of the previous "one-child" Chinese state policy, enforced over a period of 40 years. And, indeed, often applauded in the West, notably by Planned Parenthood (it took the usually liberal New York Review of Books to criticise and reprimand western agencies

for approving this inhumane policy.)

The one-child rule was not only completely unethical, but it broke up families and caused enormous grief to women – 120,000 Chinese infant girls were adopted abroad because their natural mothers had secretly given birth, but

couldn't keep the babies.

Jung Chang's poignant autobiography *Wild Swans* puts it all in personal and family context.

Does the Chinese leadership now repent of this odious error? They're certainly worried about the decline in births they once advocated.

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# ‘Ambiguous’ durable relations clause leaves Govt ‘hostage’ to future warn legal experts

**Ruadhán Jones**

The proposed recognition of ‘durable relationships’ in the Constitution leaves the Government “hostage” to future generations as “no one can define” what the term means, legal experts have warned.

The comments come as Minister Roderic O’Gorman claimed that ‘throuples’ and polygamous relationships will not be granted legal protection if a March 8 referendum to change the definition of the family in

the Constitution passes.

“It’s a very big unknown, the idea of a durable relationship, no one can define it,” Dr Leonard Taylor, law lecturer at ATU Sligo, told *The Irish Catholic*.

He warned that trying to expand the definition of the family will “undermine the meaning of marriage itself” as a moral institution with substantial content.

“The Constitution is a place you highlight institutions that have gravity and value, and create this environment where they are fundamental

institutions and cornerstones to society,” Dr Taylor continued.

If marriage is just another durable relationship, “what are you saying to society? At a principles level it is very confusing and concerning”.

We are in a phase of “hyper-individualism”, he said, and the possibility of social norms of solidarity such as marriage being “undermined by this – that really worries me”.

Dr Conor Casey, senior lecturer in public law at University of Surrey School of Law, London, said he believes judges are unlikely to con-

sider themselves “ideological actors” when it comes to adjudicating on cases that hinge on defining ‘durable relationships’.

However, “When you put something in the Constitution, especially ambiguous wording, your hostage not to this generation of judges, but to future generations of judges,” Dr Casey warned.

Interpreting something ambiguous like durable relationships “gives a lot of discretion to the high and supreme courts”, he said.

However, judges will make their

decisions with “respectful consideration” for what the Oireachtas decides what durable relationship means in policy decisions around taxation, immigration and similar issues.

“Which then shifts the debate to the Oireachtas, the amendment may deflect what durable relationship means back to the parliament,” Dr Casey told this paper.

“We as a society will have to grapple with that again in different contexts... those are difficult questions that fall to the Oireachtas to decide in the first instance,” he said.

## Schools shouldn’t welcome wellbeing programmes that deny Catholic beliefs – theologian

**Staff reporter**

There is no place for wellbeing programmes that “deny” the Catholic Church’s unique understanding of humanity in Catholic schools, a major international conference attended by Ireland’s leading educators has heard.

Speaking at the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (GRACE) conference at the University of Notre Dame Australia in

Perth last week, Irish theologian Prof. Eamonn Conway, who gave the opening keynote lecture, said that what young people grapple with today is not so much fear of truth claims but rather fear that there may be no truth at all, and so, that their lives lack ultimate meaning and distinctive purpose.

There is no place in Catholic schools and colleges, Fr Conway said, for wellbeing programmes “that deny,

bracket or ignore the unique understanding of human flourishing that the Catholic intellectual tradition draws upon, or which fail to invite students and staff alike to consider Christ as ‘the way, the truth and the life.’”

The Irish delegation included Catholic teachers and principals from Ireland, North and South, as well as the CEOs and Board Chairs of the key management and trust bodies.



Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB greets Linda Rainsberry, PhD candidate at Mary Immaculate College, Maeve Mahon, Co-ordinator of Primary Education, Kildare and Leighlin, and Dr Marie Griffin Chair of the Catholic Educational Partnership.

## RTÉ fields article questioning Irish language’s religious roots

**Jason Osborne**

An article shared by RTÉ Brainstorm sparked controversy among some readers after it asked whether the religious nature of common Irish phrases will pose a problem in a multicultural, secular society.

The article by Dr Peter Weakliam of Fiontar and Scoil na Gaeilge at Dublin City University acknowledged the Catholic roots of common Irish phrases such as ‘Dia duit’

and ‘Dia linn’ that “give us an insight into the Christian worldview held by most Irish speakers in recent centuries”.

Some readers took issue with the suggestion that the religious nature of “common Irish phrases” might become unsuitable in a less Catholic Ireland.

“If you are wondering why there is a sudden push to remove Irish from schools, it’s here,” wrote one X user, Catholic Arena, with over 40,000 followers.

However, Dr Weakliam

writes that while some religious phrases may fall out of the Irish language over time due to “the preference of individual speakers to avoid religious language,” the effect of the English language on Irish will have a greater influence.

“The phrase ‘Dia duit’ is already less common than it once was, as many younger speakers prefer to use other greetings, such as ‘haigh,’ pronounced the same way as the English word ‘hi,’” Dr Weakliam writes.

## Prelate criticises Justice minister on family reunification policy

**Staff reporter**

Bishop Alan McGuckian of Raphoe wrote to Justice Minister Helen McEntee criticising policy that sees some immigrants unable to bring family members to Ireland as they earn less than €30,000.

People outside the European Economic Area do not have the same entitlements regarding bringing family to Ireland, with one of the conditions being the salary they earn.

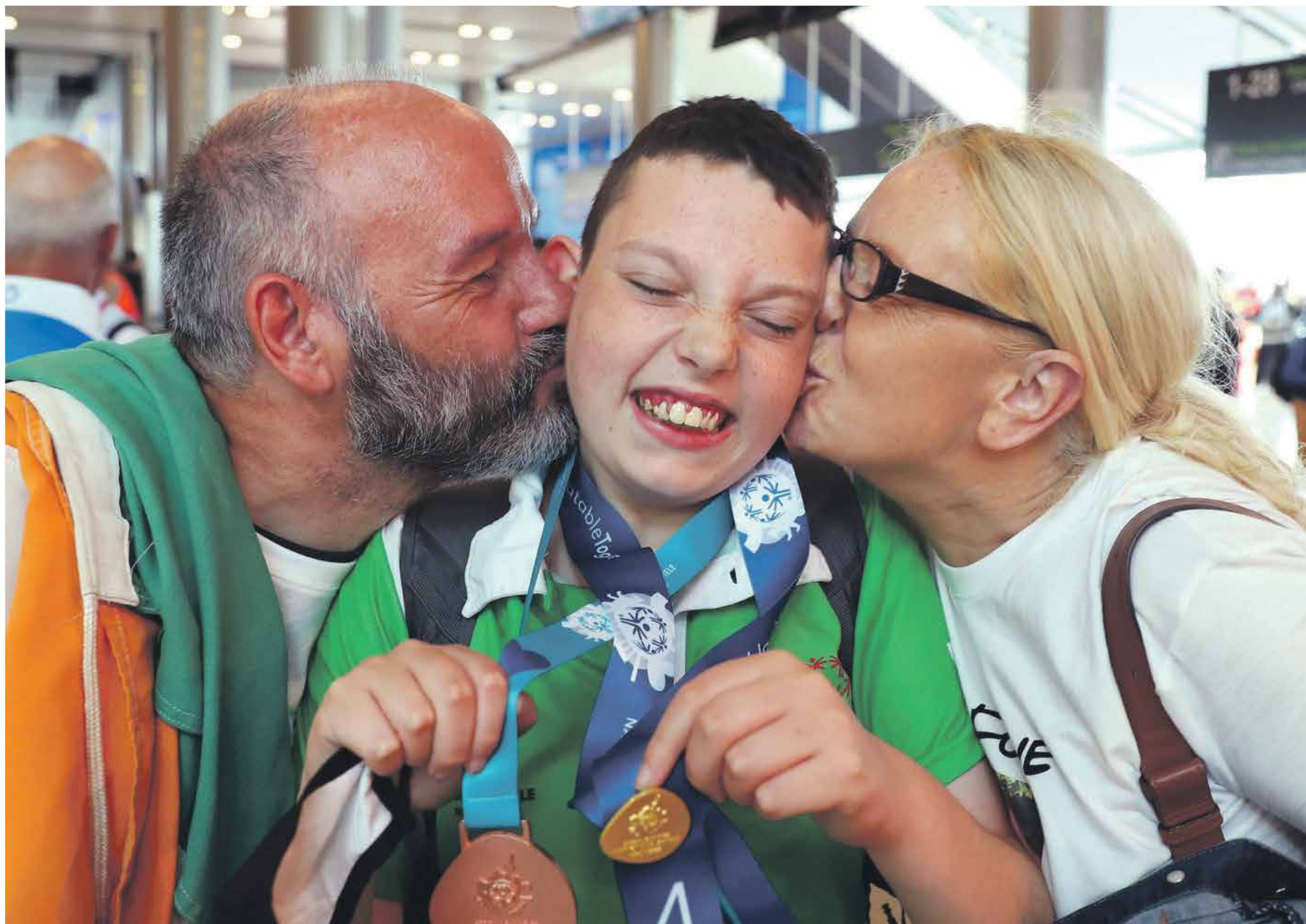
Immigrants on General Employment Permits have to wait 12 months before applying to bring their family, and must earn more than €30,000 to apply for their spouse to join them – this increases for each child the individual wants to bring.

In the letter delivered last month, Bishop McGuckian said to the minister that the bishops “believe it is wrong to delay or deny people the right to have their immediate family members with them, based

on their salary level”.

“Non-EU migrants are doing essential work, such as caring for older people and other critical jobs. They should be valued and treated with respect. We believe they deserve the right to have their immediate family with them here, as the family is foundational for the common good,” he said.

Bishop McGuckian declined an interview request about immigration when contacted by *The Irish Catholic*.



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# New Medical Council guide is 'deeply flawed' says Bishop

Staff reporter

"The Irish Medical Council has recently issued a new 9th edition of the *Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics*. This is a very important document for medical doctors, because it is against this code that their professional conduct and practice is measured. Unfortunately, there are "numerous defects" in the new edition of the guide", according to Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin,

chairperson of the bishops' Council for Life

"Towards the end of the section on 'End of Life Care' (no. 46), the previous (8th) edition (2016) states very clearly: 'You must not take part in the deliberate killing of a patient.' This statement has been dropped from the 9th edition," the bishop stated.

"I find myself wondering if this is an oversight, or is it the case that the Medical Council has now decided that it is acceptable for doctors to

take part in the deliberate killing of a patient? Even if assisted suicide were to be legalised, for example, that of itself would never make the killing of patients ethical."

The sections on Assisted Human Reproduction (47) and Abortion (48), which were in the 8th edition of the guide, have disappeared from the 9th edition.

The bishop said: "This would seem to suggest that the Medical Council does not see these very significant areas of activity as involv-

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

He continued: "Under the heading of *Conscientious Objection*, I note that the guide reflects recent legislation on abortion, in that it requires doctors to 'make such arrangements as may be necessary to enable the patient to obtain the required treat-

ment'. I'm not sure how it makes sense ethically to require a doctor to assist a patient to access a procedure which the doctor himself or herself, regards as unethical."

Bishop Doran warned that these matters do not only affect doctors, "They also impact the common good of our society by radically redefining what is 'good' for us all. I have written to the President of the Medical Council seeking clarification, but my letter has received neither a reply nor even an acknowledgement."

## Barrister: Religious groups may bear brunt of hate speech bill

Brandon Scott

Barrister Grace Sullivan has warned that the Government's proposed hate speech bill could leave religious groups and pro-life advocates open to accusations of hate speech. Ms Sullivan suggested that many won't fully grasp the far-reaching implications of the bill until it is passed into legislation and enforced in society.

Speaking with *The Sunday Independent*, Ms

Sullivan stressed that "one of the fundamental rights protected under the Irish Constitution is the right of the citizens to express freely their convictions and opinions. It is one of the foundations of a democratic society and it is in everyone's interests that it be preserved."

Calling the bill "restrictive and undemocratic", Ms Sullivan was fearful of the "problematic" nature of the proposed bill "due to its vague wording".

She warned that, under the proposed bill, it will be an offence to "incite hatred" against an individual or a group on account of "certain protected characteristics" - but "there is no clear definition of what 'inciting hatred' means".

Outlining where the bill could cause problems, Ms Sullivan said certain views on transgenderism could leave people open to accusations of hate speech.

"One of the protected characteristics in the bill

is 'gender' - and is defined in the legislation as 'the gender of a person or the gender which a person expresses as the person's preferred gender or with which the person identifies and includes transgender and a gender other than those of male and female'.

"One could conceive of disagreements with this very definition of gender," she said. "Certainly a diverse number of religious groups would disagree with this definition."

## Senator asks Govt why it's hiding information before referenda

Brandon Scott

Independent Senator Ronan Mullen has blasted Minister for Equality Roderic O'Gorman and his department for what he perceives is an unwillingness to disclose important information concerning the referenda in advance of it. Senator Mullen asserts that key insights from a wide-range of strands in society have not been released and lawmakers are suffering as a result.

Calling for greater transparency and the disclosure of the information, Senator Mullen addressed the Minister saying "there was plenty of time to do this right. Last February the Department of Equality opened consultations with the general public. It has hidden the

outcomes of those consultations from us. They were not even available to the library to help it prepare its digest on the bills".

Not only was the Department not disclosing the responses from the general public, according to Senator Mullen they were also refusing to make available specific recommendations from official state institutions and authorities as well.

"You spoke in the Dail of the advice you received from the Attorney General in the drawing up of the bills, will you share that with us or have you anything to hide? You've not made any commitment that any of these will be available before the referendum," he said.

## The Chosen comes to Irish cinemas February 1

Ruadhán Jones

Global sensation *The Chosen* is coming to Irish cinemas from February 1, with the first two episodes of season four set for the big screen.

More than 600 million people have watched the multi-series life of Christ and director Dallas Jenkins felt it would do fans a disservice if it didn't get big screen treatment.

"Every time we've dipped our toes in the theatrical waters, viewers have overwhelmingly told us they want more," he said.

"After seeing the season four episodes, we knew we'd be doing our fans a disservice if we denied them the chance to see them all on a big screen with others they can laugh and cry with," said *The Chosen's* creator and director.

The cast and crew turned out in their glad rags for a red carpet premiere on January 22.



Simon Zee (Alaa Safi), Jesus (Jonathan Roumie) and Simon Peter (Shahar Isaac) in season four of *The Chosen* releasing exclusively in theatres starting February 1. Photo: *The Chosen*/Mike Kubeisy

# Jesus was a refugee briefly, then he had a family home



Family is a key Catholic value, so why don't we hear more from the Church on family homes? writes **Michael Kelly**

**I** only met former Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald once in my life. It was in late 2007, and though out of office for more than 20 years at that stage, he swiftly proceeded to give me a stern lecture about how "the bishops" should speak out more in favour of the European Union. The Lisbon Treaty was due for a vote in only a few months, and he was anxious that the Church should be supportive.

I listened politely and smiled to myself at the thought that this was coming from the man who had led the so-called 'constitutional crusade' in the 1980s and consistently pleaded with the bishops not to speak out on controversial referenda on issues such as abortion and divorce.

The Church was indeed supportive of the treaty, but the referendum was defeated having to be re-run a year later to get the 'right' result. The old saying "the beatings will continue until morale improves" rings true.

But our politicians suffer from a very acute form of schizophrenia when it comes to the Church.

When, for example, the bishops spoke out in defence of the unborn then Communications Minister Pat Rabbitte was reaching for the smelling salts insisting he was "shocked" by the stance, as if the Church's position on abortion wasn't widely known.

## Defence

Now, the bishops are being encouraged to speak out in defence of the Government's broken asylum policy and ask their parishioners to assume that every newcomer to Ireland entering direct provision is fleeing war or persecution, when the reality is that many are economic migrants.

Don't get me wrong, I don't



begrudge anyone from poorer countries like Albania, Georgia and Morocco (whose king has a fortune estimated to be \$7.5 billion) wanting a better life for themselves, but Ireland is a small country and can't take on the ills of the world however much we might want to.

**“As the homelessness figures creep up month after month we hear the endless refrain from politicians that ‘this can’t be fixed overnight’”**

And it's wrong for bishops or others to try to use Church teaching to pretend that open borders and open arms are the only Catholic approach to mass immigration. Genuine asylum seekers deserve our absolute care and support, economic migrants entering the country illegally should be treated fairly and returned to their own country as quickly as possible. It is a basic principle of Catholic social teaching that countries have a right to defend their borders and prioritise their own citizens.

Let me be clear, I am not an 'Ireland is Full' zealot – we have one of the lowest population densities in Europe. But, our resources are over-stretched and we simply cannot sustain the level of inward immigration that we are currently seeing. We simply don't have enough

homes for people to live, and as the homelessness figures creep up month after month we hear the endless refrain from politicians that “this can't be fixed overnight”. Generations of Irish people have grown old listening to that mantra, and are as far away as ever from realising the dream of owning a home.

## Crisis

And the next big homelessness crisis will be the spectacle of people forced to rent reaching 65, retiring from work and being unable to pay the average Dublin rent of €2,385 on the state pension of €1,109 per month. Where will they go? There are tens of thousands of people in this predicament.

I was talking to a priest in the midlands recently whose parish is playing host to hundreds of Ukrainians fleeing the war. In fact, he told me the population of the parish has quadrupled – and yet there is still only one GP.

Tánaiste Micheál Martin was no doubt sincere when he told RTÉ Radio One at the weekend that the Government is “committed” to providing more nurses, doctors, teachers and gardaí to communities hosting large numbers of migrants. But, where is he going to get them? Each of those professions is facing an acute manpower shortage.

It was reported in one of the Sunday papers that Bishop of Raphoe Alan McGuckian SJ had written to Justice Minister Helen McEntee insisting that Government rules which require foreign workers to earn at least €30,000 before they can have a spouse join them in

This would inevitably increase homelessness and rough sleeping.

Of course, the ideal situation is for families to be together – it's a sad reflection on how globalisation has failed at a human level when Filipina women are forced to leave their homes and children to work as care assistants in Ireland sending every penny back home with little more than the occasional Face-Time or Zoom call for comfort.

What is Bishop McGuckian's answer to the plight of people who come to Ireland and find themselves too poor to have anything approaching a dignified life here? He wasn't available for comment when this paper called him.

## Compassionate

Everyone wants to be compassionate, but compassion also needs a reality check. Maybe Church leaders time could be usefully spent exploring in the public square some of the reasons contributing to a collapse in marriage and the birth rate

in Ireland.

I know close to a dozen young couples in Dublin who desperately want to get married and start a family, but they don't want to start that family in their childhood bedroom. The Church, evidently, has nothing to say to their situation.

A religious order in Dublin recently gifted land to the Islamic community for the establishment of a Muslim school, which is admirable. But, what about a religious order gifting land for homes to be built that would be sold directly to young couples like the ones I speak of?

When the Church speaks about family, it can't do so as a lofty concept or as some rarely-reached ideal. Family life is under serious threat for the very practical reason that families have nowhere to live. It would be good to see bishops more regularly highlighting this rather than merely rhyming off talking points from NGOs as if they are backbench TDs.

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# Government is weaponising ‘misinformation’



We have a Government that does not like public debate going out of their control, writes **David Quinn**

**T**here is misinformation, disinformation and one I would like to add to that list, namely under-information. All three of these things can badly distort the public's understanding of any given issue.

Imagine this as an Agatha Christie murder mystery. As first we think the culprit must be Person X. But that is because Person Y has been spreading lies about Person X. That is disinformation. The information is wrong, and deliberately so.

Another reason we might think Person X did it is because Person Z gave us wrong information. They believed what they told us is true, but nonetheless it is incorrect. This is misinformation.

A third reason we might think Person X is the guilty party is because we don't have all the facts, and that is under-information. It is only when we possess all relevant facts, free of misinformation and disinformation that we can arrive at the true picture of something.

The world is full of misinformation, disinformation and under-information and always has been. The ‘rumour mill’ wasn't invented yesterday, but the internet has meant that false information can spread very, very quickly and now the Government, indeed governments across the world, have declared war on false information.

## Myths

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has said that the Government needs to set the public straight on the immigration and asylum issues because too many ‘myths’ about them are in the ether. Over in Brussels, Ursula Von Der Leyen, the head of the European Commission, has announced that false information poses a greater threat to the global business community than war and climate change.

That is a big statement to make. The background is that elections to the European Parliament are coming up in June and the powers-that-be are terrified that malign powers like Russia will fill the internet with false



Former president Donald Trump, who popularised the phrase ‘fake news’ has been often accused of misinformation. Photo: OSV News/Reuters

information in order to confuse and anger voters and drive them into the arms of the populists and far-right.

