

The Irish Catholic

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Priest warns Christian plight 'ignored' following Christmas killings in Nigeria

Chai Brady

A Nigerian priest based in Ireland has warned that embattled Christians in Nigeria have been "left alone to survive" by the international community, following attacks over Christmas that left almost 200 dead and hundreds more injured.

The attacks on 20 Christian villages in Plateau state started on Saturday, December 23 and continued into Christmas day.

Fr Innocent Sunu CC in Ss Peter and Paul parish in Athlone comes from the north-east of Nigeria where Christian persecution by Islamist militants has continued for decades.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Sunu – who has been the victim of many Islamist attacks but managed to escape uninjured physically each time – said: "What we go through in Nigeria is not something new and the mainstream media does not report it, sometimes we try and come out and say what has been happening but no one seems concerned. Everybody reads what happens in Nigeria as if it is just passing news."

"The international community has not put any pressure on the government, or on enemies of Christianity to make them know what they are doing to us is really barbaric. I feel we have been neglected, ignored, we have been left alone to survive by ourselves," he said.

The governor of Plateau State said last week that the attacks were "well-coordinated" and carried out using "heavy weapons". There was footage of the Christians who

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'Let the little children come to me'



Clodagh Coffey looks at baby Jesus in Ballyroan parish's crib after the annual World Day of Peace Mass in Dublin on January 1. Photo: John McElroy.

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Priest warns Christian plight 'ignored' following Christmas killings in Nigeria

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were killed being buried in mass graves. It is believed that the Islamic Fulani tribe were responsible for the bloodshed.

"The attacks in Plateau have been going on for more than 50 years, it is something that can easily be stopped," Fr Sunu insisted. "All the attacks that have been taking place... people know the group responsible for the attacks. We all know it is the Muslim Fulani group, we know these are enemies of Christianity."

He added: "To identify yourself as a Christian in northern Nigeria is

dangerous. There was a time we were told not to even put on the collar because it was dangerous for us. How many times have you heard of Christians being killed in Northern Nigerian cities because they were going to church, they were carrying a rosary, or carrying a cross?"

This is the second largescale terrorist attack targeting Christians on a significant feast day in recent times. About 40 people were massacred during Pentecost in 2022 at St Francis Xavier church in Owo.

Strangers in a strange land

In just five years, we will mark the bicentenary of Catholic emancipation. Four years after that, in 2032, it will be 1,600 years since St Patrick's mission to convert the Irish to Christianity.

Catholic emancipation, of course, marked a turning point in the fortunes of Irish Catholicism after centuries of brutal persecution and repression by those who sought to impose the Reformation on Ireland.

But, the Reformation in Ireland was a spectacular failure, and Irish Catholicism proved to be remarkably resilient. So much so that when the fledgling Free State was founded a century ago, it was to the Church that the first leaders of an independent Irish state looked for leadership in healthcare and education.

No challenge has been greater than that of attracting young men to spend their lives in the service of the Gospel and become priests"

We can be immensely proud of that fact, and proud of the many thousands of Irish priests and nuns who sacrificed their own ambitions to bring healthcare and education to people who desperately needed it.

Today, Ireland's workforce is amongst the best educated in the world – this is largely due to the work of Catholic schools.

Those priests, sisters and brothers who dishonoured themselves and betrayed their vocation leave a sad mark on our history, but they do not diminish the overall story which is one of bringing light to darkness.

This is the 950th edition of *The Irish Catholic* that I have worked on, and my last as Editor. I have been proud to serve in this role since 2012, and work for *The Irish Catholic* since 2005. They have been years of great challenge and opportunity for the Catholic community.

No challenge has been greater than that

of attracting young men to spend their lives in the service of the Gospel and become priests. It remains the most pressing challenge facing the Church in Ireland. We are quite literally running out of priests and those heroic priests that we have are being pulled from pillar to post to keep the show on the road.

Future

So, at the turn of the year and as I step down as Editor of *The Irish Catholic*, where do I see the future of the Church in Ireland?

Well, one thing is for sure: the future will be smaller. We will have fewer people at Mass, and fewer priests to serve our congregations – one doesn't need to be a mathematician to do those sums.

But the early Church too was just a handful of people and spread the Faith to every corner of the globe. If Ireland has been Christian for 1,600 years – and if a generation is roughly 25 years – that means Ireland has been Christian for more than 60 generations.

What if we got back to doing what we do best, building faith communities?

Let's look at the context both north and south. Over the last 200 years, the Catholic Church in Ireland has been involved in State-building. This has particularly been true in the south for the last 100 years, but the context in the north has been perhaps building a coherent Catholic community – and here I don't just mean spiritually.

That's no longer the case – in the south, Church and State have gone their separate ways. But as an institution we have been slow to appreciate the space that the re-alignment has created for us.

And the space that it has given us to not so much concentrate on State-building or providing infrastructure and concentrate more on creating authentic Christian communities of intentional disciples – people committed to the Gospel who want to share it with others.

So, what about having the space to return to our core mission? Inviting people into friendship with

God. This is not to say we turn our back on the wider society, or retreat entirely. There is a danger of Catholics retreating into a 'holy huddle' – this is not the way forward.

We need to wake up and realise our wonderful Christian heritage in this land. We need to grasp who we are, who we are the descendants of"

Pope Benedict XVI was a man whose theology has had a profound influence on generations of Catholics but a man whose thinking was often misunderstood or misrepresented.

He wasn't at all interested in developing a fortress Church. He spoke very much from the European context, but he was very anxious for us as a Church to understand better the secular culture and to keep the light of faith alive in that context, and to nurture it. He didn't want us to pull up the drawbridge, but to better understand and engage with the culture.

But because we were so institutionally strong in the past with schools, hospitals etc. people can mistake this for the core mission of the Church – which it is not. The core mission of the Church is to invite people into relationship with Jesus Christ and to help them nurture and mature this relationship.

And we need to wake up and realise our wonderful

Christian heritage in this land. We need to grasp who we are, who we are the descendants of.

From one man who heard the voice of the Irish, St Patrick, grew a great nation of missionaries, saints and scholars.

In his book *Strangers in a Strange Land*, Archbishop Charles Chaput observes that: "Bland secular platitudes, consumer junk, and cheap nihilism feeds nobody's soul."

"These things strangle the heart...if we truly love God, we'll evangelise the world he made, and whose soul he created us to be. After all, we're disciples and friends – not just servants, but friends – of the Lord of history, who died and rose again to save the world."

Gratitude

As I write my last 'Editor's Comment' my heart is filled with gratitude for all the many blessings I have received in this role. I hope that I have done some service in my 12 years, and I seek forgiveness for the times I have not been the Editor people wanted me to be. I have been privileged to meet and work with some of the best people in the world, and for that I am very grateful. I will return to the pages of The Irish Catholic in the Spring as a columnist, but as I conclude my service as Editor, I say a very sincere 'thank you' dear readers – it has been the honour of my life to serve you.

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'Baggage free' youth hunger for faith say college chaplains

Ruadhán Jones

College chaplaincies have seen "rapid growth" since Covid as young people are "hungry" for faith, college chaplains have said.

Growth of college chaplaincies has been

"exponential" on campuses across the island of Ireland, with many seeing thousands of students coming through their doors each week, chaplains told *The Irish Catholic*.

While Census 2022 highlighted that under

25s are most likely to have no religion, young people have a "hunger for faith", said Shannon Campbell, director of the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast.

The chaplaincy has seen engagement with students

jump by almost 20% in 2023, as students come in having "never had faith or never encountered it", Ms Campbell said.

"We rarely meet negative responses on campus," she says, adding that the "response has

been overwhelmingly positive".

Young people don't have the "baggage" of their parents regarding the Church and find it provides answers to "difficult situations" they see in the world, according to Fr Éamonn Burke.

"There's something happening in this age group," Fr Burke, one of two Catholic chaplains at University College Dublin, told *The Irish Catholic*.

"They don't have the baggage of their parents... there's an openness to spiritual direction in particular and learning how to pray," he said.

He compared the chaplaincy's work to the early Christian Church, saying Catholic students bear witness by the "great care" they show for each other.

"Working with students, giving them the grounding in the Bible and befriending them. That's a key thing is befriending them. The early Christian Church began that way," he said.

For Fr Ger Dunne OP, chaplain to University College Cork, time and effort is needed to tap into the hunger for faith and spirituality among young people.

"It's a lot of time and effort in getting people interested and having appropriate content for people who want to know more about faith, spirituality, and the other arm of it as well are bits of health and wellbeing. That takes time, that doesn't happen overnight," he said.

Archbishop Martin decries 'shocking' modern warfare in Gaza

Staff reporter

Archbishop Eamon Martin has decried the "shocking" example of modern warfare in Gaza in his message for World Day of Peace.

Reflecting on Pope Francis' message highlighting the "serious ethical questions related to the armaments sector", particularly the weaponisation of artificial intelligence, the archbishop of Armagh said "we must not lose sight of the shocking impact that so-called modern warfare is already having in places like Gaza".

Dr Martin bemoaned "the destruction caused by endless use of rockets and bombs in built up areas often filled with displaced people who are desperate for safe shelter" in his January 1 message.

He called on the international community to "urgently ask if war crimes

have been committed, or are currently being committed" in Gaza.

Archbishop Martin also prayed for the "courageous members of Ireland's Defence Forces who are currently risking their lives while helping to maintain a fragile peace along the borders of South Lebanon".

They are doing their best to prevent this conflict from spreading, he said.

Meanwhile, in his New Year's address Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell said "It is not enough to condemn incidents" like the suspected arson at a proposed homeless shelter in Ringsend that was rumored to be used for asylum seekers.

"We have a responsibility to understand and urgently address the roots of this unwarranted fear, and the harm it unleashes," said Archbishop Farrell.



Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin is pictured with girl guides after the arrival of the baby Jesus to the crib in Armagh Cathedral.

US basketballer chooses Christ along with his children

Jason Osborne

Former NBA star Devin Harris recently revealed in an interview with US magazine *The Atlantic* that he and his three children converted to Catholicism.

The move seems to have come following an academic interest in the Catholic Faith, with many commentators noting that Mr Harris's university thesis was on the famous 15th Century Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola.

Mr Harris played for the Dallas Mavericks during three stints between 2004 and 2019, and recently made headlines for his long-delayed graduation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he first enrolled after high school and was once the 'Big Ten Player of the Year'.



Devin Harris. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

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Priest praises bumper turnout for Christmas Masses this year

Jason Osborne

Many parishes across Ireland saw packed churches this Christmas as people turned out in droves to celebrate the birth of Christ.

This followed calls from priests and prelates across the country in early December for people to use the festive period

to encourage their friends and neighbours who have been away from the sacraments, to come to Christmas Mass and experience anew the sense of community.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr Fergus O'Donoghue SJ of Clonskeagh parish in Co. Dublin said that this Christmas was a particularly "joyful

experience in his parish.

"This year there was great involvement, and there was a great deal of joyfulness about it all," Fr O'Donoghue said.

"People were very involved. In some years, I have felt that people were in a sense observing. They might be people who wouldn't have been at Mass, except for funerals or weddings, for

years, but this time I felt that people seemed to be more engaged," Fr O'Donoghue said, adding, "that was my impression, anyway".

This Christmas boost comes as many parishes struggle to attract not only people who have been away from the practice of their faith for a long time, but also people who got out of the habit of church

attendance during the Covid-19 pandemic when public Mass was forbidden.

"We have here in Clonskeagh the Christmas Eve Mass at 7pm and the Christmas morning Mass at half past 10, and attendance was far, far higher than usual," Fr O'Donoghue said.

"What was very interesting was the number of families

that were here, which was very nice."

The most important thing parishes could do in the face of the festive influx was be "welcoming," Fr O'Donoghue said, which he felt his parish managed.

"The most important thing is that the actual parish church should be welcoming, and we were."

Dialogue at Catholic college 'opaque, disquieting' say staff

Ruadhán Jones

Staff at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) have criticised the "long, disquieting" and "opaque" dialogue process with University of Limerick (UL), which has ground to a halt.

MIC staff are now questioning if the college is in a weaker position

than at the start of the dialogue process.

The comments come in response to revelations that Minister for Higher Education Simon Harris rejected MIC and UL's proposed model for closer alignment after more than a year of negotiations between the two institutions.

"The last 18 months have been

a long and disquieting process," said representatives of MIC's Irish Federation of Teacher's Union (IFUT) after a meeting with MIC President Eugene Wall to discuss the future of the process.

In correspondence sent to staff December 20, IFUT questioned whether "MIC is now in a stronger or weaker position" after the

dialogue process failed to "find favour" with Minister Harris, expressing concern for the university's status in the higher education landscape.

While staff felt that opportunities had arisen for MIC to secure its future and "solidify its position", IFUT said "it now seems any such development was never

going to happen in quite the way MIC management had envisaged".

"One of the stated aims at the outset was to achieve university-level status (which we thought we had anyway)," IFUT said in the correspondence seen by *The Irish Catholic*. "Do we now not have it?"

Late bishop hailed for robust defence of Catholic education

Chai Brady

Tributes have been paid to the "dedicated and faithful" Bishop Patrick Walsh who served as the Bishop of Down and Connor from 1991-2008, following his

death on December 28.

Bishop Donal McKeown, Apostolic Administrator of Down and Connor, described him as a "gifted academic" who taught Mathematics at St MacNissi's College, Garron Tower (1958-1964), served as University Chaplain in

QUB (1964-1970) before being appointed as President of St Malachy's College, Belfast (1970-1983). He was also Chairperson of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). "His personal commitment to Catholic education was

well known and his robust defence of it will long be remembered," Bishop McKeown said.

"These early years of his priestly ministry taught Bishop Patrick that Catholic education, and the values it espouses, opens up

incalculable opportunities for young people and assists the journey towards peace in a society often torn apart by violence and conflict."

Bishop McKeown also said that alongside his diocesan responsibilities Bishop Walsh was "ardently seeking

to protect human life from the moment of conception to its natural death" as a member of the Joint Bioethics Committee of the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

The chime of wedding bells...



Breda Mongan and Lucas Costa are pictured with Fr Karl Burns on their wedding day, after getting married in St Mary's Church, Mountbellew, Co. Galway.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Opus Dei removed from NI list after Vatican protest

A requirement for NI police officers to declare membership of Opus Dei was scrapped by the British government after criticism from the Vatican.

Declassified British state papers reveal that the Papal Nuncio to Ireland told the British government the law would amount to religious discrimination.

Following the nuncio's intervention, Britain agreed the Catholic apostolate would not be listed as a "notifiable organisation" for the PSNI, RTÉ reports.

Plans for the new police force in the North included a proposal that officers be required to state if they belonged to organisations such as the Orange Order or the Freemasons.

Under pressure from Unionist politicians, the British government included Opus Dei and the Knights of St Columbanus on the list.

However the Papal Nuncio in Ireland Archbishop Luciano Storero wrote a highly critical letter to the Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson.

Dominicans set to celebrate 800 years in Ireland

This year, the Dominican Order plans to celebrate the octocentenary of its arrival in Ireland.

Eight hundred years have passed since the Dominicans first arrived in Ireland in the year 1224.

To commemorate the occasion on social media, the Irish Dominicans will be regularly sharing snippets of Irish Dominican history, to showcase the wide variety of activity the order has engaged in since first arriving on the island.

'Mr Europe' and his Catholic faith

Jacques Delors was sometimes called "the Father of the Euro" – he successfully promoted the single currency (which marks its 25th birthday this year.) This week, President Macron will perform a national ceremony in Paris to honour M. Delors, who died recently aged 98.

Influential

He was a hugely influential personality as President of the European Commission. He changed the name of the 'European Community'



Mary Kenny

to the 'European Union'. He could have been President of France if he had chosen.

He successfully altered the attitudes of trade unions which were hostile to the European project – he made them pro-EU. Sinn Féin, too, came under that influence – originally opposed to the 'imperialist' EU, it swung behind Brussels once M. Delors identified the Union

with social welfare and workers' rights.

Faithful

He was a socialist, a trade unionist, an intellectual, a family man and a faithful husband, a jazz enthusiast – and a committed Catholic, who had been educated by Jesuits.

And perhaps a common background, education and values brought Jacques Delors

into harmony with the Irish Commissioner Peter Sutherland.

“Although Jacques Delors was a towering figure within the EU he was also, unwittingly, one of the founders of Brexit”

Despite Delors's socialism and Sutherland's free market capitalism, they were good friends and worked together within the EU structure. (Both also had Spanish wives, another point in common.)

Sutherland's many achievements in his time

as commissioner – pioneering the ERASMUS scheme for students, freeing the skies for airline competition – were backed by Delors, who came to Dublin on private visits to Peter Sutherland's home.

Towering

And yet, although Jacques Delors was a towering figure within the EU he was also, unwittingly, one of the founders of Brexit. His speeches, during the late 1980s and 1990s, urging a federalist union prompted the stirrings of British reaction against "ever closer union".

Political lobbies and think-tanks were formed against the EU's powers. *The Sun* newspaper carried the rude, but popular, headline repulsing Delors' measures:

"Up yours, Delors!"

“Protestant England and Wales had never aligned with this Europe: Henry VIII was the first Brexiteer!”

Some commentators blame Boris Johnson or Nigel Farage for Brexit, but the split began 30 years' earlier. And perhaps it was inevitable. Jacques Delors' vision was consistent with a historic notion of a united Christian Europe implementing Catholic social teaching – three of the EU's founders, Schumann, De Gasperi and Adenauer had been Catholics.

But as the British Tudor historian David Starkey has pointed out, Protestant England and Wales had never aligned with this Europe: Henry VIII was the first Brexiteer!

Jacques Delors, who lived (and ate) modestly, and never revelled in personal glory, deserves his encomiums. But his influence went in several disparate directions.



Jacques Delors

A terrible tragedy

January marks the 40th anniversary of the tragic and desperately sad death of 15-year-old Ann Lovett, who died – as did her infant son – giving birth in a grotto in Granard. I believe the permissive society was partly to blame for this tragedy.

In Britain, in the early 1980s, the campaigner Victoria Gillick was trying to halt the practice of providing contraception to young teenagers without telling their parents.

Girls as young as 12 and 13 were being put on the pill by the Family Planning Association. Vicky Gillick thought this deceptive of parents, and gave the green light to sexual activity under the age of consent. She was, of course, mocked. But she was right – as later episodes in England involving the sexual exploitation of under-girls by gangs would show.

It would be unkind and lacking in humanity to use Ann Lovett's death as a political argument: her memory

should be respected and her suffering compassionately understood.

But I do feel that those years of the 1980s drove forward a certain culture of lifting all boundaries. To some extent, this has been reversed, and it's now better recognised that young teenagers are vulnerable.

The scandal around Jeffrey Epstein and Prince Andrew has shown a much greater grasp of the age of consent boundary – the point Vicky Gillick was trying to make.

● One of the most useful Christmas presents I received cost nothing at all: a young cousin downloaded an app on my mobile phone which counts daily steps walked – the 'Pedometer Step Counter'. If you carry the mobile device with you, it measures exactly how much you walk in a day. Brilliant!

Some health gurus suggest that a fit person should walk 10,000 steps daily, but others consider 5,000 steps are sufficient to keep body and mind active. Some say 3,000 steps is a good average for older people. In

any case, it's fun to keep count. I have generally managed between 3,000 and 5,000 and on one day did nearly 8,000, but that was pretty tiring.

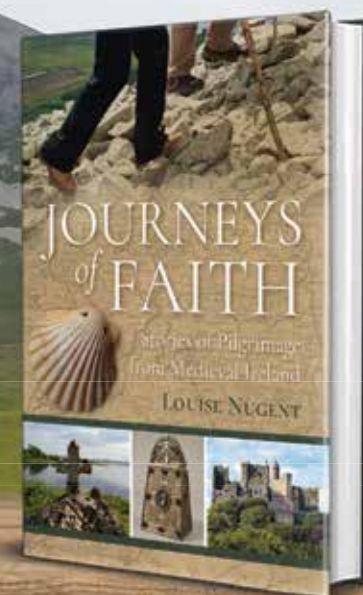
Walking can be boring, I find, but keeping a track record gives it more purpose.

Yet the orthodox Jewish regulation of walking to synagogue makes sense. It makes you think, it gives you exercise, it gives you more chance to encounter neighbours, and it saves clogging up the car parks with automobiles!

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Government ignores deep ethical problems of surrogacy



Many European countries ban both commercial and non-commercial surrogacy for very good reasons, writes David Quinn

Successive governments have been planning legislation to regulate the area of Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR), which cover techniques like In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

It looked as though such a law would finally be passed sometime earlier in the life of this Government but then it got delayed further because campaigners were not happy with how it dealt with international surrogacy. They wanted the law to make it much easier for couples or individuals who hire a surrogate mother overseas to have a baby for them to then come home with the baby and be formally approved as the baby's legal parents.

