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Married priests not answer to vocations crisis, cardinal for clergy says in Knock

EXCLUSIVE

Chai Brady

True witness to the Faith is the answer to declining vocations in Ireland, not married priests, the Vatican's cardinal for clergy has insisted during a visit to Knock shrine, Co. Mayo.

Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy told *The Irish Catholic* that there are those who call for an end to the ban on priests marrying but do nothing to promote priesthood in their own families.

In the context of marriage being an answer to the crisis in vocations, Cardinal You pointed to the Orthodox Church – where it is permitted and vocations have also been in decline. He said: "If that were the case, take for example the Orthodox Church, they would be flourishing in terms of vocations, but we have to look at the reality. I say to the lay faithful to have more children and to promote vocations in their families and among their children."

"Not wanting to cause any controversy obviously, but there are those who are shouting aloud, their voices are quite loud in the public forum, and they would not be stepping up to encourage their son or their daughter to pursue a religious life."

Cardinal You was visiting Knock for the Diocesan Vocation Director's Conference which saw vocation directors descend on the national Marian shrine from across Ireland as part of the 'Year for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood'. This began on Vocations/Good Shepherd Sunday in April 30 last year.

For almost a year there has been a major push for vocations to diocesan priesthood run by the Council for Vocations of the Irish Bishops' Conference.

Regarding the synodal process and the role of priests and clergy in a Church faced with rapidly changing times,

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Faith in the Kingdom...



Students from St Brendan's College Killarney, Co. Kerry, gather for the Diocese of Kerry's annual schools' celebration Ceiliúradh na nÓg.

WE NEED POLITICIANS WHO SAY WHAT THEY MEAN

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SAFEGUARDING 'GREATLY IMPROVED' IN IRELAND

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ON UKRAINE, POPE FRANCIS HAS A POINT

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The Irish Catholic

Bethlehem Christians hope for Irish pilgrims' return after bishop's plea

Ruadhán Jones

Christians in the birthplace of Christ hope for the return of Irish pilgrims after a plea from a Palestinian bishop to support for the local Christian population.

Bethlehem Christians are "still in darkness" due to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, but they hope to see pilgrims return soon, local guides and shop owners told *The Irish Catholic*.

"We hope they come back, they want to come back," tour guide Louis Michel said.

"We keep in our prayers the hope that everything will get better and calm, that

there will be a good solution, so that tourists can come back," he added.

David Tabash, who runs a Christian souvenir store in Bethlehem, said the people are "still in darkness", but he hopes for a truce soon and the return of pilgrims.

"Some days we open our eyes and wonder what we are doing here in Bethlehem, we feel pessimistic – but our faith is bigger than this," he said.

"There will be light at the end, I believe it will stop... I live where Jesus was born, people will come again," said Mr Tabash.

A Christian Palestinian tour guide based in Bethlehem who did not want to be identi-

fied said he hopes everything will get back to normal, but times are difficult.

"I don't know if it will be soon – everybody is suffering but there is always hope, our Faith gives us hope."

The Bethlehem Christians' comments come after Palestinian-born Auxiliary Bishop William Shomali of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem urged pilgrims to return to the Holy Land.

Tens of thousands of Christian pilgrims had to leave the Holy Land on emergency flights following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks.

The absence of pilgrims has had a dra-

matic effect on the region's tiny Christian minority in particular, given that many Christians are employed working with pilgrims.

"As churches, we want people to visit Nazareth, Jerusalem, Tiberias and Bethlehem with other Palestinian places," Bishop Shomali told *OSV News*.

According to Bishop Shomali, "It is true that there are difficulties because of security, but still Jericho and Bethlehem can be visited".

"The visit to Bethlehem is possible, even during the war," he said.

Married priests not answer to vocations crisis, cardinal for clergy says in Knock

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Cardinal You said that "the Church is not reduced to bishops, priests, or religious men or women but also includes the laity, and families and together we make up the Church and together we walk forward... We all have different roles but we are all Christians, which means that we are all called to live the word of God. What does that mean to live the Word of God? It means to love God and to love our neighbour. This is the synodal Church."

He continued saying: "No Christian is a foreigner in the Church, it is our Church, all of us are children of God. The Church in Ireland has had a wonderful history in many respects, and so putting everything in context and while acknowledging the reality of our past and where we are today, we must look to the future, and walk together."

"And so, the decision on the part of the bishops to dedicate

this year of prayer to vocations for diocesan priesthood is a wonderful initiative, for us it is important to pray, but a real prayer life is a life that gives witness. So my message to the bishops, to the priests, to deacons and to seminarians is that we have a responsibility to bear witness to Christ... When the youth see the witness, the beauty, the gift, the greatness that is the priesthood, then in turn they will be attracted to that authentic witness," Cardinal You said, adding: "I am convinced that if we as Christians lived the Word of God concretely, we would have a flourishing of vocations."

The Cardinal's comments come as some senior Vatican figures have called to re-examine clerical celibacy. Earlier this year, a secretary for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith called for celibacy to be made optional.

"If it were up to me, I would revise the requirement that

priest(s) have to be celibate," said Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta told *Times of Malta*.

The question of mandatory celibacy will not be addressed at this October's synodal discussions, Cardinal Mario Grech said last week as the Vatican announced working groups to address topics including women deacons and LGBTQ+ issues.



Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, poses with Knock Basilica in the background in Co. Mayo.

Pope rubbishes lay conclave vote rumours in new book

Staff reporter

Pope Francis has shot down claims that he is planning giving women and laity a say in the vote to elect a pope.

Speaking in his recently released biography *Life*, the Pope described as "fantasy" reports from "some American media outlets" that he intended to change the rules around the conclave to give nuns and laity a vote in the papal election.

"But this was fantasy, obviously invented and circulated to create bad feeling within the Church and disorientation among the Faithful," Pope Francis said.

Catholic news outlet *The Pillar* reported in November last year that Pope Francis had delegated Cardinal Gianfranco Ghir-

landa to develop draft revisions to the papal election process, in light of the approach to dialogue used during the synod on synodality.

The proposed changes included limiting attendance to cardinals eligible to vote and limiting the opportunity for speeches to the whole College of Cardinals, *The Pillar* reported.

Around the same time, newsite *The Remnant* reported that the Pope planned to have laity and women religious comprise 25% of the vote.

At the time, Cardinal Ghirlanda described the reports as "absolutely false" in statements provided to media outlets, while the Holy See press office issued a statement saying the reports "have no basis".

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Church's safeguarding 'greatly improved' national report finds

Ruadhan Jones

The Church in Ireland's safeguarding culture and structures have "greatly improved" in the past 10 years, according to a report from the national safeguarding body.

"A lot of progress has been made, and plans are in place to advance this further," the overview report from the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) shows.

The safeguarding policies of all 26 dioceses were reviewed between 2018 and 2023, measuring their progress according to the seven 2016 safeguarding standards and the recommendations made during the previous round of reviews held almost a decade ago.

Of the 210 recommendations made to dioceses to improve safeguarding procedures, 202 were implemented, with eight dioceses failing to meet all standards.

Both children and parents interviewed for the reviews,

providing an "important new perspective" for reviewers, the board says.

"It was clear that parents are satisfied that their children are safe when engaged in Church ministries and activities, and many shared that they have become more involved themselves as volunteers to support safeguarding at parish level," said the NBSCCCI.

The management of cases of abuse has improved, with "better processes, better record keeping and greater understanding of the need for fair and just responses", the board reports.

However, while the safeguarding body notes complainants were very satisfied overall, the records in some files "did demonstrate a lack of satisfaction with how the Church was caring and responding to their allegations of being abused as children".

"The National Board believes that the dissatisfaction described by complainants and respondents alike relates to an

absence of regular communication – even when nothing is happening in the management of their situation," the board says.

Dioceses received 219 allegations of abuse, a majority relating to sexual abuse, against named diocesan priests since the first review.

There were 12 allegations against unnamed diocesan clergy and 43 allegations against priests from other Church bodies. These figures do not include religious sisters or brothers.

The board interviewed 18 complainants and received statements from six others in the course of their reviews.

While the small number means no strong statements could be made, the board says "there was evidence of a reduced reliance on legalistic responses to complainants, and examples of bishops being more prepared to meet with complainants".

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New mural of Our Lady of Knock set to be unveiled in New York

Brandon Scott

A new mural of Our Lady of Knock is set to be created in St Patrick's Cathedral New York, the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan has announced.

The news was revealed by the cardinal after singer-songwriter Dana sang the hymn *Our Lady of Knock* at the St Patrick's Day parade Mass over the weekend.

"Dana," he said before a congregation of thousands. "This is the first time I have announced this. By next year, please God, due to the generosity of the people in this congregation, on that back wall, we will have a mural of Our Lady of Knock who appeared the very first year this cathedral opened. And on the opposite wall a mural to the immigrants who have come to this great city so mark your calendar, we would love to have you next year."

Friars going green...



Franciscan novices get into the spirit of St Patrick's Day celebrations in the novitiate in Killarney, Co. Kerry.



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‘Frustration’ in parish over asylum seeker treatment

Chai Brady

There is “concern” and “frustration” in the Dublin parish where a tent city of asylum seekers has cropped up due to lack of accommodation, according to the parish priest.

Fr Enda Cunningham, Administrator of Westland Row parish, spoke to *The Irish Catholic* about the controversial settlement of people seeking international protection on Mount

Street, outside the International Protection Office (IPO) in Dublin 2.

“It’s a very complex situation, and it’s a very challenging situation. It is of great concern to us here in the parish. The dominant feeling of most people is of concern, of frustration. It is obviously complex, I think it needs to be addressed primarily at the level of justice, not at the level of charity,” Fr Cunningham said.

This comes as the asylum

seekers in tents outside the IPO office on Mount Street were moved by Government to a site in Crooksling, South Dublin – some subsequently returning citing terrible conditions – on the weekend of St Patrick’s Day.

Fr Cunningham said: “I commend our political leaders for their efforts to try and attain some measure of justice and to support the efforts of those working for peace in the likes of Gaza or in Ukraine,

thousands of miles away, at the same time they have a situation here in their own city, and around the country trying to address what is clearly complex needs.

“There are those seeking international protection, there are those seeking economic opportunities, there those who have been trafficked here, often with a backstory that is just extraordinary and frightening, and there are the needs of the indigenous commu-

nities, the question of housing and where is the next generation to find housing that is affordable?”

He added: “These are enormously complex social issues, both national and international. I wouldn’t underestimate the demands on those in positions of leadership and responsibility, I do think the work of charities and our own local communities will, to the extent that they possibility can, seek to try and support

those efforts in the work of charity, but charity does not remove the demands of justice.”

Hundreds of asylum seekers were living outside the IPO office with no sanitary facilities, including bathrooms, which led to streets being used as toilets. More than 1,300 asylum seekers were without accommodation in Ireland when this paper went to print.

Lack of diverse voices in media causing public alienation, says veteran journalist

Brandon Scott

Seamus Dooley, Secretary of the National Union of Journalists and former editor of the *Roscommon Champion*, has expressed disappointment about the lack of diver-

sity of opinion in modern media and insisted that editors and producers need to take more risks in ensuring that more voices are brought to the table.

Speaking on *The State of the Nation* podcast, Mr Dooley said that

changes in the media landscape have created a uniformity in how news is presented in Ireland and that giving exposure to the same few familiar faces continuously is leading to biases emerging - which is consequently making media unre-

latable to some people.

“One of the problems is the lack of diverse voices means that many who write articles also present their own radio programme or they’re also a panellist on a radio programme,” he said. “Editors and producers need to

be much more consciously diverse in taking risks.”

“There’s an urban bias and this can come down to even the accents. I’m not surprised that many people may feel alienated from a media that doesn’t represent them.”

Making a song and dance...



Staff and students of Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore, Co. Tyrone gather in St Colmcille’s Church for a wonderful St Patrick’s celebration with song and dance.

Archbishop Martin: We need ‘an honest and open conversation’ about migration

Staff reporter

In his St Patrick’s Day message, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin said the “legitimate anxieties” that exist in society in relation to the implications of immigration need to be recognised in order for the conversation to “move away from the extremes” and become a normal part of civil and political discourse in both the north and south of the country.

Archbishop Martin said Ireland - north and south - needed an honest and open conversation about migration, “both outward and inward”.

“How can we truly become an island of belonging and hope where our own young people, health workers and teachers want to stay, and where others want to come and live among us,” he said.

Archbishop Martin said such an important discussion would only “move away from the extremes” when legitimate anxieties are recognised and there is a resolve to tackle the immense challenges of providing affordable homes and services for all at national and community level.

My sister had 'assisted dying' – support and care, not killing

One of the problems with 'assisted dying' – now under parliamentary discussion in both Ireland and Britain – is the very phrase itself.

In truth, a proper opportunity for 'assisted dying' can be entirely Christian and supportive. I mean in the sense that a dying person should have someone with them, to calm and care, and surround her or him with spiritual and humane comforts when leaving this life.

When my sister's life was drawing to a close – in a Catholic hospice in New York – she was attended by friends, by myself, and by a



Mary Kenny

special carer who gave his presence to a patient in the last days.