This all sounds very noble and at first glance it is. Who can be against fighting false information? The trouble is that those making the loudest noise about the matter, including establishment politicians and establishment media are often highly selective about the sort of misinformation they target and can themselves woefully misinform, or under-inform, the public.

**“Covid-19 was something to be wary of, especially if you were elderly or had a bad underlying condition, but even young people were scared they were going to die if they caught it”**

For example, can it truthfully be said that the Government and the media, and indeed even some scientists, kept us properly informed about Covid-19? Were we instead unnecessarily frightened? Early on we were greeted by headlines forecasting that up to 85,000 of us might die of the disease.

But that was never going to happen. We already knew in the

very early stages of the pandemic from the experience on cruise liners like the Diamond Princess that the death toll would be much lower than this even if we did absolutely nothing to slow down the infection's spread.

Even months later we were still being told tens of thousands of us might die because of Covid-19. Was this not misinformation on a colossal scale that kept very many people frightened out of their wits? Yes, Covid-19 was something to be wary of, especially if you were elderly or had a bad underlying condition, but even young people were scared they were going to die if they caught it. Public worship, among other things, was banned for far too long.

## Trump

In the 2016 American president election, a file about Donald Trump called the Steele Dossier was widely publicised. This purported to show deep collusion between the Russian State and the Trump election campaign. There turned out to be no such collusion. The dossier was pure misinformation.

Then in the 2020 election campaign, a laptop showed up that belonged to Hunter Biden, the son of Joe that showed Hunter engaged in some questionable business and other practices. Almost all the media suppressed the story fearing it was misinformation, or even disinformation, but it was no such thing. It turned out that most of the media had suppressed a true story on the suspicion it was misinformation, but they were wrong. The public had been very badly served.

In Ireland a new media commis-

sion called Coimisiún na Meán has been established. Among its tasks will be combating false information and so on. But will it be even-handed in how it does this, or will it only look out for false information that threatens to undermine conventional narratives?

The Government says it will fight ‘misinformation’ during the forthcoming referendums on carers and extending the Constitutional definition of the family. But there is already misinformation coming from the Yes side. (A reminder; misinformation is simply wrong, but not deliberately so).

**“Children’s Minister, Roderic O’Gorman, said that a Yes vote would mean ‘a woman’s place is wherever she wants it to be’. But that is already the case with or without Article 41.2”**

For example, the head of the National Women's Council of Ireland in an article recently linked the provision in the Constitution which seeks to protect the mother in the home to the marriage bar.

She wrote: “It copper-fastened draconian policies such as the marriage bar, which exiled a whole generation of women from the professional, cultural and political fields.”

But any such linkage is false. That provision did not stop married women from working. The public service did have a marriage bar, but it had nothing to do with

Article 41.2, which is the relevant section of the Constitution.

Announcing the carers’ referendum last month, Children’s Minister, Roderic O’Gorman, said that a Yes vote would mean “a woman’s place is wherever she wants it to be.” But that is already the case with or without Article 41.2.

The Government is basically pretending that this is a referendum about ‘women in the home’, but really it is a referendum about whether or not we think mothers should be given certain protections so they are not forced out of the home by economic necessity.

## Debate

I think that while misinformation is a reality, the concept could easily be weaponised by the Government and used only against one side in any debate. In other words, it could easily be used to further suppress free expression.

It will be added to the upcoming hate speech legislation which can’t even define what ‘hate’ is, and the law against any form of pro-life presence within 100m of facilities that carry out abortions, even if the presence consists of people silently praying in the privacy of their own heads.

In short, we have a Government, and a political establishment more generally, that simply doesn’t like public debate going out of their control. They want to corral it and make sure it stays within certain narrow parameters set by them.

Yes, misinformation must be fought, but that cannot be done in a one-side way that in reality seriously curbs legitimate public debate.

**“While misinformation is a reality, the concept could easily be weaponised by the Government and used only against one side in any debate. In other words, it could easily be used to further suppress free expression”**

# Cardinal Fernandez and his creepy 'Kamasutra' book



Patricia Casey

**T**he sexual abuse of children by priests has been a huge stain on the life of the Catholic Church, particularly in Ireland, the United States and parts of Europe. It has damaged the wellbeing of its victims, leading some to take their own lives. It has ruined the reputation of Catholicism in Ireland and as a result we have shifted seismically from being overwhelmingly Catholic to now being a country that is utterly underwhelmed by that religion. Those of us who continue to try and live our lives as Catholic Christians are seen as an ageing, regressive minority cult, whose time is limited. The new vision is that as a nation, religious Ireland will be replaced by a secular, woke, progressive people that is indifferent, or even hostile, to religion and all its emblems.

Despite this gloomy backdrop, all of us hope that clerical sex abuse is something that has been rooted out and that any abusers, who emerge in the future will be dealt with

robustly, by the law. We have protections in place for vulnerable children and there are safeguarding persons appointed in every parish who can intervene if there is a suspicion of a priest behaving improperly. Unfortunately reports of historic abuse continue to emerge, from time to time but it seems, based on my professional experience, that the Bishops, priests and lay people of Ireland understand the perversity and evil of sexual abuse by clergy, and by anybody, irrespective of their occupation, sex or age.

## Abuse

The US Church too seems to have come to grips with clerical sexual abuse. It commissioned a survey by the John Jay University of Criminal Justice in New York, to identify the numbers of clerics these who were accused of child sexual abuse. While the study is now relatively old, in 2004 it identified 4% of priests between 1950 and 2002 as having been accused. Being accused of course does not mean guilty, as the late Cardinal Pell from Australia knew only too well. The numbers accused amounted to 4392 priests in the US from a total of 109,694 over that period. Over 1300 hundred clerics in Ireland have been accused with 82 convicted.

So priests, just like everybody else, must be extremely vigilant in not breaching any boundaries in their dealings

with their parishioners. Priests must also not give the impression of being prurient even though the Confessional is the place where this is most likely might be potentially a problem.

**“The most controversial part are the musings by a 16 year old girl which Fernandez claims were disclosed to him by her”**

A unique situation has just come to public attention in which the musings of a senior cleric were published in a book detailing the quasi-spiritual nature of sexual acts, a type of Catholic Kamasutra. The author is Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, of Argentina, a friend of Pope Francis. Fernandez has recently been appointed as Prefect for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. This is the role that Pope Benedict had when he was Cardinal Ratzinger. It was then called the Congregation for the Doctrine and Faith.

The book called *Mystical Passion, Spirituality and Sensuality* was published in 1999 in Mexico. It is very explicit in its description of sexual acts. Fernandez says he withdrew it from publica-

tion several years ago. It has now resurfaced. It discussed mystical organisms and the differences between men and women in their sexual responses. He says that these are “a kind of fulfilling orgasm in our relationship with God, .....that God touches the soul-corporeal centre of pleasure”. The most controversial part are the musings by a 16 year old girl which Fernandez claims were disclosed to him by her. This seems like New Age jargon rationalising sexual activity without restraint or limitation. He does not mention marriage in this book so it appears to be giving legitimacy to any type of sexual pleasure. He stands accused of sexualising spirituality by some commentators while others describe it/him as “weird” or “creepy”. In September another work of his *Heal Me With Your Mouth: Art of Kissing* also generated controversy and he defended himself claiming it had been mistranslated.

## Dubious

Pope Francis now sits beside a friend with a very dubious record of sexually graphic writings. In addition there are serious questions about his handling of a sexual abuse case in 2019 when he was bishop. He reportedly tried to protect the priest and refused to believe a number of accusers. After

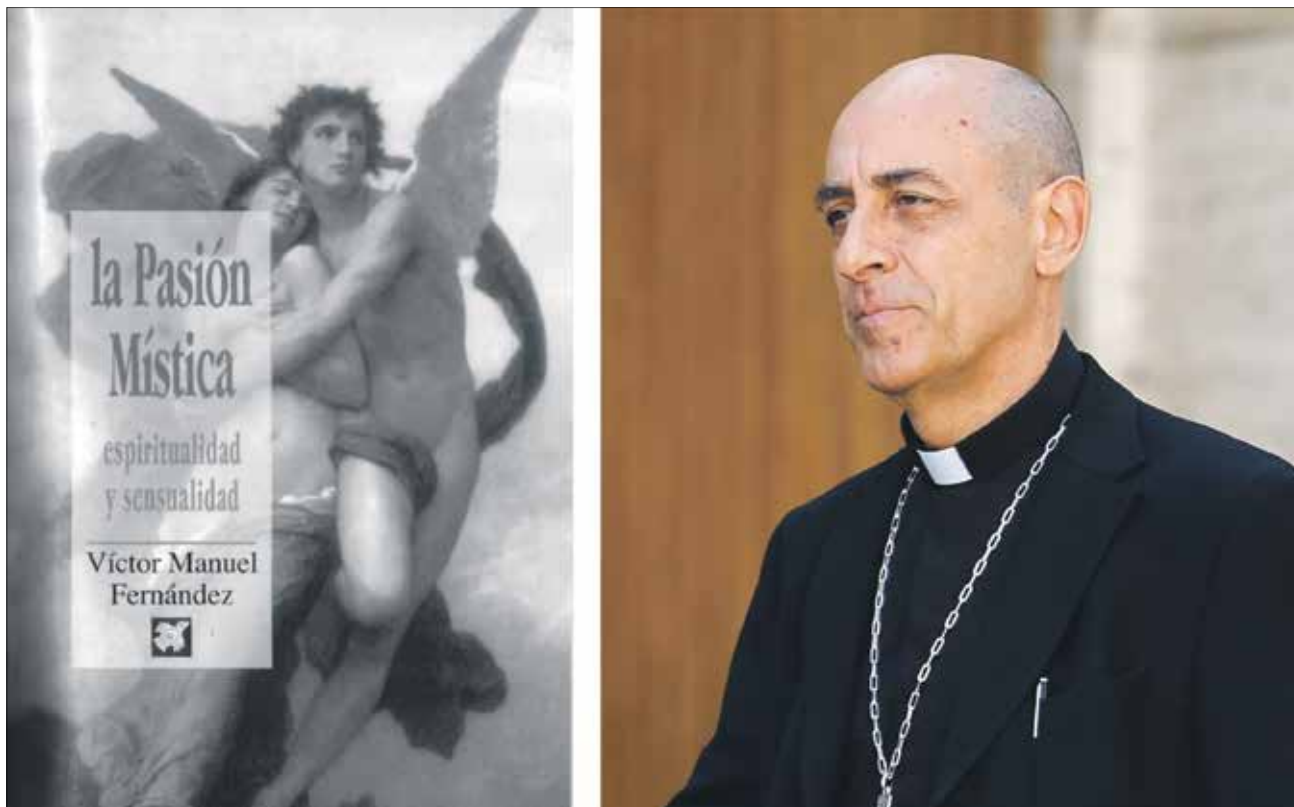
a judge agreed that the accused priest should be arrested, the priest ended his life by suicide. Fernandez said he would act differently now.

**“It also raises questions about Francis’ judgement and if he genuinely appreciates the seriousness of child sexual abuse for the victims and for the whole church”**

Yet, this was a very recent case (2019) and it raises questions about the extent to which the Catholic Church in some parts of the world does not still fully appreciate the danger

and impact of sexual abuse on children. Even more worrying is that Pope Francis appointed Fernandez to his current position. It also raises questions about Francis’ judgement and if he genuinely appreciates the seriousness of child sexual abuse for the victims and for the whole church. In convincing the faithful and the world that he is serious about this, he must be seen to have people at his side who are as determined as he is. So far, he has failed to impress and his friend Cardinal Fernandez is, to say the least, not convincing as a warrior in the fight against child abuse.

**i** Patricia Casey is Professor Emerita of Psychiatry at UCD and Consultant Psychiatrist in the Hermitage Clinic, Dublin.



The cover of “Mystical passion: Spirituality and Sensuality” and an image of Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, are pictured in a combination photo. Photo: OSV News photo/Twitter/CNS photo/Lola Gomez

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# Santo Nino procession brings faith to Dublin's streets

**Ruadhán Jones**

The Filipino community processed in style down Berkeley Road, Dublin, as they marked

the feast of Santo Nino on Sunday, January 21.

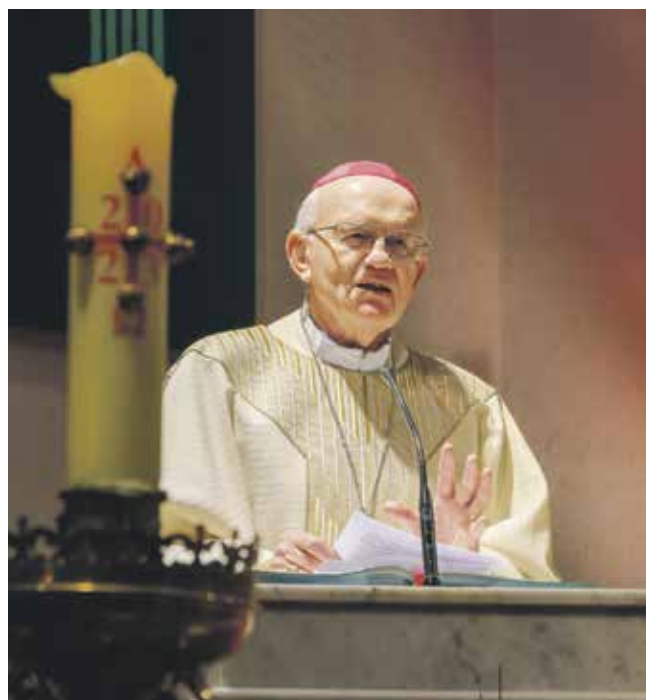
It was the 25th anniversary of the first celebration of the popular Filipino Catholic tradition, venerating an ancient

relic of the Christ Child widely venerated as miraculous.

The procession was followed by Mass at a packed out Berkely Road Church in St Joseph's parish.



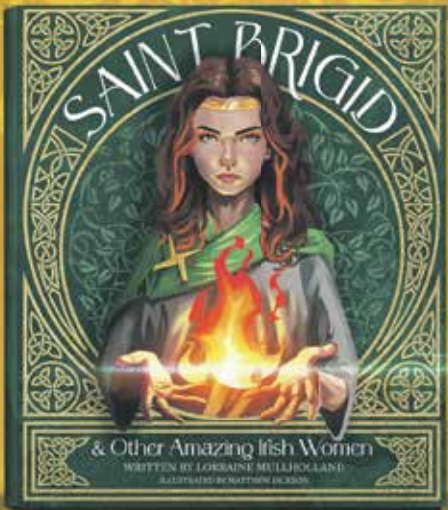
Photos: Juanito Paraguya





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# Out&About

## A student servant



**LIMERICK:** Frankie Naughton, a student at Mary Immaculate College, is wished a safe journey by Fr Des McAuliffe, parish priest of the Holy Rosary Parish, Ennis Road, where Frankie is Eucharistic Minister.



**CORK:** Wilton parishioners Sheila McCarthy and Mary O'Leary present a cheque for €4,300 to Karen O'Sullivan from Arc Cancer Support Centre in Cork. The money is the proceeds of the parish's Christmas Charity Appeal.



**WESTMEATH:** Fr Hayden Williams is pictured with Fr Finbarr, Fr Enobong and Albert Galea of Ceili Community after leading the communities retreat.

## IN SHORT

### More than 250,000 calls for help to SVP in 2023

Last year the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SVP) received just over a quarter of a million calls for help to its regional offices and local conferences throughout the country.

This was a 10% increase in the calls for help received in 2022, the charity revealed in a statement.

The bulk of the calls, just over 90,000 (36%), requested help with food.

Energy and utility bills was another area of need with almost 20,000 calls received, while another 33,000 calls were from people struggling with both food and energy

costs when they reached out to SVP for help.

Calls increased at specific times of the year with just over 34,000 from families who needed help at Christmas.

Back to school costs, third level costs, household goods, furniture, clothing, support with health related costs, issues with mortgages and rent or funeral expenses made up the majority of the remaining 77,000 calls.

In the region of 30,000 people sought SVP help for the first time in 2023.

Despite the high figures, SVP National President Rose McGowan said "Only a portion of people living in poverty and deprivation approach SVP for help and we know how hard it is to make that first call.

"The mental toll on people of ongoing

financial difficulties, poverty and lack of certainty about the future is to the forefront of our work in communities," she said.

### Galway Cathedral announces 40th annual novena

Galway Cathedral has announced the programme for its 40th annual novena, taking place February 5-13, on the theme 'But above all, do not lose hope'.

Headline speakers include Damien Richardson, who strives every day to overcome addiction, Bishop Michael Duignan, youth ministry and catechetics

expert Ciara Ferry and more.

It is planned to have three novena sessions on weekdays at 11am, 1.10pm and 7.30pm, a spokesperson for the cathedral said in a statement. Sunday will have three novena sessions at 10.30am, 12.30pm, 3pm and 6pm.

Each weekday evening there will be a guided, candlelit Holy Hour, at which people of all ages and faith-backgrounds will be made welcome.

"In a world grappling with the shadows of war and the weight of anxiety, our focus on hope is not just timely, but essential," said curate Fr John Gerard Acton.

"This theme invites us to look beyond the immediate challenges and to envision a future where peace and optimism prevail."

Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**DUBLIN:** Pictured are St Mary's Baldoye Deputy Principal John Moore, Rachel Flynn, RTÉ presenter Sophie Platt, Ayesha Ishtiaq, Ella Keyes, Leah Keyes, Niamh Nic Lochlainn, Isabel Duffy, Ella McCormac and Lauren Bannon during filming of *Operation Transformation*.



**DUBLIN:** St Mary's Baldoye students Ella Keyes and Leah Keyes speak with RTÉ's Sophie Platt as part of *Operation Transformation*, which filmed in the school's new home economics room.



**DONEGAL:** Local parishioner Breidge McLaughlin shows off and explains the crib exhibits in St Eunan's Church.



**DONEGAL:** Fr Eamonn Kelly is pictured with the 'Crib Exhibition' in St Eunan's Church, Raphoe, displaying more than 50 cribs from around the world.



**CORK:** Fifth and sixth class pupils chalk the door of Rath NS for the Feast of the Epiphany.



**WESTMEATH:** Attentive listening at a retreat at Ceili Community led by Fr Hayden Williams.

## ARMAGH

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

## BELFAST

Beginning experience programme of bereavement support offered in St Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Ave., Belfast on January 27. Booking essential, contact belfastbe@yahoo.com.

## CAVAN

Nine day novena to the Holy Face of Jesus starts on Sunday, February 4 and continues each morning until Monday, February 12.

## CLARE

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

## CORK

Alpha training days for parishes and families takes place in Blackrock Parish Centre on Saturday, January 27 at 10am and Clonakilty Parish Centre on Saturday, February 3. To register visit corkandross.org.

Connect 4, a faith gathering of 18- to 35-year-olds to take place in Devere Hall on February 18. Tickets are €10. To book tickets, visit Eventbrite.ie.

## DERRY

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

## DONEGAL

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

## DUBLIN

Teams of Our Lady to host online event in advance of St Valentine's Day for sacramentally married couples (and those engaged to be sacramentally married) on Tuesdays, January 30, February 6 and 13, from 8-9pm. Themes are: love – what's it all about; prayer and living your faith as spouses; and knowing each other.

## FERMANAGH

St Michael's Parish Enniskillen hosts a Divine Mercy Holy Hour every Sunday at 7pm.

## GALWAY

Galway cathedral novena to take place February 5 to 13 with guest speakers, Mass, prayer and social.

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

## KILKENNY

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

## LAOIS

The rosary will be prayed at the grotto of the Church of the Assumption at 8pm on the first Friday of every month. The Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayed at 3pm every Sunday in Portlaoise parish church.

## LEITRIM

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

## LOUTH

Photo exhibition marking 100th anniversary of the Medical Missionaries of Mary in MMM Motherhouse Auditorium, Drogheda, A92 XKX0, January 25-27.

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

The next Latin Mass will take place on Sunday, February 11, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, Knock Shrine, at 6pm.

## TYRONE

Eucharistic Adoration takes place St Luárán's, Dunganon on Monday and Wednesday 10.30am–5pm.

## WEXFORD

Gorey Parish archive photo exhibition to take place on January 26 at 7pm in the pastoral centre.

# Introducing euthanasia 'regressive' for disability rights



Euthanasia laws make people with disabilities feel like a burden, writes **Dualta Roughneen**

**I** was listening to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Suicide today, Tuesday, February 16. Peter Kearns, representing the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) was speaking about the negative implications for people with disabilities if the Government is to legislate for euthanasia, or 'assisted suicide/dying', depending on your semantic preferences.