Altered

The Government has now altered the AHR law to granted them their wish.

At one level, what could be more humane and compassionate, and indeed at first sight, compatible with Catholic teaching which is extremely pro-family and pro-natal? Shouldn't we be delighted when any couple has a baby by whatever means? But of course, the giveaway is in the words 'by whatever means' because obviously a good end does not justify any means.

Let's start with IVF itself. Catholic teaching is against conception outside the body itself. 'In vitro' literally means 'in the glass'. The common name for IVF babies is 'test tube' babies because they are, in effect, conceived in a test tube, that is, the egg is fertilised in a test tube, or some equivalent.

If an egg is successfully fertilised, it becomes a tiny human being. Usually, IVF labs will extract several eggs at one go from a woman and then fertilise a few of them. They will implant up to three of the successfully fertilised eggs inside the woman hoping at least one of them will 'take'.

IVF is tremendously expensive, costing several thousand euro per try, or 'cycle'. It is extremely arduous for the couples involved, especially for the woman, and it also has a relatively low success rate.

According to NHS data in England, when a woman is under 35, there is a 32% chance that a given treatment cycle will result in a pregnancy. Once she is in her late 30s, this has dropped to 19%, and once she is 40 it has gone down to 11%.

Given that many couples these days delay trying for a baby naturally until they are well in their 30s anyway, by the time they get to IVF, the woman could easily be in her late 30s and her chances of a successful pregnancy via IVF are low. Even if she tries cycle after cycle and spends very large sums of money, there is still a relatively low chance of success and in the meantime, there will have been much heartbreak.

“One way or the other, we see little respect for human life in its earliest stages”

When you look up the websites of IVF clinics, they are much keener to advertise stories of success than the many more tales of failure.

But IVF presents other problems. If three embryos are implanted in a woman, and all three 'take', then clinics will commonly recommend a so-called 'pregnancy reduction', that is, an abortion, to give the other babies a better chance of a healthy birth. The fertility industry has no visible issue with abortion.

In addition, when a woman does successfully become pregnant, there might be 'spare' embryos left over that will never be used. Depending on the law of the country, these might be stored indefinitely, destroyed, or sold for research purposes. One way or

“If three embryos are implanted in a woman, and all three 'take', then clinics will commonly recommend a so-called 'pregnancy reduction', that is, an abortion, to give the other babies a better chance of a healthy birth”



A nurse and newborns are seen in the Hotel Venice, which is owned by BioTexCom, a surrogacy agency in Kyiv, Ukraine, in this file photo from 2020. Photo: CNS

the other, we see little respect for human life in its earliest stages.

IVF sometimes involves using the sperm or eggs of third parties, that is, from people other than the couple availing of IVF. If third party gamete is used, then the natural tie to either the natural mother or father, or in some countries, both, is deliberately severed.

IVF industry

So, as we can see, IVF is bedevilled with ethical problems, and indeed the IVF industry can sometimes be accused of exploiting the desperate neediness of infertile couples in order to make a profit, but that is what all IVF clinics want to do with the end. Couples delaying trying to have children until very late in the day is a great boon for them.

The ethical problems surrounding surrogacy are much worse, which is why many European countries ban both commercial and non-commercial surrogacy, and almost all ban the commercial variety.

Even so called 'altruistic'

surrogacy deliberately splits the role of mother into at least two people, namely the surrogate (birth) mother and the woman, if there is a woman (it might be a single man or same-sex male couple) who will raise the child. There might also be a third mother when someone has donated or sold her egg to the couple or individual who have commissioned the baby.

“In Europe, only Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia permit commercial surrogacy. Every other country sees how deeply problematic it is”

This can easily create identity issues for the child.

Commercial surrogacy is worse again. In this case, money changes hands. The baby is effectively turned into a commodity. The surrogate mother enters into a contract for payment and

at the end of nine months agrees to hand over the baby she has borne.

Exploits

The woman is almost invariably from a low-income background leading to widespread accusations that commercial surrogacy exploits poor woman in addition to commodifying babies.

This is why, in Europe, only Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia permit commercial surrogacy. Every other country sees how deeply problematic it is.

The government here will not permit women living in Ireland to enter commercial surrogacy contracts. But will it allow intending parents to do so with women overseas. Why is there one standard for Irish women and a lower one for women in other countries?

The government pretends it is not allowing couples to hire commercial surrogates and will only allow surrogate mothers to be paid "reasonable expenses". But this is sleight of hand. "Reasonable expenses" can come to thousands of euro which go a long way in a poor country.

If and when the proposed law goes through, Ireland will have one of the most permissive surrogacy laws in Europe, and as usual, it will have been passed without any proper

debate, either in the Dail or in society at large. RTE has served us particularly poorly in this regard and is surely in breach of its duties as the national broadcaster. Even if it did permit critics of surrogacy on air, they would almost certainly be portrayed as heartless.

“Perhaps it is enough that surrogacy looks 'modern' and therefore a further departure from our 'dark', Catholic past”

Meanwhile, the station is glad to run stories about the adoption practices of years ago that often deliberately severed the link between the natural mother (and father) and their child, with birth certs being sometimes illegally altered.

But today we are presiding over something similar, and it has full official approval. Perhaps it is enough that surrogacy looks 'modern' and therefore a further departure from our 'dark', Catholic past. In fact, we are repeating with same mistakes, but doing so with eyes wide open. It is quite remarkable.

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Niamh Uí Bhriain

The View



Committee told gas capsules are good for assisted suicide

For the past several months, an Oireachtas Committee looking at Assisted Suicide has been hearing from expert and other witnesses in regard to the medical, political, social and ethical issues around the frankly disturbing concept of killing another person under the guise of compassion.

One of the members of the Committee, Gino Kenny, who is a People Before Profit TD for Dublin Mid-West, has already introduced a bill seeking to legalise assisted suicide, and is a trenchant supporter of changing the law. He has noted that, much as with the legalisation of abortion, introducing a law which allows a practitioner to end the life of another human being would be evidence of a “changing” country.

Solutions

Perhaps he has never paused to consider that the solutions offered by so-called liberals always seem to centre around ending life, instead of supporting it. Death, in their supposedly progressive world – and as we have seen in Canada – is fast becoming the default option. There’s really nothing enlightened about that.

Mr Kenny argues that what is under discussion is “assisted dying”, as if we were talking about scented candles and beautiful music or – as palliative care does provide – medical care to relieve suffering. But he must know that this is hogwash.

In fact, he tries to take exception to task when they point out that assisted suicide involves killing, attempting to scold eminent Consultant Geriatrician Prof. Des O’Neill by saying that he (Kenny) found it “very regretful” that the doctor spoke of “eugenics and killing” and that it was “offensive” to do so.

Mr Kenny’s attempts to interrupt Prof. O’Neill didn’t stop the doctor making the entirely correct observation that he felt concerned there was an attempt to stifle



informed debate and to avoid the reality of what’s being proposed. He pointed out that the language he used was that used in ethics journals and ethics research – and that the *Lancet*, one of the top medical journals in the world, had talked about preventing healers becoming killers.

“I did not provide the injection because what I did was build a machine so they could press the button and the machine would deliver the injection”

As more than one observer noted, it’s time to stop the obfuscation – and

“They pressed the button. It was clear that it was not a doctor doing it to a moribund patient, but it was a situation where the person knew what they were doing, answered the questions on the laptop and pressed the button”

also to call out the naked aggression being shown by some committee members towards distinguished experts. Senator Lynn Ruane’s snarling at Prof. William Binchy, and her observation about “white privileged men”, is a case in point.

Hostility

There was no such hostility shown to a witness supportive of assisted suicide, Dr Philip Nitschke, when he appeared before the committee – even when he talked about the use of a gas capsule to end human life.

Described as a maverick physician in one *Lancet* article, Dr Nitschke told the Oireachtas Committee that he “provided what turned out to be the world’s first legal, lethal voluntary injection to four patients. In fact, I did not provide

the injection because what I did was build a machine so they could press the button and the machine would deliver the injection. It moved it from what would be considered to be voluntary euthanasia, where I sat there and gave them an injection and they died on the end of my needle, to a situation where it became assisted suicide”.

“Medicalised law, which is what we had in the Northern Territory and what the committee is considering here, is a mistake”

“They pressed the button. It was clear that it was not a doctor doing it to a

moribund patient, but it was a situation where the person knew what they were doing, answered the questions on the laptop and pressed the button. That machine is now in the British Science Museum in London,” he said.

He then told the committee that even the “medicalised law, which is what we had in the Northern Territory and what the committee is considering here, is a mistake”.

He suggested that Ireland follow the Swiss model, arguing that a “a person must be of sound mind, and they have to do it themselves and have to press the button, but it gets away from that idea of having to go off and ask a panel of doctors, ‘Am I sick enough to satisfy your criteria of what the level of suffering is?’”

Then he added: “I will finish on one final point. Do not restrict the method or the means by which a person dies. I strongly urge that it is left open because we see new methods come in and I urge that one does not try to restrict it to drugs, intravenous or oral.

The use of gases is very important and we see that happen now. That will provide a better, more peaceful and reliable death for many people.”

“There was no shocked reaction from Gino Kenny or Lynn Ruane at the mention of gassing people in order to assist them to kill themselves”

Nitschke was referring to some version of his invention – ‘a death pod’ or ‘gas capsule’ – described by the *Irish Times* as resembling a vehicle “that allows people to end their lives using gas instead of drugs”.

“It has advantages for sick people who sometimes cannot swallow or have problems finding a vein. If you are alive, you’re breathing, and if you’re breathing then this will work,” he told the paper, who noted that the capsule “has divided opinion among European end-of-life organisations, with some reminded of Nazi-era gas chambers”.

Indeed. Yet there was no shocked reaction from Gino Kenny or Lynn Ruane at the mention of gassing people in order to assist them to kill themselves, despite the obvious and horrendous connotations. Instead he was thanked for his contributions.

A host of leading experts in palliative care, psychiatry, geriatrics, and more have given compelling evidence to the committee spelling out the need to oppose assisted suicide and the enormous dangers it presents to those most vulnerable. We must do more to make that evidence heard. But we also need to make people aware that its proponents are telling legislators to provide gas capsules to end human life in Ireland. That revelation tells us all a great deal about the mindset supporting assisted suicide.

"Today the visibility of faith has for all intents and purposes vanished" – Archbishop Dermot Farrell

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The Irish Catholic

Young people ‘hunger’ for faith say college chaplains



Campus chaplaincies are growing rapidly across the island of Ireland, hears **Ruadhán Jones**

When Census 2022 came out, the drop in numbers identifying as Catholic came as little surprise. However, when it came to the under 30s there was an unexpected revelation – the majority still identify as Catholic.

This reality goes against the grain of received wisdom about rejection of the Church and trends towards no religion. But while it came as a surprise to most people, college chaplains already knew that the truth was much subtler than portrayed.

We spoke to chaplains on four campuses across the island of Ireland, which revealed the “rapid growth” that many have undergone, as young people still show a hunger for the faith.

QUB

“University is the perfect time to catch students and pique their interest in something new,” says Shannon Campbell, director of the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast, adding that “there is a hunger for faith on campus”.

“We do have a lot of students coming in who are curious, they never had faith or never encountered it,” she continues. “They potentially find faith through the chaplaincy and a home where they can practice. Or else we meet people who have faith, but

“The last three years, numbers have been really high and are continuing to grow”

never really practiced it and want to try.”

For Ms Campbell, it shouldn't come as a surprise that young people are interested in faith and Catholicism as many are “deep thinkers” who are open to exploring the Faith.

“We rarely meet negative responses on campus,” she says, adding that the “response has been overwhelmingly positive”.

The response to the chaplaincy's work isn't only based on interactions with students who are already Catholic. Over the past three years, a handful of students have entered the Church through the chaplaincy.

They come from a mix of backgrounds, she explains. For example, “there are some with a Catholic and a Protestant parent who are just coming to the Catholic side of faith at university. For others, it is totally new – that started through being invited to Bible study or through coming to chaplaincy on a Wednesday when we do the Sycamore series.

“Once they know them, they invite them to appropriate meetings or Bible studies... We are definitely seeing growth”

“The last three years, numbers have been really high and are continuing to grow,” says Ms Campbell. She adds that when it happens, “we share the news and whenever that communication goes out, that is usually the time we get an email or message from a student showing interest. We do like to share the good news, that confidence is what others sometimes need.”

One of the reasons for that successful outreach has been the arrival of Focus missionaries. The American-based lay

organisation sends young missionaries to campuses around the world, and have bases in Belfast, Dublin and Cork.

“It's the second year of having them, they are the hands and feet of the chaplain,” says Ms Campbell. “They are on campus every day, meeting new students, getting to know them. Once they know them, they invite them to appropriate meetings or Bible studies... We are definitely seeing growth.”

In 2023, of the approximately 10,500 students enrolled at QUB who identify as coming from a Catholic background, 7,583 registered their wish to receive the chaplaincy's services and are in regular contact about the faith and pastoral supports they provide. This is up by 18.6% from last year 2022, with the total rate of active engagement at 72.2%.

This comes despite the fact that QUB's Catholic chaplaincy is going through a period of transition, building a new home for the chaplaincy and developing their facilities.

“Growth has been so rapid over the last few years, the diocese has a lot more confidence to continue. While many organisations would shut down during such a transition, we are continuing to grow,” Ms Campbell says.

UCD

What is the role of the chaplain on a university campus? “To confuse people,” says Fr Éamonn Bourke with a smile. “For students who have decided there's no God, to throw a spanner in the works and appear saying, well you might think about that.”

For a good number of the students coming to University College Dublin (UCD), it is the last chance for their faith, he says. So Fr Bourke and his colleague Fr Brendan Ludlow want to give students and staff “a good experience of priests” and of the Church.

“We had to really go out



Members of QUB's Catholic chaplaincy are pictured raising awareness on campus.

and sell ourselves. There's no point of sitting in and in an office, that doesn't work,” Fr Bourke tells me in their brand new kitchen, testimony to the support they receive from college authorities.

“They don't have the baggage of their parents, they've heard rumours about the Church in the past but they don't relate to that”

Hot chocolate mornings, social nights, start-of-term barbecues – all of these attract people to St Stephen's chaplaincy and open their eyes to the fact that there is a welcoming

church community open to them.

It's an approach that has borne fruit, with “exponential” growth says Fr Bourke. At the opening-term barbecue, 350 people attended, while St Stephen's chaplaincy sees more than 1,000 students coming through their doors every week. The Newman Society – named for the college's founder St John Henry Newman – regularly has 70 members at their weekly prayer and social nights.

“There's something happening in this age group,” he explains. “They don't have the baggage of their parents, they've heard rumours about the Church in the past but they don't relate to that. They're at an age now where the world is in a very difficult situation

and they're asking, what's this all about. They will come to chaplains and ask those questions.”

The two chaplains regularly have students come to them for spiritual direction, which makes up 95% of Fr Bourke's work, for Confession, adoration and Mass.

“I've had to brush up on everything to do with Catholicism to make sure I know what the Church teaches,” he reflects. “Because they do ask you and they want to know why and how and where... They will ask very interesting questions, they will ask what's this all about. There's an openness to spiritual direction in particular and learning how to pray.”

Focus missionaries have been present on UCD's



UCC's chaplaincy team are pictured with Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin.

campus for five years now. They reach students that Fr Bourke and Fr Ludlow simply can't. Fr Bourke relates the story of one young man the missionaries brought back to the Faith.

“They’re great, great young people. They’re so fun, idealistic”

“He had no faith, agnostic or atheist, and now he's in the seminary. He had no interest in that kind of stuff. They got chatting, he was a nice guy and didn't want to tell the missionary get lost. They exchanged numbers and met for coffee a few weeks later. It was so lovely to see the young man in the church, doing his holy hour each morning. He went from nothing,” says Fr Bourke.

Though Fr Bourke and Fr Ludlow are the public face of chaplaincy – their collars give them away – he stresses that it is by peer-to-peer outreach that much of the chaplaincy's work is done, comparing it to the situation for Early Christians.

“Working with students, giving them the grounding in the Bible and befriending them. That's a key thing is befriending them. The early Christian Church began that way. The early Christians fell in love with their lifestyle and other people couldn't understand how they were looking after each other,” says Fr Bourke.

When he started out at

the chaplaincy, there were just seven or eight people attending the Newman Society's meetings. Now, they come together to cook for each other and to socialise, bearing witness by the “great care” they show for each other. “They're great, great young people. They're so fun, idealistic,” says Fr Bourke. It is this that attracts other people to the Faith.

UCC

From north to south, interest in the Faith is growing on campuses. According to Fr Ger Dunne OP, chaplain to University College Cork (UCC), youth ministry has expanded significantly. The campus was blessed with the arrival of Focus missionaries, who joined the team at the start of the 2023/24 college year, while the chaplaincy has expanded the number of programmes it runs across areas from spirituality to physical wellbeing.

“The numbers attending these too are quite large... I suppose it would be fair to say that our engagement has expanded significantly over the last few years,” Fr Dunne tells *The Irish Catholic*.

The chaplaincy is starting to tap into a hunger for faith and spirituality among the students, he adds. This isn't something that sprung up overnight, however: “It's a lot of time and effort in getting people interested and having appropriate content for people who want to know more about faith, spirituality, and the other arm of it as well are bits of health and wellbeing. That takes time, that doesn't happen overnight. We spent

a couple of years trialing and all the rest before all that happened.”

There is a stereotype about campuses being a hostile place for Catholicism or religion more generally, but according to Fr Dunne much of it comes down to how you package it. You have to look at what people need, he says.

“Some of it is pre-catechetical, but there is still a genuine openness to matters of faith, matters of spirituality”

“The needs of students change year-on-year, and every four years as people come and go through the doors,” he says. “But I suppose from our point of view, we would say that we are much busier outside of normal office hours as well. That's good and bad, but it really puts pressure on chaplaincies to deliver outside normal times.”

We tend to forget that many students come from primary and secondary schools that have some kind of religious influence, the Irish Dominican stresses.

“Some of it is pre-catechetical, but there is still a genuine openness to matters of faith, matters of spirituality,” says Fr Dunne. “I often think it's how you package that, how you offer programmes to students really. That's the deal breaker.”

“It has to capture their attention. You go through phases doing the best you

can thinking they're the right way to go – but you're constantly trying to renew and reinvigorate and offer things in new ways. There is a desire out there – that needs constant sort of engagement with chaplains.”

DCU

One interesting insight that came from Census 2022

is that, as more people migrate to Ireland, we are seeing increasing diversity in the faiths professed on this island. For the chaplain of Dublin City University (DCU) Fr Seamus McEntee, this leads to an increase in obvious expressions of religiosity on campuses.

“A rising tide raises all boats is how I look at it,” he tells *The Irish Catholic*. “With the increase of those who have fervent faiths, there is a recognition by DCU that faith plays a part in the lives of people. It may be falling, or secularism may be apparently dominant, but those coming from other countries like India or Central Asia have strong beliefs and faiths.”

“They really wanted to hear the authentic truth, the real Church, saying give it to us as it is”

Seeing other young people confidently express their faith, either through prayer gatherings or their dress, gives confidence to young Catholics to embrace their own faith, says Fr McEntee. All in all, there are signs that faith is growing on campus, he adds.

DCU chaplaincy is an interfaith chaplaincy, catering to all faiths and none, and there is a specifically Catholic presence on campus through St Dominic's Catholic society.

This was founded in 2017 by Fr McEntee and a small group of students; it has grown steadily ever since, with more than 20 members now signed up. One of the students involved in founding the society is now studying for the priesthood.

“I suggested three areas to focus on: liturgy; catechesis or Scripture; and then service, which is the outreach to the poor. To build there and use those to work in events,” he says. “We had adoration last week, I'm going to give a testimony the week after that, we have Mass and rosary regularly.”

Catechesis, Bible studies, getting in different speakers and soup runs or prison visitations are just some of the areas St Dominic's society gets involved in.

“I find some students very strong in their faith, they want to learn more about it,” says Fr McEntee. “When we had the questions on the synod a year or so ago, we sat down with 14 Catholic students after Mass one day. “They really wanted to hear the authentic truth, the real Church, saying give it to us as it is. We want to hear about it. We want to know what the Church teaches, what we believe. There is a real hunger for it.”

Ultimately, through co-operation between chaplains and students, chaplaincies are “feeding the richness of the Church” in their gatherings, says Fr McEntee.



Fr Brendan Ludlow doles out free hot chocolate as UCD's chaplains get out and about to meet the students.