Doula

A midwife helps a mother bring a baby into the world – the word 'doula' is sometimes used. But there are also 'doulas' who help with a mortal departure, by holding hands, helping with breathing as it grows shallower, and in some cases providing calming music.

A book title by John Gordon Davis well describes the role: *Hold My Hand, I'm Dying*.

That constant presence by the bedside is, in the best definition of the word, an assistance to dying. No one should be alone at this last momentous and awesome hour and the 'doula' helped my sister's passage sympathetically (she also benefited from the Last Rites).

My husband, too, was surrounded by a supportive group as he moved towards life's end. Again, a true interpretation of 'assisted dying'.

But that is not really what the lobbyists have in mind: what is now being promoted is often 'assisted suicide'. It would be more honest to admit this.

Euphemisms

The campaign for assisted suicide is surrounded by euphemisms. Phrases like 'dying with dignity' are promulgated.

Death with dignity is indeed desirable – a serene and peaceful journey as

nature takes its course. That is not the same as Shakespeare's definition of 'self-slaughter'.

“We cannot always exercise our control over nature, but we can palliate the pain that nature inflicts”

When the campaigns for euthanasia were first launched, more candid language was employed. The British pro-euthanasia lobby was originally 'Exit', which is explicit and unvarnished. But then a 'softer sell' was devised to promote the ideology more widely.

I am aware that there are people who support euthanasia for well-meaning intentions – to spare suffering and the prolonged anxiety that can accompany a terminal illness.

Control

There are also those who feel we should exercise 'control' and 'choice' over our deaths, which again can be rooted in compassionate intentions – although it arises from the fallacy that we are masters of the universe controlling all of life.

We cannot always exercise our control over nature, but we can palliate the pain that nature inflicts; we can, and should, affirm that an 'assisted death' should mean support and care, not killing.

● An increasing number of school pupils apply to be exempted from learning the Irish language. As it was rigidly compulsory in my schooldays I'm inclined to think that if we had to slog our way through the linguistic discipline, so should following generations.

And yet, on reflection, I'm not really sure what the best educational policy might be. Irish should always be part of the school curriculum, obviously, but the strategy of enforcement hasn't

always encouraged a sunny approach to the language.

Affection for our hereditary tongue – I won't say 'native' tongue, since for most of us it honestly wasn't the first language – is surely a more winning tool than a harsh policy of coercion.

Irish is not an easy language to learn, because of its complex grammar and declensions. And only recently have I come to realise – via a grammarian friend – that there is no verb 'to have' in

the Irish language. 'I have a book' is 'Tá leabhar agam' – 'there is a book at me'.

I wonder does this indicate that our Irish-speaking ancestors had scant sense of personal possessions? (That there is no exact words for 'yes' and 'no' in Irish is taken to mean that the Celtic mind was circuitous and tolerant of ambiguity).

Yet there are great words for expressing dismissive scepticism – praise scoffed at as 'plámás' and pompous talk as 'ráméis'!

The hidden profundity of the desert

Peter O'Toole as Lawrence of Arabia



I will be absent from these pages next week – my Palm Sunday is due to be spent in Jordan, a place of Christian pilgrimage for millennia. It's quite something to consider that this is

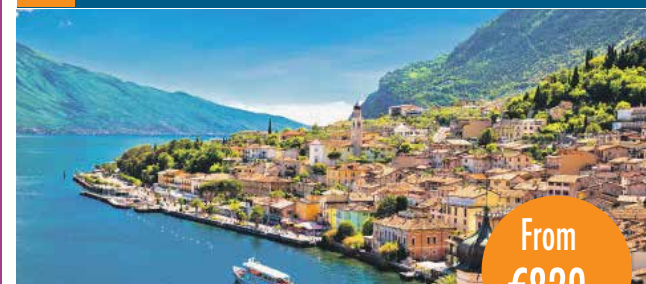
the very location where St John the Baptist baptised Christ, and from which Moses saw the Promised Land.

On the secular side, Jordan was also the literary and political inspiration for TE

Lawrence, the half-Irishman who became Lawrence of Arabia, (and played by Peter O'Toole in the unforgettable film of that name.) This movie illuminated the fascinating and enigmatic aspect

of the desert, which even in itself plays a key role in faith. The desert surely symbolises the retreat into the eternal, but also the rugged and awesome sands of time marking our earth.

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Bishop McKeown: Most political parties don't listen to anyone outside of the secular ideology

Brandon Scott

Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown has criticised what he describes as the “modern secular and consumerist culture”, saying that it leaves “no place for a dissident voice”

that doesn't support it and that the political parties who adopt this ideology in the North “seem to assume that Catholic education has no place in a modern society”.

In his St Patrick's Day sermon, Bishop McKeown

reminded parishioners that Christianity was seen as a custom a number of decades ago whereas now it's overpowered by a dominant culture which according to him, sees Christianity as a threat.

“Some decades ago Christi-

anity was taken for granted,” he said. “Now in our modern secular and consumerist culture anything that dares to speak of morality, of right and wrong, of self-control, of sacrifice, is seen as a threat to the new ideology, to the mar-

ket, to its dominant power,” he declared.

He continued: “If I am at the heart of what the world is all about then nobody will tell me or challenge me about my role as a little self-defining God. We know

that most political parties here seem to assume that Catholic education has no place in a modern society, that there is no place for a dissident voice that doesn't support the new secular ideology”.

UK MPs urged to acknowledge Irish Catholic contribution to British life

Ruadhán Jones

MPs in the UK have been urged to acknowledge the “tremendous” Irish Catholic contribution to British life, as immigration debates descend to a “game of fear”.

“The Irish Catholic contribution, both to the Catholic Church in Eng-

land and Wales and to wider British life and community, has been tremendous,” Bishop Paul McAleenan told MPs.

The Belfast-born Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster wrote to MPs ahead of a debate in Westminster on the motion, “That this House has considered St Patrick's Day and the contri-

bution of the Irish diaspora to the UK’.

Churches and communities throughout England and Wales have benefited from the contributions of Irish clergy, religious and laity since the large-scale immigration of the 19th Century, Bishop McAleenan added.

“The Irish witness in our wider

society has been similarly significant,” said Dr McAleenan, pointing to the example of Irish nurses and teachers, as well as cultural artefacts like song and spirit.

As debate around immigration “often descends into a zero-sum game of fear, suspicion and prejudice” in Britain, the Auxiliary Bishop

of Westminster said St Patrick's Day celebrations are “a good opportunity to celebrate the remarkable contribution of the Irish diaspora to British life and society”.

The Irish migrants are “an example not least of the achievements of immigration and integration”, Dr McAleenan finished.

Climate change low on list of Irish concerns study shows

Staff reporter

New research reveals three out of four Irish people support Government spending on overseas aid, but climate change is down in the list of priorities and understanding of sustainable development goals (SDGs) is low.

The Worldview

research – published Irish charities network Dóchas – showed that 76% agree it is important to provide overseas aid, with 29% in favour of increasing the level of spending.

On climate change, the research found that 14% of the Irish public believe climate change will impact them a great deal, while 59%

say it is a problem for future generations, and 51% say it is a problem for developing countries in the global south.

When it comes to responsibility for climate change, 43% of respondents believe it is a matter for ‘other’ people in Ireland apart from themselves. 40% said it is the responsibility of the

Government and only 17% said it is their personal responsibility.

War, conflict, and terrorism top people's concerns at 51% (up 8% on 2022); followed by economic crises, job security and wages (down 9%) and climate change, the environment and biodiversity (down 5%).

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thousands raised for Gaza on St Patrick's Day

A St Patrick's Day fundraising event for Gaza raised €5,500 in aid of humanitarian relief for the civilian population.

The ‘paint for Palestine’ event took place in the Castleknock Parish Centre, organised by Aontú candidate Ellen Troy, who mobilised the D15 community to get behind the effort.

The proceeds of Paint For Palestine will be donated to Trócaire.

“The people of Castleknock and the wider D15 area really came out in force to show their solidarity with the unfortunate civilians in Gaza who are going through the most unspeakable horrors,” said Ms Troy.

“I am so touched by the huge generosity shown by the community,” she added.

Bishop McGuckian to be installed as Bishop of Down and Connor next month

The former Bishop of Raphoe, Alan McGuckian SJ, is set to be officially appointed as the Bishop of Down and Connor next month.

Bishop McGuckian was appointed to the Down and Connor Diocese in February by Pope Francis. He has served the Raphoe Diocese since 2017.

Bishop McGuckian officially took up his new role Tuesday, March 19. The formal ceremony to install him as the new Bishop of Down and Connor will take place on Sunday, 14 April.

Charity call for Syria support

Concern Worldwide has warned that cuts in funding to support Syrian people are having a devastating impact on people's lives and health.

The charity say Syria is the world's largest refugee and internal displacement crisis. Approximately 16.7 million people in Syria – more than 70% of the population – require humanitarian assistance to access food, clean water, shelter, and hygiene facilities.

“The world has largely forgotten about Syria as it doesn't see what is happening in the country. But once you come into Syria and you see the needs, that's when it really hits you,” said Faryal Minhas, country director for Syria and Iraq with the Irish humanitarian organisation.

“The needs are huge and are increasing, there is support but there is not enough. Unless there is a political solution, the humanitarian assistance needs to go on. Even though there are many other disasters in the world that need donor and public support, please don't forget Syria.”

Over 90% of Syrians now live below the international poverty line. Prior to the start of the conflict in 2011 this figure was as low as 10%.

100 years young...



Babs Meskeel (central) celebrates her 100th birthday in Ahane Church, Co. Limerick, joined by Fr Willie Teehan and her family and friends on March 18.

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Euthanasia is becoming the sole solution to wide-ranging problems in some countries



Wendy Grace

Assisted suicide, and/or euthanasia, now accounts for one in 20 deaths in the Netherlands. This was just one of the many disturbing pieces of evidence presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on 'Assisted Dying'. Today it's expected the committee will make a recommendation to introduce assisted suicide and euthanasia into Irish legislation.

We are meant to be assured by the news that it will be restricted to those who have less than six to 12 months to live, depending on the illness. Yet even before we have any draft legislation, those pushing for it are largely opposed to time limits and favour a more subjective approach to an individual's experience of suffering. Promises of safeguards are hollow, as the Danish Council of Ethics concluded "it can neither be regulated nor limited".

Having read all of the transcripts of the hours of evidence given to the Committee, it's unfathomable that this recommendation has been made. The sad irony is that medical professionals, working in the area of managing terminal illness and end of life care, are overwhelmingly opposed to it, yet they are the ones that will be asked to carry out the implications of the legislation.

This includes the Irish Association of Palliative Care Consultants, The Irish College of Psychiatry, and The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, representing over 15,000 doctors in Ireland, all made it clear that introducing assisted suicide and euthanasia would completely undermine quality of care and radically alter negatively how we view dying, disability, and aging. I can only conclude that our elected representatives have once again decided that ideology trumps evidence, societal impacts and logic.

Suffering

Yes, the Committee also heard stories of truly difficult experiences of human suffering. The core argument for these individual cases was that of autonomy and choice, but this choice doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's not one that affects just the individual but the whole of society.

Several contributors, working in the area of palliative care, acknowledged that requests for hastening death were not uncommon, but were extremely rarely sustained once effective palliative care was provided. In the last cross-country comparison analysis conducted in 2021, Ireland was placed second out of 81 countries for the quality of its end-of-life care.



A photo illustration shows tools used in euthanasia. Photo: OSV News/Norbert Fellechner, www.imago via Reuters

Often, proponents in rebutting the horror that has been unleashed in countries like Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands could only clutch at straws, referencing Australia and New Zealand who only legalised the practice in 2023 and 2021 respectively.

Countries like Canada show how quickly the 'strict' proposals (similar to our own) don't last long. Their death rate from assisted suicide and euthanasia has increased by 1000% since it was introduced only eight years ago, and by 2027 Canada will legalise assisted suicide and euthanasia for those with mental illness.

“What the patient says about his or her suffering should be considered as binding on the doctor, regardless of whether the patient's pain could actually be relieved”

During evidence given by Dr Leopold Van Bellingham, from the European Institute of Bioethics which has been analysing this issue and its impacts for 20 years, explained why it quickly becomes far reaching:

“From the very beginning, the Euthanasia Control Committees in Canada, Belgium, and the

Netherlands, considered that the criterion of suffering should be assessed subjectively: what the patient says about his or her suffering should be considered as binding on the doctor, regardless of whether the patient's pain could actually be relieved, for example by palliative care.”

Horror

The horror stories presented to the committee are too numerous to recount here, but some examples included: the paralympic army veteran who asked her local authority for a stair lift; the woman who was awaiting treatment for months for her complex chronic disease; the woman denied affordable housing; the cancer patient who wasn't given any timeline for his treatment - all were offered MAID (medical assistance in dying) instead of the care they deserved.

Lengthy waits for treatment is common while availing of MAID takes just days. In fact, Canadian doctors are told to propose MAID as an option in certain circumstances.