Christian Blind Mission (CBM) Ireland is an international disability rights charity, committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and those at risk of disability, in low-income regions of the world.

I was thinking about what 'assisted dying', promoted in Ireland as a public good might mean for us.

Surely, if it is something that the Irish Government legislates for here as a 'good', it would be something that the Government ought to promote as part of its foreign relations.

## Universalisability

I was reminded of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, his principle of universalisability: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

It is, in a way, the philosopher's version of 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. You shouldn't will something for yourself that you wouldn't will for everyone.

If Ireland is to will euthanasia for itself, shouldn't it be something it wills for everyone else? And if we think it is good, shouldn't we be promoting it for others as well so they are not denied that same good?

What would it look like for CBM Ireland, as an organi-



Pope Francis blesses representatives from the Religious Association of Social and Health Institutes after a meeting at the Vatican. Photo: CNS

sation that is committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, to offer and promote the idea that euthanasia is a viable solution?

**“People with disabilities are forced to live on an income that is wholly inadequate to their needs and that the State is fully aware of the inadequacies”**

What it would mean for us to work in Kenya, or Zimbabwe, or Nigeria, in partnership with organisations of people with disabilities, to come offering solidarity and support, wrapped up with the parallel aim of convincing their governments to introduce assisted dying?

As Peter Kearns wisely points out to the Committee members, disabled people in Ireland feel that the priority now should be the right to live independent lives, and putting the supports in place to live quality lives rather

than been given the feeling that their lives are not worth living.

He noted that a State facilitated access to assisted suicide could lead disabled people where there is a lack of support to feel like a burden and that it could lead to a slippery slope under the subjective statement of 'dying with dignity'.

John Dolan, CEO of the Disability Federation of Ireland, at the same hearing, highlighted that people with disabilities are forced to live on an income that is wholly inadequate to their needs and that the State is fully aware of the inadequacies.

## Agenda

I think of the places we work and the struggles to put disability rights on the agenda, the struggle to have the voices of people with disabilities heard, the struggle in under-resourced settings to get budgets dedicated to disability investments, reasonable accommodation, accessibility in education – and I can see why offering the option to governments of an easy way out would be appealing to them.

I think of the families who

live day to day, struggling to put food on the table, who still find a way to look after their family members with disabilities.

**“Ireland has made great progress in terms of disability rights in recent decades”**

Some fight to get them the surgery they need with the little money they can find – and I think what an easy solution it would be to offer them the escape of assisted suicide.

I think of the people with disabilities who feel that they are a burden on their family and their community, watching them scrape the money together to make their lives a little more comfortable, and that they could relieve their family of that burden, with the law and society, organisations committed to their rights, telling them that this is a viable option.

Ireland has made great progress in terms of disability rights in recent decades. We have moved from a

medical model of disability to a social model, recognising that society has an obligation, both moral and now in law through signing and ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities, yet we can still do more.

We can afford to do more yet we are looking at the option that would be regressive towards disability rights.

We would be saying, you are a burden, accommodation is costly, accessibility is costly, it takes money, time and effort – you can spare us that.

## Africa

In places in Africa, relatively speaking, the burdens are even greater. Resources are less and the costs of wheelchairs, the costs of inclusive education, the costs of eye surgery, and far more prohibitive for society. Do we say to people with disabilities in Africa: 'here is an option for you? Take the burden off your family, off your society that is trying to progress?'

Does that feel right? We may wrap it up in the language of choice. But how

free is that choice going to be when it is influenced by the knowledge that your reasonable accommodation is in competition with your sister's need for a nutritious meal?

It doesn't sound so much of a choice when it is framed like that.

Yet, if we are to will the 'choice' for people in Ireland ought, if we are to adhere to Kant's categorical imperative, will the choice for people the world over?

Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, where Article 10 was inserted – with much lobbying from the Vatican – to ensure the effective enjoyment of the right to life for people with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

Being subject to inevitable undue coercion – whether intended or not, whether overt or subtle – due to their apparent burdensome lives is going to challenge that equal enjoyment of their right to life.

**❗ Dualta Roughneen is the CEO of CBM Ireland, an international disability rights organisation.**

# Irish electorate are denied any meaningful political choice



Rory Fitzgerald

**I**rish citizens get a vote, but do we really get a choice? On many key issues, Ireland's political parties are politically indistinguishable. Policy options that are considered perfectly normal in most Western states are deemed taboo in Ireland, and are not even discussed. The Irish people's trust in politicians and the media is plummeting new lows. We need to now consider the troubling reality that Irish democracy is now barely functional.

Ireland's new censorship regime and the growing ideological gulf between the Irish people and their government is discussed internationally. Yet in Ireland, most of the media simply refuses to discuss such issues in clear terms. Free debate is fundamental to democracy, without it, free elections which offer diverse policy options are impossible.

## Regime

While a nod-and-wink censorship regime has long prevailed in the Irish media as regards certain hot topics, Ireland's government is now becoming formally authoritarian, with legislation that would criminalise certain opinions, and even the possessing of material that states certain opinions on your own private device in your own home. The Gardaí can enter your home and demand your pin number or face two years in jail. This is all clearly antithetical to democracy and liberty.

In Ireland, come election time, none of the main political parties will offer a platform which will roll back such censorship. None will accord with the basic desires of the majority of the people on issues like sovereignty, housing or immigration. Nor will the media even air certain policy proposals which are commonly discussed elsewhere, but which are bizarrely deemed taboo in Ireland. It is therefore becoming impossible for the Irish people to democratically achieve a meaningful change of political direction. On certain



issues, there is a *de facto* political and media cartel in operation. Only some constituencies will have the opportunity to vote for the few dissenting independents, but the Irish people as a whole will have no such opportunity - unless a truly national dissenting political party is suddenly formed, but that could take decades.

**“The current political and media consensus is so narrow, and so strong, that the electorate is effectively denied any meaningful political choice”**

Even such a party would be largely powerless, since EU law now stands supreme over Irish law. The Irish people, with a some two percent of the EU's population, have little meaningful democratic control over the laws made by the EU. The Irish people's democratic control over their own state has been markedly diminished through an obsequious Irish political deference to EU and international law.

The deficiencies in Irish democracy stem primarily from the lack of any mean-

ingful and balanced media discussion of policies which are perfectly mainstream internationally. The main parties then follow this very narrowly delineated media-generated consensus and do not offer a sufficiently broad range of political options come election time.

Most Irish people would like lower taxes, more control over who enters Ireland, and in what numbers, and more control over their own laws, seas and agricultural and taxation policies. However, the current political and media consensus is so narrow, and so strong, that the electorate is effectively denied any meaningful political choice on these fundamental matters.

## Immigration

Immigration is one currently hot political topic where open political debate and democratic choice is almost completely circumscribed. Instead of engaging in debate, the political and media class have taken to demonising ordinary Irish people who have concerns about migration and fraud in the asylum system.

Polling shows that 75% of the Irish people believe asylum numbers are too high and 73% believe that immigration is too high. Therefore, by definition,

such concerns are in fact normal and mainstream and not “far right”. The vast majority of Irish people have perfectly reasonable and rational concerns, but their own government accuses 75% of the Irish people of being extremists or far-right.

**“Minority interests often seem to have more influence than those of the majority, which is precisely contrary to democratic principles**

What is extreme is the idea that nobody should be allowed to raise concerns about fraud, people trafficking, or criminals entering the country without papers. Yet that radical position is piously advocated by virtually all Irish politicians and media commentators - even though arriving without documents, or giving false details on arrival, are actually crimes in Irish law.

In Ireland, niche political parties such as the Greens seem to be perennially in government, no matter who is in power. Again, no matter who is in power,

the Irish state funds a vast conglomeration of NGOs with niche interests, who wield an outsized influence. Minority interests often seem to have more influence than those of the majority, which is precisely contrary to democratic principles.

## Bizarre

This government's response to genuine concerns about its more bizarre laws and policies has been to threaten dissenters - which are the majority of the population, on issues such as migration and transgender self-identification - with prosecution for hate speech.

Soon you could be looking at jail if you dare to say that a man who thinks he is a woman, is in fact a man. Only in totalitarian societies are people criminalised for speaking basic truths. Only in totalitarian societies is reality twisted and free speech suppressed in such perverse ways. These are the dark realities now facing Irish citizens under this present government.

Such radical divides between the ordinary people and their governing class on matters of basic reality are rare. They are unprecedented in post-independence Ireland. I believe this divide, and this government's totalitarian

responses to criticism, are becoming truly dangerous.

There is some hope in that the government's false narratives are beginning to fall apart, thanks to some dissenting publications and social media. Some opposition is arising within the establishment political parties at local government level as elections approach. Mayo county council recently voted to cease cooperation with the national government on asylum accommodation.

**“The Irish people's consent to being governed by the deluded is waning fast”**

Other western governments have no problem understanding their primary duty to their own citizens, and the laws of supply and demand. Australia's left of centre government recently pledged to halve immigration within two years to reduce pressure on housing and services.

The Irish people's consent to being governed by the deluded is waning fast. As this chasm widens, Ireland's democracy risks breaking apart at the seams. Something has got to give.

# Oireachtas health committee casts doubts on Abortion Review



Doubts from members of the Oireachtas means Abortion Review recommendations face obstacles, writes **Eilís Mulroy**

**I**t's hugely significant that members of the Oireachtas Health Committee have expressed doubts about the content of the Three Year Review Report on Ireland's abortion law.

After the Review report last year recommended wide-ranging changes to the abortion legislation, the Health Committee was tasked with considering its proposals and making a recommendation to Government on what should come next.

To date, the Review has been highly choreographed and has gone largely unscrutinised. The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, appointed a barrister – Marie O'Shea – to chair the Review in 2022.

## The report

Her report recommended removing the life-saving three-day waiting period, eroding freedom of conscience for healthcare workers, and removing criminal sanctions from medical practitioners thereby allowing them to operate outside the law with impunity.

The fact that the Health Committee, despite skewing heavily towards those who favour reduced restrictions on abortion, failed to unanimously sign-off on all these recommendations indicates that trust in the Review is slipping.

The recently issued official report from the Health Committee noted that some members were concerned that research was "not conducted or used" to justify removing the three-day waiting period.

The same report further noted that members felt the Review's recommendations "entail a substantial depar-



ture from the proposals presented to the electorate before the May 2018 referendum".

**“Asked by Peadar Tóibín if she had met with any woman who, after the three-day waiting period, decided to keep her pregnancy, Ms O'Shea answered that she had not”**

These are significant concessions and a major crawl back from the draft report seen by *The Irish Times* (November 22, 2023) and suggested that the Health Committee would uncritically greenlight all the Review's proposals.

Why did some members of the Health Committee feel so strongly that they included this critical section in the official report?

One possibility is that the appearances of the chairperson and her team of researchers before the Health Committee, on two occasions, backfired.

Ms O'Shea, accompanied

by an academic from Trinity College, was present at a meeting of May 31, 2023 to discuss her report.

## Discrimination

In reply to a question from Michael McNamara on whether it would be appropriate to essentially discriminate against doctors in the hiring process for the Irish healthcare system who were unprepared to perform abortions, Marie O'Shea said candidly it was appropriate "if you have to meet the needs of the service."

In the same meeting, when asked by Peadar Tóibín if she had met with any woman who, after the three-day waiting period, decided to keep her pregnancy, Ms O'Shea answered that she had not.

This was a startling admission and a very revealing moment that brought home to anyone paying attention just how one-sided and inadequate the entire Review process had become.

She also failed to engage with data provided by the HSE showing that the annual number of first consultation abortion appointments far outweighs the annually

reported abortion numbers (over a thousand annually).

**“To imply that Ireland is somehow ‘out of step’ with the rest of the world in this regard amounts to misinformation”**

On October 18, the chairperson again appeared before the committee. In the course of answering a sympathetic question from Senator Martin Conway, he asked whether there was any jurisdiction in the world beside Ireland which mandates a three-day waiting period for a "medical procedure". Her response was: "Not to my knowledge, no."

To imply that Ireland is somehow "out of step" with the rest of the world in this regard amounts to misinformation. Scores of jurisdictions mandate a waiting period, some such as Italy and Belgium prescribe a 7- and 6-day waiting period respectively.

Some politicians, even those who voted yes and persuaded their constitu-

ents to do likewise, have likely concluded that what they sold to the electorate is very different from what has materialised: massive abortion numbers (an estimated 34,000 by mid-2023), misdiagnoses, evidence of babies born alive after failed abortions and much more.

Politicians, including those on the Health Committee, are responsible to their constituents. By contrast, the shapers behind the Review are unelected and unaccountable.

## Extreme changes

If the very same Taoiseach who oversaw the May 2018 referendum were to enable extreme changes to be made to the abortion legislation just five years after the contentious referendum, it would represent a severe democratic deficit.

Even if there were a change of government, it would still be unjustifiable to radically expand what is already an extreme and controversial abortion law.

Since last summer, a strong grassroots campaign has seen people across the country lobby their TDs

and Senators to shelve the extreme Three-Year Review report.

**“The final report will hopefully cast serious doubts on the abortion Review's future”**

These important changes to the versions of the Oireachtas Health Committee's report are an indication that the pro-life movement, through individuals communicating with the politicians via visits, telephone calls or emails and keeping the abortion issue on the agenda has borne fruit.

The final report will hopefully cast serious doubts on the abortion Review's future.

Given that 2024 is an election year (with local and European elections in June, with the possibility of a general election), efforts from pro-life advocates will be more important than ever. With continued commitment and resolve, we will see positive change.

**✉ Eilís Mulroy is Chief Executive Officer and Spokesperson for the Pro Life Campaign**

# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE UISG, IRISH SISTER MARY T BARRON

HOW SYNODALITY IS A  
RENEWED CALL TO HOPE

PAGES 20-21

## DEATH IN VENICE

PENELOPE MIDDELBOE  
HAS AN UNEXPECTED  
ENCOUNTER WITH THE  
MAGIC OF VENICE AND  
CHRIST'S VIOLENT DEATH

PAGE 22

## Church in Ireland calls on Church organisations to assist faith development

**T**he Irish Synodal Pathway Steering Committee has urged Church organisations to become involved in the faith development of Catholics and explore what they might have to offer in terms of training and skills development in the future.

The call forms part of the recommendations submitted by the Steering Committee in its latest report ‘What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?’. The report acknowledges that there is a “growing appetite for faith development that has been emerging from the synodal process” and recommends that the Church maximise the use of its services in order to cater to this demand – thereby relieving some of the strain on the parish system.

Other recommendations included in the report cen-

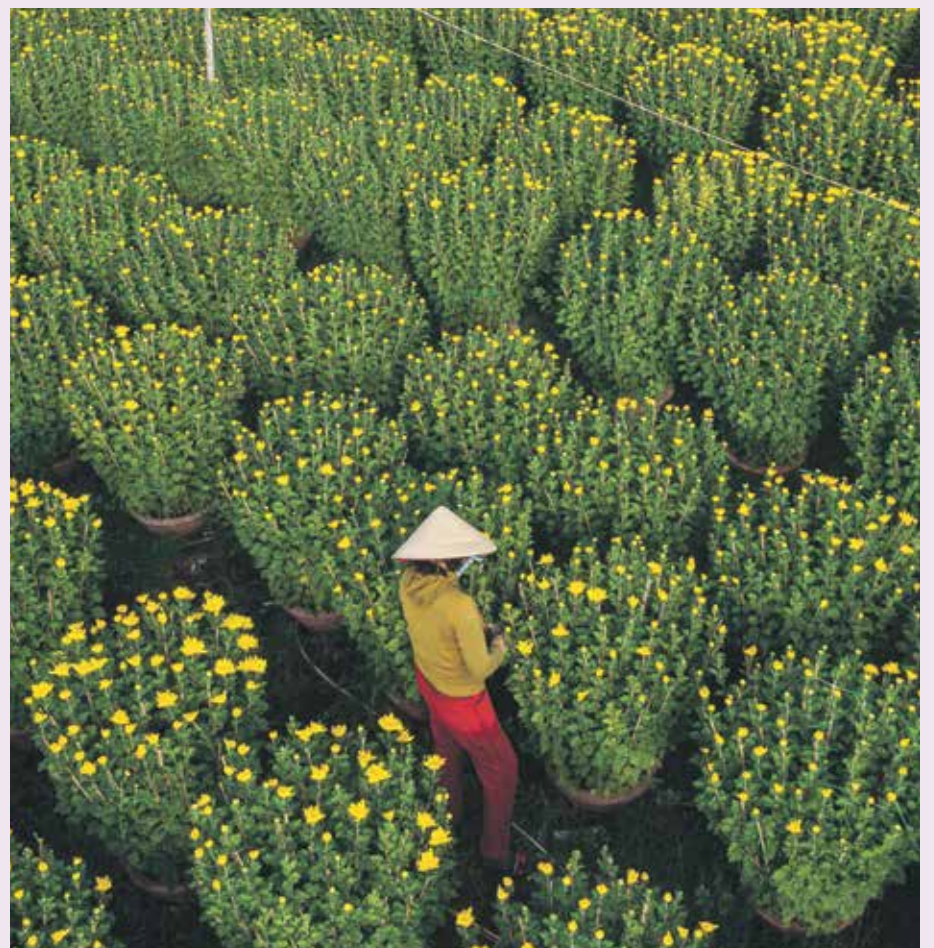
tered on the development of a pilot programme to be promoted at local level to current and emerging local leaders, greater clergy-specific elements to the training undertaken by clergy and laypeople, a focus on the welfare of priests, creating a series of national assemblies extending beyond the initial 2021-2026 timeframe of the synodal pathway, a three year multi-disciplinary process be held that will continue to be predominantly volunteer-led at national level and to further the work being done by parish and diocesan pastoral councils nationwide by establishing leadership teams at diocesan level.

Co-chairs of the Synodal Pathway Steering Committee Dr Nicola Brady and Fr Declan Hurley highlighted that the research undertaken with the local leaders “dem-

onstrates clearly that for those in local leadership the spirituality of the process is central. There is a diversity of views among them about what the future of the Church will look like, but a shared sense that the experience of synodality is helping to shape our thinking and planning for that future in a positive way”.

Recognising that the totality of the work has yet to be completed, the two chairs stressed that “many more people are still to be reached” and that in spite of the “many challenges before us, the engagement with the process to date affirms that for many people in Ireland today, faith and experience of being part of a worshipping community are important and much-valued parts of their lives”.

## Asia prepares for Year of the Dragon



A Vietnamese flower farmer with traditional Têt chrysanthemums used to celebrate the Lunar New Year

**NEXT WEEK: INTERVIEW WITH THE ARCHBISHOP OF LAGOS, NIGERIA ON THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS**

# ‘Synodality: A renewed call to the prophecy of hope’

Interview with Sr Mary T. Barron, OLA, President of UISG



Mary T. Barron pictured with her first table group during the pre-synod Retreat in 2023 and for the first and last module of the Synod.

## Luca Attanasio

This is the theme of the residential meeting which took place in November 22 to 24 at the “Fraterna Domus” Spirituality House in Sacrofano (Rome), organised by the executive councils of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and the Union of Superiors General (USG). The event, which saw the participation of over 250 Superiors General, evenly distributed between male and female religious leaders, marked the first joint meeting of the two unions. It has been a response to the shared desire of the unions to continue walking together. The two unions, no strangers to joint initiatives, have intensified their collaboration since their online reflection on Pope Francis’s encyclical “*Fratelli Tutti*”. They also made a joint contribution to the first phase of the synodal process in 2022. To better understand the aims, the outcomes and the meaning of such an important event which is a contribution of the two unions to the path of the Synod on Synodality, *The Synodal Times* turned to Sr. Mary T Barron, OLA, President of UISG.

### What were the main outcomes? and next steps?

Both Unions – the USG (men) and UISG (women) have their own manner and frequency of meeting with

their membership which is very different because by nature the two Unions are very different in terms of number and location of membership. There is already good collaboration between the two Unions. At the level of the two Boards, there are meetings every six months. There are also shared experiences and collaborations with joint commissions in different domains: JPIC, Care and Safeguarding to mention just some. Following the publication of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, an online Assembly was organised which was well attended and well appreciated by membership. But this meeting in Sacrofano was the first in person gathering of such a large number of leaders of male and female Religious Congregations and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The focus of the meeting was in the first instance to share with the participants the experience of the recently completed first session of the Synod and to also help us begin to focus on the upcoming Jubilee 2025, hence the title: “Synodality: A Renewed Call to the Prophecy of Hope.”