Chasing storms with Christ at your side



Chasing tornadoes has shown storm chaser Tanner Charles a side of God that few ever see, writes **Jason Osborne**

It's a fascination many have, but few follow through on. The elegant – violent – twisting and meandering of tornadoes across endless plains speaks more loudly of creation's grandeur than most other natural phenomena. I couldn't get enough of those captivating images as a child, coming to me via *National Geographic* or children's books as they did. Even now, every so often, I find myself falling down a YouTube 'rabbit hole' of tornado videos, with spectacular footage freely available online that my childhood self could only dream of.

One man who did follow through on that fascination, though, is US storm chaser, Tanner Charles. Having amassed a large following on YouTube and social media with his spectacular storm footage, what sets Mr Charles apart from the crowd is his outspoken love of the Lord. Prayers and exclamations of trust and love for God are a frequent feature of Mr Charles's chases, as tornadoes loom up on the horizon above him and his team.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Mr Charles said that



Tanner Charles is pictured beside a tornado while stormchasing. Photo: Tanner Charles.

while he'd had a love and appreciation for this wild aspect of God's creation for as long as he could remember, his adrenaline-pumping pursuits only got underway by chance – the suit fitting for his sister's wedding was interrupted by a fast-approaching tornado.

"When I was young, I always was looking up at the sky, and watching the sky and watching the clouds and when the weather would come in I would always be outside getting soaked by the rain. But also my grandparents would record these storm chasing shows on the VHS tapes and so we would

get them from my grandparents and I would put them in a VHS player," Mr Charles begins.

Fuelled

"So I'd watch all these shows. And that just fuelled the fire. And so it was storm chasing and roller-coasters and amusement parks that I was interested in. Storm chasing definitely took the lead, though. And so as I grew, when I was 15 was when I really stepped out and started storm chasing for the first time. I was just done going to Church camp and my sister was getting married so my dad pulled

me out of Church camp early...and then I got fitted for my tux for the wedding. So we're after getting fitted and my dad got a message on his phone and then this friend is telling him that there is a tornado storm, there is a storm coming.

“It's interesting, I believe that tornadoes, large hail...just powerful storms, superstorms in general are a result of the fall. Something that wasn't actually in the original blueprint for Earth”

"My dad looks like me and is like, 'Do you want to chase it?' and me being 15, I'm like, 'Bro, yeah, let's go'. We don't know what we're doing so we sat in this parking lot as the storm is coming up towards us, we don't really have radar or anything so we're totally just winging it. We see this low hanging cloud come over and it's kind of spinning and we're like, 'Oh that's cool' and then we see the doppler radar trucks come by and stop. We start following them and I end up seeing my first tornado while storm chasing.

"And so, after that I was hooked. I didn't have a license then, so I ended up convincing my friends to drive me out to the middle of nowhere with a laptop so I could connect to the unsecured Wi-Fi in certain towns to get data and just do my best to figure out what to do. Looking back on it, it was so dangerous. But it was good and so I started storm chasing and I've been doing it ever since so I've been a storm chaser for about 14

years now," Mr Charles says.

His relationship with Jesus "changed everything," and God is no less present to Mr Charles in his storm chasing. As he seeks to put himself – if not in – as close to the eye of the storm as possible, Mr Charles finds himself walking alongside the Master of nature himself. "I know for a fact that God loves when I storm chase," as he puts it.

"It's interesting, I believe that tornadoes, large hail...just powerful storms, superstorms in general are a result of the fall. Something that wasn't actually in the original blueprint for Earth. And so, technically, from that logic, you could just write off storms as evil things. But for me, I have found so much fascination in just watching and experiencing stuff like this where it's all the emotions. And I know for a fact that God loves when I storm-chase and he loves my enthusiasm and my wonder when it comes to things like this," Mr Charles says.

Currents

There's a certain "sober-mindedness" needed to engage in something like storm chasing, Mr Charles says, because there are currents of good and bad to be found within it. The danger and destruction ensuing from tornadoes and other forms of extreme weather are a result of the fall, as Mr Charles would say, but the beauty and the awe inspired in the human soul by it are certainly good.

"This is still something I'm working through with my theology within this area, so forgive me...One of the reasons why I love storm chasing so much is that I love just being next to something so powerful and experiencing



A tornado races across the American midlands. Photo: Tanner Charles

this thing that not a lot of people get to experience. You know, this giant tornado just whirling and it's like going right by me and it's just crazy, just incredible.

“He didn't have to make volcanoes as beautiful as they are. He didn't have to make hurricanes as visually stunning from space as they are”

“It's not just that, it's the large raindrops that hit your face when you're just getting into the storm, it's the smell of the rain, it's the lightning, it's the thunder, it's the hail, it's the beauty of the structure of the actual storm, how it looks and the mechanics of how it all operates, so there are all these factors of storm chasing that I just love,” he says.

The wonder these storms generate underpins the entire experience for Mr Charles. Deepening and widening this wonder, he says, is the understanding that God didn't need to make these storms as “beautiful” and as “visually stunning” as they are.

“He didn't have to make volcanoes as beautiful as they are. He didn't have to make hurricanes as visually stunning from space as they are. He didn't have to make tornadoes, these beautiful clouds that rotate, as beautiful as they are. He didn't have to put this ‘awe-struckness’ inside of us, you know,” Mr Charles muses.

As with all earthly pursuits for Christians, though, storm-chasing can also be done in service of our neighbour. Aside from the vivid experience Mr Charles outlined above, he also volunteers with the US National Weather Service and finds purpose in the work he's able to do for them.

“Another reason why I storm chase or another facet to storm chasing is I volunteer with the National Weather Service. Me and almost every other storm chaser do. We do a little class with them where we learn how to storm spot and then we're given the number of the National Weather Service, basically we just give them a report from the ground, what we're seeing on the ground, what's going on, like is the tornado on the ground, either I'll call them or they'll call me, they call me, they're like, ‘Hey what does that storm look like by you?’

“It's always good to have that, storm chasers are needed, because we need to see what's happening on the ground so we can give accurate reports about what's happening that we can put out so the National Weather Service can put out warnings and more people know what's happening with the storm,” he says.

CPR trained and familiar with first aid and with how rescue services work in the wake of storms, Mr Charles is also often one of the first, along with other storm chasers, on the scene after a tornado rolls through. As such, while there is much spiritual fruit to be gained by reflecting upon creation's design and God's intentions behind it, there is also much service to render to Christ in the form of neighbours



A tornado is discoloured by the dirt sucked into its vortex. Photo: Tanner Charles.

who've just lost everything to a devastating storm.

Dangerous

As might be expected, storm chasing can be a dangerous undertaking at the best of times – and this year, more than ever before, Mr Charles came face to face with that fact. April 4 this year saw Mr Charles and his team take a direct hit from a powerful tornado they'd been chasing after their car was trapped on the route they'd been taking. Naturally, he puts their very survival down to the grace of God.

“We got hit by an EF3 tornado and that's more than enough to pick up your vehicle and toss it. There was even another vehicle that got caught in the tornado, another storm chaser, that was 2000 feet away and his vehicle got rolled and tossed. We were not that far away from him, and we got hit broadside by some of the most intense circulation so we should have been picked up and rolled and tossed, but we weren't, we were good and safe and so I had this weird peace during the whole thing and I got this vision of angels holding down the vehicle so it wouldn't get lifted or anything,” Mr Charles says.

“I had so much peace during it that even during the tornado, I was talking to my friend Tyler as he had his head covered and I was like, ‘Hey man, we're goinna be okay, I see there are angels protecting us, we're gonna be okay’. And there is all of this craziness happening right, it's crazy,” he laughs.

“And so it's just insane. In the future I'll do some videos, I have some reels and some tiktoks planned where I'm going to tell what happened specifically because I've only talked about this in my posts about it or in the description of my video but I haven't actually made a video about it yet, so I'm going to do a little tiktok thing about that.”

Asked whether any scriptural verses particularly speak to him while stormchasing, or whether his experience of the power and fury of these storms has revealed anything of God to him, he has number leap to mind.

“So Psalms 19, verses 1 through 3: ‘The heavens proclaim the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.’ This psalmist, Psalm 19,

is just talking about the correlation between God's creation and how they glorify God, even though they never speak or say anything. And so in a weird way, even though storms, volcanoes, natural disasters are a result of the fall in my current thinking, the Lord still put beauty in all these things and his creation, no matter what. It's interesting because I'm thinking also, I'm wondering, ‘Okay God, like lions they're so beautiful yet they can kill you, you know’ and so the same thing with a tornado.

“My experience within April 4th was when we got trapped I started praying throughout it but I was like ‘God thank you so much, thank you that you're going to protect us in the name of Jesus’”

“And then another one is Romans 8:28 which says: ‘And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.’ So Romans 8:28 talks about, basically it's like no matter what happens, like the Lord is going to turn it for its good. Like having faith that, ‘Ok, I got hit by a tornado’ but, and the Lord told me, he was like, ‘I wish this had never happened to you, but Romans 8:28 is in full effect in all of this thing, because it's the reason why I'm able to talk to you...’ So my experience within April 4 was when we got trapped I started praying throughout it but I was like ‘God thank you so much, thank you that you're going to protect us in the name of Jesus, thank you that you're protecting us right now.’”

Our God is the master of winds and rains, of storms and disasters, and Mr Charles's faith reflects that. His intimate knowledge and experience of nature's furious face has clearly deepened his faith in the one who reigns

.....
Tanner Charles footage and media content can be found on YouTube at @TannerCharlesYT and on Instagram at @tannercharlesyt



Photo: Tanner Charles

Carry on Catholic



One of the oldest living *Carry On* actors and Catholic convert talks to Ruadhán Jones

It's hard to believe that Knock International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine has a devotee in a *Carry On* actor. Those British films, now considered national treasures, are known more for bawdy humour and innuendos than faith and morals.

But with Covid-19 shutting churches, the Masses streamed from Knock were regularly attended by Peter Jesson (86), stage name of Peter Jones, who acted in three iconic *Carry On* films before retiring from the silver screen to focus on his family.

Mr Jones, who co-starred with *Carry On* favourites Kenneth Williams, Syd James, Hattie Jaques and more, even visited the shrine in Co. Mayo for the first time earlier this year.

Having acted in *Carry on Cabby* (1963), *Carry on Cleo* (1964), and *Carry on Follow That Camel* (1967), Mr Jones joins Jim Dale as one of the oldest living actors from the comic series.

When asked if, at the time of filming them, he expected the *Carry Ons* to become national treasures, he says with a laugh, "Absolutely not!"

"I can remember that Marina [his wife] and I went to a press showing for one of the movies, it might have been the one with the steam engine," recalls Mr Jones.

"We sat through this movie and were not desperately impressed by it. And in the end, Marina said to me, I like the music. And the guy behind us said, 'Oh that's nice, I wrote it!'"

Mr Jones's movie career began in a film helmed by the same team behind the *Carry Ons*, producer Peter Rogers and director Gerald Thomas. He started out as a young man driving a sports



Carry On legends Kenneth Williams and Joan Sims act in *Carry on Cleo*, one of the three films Mr Jones acted in.

car, a small part for an actor starting out.

"Subsequent to that, whenever they needed somebody to drive a car, they seemed to think of me," says Mr Jones. "My next roll was as a driving instructor in a film called *Nurse on Wheels* with Juliet Mills."

Abrupt

His career as a film car-driver came to an abrupt end, however, following an incident on another Rogers-Thomas production, *The Iron Maiden*.

"I played the driver of a Rolls Royce who is mistakenly followed, because there are two people driving Rolls. I was the wrong one, but I got followed by the main characters in the movie.

"I had this scene where I had to drive a country lane and through some gates and drive up the driveway of a big house in this Rolls. I said to Gerry Thomas the director, I'd like to do a practice run on

this, I'm not used to cars of this size. He said, to hell with that, we're going to get it in one take – that's the way they did things on *Carry On* movies.

"I drove down the lane and swung into these big gates and hit the back of the Rolls Royce on the gatepost. And did a considerable amount of damage to the rear wing. Do you know what, after that he didn't ask me to drive cars any more!"

“I can remember we spent a lot of time waiting for the rain to stop so we could go out into the hot desert”

Mr Jones's time on the *Carry On* films had its moments. He swanned across the 'desert' as Lawrence of Arabia in *Carry on Follow that Camel* wearing

Peter O'Toole's costume, although his role ended up on the cutting floor.

Cheerful

Typical of the films' cheap and cheerful production style, the desert was actually on one of England's beaches: "I can remember we spent a lot of time waiting for the rain to stop so we could go out into the hot desert," Mr Jones recalls with a laugh.

His longest roll came in *Carry on Cleo*, when he had about 10-12 days' work as the sidekick of one of the film series' regulars Jim Dale. Again, the film had a connection with some of the stars of the day.

"An interesting thing about *Cleo* was that Elizabeth Taylor played Cleopatra in the big move of the same period with Richard Burton," Mr Jones recalls. "They started that movie at Pinewood... they had to close down the production and when they

opened it up again, they went and did it in Rome.

"But they had built all these very elaborate sets for the original Cleopatra and the sets were still there. That is why Peter Rogers and Gerry Thomas decided to do *Carry on Cleo* because they had the sets. It was actually, for them, quite a lavish production because these sets had been built for this really expensive movie and they were just making their usual tuppence-halfpenny movie!"

“I looked at the possibility of converting and did convert. That was because of Ray's influence”

Film and faith intertwined for Mr Jones all his life through a connection with a legend of stage and screen in Ireland, Ray McAnally. Best known for his role as Cardinal Altamirano in *The Mission* alongside Jeremy Irons and Robert DiNiro, Mr McAnally met Peter Jones for the first time on a 1967 TV serial, *Spindoe*, being filmed in Manchester.

The pair shared lodgings and got to talking about their lives. The effect was "transformative" for Mr Jones, changing his whole life by his introduction to the Catholic Faith.

"He was an alcoholic," Mr Jones begins, adding, "that was what sort of drew me to him, because he started to tell me about alcoholism and his trials and tribulations."

Transformed

As a result of listening to his life story, "it transformed my life because I then started to look into the possibility of becoming a Catholic. I wasn't at the time. Marina was born a Catholic, but had lapsed. I looked at the possibility of converting and did convert. That was because of Ray's influence.

"He used to tell me a lot about his life and situation and I was just impressed with his attitude," says Mr Jones, explaining how the "charismatic" Ray McAnally convinced him to consider converting. "And this idea, he was going to AA and in AA you acknowledge the existence of a higher power, you don't have call that God, you don't have to give it a

“I had to drive a country lane and through some gates and drive up the driveway of a big house in this Rolls. I said to Gerry Thomas the director, I'd like to do a practice run on this, I'm not used to cars of this size. He said, to hell with that, we're going to get it in one take”

Carry On actor Peter Jones is pictured with his children.



Irish acting legend Ray McAnally, a close friend of Mr Jones, is pictured in *The Mission*.

“If he lost his place, he would talk through until he found it again. He never took a prompt. He would carry on talking, even though he was talking absolute rubbish, until he got back on the script. And nobody noticed, because he did it with such aplomb”

label. But it's a power over your life, which is there if you want it.”

Doyenne

The doyenne of Irish stage and screen had quite a strong attachment to his faith, says Mr Jones, who became friends with Mr McAnally until his death at the age of 63.

“Ray studied for the priesthood, he spent two years in Maynooth,” he says. “Ray’s explanation of why he didn’t make it was that he could see very little prospect of becoming pope!”

His link with Mr McAnally brought Peter to Ireland, where he did a play in the Gaiety Theatre, *Relatively Speaking* by Alan Ayckbourn. Mr Jones says the Irish actor had something “unique” about him, the kind of qualities you see in very good actors. When asked about what kind of actor Ray McAnally was, Mr Jones recalls an encounter he had during a TV shoot that is illustrative.

“We were in rehearsals one day, this was when we were doing *Spindoe*, and he came up to me in the rehearsal hall – we weren’t actually doing

the rehearsal at the time, we were waiting for a set up to be organised,” he begins.

“He came up and stood beside me and started talking to me. I couldn’t really understand what he was talking about, it didn’t seem to make any sense. Then he said to me, ‘I’m feeding you the lines’. He did it in such a way, that it was so natural that I didn’t even recognise what he was he doing. That’s the kind of actor Ray was.”

“Mr Jones’s services were needed for acting in an advertisement for one of Hitchcock’s films. The director always played a part in his trailers”

Peter Jones’s career brought him into contact with many of the great names of his time, in stage and in film. For instance, he acted with Sir Ralph Richardson in Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* at the height of

the knight of the realm’s powers.

Eccentric

“He was very, very eccentric,” Peter says with a laugh. “If he lost his place, he would talk through until he found it again. He never took a prompt. He would carry on talking, even though he was talking absolute rubbish, until he got back on the script. And nobody noticed, because he did it with such aplomb.”

Another memorable encounter was with another English Catholic film professional, none other than Alfred Hitchcock, the master of suspense. Mr Jones’s services were needed for acting in an advertisement for one of Hitchcock’s films. The director always played a part in his trailers and this particular shoot took place at night.

“I was sitting in a car waiting to be called and he came and sat in the back of the car,” Mr Jones says. “I had a bit of a chat with him. He was drunk at the time, I think! He certainly had fed and watered well. It was late at night, it was midnight. He’d been out dining before coming to

work.”

They had some time to speak and Mr Jones asked Hitchcock to name the favourite film of those he made. The answer may come as a bit of a surprise: “I think one of his favourites films is the one with Joseph Cotton, *Shadow of a Doubt*, he reckoned that was one of his best movies.”

Mr Jones’s film career ended in the 1970s, as he turned more towards providing for his family. However, while his career faded, his faith remained strong and is still providing strength and solace today.

One of the English actor’s devotions is to the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France, which he has kept up ever since in his conversion almost 50 years ago. Someone from his local parish invited Mr Jones and his family on an Easter pilgrimage for children with disabilities or who were socially deprived.

“I used to go regularly for about 10 years on the Easter pilgrimage, which always left on Easter Monday”

“We go in small groups, our group which was called group 18, was probably only about 25-30 people,” explains Mr Jones. “Each group usually had its



Peter Jones, who under his stage name Peter Jesson, acted in three *Carry On* films.

own priest and probably a nurse. It was comprised of helpers and kids. I started going on the Easter pilgrimage quite soon after I became a Catholic, which was when I was in my 30s so we’re talking 50 years ago now.

“I used to go regularly for about 10 years on the

Easter pilgrimage, which always left on Easter Monday. It was a huge pilgrimage and it still is, thousands and thousands went on that pilgrimage.”

Not only has his faith stayed with Mr Jones, it has grown he says; he cherishes it “more and more” each year.

Out&About

80 years young...



BELFAST: Bishop of Raphoe Alan McGuckian SJ joins members of the Focolare community in Ireland as they celebrate the 80th anniversary of the community's founding.



BELFAST: Members of the 4 Corners committee, including co-founders Fr Martin Magill and Rev. Steve Stockman, launch the 2024 festival.



CORK: Lord Mayor of Cork Cllr Kieran McCarthy returns to his school, Coláiste Chríost Rí, to give an address. He is pictured with Principal Pádraig Mac An Rí and former teachers Tony Power, Tom Daly, Frank Mulvihill, Gerry Duggan and Bro. Patrick Fitzgibbon.

IN SHORT

American order mourns loss of Irish sister

Sr Mary O'Mahony OSF (formerly Sister Mary Cornelia) died in Assisi House on Sunday, December 10, aged 91. She had been a professed member of the Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia for 72 years.

Sr Mary is predeceased by her sister, Sr Nora O'Mahony, who was also a member of the congregation. Her funeral took place on December 15.

Sr Mary was born in Tureenclassaugh, Knocknagree, Co. Cork, where she was a member of St Mary Church in Rathmore. She entered the congregation in 1946 and professed her first vows in 1951.

The Cork nun served for 25 years in the Diocese of San Bernardino, California, where

she taught at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School and served as director of attendance at Notre Dame High School.

For 12 years Sr Mary ministered in the San Diego Diocese teaching at both Our Lady of Guadalupe School and the Madeleine School. She also served for six years in the San Francisco Diocese as a caregiver in San Bruno.

In Washington, Sr Mary taught for 10 years at St Charles School in Spokane, and for a year at St Leo School in Tacoma.

In 2011 Sr Mary moved east to Philadelphia where she served in local house ministry at Our Lady of Angels Convent in Aston. She moved to Assisi House, the congregation's retirement residence in Aston, in 2019, where she served in prayer and hospitality ministry until her death.

4 Corners festival returns February 2024

The annual 4 Corners Festival is back with a packed lineup of events next year, under the theme 'Our Stories – towards a culture of hope'.

The festival, which will feature a range of art, music, discussion, sport and faith-inspired events, runs from February 1 to 11 in venues across Belfast city.

Now in its 12th year, the festival was conceived as a way to inspire people from across the city to transform it for the peace and wellbeing of all, a spokesperson for the festival said.