Or what about the 23 year old Belgium girl who was legally killed as the answer to her depression, or the woman in the Netherlands with dementia who was forcibly held down while the doctor killed her, or the deaf Belgian twins who were euthanised after learning they would go blind.

The culture changes whereby

it is no longer the 'choice to die' but a 'duty to die'. That is why the evidence consistently shows one of the core reasons people request assisted dying is because they feel like they are a burden.

Around the world, disability rights organisations are overwhelmingly against assisted suicide and euthanasia because of the demonstrable impact they have seen it have on devaluing life, giving the state an excuse to forgo their responsibilities, and providing an existential threat to disabled people.

“Several contributors highlighted the potential it has to normalise suicide in an Ireland that has come so far in trying to prevent it”

Dr Siobhan McHale, representing the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, explained that as psychiatrists they believed it's not possible to clearly differentiate between suicidal patients and patients who request assisted dying. Several contributors highlighted the potential it has to normalise suicide in an Ireland that has come so far in trying to prevent it.

In fact Professor of Health-

care Ethics, Theo Boer, gave evidence having just returned from a congress with 250 psychiatrists considering the connection between euthanasia and suicide. He detailed that in the Netherlands the violent suicide rate has increased by 35%.

On the one hand the Government will support suicide prevention for some vulnerable groups and on the other there will be state sanctioned suicide for others. We would create two forms of suicide: one, which we are saying is upsetting and worthy of huge efforts to prevent, and another which is given the protection of law, a premise that cannot make sense.

Cautionary

The evidence presented to the Committee is a cautionary tale we must heed, the cruel disregard for human life that ensues when you introduce the concept that some lives are not as valuable as others. We should be doing all we can to strive for the best care possible rather than debating over whether consensual killing should be part of Irish healthcare.

The potential harms far outweigh the arguments being made in favour of legislation. Will the committee listen to a small but vocal minority or will they reconsider the medical experts, the experience of other countries, and the tragic stories of vulnerable lives being unnecessarily ended.

We need politicians who say what they mean – and mean what they say



It's amusing that Govt representatives campaigned for a 'yes' and voted 'no', but it is corrosive of politics, writes **Michael Kelly**

You don't hear much from former Labour leader Pat Rabbitte these days. He left active political life in 2016, with a pension pot of some €2 million.

Mr Rabbitte – now aged 74 – receives a pension from the Oireachtas of some €73,629 per year. He is also entitled to a further €14,000 in the old age pension.

That's over €7,000-a-month, so Mr Rabbitte is hardly serving as chair of the Family and Child Agency Túsla because he needs the €12,000 fee that comes with that job.

It's a cruel reality of politics that, despite the fact that he has been involved in public life for more than 50 years, Mr Rabbitte is remembered by many people for offering a rare glimpse into what goes on behind the scenes in Irish politics.

Appearing on RTÉ's *The Week in Politics* in late 2013, Mr Rabbitte was discussing his Labour party's pre-election pledge to maintain child benefit rates – a promise later abandoned.

Mr Rabbitte responded by saying: "Isn't that what you do during an election?" – a comment widely picked up to mean that parties made flip-pant election promises while seeking office.

At one level he is right, of course. We see it in almost every single election campaign.

Conversions

But the post-referendum conversions to the 'no' side following the thundering defeat for the political establishment/NGO alliance last week really takes the biscuit.

“We need a culture in Irish politics where conscience and doing what one believes to be the right thing is seen as ordinary, rather than something exceptional”

The first embarrassment for the Government (apart from the disastrous result) was the revelation that two prominent Fine Gael senators, who had spent the campaign lecturing the plain people of Ireland about the importance of voting, hadn't bothered to vote deciding to head off early to make the most of a long weekend in London.

Fine Gael Senators John McGahon and Garret Ahearn did not cast their ballots in the proposals, because they were travelling to the airport for an early morning flight.

The day before, both men had dutifully posted photographs of themselves on social media affixing posters to lampposts and solemnly intoning the Government message that voting is a vital part of a democracy.

A classic case of 'do as we say, not as we do'.

Worse was yet to come for the beleaguered Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael-Green Party coalition as Seanad leader Lisa Chambers admitted that she had, in fact, voted 'no' to both referendum proposals – despite the fact that she had campaigned for a 'yes' in both campaigns.

“We have a right to choose politicians who are scrupulously honest with the electorate, and say what they mean and mean what they say”

So far, four Fianna Fáil politicians, including founder Éamon de Valera's grandson Éamon Ó Cuív voted no. Limerick TD Willie O'Dea and Cavan-Monaghan deputy Niamh Smyth have now said they voted 'no' in both referendums.

In fairness to Carlow-Kilkenny backbencher John McGuinness, he said before the referendums that he would be voting 'no'.

At one level, it's tempting to just see this as the farce that Fianna Fáil has become under Micheál Martin where party discipline doesn't really matter, and TDs and Senators can vote how they like. And, certainly, who could fault those of us on the 'no' side for taking a bit of pleasure in the Government's discomfort.

But, the reality is that this sort of behaviour is absolutely corrosive to faith in politics. We have a right to choose politicians who are scrupulously honest with the electorate, and say what they mean and mean what they say.

Spin, misinformation and disinformation have a corrupting effect on politics just as damaging as politicians taking bribes in brown envelopes.

We should all be able to look at politicians and see men and women who are people of their word, and people of principle.

The idea that a senator would go around handing out leaflets urging a 'yes' vote in a referendum, and then vote no is demoralising for anyone who believes in honest politics.

I've heard it speculated in the US that one of the reasons that Donald Trump's public misdemeanours don't seem to overly bother voters, is that voters generally believe that all politicians are the same – and only Mr Trump is honest about it.

Uniformity

There is a crippling and bland uniformity in Irish politics. Take during the abortion referendum, for example, how many politicians who had presented themselves as ardent pro-lifers down the years suddenly found themselves on 'journey' to supporting an extremely liberal abortion regime that has seen around 10,000 unborn babies lose their lives each year.

You'd have to wonder to what extent the enticing prospect of promotion convinced people to change their minds. Was it Groucho Marx who said, "those are my principles, and if you don't like them...well, I have others".

We need a culture in Irish politics where conscience and doing what one believes to be the right thing is seen as ordinary, rather than something exceptional.

When Peadar Kirby lost the Sinn Féin whip for refusing to back abortion, one prominent commentator in *The Irish Times* scratched her head at the move pointing out that if Deputy Kirby just voted in favour, he could probably be guaranteed a Cabinet seat in a Sinn Féin-led coalition.

What sort of impoverished idea of principles



Ireland's Taoiseach Leo Varadkar walks to cast his vote in a referendum on changes to the Irish Constitution called the Family Amendment and the Care Amendment, at Scoil Treasa Naofa in Dublin, March 8. Photo: OSV News/Reuters, Clodagh Kilcoyne

and doing what is right and wrong leads one to such a conclusion? We're always talking about how we want young people not to go with

crowds, and make up their own minds and decide for themselves.

They have precious few role models in Leinster House

where the policy seems to be: if there's the slightest possibility that doing something I don't believe in could get me ahead, I'll do it.

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The Church in light of the referendum results



We might have passed peak anti-Catholicism, writes David Quinn

The bishops played little part in the recent referendums. That was probably wise. They did issue a statement in the closing stages which could be picked up at Masses (if the priest thought to mention it). The statement did not advise people how to vote, but it did make a case, without explicitly saying so, for voting No.

Should the hierarchy have said how Catholics should vote? I don't believe so. I think a Catholic could, in good conscience, vote in favour of the one on carers. (I voted No to both). This was the proposal to remove the section of the Constitution that mentions mother in the home and replace it with a provision that would "strive" to support carers.

A Catholic could easily take the view that what was on offer did not go far enough in support of carers, or else recoil at the idea of removing the word "mother" from the Constitution.

Honours

Personally, I believe that Catholic social teaching honours the role of mothers in a way our very economy-driven modern societies do not.

Catholic social teaching places an enormous value on the home. A society that values the economy over the home and wants to turn us all into units of produc-



Despite efforts to frame the March 8 referenda as a chance to remove Church influence from the Constitution, voters said no. Photo: OSV News/Reuters

tion and tax-payers, has taken a wrong turn somewhere.

Yes, it can be justifiably argued that the current language of Article 41.2, the provision that discusses mothers and the home and "duties", is archaic, but you could change some of that language and still keep the aspiration to protect mothers from the demands of the economy and to protect the home from the same thing.

“Modern governments seem to be telling mothers that their place is in work, not the home, a total reversal of the old attitude”

We constantly hear that aspects of Catholic social teaching are 'out of date', but home should always be honoured and so should motherhood.

Recent opinion polls, including one commissioned by The Iona Institute (which I run) have found that around two-thirds of mothers of children under 18 would prefer to mind their children at home than go out to work.

Can it be said that modern Irish governments have tried to fulfil this wish? On the contrary. Modern governments seem to be telling mothers that their place is in work, not the home, a total reversal of the old attitude.

Trickier

It was trickier for a Catholic to vote in favour of the second proposal which was to give something called "durable relationships" a status in the Constitution something close to that of marriage.

Catholic social teaching gives marriage a special place for a very good reason; nothing is better for children. Yes, it's true that there are terrible marriages, but on average children fare best when raised by a good father and a good mother.

In any case, any kind of relationship can go wrong, including that between a cohabiting couple, so I always think it is very strange, actually it's agenda-driven, to single out bad marriages from all the other bad relationships that exist.

Marriage is a public, legally binding commitment a couple make to one another. In return the couple is given certain entitlements and protections.

Why give the same things to a cohabiting couple who have the option of marrying and may not be marrying specifically because they don't want to be legally bound to each other?

“I don't think very many people really thought about the Church at all when casting their vote, but actually this is where there might be a small ray of hope amid the gloom”

Of course, marriage is not remotely as legally binding as it used to be, but a bit of the old system still

remains. You still can't walk away from a marriage without considering your legal and financial obligations.

Does the overwhelming rejection of the Government's two referendums have anything to say about the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland? In a direct sense, probably not.

I don't think very many people really thought about the Church at all when casting their vote, but actually this is where there might be a small ray of hope amid the gloom that has mostly enveloped the Church as an institution for the last few decades; at least this time voters weren't out for revenge against the Church.

I think there was a fair element of that at work in the marriage referendum of 2015 and the abortion referendum of 2018. Both of those were seen by a sizable number of voters as an opportunity to further consign Catholic Ireland to the past.

Middle Ireland

But perhaps the average voter genuinely believes this has now happened. Yes, they will become angry again when the exhuming of bodies at the old Tuam Mother and Baby home

takes place and we are reminded of that time, but for the most part 'Middle Ireland' is not considering the Church in the hostile way it did during past social issues referendums, or about Eamon de Valera for that matter.

Yes, there is a chunk of the electorate – at a guess one fifth of it – that is still viscerally anti-Catholic, and they are extremely noisy on social media and over-represented in the mainstream media and probably in the Dáil as well, but it is no longer where the average voter is at.

“What the two referendums also reminded us that roughly a third of voters still have what might be called a broadly traditionalist outlook on social issues”

The average voter might lean liberal, but he or she is not hard-core liberal, or 'woke'. In fact, the excesses of 'woke' ideology ('hate speech' laws and so on), are beginning to drive them mad.

And, of course, what the two referendums also reminded us that roughly a third of voters still have what might be called a broadly traditionalist outlook on social issues.

That is, they value the family based on marriage, they value the home, they value motherhood, they don't believe in abortion, or euthanasia, and they don't believe in hyper-individualism. They value solidity and stability over fluidity and flux.

So, what do the results mean for Catholicism in Ireland? No, they don't mean the Church is about to make a comeback, and I don't know a single person who has suggested otherwise.

But they might mean we have passed peak anti-Catholicism and that the average voter has passed peak political correctness, even if the political establishment hasn't got that memo yet.

Overall, the results do give us some reason to have a bit more optimism than we have felt in quite some time, to which we can only say, 'Deo Gratias'.

“So, what do the results mean for Catholicism in Ireland? No, they don't mean the Church is about to make a comeback, and I don't know a single person who has suggested otherwise”

Truth is under attack



Truth is no longer just the first casualty of war, it is the target, writes **Martina Purdy**

Three little words, uttered by a politician, echo down the ages: "What is truth?"

The question will be posed again at Good Friday services next week, the words of Pontius Pilate – a politician, who gets a mention at every Sunday Mass.

"What is truth?" remains an apt question for all of us today as the fall-out from the Irish double-referendum on care and the family continues.

We live in an era where truth, or 'objective reality', is too often denied for selfish or narrow political interests.

All have fallen short in this regard (thank God for confession).

But as we approach Easter, it is worth recalling how a politician washed his hands of Christ, the Truth incarnate.

How ironic, as politicians generally, with honourable exceptions, have a reputation for lies, half-truths, and spin.

Exposed

Thanks to a minority of vocal critics, the dishonesty of the double referendum has been exposed.

The tipping point was arguably the 11th hour leak of the Attorney General's advice. This contradicted government assurances that issues such as child-care, social welfare, and



A person in New York City holds up a transgender flag. Photo: OSV News/Brendan McDermid, Reuters

immigration would not be impacted by the proposed constitutional change.