As with the Synod, the fruitfulness of the process used during the meeting is of much greater importance than any outcomes in terms of concrete actions. We replicated the Synod methodology by using round tables, engaging in conversations in the Spirit

and punctuating the sharing with many moments of pause to allow the words of others to sink in and to allow us to notice what was moving in us as we listened, coming to a sense of where the Spirit was guiding us as table groups. This time there was an equal number of men and women participants at each table which was very refreshing. Of course our time was very limited but we sensed the call to return to our sources, to reclaim a more contemplative stance in all aspects of our lives. We realised that to be synodal and to be prophets of hope we simply need to live authentically the call to Religious Life which is meant to be radical and from the peripheries. By so doing we are bearers of Christian Hope. We simply need to recalibrate, and go back to the Source.

**Commenting on the sense of the meeting, you stated that “can give new impetus to the synodal journey together, helping us to imagine new possibilities, calling us to live out our responsibilities, to continue the synodal path to deeper communion, to wider participation and to an ever more fruitful mission with all members of the Church.” Did it realise this desires of yours? How?**

I am very excited by the possibilities offered by

this first in presence meeting. It was a very profound time together of prayer and sharing. It allowed us to get to know each other better and the first step in any good collaborative initiatives has to be the development of relationships rooted in trust and in our common faith in Jesus Christ.

As we are called to continue the Synodal Journey with all the People of God, more opportunities will emerge for male and female religious life to contribute together along this journey.

**What was the first reaction of the world of religious life to the call of the Pope to start and concentrate efforts on a Synod with a totally new format and with a different and large participation? And what does being involved in such a demanding and inspiring process mean for your world?**

Being involved in the synodal process, which is both demanding and inspiring, is a great privilege for all in Religious Life and is an opportunity for profound renewal. Back in 2021 when the Synod on Synodality was announced



with the various steps beginning at local level and culminating in the 2023 Synod Assembly, we Religious welcomed this call enthusiastically, recognising the potential the process offered for renewal. We are deeply appreciative of the new format, and the wider participation. This enthusiasm and appreciation for the process has not waned, and in fact has deepened, as the journey evolved and the synodal path was extended to 2024, including two Synod Sessions in Rome. We are particularly appreciative that lay participants and female religious participants, for the first time, are recognised as full members, with voting rights. This synodal journey is an area in which USG and UISG have worked closely: initially offering all membership

the opportunity to reflect on the key synodal questions from the perspective of Religious Life. A summary document was offered to the Synod Secretariat which is the fruit of the reflections of global Religious Life and is an important document for us as we continue the journey and which we have struggled to put into practice. Within Religious Life we also sense this call to renewal and to a recalibration of returning to the essence of our being. It is true that for many in Religious Life, processes for listening, dialogue, seeking the common wisdom of the group under the guidance of the Spirit of God, are not new but rather are constitutive of how we live out our communal consecrated life. Notwithstanding this reality, the shared reflections of USG and UISG pointed to five

**“Just as we sense this call to Synodality is not a new fad within the Church but is simply a Spirit-guided process to help us live into the beautiful vision of Church that emerged in the second Vatican Council”**

**“We will live into an epochal change in our Church which will bring us back to the essence of the early Church”**



Two Egyptian delegates, one of whom was one of the President Delegates at the Synod.

calls for Religious Life: *to be rooted in the Spirit* recognising that Synodality requires conversion and becomes our path to formation and spirituality; a call for a *new type of mutual relations* which invites Institutes to make a clear call for dialogue between cultures and generations within their membership and beyond; *openness to collaboration* with other Institutes and with all the faithful so our witness is stronger and mission is more fruitful; *formation for synodality* which calls for wisdom, openness, exercise and apprenticeship; and *leadership and governance* calling us to take the necessary time and processes to invite fuller participation of all membership.

Religious Life is challenged by the Synodal process, to live fully into the radical prophetic witness that is its call and its place in the Church and Society. As the USG-UISG contribution to the Synod highlighted, *Synodality challenges ministries that are not located in areas of need but in comfort zones. The cry of people who are poor and vulnerable on all continents must be heard.*

We in Religious life

have to have an honest self-reflection of how synodal our own processes actually are, of how prophetic our witness is in today's world and continue the synodal processes to help us recalibrate under the guidance of the Spirit.

**Do you think this time is a time of real changing in the Catholic Church, an epochal change similar to that triggered by the Second Vatican Council? And if so in what ways?**

Having participated in the synodal process since the opening in October 2021 and having just completed the first session of the Synod in October 2023, I have the sense that we are in an era of epochal change. I have been following many people's contributions and follow-up after the Synod 2023 and there is a common thread in many: we cannot go back to how we were.

I sense we are in a moment where we have pressed pause: pausing our learned habits of how we are Church, pausing to truly listen and be moved by what we have heard from our brothers and sisters from all around the world, pausing to take the time to pray together and try to

The Pope with all the 10 delegates sent by UISG (female) and USG (male).



detect what the Spirit is saying to us as a Church, pausing to review how we have been doing with implementing the vision of Church from Vatican II. The image that comes to mind is of Elijah in the book of Kings, waiting for God to pass. And God is not in the powerful wind or in the raging fire. God is in the gentle breeze and Elijah immediately knows it is God and covers his face.

As we take the time to truly listen to each other, to pray with what we have heard, and to respond from a deep inner conviction that is of the Spirit, we will live into an epochal change in our Church which will bring us back to the essence of the early Church we find in the Acts of the Apostles, a Church rooted in service for mission.

**What can the reality of religious life offer and take from the process of the Synod on Synodality?**

Religious Life has a very wide-reaching and committed membership in all the local Churches across the world. With our experience of communal process of discernment, we do have a certain wisdom to offer on the journey. With our presence in the peripheries we can also be attentive to ensuring that 'people in poverty are truly protagonists of the Church's Synodal Journey' as the synthesis document states.

The synod on Synodality offers Religious Life the opportunity to evaluate the Synodality of our own processes, inviting us to an honest assessment of how participative, how spirit-guided our processes actually are. It invites us to look at our life and see if all we are and do is rooted in service for mission. We are invited to see if our ministries are in the peripheries in areas of need or if we have become somewhat

comfortable in comfort zones. The calls emerging from the synod process for accountability is also a call to Religious Life for greater accountability.

**Finally, another novelty of the synod was the large and extensive call for representatives of the so-called global south to take part in the assemblies, what do you think?**

Our Church has been a Western Church for centuries and we are in a time of change where the youth and vibrancy in the Church is located very much in the Global South. It was extremely important to have many voices from all parts of the universal Church represented at Synod 2023. Each culture has different expressions of being Church and the cultural experiences of decision making and taking are also extremely informative and interesting for us as we grow into

our essence as a synodal missionary Church.

I am from an international Congregation founded for Evangelisation in Africa. Forty years ago when our Constitutions guiding the Congregation were being updated for that time, there was a phrase included that when choosing delegates for General Chapter, care must be taken to ensure African Sisters are well represented. This came from the wisdom and realisation that we had to intentionally create the space for participation because with our blindness and unintentional prejudices, these things do not happen automatically.

I think the same is true in the synodal journey: we have to intentionally create the spaces for participation and I think we must continue to do better in fostering a more just representation of the universal Church in synodal gatherings.



A visit to the Catacombs - four sisters from UISG from four continents Sr Maria Cimpermann, USA, Elysée Izermana Burundi Africa, Maria Nirmalini India and Irishwoman Sr Mary T. Barron.

# Death in Venice



Penelope Middelboe

**Y**ou have to keep inside the dolphins in the Venetian lagoon. These tall groupings of two or three wooden pillars, set a short distance apart, mark the outer edge of deeper water. The locals call them *bricola*. There are apparently 90,000 of them creating sea-lanes like railway tracks to steer clear of the oncoming marine traffic and the wintry mud flats and tidal shallows. Our *Alilaguna* boat sped ever closer to the tiny island of Venice silhouetted against a setting sun. *La Serenissima*, my husband said, pointing. Its old name. The Most Serene Republic of Venice. An appropriate destination for recharging our spiritual batteries.

We arrived on Friday afternoon, and on Sunday morning went to Mass in nearby San Salvador, the Church of the Holy Saviour, on the main shopping street in San Marco. It's a grand 'large hall church', begun in 1508 and formed from three Greek crosses placed end to end. Each has a dome with a lantern. There's a Titian on the south wall, and another on the altarpiece although we didn't notice them. There were fewer than 20 of us, which might have been nice had the priest held an informal Mass and gathered us around. It would have suited the handful of excited Italian children on their best Sunday behaviour, allowed unaccompanied in the front pew. We couldn't have been more disappointed. Nor could they. The church dwarfed the three-man choir made up of the organist, a seminarian altar server and one other man obscured by the pillars. The liturgy (which we tried to follow in English on our app) dragged on interminably, wordy and lifeless. The first child to admit defeat scurried back a few rows to sit on her father's knee. This set off a chain reaction, leaving a deeply symbolic abandoned front row. This wasn't *La Serenissima*. It was more like *Somniferum* (excuse the Latin).

## Aperitivo

Emerging into sunshine, over a lunch-time *aperitivo*, we filled our own little echo chamber, telling each other the plainly obvious - that Jesus will not have recognised a single thing in that Mass. If only 19% of Italians go to Church regularly then we're not alone. There are apparently 87 Catholic churches in the 2.9 square miles (7.5 square kms) of Venice, most of them

**“Sit on the front pew and you can almost feel as if you're lying collapsed in horror, like Mary his mother, amongst the rocks and weeds of the wasteland of Golgotha”**



vast, dark, cold, decked with priceless treasures, all of them built before 1738. There used to be 107 but some have been deconsecrated. Our morning experience made us wonder how many more will soon follow.

At a Venetian friend's advice we had booked tickets to an art installation curated by a Spaniard, Alvaro Blanco, based on his 15 years study of the Turin Shroud. It was a couple of hours away by boat, bus, ferry, and another boat, on the seaside island of Chioggia, which is also criss-crossed by canals. The exhibition was so popular we'd been advised to book weeks before to secure a slot. An indication perhaps of how the search for spiritual enlightenment is moving away from church buildings? In the modest harbour filled with fishing boats - not a gondola in sight - we crossed to a tiny island and the church of San Domenico which was hosting *The Mystery Man* exhibition.

**“Surely Pilate, fearful of crucifying Jesus, was hoping he'd done enough to satisfy the crowd, when he said 'Behold the man!'”**

Now it's some time since either of us had given much thought to the mystery of the Shroud. Nobody has been able to prove how the negative

image of the front and back of a man with possible thorn marks on the head, cuts on the back and bruises on the shoulder came to be imprinted on a piece of linen 14 foot long without the use of pigment. The mind-bending thought that a radioactive photographic impression of Jesus was somehow created at the moment of the Resurrection was sadly quashed when carbon dating carried out in 1988 estimated the Shroud at only 700 years old. The Catholic Church has never claimed it as a holy relic.

Nonetheless it's priceless. It's kept in a special vault in Turin Cathedral and, to protect it from ultraviolet damage, is only exhibited a couple of times a century. The next time the Turin Shroud will be exhibited will be 2025. I'll never see it. So we were up for an artistic experience, combining forensic research with cutting edge *son et lumiere*. We were not prepared for its profound effect. Besides, we might easily have missed the item that most affected us, as we jostled with other visitors. It was a small Roman whip, with three or four short thongs at the ends of which had been embedded sharp pieces of sheep's bone, metal balls and nails. Officially called the *flagrum* or *flagellum*, it gives us the English word 'fillet' - since this is what it was designed to do to the body.

## Scourged

It had us pondering deeply on the statement “then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him” John 19:1 (also Mark 15:15, Matthew 27:26). Flogging was standard practice before a crucifixion. The prisoner was tied naked to a pillar, or between two, and two soldiers systematically whipped the body up and down. Greek Palestinian historian Eusebius of Caesarea (300 AD) recounts a scourging so

brutal that “the hidden inward parts of the body... were exposed to view.” Surely Pilate, fearful of crucifying Jesus, was hoping he'd done enough to satisfy the crowd, when he said “Behold the man!”

**“Jesus has never been depicted like this. And yet every single wound on the sculpture corresponds accurately to a mark of blood on the Shroud.”**

In the final room you come face to face, on the altar, with a man. Not *that* man, they carefully say. But the man who left his mark on the Turin Shroud. The hyper-realistic sculpture is about 1.78 meters tall (5ft 8inches) and weighs 75 kg. He's naked and lies on his back in a slightly concave position caused by *rigor mortis* - head looking towards his raised knees. His head hair is tied back in a ponytail. There are huge holes in his feet and wrists. His shoulder is dislocated, his nose deviated by blows to the face and head. Most of all you're struck by the way his entire body is covered with the marks of the flagellum. Jesus has never been depicted like this. And yet every single wound on the sculpture corresponds accurately to a mark of blood on the Shroud.

Back in Venice we felt obliged to seek out a Renaissance painting of the Flagellation. We ended up west of the Rialto bridge, at San Cassiano. John Ruskin described “*The Crucifixion of Christ*” by Venetian born Tintoretto as ‘the finest [example of a Crucifixion painting] in Europe.’ Sit on the front pew and you can almost feel as if you're lying collapsed in horror, like Mary his mother, amongst the

rocks and weeds of the wasteland of Golgotha. We'd gone to examine the painter's knowledge of the effects of the flagrum. Instead we lay at the foot of the cross and contemplated Christ's suffering and his humanity. Nailed to a simple piece of wood.

I was reminded of Tintoretto's extraordinary painting on our way home, as the *Alilaguna* boat emerged from the Grand Canal and slowed to enter the channel taking us out towards the airport. As we passed within inches of the first of the wooden navigation *bricola* I remembered Tintoretto's Roman soldier, leaning his long ladder on Jesus's cross and attempting to fix the I.N.R.I sign above his head. Flanked by the posts of the two thieves, the artist had created a four-posted *bricola*.

## Bricola

Gaining speed now between the numerous *bricola* guiding us across the lagoon, I found the painful image of the hyper-realistic, tortured man at Chioggia combining with these timeless wooden structures flying past. We'd been told that ‘without wood Venice would not exist’. We now knew that as well as supporting marine navigation, millions of wooden posts - like the cross on which Jesus died - support the very structure of the buildings. Whether oak, alder or conifer wood, these timber pilings have petrified throughout the centuries and replaced the natural bedrock missing in the soft Venetian marshland. The Venetian waterways and beautiful buildings had suddenly become a symbol. They revealed to us how Jesus's death on a wooden post both supported and, like the *bricola*, guided each one of us.

*La Serenissima* had worked her magic.



# Letter from Rome

## A fraternal embrace that is also a commitment



Cardinal Kurt Koch

January 5 and 6 marked the 60th anniversary of the meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras. It was the first meeting between a pope and an ecumenical patriarch since the one between Pope Eugene IV and Patriarch Joseph II during the Council of Ferrara (1438-1439). This important anniversary is a fruitful opportunity to look, first of all, at the painful past relations between the two Churches, in the knowledge that the only way to act on the past is to purify the historical memory and to forgive. However, the goal of a gaze turned towards past events is to gratefully acknowledge what was achieved from 1964 onwards, and to permit new steps towards the future.

### Return of Charity

The meeting in Jerusalem made an impact on history especially because that fraternal embrace confirmed both Churches' willingness to restore charity between each other. This gesture is before our very eyes as a lasting icon of a willingness for reconciliation. This is why in his 2023 message to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I on the occasion of the feast of the Patron Saint Andrew, Pope Francis highlighted, that the journey toward reconciliation began "with an embrace, a gesture that eloquently expresses the mutual recognition of ecclesial fraternity".

This fraternal kiss has profound spiritual meaning. Since the agape and the fraternal kiss represent the term and rite of Eucharistic unity, the goal of the journey that began in Jerusalem has to be the re-establishment of Eucharistic communion. Indeed, when the agape is seriously experienced as an ecclesial reality, in order to be credible, it has to become a Eucharistic agape. This was the intention of the two pilgrims who met in Jerusalem. In this event, they glimpsed the dawn of a new day in which future generations would praise together the One Lord, by participating in his Eucharistic Body and Blood.

The memorable meeting in Jerusalem paved the way for the one that took place on 7 December 1965, when the leaders of the two Churches lifted their mutual excommunications of 1054. From Constantinople's Patriarchal Church of Saint George in the Phanar and from Rome's Saint Peter's Basilica, they affirmed their joint willingness to remove the anathemas, the memory of which still persists, "from memory and from the midst of the Church", so that they could no longer be a hindrance to "closer relations in charity". In this solemn and legally binding way, the events of 1054 and

their consequences were committed to historical oblivion. At the same time, it was declared that they were no longer part of the official inventory of the two Churches.

With this historical act, the poison of excommunication was removed from the Body of the Church, and the "symbol of division" was substituted with the "symbol of charity". In the words of then-theologian Joseph Ratzinger, "the relationship of 'cold charity', of contrast, mistrust and antagonism' was substituted with a relationship of charity and fraternity, symbolised by a fraternal kiss". With the repeal of the excommunication, the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople can go back to recognising each other as sister Churches, an even more significant fact when we consider that the patrons of the two Churches, Saint Peter and Saint Andrew, were biological brothers.

These memorable events were the starting point for an ecumenical dialogue of charity which deepened in the following years through a lively exchange of visits and communication, as seen in the shared documentation that has the beautiful name *Tomos Agapis*. The dialogue of charity found visible expression especially in the good tradition of reciprocal visits between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome on the occasion of their mutual Patronal feast days or other particularly important events. For a newly elected Pontiff, visiting the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Phanar in Constantinople shortly after the beginning of the pontificate has become a custom filled with meaning. And it was a beautiful sign of mature friendship when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I came to Rome for Pope Francis' inauguration ceremony, a gesture that was even more significant because it was the first time it had occurred in the history of ecumenical relations between Rome and Constantinople.

### Despite these differences, the Christian world of the first millennium in the East and in the West lived as one Church

The dialogue of charity has to continue and deepen both today and in the future, also because, throughout the course of history, different spiritualities in the East and the West have progressively distanced the Churches and largely contributed to the later rupture. Cardinal Walter Kasper summed up this process by stating concisely and incisively: "Christians did not distance themselves mainly due to their disputes and their different doctrinal formulations, but rather, they became estranged from one another because of their different way of living". This development can be explained by the fact that from the very start, the Gospel of Jesus Christ was received differently in the Christian Western and Eastern world, and it was lived and passed on



Pope Francis kisses the encolpion of Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople as they meet in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican September 30, 2023, ahead of an ecumenical prayer vigil for the Synod of Bishops in St Peter's Square. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

according to different cultural traditions and forms. Despite these differences, the Christian world of the first millennium in the East and in the West lived as one Church. However, Christians progressively grew apart and began to understand each other ever less, to the point that, as Yves Congar eloquently highlighted, we can acknowledge that this process of mutual estrangement was one of the main causes for the schism that later occurred.

### Division

In light of these historical developments, we have to ask ourselves if we can really talk about division between the East and West in the Church. The so-called "division" is usually associated with the year 1054, when Constantinople and Rome pronounced the excommunications. However, this is more of a symbolic rather than a historic date. Indeed, there was no schism, in the true sense of the word, between the Church of the East and that of the West. And there was no formal mutual condemnation in 1054 nor on any other date. Orthodox theologian Grigoriou Larentzakis summed up this important fact in the following brief formulation: "No schism, and yet separated". We should thus not speak about a schism but rather, of a growing estrangement between East and West within the Church. This distance, which led to

misunderstandings and controversy throughout the course of history, can only be overcome with patience, and above all, with charity, sincerely trying to meet each other halfway.

### Constantinople was taken and plundered by Venetian sailors, despite the fact that Pope Innocent III had firmly banned war against Christians

The dialogue of charity has allowed us to rediscover that fraternity between Catholics and Orthodox that Pope John Paul II considered one of the most important fruits of ecumenical engagement. The dialogue of charity contributes first of all to reconciliation between the Churches, which is expressed practically in the request for forgiveness for the sins committed in the past. This request for forgiveness is particularly urgent with regards to the fourth crusade, of 1204, which, for understandable reasons, is still today an open wound for many Orthodox Christians. This crusade initially began with a positive objective. However, for political reasons, Constantinople was taken and plundered by Venetian sailors, despite the fact that Pope Innocent III had firmly banned war against Christians — a warning which is once again topical, in light of the war in

Ukraine.

The objective of these ecumenical efforts is to restore ecclesial communion in such a way that the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church do not continue to live as two separate Churches, but that they live as a single Church in the East and the West, thus reflecting the unity of the Body of Christ. But being the Body of the Church tends to go beyond the self, towards the binding communion in the Eucharistic Body of the Lord, the reason for which restoring the unity of the Church would result in the reconstruction of Eucharistic communion.