"The 4 Corners Festival is an embodiment of the change the

organising committee wishes to see in Belfast – a manifestation of the Gospel's teachings in action," the spokesperson said.

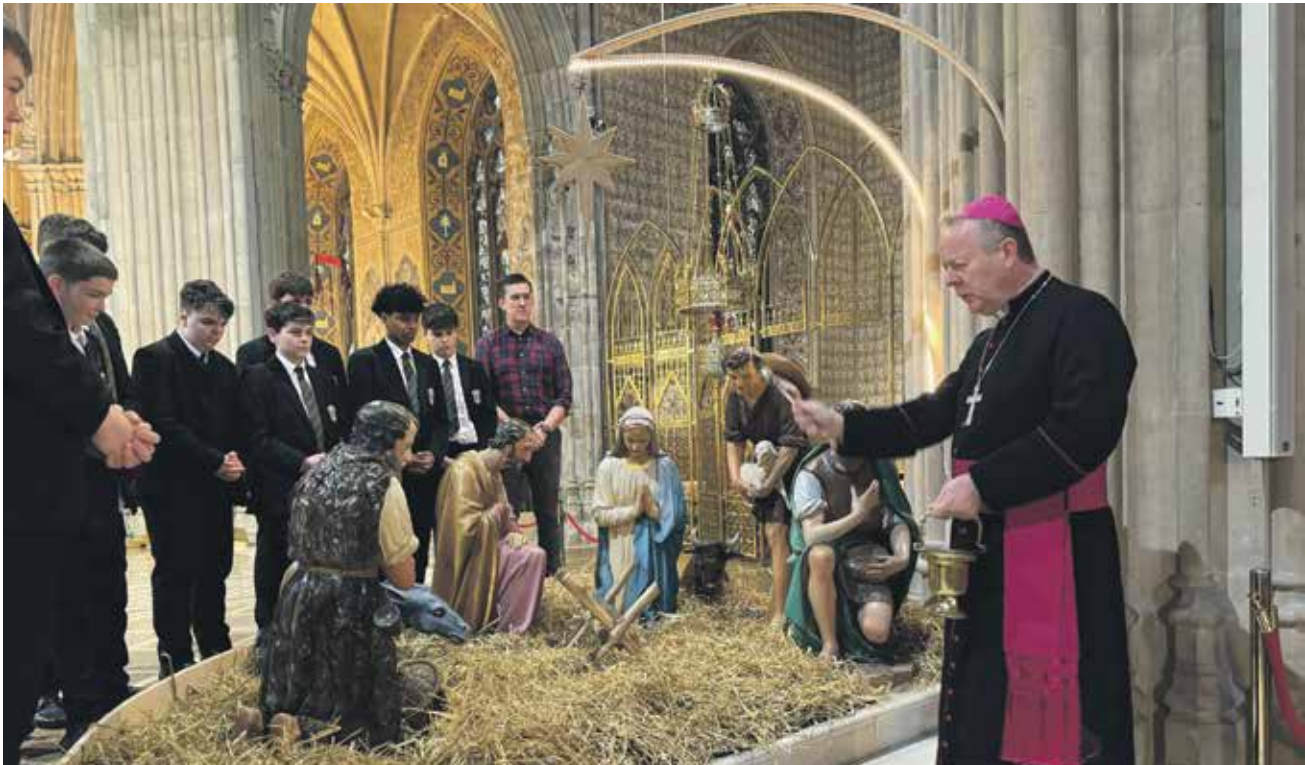
Co-founder, Fr Martin Magill explained that while in the past there was a focus on peace-making, the festival was about the next step.

"I see the 4 Corners Festival as making a contribution towards peace building, where people meet, get to know one another and are encouraged to keep meeting long after the festival has finished for another year," he said.

Fellow co-founder, Rev. Steve Stockman said the traditional divides have changed much in recent years and that's one of the things that keeps him involved.



AV TYRONE: Members of St Teresa’s Primary School attend Mass in Loughmacrory on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception for the rededication of a Statue of Our Lady from the school, which has been restored and rededicated.



ARMAGH: Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin blesses the new Nativity scene in St Patrick’s Cathedral Armagh on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, joined by Mr John Devine and students from St Patrick’s Grammar School who helped to build and design the scene.



CAVAN: Alan Smith, Michael Donohoe, Michael Victory KHS and Catherine Victory are pictured after Kingscourt parish collected €9,000 at the Mass collection in support of those suffering in the Holy Land.



CAVAN: Pictured are Alan Smith, Padraig Donagh, Clifford Kelly and Michael Donohoe of Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Kingscourt after the annual Giving Mass of food hampers in the parish.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

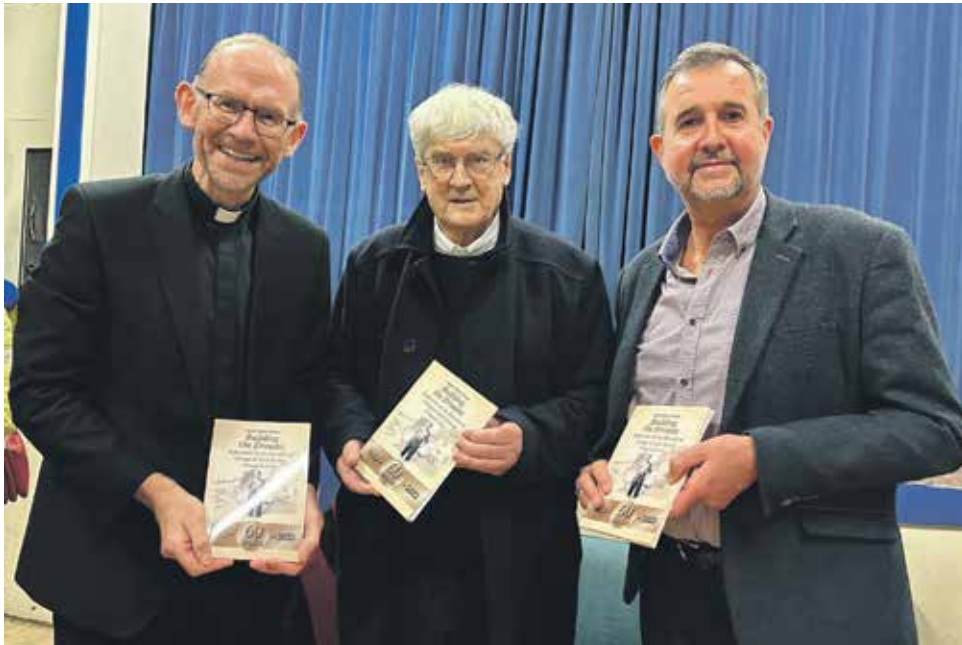
Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



KILDARE: Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey joins Israel and Patrick from Ogoja Diocese in Nigeria at St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, where six seminarians received their candidacy for the priesthood.



CARLOW: Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty meets four Mercy Sisters from Michigan, USA, on pilgrimage to visit places associated with their founder Venerable Catherine McAuley including St Leo's Convent.



CLARE: Bishop Fintan Monahan launches Fr Harry Bohan's *Building on Dreams – Reflections on Six Decades of Irish Life, Church and State* with Tom McEvoy of Pieta House, to whom the proceeds of the book will go.



DERRY: Parishioners of St Brigid's, part of the parish of Three Patrons, enjoy a Christmas wreath tutorial.



KERRY: Continuing the tradition of St Mary's Cathedral life-size Christmas Crib in Killarney, a new crib was installed for the Christmas season, inspired by Mrs Rena Kennelly (centre) who created the Cathedral crib for over 50 years. Fr Kieran O'Brien Adm Killarney Parish, commissioned the Eamonn Mulvihill (left) to design and construct a new crib. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan.



DONEGAL: A crib designed by Fr Denis Quinn is pictured in St Columba's Church, Carrick. The crib is built with stones from the Slieve League area, the highest accessible sea cliffs in Europe, and from this area the first Irish Monks set out to Iceland and Greenland and eventually Western Canada.

**THERE IS NO EVENTS
COLUMN THIS WEEK, IT WILL
RETURN IN COMING WEEKS.**

HOMELSS

SUPPLEMENT 2024

On 25 January 2024 *The Irish Catholic* newspaper will publish a special issue highlighting the ongoing Irish Homeless crisis.

The faces behind the figures

Our editorial team will be presenting readers with up-to-date homeless statistics and discussing the implications for individuals and families and of the crisis for those without homes this winter.

Looking forward

We anticipate publishing only one such supplement during 2024. This is undoubtedly the issue to showcase your organisation's work across the sector and highlight where you will be focusing your efforts during the year.

We are inviting all members of the Dublin Homeless Network and all interested groups nationwide to participate in the supplement, to give voice to the many perspectives and challenges facing those who both work in and rely on the homeless services.

Please call us on the contact details below to participate in this special edition.

@ hannah@irishcatholic.ie

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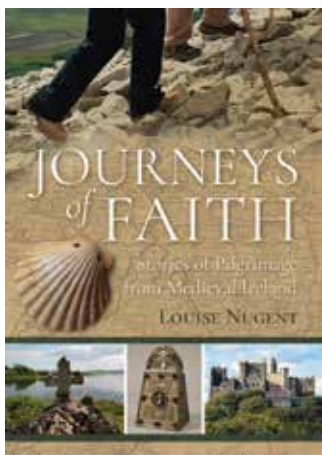
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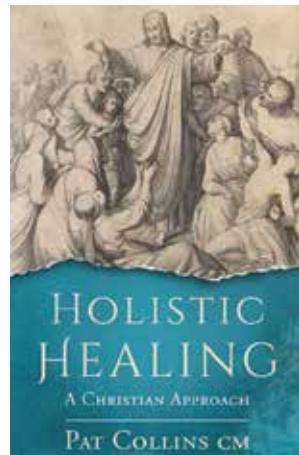
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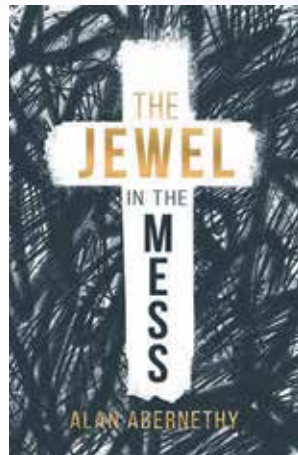
Journeys of Faith
Louise Nugent

A complete guide to the world of pilgrimage in medieval Ireland with photos and maps.



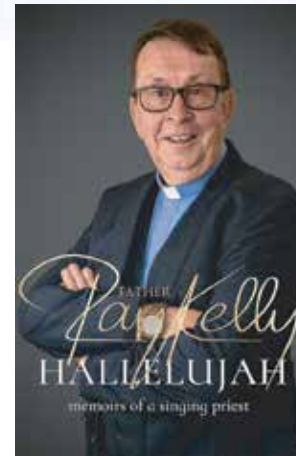
Holistic Healing
Pat Collins CM

A timely book on the rediscovered gift of healing and the therapeutic power of the Eucharist.



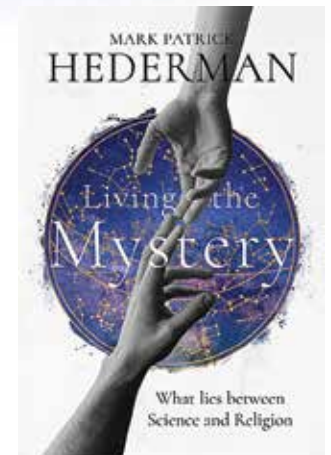
The Jewel in the Mess
Alan Abernethy

Bishop Alan Abernethy examines how his years in the church caused him to lose sight of the original awe of his faith



Hallelujah
Fr Ray Kelly

A poignant memoir describing Fr Kelly's fascinating journey from parish priest to global fame.



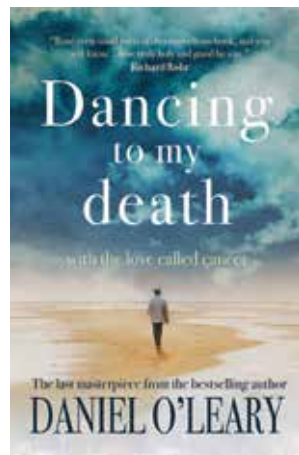
Living the Mystery
Mark Patrick Hederman

A Benedictine monk for over fifty years, Mark Patrick Hederman sets out to explain in this book how to bring a new sense of the sacred into your life.



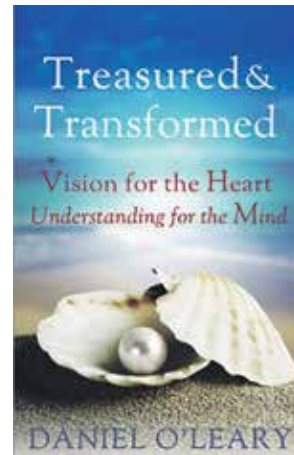
Already Within
Daniel O'Leary

A thought-provoking collection of Daniel O'Leary's contributions to the Tablet over a period of three years, touching upon seasons of the year, liturgies and the heart.



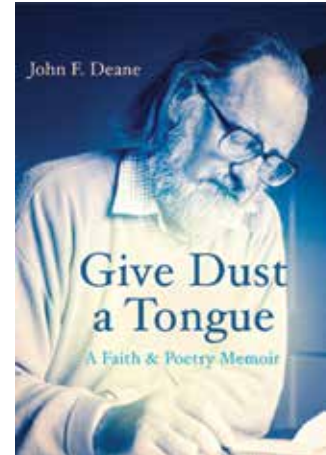
Dancing to my Death
Daniel O'Leary

Priest, teacher and bestselling author Daniel O'Leary journals his thoughts and feelings during his cancer journey in this courageous book.



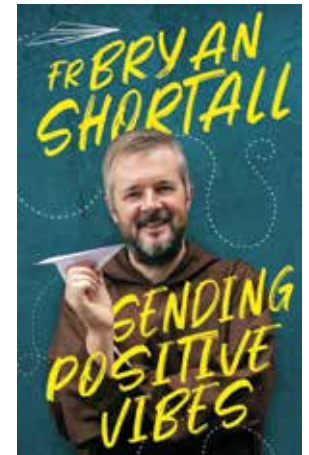
Treasured & Transformed
Daniel O'Leary

In this book Daniel O'Leary has written a collection of reflections, thoughts and advice on how we can live more fulfilling spiritual lives.



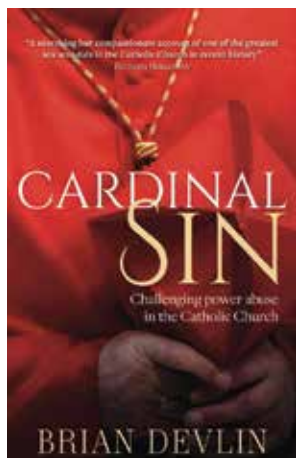
Give Dust a Tongue
John F. Deane

A memoir that views the spiritual developments of internationally acclaimed poet John F. Deane from his upbringing on Achill island, his time with the Spiritans, to his marriage and widowhood.



Sending Positive Vibes
Fr Bryan Shortall

Dublin-based Capuchin Priest Fr Bryan Shortall spreads the Good News in this positive collection of homilies, blogs, talks and reflections.



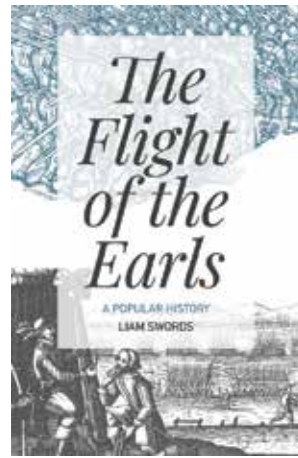
Cardinal Sin
Brian Devlin

A critical work, a whistleblower asks the Catholic Church hard questions and provides ways the Church can heal and regain the trust of its faithful.



Early Irish Saints
John J. O'Riordan

These short essays on well-loved saints present a very readable mix of historical fact and folklore.



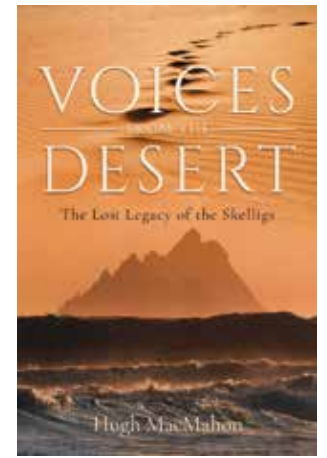
The Flight of the Earls
Liam Swords

A detailed but highly readable account of the event that saw the Plantation of Ulster which led to sectarian division for 400 years.



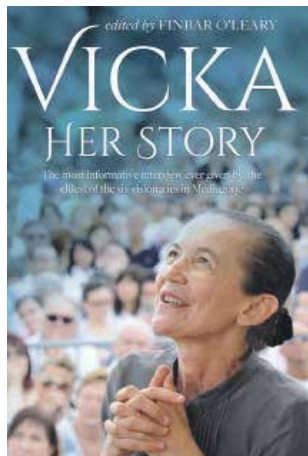
Tomorrow's Parish
Donal Harrington

This book is for those interested in the future of the Church, especially in parish ministry and parish pastoral councils.



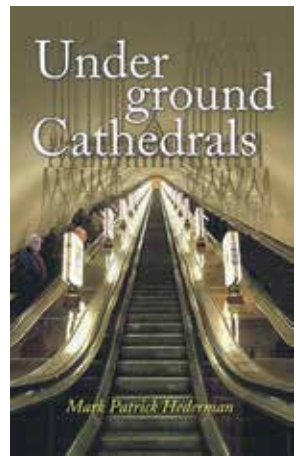
Voices from the Desert
Hugh MacMahon

What the Desert Fathers had to say about Christianity and their own spiritual practices is as relevant now as it has been through the ages.



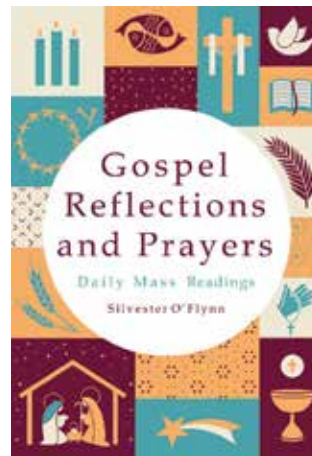
Vicka Her Story
Finbar O'Leary

A full account by the eldest visionary Vicka of her story and extraordinary experiences with Our Lady.



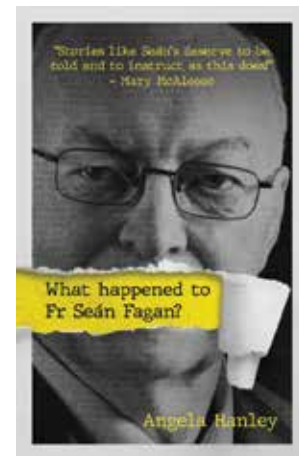
Underground Cathedrals
Mark Patrick Hederman OSB

Abbot offers incisive and honest comments on the current state of the church in Ireland with a reflective meditation on the Murphy Report.



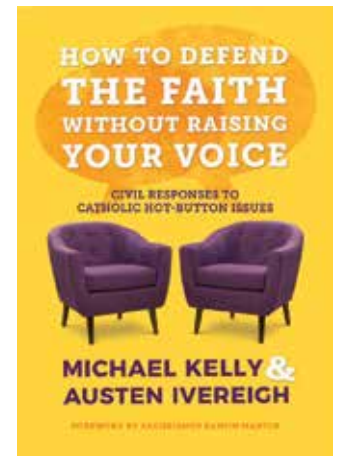
Gospel Reflections and Prayers
Silvester O'Flynn

This book offers two very short reflections on the daily gospels. An invaluable resource for preachers and any prayer group.



What Happened to Fr Seán Fagan
Angela Hanley

What happens when theologians are asked to obey rather than discover? When the Church doles out punishment to those critical of the Vatican's stance on issues? Fr Seán takes the opportunity to tell his side of the story.



How to Defend the Faith Without Raising Your Voice
Michael Kelly & Austen Ivereigh

This book answers common criticisms of Catholicism and helps in understanding the Church's stance on controversial topics.