The truth has set us all free from bad laws!

How quickly a few government coalition TDs washed their hands of the result, confessing they had secretly voted 'no' despite campaigning for 'yes'. Sinn Féin and Labour tried to tip-toe away from their position.

“The whole abortion industry is based on a tissue of lies”

It takes courage to stand in the truth – politician or not.

These days, truth is no longer just the first casualty of war: truth is the target. Take the culture wars over issues such as abortion, and transgenderism.

The whole abortion industry is based on a tissue of lies: that no one gets hurt (actually, little children die and many men and women are emotionally and mentally wounded.)

When the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, announced the referendum to Repeal the Eighth Amendment and legalise abortion, he quoted President Bill Clinton's dis-

honest phrase: abortion would be "safe, legal and rare". Since 2019, around 30,000 abortions (not counting the north) have taken place.

Abortion is about as rare as rainfall in Knock Shrine.

Transgender ideology is based on another lie: that your biology does not determine your gender. Yet it is passionately promoted by politicians and professionals who should know better.

Beware!

Challenging what Pope Francis calls an "ugly ideology" is no longer just a matter of hurt feelings (calling someone by the 'wrong' pronoun for example).

Last year a Canadian student, Josh Alexander, was suspended from St Joseph's Catholic High School for saying there are only two genders.

The Scottish government has just passed new anti-hate laws, effective April 1 and the Irish government is proposing something similar.

Frankly I'm not reassured by Justice Minister Helen McEntee's assurance that 'misgendering' someone will not be a hate-crime.

Without a clear definition of hate, what is to stop someone from being

accused of transphobia if they object to a trans-identifying man in a ladies' loo?

How far are we prepared to go to stifle free speech so minority groups are not offended? How much power are we willing to hand to politicians and petty bureaucrats?

The other day, famous feminist Margaret Atwood

(author of *Handmaid's Tale*) tweeted her concerns about proposed laws in Canada.

The Online Harms Bill C-63 is apparently designed to stop children being victimised on social media. But she was spooked when *The Spectator* in London called it an Orwellian "thought crime nightmare" for those who disagree with government ideology.

Truth is vital for democracy.

John Paul II knew that, having survived the twin scourges of Nazism and Communism. He said there can be no rule of law "unless citizens and especially leaders are convinced there is no freedom without truth."

“The truth is a dangerous thing as many Christian martyrs are still finding out. But the alternative is worse”

Of course there's no truth without love, but it is a love defined by Christ: one that

will the good of the other.

Last week, a Harvard professor revealed the cost of speaking out for the greater good. "The truth can get you fired," tweeted Prof. Martin Kulldorff. The epidemiologist was an outspoken critic of Covid-era policies. He had opposed school lockdowns and described vaccine mandates as "unethical and unscientific". Most recently, the professor claimed "truth" had not been a guiding principle in decision-making by Harvard leaders. Nor, he added, was concern for the public and academic freedom.

Veritas

The Harvard motto is 'Veritas', the Latin word for truth. The university made no immediate comment.

The truth is a dangerous thing as many Christian martyrs are still finding out. But the alternative is worse.

This Easter let's thank God for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To quote a priest friend of mine: "It's a good thing there is life after death, because the truth can get you killed."

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Sorry to see that Christian unity has taken another hit. The Coptic Orthodox Church has suspended theological dialogue with Rome citing its "change of position" on homosexuality. The Coptic Church, which made the

decision after its own annual Synod, did not specifically mention the recent Vatican document, *Fiducia Supplicans*, which allowed "spontaneous" and "non-liturgical" blessings of same-sex couples.

Paddywokery

Despite the paddywhackery and paddywokery of St Patrick's Day, wonderful works are still being written about our patron saint. In fact, *The Spirituality of St Patrick* by

Fr Aidan Larkin, just made its debut in Downpatrick where the late author's brother Colm recounted how the book was gifted to President Joe Biden, and is

now in Washington's Blair House, a famous guest house for dignitaries. Perhaps St Patrick's powerful words may bring some peace to a travelling diplomat!

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On Ukraine, Pope Francis has a point



Pope Francis and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shake hands after their meeting at the Vatican May 13, 2023. Photo: CNS



Pope's call for courageous negotiations a red flag to critics, writes **Dr Michael Sanfey**

Remarks by Pope Francis during a recent interview with Swiss TV have sparked outrage. As *The Pillar* reported, Francis was asked about global conflicts and his hopes for peace.

The Pope responded "I believe that the stronger one is the one who sees the situation, who thinks of the people, who has the courage of the white flag, to negotiate". Use of the term "white flag" turned out to be a red rag to his critics.

For example, in an interview with an Italian newspaper (*Corriere della Sera*, March 13) Mykhailo Podol-

“Why should Pope Francis – even if you disagree with him – be condemned for having adopted a Voltairean approach in regard to the war in Ukraine?”

yak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Zelensky, said "Appealing for negotiations does not bring solutions. It amazes me that anyone can still show so much incomprehension for the crimes of the Russians".

The writer, editor, diplomat, and former government Minister Conor Cruise O'Brien once observed that conflicts do not have "solutions" – they have "outcomes". This is the key point which so many people are missing.

The Pope was not calling for abject surrender by Ukraine, but rather for a willingness to engage in negotiations with its adversary, Russia. Ultimately, this could lead a deal which would definitely not be fully to its satisfaction but which could bring an end to the continued suffering of its people.

Capability

The Brookings Institution held an online event on March 12 entitled 'Is

Europe Capable of Defending Itself'? In what was a valuable but depressing session, the moderator Constanze Stelzenmüller expressed concerns on several fronts – most notably in this context that Russia might win against Ukraine.

“Why shouldn't Pope Francis call for negotiations? Somebody has to shout 'Stop!'”

But she was also worried about the prospect of far-right gains in the upcoming European Parliament elections, about a rise in anti-semitism in Europe, and about the possibility that Donald Trump would be re-elected in November.

Far from being "isolationist" she believes that a second Trump administration would be "ruthlessly transactional". She is also fearful that the ongoing war in Gaza could lead to a

resurgence of Middle East-related terrorist attacks in Europe.

A survey of the international geopolitical scene must also include the credible threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan within the next few years, which would have far greater implications for the world economy than the war in Ukraine.

Set against this backdrop why shouldn't Pope Francis call for negotiations? Somebody has to shout 'Stop!' – particularly in the face of EU policy wishfulness.

'Woke'

Notably, the French President Emmanuel Macron recently made an irresponsible suggestion about the possibility of sending troops to defend Ukraine.

We all know that this is not going to happen, so why resort to school playground bluster?

The discussion during the Brookings event

showed that Europe is nowhere near being able to defend itself, never mind getting directly involved in a war with Russia.

What the current global state-of-affairs demonstrates is the danger posed by 'woke foreign policy' and a disinclination to think realistically.

“Pope Francis advised 'Do not be ashamed to negotiate before things get worse'”

It is one thing to indulge in wokery on a domestic basis, but at the international level it is potentially disastrous.

If not an exact parallel, there is at least some similarity to what happened with neo-conservatism in the Naughties.

Specific domestic aspects of neo-conservatism were

“What the current global state-of-affairs demonstrates is the danger posed by 'woke foreign policy' and a disinclination to think realistically”

actually quite valuable – eg, the 'Broken Windows' theory in regard to crime prevention.

However, applied internationally, in the shape of the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies, neo-conservatism proved to be exceptionally harmful and we are still reaping the consequences.

Yet commentators in the EU – academics and newspaper pundits among them – sit on the sidelines rooting for a 'solution' whereby Ukraine wins 100% success against Russia, including return of the Crimea.

Voltaire said that "the best is the enemy of the good". In his much criticised remarks Pope Francis advised "Do not be ashamed to negotiate before things get worse".

Why should Pope Francis – even if you disagree with him – be condemned for having adopted a Voltairean approach in regard to the war in Ukraine?

i Michael Sanfey holds a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from UCP Lisbon. He is a Visiting Fellow at the EU's Robert Schuman Centre, working on a research project entitled *The Liberal International Order and Global Governance: Ramifications of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*.

Church's safeguarding 'greatly improved', report shows



Still lack of satisfaction with Church's response to abuse allegations, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

The quality of the Church in Ireland's safeguarding structures and culture has "greatly improved" in the last 10 years, according to a report from the national safeguarding body.

"A lot of progress has been made, and plans are in place to advance this further," the overview report from the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) shows.

Standards

The safeguarding policies of all 26 dioceses were reviewed between 2018 and 2023, measuring their progress according to the seven 2016 safeguarding standards and also the recommendations made during the previous round of reviews held almost a decade ago.

Of the 210 recommendations made to dioceses to improve safeguarding procedures, 202 were implemented.

Some eight dioceses did not meet all standards, but the board says this "need not be a cause of disappointment or criticism" so long as feedback provided to bishops is taken on board and the required changes, mostly quite small, are implemented.

"It would be unrealistic

to expect that every diocese would 'score' 100% in such an external audit."

Volunteers, lay staff and Church personnel take their responsibilities seriously, the NBSCCCI says, so that children can participate in Church ministries and activities, knowing that there are adults that they can go to if they are worried or concerned.

"The children, with whom the reviewers engaged, reflected very eloquently their feelings of warmth about and safety in Church life," the board writes in the report.

The opportunity to engage with children and youth groups provided "a very important new perspective for reviewers", the report says.

Dioceses received 219 allegations of abuse, a majority relating to sexual abuse

"Where possible, the reviewers also spoke with parents of participating children and young people, and with group activity leaders.

"It was clear that parents are satisfied that their children are safe when engaged in Church ministries and activities, and many shared that they have become more involved themselves as volunteers to support safeguarding at parish level."

The management of cases of abuse has improved, with "better processes, better record keeping and greater understanding of the need for fair and just responses", the board reports.

However, while the safeguarding body notes complainants were very satisfied overall, the records in some files "did demonstrate a lack of satisfaction with how the Church was caring and responding to their allegations of being abused as

children".

"The National Board believes that the dissatisfaction described by complainants and respondents alike relates to an absence of regular communication – even when nothing is happening in the management of their situation," the board says.

Dioceses received 219 allegations of abuse, a majority relating to sexual abuse, against named diocesan priests since the first review.

There were 12 allegations against unnamed diocesan clergy and 43 allegations against priests from other Church bodies. These figures do not include religious sisters or brothers.

The board interviewed 18 complainants and received statements from six others in the course of their reviews.

While the small number means no strong statements could be made, the board says "there was evidence of a reduced reliance on legalistic responses to complainants, and examples of bishops being more prepared to meet with complainant".

The independent reviewers also received representations from 32 priest respondents to allegations of abuse, representing 15 dioceses.

Themes

Two recurring themes were identified: firstly, though there is meant to be a presumption of innocence, the respondent priests suggested that it is "extremely difficult for them to uphold their innocence and have their reputation protected during the period of the investigative and assessment processes".

Secondly, respondents expressed concern over the time it took for a final decision to be reached in relation to the allegations received, and the distress that this caused.

The NBSCCCI's report notes that "reviewers themselves were concerned about how

long all aspects of the process take", including police and Church investigations.

The report focuses especially on the "lengthy delays" in cases being addressed within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), saying this "can cause further hurt and harm to all involved".

25 dioceses hit the mark, with one whose safeguarding structures were 'complicated and not fully integrated, failing to meet the standard in full'

The delays continue despite canon law requirements for managing accused priests have become clearer and stricter under Pope Francis.

The reviews are part of the Irish bishops' commitment to transparency about the past, as

laid out in the 2011 publication, *Towards Healing and Renewal*.

The reviews measured the safeguarding structures and culture of the dioceses against seven standards. Some 18 of the 26 dioceses met all seven 2016 Standards, "which is both commendable and heartening", the board says.

For the first standard, 'Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments', 25 dioceses hit the mark, with one whose safeguarding structures were "complicated and not fully integrated, failing to meet the standard in full".

Development

Overall, the National Board "believes that significant effort is being made by volunteers, lay staff, clerics religious and bishops to create safe ministry for children".

It notes, however, that there are some areas that would benefit from further development.

For instance, bishops need to ensure that if any of their priests wish to minister outside of their home diocese,

they must be made aware of this and ascertain that each individual priest will observe the child safeguarding policies and procedures of the external Church body in which they will be ministering.

Similarly, the board believes greater attention needs to be paid to ensuring that lay associations adopt the Church's safeguarding policies and implements practices.

For standard two, 'Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations', 22 dioceses met the standard.

Some 25 dioceses met standard three, 'Care and Support for the Complainant', with 24 meeting the fourth standard 'Care and Management of the Respondent'.

All dioceses met standards five, six and seven, these being: 'Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe'; 'Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message'; and 'Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards'.