### Christian courage

Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras expressed this vision with incisive words in 1968: "This is the time for Christian courage. Let us love one another in order to confess our former common faith: let us make our way together before the glory of the holy common altar in order to fulfil the will of the Lord so that the church may shine, so that the world may believe and the peace of God may be with us all". Fulfilled in this vision is the deep significance of that fraternal kiss that was exchanged in Jerusalem 60 years ago and that today continues to unite Catholics and Orthodox in a common endeavour.

**i** Cardinal Kurt Koch is the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Report: 33 churches in Canada destroyed by fire since May 2021

● Arson attacks against churches in Canada are on the rise, according to a Canadian news outlet, which reported that since May 2021, 33 churches in Canada have been burned down to the ground.

The outlet, *CBC News*, reported that 24 of those devastating fires were intentionally set, while two were determined to be accidental. The rest were ruled to be suspicious or are currently under investigation.

That number represents a marked increase in the number of churches destroyed by fire. Between January 1, 2019, and May 2021, 14 churches in Canada burned down, according to the outlet's review of police and court records along with media reports.

### St Charbel mosaic blessed installed in Vatican grottoes

● A mosaic of St Charbel blessed by Pope Francis was installed this morning in the Vatican grottoes located beneath St Peter's Basilica.

On January 19, Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, participated in placing the framed mosaic in the grotto where the papal tombs are located.

After the installation of the mosaic, attended by Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches,

a Maronite-rite Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the Hungarian chapel of the Vatican crypt by the Maronite patriarchal vicar to the Holy See, Bishop Rafik Warsha.

The image of the Lebanese saint, who is revered in both East and West, was blessed by Pope Francis after the November 15, 2023, general audience and was hung next to the tomb of St Paul VI, the pontiff who declared him a saint on October 9, 1977.

### Jerusalem Church official: Gaza situation 'extremely catastrophic'

● The situation in the Gaza Strip is "extremely catastrophic," and people are dying not only from violence but from preventable illnesses, said the CEO of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

"People are really losing their life because of no treatment, no medical care," Sami El-Yousef, CEO, told *OSV News* January 20. He repeatedly described the situation as "catastrophic" throughout the interview.

The supplies that are being allowed in are being transported from Egypt into southern Gaza Strip.

"There have been no supplies allowed into the northern part of Gaza," including Gaza City, where most Christians are sheltering in the Catholic and Orthodox parishes, Mr El-Yousef said. He said that during January, a black market has sprung up, and things like medicine and blankets were being sold for 10 times the amount they sold for before Israel declared war on Hamas in retaliation for an October 7 attack launched by the militant Islamic group.

### Survey: Americans of faith feel less accepted by society

● Religious Americans feel their faith is less accepted by society than in previous years, a new survey by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty found.

According to Becket, "the greatest change in perceived feelings of acceptance is among Christians". However, consistent with previous years' studies, religious non-Christians report significantly lower levels of perceived acceptance, 8% lower than people of faith as a whole and 12% lower than non-Catholic Christians.

Only half of people of faith in the US feel their faith is "completely" accepted or accepted "a good amount," according to Becket's new 2023 Religious Freedom Index, which was shared exclusively with *CNA*.

## Armed men kidnap six nuns in Haiti

Six nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of St Anne were kidnapped January 19 while traveling on a bus in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, according to the Haitian Conference of Religious.

Other passengers on the bus also were taken in the abduction, the conference said in a statement.

"These many kidnappings fill the consecrated people of Haiti with sadness and fear," said the statement, signed by conference president P. Morachel Bonhomme.

Pope Francis appealed January 21 for the release of all the hostages, while praying for "social harmony" in the country, *Vatican News* reported. In remarks after the Angelus, he said he had "learned with sorrow the news of the kidnapping" of the sisters and the others. "I call on everyone to stop the violence, which causes so much suffering to that dear population".

Bonhomme in his statement prayed that "the spirit of strength be given" to the sisters "to find a way out of this terrible situation". "May the solidarity of the consecrated people of Haiti and the world help them overcome this difficult ordeal," he added.

In a statement published January 19, Bishop Pierre-André Dumas of Anse-à-Veau et Miragoâne prayed "to help us put an end to this bitter nightmare and this tragic ordeal of our people which has lasted too long". He also offered himself in



People take a wounded man to a hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in late 2023, after gangs took over their neighbourhood Carrefour-Feuilles. *Vatican News* reported January 19 that armed men in Port-au-Prince took over a bus and kidnapped at least six nuns and others who were on the bus. Photo: *OSV News/Ralph Tedy Erol, Reuters*

exchange for the hostages.

"We denounce with vigour and firmness this ultimate odious and barbaric act which does not even respect the dignity of these consecrated women who give themselves wholeheartedly to God to educate and train the young, the poorest and the vulnerable in our society," Bishop Dumas wrote, according to a translation posted to social media by Fr Louis Mérosné.

"Let us call for the release of these nuns as well as their driver and the other passengers of the bus," the bishop

said. "We also ask that these abject and criminal practices be stopped on the sacred land of Haiti since they degrade the dignity of the human being ... by plunging us into the inhuman abyss of nothingness."

The Sisters of St Anne did not respond to a message left by *OSV News* at its Canadian office prior to publication of this story.

The religious order, founded in the Canadian province of Quebec in the 1850s, started working in Haiti in 1944. The Sisters of St Anne focus on educational

projects in Haiti and have 40 sisters in the country, according to its website.

Kidnappings have plagued Haiti in recent years – with religious and missionaries falling victim. Five priests, two nuns and two other victims were freed in 2021 after being held for nearly three weeks. They were kidnapped as they travelled east of the capital.

The country is the poorest in the hemisphere and also convulsed with gang violence, which has intensified since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

## US Pro-lifers: We'll march until abortion is 'unthinkable'

Thousands of pro-life advocates descended upon the nation's capital for the 51st annual March for Life January 19, undeterred by several inches of snow that accumulated in Washington leading up to – and during – the event.

The 2024 March was just the second to take place since the US Supreme Court reversed its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that initially prompted the annual pro-life demonstration.

Jeanne Mancini, president of March for

Life Education and Defence Fund, told rallygoers, "We will keep marching every year at the national level, as well as in our states, until our nation's laws reflect the basic truth that all human life is created equal and is worthy of protection".

Ms Mancini said the group plans to hold marches not only in the District of Columbia but in all 50 states in the coming years.

"We will march until abortion is unthinkable," she added.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson, who

spoke at the rally, told attendees that the notion that all people are created equal is a bedrock principle of America, written into the nation's founding documents.

"Every single person has inestimable dignity and value," Mr Johnson said.

"Your value is not related in any way to the colour of your skin, or what zip code you live in, how good you were in sports, where you went to high school, it's irrelevant, your value is inherent because it is given to you by your Creator."

## Spanish university cancels Rupnik chapel project

Spain's Francisco de Vitoria University (UFV) has cancelled its planned collaboration with former Jesuit Fr Marko Rupnik, who was initially presented as the driving force behind a new campus chapel project, as first reported by *ACI Prensa*.

Located in the town of Pozuelo de Alarcón near

Madrid, the institution with ties to the Legionaries of Christ began construction on a new chapel in September 2022, when the archbishop emeritus of Madrid, Cardinal Carlos Osoro, blessed the first stone.

The original project involved close collaboration with Rupnik. At the time, the university

stated that it was "the first work of architecture in which Rupnik has been involved in the entire process of creating the project, starting with the temple's theological and symbolic foundations".

However, just three months after work began, the university decided to "pause the work

related to the iconographic programme," which was shared with the university community through an internal statement to which *ACI Prensa* had access. Rector Daniel Sada explained in the statement that this change was made "in light of published information" about sexual abuse committed by Rupnik.



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## Pro-life and proud



Pro-life demonstrators carry a banner past the US Supreme Court building while participating in the 51st annual March for Life in Washington January 19. Photo: OSV News/Leslie E. Kossoff

# Nicaragua cancels legal personhood of Catholic and evangelical NGOs

In a new attack against the Catholic Church and other Christians in Nicaragua, the dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, has cancelled the legal personhood of several religious congregations and evangelical groups.

On January 16, the Ministry of the Interior published in the official government newspaper *La Gaceta* the agreement ordering the measure, signed by Minister María Amelia Coronel Kinloch, and affecting 16 nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), 10 of which are Catholic and evangelical institutions.

Of the 16 groups, nine organisations were dissolved by order of the government and their assets will be expropriated, while the other seven, according to the government notice, requested voluntary cancellation.

The six government-dissolved religious groups are the Consecrated Missionaries of the Most Holy Savior Foundation, the Missionaries of the Company of Mary Association (Montfort Missionaries), the Jehovah Will Provide Pentecost Mission Association, the Evangelistic and Prophetic Apostolic Mission Association, the New Restoration Family Church Foundation, and the

Worldwide Missions Association of Nicaragua.

According to the Ministry of the Interior agreement, the accusation against these institutions is not having reported their financial statements.

The four religious groups that requested voluntary cancellation are the Evangelical Life Fraternity Association of Missionaries of the Cross Association, the Marriage Ministry on the Rock Association, the Tabernacle of David Church Association, and The Redeemer Pentecostal Church Association. The destination of their assets was not specified.

According to *Vatican*

*News*, more than 3,500 NGOs have been cancelled by the Nicaraguan dictatorship since 2018, when protests against the regime began over social security reform.

According to *statista.com*, less than 50% of Nicaraguans identify as Catholics, the rest being mostly some form of Protestantism.

This comes not long after the dictatorship released and sent to the Vatican two imprisoned Nicaraguan bishops, one of whom was Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, along with 15 priests and seminarians.

# Polish prelate offers help in case of jailed ex-members of government on hunger strike

The hunger strike of two imprisoned ex-members of the Polish government has caused an international stir. Now the Church wants to try to resolve the conflict. Poland's bishops' conference announced late January 17 that its president, Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki of Poznan, had written to both politicians – former Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski and his former Secretary of State Maciej Wasik – offering to lobby the Minister of Justice Adam Bodnar for a “humanitarian intervention”.

The men, each sentenced to two years in prison for abuse of office, see themselves as political prisoners and have gone on hunger strike. Both imprisoned politicians are from the national-conservative opposition party PiS, which is the Law and Justice Party.

According to the bishops' conference, the wives of the two prisoners have approached the archbishop for help. They asked Archbishop Gadecki to mediate between their husbands and Mr Bodnar. As a consequence of the request, in a letter to Mr Kaminski and

Mr Wasik, Archbishop Gadecki promised to help both PiS politicians if they agreed.

According to the Church, the president of the Polish bishops called on the ex-members of the government to end their hunger strike, which was threatening not only their health but also their lives. At the same time, he assured them that he understood why they had resorted to “such a dramatic form of protest”.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope Francis announces Year of Prayer to prepare for 2025 Jubilee

● Pope Francis announced the start of a Year of Prayer on Sunday in preparation for the Catholic Church's 2025 Jubilee Year.

In his Angelus address, the Pope said that a Year of Prayer starting on January 21 will be “a year dedicated to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer in one's personal life, in the life of the Church, and in the world”.

“Dear brothers and sisters, the coming months will lead us to the opening of the Holy Door, with which we will begin the jubilee,” Pope Francis said from the window of the Apostolic Palace.

“I ask you to intensify your prayer to prepare us to live this event of grace well and to experience the power of God's hope. That is why today we begin a Year of Prayer”.

The Pope said that the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation will publish resources to help Catholic communities to more fully participate in the Year of Prayer. The Holy See Press Office has also announced that a press conference on the Year of Prayer will take place on January 23.

The Vatican and the city of Rome are expecting an estimated 35 million people to flock to the Eternal City for the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope — the first ordinary jubilee since the Great Jubilee of 2000.

### Vatican meeting sees experts look at ethics of medical research

● Inequalities in healthcare and clinical research must be prevented, Pope Francis told medical doctors, health practitioners, researchers, ethicists and other experts attending a conference at the Vatican.

Promoting the life and health of others must be guided by an attitude of care, not made subordinate to the “mentalities of the market and of technology,” he said in a message read to conference participants January 18.

“While the asymmetry present in the therapeutic relationship is all too apparent, the central role that the sick person should have has not yet become a reality. It needs to be continually safeguarded

and promoted,” he wrote.

“We need to balance research opportunities and the welfare of patients, so that the expenses incurred by research and access to the resulting benefits are equitably distributed,” he added.

The Pope's message was addressed to experts and professionals in health care fields taking part in a January 18-19 conference organised by the World Medical Association together with the American Medical Association (AMA) and the Pontifical Academy for Life.

The conference was one of many taking place over a two-year period around the world as part of updating and revising the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Vatican prefect notes ‘negative reactions’ to ‘Fiducia Supplicans’

● Orthodox and other Christian leaders have raised concerns to the Vatican about its recent declaration allowing nonliturgical blessings of same-sex couples, according to a top cardinal in charge of ecumenical affairs.

In an exclusive interview with EWTN and in separate comments to the Vatican's news agency, Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, revealed that he has received negative reactions to the December 18, 2023, declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*. Both interviews were conducted in connection with this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which runs from January 18–25.

“I have received a long letter from all the Oriental Orthodox churches. They want to have some explanation and clarification about this document,” Cardinal Koch told EWTN.

# The Catholic difference: Standing with Ukraine



George Weigel

**M**y friend and colleague Carl Trueman recently observed that “the West is no longer a consortium of serious cultures”. To which I am sorely tempted to add, “...or serious politics”. The two are connected, the cultural decay of the West being a not-insignificant factor in our descent into political infantilism. The exploration of that connection can be left for a later date. Here, let me simply assert that the political mindlessness currently on display in the West is threatening to unravel the victory of freedom in the Cold War: the victory of what were admittedly imperfect democracies over what were indisputably pluperfect tyrannies.

**“Today’s geopolitical blindness about Ukraine is a failure of moral insight and moral nerve as well as a political failure”**

Who with a sense of history can deny that the current, gelatinous policy of the great Western powers toward Ukraine is ominously reminiscent of the errors the democracies made in the mid-1930s? Western dithering in providing the willing, courageous Ukrainians the wherewithal to defeat a Russia bent on destroying the Ukrainian nation inevitably recalls the fecklessness that led Great Britain and France to acquiesce to the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936, to the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938, and to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938-39. (And please do not talk to me about “tattered, old analogies to the 1930s;” they’re only tattered and old if they’re wrong, which they’re not.)



Rescuers speak with a wounded local resident in central Kharkiv, Ukraine, January 2 at the site where a residential building was heavily damaged during a Russian missile attack. Photo: OSV News/Vyacheslav Madiyevskyy, Reuters

Today’s geopolitical blindness about Ukraine — this willful deconstruction of the Western capacity to deter aggressive authoritarian powers — is a failure of moral insight and moral nerve as well as a political failure. And those failures are having global effects that are likely to worsen in the year ahead, causing even more suffering and death.

## Ukraine’s plight

What are French, German, and American political leaders thinking when they wring their hands and whine about being “tired” of the war in Ukraine? I’m quite sure that Ukrainians are also tired: tired of having their children kidnapped and taken to Russia for brainwashing; tired of burying their dead after Russian drone strikes on civilian targets; tired of being denied adequate arms and ammunition. Yet they carry on. How dare a comfortable French presi-

dent, a comfortable German chancellor, and comfortable American congressmen and senators speak of “Ukraine-fatigue” when our ally is being bled white and yet fights on?

Fortunately, others with stronger moral fiber get it.

**“Inciting hatred and waging war based on the ideology of the ‘Russian world’ violates Christian principles and contradict the spiritual norms”**

They include a coalition of Ukrainian Christian leaders, who on January 11 issued a joint statement condemning the “aggressive ideology of the ‘Russian world,’” which underwrites Russia’s genocidal war in and on Ukraine. This ideology, promoted and blessed by the leadership of

the Russian Orthodox Church, “has been claiming for years that Ukrainians, as a people, ‘do not exist’”. The statement continues: “Inciting hatred and waging war based on the ideology of the ‘Russian world’ violates Christian principles and contradict the spiritual norms that the Church is supposed to embody.” These betrayals of Christ undermine “the credibility of...Christian testimony....” and not only in Eastern Europe. Amen.

## Christian leaders

Ukraine’s Christian leaders go on to thank those who have stood in solidarity with suffering Ukraine, including “humanitarian organisations [which] provide assistance to the needy in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.” The names of those organisations constitute a moral honor roll. High on that roster of the righteous will be found the Knights of Columbus.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the Knights have raised \$22.5 million from more than 67,500

**“For months, the US Congress has played games with Ukrainian military aid, holding it hostage to yet another mindless fracas”**

donors. Those donations have helped the Knights serve 1.6 million Ukrainians by distributing, in Ukraine and among Ukrainian refugees in Poland, 7.7 million pounds of food and medical supplies, reached (in some cases at considerable risk) by KofC Charity Convoys; 250,000 individual care packages; over 4,000 coats to warm Ukrainian children; and hundreds of wheelchairs, generators and other technical essentials.

For months, the US Congress has played games with Ukrainian military aid, holding it hostage to yet another mindless fracas between Democrats and Republicans over what every sane American citizen understands is a grave crisis of immigration policy. This is behavior unworthy of a great

nation. It is past time for the citizenry to call those who represent us in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate to stop their childish caterwauling, to cease debasing our politics with social media snark, to behave in a manner befitting adults who have taken oaths to legislate responsibly — and to support a brave people who, against terrible odds and in the face of immense suffering, are defending our victory in the Cold War as well as their country.

Those who do not are going to face a harsh judgment at the bar of history.

**George Weigel is senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, DC.**

# Letters

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

## Letter of the week

### Polarisation on immigration order of the day

**Dear Editor,** There has been a lot of controversy recently regarding immigration with one side expressing concern over its level or type and the other condemning them as simply hating foreign people and being far right.

Polarisation is the order of the day and the possibility of a meeting of minds on the subject seems impossible. But is there a Christian perspective on this?

If we claim that our faith applies in the real world then it should give us an approach in this area.

A good basis is Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the

image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Every person is created in the image of God and thus has innate dignity. As such the way we refer to fellow human beings should always be respectful. In the context of doing this, if people have concerns regarding the population size of the state, the impact on services both nationally and locally, housing, social cohesion etc. or think society works best if the overwhelming majority irrespective of ethnic background affirm to the traditional cultural identity of the country, they should be free to express this without being con-

demned as haters or racists.

If we truly believe that Jesus loves every person then there must be an equal concern for the welfare of people of the traditional native population as well as those incoming.

If the Church simply echoes the ruling establishment then we should not be surprised if people see it as irrelevant or worse, as an agent of a political system actively imposing an agenda that undermines their future and that of their family.

Yours etc.,

**Michael Gavin**

Royal Canal Park, Dublin 15

### If sacraments are not needed, neither are priests

**Dear Editor,** It is to say the least disappointing that neither in Ardal O'Hanlon's film nor in the subsequent discussion on January 15 no mention was made of the Eternal High Priest Jesus Christ or the fact that every Catholic priest stands at the altar of God "in persona Christi" (in the person of Christ) praying for the souls of the living and of the dead. Every priest's calling is to help people to get to heaven. At the Holy Sacrifice of every Mass the death and resurrection of Jesus is re-presented. In the sacrament (sacred or holy thing) of Reconciliation (confession) through the priest, the "alter Christus" (the other Christ), Christ himself forgives the penitent in the name of the Holy Trinity of God.

Maybe "holy Catholic Ireland" is, like Yeats, "with O'Leary in the grave". Maybe sophisticated Irish men and women have "moved on" from the simple Faith of their ancestors who died for the pearl of great price. But at what cost? A growing sense of unease in society. Youngsters finding refuge in unregulated drug taking, drunkenness and other immoral activity. Violent assaults an almost daily occurrence.

Perhaps society no longer needs the sacraments. If the sacraments are not needed, neither is the priest.

Yours etc.,

**Fr Oliver Skelly PP**  
Coole, Co. Westmeath



### A WWI Irish chaplain in the thick of the fighting

**Dear Editor,** All war is obnoxious and World War I particularly so with its hand-to-hand fighting in appalling conditions. A.P. Breen [*The Irish Catholic* - January 11, 2024] is obviously anti-war. He informs us that in that war "Apparently on one occasion Fr Gleeson actually joined in the combat". The question arises, why did Fr Gleeson do so?

Fr Frank Gleeson's decision, following the death of all the

regiment's officers, to remove his chaplain's insignia to take command of the survivors of 'The Munster Fusiliers' was to give them the chance to save their lives.

Fr Frank Gleeson, a Tipperary man, was an Irish chaplain in the thick of the fighting, putting his own life at serious risk to bring comfort and the sacraments to the wounded and dying Irish soldiers. Many were inspired by this good

priest.