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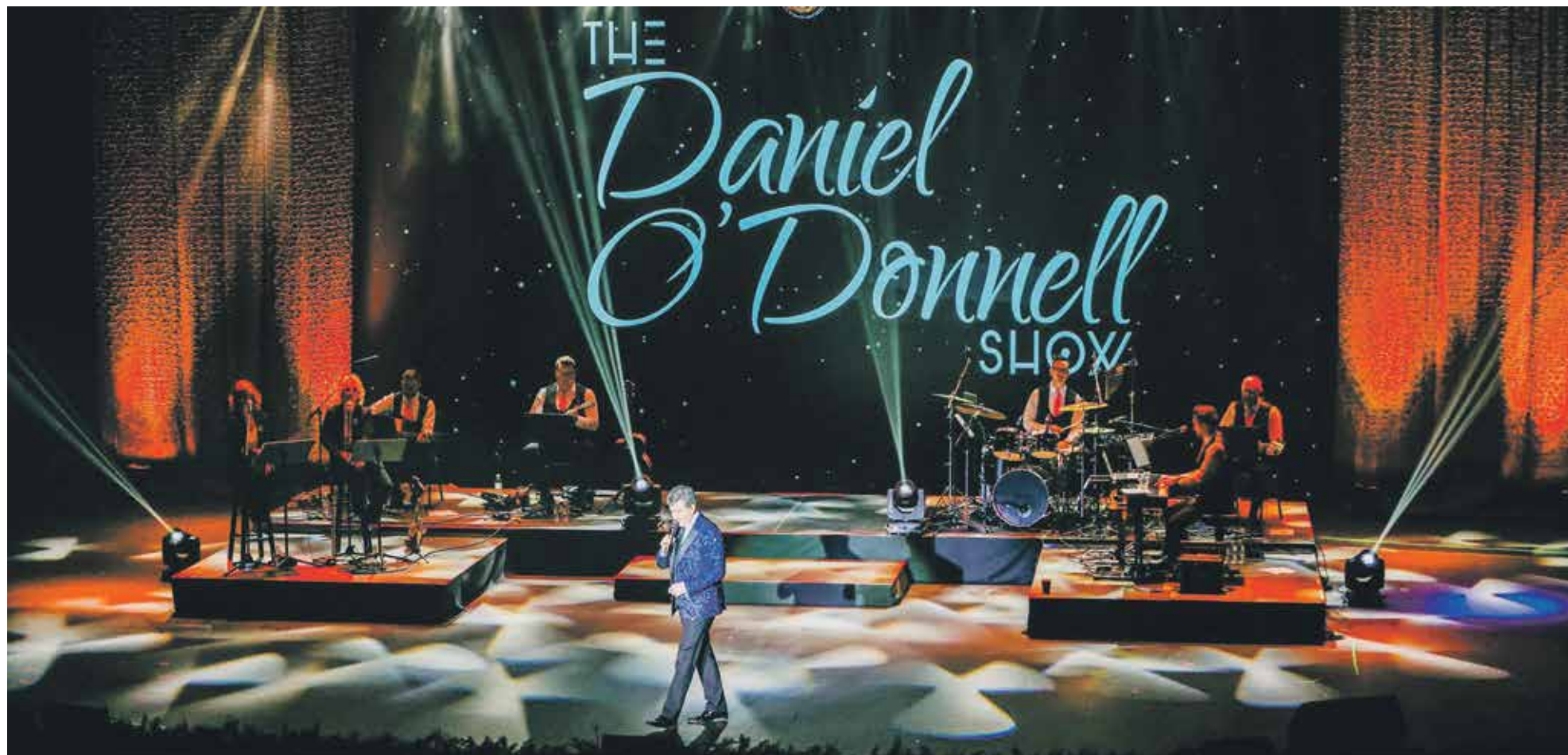
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Daniel O'Donnell reflects on the role of faith in his music



Daniel O'Donnell performs at the Blue Gate Performing Arts Center in Shipshewana, Indiana, during his recent US tour. Photo: OSV News

Michael R. Heinlein

Legendary singer Daniel O'Donnell readily admits that he doesn't write many songs. But two that he has written came to him almost as inspired works when he was on pilgrimage in 2002.

"When I went to Medjugorje, I didn't intend to write songs," Mr O'Donnell told *OSV News*. "I just felt I wanted to go."

However, while he was in the town in Bosnia and Herzegovina – which despite being an unapproved Marian apparition site welcomes millions of pilgrims a year – the Donegal born singer wrote a hymn about the Blessed Mother, titled 'Sweet Queen of Peace', which he said he "felt very compelled to write".

"I felt drawn up the mountain and wanted to sing 'Sweet Queen of Peace,'" Mr O'Donnell said.

Praising the Lord

He also wrote 'When Darkness Falls', a hymn in praise of the crucified Lord and trust in providence. Ascending the very rugged terrain in Medjugorje, Mr O'Donnell recalled having a walking stick in one hand and a flashlight in the other.

He looked up into the darkness of the sky, saw the stars and remembered

thinking what would become the song's opening lyrics "when darkness falls, I feel you close to me". He didn't have a free hand to write that evening, but pledged to put it to paper when he returned home. He did. And recorded it.

“When I faced an uncertain future, I started to seek solace through my faith”

Born the youngest of five children, Mr O'Donnell grew up in a small sea town in Co. Donegal. Although he considered a career in accounting, singer began his music career in 1980, getting his start with his sister Margo, who was by then a famous musician in Ireland. About a decade later, after a run of sold out shows, Mr O'Donnell was hit with exhaustion.

He recalled in his 2017 memoir *Living the Dream* that "when I faced an uncertain future, I started to seek solace through my faith. And I began to think: Well, maybe there's something else HE wants me to do. ... I'm very pleased that HE didn't want me to do something else." By the mid-1990s, Mr O'Donnell was a household name throughout the UK and Ireland.

Now at 62, Mr O'Donnell shows no signs of slowing

down. He appeared on the UK music charts earlier this year for an unprecedented 35th year in a row, this time for his latest album *How Lucky I Must Be*.

One of Ireland's most beloved singers, Mr O'Donnell has garnered a substantial American audience as well. His PBS specials first appeared in American living rooms over two decades ago, and he now has a weekly television programme on satellite and cable via RFD-TV. He wrapped up a monthlong tour of the US on December 15.

Catholic roots

Mr O'Donnell doesn't wear his faith on his sleeve, though. "I'm not in the world telling people what they should do, and I don't judge people at all because we never know how anybody's life is," he said. But his strong Catholic roots have shaped and informed his work throughout a successful career.

An intentionally strong sense of family comes across for Mr O'Donnell's audience, which he called "just an Irish thing". Concert-goers have no doubt how much the star loved his late mother or how devoted he is to his wife of 22 years, Majella, or their children (Majella's from a previous marriage), and three grandchildren.

And Mr O'Donnell is known for his great connection

with his audience. After his concerts, he takes the time to meet and greet those who come to hear him perform – many of whom he has gotten to know over the years.

"I always say, a show doesn't change the difficulties that anybody might have in their lives, but it might diminish it for a period. Lots of people say the music is a comfort. But that'd be true of a lot of singers, not just me.

"In life, if there's something you can do to make things better, even for one person, it's great to be able to do it," he told *OSV News*. "And I've had the opportunity to be able to do it in abundance. It's been a great opportunity. It's a great way to spend your life."

“I don't know that anything that's ever happened to me has been as bad as happens to some”

Mr O'Donnell recalled how "things very much revolved around the church" in his earliest years, including attending October devotions and novenas in May. He loves going to Mass, which he insists is not out of obligation but because he recognises its great value. "It's a good thing for me," he said.

The singer's Catholic culture is often evident on his social

media, and Mr O'Donnell regularly lends his musical talents at his parish, where he often sings in the choir when he's not on the road.

Mr O'Donnell has had his own share of struggles in life. His father died when he was 6. His wife battled breast cancer. He's had his own difficulties in his career. But he keeps a healthy perspective. "I don't know that anything that's ever happened to me has been as bad as happens to some," he said.

Charity

In 1998, Mr O'Donnell became very involved with raising money for Romanian Challenge Appeal, a charity that helps orphaned Romanian children find a place in society. During this time he urged Irish families to give a temporary home to them.

He recorded the song 'Give a Little Love', which speaks of the importance of showing love to others in need. When Mr O'Donnell sang the song he was drawn in his mind to images he was shown of a Romanian orphanage.

He asked the songwriters and record company to use the song to raise money. Having gone to Romania, he realised the enormity of the horrible living conditions of the children.

"People who have celebrity should realise that they can

do things that people who are not celebrities can't do," Mr O'Donnell said. "There were lots of charities I was involved with at home, but I felt others could help them, too."

"I felt that maybe nobody would ever come across this charity again." For his work, Mr O'Donnell was named an honorary citizen of Romania in 2000. He recalled the experience as "a privilege, really".

"Achievement is not on the world stage. It's what you can do. And the least person can achieve more if they're given the chance," he said.

When Mr O'Donnell is asked to pray for others, he said he immediately prays to their guardian angel to take care of them. "I say, 'Angel of God, his/her guardian dear ...' In that moment I'm thinking about that person. I pray to all the angels of the people who ask for prayers, too."

He also is drawn to the rosary, calling it "powerful". "That's very much the thing of Medjugorje, too. It's beautiful," he said. "The positivity, prayerfulness, all in one place. Amazing." He hopes one day to return.

i Michael R. Heinlein is editor of *OSV's Simply Catholic* and author of *Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, OMI*.

AI poses 'grave risks' Pope says in Peace Day message



Carol Glatz

All forms of artificial intelligence should be used to alleviate human suffering, promote integral development and help end wars and conflicts, not increase inequality and injustice in the world, Pope Francis said in his message for World Peace Day 2024.

"Artificial intelligence ought to serve our best human potential and our highest aspirations, not compete with them," the Pope said in his message for the January 1 commemoration.

The message, 'Artificial Intelligence and Peace', was addressed to all men and women in the world, and in particular to heads of state and government and the leaders of the different religions and civil society.

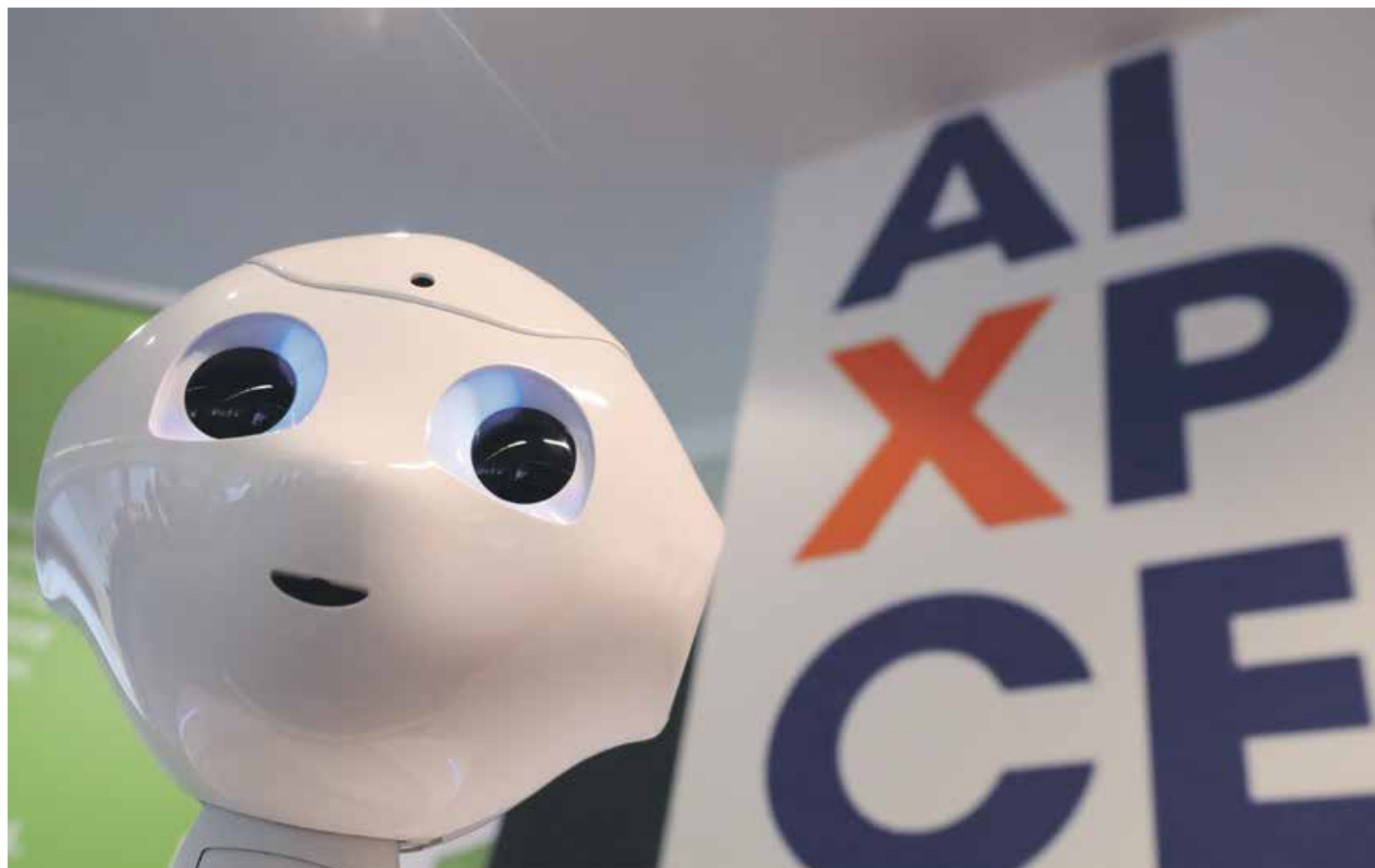
The Pope's message highlighted the "need to strengthen or, if necessary, to establish bodies charged with examining the ethical issues arising in this field and protecting the rights of those who employ forms of artificial intelligence or are affected by them."

Artificial intelligences already exert huge influence and will increasingly do so"

The impact of any form of artificial intelligence "depends not only on its technical design, but also on the aims and interests of its owners and developers, and on the situations in which it will be employed", he said.

Positive outcomes "will only be achieved if we show ourselves capable of acting responsibly and respect such fundamental human values as 'inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy and reliability,'" the Pope added.

The huge advances in new information technologies, he said, "offer exciting opportunities and grave risks, with serious implications for the pursuit of justice and



A robot equipped with artificial intelligence is seen at the AI Xperience Center in Brussels. Photo: OSV News/Yves Herman, Reuters

harmony among peoples".

Many urgent questions need to be asked, he added, including, "What will be the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technologies? And what impact will they have on individual lives and on societies, on international stability and peace?"

Transformations

Pope Francis said, "We need to be aware of the rapid transformations now taking place and to manage them in ways that safeguard fundamental human rights and respect the institutions and laws that promote integral human development."

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told reporters at the Vatican that "like any other product of human ingenuity, artificial intelligence is acceptable if it serves the common good, protects the inalienable value of the human person and promotes fundamental rights".

"Artificial intelligences already exert huge influence and will increasingly do so," the cardinal said, "but we do

not know where AI will take us in politics and commerce, culture and the environment and so on, so everyone needs to be better informed about developments as they occur, to speak up and take responsibility."

In his message, the Pope pinpointed specific technologies and advancements in the world of artificial intelligence that require urgent attention and oversight such as: machine or deep learning; surveillance systems; social credit or ranking systems; and lethal autonomous weapons systems or LAWS.

The weaponisation of artificial intelligence through LAWS, he said, "is a cause for grave ethical concern. Autonomous weapon systems can never be morally responsible subjects," and so "it is imperative to ensure adequate, meaningful and consistent human oversight of weapon systems".

Nations are responsible

"In an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves"

for regulating AI at home and "international organisations can play a decisive role in reaching multilateral agreements and coordinating their application and enforcement," Pope Francis said, calling on the global community of nations to work together to adopt "a binding international treaty that regulates the development and use of artificial intelligence in its many forms".

Regulation should aim not only at preventing harmful practices but also at encouraging best practices, he added.

Fundamentally, he said, in a world of seemingly limitless technological possibilities, people risk falling prey to a "technocratic system," which "allies the economy with technology and privileges the criterion of efficiency, tending to ignore anything unrelated to its immediate interests".

"In an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves,"

he said. "In the quest for an absolute freedom, we risk falling into the spiral of a 'technological dictatorship'."

"Inspired by a Promethean presumption of self-sufficiency, inequalities could grow out of proportion, knowledge and wealth accumulate in the hands of a few, and grave risks ensue for democratic societies and peaceful coexistence," he said.

Collecting data

Barbara Caputo, a professor of computer engineering and artificial intelligence at the Turin Polytechnical University, told reporters at the Vatican news conference that while AI isn't new, what is different today is the amount of information collected on individuals and "the concentration of resources" in so few hands.

The concentration of data, human talent, economic resources and computer capabilities in the hands of fewer entities means that profit will be their only or overriding motive, she said.

"The Pope reminds us with his message that artificial intelligence is

made by people for people, and it must go back to being for everyone so it can really be an instrument for peace."

She supported the Pope's call in his message for adequate education and methods of training.

"We must commit ourselves to ensuring quality technical training in artificial intelligence for all young women and men, all over the world, who wish to put their talents to use in this discipline, with dedication and enthusiasm," she said.

The more "authoritative technical voices" there are from all over the world, she said, the more they can bring "the richness of their experience, history and culture to the technical development of the artificial intelligence to come."

Pope Francis said he hoped his message "will encourage efforts to ensure that progress in developing forms of artificial intelligence will ultimately serve the cause of human fraternity and peace. It is not the responsibility of a few but of the entire human family".

The Pope's 2023: A year of health challenges, travel and the synod



Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis' 2023 was a year of important trips made or postponed, a predecessor's funeral and his own 10th anniversary as Pope, a call to the world to act on climate change and a call to the Church to strengthen its mission by learning "synodality".

The Argentine pope, who was born on December 17, 1936, was to finish the year as an 87-year-old.

As the oldest reigning pope in the last 120 years, Pope Francis' year was punctuated with hospitalisations, breathing difficulties and ongoing mobility challenges. The last pope to serve at his age was Pope Leo XIII, who died at the age of 93 in 1903.

For Pope Francis, the year began with mourning Pope Benedict XVI, who resigned in 2013 and died on December 31, 2022.

“His explanation of the Faith was carried out with the devotion of a man who has surrendered all of himself to God”

Pope Francis spent the week after his death speaking about his predecessor, lauding his “wisdom, tenderness, devotion” and lauding how his theology was a direct result of his faith.

“His explanation of the Faith was carried out with the devotion of a man who has surrendered all of himself to God and who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sought an ever-greater participation in the mystery of that Jesus who had fascinated him from his youth,” Pope Francis wrote in the introduction to a book published by the Vatican.

Pope Francis presided over his predecessor's funeral on January 5, and preaching about the Gospel rather than giving a eulogy as liturgical norms dictate, he built his homily around

four quotations from Pope Benedict.

The first of five foreign trips Pope Francis made in 2023 took him to Congo and then on an ecumenical peace mission to South Sudan. The trip with the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury and the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland had been set for July 2022, but was cancelled because Pope Francis was experiencing intense pain in his knee.

Even though he was well enough to travel in 2023, the knee continued to be a problem. Photos taken in his residence often showed him using a walker. He would be pushed in a wheelchair to his place when presiding at Mass in St Peter's Basilica and when greeting people at his general audiences. On days when it was not so painful, he would use a silver cane.

Surgery

Pope Francis spent nine days in Rome's Gemelli hospital in June after undergoing a three-hour surgery to repair a hernia. Surgeons also removed several adhesions or bands of scar tissue that had formed after previous surgeries decades ago.

Suffering from a respiratory infection, he also spent four days in March in the suite of rooms the Gemelli reserves for the pope. When he was experiencing respiratory difficulties again in late November, he went to the Gemelli Isola hospital for a CT scan but returned to his Vatican residence the same day. He was given intravenous antibiotics at home but kept many of his appointments, even if he did have an aide read his speeches for him.

The bronchial infection, which made his breathing very laboured, forced him to cancel his planned trip to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates in early December for COP28; he would have been the first pope to attend a UN climate change summit.

“Are we working for a culture of life or a culture of death?” he asked world leaders in his COP28 message read in Dubai by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. “To all of you I make this heartfelt appeal: Let us choose life! Let us choose



Pope Francis holds a bouquet of white roses as he visits the graves of members of Commonwealth military units who died during and immediately after World War II and now rest in the Rome War Cemetery where the Pope celebrated Mass on November 2, 2023, the feast of All Souls. Photo: CNS

the future!”

The destruction of the environment is “a sin” that not only “greatly endangers all human beings, especially the most vulnerable”, he wrote to the leaders, but it also “threatens to unleash a conflict between generations”.

In anticipation of the conference, Pope Francis in early October released *Laudate Deum* (“Praise God”), a follow-up document to his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*.

Courage for change

“We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but not having the courage needed to produce substantial changes,” he wrote in *Laudate Deum*.

Making an even more urgent appeal for action than he did with *Laudato Si'*, the Pope wrote that COP28 could “represent a change of direction, showing that everything done since 1992 (with the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) was in

fact serious and worth the effort, or else it will be a great disappointment and jeopardise whatever good has been achieved thus far.”

The two major events Pope Francis was able to participate in were World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, in August and the long-awaited first assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality in October.