Wendy Grace



Eilís Mulroy



Maria Steen



Senator Ronan Mullen



Martina Purdy



Michael Kelly



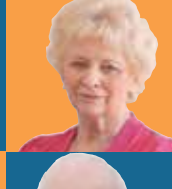
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Mary Kenny



Nuala O'Loan



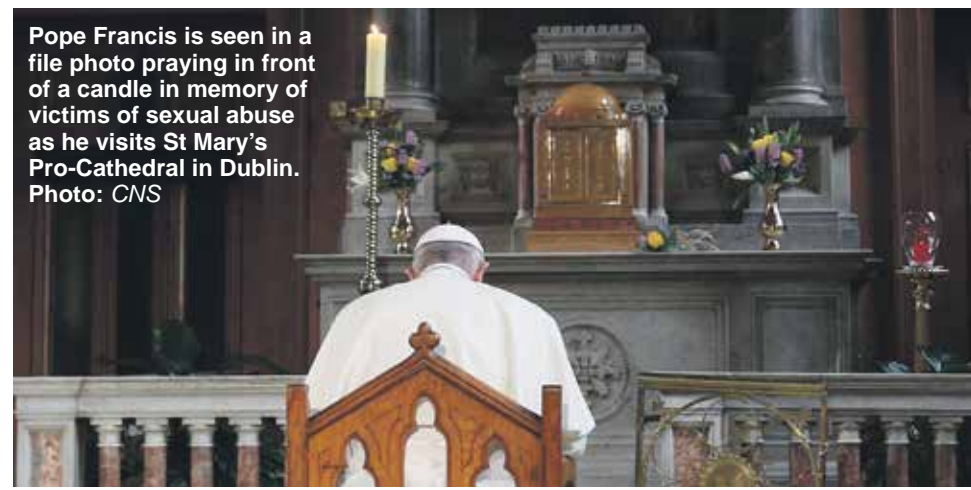
Brendan O'Regan



Ian Dunne



Our writers share the Good News
The Irish Catholic
Since 1888



Pope Francis is seen in a file photo praying in front of a candle in memory of victims of sexual abuse as he visits St Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin. Photo: CNS

Acknowledge past, give authentic witness and Irish vocations will flourish says cardinal for clergy



Many loud voices calling for married priests do not promote priesthood at home, Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik tells **Chai Brady**

In Pope Francis' message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2023 he compared a vocation to a "divine seed that springs up in the soil of our existence, opens our hearts to God and to others, so that we can share with them the treasure we ourselves have found".

The divine seed that grows priests may seem to be sewn fewer and farther between to those hoping and praying for more vocations to the priesthood in Ireland.

For almost a year there has been a major push for vocations to diocesan priesthood run by the Council for Vocations of the Irish bishops' conference. While the vocations crisis has affected everyone, overall dioceses have been suffering more than religious orders.

Some 15 students began formal seminary studies for the priesthood for Ireland's 26 dioceses in September 2023. Just nine students entered seminary studies in 2022, while six entered in 2021.

Vocations

In this context came the 'Year for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood', which began on Vocations/Good Shepherd Sunday, April 30 last year. On the theme 'Take the Risk for Christ', it saw a host of events take place across Ireland aiming to start conversations within families, with priests and in parish communities regarding the vocation of priesthood.

One of the last events of the promotion year was organised for Knock, Co. Mayo earlier this month. The Diocesan Vocation Director's Conference took place from March 7-8 and saw dozens of vocations directors from across Ireland descend on the national marian shrine for a conference which was addressed by Vatican heavyweight Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy.

Sitting down with *The Irish*



Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik stands with Rector of Knock Shrine Fr Richard Gibbons (left), and Msgr Eamonn McLaughlin, adjunct under-secretary of the Formation Office of the Dicastery for the Clergy.

Catholic in Knock House Hotel, Cardinal You immediately began by speaking glowingly of the Church in Ireland and its missionaries, highlighting the Irish Columbans martyred in his home country of South Korea during the Korean war.

“Currently there are more than 80 modern day martyrs the Church in Korea is promoting for beatification”

The cardinal said: "First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude to the Church in Ireland, to the Irish missionaries who came to bring the Faith, to evangelise in Korea. They were extraordinary missionaries. Several of these Irish missionaries, during the war in Korea, they lost their lives for the mission."

"We are, at this moment in time, working on the beatification cause of many of those martyrs, among them are some [three] of the Irish missionaries, the Columban Fathers. They were martyred in my diocese of Daejeon and their bodies are laid to rest in our diocesan graveyard. It has been my first time to Ireland, and to meet the bishops, the priests, deacons, seminarians, and lay people involved in caring for priestly vocations in Ireland. I am deeply moved I am here and that I am meeting the Irish," he said.

Currently there are more than 80 modern day martyrs the Church in Korea is promoting for beatification. Seven Irish Columbans, and one Irish-American Columban, were martyred during the Korean war.

The question of vocations in Ireland cannot be broached without facing the reality of "the abuse that took place" in Ireland by members of the clergy, Cardinal You insisted, "we can't hide from it".

Sincerity

"The Church must be sincere before the Lord and before humanity. There's an importance in asking forgiveness honestly, from the heart, and that there were priests who did abuse and that you had those in responsibility who did not respond as they should have," he said.

However, the prelate added that "we must not forget also of the great heroism among the many priests and religious in this land. The media, a lot of the time, is focused on the negatives, only presenting the negative face of the Church and did not look at the positive face also".

"As a result of what happened, also of the constant negative reporting on the Church, the consequence was that many laypeople have distanced themselves from the Church. We must humbly ask for forgiveness and confront reality, but we must move forward together, to be the Church that God wants us to be. Pope Francis exhausts himself in insisting that we need to get back to the Church envisioned by Christ."

"And so, the bad fruits that were there have also had an impact on vocations to the priesthood, religious and diocesan, and religious sisters. It is a great difficulty that the



Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, poses with Knock Basilica in the background in Co. Mayo.

Church has to overcome in order to move forward. This drives us home to the realisation of the centrality of the role of the lay faithful."

“No Christian is a foreigner in the Church, it is our Church, all of us are children of God”

During his pontificate Pope Francis has made synodality the name of the game, tackling a more clerical way of decision making within the Church and calling lay people to live out their baptismal calling and become more involved. In the western world there is no doubt the Church will become more lay-led as vocations decline.

Touching on this, Cardinal You said that "the Church is not reduced to bishops, priests, or religious men or women but also includes the laity, and families and together we make up the Church and together we walk forward... We all have different roles but we are all Christians, which means that we are all called to live the word of God. What does that mean to live the Word of God? It means to love God and to love our neighbour. This is the synodal Church."

"No Christian is a foreigner in the Church, it is our Church, all of us are children of God. The Church in Ireland has had a wonderful history in many respects, and so putting everything in context and while acknowledging the reality of our past and where we are today, we must look to the future, and walk together."

"And so the decision on the part



Pictured during the break of a conference for vocations directors in Knock are guest speaker Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy (centre), Msgr Eamonn McLaughlin, adjunct under-secretary of the Formation Office of the Dicastery for the Clergy (far-right), and vocations directors from across Ireland. The Diocesan Vocation Director's Conference ran from March 7-8 at Knock House Hotel, Co. Mayo, as part of the Year for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood.

of the bishops to dedicate this year of prayer to vocations for diocesan priesthood is a wonderful initiative, for us it is important to pray, but a real prayer life is a life that gives witness. So my message to the bishops, to the priests, (to deacons) and to seminarians is that we have a responsibility to bear witness to Christ... When the youth see the witness, the beauty, the gift, the greatness that is the priesthood, then in turn they will be attracted to that authentic witness," Cardinal You said, adding: "I am convinced that if we as Christians lived the Word of God concretely, we would have a flourishing of vocations."

In the Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod 2021-2023, which brought together synodal discussions from parish to diocesan level across Ireland, "there were calls from both younger and older participants" to allow priests to marry.

Asked about the support for married priests, particularly in the context of being an answer to the crisis in vocations, Cardinal You pointed to the Orthodox Church. He said: "If that were the case, take for example the Orthodox Church, they would be flourishing in terms of vocations, but we have to look at the reality. I say to the lay faithful to have more children and to promote vocations in their families and among their children."

Fertility

He continued: "Not wanting to cause any controversy obviously, but there are those who are shouting aloud, their voices are quite loud in the public forum, and they would not be stepping up to encourage their son or their daughter to pursue a religious life."

Another crisis not just for vocations to the priesthood but for societies across Europe is the huge decrease in birth rates. Ireland's

“There are those who are shouting aloud, their voices are quite loud in the public forum, and they would not be stepping up to encourage their son or their daughter to pursue a religious life”

fertility rate sits at 1.7 babies per woman as of 2022 figures – well below the population replacement level of 2.1.

Cardinal You is familiar with the issue, considering South Korea is facing the same problem, albeit far more acutely. As of 2023, South Korea now has the lowest birthrate in the world standing at 0.72.

Asked about this, the cardinal answered: "It's a great difficulty, a great concern. But we are all called to be the family of the Church and there is a great hope that we live our Faith, that we be authentic Catholics."

"It's important as we are growing up that we are nourished, it takes patience, it takes years and it takes time, it's the same thing with vocations, we must nurture them, we must promote them and we must do everything we can to promote vocations to the priesthood."

Those joining the priesthood in recent times are faced with a totally different society than many of the priests who were ordained three or four, or more, decades ago. Last year a study conducted by The Catholic Project, a research group at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., found that self-described 'liberal' or 'progressive' priests have all but disappeared from the youngest cohorts of priests and that priests describing themselves as 'conservative/orthodox' reached more than 80% among those ordained after 2020.

The study used survey responses from 3,516 priests across 191 dioceses and eparchies in the United

States.

Regarding a potential divide in thought between young and more senior priests, Cardinal You said: "Whether it be a young priest or a more senior priest, all of us need to do an examination of conscience, do I give a good witness to the people? Because of a lack of witness, there is a consequential lack of vocations to the priesthood. Whether it be young priests or more senior priests, if they are not giving a good example, who is going to follow them?"

“The Lord does not give the grace for the past, he gives it for the present. The Lord cannot give grace for the future, it has not come to pass”

"The dream would be, and should be, that there is a common house for priests, to come together and support each other, whether it be the young priests or the more senior priests – for the priests to be in community, not isolated."

More generally, Cardinal You added: "The past is the past, the Lord does not give the grace for the past, he gives it for the present. The Lord cannot give grace for the future, it has not come to pass. The Lord gives us the grace for here and now."

Ireland's Year for Vocations to the

Diocesan Priesthood concludes on April 21, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The day it began in 2023 marked the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations, instituted by St Pope Paul VI in 1963 during the Second Vatican Council.

Bishop Phonsie Cullinan of the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore, who is Chairman for the Council for Vocations of the bishops' conference, also spoke to *The Irish Catholic* in Knock.

"We have been very privileged throughout this year to have had so many events. Very many of them small that is true, but yet at the same time, connecting with people, getting the message out there..." the bishop said, adding that he hopes the momentum of the year promoting diocesan vocations will continue.

Future

Bishop Phonsie is filled with hope for vocations and the future of the priesthood in Ireland, saying: "We have the example of very tragic events in this country where people, when they came up against the mystery of death and suffering, turned to the priest. We think of the tragedies around the country, I won't name them because they are very painful things for people, but we saw the centrality of the work of the priest, because up against the mystery of death, where do we turn to? We turn to Christ, we turn to his Church for solace, for peace, for meaning."

"And in my own interactions with young people, I see the pain and the suffering, there is a huge level of addiction, trouble with gambling, relationship issues, self-harming, depression and I believe as a society we are not really tackling these things at their base. We're saying things like we need more counsellors... but I think it's much deeper than that, I think the cry of young people is a legitimate response to their lack of sense of meaning, lack of a sense of a love of God in their lives, lack of a sense of the reality of sin and death and the answer to this is being offered to us, it's being proposed to us by Jesus and that's just not a nice theological phrase thrown out there, I believe it's true, I believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and he is offering us something which is priceless."

He added: "I really do believe that right now there are a lot of young people out there – and they are the curious generation – who are looking around and they are asking 'What is going to work for me?' And it is my hope that there are people of Faith all around the country who are offering, who are proposing, an answer to their questions in the person of Jesus himself. The priesthood is essential for the Church."

Relaying an anecdote, he concluded: "I remember the question being asked to the former papal nuncio, Archbishop Jude Okolo, who gave a talk in Waterford, and somebody asked him about vocations... and he said that 'the Lord will send enough priests'. I thought it was an interesting answer. We will get the priests that we pray for, that we really strive to get, that it is up to all of the Church, to pray for and promote priesthood. I am full of hope."

Out&About

Youth raise voices for faith...



DUBLIN: Students and staff from Abbey Community College celebrate winning the Knights of Columbanus' public speaking competition 'Young People Find Language for their Faith', held in the Carlton Hotel, March 8.



CAVAN: Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes is pictured at a statue of St Kilian with Cathaoirleach of Cavan County Council Philip Brady and Patricia Sheridan, Diocesan Advisor and on the St Kilian's Relics steering committee, in the grounds of St Kilian's Church Mullagh after announcing his relics will be coming to Cavan later this year. Photo: John McElroy.



GALWAY: Dr Colán Ó Clabaig, Dr Bronagh Ann McShane, Mother Máire Hickey OSB and Dr Tracy Collins are pictured at the launch of *Brides of Christ* at Kylemore Abbey on March 6.