I have a card from the front lines of World War I, which was given to a Sarjeant of 'The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' and reads as follows "Souvenir of Easter Confession and Communion on Active Service in France 1917". This is at the centre of an army chaplain's life and work.

Yours etc.,

**Daithi O'Muirneachain**  
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

### An important forgotten premise

**Dear Editor,** Without a doubt, the recent decision from the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith and from various episcopal conferences worldwide have reflected much heat and very little light on a matter that would see the difficulty of a square peg into a round hole as a piece of cake!

However, when one tries to find something that reflects

a practicality that is somehow acceptable in this whole matter, there is one word describing and holding to a most important premise that somehow has been forgotten, or accidentally overlooked and is also vital in this whole debate namely: conscience!

Yours etc.,

**Fr John McCallion**  
Coalisland, Co. Tyrone

## 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.

## Catholic schools rich in understanding humanity

### The Irish Catholic

**T**his week has seen the celebration of Catholic Schools Week in Ireland, which is running from Sunday, January 21st to Saturday, January 27th. Coming around with the unassuming regularity that they do, we often allow all but the biggest annual celebrations to slip us by, but when it comes to celebrating the contribution made by Catholic schools in present-day Ireland, this really will not do.

In his homily during Mass to open Catholic Schools Week, Bishop of Meath and chair of the Catholic Education Service, Tom Deenihan painted a broader picture of the role of Catholic schools in a pluralistic society than many perhaps are used to hearing.

"Much has been written about Catholic schools. There can be some confusion about what a Catholic school is and does. For some, it is an excellent academic education, for others, it is a more general and broad contribution, bearing in mind the needs of the student. Unfortunately, others see it as indoctrination. The reality is broader," Bishop Deenihan said.

"A Catholic school, and by extension, a Catholic education, is about people. Students come from different backgrounds, with different personalities and have different experiences but, like everyone else, are made in God's image. Today, the diversity in our Catholic schools in terms of ability, nationality, socio-economic background, ethnicity and faith is significant and that is as it should be. When these five criteria are taken into consideration, I would challenge anyone to tell me that Catholic schools are not as inclusive as any other type of school. They must be to be true to their ethos!"

As the bishop mentioned, much has been written in many publications about the place of Catholic-ethos schools in 21st Century Irish society. Divestment is frequently mentioned, as is the need for a greater secular presence in our education system, such as is seen in the United States public school system. In the North, integrated education is frequently touted as the obvious solution to an ever more diverse and multicultural population.

What receives less mention, though, is the reality that nobody does diversity-like Catholicism – particu-

larly in the educational sphere. As the CEO of the Catholic Education Partnership, Alan Hynes, noted in an article for *The Irish Times* earlier this week, the Catholic Church "is the only truly global body involved in education, working to provide education to more than 60 million children across the globe".

"The Church speaks in many scores of languages and has interacted with hundreds of cultures. By doing so, Catholicism has gained a rich understanding of humanity," Mr Hynes writes.

While the benefits of a supposed 'ethos-free', 'values-neutral' education are the subject of frequent imagination here, the benefits of a real, concrete faithful and respectful approach to education are already apparent to communities across the island of Ireland.

As this paper has reported on previously, divestment consultation with parents – those of faith and those without – often reveals a real hesitancy to let go of the Catholic education their children are receiving. While parents no doubt appreciate, as Bishop Deenihan noted in his aforementioned homily, the excellent academic education the schools offer to students of every background, what surely must undergird the attachment they have to Catholic schools is the grasp of their children's God-given dignity that a Catholic education demonstrates.

Catholic education takes a much broader view of its purpose than simply to prepare children for the workplace, although it does that well. To quote alongside Bishop Deenihan the foundress of the Mercy Sisters, Catherine McCauley, "The function of a school is to fit its students for life without unfitting them for eternal life". A good Catholic education, then, is one that takes a holistic view of each and every student, no matter where they come from in terms of ability, nationality, socio-economic background or religion, and attempts to meet them where they're at, informed and empowered by the teacher of teachers, Jesus Christ.

Catholic schools across Ireland have made and continue to make a truly unquantifiable contribution to the common good in Ireland, and that is truly worthy of recognition and celebration this week.

# Ireland's former Holy See embassy should be restored to 'former glory'



Mary E. Fitzgibbon

Last week there was considerable dismay over the proposal to change the name Páirc Uí Chaoimh to Supervalu Park. The Tánaiste rowed into the controversy posting on X: "deeply disappointed and annoyed at the proposal to change the name of Páirc Uí Chaoimh given that Pádraig Uí Chaoimh was a key figure in the formation of the GAA at club and national level." He went on to say that the Government allocated €30million towards the development of the stadium and never sought naming rights. There are few who would disagree with the sentiments expressed by Michéal Martin given that the very name Páirc Uí Chaoimh resonates with the inner soul of GAA support in Cork.

For the past 12 years a national lay initiative 'Ireland Stand Up' has campaigned to have Villa Spada, the former residence for the Irish Embassy to the Holy See, reinstated. On November 3, 2011, there was also deep disappointment and annoyance at the decision by Eamon Gilmore, and supported by Enda Kenny, to close Ireland's Vatican Embassy. Michéal Martin, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs, understood this. He spoke eloquently at a press briefing in Buswells Hotel on January 18, 2012, about the importance of diplomatic relations and our historic links with the Holy See. For thousands of Irish people our links with the Holy See, like our love of GAA, are synonymous with our Irish culture, heritage, and independence. They strike at the very heart of what it means to be Irish.

## Links

Ireland's historic links with Rome go back to the time of St Patrick. The Flight of the Earls from Rathmullan, on

St Peter's Square, the Vatican.



the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14, 1607, was another sad chapter in Ireland's fight for freedom. Pope Paul V granted the Earls exile in Rome. The O'Neil's and O'Donnell's are buried in San Pietro in Montorio which fortuitously neighbours Villa Spada. The Holy See was the first state to recognise Ireland's independence and exchanged envoys in 1929.

**“Ireland has a very special position in the Catholic world and in Rome should have an embassy worthy of Ireland”**

In 1946 Myron C. Taylor, President Roosevelt's personal envoy to Pope Pius XII, said to the Irish ambassador, Joseph Walshe, "Ireland has a very special

position in the Catholic world and in Rome should have an embassy worthy of Ireland". Taylor did the bidding for Villa Spada and Frank Aiken, Minister for External Affairs sanctioned its purchase for £150,000. For 65 years (1946-2011) Villa Spada, considered the Jewel in the Crown of Ireland's diplomatic mission, served as Ireland's resident Embassy to the Holy See playing host to culturally momentous events.

## Closure

Following the closure of our Vatican Embassy, the Irish Embassy to Italy was moved to Villa Spada in 2012. However, a review in 2021 said it was too small for the staff based there and "generally substandard in terms of office and conference facilities". No major refurbishment works had taken place on the property interior since 2004 and urgent

The Villa Spada in Rome. Photo: DFA



maintenance was required. In February 2023, a further survey reported it was "barely adequate" to serve as both an embassy and the official residence of the Irish ambassador to Italy.

For over a decade Ireland Stand Up has requested meetings with the various Ministers for Foreign Affairs, most recently with Michéal Martin, but to date our requests have been denied. Given that our Vatican Embassy's current office space over a Restaurant/Pizzeria named

'Satiricus' in Via dei Corridori, is unsuited to hosting any cultural events and the Villa Spada is 'barely adequate' to meet the needs of the Irish Embassy to Italy, there is ample justification for a reversal of the decision made in 2011.

## Tapestry

Like Páirc Uí Chaoimh, Villa Spada can validly be considered part of the rich tapestry of Ireland's cultural and historic soul. It justifiably deserves to be reinstated and restored to its former

glory, to once again serve as Ireland's Embassy to the Holy See.

**i** Mary E. Fitzgibbon is a spokesperson for Ireland Stand Up. Ireland Stand Up is a lay initiative that stands up for Ireland's Christian Faith and Heritage and campaigns for the reinstatement of Villa Spada to serve as Ireland's Embassy to the Holy See. It came into existence in November 2011 because of the closure of our Vatican Embassy by the Fine Gael/Labour Coalition government.

**“Like Páirc Uí Chaoimh, Villa Spada can validly be considered part of the rich tapestry of Ireland's cultural and historic soul”**

# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, January 25, 2024

## Mercy in Marriage

It will need to be given and received

Page 31



# Church's surrogacy teaching rooted in rights of the child

Pope Francis blesses the womb of a pregnant woman in this 2022 photo. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

**T**he gift of life which God the Creator and Father has entrusted to man calls him to appreciate the inestimable value of what he has been given and to take responsibility for it.

So begins the 1987 document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith known as *Donum Vitae* (*The Gift of Life*) on the Church's respect for human life and the dignity of procreation, replying to bioethical questions raised by emerging conception practices. It noted that this idea – life as a gift – is the fundamental principle upon which moral questions related to procreation pivot.

*Donum Vitae* is a document that, nearly 40 years ago, made



**The Church's view of life as a gift informs its view of the practice of surrogacy, writes Maria Wiering**

explicit the Church's teaching about in vitro fertilisation and related practices, including gestational surrogacy – a teaching that in January 2024 made headlines after Pope Francis called for a worldwide ban on surrogacy while speaking with members of the diplomatic corps assigned to the Holy See.

"The path to peace calls for respect for life, for every human life, starting with the life of the

unborn child in the mother's womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking," he said at the beginning of his address specifically to ambassadors. "In this regard, I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material

needs. A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract.

"Consequently," he continued, "I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally. At every moment of its existence, human life must be preserved and defended; yet I note with regret, especially in the West, the continued spread of a culture of death, which in the name of a false compassion discards children, the elderly and the sick."

"Gestational surrogacy" describes the practice of a woman carrying a child in pregnancy on behalf of another individual or couple through the use of IVF. Gestational surrogacy is reportedly more commonly

used than its predecessor "traditional surrogacy," which relied on artificial insemination, resulting in the "surrogate mother" also being the egg donor, and thus the child's biological mother, creating greater legal (and psychological) complexity.

In the United States, an estimated 750 babies are born annually via gestational surrogacy, but as an international commercial industry, surrogacy is reportedly experiencing what *Forbes* magazine described as a "global boom". Global Market Insights anticipates that it will grow from an estimated value in 2022 of \$14 billion to \$129 billion within a decade.

Contributing to this rise are celebrities who have publicly used surrogacy for their own

children, including Kim Kardashian, Anderson Cooper, Matthew Broderick and Sarah Jessica Parker, and Paris Hilton.

According to one surrogacy website, the United States – where surrogacy may cost \$130,000 to \$160,000 – “is the ‘gold standard’ destination for surrogacy” for its clinics and “supportive legal framework”. Surrogacy costs less in other countries, such as those in Eastern Europe and South America. However, surrogacy laws vary by country (and, in the US, by state), with some having no regulations around the practice.

Nine years before the CDF (now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) published *Donum Vitae* – largely in response to the development of IVF – Louise Brown had been hailed as the world’s first “test tube baby,” after being conceived via in vitro fertilisation in Britain. Prior to this scientific breakthrough, surrogacy was possible through artificial insemination, requiring the child’s “surrogate mother” to also be his or her biological mother. It also allowed for the possibility of a couple who could not conceive themselves to have a child at least partially genetically related to them.

In April 1986, a Detroit housewife became the first “gestational surrogate” to give birth to a child conceived of another couple’s gametes through IVF and then implanted in her uterus.

It was the second time the surrogate, Shannon Boff, had carried a pregnancy for a New York couple, Elliott and Sandra Rudnitzky.

The first time Ms Boff had served as a surrogate, the child was biologically hers – she was considered the “egg donor” but inseminated with the intended father’s sperm. With that baby, “I had to keep telling myself that this was the couple’s child,” Ms Boff told *People* magazine in 1987. “This one I knew wasn’t mine. That made it easier.” She was paid \$10,000.

Less than three weeks before Ms Boff gave birth, another surrogate, Mary Beth Whitehead, gave birth in New Jersey to “Baby M”. As a “traditional” surrogate, Ms Whitehead was the child’s biological mother. After giving birth, Ms Whitehead threatened suicide if the baby’s parents, William and Elizabeth Stern, didn’t give her more time with the newborn. They permitted her to take the baby for one week. Instead of relinquishing the infant, Ms Whitehead and her husband absconded with the baby to Florida. With both the Sterns and the Whiteheads claiming parental rights, the case went all the way to the New Jersey Supreme Court. The Sterns ultimately were granted custody, but the case challenged the legality of surrogacy contracts.

### Concerns

While the case was before the New Jersey Supreme Court, the New Jersey Catholic Conference filed in July 1987 an amicus brief that sided with neither couple, but rather expressed concerns about surrogacy as a whole, arguing the practice “promotes the exploitation of women and infertile couples and the dehumanisation of babies”.

“In short, it traffics (sic) for profit in human lives,” the New



A nurse and newborns are seen in the Hotel Venice in Kyiv, Ukraine, in this 2020 photo, which is owned by BioTexCom, a surrogacy agency. Pope Francis told diplomats January 8, 2024, that he finds surrogacy “deplorable” and would like to see the practice universally banned. Photo: OSV News/Gleb Garanich, Reuters

Jersey bishops said. “What is being paid for is a living child.”

**“An embryo is a unique human life and therefore ‘demands the unconditional respect that is morally due to the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality’”**

Their position reflected *Donum Vitae*, which had been released in February. However, Noel Keane, the Michigan attorney who brokered both surrogacy contracts, was quoted in *The New York Times* saying, “I think the Church is a little out of touch with the reality of all the Catholic couples who want children to say, ‘You’ve been dealt this hand by God and you’re going to have to live with it’”.

The document, however, makes it clear that its aim is freedom, not limitations, rooted in God’s plan for the human person. *Donum Vitae* considers specifically the morality of in vitro fertilisation, including respect due to the embryo, the procedure’s intervention upon human procreation, and its relationship to civil law.

The instruction affirms that from the moment of fertilisation, an embryo is a unique human life and therefore “demands the unconditional respect that is morally due to the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality”. It further notes that the IVF procedure often involves “spare” embryos that are ultimately destroyed. “The connection between in vitro fertilisation and the voluntary destruction of human embryos occurs too

often,” it states. “This is significant: Through these procedures, with apparently contrary purposes, life and death are subjected to the decision of man, who thus sets himself up as the giver of life and death by decree.”

*Donum Vitae* completely rejects the use of IVF, even for married couples, explaining that fertilisation cannot be separated from the conjugal act, because that act is “inseparably corporal and spiritual”.

Also among considerations in *Donum Vitae* is the use of surrogacy. It asks the question, “Is ‘surrogate’ motherhood morally licit?” and answers, “No ... for it is contrary to the unity of marriage and to the dignity of the procreation of the human person”.

### Failure

“Surrogate motherhood represents an objective failure to meet the obligations of maternal love, of conjugal fidelity and of responsible motherhood,” it states further. “It offends the dignity and the right of the child to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up by his own parents; it sets up, to the detriment of families, a division between the physical, psychological and moral elements which constitute those families.”

In 2007, 20 years after the publication of *Donum Vitae*, the CDF revisited the document and new bioethical considerations, especially related to human embryo research, in the instruction *Dignitatis Personae*. It affirmed that “the teaching of *Donum Vitae* remains completely valid.

So what of the infertile couple? Does *Donum Vitae* simply declare that married couples will simply “have to live with it,” as Mr Keane,

the Michigan surrogacy attorney, suggested?

No, indeed. Rather, the document suggests that Mr Keane’s kind of criticism is based on a false premise – that a couple has a right to a child, and that “right” usurps the rights of that child.

**“Donum Vitae, however, acknowledges the real suffering that can accompany infertility and calls for the Church to accompany couples who cannot become biological mothers and fathers”**

“The child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather, a child is a gift, ‘the supreme gift’ and the most gratuitous gift of marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents,” *Donum Vitae* states. “For this reason, the child has the right ... to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents; and he also has the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception.”

The document calls for continued medical research to prevent and remedy sterility, and for couples who experience infertility to recognise that it can be “an occasion for other important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work and assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children”.

*Donum Vitae*, however, acknowledges the real suffering that can

accompany infertility and calls for the Church to accompany couples who cannot become biological mothers and fathers. The Church’s pastoral documents, especially the 2009 document from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Live-giving Love in an Age of Technology*, expound upon why artificial reproductive technologies “are not morally legitimate ways” to solve the problem of infertility. Rather than turn to ART, the bishops encourage couples not to lose their hope for a child and to pursue medical treatment that could remedy their situation.

### NaProTechnology

As ART has advanced, so has NaProTechnology, developed at the St Paul VI Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, which aims to identify and treat the medical reasons a couple is experiencing infertility. Meanwhile, the ministries in the Church have also developed to walk with couples enduring this hardship. The US ministry Springs in the Desert, for example, offers multimedia resources, pastoral toolkits for parishes, Zoom-based meet-ups and other events for couples with infertility.

A recent Springs in the Desert blog post rooted infertility within the context of one’s hope of salvation. While acknowledging the deep struggle of waiting to conceive, and wondering if it will ever happen, the author also called for courage, writing, “The key is to realise he (God) gave you this struggle for a reason. It’s not about hopes for a baby or a cure. It’s about hope in God, Heaven, and him alone as the ultimate source of happiness”.

**i** Maria Wiering is senior writer for OSV News.

# To love and to cherish: Bringing mercy into marriage



Bill Dodds

**O**n their wedding day, a bride and groom may have stars in their eyes, but they have rocks in their heads if they think their partner isn't going to:

Drive them nuts. Sometimes.  
Take them for granted. On occasion.

Do something that truly hurts them. Once in a while.

Husband does it to wife. Wife does it to husband.

There are moments – there can be periods – when those wedding-day stars are replaced with long-time-married sparks of anger. Even in a happy marriage. Even in a marriage filled with joy and grace because:

A marriage is made up of two imperfect people. (Yes, yes, your betrothed was perfect! But how he or she has changed! Or more correctly, how your perception has improved.) That's why each person, at times, needs to seek forgiveness. Why each, at times, needs to offer it.

## Mercy

Enter mercy. Wedding homilists and marriage vows speak of love, honour and cherish, but mercy pops up again and again as the marriage progresses. And with mercy, that relationship does make progress. It broadens, deepens, intensifies.

If love is the engine that drives a marriage, mercy is the oil that keeps its many parts running smoothly.

What's in this amazing fluid that goes such a long way on cutting down friction? The glossary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: Mercy is "the loving kindness, compassion, or forbearance shown to one who offends (e.g., the mercy of God to us sinners)".

No couple gets very far down the road of life together without one person offending the other. And the other person offending the one. Those unpleasant mileposts can demand loving kindness, compassion and forbearance (that is,



patience and leniency).

Wonderful in theory. Pretty darned tough sometimes in the real world. And marriage is no honeymoon. It's as real as real can get.

**“Mercy talks, and mercy listens. It's no secret that one of the cornerstones of a happy and healthy marriage is communication”**

With all that in mind, here are a few points to consider:

To grow in love is to grow in mercy. God, all merciful, is love (1 Jn 4:8) and – thanks be to God! – a husband and wife were created in his image. But that growth in love and mercy isn't like some beautiful piece of furniture delivered to your front door and placed in your home.

No, no, no. When it comes to virtues, God can be more like ... IKEA. Here's a box crammed with parts, here are the instructions.

Now, put it together! (Yes, his helpline is always open.)

How do you do that? The good news: He gives each of you a lot of opportunities to get better at loving and being merciful. The bad news: He gives each of you a lot of opportunities to get better at loving and being merciful. Practice won't make you perfect, but it will make you much, much better.

Mercy talks, and mercy listens. It's no secret that one of the cornerstones of a happy and healthy marriage is communication. But not all talking is created equal. Sometimes it's so easy. ("That coat looks good on you.") Other times, not so much. Other times, it's saying things that are hard to say or hearing things that are hard to hear. ("Over the last couple of months your drinking has ...")

It's a wonderful, heady feeling to realise that someone who knows you better than anyone else on earth still loves you. Who, despite his or her awareness of your many faults and shortcomings, still truly loves you.

## Off course

But that also means your spouse is the one who can tell you when you've started to go off course. Started to slip here or there. Started to become less like the person God created you to be.

Not that you or your loved one will ever reach that goal in this lifetime, but moving forward in that direction matters. To you. To him or her. To your marriage.

There's a big – and important

– difference between being merciful and being a doormat. A misguided sense of mercy can lead to a host of problems in a marriage. Mercy doesn't overlook, ignore or simply dismiss an action or pattern that needs to be addressed.