WYD brought more than 1.5 million young people together and, in a letter for local youth day celebrations in November, Pope Francis described it as an “event that surpassed all our expectations. Our meeting in Lisbon was magnificent, a genuine experience of renewal, an explosion of light and joy!”

Throughout his visit to Portugal, in meetings both with young people and with clergy, the Pope's refrain was that in the Church there is room for “*todos, todos, todos*” -- “everyone, everyone, everyone.”

“Please, let us not convert the Church into a customs office” where only the “just,” “good,” and “properly married” can enter while leaving

everyone else outside, he told Portuguese bishops, priests and pastoral workers. “No. The Church is not that,” he said, rather it is a place for “righteous and sinners, good and bad, everyone, everyone, everyone.”

Interviewed by Italian television about the October 4-29 assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the Pope said, “The result is positive. Everything was discussed with full freedom, and this is a beautiful thing.”

“The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time”

Asked specifically about the assembly's discussions about welcoming gay Catholics, Pope Francis responded: “When I say ‘everyone, everyone, everyone,’ it's the people. The Church receives people, everyone, and does not ask what you are. Then, within the Church, everyone

grows and matures in their Christian belonging. It's true that today it's a bit fashionable to talk about this. The Church receives everyone.”

At his Mass concluding the synod assembly, the Pope summarised his key hope for the synod, which will meet again in October 2024: “The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring to everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel.”

Just days before the synod opened, Pope Francis created 21 new cardinals from 16 nations, including Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, the Chicago-born prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, and French Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the nuncio to the United States.

In an interview with Mexican journalist Valentina Alazraki December 12, the Pope said he feels “quite well” physically and his health continues to improve. Yet asked if people should be concerned about his health, he responded, “Yes, a little bit, yes. I need them to pray for my health.”

i Cindy Wooden is chief of the Rome bureau of Catholic News Service.

“The result is positive. Everything was discussed with full freedom, and this is a beautiful thing”



LetterfromRome

Francis's company at St Mary Major captures contrasts and contradictions of papal history



John L. Allen Jr

Pope Francis revealed his intention to be buried at Rome's Basilica of St Mary Major, reflecting his intense personal devotion to Mary and the famed icon of *Salus Populi Romani* contained in its Borghese chapel.

Francis thus will become the sixth pontiff to be interred in the basilica, joining Pius V, Sixtus V, Paul V, Clement IX and Clement XIII, all of whom reigned between the late 16th and late 18th centuries.

The fact that Francis's mortal remains will be interred along with these five predecessors offers a presumably inadvertent, but nonetheless unmistakable, reminder of the contrasts and contradictions of papal history through the ages.

Irony

To begin with the most obvious irony, Pope Pius V, who ruled the Church from 1566 to 1572, was the pontiff who standardised the celebration of the Mass after the Council of Trent, issuing a new edition of the Roman Missal in 1570 which would become known as the "Tridentine Mass," and would remain basically unchanged until the post-Vatican II reforms of Pope Paul VI in 1969.

Pope Pius issued the Tridentine Mass with the bull *Quo primum* of July 14, 1570, which contained the provision that "this ordinance applies henceforth, now, and forever, throughout all the provinces of the Christian world". That line is much cited by devotees of the Latin Mass who believe that post-Vatican II popes, above all Francis, have exceeded their authority (or, at the very least, upended tradition) by restricting celebration of the older rite.

A body of priests which actually broke with Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and his own Society of St Pius X in 1983, on the grounds that even the staunchly traditionalist Lefebvre was too liberal, chose to call itself the "Society of St Pius V" in honor of the Pope of the Latin Mass.

It's got to be some sort of testament to the both/and

character of Catholicism that the pope who launched the Tridentine celebration, and the pope who's perceived as attempting to extinguish it, will now be entombed cheek by jowl in the same liturgical space.

For a pontiff dubbed the "Great Reformer," Francis might take greater comfort from his eternal proximity to Pope Sixtus V, who ruled from 1585 to 1590, and who's known, among other things, for fighting corruption and criminality in the Papal States.

Francis has to appreciate the irony of being entombed alongside a pope who reportedly ordered at least 5,000 executions during his five-year reign"

In truth, Francis might actually envy some of the tools Sixtus had at his disposal. Francis recently got into hot water for firing one bishop and taking away the apartment and stipend of another, but retribution in Sixtus's era was made of far sterner stuff – it's said, perhaps only half in jest, that there were more heads on spikes along Rome's Castel Sant'Angelo bridge under Sixtus V than there were melons for sale in Roman markets.

For the pope who wrote an absolute ban on capital punishment into the Catechism, Francis has to appreciate the irony of being entombed alongside a pope who reportedly ordered at least 5,000 executions during his five-year reign, an average of 2.7 per day.

Putting these two popes in the same spot, therefore, amounts to a permanent rebuttal to anyone who claims Catholicism is incapable of change.

In addition, just as Francis is perceived as feeling some ambiguity about the Anglo-Saxon world, it's worth recalling that Sixtus V once excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I of England and pledged his support to the legendarily failed Spanish Armada. (It remains to be seen if Francis will have any more luck bending mettlesome Anglos to his will than his predecessor.)

Of Paul V, who reigned from 1605 to 1621, it's striking that history's first Jesuit pope will be interred alongside a predecessor who engaged in a bitter conflict with the Republic of Venice, which ended up with the Jesuits being banned from the city.



Pope Francis prays before the icon of Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, in the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome earlier this year. Photo: CNS/Holy See Press Office

There's also the small matter that Paul V, a scion of the fabled Borghese family, was an enthusiastic practitioner of nepotism, among other things naming his own nephew as a cardinal, in a manner of which the reforming Francis likely would not approve.

The Inquisition

Famously, in 1616 Pope Paul V promised Galileo that he would be safe from prosecution, a vow which was abandoned by Paul's successors, leading to Galileo's condemnation by the Inquisition in 1633. Only time will tell if the same fate applies to any of the promises Francis has issued during his own reign.

Clement IX's papacy lasted only two and a half years, from June 1667 to December 1669, but he nevertheless proved popular among the people of Rome for some of the same touches of personal humility that have made Francis a sensation – he rejected personal privilege, for instance declining to have his name etched on monuments erected during his papacy; he gave alms to the poor out of his own pocket; and, much in the style of Francis, twice a week he would go down to St Peter's Basilica and hear the confessions of ordinary people.

On the other hand, Clement IX is also known for pacifying one of the most contentious theological

disputes of his day, the fight over Jansenism in France, by allowing dissident bishops to accept a theological condemnation with an "obsequious silence," meaning they could continue to disagree as long as they didn't go public. The resulting calm was known as the *Pax Clementina*.

The Catholic story inevitably is composed of both light and shadows"

That bit of Clement's legacy arguably creates a bit of a contrast with Francis, since most observers would say that theological debates on his watch have gained intensity – and, anyway, just about the last quality anyone would associate with the polarised and raucous climate of the Francis era is "silence".

Francis undoubtedly will be amused by his proximity to Pope Clement XIII (1758-1769), who did everything in his power to prevent the suppression of the Jesuits, even at one point trying to nullify a decision of the French parliament imposing deliberately intolerable conditions on any Jesuit who remained in the country.

Clement failed to stop the tide at the time, but the fact that 250 years later a Jesuit was elected to the Throne of Peter arguably

suggests he was on the right side of history.

As a final footnote, there are also non-popes buried at St Mary Major, including Cardinal Ugo Poletti, who served as the Vicar General of Rome from 1973 to 1991. It was Poletti who approved the burial of notorious Roman mob boss Enrico De Pedis at the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare, a fact that's sometimes been linked to the "Vatican girl" mystery surrounding the disappearance of 15-year-old Emanuela Orlandi in 1983.

A former lover of De Pedis once claimed that she delivered Orlandi to an unnamed monsignor on instructions from the mobster, and, although her credibility has been questioned (among other things, she's acknowledged long-term drug abuse), the rumors were persistent enough that investigators opened his tomb in 2012 to search for clues about Orlandi's fate. In the end, nothing was found, but speculation about a possible mafia role in the affair continues to percolate.

Francis rubbing shoulders with Poletti, therefore, is also a reminder that the Catholic story inevitably is composed of both light and shadows – and that even popes, sometimes, can't escape those shadows' reach.

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

Vatican panel celebrates declaration of human rights anniversary



Jonathan Luxmoore

As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is celebrating its 75th birthday, the Vatican's Permanent Representative in Geneva, Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, organised a symposium that aimed to focus on both human rights and care for creation.

The December 8 symposium, co-sponsored by the Sovereign Order of Malta, Caritas in Veritate Foundation, and the International Catholic Migration Commission, formed part of week-long commemorations of the declaration, signed December 10, 1948, widely seen as a foundational text for modern human and civil rights.

In his introduction, Archbishop Balestrero said the 30-article landmark document, adopted by the UN's General Assembly, had recognised the "intrinsic dignity of the human person" in the wake of World War II.

Dire

However, he added that the global situation 75 years later looked "undeniably dire" and said the Vatican also believed human beings were "relational in nature," and existed "not as isolated rights-bearers, but in a web of connections and relationships".

Meanwhile, Salesian Sr Alessandra Smerilli, the secretary of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said she believed the declaration's vision of "inherent dignity and inalienable rights" needed urgent revival.

She added that Pope Francis had warned in his most recent apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, released on October 4, against a new "technocratic paradigm" of limitless human capacity, in which "goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power".

"The Pope has appealed for long-term planning, and made



The European headquarters of the United Nations is pictured in Geneva. Photo: CNS/Denis Balibouse, Reuters

concrete proposals for a possible way forward through a prudent and realistic rethinking of multilateralism," the Italian nun told the symposium.

“She hoped international agencies and organisations would work more effectively in ‘addressing current challenges together, not in separate silos’”

"Without this, the myth of limitless growth seems set to continue, compounded by a deceptive, false meritocratic logic aimed at disadvantaging the weak and excluded, and holding them responsible primarily for their condition," Sr Alessandra continued. "The alchemy of these two ideological principles has provided the basis for unscrupulous economic pragmatism and a reckless exploitation of natural resources."

Sr Alessandra said the

Pope had hoped to attend the UN's COP-28 Climate Change Conference in Dubai, which closed December 12, to encourage "binding international decisions," adding that she hoped international agencies and organisations would work more effectively in "addressing current challenges together, not in separate silos".

The Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, headed by Cardinal Michael Czerny, has made resources and planning guides available to Catholics active against climate change and economic exploitation since the *Laudato Si'* encyclical, which focused on the integral relationship between God, humans and the Earth.

Inadequate

In his follow-up *Laudate Deum*, published at the start of the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis said he believed the responses had been inadequate, leaving the world "nearing the breaking point," adding that the world's "great economic powers" were still concerned "with the greatest profit possible at

minimal cost and in the shortest amount of time".

Addressing the Vatican-run symposium, Amy Pope, the director-general of the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM), commended the Pontiff's approach to migration at a time of mass population displacements in Gaza, Ukraine, Congo and elsewhere in the face of war, climate change and demographic decline.

“She and other UN officials shared the Pope’s view that a ‘new paradigm’ was now needed, as well as a ‘renewed multilateralism’ to combat ‘global mistrust and geopolitical tensions’”

She added that the IOM also believed in the "dignity and worth of all people" and the "capacity of humans to do good," and said "well-managed migration" could create widespread benefits by enabling migrants to send money home while making up labour shortages in developed countries.

Meanwhile, Tatiana Valovaya, director-general of the UN Office in Geneva, said she concurred with Pope Francis that the multilateral system created in the 1940s was

"not fit for the 21st Century," and needed replacing with a more "inclusive multilateralism," giving a "equal voice" to all states and drawing on expertise from regional organisations and civil society.

Ms Valovaya, who is Russian, said the human rights declaration, celebrated at the event, had marked the first global rights consensus, enshrining "common values transcending borders, cultures and faiths," and had offered a "contractual foundation for justice, equality and freedom between governments and peoples".

Paradigm

However, she added that she and other UN officials shared the Pope's view that a "new paradigm" was now needed, as well as a "renewed multilateralism" to combat "global mistrust and geopolitical tensions".

In his address, Archbishop Balestrero said many "principles and objectives" of the UN system resonated "with Catholic Church priorities," especially in its focus on "solidarity and inclusion".

He added that Geneva provided a "strategic hub" for numerous international organisations, and said he hoped a new multilateralism would enable "ideologies and utilitarian thinking" to be set aside as the UN and its agencies thought and acted more closely in tackling current problems.

i Jonathan Luxmoore writes for OSV News from Oxford, England.

“The alchemy of these two ideological principles has provided the basis for unscrupulous economic pragmatism and a reckless exploitation of natural resources”

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

Telling the truth or the whole truth

Dear Editor, In George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four world the bandwagon effect has made people so timid that all enrol for the brainwashing programmers; nobody wants to incur the sanctions of 'Big Brother'. In the real world many hide their firmly held beliefs and give way before public opinion. By not daring to speak the truth they deprive both themselves and their conversation partners of

the benefits arising from honest dialogue. Though all can see that the emperor has no clothes, only a child is prepared to say so!

These thoughts come to mind as I peruse the Editor's Comment 'Why are we so unwilling to face the unhappy truth?' [*The Irish Catholic* – November 23, 2023]. The unhappy truth is now staring us in the face: Ireland has changed in an alarming way;

what happened in our capital city, coincidentally after Michael Kelly's article, leaves us in no doubt about that. However, not everyone is willing to face this embarrassing truth. This is evident in the omission of what Mr Casey said at the trial of the man responsible for the death of his girlfriend: "I feel like this country is no longer the country Ashling and I grew up in and has officially lost its innocence. This country

needs to wake up."

Telling the truth is one thing; telling the whole truth is something else. Telling the truth about the many failures of the Catholic Church in the bad old days takes no courage at all, it is just a matter of jumping on the bandwagon. Telling the whole truth – pointing to anything positive the Church has done or is doing – takes very considerable courage. Sadly, such courage is rare.

Are we Irish people so unsure of ourselves that, in psychological terms, we over-compensate? When the electorate voted to remove the Eighth Amendment from our Constitution, one of our lawmakers hailed this tragic decision as placing us out there with the progressive nations of the world!

Yours etc.,
John Joyce
Kiltegan, Co. Wicklow

Expunging 'woman' and 'home' from the Constitution

Dear Editor, It is most ironic that March 8, International Women's Day, has been chosen as the date for the upcoming referendums, to expunge the words, 'woman', 'motherhood', and 'home' from the Constitution.

Sadly, it's not surprising given that in the past few months this Government has erased the word 'woman' from all legislation on the statute books, while spokespersons for the main opposition party and the National Women's Council of Ireland, could not define what a 'woman' is.

Perhaps this brave new world, we are being told to aspire to, does not need 'women', 'mammies' or 'homes'. After all, our Justice Minister, Helen McEntee, informed the Dáil that we are facing a "demographic challenge" so "we need inward migration". By outsourcing having babies to the global south, we will only need workers and consumers.

Yours etc.,
Gearóid Duffy,
Lee Road, Cork.

A firm hand on the tiller of the IC

Dear Editor, It is with sadness we learn that you will be leaving your work as Editor for *The Irish Catholic* in early 2024.

It is such an interesting publication and embraces the Church both here at home and worldwide.

You have guided the paper through stormy waters and, I am sure many will agree with me, you have managed to keep a firm hand on the tiller.

You have accompanied us all along the 'via media' and have had to absorb some abuse in the process.

Thank you and wishing you and your family a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Yours etc.,
Judith Leonard
Raheny, Dublin 5

Putting up the Jesse tree at Christmas

Dear Editor, I read with interest the column 'Questions of Faith' [*The Irish Catholic* – November 30, 2023], by Jenna Marie Cooper, and how she outlined the protocol as she sees it, as to when to put up and take down the Christmas tree. It was all very well, but I think she missed a great opportunity to explain that a Christmas tree is in fact a pagan tradition. A more appropriate tree for us Christians to put up at the start of Advent is the Jesse tree. This tree and symbols, which are added incrementally, on each Sunday in Advent, represents the family tree of Jesus. May be Jenna, you will give a run-down on the protocol surrounding the Jesse tree next time.

Yours etc.,
Donnchadh Mac Aodha
Roosky, Co. Leitrim



Shane MacGowan's unwavering connection to Catholicism

Dear Editor, I have a deep admiration for Shane MacGowan, the iconic songwriter, whose unique blend of prayerfulness and devotion to Our Lady has not gone unnoticed. In a world where artists often shy away from expressing their faith, MacGowan's unapologetic embrace of his Catholic roots is truly commendable.

While it is undeniable that MacGowan's life has been marked by

the struggles of human imperfection, his unwavering connection to his Faith and his frequent prayers to Our Lady showcase a profound spiritual dimension. In acknowledging the existence of sin in his life, MacGowan mirrors the reality that every Catholic grapples with their own flaws and failings. His openness about the dichotomy between his Faith and the challenges he faced serves as a reminder that the journey

of Faith is a continuous struggle for all.

In a society that often sensationalises the shortcomings of public figures, it is refreshing to see someone like MacGowan, whose Faith remains a guiding force despite the turbulence of a life lived in the public eye.

Yours etc.,
Mark Brady
Greenhills, Dublin 12

Have we any claim to democracy?

Dear Editor, Your editorial [*The Irish Catholic* – November 23, 2023] pointed out that "Modern Ireland, for all the opportunities and good thing, is also a sad, frightened, angry and unhappy place" and "anyone who tries to articulate a balanced approach to the past is demonised as either a 'fascist' or a 'misogynist' trying to bring us back to the dark ages". Indeed a balanced approach to any subject is now unacceptable. When did we last have meaningful and factual debate here? Any opinion which is not in

line with the 'woke agenda' is either dismissed out of hand or, most likely, not allowed to even be heard. Have we any claim to democracy when this is happening? We have a 'hate speech' bill going through the Dáil without explanation of who decides what is 'hate'. Another bill/pending bill means we can be fined or jailed if we stand silently praying outside an abortion facility but would likely be ignored if we demonstrated regarding the dreadful lack of services for so many sick people. We have €46 million to

date spent on abortion facilities but cannot update our X-ray and scan facilities to speed up diagnosis and ensure beds are only occupied by those who actually require them. Surely our health services should be engaged with saving lives rather than prioritising disposing of them? We even have a push for assisted suicide while we have a spiralling rate of suicide in our country. How does this make sense?

Yours etc.,
Mary Stewart
Ardeskin, Donegal Town

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.



Handel's 'Messiah': Is it just the 'Hallelujah' chorus?

The "Hallelujah" chorus from George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* is probably the most well-known classical piece of music written for choir. People love to hear it, and they love to sing it.

If you have sung in a school, college or church choir, chances are that you have sung it at some point in your life, either around Christmas or Easter or both.

And so the question arises: Is there more to Handel's *Messiah* than the Hallelujah chorus?

Indeed, there is! The "Hallelujah" chorus is only one of 53 movements in the larger work that we call the *Messiah*, which Handel composed over the course of just 24 days, from August 22 to September 14,



Handel's *Messiah* offers soul-food this Christmas season, writes Fr Vincent Ferrer Bagan OP

1741.

To understand Handel's *Messiah*, it is helpful to go back to the year 1600. Within a decade on either side of that year, two very important musical forms came into being: the opera and the oratorio.

Opera is essentially a play using only music, with no speaking. The individual characters sing in two different ways.

Most of the action takes place through what is called recitative, a sung recitation in which the singer can sing quite a lot of text in a short amount of time. Most of the singing time is taken up by the arias, the beautiful songs, often with just a phrase or two of text and several minutes of music.

Operas usually have choruses, where all the singers collectively comment on or take

part in the action. And at times just the instruments play.

Handel's *Messiah* is an oratorio, which is like an opera but without the movement and staging. Unlike operas, oratorios are typically about sacred subjects. Like operas, however, they typically tell a story, often from the Old Testament.

A meditation

But Handel's *Messiah* is not your typical oratorio.

It is more of a meditation than a story, in which the solo singers do not play a particular character but rather sing verses selected from throughout the Bible to tell what, for Christians, is the overarching story of the whole Bible: the foretelling, the coming, and the life, death and

resurrection of the Savior, the Messiah.

“Comfort ye, my people, saith your God”

Messiah tells that story in three parts. The first part, the part about Christ's coming and earthly ministry, the most commonly performed part around Christmas, has five different scenes.

The text for the first scene is entirely from the prophet Isaiah, who foretells the coming of the Messiah. Handel fittingly begins with the first verse of Chapter 40: "Comfort ye, my people, saith your God."



Photos: CNS/Gregory Shemitz

Comfort and strength

At its heart, the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one who will save his people, is a message of comfort, of strengthening for those who are weak because of their sins.

Even though this movement is a recitative, the first part of it is an accompanied recitative, which tends to be more song-like. For the phrase, “Comfort ye,” the tenor soloist descends gently by a step for each note and ends on the third note of the major scale, often known for its sweetness.