IN SHORT

QUB to explore religion since Covid-19

Researchers at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) are asking people to respond to an island-wide survey on the role of religion on the island of Ireland since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The questionnaire is part of a larger, three-year research project on 'The Changing role of Religion in Societies Emerging from Covid-19', which investigates how the roles of religions have changed not only on the island of Ireland, but also in Canada, Germany, and Poland.

The questionnaire is now open and can be completed here: <https://recov19.uni-bremen.de/>

index.php/2024/02/26/questionnaires-for-members-now-open/

Ethiopia's cry for food 'falls on deaf ears'

Ethiopia is facing an "unfolding catastrophe as extreme as anything" in terms of suffering and potential for deterioration, a charity chief has warned.

Mary's Meals CEO Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow urged people to take immediate action to prevent widespread starvation following a recent trip to the war-damaged region.

More than 91% of Tigray's population has been "exposed to the risk of starvation and death", according to the president of Tigray's Interim Regional Admin-

istration, Getachew Reda, and millions are in desperate need of food aid, Mary's Meals said in a statement.

The region recently endured two years of deadly civil war that displaced millions, destroyed essential infrastructure and health services, and is estimated to have claimed the lives of upwards of 600,000 people. With interruptions to aid following, Ethiopia is facing catastrophic levels of hunger.

"It's hard to exaggerate just how serious the situation is in Tigray," said Mr MacFarlane-Barrow.

"People are already dying of hunger and everything we're hearing on the ground points to a

well-founded fear of much worse to come if the world doesn't respond."

Kylemore Abbey honours women religious

Kylemore Abbey hosted the 'Keepers of the Sacred Flame' symposium in the Fordham Law School Great Hall within the castle's walls, serving as a platform for discussions and presentations focused on the rich tradition of female monasticism in Ireland.

Distinguished speakers and panellists included Dr Tracy Collins of the National Monuments Service, Sr Faustina Grealy of the Poor Clares, Dr Bronagh Ann McShane of Trinity College Dublin, Prof. Amy Mulligan from

the University of Notre Dame, Dr Colmán Ó Clabaigh OSB of Glenstal Abbey, and Professor Deirdre Rafferty from University College Dublin.

The symposium facilitated engaging conversations and insightful reflections on the significance of female monasticism throughout Irish history.

A highlight of the event was the formal book launch of *Brides of Christ: Women and Monasticism in Medieval and Early Ireland* formally launched by former Abbess of Kylemore Abbey, Mother Máire Hickey OSB who authored the foreword for the book.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



KERRY: Fr John Harris OP, prior provincial of the Dominicans in Ireland, meets lay Dominicans at their regional meeting in Tralee on Saturday, February 24. Photo: John Cleary.



CAVAN: Ciaran Coll of the Irish Church Music Association and Derek Eakins, Director of Music at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt receive a certificate acknowledging their recent Choral Workshop for choirs and soloists at the Parish Centre in Kingscourt.



CAVAN: Ms Fiona Kane DHS, a Dame of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, is pictured after speaking at a special ecumenical service to mark Women's World Day of Prayer as prepared by an ecumenical group of Palestinian women alongside Joseph Kane KHS, Caroline Naughton DHS, Michael Victory KHS and the local committee of Laura Marron, Ena McGinley and Ann Burns who prepared the event.



ROME: Irish Minister of State for Health Mary Butler TD, Irish Ambassador to the Holy See Frances Collins and Fr Paul Finnerty, Rector of the Pontifical Irish College, show off a bowl of shamrock for Pope Francis they brought to a general audience with the Pope.



KERRY: Sr Mary Shelia OP addresses the meeting of lay Dominicans in Tralee. Photo: John Cleary.

ARMAGH

Lourdes fun bingo takes place Sunday, March 24, at 3pm in Pearse Og's Club, Armagh parish.

ANTRIM

Antrim parish rosary and night prayer takes place on Tuesday's at 8pm in St Joseph's Church.

CARLOW

Parish Biblical Studies Group with Dr Amelia Fleming, take place each Friday 10.30am-12pm in the Cathedral Centre.

CORK

'Seminars in the Spirt' are taking place in the Vincent's Hall, Keatings Lane, Charleville, P56EW 60, on Fridays in March except Good Friday into April. Next seminar takes place March 22.

Frankfield/Grange children's rosary group meets second Saturday of every month at 6pm in front of Our Lady's Shrine at the Church of the Incarnation, Frankfield.

DERRY

'The Demons and the reality of spiritual combat' a talk by Fr Cajetak Apeh OCD takes place in the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termon-bacca, April 18.

DONEGAL

A guided holy hour of adoration in honour of the Holy Face of Jesus takes place on Sundays, 6-7pm in St Mary's Oratory.

DUBLIN

The feast of Divine Mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 7, in St Vincent De Paul church in Marino. Holy hour from 3-4pm followed by Mass at 4pm. Confessions will be available from 3-4pm. Collection to Capuchin Day Centre.

Rosary of reparation and conversion takes place first Saturday every month at 2pm on North Earl Street.

GALWAY

A Lenten Bible study led by Fr Benny McHale on St Mark's Gospel to take place on the Monday nights of Lent in the Athenry Pastoral Centre at the Church of the Assumption, Athenry. Next session takes place March 18 at 8pm.

LAOIS

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place each Sunday of Lent from 5-7pm and concludes with the rosary.

LOUTH

Fr Willie Doyle SJ prayer group takes place in Holy Family Church, Drogheda every Thursday at 7pm. Includes Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and a prayer for vocations.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place at 6pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock Shrine on Sunday, April 14.

MONAGHAN

Rosary for Lent – the rosary is recited each Wednesday evening at 6.50pm and each Sunday morning at 10.20am before Mass in Corduff and Raferagh.

SLIGO

Youth-led Mass takes place in St Anne's Church, F91R250 on Saturday, March 23, at 6.30pm with refreshments afterwards.

TIPPERARY

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

TYRONE

The men's rosary takes place on the first Saturday of every month in Market Street, Omagh (opposite Primark) at 1pm. Next rosary April 6.

WATERFORD

Youth 2000 Munster Retreat takes place in De La Salle College from April 5-7 for ages 16-35. Donation only, to book visit youth2000.ie

The Focolare Spring Gathering will take place from April 4-7 in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. For more information contact Gerard at 086 2243631 or focolare.ireland@focolare.org

WESTMEATH

Caná couples event takes place on Sunday, March 24, in Ceili Community House, Kilbeggan, N91 NY28. For more information contact canaireland@gmail.com

A picture of the Dominicans' past inspired by the present



Photo: William Nathans



Jason Osborne

Those gathered February 11 in St Saviour's at the heart of Dublin city centre were treated to a masterclass in auditory and visual beauty, as artist William Nathans' painting celebrating 800 years since the Dominican Order's arrival in Ireland was unveiled to the heavenly sound of the *Te Deum*.

The painting, commissioned by the Irish Dominicans, depicts the friars from Oxford arriving on the north bank of the river Liffey, Dublin, in 1224. 12 brothers, symbolic of the apostles, are seen striding ashore, blessing and engaging with those gathered around them.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Mr Nathans said that the unveiling was

"very successful," and that the weight of being tasked with the painting itself was made easier by his love for the people "who devote their lives to the Faith".

"It was very successful. I have to say, it was absolutely beautiful, the Mass itself was beautiful," Mr Nathans told this newspaper.

"I've never actually unveiled a picture at a Mass, I've never had that before, normally they're always secular environments and there's usually people clapping in all those events, which I suppose is customary with a regular unveiling.

"But because it was at Mass, I didn't know how it would go. They actually sang the *Te Deum*, just before they unveiled it, and I thought that was perfect because it kept everybody in a prayerful reverence and I thought that was brilliant. It was such a wonderful way to reveal it, that it wasn't just a picture but that it had a sacredness to it, to marking the occasion."

Process

Asked how he set about producing such an epic work for such a momentous occasion,

Mr Nathans said that he'd been given key elements to include, but that after that, his "imagination was running wild".

"They'd given me a basic brief of the Dominicans coming up the Liffey and then in October, I met with Fr Terrence Crotty of the committee and we set down a bit more detail.

"They're all a community, so I was trying to evoke that, that feel that they were this community coming to lay down roots"

"There were specific things he wanted to see in the painting and they were, roughly, Christchurch in the background, he specifically asked for 12 Dominicans, which I thought was great because it had the link to the apostles. He wanted dawn.

"He said he'd love it if it was dawn light, early morning. The fourth thing was them approaching the actual site that they were given, which is

"The weight of being tasked with the painting itself was made easier by his love for the people 'who devote their lives to the Faith'"

where the Four Courts stands today," Mr Nathans says.

Knowing the local Dominicans – attending Mass there as he does – was very informative as he figured out how to bring the scene to life.

"Knowing the Dominicans, that helped tremendously because we go to Mass there in St Saviour's and we're quite close with a lot of the brothers and the priests.

"Even after Mass, just fraternising with them outside. I was trying to get into my head what these Dominicans would have been like and I can't imagine they would have been so different because, in the painting you had older Dominicans, ones who've sort of been around the block, so to speak, bearing the battle scars of religious life.

"The younger ones, with their real devout, holy piety, and there are some in the

background meeting locals. We know such a variety of the Dominicans and their character traits, so I was thinking about that, to make it more realistic, more authentic.

"I was really trying to get the effect that they were all one community, so that's why they're all walking, for the most part, they're all moving together. They're all one. They're all a community, so I was trying to evoke that, that feel that they were this community coming to lay down roots," he said.

Passion

Depicting spiritual subjects could be difficult, Mr Nathans admitted, but he said that a love for the saints and all things of the faith made the task much easier.

"It's always a challenge for sure, but I have to say, I have a particular love for the history

of the saints and what they went through. If it was, say for instance, a picture of another subject, I may have struggled. It was a challenge to paint it, but I think what helps is having a love for the subject.

"I just love people who devote their lives to the Faith and the stories that they went through and the sacrifices, it fires my imagination"

"I just love people who devote their lives to the Faith and the stories that they went through and the sacrifices, it fires my imagination. If I didn't have that, it probably would have been a much greater challenge, but having that, it helped tremendously."

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

SPEAKING WITH PASSION FOR WOMEN AT THE SYNOD

LUCA ATTANASIO

PAGES 20-21



FRANCIS' VISION OF A RENEWED THEOLOGY

FR JAMES HANVERY SJ

PAGE 22



Women criticise removal of women's ordination from world synod



Members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops pray before a working session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall October 17, 2023. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

Last week, the Vatican presented ten study groups, each of which will deal with one of the topics formulated by Pope Francis. One specific question in one group is whether women can become deacons. Until now, the ordained office of deacon in the Catholic Church has been reserved exclusively for men, as has the priesthood.

In October, the experts are to present the status of their work at the central meeting of the World Synod in the Vatican. However, the synod members

will not be able to vote on the topics. The groups will draw up their final results by June 2025 and then present them to the Pope.

In spite of novelty of these topics, some women in the Church have voiced their disappointment at the Church's unwillingness to go one further and ordain women.

The former chairwoman of the German Conference of Religious Superiors, Sr Katharina Kluitmann, said that it is “disappointing” that this topic in particular has once again been put on the

back burner, the Franciscan told the *Catholic News Agency*.

“How many more working groups on the diaconate of women should there be?” asked Sr Kluitmann. The first phases of the World Synod had already shown that the topic was on the minds of many around the world. However, there was clearly a lack of courage to discuss the issue openly at the synod and to make decisions.

Sr Kluitmann, who is a member of the Synodal Committee and was a delegate to the German Synodal

Path reform project, added that she had written an open letter to Pope Francis some time ago to once again make clear to him the urgency of dialogue on an equal footing. Unfortunately, however, she has still not received “even an acknowledgement of receipt”.

The Italian theologian Serena Noceti said that the World Synod in October must have the courage to debate the ordination of women and vote in favour of change. It is not enough to promote women as laywomen to Church leadership positions.

The approaches of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) must be further developed.

Ms Noceti emphasised that the Catholic Church had already changed the doctrine and practice of ordained ministries many times in its history. Now further change is not only possible, but urgently needed. “A synodal Church must be a Church of men and women”, said Ms Noceti. She argued in favour of concentrating on the diaconate for women first, because this change is now possible; then we can look further.

Nora K. Nonterah



Luca Attanasio

Nora Kofognoterah Nonterah, a Ghanaian theologian and university lecturer, is one of the lay women who participated in the assembly work of the Synod on Synodality as a witness to the synodal process for Africa. Nora teaches at Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana.

Her presence at the synodal assemblies sums up a very significant series of novelties that, at the behest of Pope Francis, this synod represented. She is a woman, she is a laywoman, she is African, she is a woman theologian, roles that are only recently gaining their own position and space in the Catholic Church. It is no coincidence that Nora considers herself 'a voice' of a Church that has been silent for a long time.

The new voices, the different sensitivities, the different perspectives have brought a decisive contribution to the reflection of the synod process as well as to the whole Church.