**“As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action toward us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible”**

At times it can rightfully and wisely call for professional help. A case of the sniffles? Maybe a nice bowl of chicken soup. A ruptured appendix? Much more sophisticated and professional care. A series of spat or a developing pattern of underappreciating each other? Perhaps a date night or setting up those evenings on a regular schedule. A larger and more complex problem – infidelity, addiction or abuse? Assistance from those educated and trained to help couples and individuals.

Mercy is always a choice – an action based on free will. Just as God will never force someone to be merciful, neither can one spouse force the other to act that way. Yes, over time, being merciful can seem like an automatic response, but

that's only because – as the years have passed – a person learns to offer mercy with grace and speed. It may appear effortless, but each time, whether for a small misdeed or large offense, mercy demands an action. Or, rather, four actions.

Being merciful is making the decision to be kind, compassionate, patient and lenient.

In *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis' message announcing the Jubilee of Mercy, the Holy Father wrote:

"As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action toward us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible.

## Abstraction

"Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our well-being and he wants to see us happy, full of joy and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other."

So you are called to be merciful to that wonderful, amazing, loving – and imperfect – person you married.

**i** Bill Dodds writes from the US.

**“It's a wonderful, heady feeling to realise that someone who knows you better than anyone else on earth still loves you. Who, despite his or her awareness of your many faults and shortcomings, still truly loves you”**

# Is hell empty? I think not, but I hope I'm wrong



**Fr Patrick Briscoe OP**

Sometimes you hope to be wrong.

For example: A good friend that I made in college seminary discerned out of formation and began to pursue a relationship with a young woman. I didn't think they were a match. I told him as much. (Graciously, he did not end our friendship over my opinion.)

He continued to pursue her. Years later, they're happily married. They're very devout. And they're raising a beautiful family. I was wrong, thank God!

I feel the same way about hell. I think there are a lot of souls lost for eternity because they've refused God's love. I hope I'm wrong. But I don't think I am.

## Hoping versus thinking

Hell is on my mind because of a comment Pope Francis recently made. During an interview January 14 on *Che Tempo Che Fa* on Italy's Nove channel, the Pope was asked how he imagines hell. The Holy Father responded, "It's difficult to imagine it," and added, "What I would say is not a

dogma of faith, but my personal thought: I like to think hell is empty; I hope it is".

You can imagine the reactions on social media. Some commentators declared the Pope had decreed hell was empty. Others offered more nuanced responses. Catholic speaker Chris Stefanick said on X, "It seems to me that, in Scripture, God 'desires' that all men be saved but explicitly warns us that many are not." Another X user, Fr Joseph Krupp, wrote in a post, "Why freak out over the Pope saying he hopes hell is empty? What kind of psychopaths hope hell is full?" I certainly hope it's empty.

But there's enough evidence in Scripture and tradition to give one pause. I might hope hell is empty, but I think that it's probably not.

## Evidence from Scripture

Jesus warns in the gospels how our attachments can keep us from heaven's joy. "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire" (Mk 9:43). Jesus seems to be saying that it's possible to reject his love and cling instead to our own desires. We can put things between us and God.

Jesus admonishes us, putting us on alert for the judgement that will come on the last day. Those sorted on the right will enter into the Father's house. Those on the left who have ignored the way of life prescribed in the Gospel will be told, "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire

prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

St Paul frequently writes of the possibility of damnation. The book of Revelation offers some pretty graphic imagery about the torments of fire and brimstone that await those who belong to the devil.

Based on the teaching of Jesus and the witness of Scripture, the Church has long taught that love of God is incompatible with grave sin. Those who refuse to repent will perish (cf. Lk 13:5).

St Thomas Aquinas teaches that this eternal punishment is just. He writes: "Now after their fall the angels could not be restored. Therefore, neither can man after death: and thus the punishment of the damned will have no end. ... [J]ust as the demons are obstinate in wickedness and therefore have to be punished forever, so too are the souls of men who die without charity, since 'death is to men what their fall was to the angels.'" It's not possible to repent after death.

And the examples of men and women who have wronged little ones, preyed on the Faithful, ignored the poor, waged wars and committed countless other crimes that cry out to heaven for vengeance are too numerous to mention here.

Did they repent? I hope so. Do I think it is likely? No. I hope I'm wrong.

**i** Fr Patrick Briscoe, OP, is editor of Our Sunday Visitor. Follow him on Twitter/X @PatrickMaryOP



## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

### Why do we use incense at Mass?

**Q:** Our daughter has totally given up going to church because of the relentless use of incense at each Mass. It doesn't bother me but I do notice a lot of people in the congregation that obviously have problems with it. Since it causes breathing difficulties for many people is it really appropriate to use at Mass when it excludes attendance by many?

**A:** In principle, incense is indeed appropriate for Mass. The smoke that rises from the burning of incense has for millennia been understood by the Christian community as a symbol of the prayers of the Faithful rising up to God. Even beyond this, Catholicism in general and Catholic worship in particular has a strong 'incarnational' dimension. Among other things, this means that the Church understands that we are both body and soul, and that the engagement of our five senses – including our sense of smell – can help us enter more deeply into prayer.

I can understand how the overuse of incense might be a health issue for some people, and it's unfortunate that your daughter is struggling with this. If you sincerely believe that the parish's use of incense is excessive, perhaps it would be worth having a respectful conversation with the pastor. Also, most parishes do have at least one Sunday Mass that is celebrated in a less elaborate fashion, so perhaps your daughter could inquire as to whether there may be at least one incense-free Mass per week. If worse really comes to worst, it would also be legitimate for your daughter to opt to attend Mass at another nearby parish which might not use as much incense.

**Q:** I was very disappointed in your Q&A about why someone can't just attend Mass on Sunday and 'count' it for both Christmas and the 4th Sunday of Advent. There seems to be a genuine question of why we go to Mass in the first place. There is a real person, Jesus, who waits for us and wishes to

hear all about our day, our dreams, our frustrations. How many Catholics are happy to give just the bare minimum? Unfortunately, there is a trend in the Catholic Church to become theologians at the expense of a relationship with our Lord.

**A:** First of all, I do agree with you in principle – as Catholics, we should genuinely want a vibrant prayer life, and ideally we should all look forward to going to Mass, understanding it as a privilege and a joy, and not a chore to check off our list.

But like so many things in Catholicism, this isn't a matter of 'either/or' but of 'both/and.' That is, we can both attend Mass out of a sincere love for God while at the same time also taking care to understand the extent of our actual obligation.

Logically, it would be silly for the Church to articulate laws and obligations if paying attention to such laws was meant to be discouraged. One of the main reasons why the Church spells out obligations in the first place is to help us to better love and serve our Lord. So even if we as Catholics just do "the bare minimum" required of us by our state in life, this should be enough to help us grow in holiness if we fulfil these obligations with the correct disposition.

A healthy spiritual life is marked by a sense of balance and serenity. For those who struggle with any level of scrupulosity, stated obligations can be helpful insofar as they allow for objective knowledge of when one has actually fulfilled God's expectations. If the only guidance available on how often to attend Mass was something along the lines of: "Let your love for Jesus determine how often you go," this could set many Catholics up for a vain chasing of an impossible standard.

**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.

# The spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

**D**uring the years I have been writing this column, I have rarely mentioned the fact that I belong to a religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. That omission is not an evasion, since being an Oblate of Mary Immaculate is something of which I am quite proud. However, I rarely flag the fact that I am a priest and a member of a religious order because I believe what I write here and elsewhere needs to ground itself on things beyond titles.

## Legacies

In this column, however, I want to speak about the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St Eugene de Mazenod, because what he had to say about Christian discipleship and spirituality is something of value and importance for everyone, like the legacies that have been left us by other great religious founders like Bernard, Francis, Dominic, Angel Merici, Ignatius of Loyola, Vincent de Paul, and others.

St Eugene de Mazenod (1779-1861) was a French bishop of aristocratic origins who some popular myths identify as the bishop in *Les Misérables*. He was a man whose personality ran somewhat naturally in the direction of the stern, the introverted, the strongly inner-directed, the mystical, and the single-minded. He wasn't the type of person most people

would choose as their first choice for light dinner conversation, but he was the type of person who is often God's first choice to found a religious order.

Soren Kierkegaard once stated that to be a saint is to will the one thing. Eugene de Mazenod clearly did that and, in his case, that one thing had a number of aspects which, taken together, form the basis of a very rich, balanced spirituality - one which emphasises some salient aspects of Christian discipleship that are often neglected today.

What shaped the spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod and the charism he left behind?

First, he emphasised community. For him, a good life is not just one of individual achievement, fidelity, or even greatness; it is a life that links itself to the power inherent within community. He was a firm

believer in the axiom: what we dream alone remains a dream, what we dream with others can become a reality. In his view, compassion only becomes effective when it becomes collective, when it issues forth from a group rather than from just one individual. He believed that alone you can make a splash but not a difference. He founded a religious order because he deeply believed this.

In the face of all the issues confronting the world and the Church today, if someone were to ask him: "What's the one single thing I might do to make a difference?" He would reply: Connect yourself with others of sincere will within community, around the person of Christ. Alone you cannot save the world. Together we can!

Second, he believed that a healthy spirituality makes a

marriage between contemplation and justice. Judged in the light of our contemporary sensitivities, his exact expression of this is perhaps linguistically awkward today, but his key principle is perennially valid: only an action that issues forth from a life that is rooted in prayer and deep interiority will be truly prophetic and effective. Conversely, all true prayer and genuine interiority will burst forth in action, especially in action for justice and the poor.

## The poor

Third, in his own life and in the spirituality he laid out for his religious community, he made a strong preferential option for the poor. He did this not because it was the politically correct thing to do, but because it was the correct thing to do; the Gospel demands this and it is non-negotiable. His belief was simple and clear: as Christians, we are called to be with and work with those whom nobody else wants to be with and work with. For him, any teaching or action that is not good news for the poor cannot claim to be speaking for

Jesus or for Scripture.

Fourth, he put all of this under the patronage of the mother of Jesus, Mary, whom he saw as an advocate for the poor. He recognised that the poor turn to her, for it is she who gives voice to the Magnificat.

**“He wasn't afraid to publicly point out the Church's faults or to admit that the Church needs constant challenge and self-criticism”**

Finally, in his own life and in the ideal he laid out, he brought together two seemingly contradictory tendencies: a deep love for the institutional Church and the capacity to prophetically challenge it at the same time. He loved the Church, believed that it was the noblest thing for which one might die; but at the same time, he wasn't afraid to publicly point out the Church's faults or to admit that the Church needs constant challenge and self-criticism... and he was willing to offer it!

His personality was very different from mine. I doubt that he and I would spontaneously like each other. But that's incidental. I'm proud of his legacy, proud to be one of his sons, and convinced enough of his spirituality to give my life over for it.

**“Connect yourself with others of sincere will within community, around the person of Christ. Alone you cannot save the world. Together we can!”**

# Teaching with the highest authority



The sermon on the Mount by Carl Bloch. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Dt 18:15-20  
Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9  
1 Cor 7:32-35  
Mk 1:21-28

## The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



In this 21st Century, we absorb the news of the world quickly, through myriad technical gadgets. We're seeking information, knowledge and understanding of the world all day long. As we travel the information superhighway, though, we must learn to discern the authenticity and authority of those who speak or write all the words spinning around us.

In today's Gospel, Saint Mark tells us that Jesus entered a synagogue in

Capernaum on the Sabbath and taught with great wisdom. At the sight of Jesus, the people would have recalled Moses' promise of a prophet, as described in the first reading. The scene at Capernaum recalls the Gospel moment when Mary and Joseph, after anguished searching, found the child Jesus in the temple, teaching and conversing with the scribes and doctors of the law.

Jesus amazed the people

in Capernaum for he taught with authority. Then Jesus performed the powerful deed of healing a man by driving out the unclean spirits tormenting him. No surprise, then, that Jesus' words and deeds astounded those who heard him or that his fame spread quickly through the region of Galilee.

Jesus' identity and mission far surpassed the greatest of the prophets of Israel, for the source

of his authority was his divine origin and identity. Jesus is the Son of God, the one sent by the Father to reconcile us to friendship with God.

### Individualism

In a culture marked by individualism, the word authority inspires scepticism, indifference or rejection. At Capernaum, Jesus shows the people a different kind of authority. His words and deeds reveal

the love of God, a love that far exceeds our imagination and expectation.

**“May we marvel at the healing, comforting power of God's word in our lives”**

The word of God is trustworthy because it transcends human words

as an expression of divine love. Today's Gospel reading invites trust in the Word as a light for the journey of life. Just as the people were astonished by Jesus' authority revealed in his speech and his actions, may we marvel at the healing, comforting power of God's word in our lives, as we say in faith, “speak to me, Lord”.

Question: What is the place of God's word in your daily life?

**i** Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

**“At Capernaum, Jesus shows the people a different kind of authority. His words and deeds reveal the love of God, a love that far exceeds our imagination and expectation”**

# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## The contradictions in Govt's approach to public policy

**P**riests have been more in the news of late, thanks to that 'Last Priests' programme reviewed last week.

Yet again we got another fine example of a priest in action on **Mornings with Wendy** (Spirit Radio, Friday) when Rob Clarke interviewed Fr Gabriele Dolan – a Kiltegan missionary in Kenya for the past 40 years. He had just been awarded the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for his human rights work in Peace, Reconciliation and Development.

He spoke of being awed by the remoteness of where he was posted in Kenya when he went first. He worked a lot in the area of land – protecting land rights, helping the poor to avoid eviction, empowering the locals to use judicial processes to defend themselves. He was inspired by the people and by the Gospel, sowing seeds for the future. Asked about the state of the Church in Kenya he said it was a young and lay-led church.

Another priest Fr Eamonn McCarthy presented a new show **Science, Religion and the Modern World** (Radio Maria, Wednesday). This is really timely, an antidote to that lazy assumption that science and religion are in conflict with each other. This show explores the relationship and complementarity of faith and science.

Special guest Michael Flanagan from Derry has a



Jesuit Fr Gabriele Gionti, an astronomer, shows off Vatican observatory's Zeiss telescope. The relationship between faith and science has been highlighted on a new Radio Maria show. Photo: CNS.

background in engineering and physics. He came from a religious family but had a strong interest in science and sought to reconcile the two. Too often, he thought, young people opt for one or the other, and the world seen only through the lens of science can be a cold place.

He was obviously an enthusiast for both faith and science – he described himself as "blown away" by what the scientific method has achieved. In the Western World he thought there was too much materialism.

Historically he thought an intellectual elite had become drunk with pride in their own

ability, thus taking us away from God. All they could see was the material world, with love and beauty reduced to a chemical reaction. Yet so many scientists and medical people, even some Nobel Prize winners, were religious believers – a majority in the USA, he said.

He referenced miracles, with Fr McCarthy referencing the 67 proven miracles from Lourdes that had undergone rigorous scientific investigation. The priest-presenter also spoke of people being brought to the edge of science, where there could be or needed to be a 'leap of faith'.

Those who regularly urge

us to 'follow the science' are quite willing to abandon it when it suits them – especially on the issue of abortion. What's obviously a human life magically morphs into some mysterious entity that doesn't attract any human rights.

On **Newstalk Breakfast** (Thursday) Labour Leader Ivana Bacik was speaking about her party's 'Reproductive Health Related Leave Bill' when she gave the game away: "pregnancy is not sickness". I heard a penny dropping and I hope Ms Bacik did.

So, if it's not sickness, or an illness, why is so much Department of Health money being spent on it? Not to enhance

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday January 28 1.15 pm**

Pam Rhodes marks International Holocaust Memorial Day and explores stories of when hope and refuge were offered by Christians to Jews fleeing the Nazis in one of the darkest chapters of human history.

#### BROTHERHOOD: THE INNER LIFE OF MONKS

**BBC Four Monday (night) January 29 12.25 am**

At a time of change, a community of ageing monks reflect on their spirituality as the number of burials in the monastery graveyard continues to grow (R).

#### FÍORSCEÁL

**TG 4 Thursday February 1 10.30 pm**

Exploring how social media influencers share details of their children's lives, with parents monetising their daily life, their struggles and their private moments.

the health of mother and baby when sometimes sickness becomes an issue, but to end the very life of the baby – €46 million spent since abortion was legalised. And yet some who are really ill struggle to get treatment.

We have so many such contradictions, ironies, even hypocrisies in our approach to public policy. We pass a children's rights referendum, then another to take away their right to be born; we have well regarded campaigns against suicide, then at the same time assisted suicide is promoted; we have a drug driving problem and seek to decriminalise drugs, thus making them more readily available and therefore used more often. We have a notorious drink problem, and yet the Government is planning longer

opening hours for pubs.

This issue was discussed on **Today with Claire Byrne** (RT Radio 1, Thursday) with Dr Sheil Gilheany, CEO of Alcohol Action Ireland and Patrick Costello, Green Party TD and member of the Oireachtas Justice Committee.

I thought Ms Gilheany made sense, with her 'wealth of evidence' showing a strong link between extended opening hours and increased alcohol related harms including road deaths and assaults, especially in rural areas. I was impressed by Deputy Costello's defence of the plans. Aske for the benefits, he said that would improve the "night time economy" and that the night club and disc jockey sectors wanted it.

Not exactly a slam dunk.

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Four-hander explores complex identity trauma

When Pope Francis recently approved the blessing of same sex couples by priests, he polarised many Catholics. Andrew Haigh's *All of Us Strangers* (16) may polarise them even more. It deals with the struggle of a gay man, Adam (Andrew Scott), with his sexuality, mixing reality and illusion in an intense operetta of the emotions.

Adam is a blocked screenwriter living an isolated life in a tower block in London before starting a relationship with his more outgoing neighbour Harry (Paul Mescal).

At times the film seems more like a play than a movie with its atmospheric minimalist approach. There are

basically only four people in the cast: Adam, Harry and Adam's parents, played by Jamie Bell and Claire Foy.

Adam tells Harry his parents died in a car crash when he was 12 but when we see him visiting them he's 47 and they're the age they would have been when they died. What's going on?

He tells Foy he's gay. She doesn't take it well. His father seems more accepting. But then the landscape shifts, as does everything else in this challenging film.

When Adam brings Harry back to his house to meet his parents, it's empty. (The house used for the scene was Haigh's actual one.) He becomes very upset. Is this really happening or is it all in



A scene from *All of Us Strangers* (2023)

Adam's mind? Is Adam here at all? Or Harry?

By now the penny has begun to drop. Adam wants

to go back to the old days of a lost Eden, to the days when his parents were alive. He's in denial about their deaths just

as he is about his sexuality.

Within this juggled time frame there's an incredible scene where Adam can't sleep. He asks Foy if he can come into the bed with her and his father and sleep between them. But he's asking her as an adult, not a child.

When he does so, and they start to talk, Haigh keeps the camera on them for what must be at least five minutes. There's a shocking end to the scene.

I don't think I've seen a take this long since Cristian Mungiu's last outing – or a scene from the 1956 film *Giant* which I've never been able to get out of my mind featuring James Dean and Carroll Baker. It takes amaz-

ing acting to be able to sustain one's concentration for this long. But then Scott and Foy are amazing actors.

*All of Us Strangers* has been winning awards all over the world for the heart-breaking story it tells and the convoluted manner in which it tells it, continually teasing us with its freeform structure. It goes wherever it will as it takes us inside the aching loneliness of Adam's impressionable head.

Notwithstanding its brilliance, it will make for uncomfortable viewing for many. There are explicit sex scenes in it. But it's never exploitative. Ultimately it's a love story about the devastating effect of tragedy on fragile temperaments.



# Conflicting tensions in a renaissance Ireland

**Gerald O'Donovan: A Life. 1871-1942,**  
by John F. Ryan  
(Liverpool University Press,  
£95.00)

**Thomas O'Loughlin**

**T**his book is, to my knowledge, the first full length biography of that most complex character of the late-19th and early 20th Century, Gerald O'Donovan, who is now best remembered for his first novel: *Father Ralph*, published in April 1913, a momentous year for Ireland,

A few years later when Frank O'Connor was starting out in his first job down in Cork, one of the older men, knowing his interest in writing, one day produced from under his jacket a copy of *Father Ralph*, with the whispered comment: "Read that, boy. That'll show you what the country is really like".