The very first musical and textual message of *Messiah* is the rest and peace that the Savior’s coming will bring.

While the first scene speaks generally of the revelation of the glory of the Lord, the second scene tells us that the Lord’s coming will be sudden and will purify his people.

The third scene then focuses on prophecies of Christ’s birth, beginning with a beautiful recitative by the alto soloist, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive,” from the prophet Isaiah, quoted also in Matthew’s Gospel. Christ is foretold as the light that is coming to save those who walk in darkness.

The scene ends with one of the most energetic choruses

from the whole *Messiah*, “For unto us a child is born”. Handel has each of the four parts of the choir express Isaiah’s prophecy joyfully by singing many quick and bouncy notes all on the word “born”.

“We must not forget about the chorus that concludes the second part of *Messiah*, which tells the story of Christ’s passion, death, resurrection and ascension”

The fourth scene is the fulfilment of that prophecy: the story of the birth of Christ in the Gospel of Luke, with the soprano soloist singing four short recitatives telling the story of the angel’s announcement of Christ’s birth to the shepherds. The whole choir then sings the part of the angel chorus: “Glory to God in the highest”!

The fifth and final scene of the first part focuses on the peace and healing and rest that Christ will bring, ending with perhaps the

most beautiful chorus of the whole *Messiah*, “His yoke is easy, and his burden is light”.

But we must not forget about the chorus that concludes the second part of *Messiah*, which tells the story of Christ’s passion, death, resurrection and ascension: the famous “Hallelujah” chorus. Whether it is added on to the first part around Christmas or sung most fittingly at Easter, it expresses the joy of the everlasting salvation brought by the Messiah, who shall reign for ever and ever.

As we celebrate our Savior’s birth at Christmas, consider attending a performance of Handel’s *Messiah* if there is one in your area, or check out the King’s College performance on YouTube. You will have not only the pleasure of listening to beautiful music but the joy of healing your soul with the story of our salvation.

Fr Vincent Ferrer Bagan is a Dominican friar who has worked as a school music teacher and church music director and presently teaches music and theology at Providence College in Rhode Island, USA.



This is an image of the music sheet of George Frideric Handel’s *Messiah* from the British Library. Photo: CNS/British Library

You don't really know who you are



David Mills

One of the most important rules for living in the world is: You are probably not who you think you are, and many others know you better than you know yourself.

This is an old-guy lesson, I'm afraid, one of those lessons one learns from long and painful, often embarrassing experiences. We charge into life full of certainties – among them the certainty that we know exactly who we are – and then we find out we don't. That usually happens in stages over time, and it's rarely fun.

We can easily see this in other people, because sometimes it's really obvious. The man who thinks he's God's gift to women and hits on women

half his age, and doesn't understand why they don't respond.

The woman who thinks she's a ray of sunshine and never notices that people hide when they see her coming. The man who thinks he's a bold truth-teller who doesn't know he's usually wrong and blames his not having any friends on everyone else's unwillingness to hear the truth.

A true lesson

In one of the most terrifying passages in Scripture, Jesus speaks of the unexpected hour when the Son of Man returns and separates the sheep from the goats. The goats see themselves as sheep and protest Jesus's judgment.

They'd thought they were good religious people – they'd have done anything for Jesus – and find the angels herding them to the down escalator. It turns out Jesus sees them differently, and he's the only one who sees clearly.

St Augustine knew that

we're all a mess, and such a mess we don't know how much of a mess we are. As a theologian said to me, in his *Confessions* the saint teaches that "We are unavailable to ourselves".

“We see error as a fire set by arsonists that will sweep through the building unless we stop the arsonists”

We hear Augustine's famous line "Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee" as a truism, but for the saint it was a hard-won discovery. He'd gone wrong in all sorts of ways following his restless heart, because he didn't know who he was and therefore couldn't see who was the answer to all his questions and desires.

The problem

It's not a small thing, this ignorance. It hurts our relation to our Creator and Redeemer, and our relation to the world, especially the

people who know us.

Here's a practical example that affects almost all our lives, thanks to both the media and social media: the belief that you must speak out, hard and loud, against the enemy. That you must go after them the way General Sherman went through Georgia. That you are 2023's Elijah facing the prophets of Baal.

We feel zeal for the good and that feeling makes sense. We see error as a fire set by arsonists that will sweep through the building unless we stop the arsonists. We must warn everyone about the arsonists as loudly and forcefully as we can.

See something, say something, yell something

But if something must be said, must it be said by you? A lot of social media anger (and division in the Church) would be avoided if everyone tempted to speak out first asked themselves "Am I the

person to do this"?

Are you actually a prophet like Elijah with his role and his duties? Is that who you are and who God wants you to be? Maybe, but it seems unlikely. You're probably not articulate enough, clever enough or holy enough. Few of us are, even among those of us who speak out for a living.

“Destruction comes forth from him and desolation follows in his wake”

In any case, it is obvious that many people who think of themselves that way don't have the gifts for it, and more importantly, don't have the character for it. Maybe they may become the person to speak out. They're not that person now.

Good and bad zealotry

The Greek St Nectarios of Aegina, a holy man who

seemed to other Orthodox a kind of fanatic because he took holiness so seriously, knew something about this. He distinguishes two kinds of zeal.

"The zealot according to knowledge," he said, "motivated by the love of God and his neighbour, does all things with love and self-effacement. He does nothing that might bring sorrow to his neighbour."

But the zealot "not according to knowledge is a ruinous man who turns the Gospel of Grace and love upside down. His zeal is a seductive fire, a consuming fire. Destruction comes forth from him and desolation follows in his wake".

Who are we really? Which kind of zealot would we be if we tried speaking out? There's no easy answer, except to listen to those good people who know you and love you enough to tell you the truth. And to watch your language until you know.

i David Mills writes for OSV

'Three Kings' parades flood Poland's streets on Epiphany



Paulina Guzik

Every year on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, Polish cities get flooded with joyful Three Kings Parades. Designed as theatrical performances that recall the historical event of Jesus' birth and the visit of the Magi who worshiped him 2,000 years ago, the parades' purpose is to familiarise their audiences with the Gospel tradition.

"The Magi came to the manger as pagans. They searched for truth and beauty, and they found God. This is the pattern for our parades: to commemorate their search and reach all – believers and non-believers," Piotr Giertych, one of the initiators of the Three Kings Parades in Poland and a head of the foundation organising them, told *OSV News*.

"The parade is a cultural, religious, and apolitical event open to everybody, regardless of one's religious beliefs, personal convictions, or cultural traditions"

The Magi, "thanks to their reason, discovered that something important happened in the history of the world," he

said. From the very beginning, Poland's parades were to commemorate "God's love for every person in the world. Because everyone can fit around the manger".

The event traces its history to 2009, when students in Warsaw decided to perform a live Nativity scene. Within two years, other places had joined Warsaw in holding the parades. Ukraine held the first Three Kings Parade outside Poland in 2013. In 2019, the parade was held in 752 places in Poland and in 22 places abroad, including in Chicago and New York, where smaller parades were organised by the cities' Polish communities.

"The parade is a cultural, religious, and apolitical event open to everybody, regardless of one's religious beliefs, personal convictions, or cultural traditions," Mr Giertych said. "It is not a time for protests or demonstrations against anybody or anything, but an occasion to spend time with others."

The parade

During the parade, participants walk from a designated beginning point to the Nativity scene while singing Christmas carols. Amateur actors play the Holy Family and the Magi from three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. The star-bearer and the Magi lead the parade, accompanied by children dressed as knights and ladies-in-waiting. Residents of the city or village also join the parade wearing crowns and singing Christmas carols from song books

from the organising foundation.

Carols

"Singing Christmas carols is an important part of the parade tradition," Mr Giertych told *OSV News*. "Christmas carols express the joy of the King born in Bethlehem. We print the carol booklets and we know that over the years, thousands of those booklets stayed in people's homes, and they sing carols from the previous booklets on the following Christmas."

Mr Giertych said that many tourists join the parades.

"It is touching and amazing that since 2009, we have managed to build a tradition that unites peoples in so many places around the world," he said. "It turned out not the concerts, not New Year's Eve festivities, not shops and stores, but the Three Kings Parades have the biggest turnout around the time of Christmas, and this is more than we could dream of," he said.

The feast of the Epiphany – which celebrates the Magi's arrival and, through their encounter, Christ making himself known to the world – is a national holiday in Poland, a country of 27 million Catholics, 71% of the population. In 2023, 1.5 million people marched the Three Kings Parades in 750 cities around Poland and the world.

Paulina Guzik is international editor for OSV News.



Children are pictured in a file photo taking part in a Catholic procession on the feast of the Epiphany in Warsaw, Poland. After celebrating the 12 days of Christmas, Christians celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, often referred to as the 'feast of the three kings'. Photo: OSV News/Kacper Pempel, Reuters

Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

On women priests and repairing statues

Q: Why doesn't the Church allow women to be priests?

A: The reason why women can't be ordained priests is because of the pattern set by Jesus himself while he walked the earth. Pope St John Paul II mentions this historical fact as the fundamental rationale for reserving the sacrament of holy orders to men in his 1994 apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.

The original 12 apostles were the first bishops; the priesthood is deeply connected to and flows out from the office of bishops. All bishops start as priests, and only a bishop can ordain new priests. We know from Scripture that Jesus called only men to be apostles. As several saints and scholars have noted over the centuries, Jesus didn't even call Our Lady to be an apostle, even though after Jesus she was the holiest person ever to be born.

Of course, some people say that Jesus was only following the customs of his time in calling only men to ordained ministry. But Jesus was truly God, so if he wanted to call women to the priesthood, he certainly would have had the power to do that.

We also have many instances in the Gospels where Jesus did treat women as equals, even when the culture of his time would not have seen women this way. For example, in chapter 10 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus encourages Mary (sister of Sts Martha and Lazarus) to sit at his feet as a student, at a time when ordinarily formal studies were considered something proper to men. And St Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the Resurrection – even while women under Jewish law at the time could not be witnesses in formal court cases.

Some argue that it's not fair for men to be able to be priests when women can't. But priesthood – and really, any position in the Church – is not about power or prestige, but about service to others. Priests are priests so that they can serve the rest of the Church, not so that the Church can serve them.

Even though Jesus's actions are the reason why we can't have

women priests, professional theologians sometimes make educated guesses on why Jesus may have made that choice. There are a lot of really interesting writings out there on the idea that men and women have different but equal and complementary vocations in the Church, even if these writings aren't official Church teachings at this point.

Q: We recently sold our house thanks to St Joseph's intercession. We buried a statue in the front yard and unearthed it once the house was sold. While moving, the head of the statue broke off. Is it ok to simply glue it back on?

A: Yes, it's fine just to glue it back on!

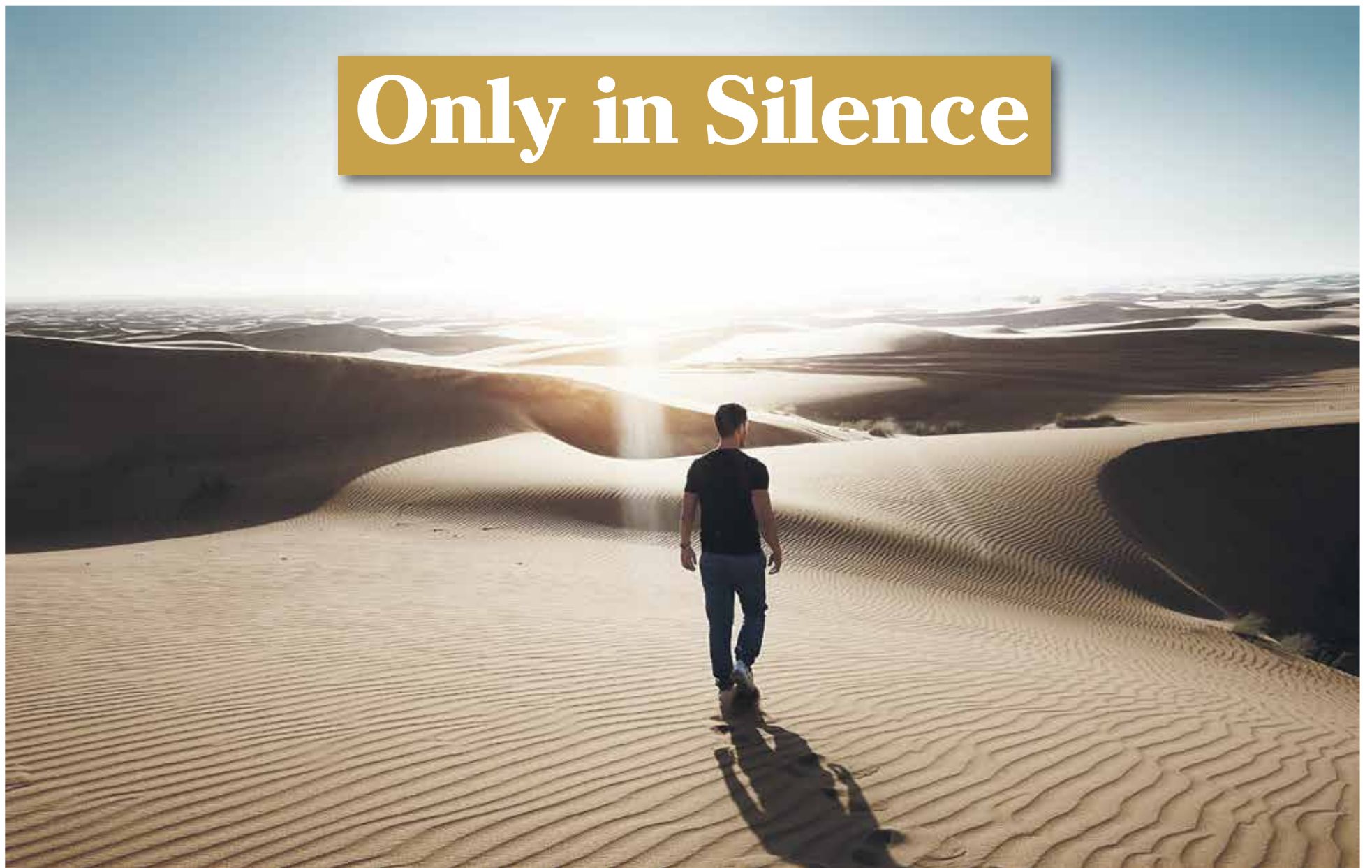
Generally, we say that devotional objects, especially blessed devotional objects, should be treated with a certain degree of respect (eg., worn or damaged devotional objects should be disposed of reverently and not simply thrown out with the regular rubbish). Carefully repairing a St Joseph statue is very much in line with this kind of reverence.

But devotional objects such as statues and images of saints aren't magical or holy in and of themselves. In a similar way to how family photos can help us recall our loved ones, images of saints remind us of who we are, as the family of the people of God.

In terms of the specific custom of associating a statue of St Joseph with real estate transactions, we recall St Joseph's role as the provider and protector of the Holy Family. St Joseph made sure that Our Lord and Our Lady always had a roof over their heads, and so it makes sense for us to turn to him when we need help in arranging a safe and comfortable home for our own families.

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

Only in Silence



The Belgian spiritual writer, Bieke Vandekerckhove, comes by her wisdom honestly. She didn't learn what she shares from a book or even primarily from the good example of others. She learned what she shares through the crucible of a unique suffering, being hit at the tender age of 19 with a terminal disease that promised not just an early death but also a complete breakdown and humiliation of her body enroute to that death.

“Uncovering the secrets that silence has to teach us is not easy”

Her attempt to cope with her situation drove her in many directions, initially to anger and hopelessness but eventually to monasteries, to the wisdom of monasticism, and, under its direction, into the deep well of silence, that desert that lurks so threateningly inside each of us. Away from all the noises of the world, in the silence of her own soul, inside the chaos of her raging, restless insides she found the wisdom and strength not just to cope with her illness but to also find a deeper meaning and joy in her life.

There are, as John Updike poetically puts it, secrets that are hidden from health, though, as Vandekerckhove makes evident, they can be uncovered in silence. However uncovering the secrets that silence has to



Fr Rolheiser

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teach us is not easy. Silence, until properly befriended, is scary and the process of befriending it is the soul's equivalent of crossing a hot desert. Our insides don't easily become calm, restlessness doesn't easily turn into solitude, and the temptation to turn to the outside world for consolation doesn't easily give way to the idea of quiet. But there's a peace and a meaning that can only be found inside the desert of our own chaotic and raging insides. The deep wells of consolation lie at the end of an inner journey through heat, thirst, and dead-ends that must be pushed through with dogged fidelity. And, as for any epic journey, the task is not for the faint of heart.

The journey

Here's how Vandekerckhove describes one aspect of the

journey: “Inner noise can be quite exhausting. That's probably why so many flee to the seduction of exterior background noises. They prefer to have the noise just wash over them. But if you want to grow spiritually, you have to stay inside of the room of your spiritual raging and persevere. You have to continue to sit silently and honestly in God's presence until the raging quiets down and your heart gradually becomes cleansed and quieted. Silence forces us to take quiet of our actual manner of being human. And then we hit a wall, a dead point. No matter what we do, no matter what we try, something in us continues to feel lost and estranged, despite the myriad ways of society to meet our human needs. Silence confronts us with an unbearable bottomlessness, and there

appears no way out. We have no choice but to align ourselves with the religious depth in us.”

“A person is ready to go to any kind of desert. He's willing to sit anywhere, as long as it's not his own desert”

There's a profound truth: Silence confronts us with an unbearable bottomlessness and we have no choice but to align ourselves with the religious depth inside us. Sadly, for most of us, we will learn this only by bitter conscription when we have to actually face our own death. In the abandonment of dying, stripped of all options and outlets we will, despite struggle and bitterness, have to, in the words of Karl Rahner, allow ourselves to sink into the incomprehensibility of God. Moreover, before this surrender is made, our lives will always remain somewhat unstable and confusing and there will always be dark, inner corners of the soul that scare us.

But a journey into silence

can take us beyond our dark fears and shine healing light into our darkest corners. But, as Vandekerckhove and other spiritual writers point out, that peace is usually found only after we have reached an impasse, a “dead point” where the only thing we can do is “to pierce the negative.”

In her book, *The Taste of Silence*, Vandekerckhove recounts how an idealistic friend of hers shared his dream of going off by himself into some desert to explore spirituality. Her prompt reaction was not much to his liking: “A person is ready to go to any kind of desert. He's willing to sit anywhere, as long as it's not his own desert.” How true. We forever hanker after idealised deserts and avoid our own.

The spiritual journey, the pilgrimage, the Camino, we most need to make doesn't require an airline ticket, though an experienced guide is recommended. The most spiritually rewarding trip we can make is an inner pilgrimage, into the desert of our own silence.

As human beings we are constitutively social. This means, as the Bible so bluntly puts it, that it is not good for the human person to be alone. We are meant to be in community with others. Heaven will be a communal experience; but, on the road there, there's a certain deep inner work that can only be done alone, in silence, away from the noise of the world.

“Silence confronts us with an unbearable bottomlessness and we have no choice but to align ourselves with the religious depth inside us”

Encountering Christ with the Magi changes everything



Photo: OSV News

Is 60:1-6
Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11,
12-13
Eph 3:2-a, 5-6
Mt 2:1-12

On a Sunday that centres on discovery, revelation, and manifestation – the very definition of ‘Epiphany’ – one of the most important discoveries for the magi (and for us!) comes at the very end of this week’s Gospel.

A warning

After searching for the newborn king and finally finding him, the Magi were warned in a dream to avoid Herod. So what did they do? “They departed for their country,” Matthew writes, “by another way”.

This is more than GPS or Google Maps sending them another route to follow. What is happening involves

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon
Greg
Kandra



much more than geography. This is the profound lesson for all who have found Christ after a long and difficult quest. It tells us this beautiful truth: an encounter with Jesus Christ changes everything. It alters the direction of life, the way you continue your journey. It sends you to places you never imagined.

Certainly, the Magi learned that and much more in their search to find the newborn king. What they discovered tells us a lot about what it means to find

“Christ is discovered among the humble, the overlooked, the meek. Don’t look for him among privilege or power”

the Lord – and where, in fact, you find him.

First, we learn, this newborn king was not with the people you would expect. He’s not in a palace, with another king, Herod. He was not surrounded by servants and footmen, wealth and power. No trumpets. No fanfare. No. Christ was discovered in a simple house, where the Magi “saw the child with Mary his mother”.

This newborn king’s court is different from any other. Christ is discovered among the humble, the overlooked, the meek. Don’t look for him among privilege or power.

No. He was born into a world that could not make room for him.