She and Sheila Pires from Mozambique (serving as Secretary of the Synod on Synodality Commission for Information) have been the two African lay women at the synod. **Dr Nonterah let us start from the beginning, tell us a little about yourself, your history, your family, your work and your role within the Ghanaian and African Church**

"I describe myself as a teacher and a mother. I am a biological mother of a son and a mother to many others in my family, community and students. Being a professional teacher has always been my passion, I felt called to this role and I have taught at all levels, from primary to university. I studied and graduated at various universities including Urbiana, in Rome, for four years and KU Leuven, Belgium. I mentor many young people both inside and outside the Church. I am involved in and follow inter-religious encounters and can say that I am a mentor for people of other faiths too. I am a researcher in various fields and teach in seminaries as a volunteer. I contributed to the African Synodality Initiative (ASI) that produced much work for the Synod. I am engaged in several academic networks like the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) and Catholic Theological Ethics in World Church (CTEWC). In my position as a woman theologian, I try to encourage women to take up advanced studies especially in fields where women are not employed".



You are a woman, lay and African, three categories that did not find much space in the Church before this Synod: how do you experience this opportunity for you and women like you to make a contribution and for the Church to receive it?

“Women can offer a wider understanding of life, something the Church has lost for centuries”

"The synod was and is a moment of grace, in two senses: a place to feel gratitude and, even more, to experience prophetic awareness. A place of gratitude because as

a Church we are grateful to God for a moment of pneumatological experience, of togetherness. The composition of the assemblies with the presence of non-bishops, women, lay people, young people was a gift to the Church. For me as an African woman it was the certainty of not wanting to walk alone but at the same time not being left out of decision-making process. I want to bring my perspective to enrich, but not to it alone. This is why I emphasise that the synod is a moment of grace, because, even if late, women are heard and sit around the tables that matter, our contribution was lost for many centuries, but now it is there. Prophetic reflection and awareness are pentecostal graces. Women can offer a wider understanding of life, something the Church has lost for centuries".

“She is a woman, she is a laywoman, she is African, she is a woman theologian”

During a recent briefing you said: “I tend to believe that African women can teach the Church how to be a mother for all, how to be a visionary mother for all her children.” Can you deepen and explain to us what you mean? What is it about African women that can make a unique contribution to the Church and the world?

"There is a very important concept here that I would like to bring out, and that is, how an African woman is an embodiment of wisdom, is a repository of wisdom, of knowledge of the values of history, of family, of ethnic groups, of com-

munity. In this perspective, women are the ones who teach the children and pass on this wisdom that helps them build an identity. It is fundamental to have what we call Ubuntu, the sense of awareness of a people, of having a history behind, the values of the community: ethics, in a way, you inherit it from women. And the Church can finally realise that it cannot survive without recognising this teaching role of women. Another fundamental point is that the woman is a custodian of culture. In African spirituality there is the concept of the abundance of life, the life of which no one has a monopoly

“We need to listen, to understand and have genuine conversations with those who are different from us”

over. The African woman, precisely because of this spirituality linked to abundance of life, becomes the anthropological ritualisation of cosmic life, available to nurture without seeking perfection. African women are the symbol of a love that is not tied to merit, but to the role of the woman who makes herself available to nurture and to teach. There is a strong sense of inclusion here: you are not included because of your perfection, but because of love, just as Jesus teaches.

“We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past by denying that violence exists”

A final element is the sense of collectivity. The African woman does not want to walk alone, the spirit of communion is embedded in what it means to be a woman. Women serve as cultural bridges in the sense that they hold varied cultures in place and pass on these in a way that help people to expand their knowledge of each other. Many episcopal conferences are not yet used to hearing the voice of women, but this must change”.

Quoting a book you said that a full realisation of women's potential for the emergence of a synodal Church requires a conscious, good and authentic listening to the issues that concern them; these include - but are not limited to - issues such as gender-based violence, sexual abuse and its legacy in the Church, child protection and quality, can you explain why you think this, is it something that happens very frequently also within the Church and it is not enough tackled? and if so what should be practically done?

“We witness violence and abuse all over the world. The first thing is not to deny them and then counter them. But it is not enough to rely on the forces of law, we need proper education. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past by denying that violence exists, that it is disastrous for the whole of humanity, not just the Church. When I say proper education I also mean handling the victims' journey holistically. I want to propose that the Church lead an interreligious approach because it is a societal problem. But our understanding of dignity through Christian faith is multidimensional and involves policies that must be implemented, education and holistic care’.

What role do you imagine for women in the Church of the future, especially after this Synod?

“Pope Francis has opened a path that has finally led us to prominent positions, to lead a dicastery for religious life, for example, and he is making many concrete changes, but the example must trickle down at the local level. Bishops must increasingly involve women. Who are the bishops' advisors at the moment? If we

go and look I think we will find that there is not a single woman. These things must change quickly, women must be part of the advisory bodies of the conferences and the bishops. Another rightly notable area for the future of the Church is that of the seminaries, there is a need to involve women in the formation processes of future priests. There are so many women who can play this role. And then formation in the parish, in the communities: there is still a lack of recognition of that dimension of women as repository of wisdom that I mentioned earlier. To recapitulate: advisory role, education and formation of seminarians. Some leadership roles will increasingly have to be entrusted to women also when it does not require sacramental orders. At the local level, it is more than evident, there is an absolute male dominance, it is enough to see how it works in the parishes, also for this there is a need for holistic education. In theology, in canon law, in Catholic courts, you usually don't see women, education must be linked to the role of women...it is a gradual but inescapable process. And let me add that I do not have to be a cleric to make me feel equally responsible and equal, if we wait for everything to come from them we risk falling into clericalism too. Governance in the Church can be exercised whether you are ordained or not”.

What will the best legacy this Synod will leave to the Church and the world in your opinion?

“The best legacy is this emerging spirit of co-responsibility. We are in the full spirit of the Second Vatican Council and living the teachings of that great event has so many benefits. The concept that differences are not a threat but an asset is gaining ground. Putting our vulnerabilities together makes us strong. When we hear from others what I call the ‘wow moment’, because we discover, we open up, we understand, especially from people who are different from us”. This should be a course to introduce every Catholic into the Conversation in the Spirit method which is a process of mutual listening.

Speaking of which, in a recent interview with the BBC, Cardinal Turkson, your fellow citizen said ‘It's time to understand homosexuality’, what do you think?

“That's what I was saying, we need to listen, to understand and have genuine conversations with those who are different from us. I think this sense of openness to others is another gift of the synod, entering into the world of others, appreciating their experiences, perspectives and learning how to journey with them precisely because we are all never the same.”

Luca Attanasio is a journalist based in Rome.



Pope Francis gives his blessing at the conclusion of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops' last working session October 28, 2023, in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

Francis's vision for a renewed theology



Fr James Hanvery SJ

Recovering the vocation of the theologian in the service of a missionary Church: 'In solidarity with all the shipwrecked of history'

In 1990, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith set out the 'ecclesial vocation of the theologian'. We can see that Francis' vision of the vocation of theology and of

“Now the work of theology is rearticulated: it is not just speculative but also performative and transformative”

the theologian is a development of this. It is not now read in terms of a defensiveness, but in terms of a missionary or evangelical Church which is profoundly engaged with the world, especially the poor, abandoned and suffering. Now the work of theology is rearticulated: it is not just speculative but also performative and transformative, working with all other academic and social agencies for the lasting human and ecological good. If the service of theology is conceived in this way, what is required of the theologian? Here, Francis offers a picture which is challenging to a 'professional' theology conducted mainly in the university, which competes for resources and academic

status. It is also challenging for an instrumental approach to theology as a part of formation for ecclesial ministry, where it can too easily become another credit to be earned or becomes reduced to a higher form of catechetics with an apologetic intent.

In his address to the *International Theological Congress* (Argentina, 2015), Pope Francis described three traits that marked the identity of the theologian:

I: A theologian is first a son of his people

This is a source and resource for the theology that the theologian is asked to develop. This is the soil

in which theology is rooted and from which it draws its self-understanding.

II: The theologian is a believer

This is a challenge to those who seek to practise theology in a 'faith-neutral' way, as if it were simply another academic discipline. Without sacrificing the intellectual demands and awareness of other relevant disciplines that a contemporary engaged and grounded theology demands, the theologian is one who seeks to know God and recognises that, without God, he or she cannot live. This God is revealed in Christ, 'in word, in silence, in wound, and healing, death and resur-

rection'. The theologian is one whose life is marked by this imprint 'which has left open his thirst, his anxiety, his curiosity, his existence. He (or she) is not a theologian unless they can say 'I cannot live without Christ'.

III: The theologian is a prophet

Theology begins in listening to God and the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of God's faithful people and in the world. If the theologian is called to be a prophet, he or she is first called to be a disciple.

The crisis in contemporary society is also a crisis of faith. Society believes it can prescind from faith in God and believe only in itself. This creates a fracture in personal and social identities. In this situation of alienation, spiritual as well as social, the theologian has a prophetic mission: to heal the levels

of division. Faith makes available the richness of the past and the call of the future. In this sense, the theologian is also the herald of salvation history, which witnesses to the salvific action of God in history (tradition) and the promise of the future given in Christ. The prophetic vision is always marked by an epistemological *ek-centricity* because it has a *theo-centric* vision. The prophetic work of theology is to bring this perspective to all things. Therefore, it not only begins in the realities of the world but also in prayer: 'it is a reciprocity between the Pascal Mystery and the many lives not yet realised who wonder: where is God?' It is lived in the gaze of the one who makes all things new.

i This article first appeared in *Faith Dimensions* magazine and is re-published with the kind permission of the author. This concludes the series.

Vatican cardinal hints at possible rethink on two-state solution in Middle East



Cardinal Fernando Filoni, grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, is pictured in an undated photo at the site marking the birth of Jesus in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Photo: OSV News/courtesy Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem



Elise Ann Allen

A top cardinal and leading papal diplomat has said that amid the ongoing war in Gaza, peace in the Holy Land requires a change of mentality in which both sides recognise and respect each other's right to exist, regardless of whether there is one state or two.

"I don't know if two states are better than one, integrated," said Italian Cardinal Fernando Filoni, a veteran diplomat and currently Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Asked whether the two-state solution was still a viable option, Cardinal Filoni said, "I can't say", and added that predicting the potential outcome of such a solution is difficult, because "they are two realities that live in the same territory".

The Vatican has long insisted on a two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, a position reaffirmed recently by Pope Francis in an interview with an Italian media outlet. Cardinal Filoni's comments represent one of the first hints that at least some in the Vatican may be rethinking that stance.

Cardinal Filoni said the most important thing, in his view, is

to have "the rights of each one" respected, meaning both Israel and Palestine, "without having citizens of first-class, second-class, third-class". Speaking to journalists at a media round-table last week, Cardinal Filoni said that as a basic principle, "You cannot have peace without justice".

"A peace that is not just creates new wars, new hatred, new violence," he said, noting that the Second World War broke out because citizens in Germany believed they were victims of injustice.

"I'm not judging whether it's true or not, but it was like this. Then in other parts of the world, it's the same thing. When a people, a group, a reality, feels that they are the victim of injustice, if they are not listened to, it fomented and hatred is born and grows and, at a certain point, becomes violent," he said.

“You cannot negate Palestinians the right to exist, and you cannot deny Israelis the right to exist, both of them, in peace”

Former nuncio to Iraq and Jordan from 2001-2006, Cardinal Filoni served as *sostituto* of the Vatican's Secretariat of State, a position akin to the Pope's chief of staff, from 2007-2011, when he was named prefect of the former Congregation

for the Evangelisation of Peoples, a position he held until his appointment Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in 2019.

When it comes to the Holy Land, Cardinal Filoni said that in his view, the current divisions stem from a lack of tolerance and respect for basic rights on either side. "You cannot negate Palestinians the right to exist, and you cannot deny Israelis the right to exist, both of them, in peace. You cannot say, we want the destruction of Israel, this always generates new violence. Just as you cannot say, we want to destroy the Palestinians, you can't say this," he said.

Referring to the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, Cardinal Filoni said the Palestinians believe their land has been illegally occupied, and that "this is not normal, this is an act of violence". Peace, he said, is "not about balancing between one side and the other, it's to say that these elements, these violences, create situations of conflict that become war".

Principle

"We remain in the principle that peace is possible if done in justice and in recognition of everyone's rights," he said. In terms of how to get out of the longstanding regional dispute between Israel and Palestine, Cardinal Filoni said regardless of whatever proposal is deemed best, "you must sit at the table and discuss

it, but the right to existence must be guaranteed by all".

“We should not carry injustices forward, otherwise peace will not be achieved”

"Little by little, these hatreds, these tensions, must be emptied, otherwise they'll become almost natural and little by little they grow and then they erupt," he said, voicing his belief that peace is still possible, but "we must want it, we must work for this".

However, most of all, he said, "We should not carry injustices forward, otherwise peace will not be achieved." Cardinal Filoni also spoke of the work performed by the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, composed of some 30,000 knights and dames from around the world.

It attracts roughly 1,000 new members annually and is dedicated to providing financial support to the Church in the Holy Land. Cardinal Filoni said most of the support provided by the order is sent directly to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and distributed to projects and populations most in need.