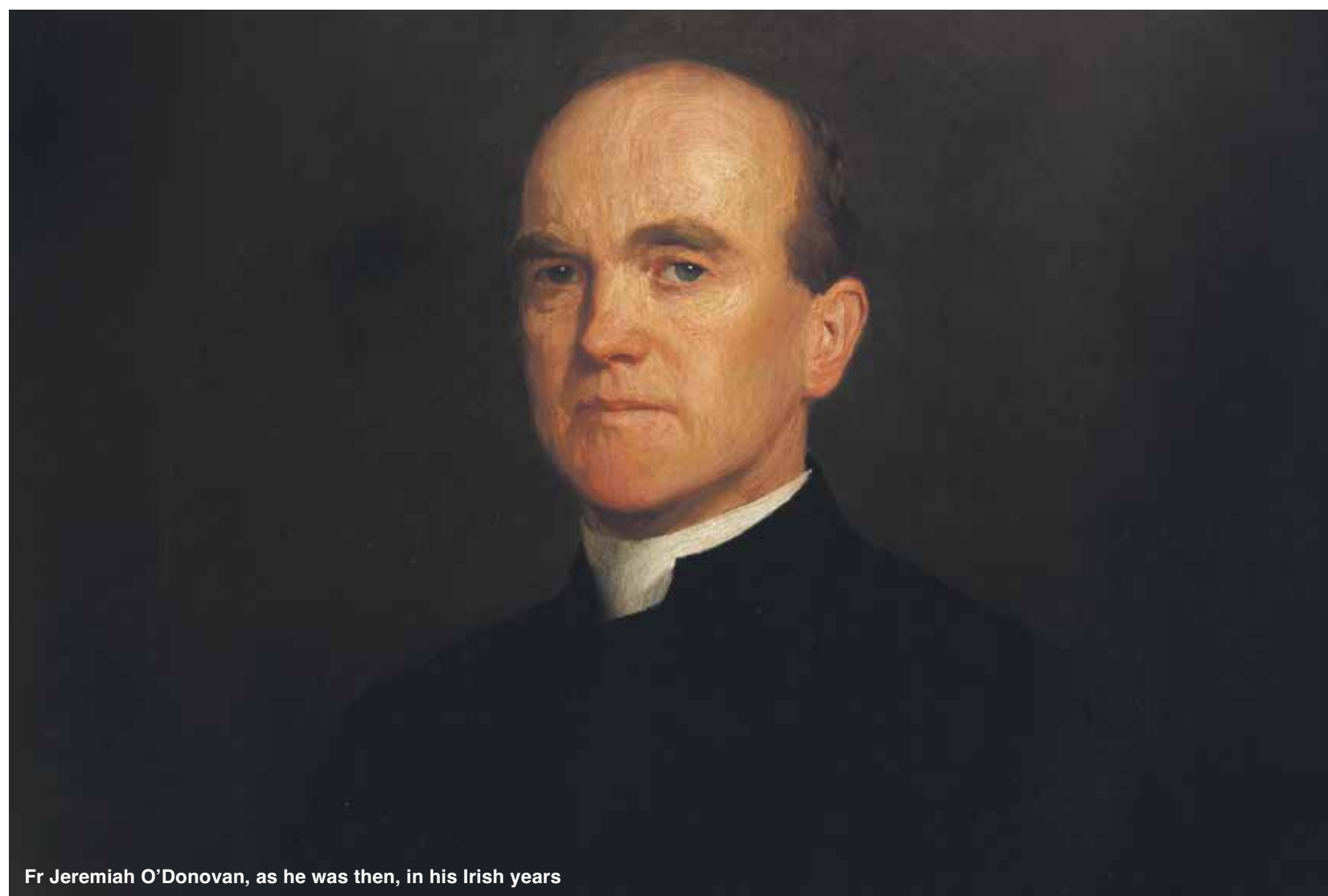
## Vocation

That was about 1918. And it was perhaps this book that confirmed the young man in his vocation to be a writer.

So for this and other reasons Dr Ryan's literary study is a most welcome book for not only does it give a panorama of O'Donovan's life of many changes, but draws together the clerical and literary parts of his life with his complex romantic life and some of his other endeavours such as working in the British propaganda agency during World War I.

*Father Ralph* ends with Ralph looking back from the mailboat at the receding Dublin and Wicklow coast while viewing his now removed clerical collar:

"He thought of how he dreaded laying it aside. And now there was only a sense of escape from bondage, of freedom ... Only one dream



Fr Jeremiah O'Donovan, as he was then, in his Irish years

had faded into the sea, he thought ... And then?"

**“We a century later who have often seen an even deeper abyss in recent Church scandals can view him as a prophet”**

A dramatic ending that sets out O'Donovan's own tensions between being a priest in a rural diocese and seeking cultural and eco-

nomie revival, but also the deeper tensions that then went unspoken.

## Complexities

He contrasts the complexities of life – in O'Donovan's phrase: “in the blind groping way that is the way of life” – with the outward face of Pius X's triumphalist Church: all knowing, all assured, and seeking to be all encompassing.

This tension, encapsulated in *Ralph*, O'Donovan presented as running right through the Church – and we sense that O'Donovan

knew he had committed the greatest crime in speaking about it.

**“He threw himself, literally, into the war effort in 1915 as a soldier, and then, when invalided, as a civilian working for the war effort”**

He remains one who shouted out that the emperor has no clothes – and we a century later who have often seen an even deeper abyss in recent Church scandals can view him as a prophet.

But the life of O'Donovan has still other strange twists. In Ireland he was deeply involved in the

Gaelic League, the creation of the co-operative movement, and those who created the Abbey theatre.

But while he seems to have remained in Ireland within his imagination – his later novels re-working themes from *Father Ralph* – he threw himself, literally, into the war effort in 1915 as a soldier, and then, when invalided, as a civilian working for the war effort; and who was thought of in later life as English.

## Affair

He married in 1910, but now he is best remembered for his long term love affair with the Anglican novelist Rose Macaulay that lasted from 1918 till his death – and which is explored in her 1956 novel *The Towers of Trebizond* – for many people her great masterpiece.

John F. Ryan has given us a fascinating, meticulously researched book that draws together many strands of a well filled life and throws light on all of them.

**“Not all of what he strove for was a lost cause”**

If readers, however, want to encounter a substantial monument to the talents of Gerald O'Donovan they should visit the great cathedral in Loughrea dedicated to St Brendan, a monument to the Irish art and artists of the Irish Revival, which was facilitated and urged on by O'Donovan in his years as a priest when he was Administrator there, his hopes of being made a bishop frustrated. It is a reminder that not all of what he strove for was a lost cause.

**“John F. Ryan has given us a fascinating, meticulously researched book that draws together many strands of a well filled life and throws light on all of them”**

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.

# A displaced person's prayer



Peter Costello

The other day to a female associate of mine (which is modern speak for my wife) who remarked to me that she had a clear recollection of a prayer used in her Dublin convent school in the early 1950s, she thinks about 1953, which the diocese had asked to be used in both schools and churches.

The idea of such a prayer seemed so appropriate, so very much of the present moment in this country, I thought it ought to be looked out and revived.

The term 'displaced person' came into use to describe those many, many thousands of people whose lives were disrupted, by World War II, which involved extensive aerial bombardments of cities and railway junctions and bridges across Northern Europe from Rennes to Berlin.

## Fled

Some were people made homeless in their own countries, but mostly they were people from Eastern Europe. They fled not just the actual fighting between 1939 and 1945, but also the advance of the Russian army across Eastern Europe, which promised not so much liberation and enslavement, and which led to the creation of the so-called 'Iron Curtain' and the establishment of Communist regimes in eastern European monarchies and democracies.

(The term 'iron curtain', while not his creation, was popularised by Winston Churchill in a speech at Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946. But this Communist dominion was an outcome of the talks he and President Roosevelt had with

Stalin at Yalta in early February 1945.)

**“Patrick Pearse, in his vision of the Ireland of the future before 1916, thought that Ireland would not be complete till it once again was home to eight million people”**

Ireland accepted many displaced persons at that time, especially those who could establish a connection with Ireland. The term passed out of use after the Hungarian Revolt in the autumn of 1956 – which also brought refugees to Ireland, many, but not all, hoping like the Jews earlier to pass on to the USA.

Our own national history depended on millions of Irish people finding refuge and new lives in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Africa, New Zealand and Australia. We were not always welcome in these places, especially in the USA and Australia. They too saw themselves as 'full up'.

It ill behoves us now, in our new but lasting prosperity to reject those who have come here hoping for aid and shelter.

In any case Patrick Pearse, in his vision of the Ireland of the future before 1916, thought that Ireland would not be complete till it once again was home to eight million people, the population before the Famine.

He, of course, envisaged for them lives of frugal comfort on small farm holdings of few

acres – but then Pearse was a poet and not an economist.

The idea of an Irish prayer from the past for the kind problem now facing us interested me greatly. But a search turned up nothing. The Catholic papers back then seemed not to mention it; research continues. But in the interval here is a suitable prayer current among the world wide Jesuit community. The prayer speaks for itself:

Strangers in a Foreign Land  
Lord God, help us to remember those who tonight will go to sleep unfed and unwelcome, strangers in foreign lands, people who have fled for their lives and are far from their homes. We lift up to you those who are escaping persecution and conflict, having fled death, torture or ruthless exploitation. So many carry wounds, mental and physical. So many have suffered greatly. Lord Jesus, give us more of your compassion for their plight, soften our hearts to their situation, and help us follow your lead in seeking justice and mercy on their behalf. We pray for an end to the wars, poverty and human rights abuses that drive desperate people to become refugees in the first place.

We give thanks for people working in troubled countries and ask for more of your blessing so we can bring life, dignity and hope to those that remain. We thank you that you are Lord of all the earth and all its people are loved by you. We pray these things in the name of your Son who was himself born into the troubled life of a refugee.

- Author Unknown (abstracted from Jesuitre-

source.org)

As a footnote I might add that readers should read Flannery O'Connor's short novel in her 1955 collection *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (Faber and Faber, €14.00). Miss Flannery is regarded as one of the most distinguished Catholic writers in the USA.

The story is entitled 'The Displaced Person' and in her own personal manner O'Connor explores the whole experience of being a displaced person, as the central character in the tale is.

Strangely the author considered the tale a failure, but that was by her own exceptional standards, which involved not merely literary qualities, but also theological concepts as worked out in a small town in the American south (she lived much of her adult life in Milledgeville, Baldwin Co., Georgia).

## Qualities

The gothic qualities so characteristic of Southern life and literature are also reflected in her work – for the South has been a morally challenged region since the earliest days of its history.

Here the Polish refugee Guizac is brought to the town by a Catholic priest at the request of a local farm owner to work on her holding. He is eventually killed as the outcome of the fears and resentments of the local people.

It suggests bleakly that displacement can end for a refugee, far from the war torn country that he comes from due to a failure of acceptance. It suggests a bleak view of life which Irish people would home is not ours.

# Exhibition shows off 'miniature masterpieces'



A blue tinted stamp of an angel flying over Cashel from a design by Richard King (1948)

**Miniature Masterpieces: Cultural identity, artistic expression and a century of Irish stamps,** by Stephen Ferguson (National Print Museum, €12.00; also available from the GPO Archives & Museum)

The first Irish stamps of the Free State were standard British stamps, adorned with King George's head, over-printed for Irish use temporarily in the new domain.

But soon stamps of Irish designs were produced. These were for the most part of a very high quality, and so they remain to this day.

It is to be remembered that stamps are not only for use in the post; just as import from the very beginning was the purchase of stamps and first day covers by collectors.

We tend to think of such collectors as boys about the ages of 11 or 12; but in fact there were large numbers of adult collectors.

Currently the history of modern Irish stamps is on display in the Printing Museum, Beggars Bush Barracks, in an exhibition put together by Stephen Ferguson, who is the leading expert in all things relating to Irish stamps from the earliest days.

These days a great deal of effort goes into the selection, design and production of stamps. But printing technology is constantly changing, and this means that the stamps themselves inevitably change in style.

When I was interested in stamps, Colonial stamps of all kinds were my favourites; I was a sucker for Pacific palm trees, and crocodiles on African rivers, and the sands of the West Indies.

However, seeing what are called in this show 'miniature masterpieces', I have come to see the great virtues of Irish stamps.

**“It implies that the voice of Ireland in the modern world of air flight would give expression to ancient Christian values”**

Everyone will have their favourites in this show but the one that really appeals to me is one from the 1948 showing an angelic figure flying above the ruins on the Rock of Cashel, bringing symbolically news of Ireland to the wider world. It was the work of noted religious artist of the day Richard King.

In my mind this image is tied up with the Ireland of de Valera. Radio had begun under the first Irish government, but he it was who created a short wave service so that he could speak directly to the Irish scattered around the world at Easter time. I love this stamp, and would give the very highest marks.

The figure was inspired in the artist's imagination by the angel Victor who appeared in a dream to St Patrick as the voice of Ireland calling him back to Ireland once more to walk among them.

It implies that the voice of Ireland in the modern world of air flight would give expression to ancient Christian values.

But readers can judge for themselves what their favourites are by going along to see the wonderful exhibition in Beggars Bush, curated by An Post's archivist and museum curator Stephen Ferguson.

# Classifieds

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Ireland

*Please pray for the beatification of*

*Little Nellie  
of Holy God*

“May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model”

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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# Leisure time


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[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)



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## Crossword

Gordius 647

- Across**
- 1 Erysimum, or a shy person who is frightened to get involved in social activity (10)
  - 6 Snare (4)
  - 10 Devil, fiendish type (5)
  - 11 Heavenly being such as Michael or Gabriel (9)
  - 12 Began (7)
  - 15 Bury (5)
  - 17 The longest river entirely in Spain (4)
  - 18 Topmost point (4)
  - 19 Allege (5)
  - 21 Popular ice-cream flavour (7)
  - 23 Follow on from (5)
  - 24 Chant, give voice (4)
  - 25 One of a pair born together (4)
  - 26 Firearm (5)
  - 28 Menaces (7)
  - 33 Herb known to Americans as cilantro (9)
  - 34 Causing death (5)
  - 35 Flank (4)
  - 36 Rudeness (3,7)

1		2		3		4		5			6	7		8
									9					
10						11								
	12				13		14			15				
16						17								
18										19		20		
				21					22					
23											24			
				25										
26		27					28	29		30				
						31								32
33										34				
35					36									

- Down**
- 1 Walk through water (4)
  - 2 Infinite (9)
  - 3 Of higher quality (5)
  - 4 Make a speech (5)
  - 5 Every one (of a group, etc) (4)
  - 7 Correct (5)
  - 8 Holy journey (10)
  - 9 Pudding made from cassava root (7)
  - 13 Musical instrument (4)
  - 14 Obstinate resist-ant (7)
  - 16 Depart (4,6)
  - 20 Greek philosopher (9)
  - 21 One of great expe-rience (7)
  - 22 Den (4)
  - 27 Discharged a weapon (5)
  - 29 Group of concu-bines (5)
  - 30 Pixie-like (5)
  - 31 Notion (4)
  - 32 This mathematical sign tells you to add (4)

### SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 18

GORDIUS No. 646

**Across** - 1 Parallel bars 7 Hop 9 Wean 10 Warhol 11 Spar 14 Whisk 15 Easel 16 Lies 18 Lucid 21 Dirge 22 Aesop 23 Taste 24 Vast 25 Cacti 26 Chase 29 Nape 33 Sahara 34 Lost 36 Roe 37 Little Bo Peep

**Down** - 1 Poe 2 Ring 3 Lawn 4 Earth 5 Books 6 Ship 8 Parish priest 9 Water diviner 12 Osiris 13 Fleet 14 Wales 17 Insect 19 Crewe 20 Darcy 27 Heart 28 Stare 30 Peel 31 Halo 32 Blue 35 Sip

### Sudoku Corner

517

**Easy**

		9			2			7
7				3	8	2		
	3					8	1	9
5	6		1		3			
			7		9		2	3
8	9	6					4	
		1	4	9				5
4			2			3		

**Hard**

3								
	8		6		2	9		
	2	4		1	9			
9		6			5			
1								7
			3			6		9
			2	8		3	4	
		5	4		1		8	
								1

### Last week's Easy 516

4	5	9	3	2	7	6	1	8
3	7	6	9	1	8	5	2	4
1	2	8	4	6	5	3	7	9
6	4	7	8	5	1	2	9	3
9	3	2	6	7	4	1	8	5
8	1	5	2	3	9	4	6	7
7	8	3	1	4	6	9	5	2
5	6	4	7	9	2	8	3	1
2	9	1	5	8	3	7	4	6

### Last week's Hard 516

1	2	9	3	5	7	4	8	6
7	3	5	8	6	4	1	9	2
6	8	4	1	2	9	7	3	5
3	1	8	7	4	6	5	2	9
5	4	6	9	8	2	3	7	1
2	9	7	5	3	1	8	6	4
9	5	1	6	7	3	2	4	8
4	6	3	2	1	8	9	5	7
8	7	2	4	9	5	6	1	3

## Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# Is Confirmation 'a dead duck'?

**We have Confirmation** in the parish where I live, this year. Confirmation is celebrated every second year, with the liturgy alternating between our two churches. Thus has it ever been, since at least the Year Dot!

In preparation for it and First Communion, a meeting was held with each set of parents. First Communion parents were generally full of enthusiasm and willing to go along with the proposed set of 'special Masses', Confirmation parents less so. Perhaps they are jaded from eight years of participation, or perhaps they are just jaded. They agreed they might attend these 'special Masses' but participation could not be guaranteed. At the end of what was quite a non-participative ordeal, the guest speaker and chair at these meetings concluded that Confirmation was "a dead duck", that it is impossible to summon up any parental enthusiasm for it at all. I wonder if the experience of other parishes has been similar?

## Covid

It was not ever thus. Confirmation in Covid times was quite a nice celebration. Gone was all the



razzle dazzle, the shoals of hangers-on parachuted in for the occasion. The liturgy was simple and local, usually presided over by the local pastor and involving just the families concerned. Instead of one mega-ceremony for the parish, a number of smaller liturgies were organised. But it is as if the memory of those prayerful Covid-times liturgies has been entirely excised. And yet, many people have happy memories of those unusual but intimate celebrations. It would have been wonderful if some elements of those liturgies could

have been retained. Unfortunately, this has not happened.

## Celebrations

It would be a great situation if people could choose between big bells-and-whistles liturgies presided over by the bishop, perhaps in a centrally-located church, and low-key celebrations in the local church, perhaps as part of Sunday Mass in Eastertide, when many First Communions are now celebrated. Perhaps such a local event might attract greater 'buy-in' from parents than the bigger more impersonal ceremonies. I don't know. Perhaps. Of course the big parish celebrations have attractions for bishops. The liturgy is almost perfect, rehearsed over and over again by the ever-cooperative schools. Music is often beautiful, again well rehearsed. The bishop can get a buzz from these liturgies, and no doubt he does work hard in presiding and preaching. The only question which remains is what lasting impact these big days leave: a memory of a nice Mass maybe, for the confirmand who may not be seen again till his wedding day, if then.

The amount of work schools put into Confirmation is enormous, often

taking up the slack in view of the parents' seeming lack of interest. It is hard to guarantee this into the future — and anyway, schools sometimes have their own agenda, perhaps underlining their own credentials as they compete with other local schools for future enrolments. But for all that, a 'dead duck' seems to describe the experience well!

## Cribs taking place of altar

When I was young, the crib was in a quiet spot in the church, where a person could nip in and say a prayer, anonymously. Gradually cribs moved to a more prominent location, even into the sanctuary. This was so we could all see the crib (even when we were supposed to be looking at the altar). Now the crib has all but taken the place of the altar in places, often obscuring it or using it as a backdrop. It seems inappropriate and yet people apparently love it. But a quiet corner might suit better; people might even pray there.

## Leaving judgement to God...

The hardest funerals we priests attend now are those of colleagues forcibly removed from ministry. We honour them because they were our co-workers, yet we can't concelebrate, they may not be addressed as "Fr" by the celebrant, their deaths maybe even go unpublished. Concern for their victims drives this, understandably; yet it hurts us too. Because we priests preside at the funerals of others who leave victims behind them: perpetrators of domestic abuse, drug dealers, paedophiles who terrorised their families, killers, even murder/suicides. We preside as professionally as we can, leaving judgement to God, who spares all. It seems as if only priests are unforgiveable.



## A bishop in southern India looks to The Little Way Association for vital aid for many suffering from flooding

Bishop Antony of Palayamkottai in south-east India has written to The Little Way Association in the aftermath of severe floods which have ravaged parts of Tamil Nadu including his diocese. He says "Many groups of people, including expectant mothers, children, the disabled, aged and sick have been left in a state of acute distress. Many have lost their employment and daily wages, significantly affecting their food security and health. Households have been particularly badly-hit, losing essential items such as cooking vessels, clothing, livestock, and more.

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"These people are struggling to meet their basic needs. I reach out to you, on behalf of all our people, to request your compassionate response to my appeal for funds to be used for food supplies, protective clothing, blankets, and nutritional supplements. Our Social Service Society will implement the relief work and are well-equipped to bring relief to those most in need.

### Please do help us to aid the recovery of the affected families and individuals, helping them to rebuild their lives.

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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.

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