Secondly, Christ’s first

home was off the beaten path. He was in a small town that most people wouldn’t think about twice, Bethlehem. (Scripture reminds us later that the place where he grew up was a town where people sneeringly asked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”) From the very beginning, in the first days of his earthly life, this most extraordinary of children was found among the most ordinary of people in the most ordinary of places – so ordinary that you have to “search diligently,” as Herod put it, to find him.

Christ everywhere

This tells us something wondrous: Christ could be anywhere. He could be anyone. He could be everyone. You never know where you might encounter him.

Thirdly and finally, amid

the darkness, Christ was discovered where there is light. A star guided the way to the place where this new king was found. The point is clear: If you want to find him, follow that light. It’s difficult to do that in a world so often overcome by shadows and darkness. But the Magi looked up and looked out. They found the son of God in a forgotten corner of the world, among forgotten people, under a star, beneath a pinpoint of light.

“The road may be unfamiliar and the signposts may be different, but it will be worth it. And a new light will guide the way”

Follow the light. That may be the most reassuring and

practical lesson of all.

This is our Epiphany – our great discovery of God for our own time. He is made manifest to seekers in astonishing places, in astonishing ways.

And after he has been discovered, nothing can ever be quite the same. Our lives change. Our direction shifts. Our perspective and sense of purpose are transformed. The old way will not do. There is a better road to travel.

Set out on a new journey. The road may be unfamiliar and the signposts may be different, but it will be worth it. And a new light will guide the way.

I can’t think of a better message from the Magi – or for the start of a new year.

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

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



The dos and don'ts of diversity box ticking

Looking back on the year just ended, I had a whimsical notion to reflect for a change on what we rarely if ever see in the broadcast media. And if I appear to be complaining too much, check out my Review of the Year from the December 21 edition for its positivity!

It's so rare to find an edgy TV crime drama on after the 9pm watershed that rates as a good thriller but avoids all the bad language and the wokery. The great TV dramas of the past (*Lost*, *Line of Duty*, *X-Files*, *The Riordans*) never needed any of that.

This is true especially of the home-produced drama on RTÉ, which tends to be drug fuelled, stiff and awkward, in my opinion. The afternoon crime dramas (*Father Brown*), rare enough as they are, tend to be pretty harmless and not at all tense or thrilling – fine if that's your cuppa.

In these dramas you rarely find a person of faith treated sympathetically, and especially not a young person. Usually, the religious people are old-fashioned or, even worse, totally psychotic. The script writers are no scripture writers and often show a thorough misunderstanding of matters of faith.

Ignorance

Ignorance is not always bliss. Of course, there are exceptions (*Shetland*, *Time*) and some may be coming to mind already, the ones that prove the rule. So, in these days of obsessive diversity box ticking you don't, funnily enough, see a quota requirement for devout and sensible people of faith. Not that there's anything wrong with diversity, but preachy dramas where the box ticking trumps the art – not so good.

Surprisingly, I've rarely seen in these dramas an outright championing of abortion – so many show pictures of unborn children in ultrasound scans, and these babies are treated as, and referred to, as babies. Pregnancy is often seen in a positive light, even if challenging (*Time*) and never as a disease to be cured.

Yes, the approach is gener-



There aren't enough family friendly series like the BBC's *Father Brown* on our screens.

ally pro-choice in a broad sense, but with a positive twist – yes it's the woman's choice, they are quick to point out, but we're rooting for her to keep the baby and to get the support that will facilitate the pro-life outcome. Maybe, I wonder, is this because gung-ho support for termination is so gross that viewers will be repelled?

Another notable absence from the media landscape is family-friendly comedy on mainstream channels and at prime time. So much of late-night comedy is gross and offensive, the mid-evening stuff tends to be fairly rude (*Simpsons*, *Ghosts*), while the earlier output tends to be just for children, with not much for the adults. The older movies tend to fill that gap, along with the slew of re-runs from more innocent times (media wise at least).

As for the current affairs shows, regular readers will know that I often complain about bias, and it's still there. When it comes to

religious matters it's mostly the liberal or even dissident priests or commentators that get most coverage (you know who you are!).

Fantasia

Now and then I fantasise about RTÉ keeping a secret apartment in the Montrose basement for such commentators, for easy access. Occasionally you'll get an ultra-conservative for spurious balance, but that seems to happen less nowadays, perhaps because

of the fear of the dreaded 'far right', or at least those lazily labelled as such.

They have to be silenced and cancelled – you can talk about them, but never talk to them. I'd love to see them on current affairs shows and subjected to robust questioning. If their views fall apart under scrutiny, so be it – a public service will have been done. If not, that would be useful too. Of course, the liberals and the left wingers must be given the

same kind of questioning but that rarely happens. The tough questions go missing.

Current affairs

Speaking of diversity box ticking, while it's a turn-off in drama, we could do with more of it in current affairs – too often on chat shows and reviews of the week it's the same contributors – mostly journalists from left or liberal leaning newspapers. They tend to stick to much the

same narrative and share the same attitudes from the echo chamber, with occasional divergence over economic matters and some cross-party mud-slinging.

So I often yearn for something new and fresh in the media, something innovative that will surprise me. I so rarely get it, but my Review of the Year from December 21 points in a few hopeful directions. And I do like a bit of hope.

“When it comes to religious matters it's mostly the liberal or even dissident priests or commentators that get most coverage”



Irish current affairs programmes could do with more political diversity

BookReviews

Peter Costello



A new deal on the State files annual release

This year the reports on the State files' annual release, which has become very much a fixture of the turnover between Christmas and the New Year, will take a different form as it appears in the pages of the papers and in other media.

Rather than as before a very large number of up to 25 or more journalists, competing for stories against each other, a pool system has been run to which the much smaller number of reporters shared between them what stories they found of interest.

This means a change in our approach as well. This year rather than a series, I am filing a report on a single set of documents, the release of files from the Office of the Film Censor covering 1924-1965.

They are revealing of social and politi-

cal changes over those years in relation to public entertainment, public morality and a perceived threat to Ireland's own culture. This approach is how, in fact, the masses of documents preserved over the centuries in the National Archives are meant to be used.

Censors' files express fears for public morality over four decades

Peter Costello

Some four decades of files from the Office of the Film Censor cast new light on the changing nature of Ireland from the first days of the Irish Free State in 1923 to the arrival of television in the early 60s.

Though films had been shown in Dublin since the 1890s it was the arrival of the comedies of Chaplin and others that turned "the pictures" into a mass international entertainment from 1910 onwards.

However, the nitrate stock on which the images were recorded was highly flammable and there were many accidents due to fire. In Ireland local authorities attempted to control the cinemas and films to some extent. In Britain the industry itself established the independent British Board of Film Censors in 1912 in order to pre-empt local censorship by issuing a national certificate.

“Though the scheme was widely supported, there was trouble with the cinema proprietors resulting in temporary ‘boycott’”

Ireland took another path: the appointment of the world's first state appointed film censor. With the coming of an independent State the new government repealed the old regulations and centralised the control of films in the Department of Justice and their censorship with the Censorship of Films Act 1923, which led to the appointment of a film censor with an office of his own, initially in a former cinema in O'Connell Street, near the main trade outlets, later in

Molesworth Street near the Government, and finally in a small purpose built bungalow on OPW land on quietly respectable Harcourt Terrace, an elite location.

The first censor

The first censor was James Montgomery, appointed by Kevin O'Higgins, the Minister of Justice, on November 1, 1923. Though the scheme was widely supported, there was trouble with the cinema proprietors resulting in a temporary 'boycott', as the censor called it, which was soon smoothed out.

Mr Montgomery seems to have had no real qualifications for the position. He owed his appointment to his social and political connections with people like Senator Oliver Gogarty and other wits of the Dolphin Hotel coterie.

In his first reports, however, the films were not distinguished by title, but the total film length of imported stock was the recorded (an imposition perhaps by Customs and Excises). This makes it hard to judge the work of the censor.

It is significant that the government began with censorship of films, the great form of mass entertainment for the working and lower middle classes, rather than books which were bought mostly by the educated upper classes. When officials spoke about public morality they were expressing fears about the 'corruption of the lower orders' (as the phrase then was).

But there seems to have been general agreement between censor and the social publicists and 'influential laypersons' about what was wanted. There was no need to consult the general public.

Catholic opinion here was greatly influenced by controversy on the matter of film controls in the US, and much of what was said in



A new style nun queuing with the crowd to see *Love Story* in 1972.

Ireland in 1923-24 had been said there in 1921.

The censoring of silent films was simple enough; the objectionable matter could simply be edited out. But arrival of "talking pictures" over the course of 1929 presented technical difficulties for Montgomery, for while the images would be harmless, for the sound (which was on a magnetic strip on the film was not beside the image but in advance of it) a jump cut would not work. The censor found it easier simply to reject films, rather than cut them.

The introduction of the Hays Code in the United States in 1930 (sternly enforced from 1934 on into the 1950s, initially by an Irish Catholic)

was also a creation of the industry itself to protect its theatre chains from local censors in places like Boston. This 'clean screen' movement certainly improved American films in the eyes of James Montgomery.

(The sort of thing objected to is well illustrated by new Irish star Maureen O'Sullivan's 1932 pre-Hays Code film *Tarzan the Ape Man*, which has a nude swimming scene and one of her undressing behind a white screen. It opened in Dublin, trimmed of the more revealing moments, for Christmas 1932 – "the most sensational film of the year", according to the posters outside the Savoy.)

Having established the strict procedures of Irish film censorship, in 1940 Montgomery having reached the age of 70, retired in September. The press on this occasion spoke well of his time as censor, saying that there had been few criticisms from either the public or trade.

“Ireland's neutrality went on down to the end of the war and was very strictly applied to British film, especially those dramas dealing with the war”

The government, with all the new concerns of the ongoing war, appointed Richard Hayes, the Director of the National Library, to the post. Born in 1902, he was an old Clongowes boy and a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, as well as a director of the Abbey, which was held against him in some quarters. Others wondered why the post (at £900 a year) was not advertised. But the public were not privy to what was going on behind the scenes.

Hayes was perhaps an inevitable choice in the day, given the existence of the

wartime Emergency Powers Order, under which the country was being run. This was because Hayes was central to the government's counter-intelligence work as chief code breaker of suspect cable and radio traffic from the German Embassy and other legations.

An essential part of his role as film censor at this date was to view and edit the cinema newsreels, such as *Time Magazine's* popular newsreel, 'The March of Time' from the then neutral US.

Issues of this series were indeed rejected, but afterwards they were allowed in after they had been re-edited to meet the demands of Irish neutrality. The concern to preserve Ireland's neutrality went on down to the end of the war and was very strictly applied to British film, especially those dramas dealing with the war.

In general the war meant a reduction in the numbers and suitability of films from both the US and Britain. But with the end of the war there was a return to the former large importations.

Strange decisions

Dr Hayes was perhaps stricter than Montgomery had been, preserving the same social norms that affected Irish society. James Montgomery served for some 16 years, Hayes would last 14. In that



Dr Richard Hayes about the time of his retirement.

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.

time he made some strange decisions.

This is illustrated by the matter of the Danny Kaye vehicle *Hans Christian Andersen* (1952). When it was originally offered for censorship late in the year the censor demanded cuts which the producers refused to make, at which he simply rejected the whole film.

The film, however, was released in Dublin in the autumn 1953, a year late, after undisclosed cuts. The screen play was drawn from a story by Myles Connolly, the noted Catholic novelist, author of *Mr Blue* (1928). *The Catholic Standard* was distinctly cool in its review, though the film was warmly praised elsewhere.

The trouble was Hans' infatuation with a beautiful ballerina at the Royal Danish Ballet, who was married to a husband she loves with whom she bickers. Hans writes *The Little Mermaid*, which is made into a successful ballet. Only then does the deluded Hans realise the folly of his love for the ballerina and he returns home.

The theme suggestive of adultery in what was seen as family Christmas entertainment led to the rejection. All of this suggests that Dr Hayes lacked the sensitivity and understanding of films in a cross-cultural context.

But he and James Montgomery had established the pattern by which the films were edited to make them suitable for, say, 12-year-olds on Saturday afternoon's shows. Most provincial towns now had a cinema, and in greater Dublin alone 32 cinemas could hold

40,000 people a night.

Dr Hayes was followed by Martin Brennan, a Sligo doctor with a national record as a commander in the South Sligo brigade of the IRA, who had an interest in drama and the language movement.

“The overnight transition from standards of Our Boys to those of Greenwich Village deserved an explanation”

He died in 1956, to be succeeded by Liam O'Hara, a Dublin barrister, with a mixed career who had previously been the manager of the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin for seven years – earlier he had been in the Irish Army and then in the notorious Palestine Police under the British Mandate.

O'Hara found the atmosphere very difficult with the censor now open to a great deal of public criticism, which he did not care for. In his report for 1963, he remarked plaintively, about the emerging culture of modern Ireland, that: “The overnight transition from standards of *Our Boys* to those of Greenwich Village deserved an explanation.”

After him came Dr Christopher Macken, appointed by Mr Haughey on April 13, 1964. He lasted to 1972. However, the files just released pause with 1965 – the year Dr Macken banned the German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, a German silent classic made in 1920. Horror films of all kinds had long been, perhaps rightly,

a concern of all the censors, worried about their effect on a younger audience.

That year in fact Dr Macken banned twice as many films as the year before. His heavy hand soon drew the criticism of the newspaper film critics, who were now increasingly professional in outlook and well informed about international cinema, especially Italy and France. Continental films were more common now, with two cinemas devoted just to them alone in Dublin.

Irish television

Then there were Dr Macken's fears for the arrival of television in Ireland.

Those living along the Leinster coast had been able to receive British television transmissions from Ulster and Wales since the early 1950 – it was said that some 700 television sets were sold before the Coronation in 1953.

Families without one would finish their Sunday family drive with tea in a hotel to watch the Sunday serial, then of a religious kind, from the BBC such as *Paul of Tarsus* in 1960. *The Maigret* series also in 1960 was also a great hit in Ireland. RTÉ met these with popular comedies from the US to counter the appeal of *Coronation Street* on ITV.

But the introduction of an Irish television service, which began broadcasting on December 31, 1961, was also altering the setting for the film censorship debate which was growing in volume.

There were calls of the introduction of a properly graded age-related certificate for film censorship to



Poster for Hans Christian Andersen

overcome the anomalies that were all so obvious. Also the appointment to the post of party stalwarts by both main parties seemed to need to become more open to many.

The film censors all claimed to have in mind when going about their work the 'average Irish family'. But new academic studies showed that the average Irish family and what they thought and believed, was not as the censors and many public figures imagined them to be.

“The years from 1969 to 1972 would be very difficult for the then Film Censor Dr Macken. He found the new Ireland an uncomfortable place”

It could be said that the main audience of film in Ireland lived in the world described by Jesuit sociologist AJ Humphries in *The New Dubliners* (1966) which specifically dealt with the consumption of the media, while the censors and many politicians lived in the fast fading realm described by anthropologist Conrad Arnsberg's *The Irish Countryman* in 1936.

A new kind of clerical expert on culture emerged too, notably Fr Donald O'Sullivan of the Arts Council, Prof. Fr Peter Connolly of Maynooth, Fr John Kelly, Fr Micheál MacGréil SJ, and others. Then there was in Dublin the creation of the Irish Film Society which could show uncertified films often from the



The Savoy cinema, Dublin, in 1929, typical of the movie dream palaces of the great era of film going. Photo: Archiseek.

Continent to private middle-class audiences in a club. The huge increase in university graduates since the 1950s meant there was a very different and enlarged audience generally for all the arts.

In the schools the watch word of the day was 'the mature Christian', the informed and educated Catholic needed for a modern society which was no longer the 'Catholic state' so many nationalists had once spoken about. This mature Christian was inevitably seen as the mature citizen of the future too.

Then there was the television lecture series *The Course of Irish History*, a resumé of what modern academic historians believe to be the case about the past and present. This altered many old uncomplicated views, and remains a standard work which all can be considered to have read or at least been influenced by.

Nor indeed in the early 60s could Liam O'Hara and

Dr Christopher Macken readily fall back on the Department of Justice for support where the permanent secretary of the day whose advice they had been advised to take was an admitted atheist.

So the years from 1969 to 1972 would be very difficult for the then Film Censor Dr Macken. He found the new Ireland an uncomfortable place. But we will have to wait another year before I learn more about the crisis years that followed down to 1972 and after.

[This appraisal is based on a release from the Office of the Film Censor Annual of reports covering 1924-1965, FOC 2023/133/1-32, now currently available to the public in the National Archives in Bishop Street, Dublin...]

There are other documents relating to the Film Censors Office in earlier transfers which we have not had a chance to examine, but those interested can inspect them.]



The mass audience for films in the 1950s

90-year anniversary for Tubbercurry church

I had known that the parish church in Tubbercurry turned 90 in 2023. I wasn't sure of the date but had mentioned it at a pastoral council meeting and thought we should mark the event as the year was coming to a close. I called Bishop Paul and asked if he might be free to celebrate Mass and he readily agreed. We looked at dates and I mentioned the first Sunday in December. He suggested the following Sunday as the first Sunday was the first Sunday of Advent. We agreed on Sunday, December 10.



Plaque
There is a plaque at the back of the church. To my shame, I had never read it but when I looked, I was pleased to read: "This church was dedicated by the Most Rev Dr Morrisroe on 10th December 1933 under the titularship of St John Evangelist. The cost of building was defrayed by a gift made to the bishop by an English lady, Miss Jessie Wilson, to mark her appreciation of the attachment to the Faith of the Irish under many trials. And with the generous offerings of parishioners and friends. Prayers for donors requested." Very Rev James Canon

Spelman, PP.
So, by happy coincidence we had arranged our celebration by day and date exactly 90 years after the first Mass was celebrated.
Bishop Paul, the successor to Bishop Morrisroe walked in the track of his shoes as we processed through the church to celebrate Mass. People filled seats that had first been filled 90 years earlier by their ancestors. The choir sang from the gallery that has been home to singers and musicians from the earliest days. Marist Sisters attended the

Mass as had their predecessors who taught in the local school for several decades. Altar servers rang the bell that sounded all those years ago to call us to attentive prayer. The widow of a man who served that first Mass, together with the daughter of one of the men who worked on the building of the church, carried forward the gifts of bread and wine. And I, stood in the shadow of names of other priests who have worked in the parish through those 90 years – James Spelman, John O'Dowd, Dominic Casey, Peter Harte, Denis Gildea, Walter Casey, Ambrose Blaine, Jack McGarry, John C. Duffy, James Gavigan, Joseph Higgins, Pat Peyton, Pat Lynch, Martin Jennings, Ambrose McLoughlin, Padraig McGovern, Jim Finan, Gerard Davey, John Geelan, Dan O'Mahony, and, no doubt others and it felt both humbling and

inspiring to feel oneself part of a journey of faith and part of a sacred story that is parish and diocese.
Remembered
We remembered Mary Ellen Murphy, the first child baptised in the new church. We prayed for Michael Brennan and Mary Daly, the first couple married, and we paused in prayer to recollect Bridget Brett the first funeral on record.
Thought and gratitude too, for Jessie Wilson, that 'English lady' who put up the funds to build the church. The plaque identifies her and her country but does not mention that she was not Catholic but a member of the Church of England. Her generosity and vision crossed the Irish Sea and crossed religious divide to help secure a place of worship. There is surely a

message here around ecumenism and around seeing the oneness of God and his hand at work in all that is good.
The church that had been in the town was named 'Sacred Heart' and the new church was to be named likewise. Jessie requested the name St John Evangelist. Somewhere, you can almost visualise Zechariah taking the tablet in his hand and scribbling "His name is John", albeit a different John, but the voice was found and 90 years on the Gospel of the Evangelist and his three companions is preached.
Someone mentioned a quote to me, in the context of our celebrations, and though I haven't it exactly as given, it was along the lines "People who drink the water, must never forget those who dug the well".

“Her generosity and vision crossed the Irish Sea and crossed religious divide to help secure a place of worship”





YOUR NEW YEAR GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

Millions of children throughout the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition due to conflict, disease, displacement, and other factors. And the situation in Africa is only getting worse. Millions of women and children are struggling with inadequate diets which can lead to stunting and other health problems. Countless children are dying of malnutrition each day.

The Little Way Association is receiving requests from missionary priests and Sisters who urgently need funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. For a helpless child, prolonged hunger is a devastating, bewildering, intensely painful experience.

Your New Year gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **FOOD FOR A HUNGRY CHILD**

€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **WELLS AND WATER**

€..... **MASSES** (please state no.)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

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Address

IC/01/04



"Insofar as you did this to one of the least of My brethren, you did it to Me".

As 2024 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.



We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain all the blessings and graces you need for 2024.

Daily Mass for your intentions

You and your intentions are remembered in a special Mass offered in the Missions for all Little Way benefactors and friends.

It was St Therese's vocation to be **"love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church"**, and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since St Therese's death on 30th September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.