One major source of funding, aside from the contributions of individual members, is the order's famed Palazzo della Rovere along the Via della Conciliazione, the main street leading up to the embrace of Bernini's colonnades in St Peter's Square, which is about to be converted into a luxury Four Seasons hotel. Cardinal Filoni said that around 10% of the money the

order draws in from these and other sources is used to cover administrative costs of running the order, and that around 90%, "if not more", is sent directly to the Latin Patriarchate.

In terms of what role the order may have in promoting peace amid the ongoing conflict, which erupted after Israel retaliated for an October 7, 2023, surprise attack by Hamas that left some 1,200 Israelis dead and over 200 others taken as hostages, Cardinal Filoni said it comes down to daily actions.

"We are not architects of peace in the Holy Land, we are small workers, we stay in our place, and we try to do well what we can, or no one else will," he said, saying members are tasked with promoting justice and love through their work.

Education

One of the main ways to promote peace is through education, he said, noting that the Order funds schools in the Holy Land where some 20,000 students, around half of whom are Muslim, are educated. "We can teach peace from the base to young people," he said, saying, "if we create a calm, respectful environment where we teach peace, mutual respect, and human rights (then) we are promoting peace" to both students and their parents.

Cardinal Filoni said surrounding countries such as Jordan also have a role to play in the current conflict in Gaza, and that longstanding regional alliances can help alleviate the situation

for those bearing the brunt of the violence.

“If we create a calm, respectful environment where we teach peace, mutual respect, and human rights (then) we are promoting peace”

To this end, he noted that Jordan runs a hospital in Gaza that is still operational amid the current war, and that the pastor of Gaza has taken people there for treatment. He noted that in some areas of the Holy Land, a crossroads of different peoples live in peace, whereas in other places there is conflict.

He noted there are still many places where Christians are a minority and face hostility, being required to pay a tax to live in Muslim territory or enduring legal and social discrimination, among other things.

"Culturally, this exists. So, if we eradicate the concept of who is first-class, second-class, who has the divine right, then peace would be easier, Cardinal Filoni said. The first and most important thing to work for, he said, is coexistence, "always in the right of all to live with justice and the recognition of everyone's rights, because if this is lacking, two states or three states, problems would exist".

i Elise Ann Allen is a Denver native who currently works as a Senior Correspondent for Crux in Rome.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Four kidnapped religious men and a teacher released in Haiti

● As Haiti reels under a state of emergency amid gang violence threatening to bring down the government, the Haitian province of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart announced on Monday that five of the seven people kidnapped just over two weeks ago in Port-au-Prince have been released by their kidnappers.

They include four members of the religious Congregation and a teacher. "The struggle is not over, because Brs Pierre Isaac Valmeus and Adam Montclaison Marius are still held captive," said a press statement shared with SIR news agency.

The seven were kidnapped by an armed group on 23 February as they travelled to the Jean XXIII School in downtown Port-au-Prince.

Peru's Congress approves legislation protecting pregnant women and their babies

● The Peruvian Congress passed by a wide margin a bill that establishes the obligation of the state to guarantee "the protection of the pregnancy, the pregnant mother, the unborn child, and their family environment".

The measure, sponsored by Congresswoman Rosangela Barbarán of the Fuerza Popular (Popular Force) party, was approved on March 13 by

a vote of 87-18, with seven abstentions, and has been sent to the country's president, Dina Boluarte.

In an interview with ACI Prensa, CNA's Spanish-language news partner, the director of the Latin American Office of the Population Research Institute, Carlos Polo, said the legislation represents "true progress in the agenda for respecting the life of the conceived child".

Catholics divided as Brazil debates decriminalising marijuana use

● As Brazil's Supreme Court and Congress find themselves at odds over the decriminalisation of marijuana possession, the same clash runs through the church in the world's largest Catholic country, with some believers urging a hard line and others insisting the last thing Brazil needs is a new "war on drugs".

Lawyer Miguel Vidigal, who heads the Brazilian Union of Catholic Jurists, is among those adamantly opposed to calls for decriminalisation. "Studies show that marijuana is the entrance door for other drugs. It cannot be decriminalised," Mr Vidigal told Crux. "Drugs are an evil in itself. They cause health, psychological, and spiritual damages."

Fr Valdir Silveira, however, disagrees. After more than 18 years working with prisoners as head of the episcopal conference's "Prison Pastoral Ministry", he thinks the criminalisation of drugs has only contributed to expanding Brazil's penal population.

Argentine bishops meet with President Milei: Complain about poverty

● Amid a serious economic crisis in Argentina and a poverty rate of almost 60%, ultra-libertarian President Javier Milei on March 12 received the heads of the bishops' conference for his first meeting with the Church. He heard their concerns over the lack of food and medicines for the poor. Since Milei took office in December, he has been implementing a number of measures that critics say intensified the hardships faced by the poorest in society.

In one of his first acts, he devalued the Argentinian peso by more than 50%, something that had the initial result of increasing the prices of most products. He has also cut the State's expenditures, including those offering social relief.

In February, the annual inflation rate attained 276%, something that puts gives Argentina one of the world's highest inflation rates. The monthly increase, however, corresponded to 13%, a rate significantly lower than that of January – which reached 20%. Milei celebrated the figure as a sign that his policies are working, something disputed by many analysts.

French bishops condemn Macron's assisted suicide bill

French President Emmanuel Macron announced last week that the French Parliament in May would examine a proposal to legalise 'aid-in-dying' throughout the country. Macron in an interview with the Catholic newspaper *La Croix* described the measure as "a law of fraternity" that "reconciles the autonomy of the individual and the solidarity of the nation".

The law "opens the possibility of asking for help in dying under certain strict conditions", the president said.

Reims Archbishop Éric de Moulins-Beaufort condemned the president's proposal in an interview with *La Croix*.

"Calling a text that opens the door to both assisted suicide and euthanasia a 'law of fraternity' is a deception," the archbishop told *La Croix*. "Such a law, whatever one may desire, will shift our entire health care system toward death as a solution."

Tours Archbishop Vincent Jordy likewise criticised Macron's description of the proposed law, arguing that fraternity "means taking care of others, it means supporting them until the end, especially when they are weak and fragile".

The bishop told the Catholic weekly *Famille Chrétienne* that "despite the use of terminology which avoids the terms euthana-



Pope Francis meets with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Pharo Palace in Marseille, France, September 23, 2023. Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media

sia and assisted suicide", the proposal risks bringing about those practices.

In a statement posted to X, meanwhile, Lille Archbishop Laurent Le Boulc'h warned that assisted suicide could hasten the death of individuals who see themselves as burdens upon others.

"Does it not risk further increasing the depressed character of our society in loss of hope?" he wrote.

"Does it not risk weakening so many people who see themselves as a weight that has become unbearable for those around them?"

Macron in describing the proposal said that individuals seeking assisted suicide "will have to be capable of full discernment" before being permitted to undergo it.

Patients "with psychiatric diseases or neurodegenerative diseases that

alter discernment, such as Alzheimer's", will not be offered help in killing themselves, he said.

The president urged those who disagree over the proposal to nevertheless "have a debate at the right level."

"The nature of the subject is intimidating enough for respect to set in, even between people who are in deep disagreement," he argued.

British parliament questions 'false baptism' by asylum seekers

A member of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales told members of the British Parliament that clergy have a "clear engagement" with those seeking baptism. The Home Affairs select committee were listening to experts about the possibility that asylum seekers were receiving baptisms in order to stay in the United Kingdom.

Open Doors UK publishes a list of 50 countries where Christians face persecution, with the top ten being North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, and Afghanistan. However, earlier there was evidence earlier this year that 40 migrants on board the Bibby Stockholm – a vessel holding about 500 people while their asylum claims are

processed – were seeking to become Christian.

Fr Matthew Firth, a former Church of England priest now with the Free Church of England, told the *Daily Telegraph* in February that he personally witnessed 20 cases of failed asylum seekers requesting baptism during his time with the Church, and believes there are thousands more cases.

Francis: West's silence over Syria is 'unacceptable'

"Let us not forget Syria, a country that has suffered so much from war for so long". Those were Pope Francis' words this on March 17, at the end of his weekly Angelus prayer.

For almost thirteen years

now, Syria has been sinking into poverty, forgotten by the international community. Since 2011 and the Arab Spring uprising, the country has experienced government repression, a terrible civil

war, and ISIS terrorism, to which was added the deadly earthquake of February 2023.

The country, governed with an iron fist by the Assad regime, has, over the years, been shunned by the

international community. Economic sanctions targeting Damascus, imposed by Western countries, have only exacerbated poverty in the country, which also faces a massive exodus of the youth.



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The cry of a child



A child holds a sign in Kaduna, Nigeria, on March 8, 2024, protesting the current conditions in the country. The recent abductions of hundreds of people, including nearly 300 schoolchildren on March 7 in Kuriga, central Nigeria, have left Church leaders and parents, including Catholics, in fear of their safety. Photo: OSV News/Reuters

Cuban priest: 'Communism won't survive' and 'the Church will remain'

In an interview with *EWTN Noticias*, the Spanish-language sister service of *EWTN News*, Cuban priest Fr Alberto Reyes spoke about his apostolic ministry in Camagüey province, located in the central area of the island, and about how his defence of religious freedom on the island has earned him

friends and enemies alike.

Fr Reyes did not hesitate to say that in Cuba "communism will not survive" and "the Church will remain".

The Cuban priest works in Esmeralda, a small town "that was once flourishing", according to *EWTN News*-correspondent Rachel Diez. Today, the daily life of the

people is the same as that of many others in Cuba, one of "sadness, migration, and deprivation", he commented.

Since his ordination, Fr Reyes has always been involved with the peripheries of society, in areas that have been very poor, but with a community of faith-

ful always willing to serve just as they are in Esmeralda.

The diocesan priest has been a critical voice against the extreme poverty and the repressive actions of the police state, since he himself has experienced both and has seen them in the lives of fellow Cubans.

Christians in Gaza face 'worst period' since start of war, report says

The pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has released a report highlighting that the Christian community in Gaza "is going through the worst period" since the start of the war on October 7, 2023.

According to the report released on March 8, Gaza is facing difficult times, with shelling, disrupted communications, and food shortages. Sr Nabila

Saleh, a religious of the Holy Rosary Congregation, described the situation as distressing but is grateful for God's grace even in adversity.

"The little we have is because of God's grace. The people outside suffer even more than we do, because they don't have that consolation at this time," she said.

Holy Family Parish in the neigh-

bourhood of Al Zeyton, in the north of the Gaza Strip, is one of the places affected by the intense clashes and bombardments. The church is currently sheltering 128 families - a total of 512 Christians, both Catholics and Orthodox - including 120 children under the age of 18, among them 60 with disabilities, and 84 elderly people.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis takes on critics in forthcoming memoir, says he won't be resigning

● Pope Francis has no plans to resign from office — though he says some in the Church wish he would.

The Pontiff addresses the topic in *'Life: My Story Through History'*, his forthcoming autobiography. Excerpts from the book, which explores in detail the most significant moments of the 87-year-old's life up until the present day, were published March 14 by the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

In the book, Pope Francis says that despite the criticism and medical issues he has faced during his 11-year pontificate, he considers the Petrine ministry to be "for life" and sees no conditions for resignation, barring serious physical impairment.

"Over the years, perhaps some people have hoped that sooner or later, perhaps after hospitalisation, I would make an announcement like this, but there is no such risk: Thanks to the Lord, I enjoy good health, and God willing, there are many projects still to realise."

Vatican's Good Friday Holy Land collection to aid humanitarian efforts in Gaza

● This year's Vatican financial appeal for the Holy Land highlights the urgent humanitarian crisis facing the beleaguered population in Gaza and the Pope's plea for peace.

"The outbreak of the war in Gaza, after the events of October 7, paralysed the Holy Land. The lack of pilgrims and tourists has put thousands of families in difficulty," Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, said in a letter released March 8.

The Vatican has overseen the Pro Terra Sancta fund, or the Pontifical Collection for the Holy Land, since 1974, when Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Nobis in Animo*, designated Good Friday as the day for the collection to be taken up by parishes around the world. This year Good Friday falls on March 29.

Vatican seeks to break new ground in Confucian and Christian dialogue

● The Vatican sponsored a dialogue in Taiwan last week as the Catholic Church prepares to release official guidelines for engagement with Confucianism, one of the most influential religious philosophies in the history of China.

Fr Paulin Kubuya, the undersecretary for the Vatican Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, travelled to New Taipei City for the meeting at Fu Jen Catholic University. He told CNA in an interview on March 12 upon his return to Rome that the guidelines could help Catholics in East Asia to navigate living out the faith amid their cultural traditions.

Fr Kubuya is from the Democratic Republic of Congo and is fluent in Chinese after serving as a Xaverian missionary in Taiwan. During his time as a missionary, he saw how converts to Catholicism wrestled with what to do with the traditions and rituals that they grew up with, such as veneration of one's ancestors.

Controversial Sr Lucía Caram and Religión Digital team meet with Pope

● Last week Pope Francis received the controversial nun Sr Lucía Caram and team members of the Spanish-language news portal Religión Digital, which regularly publishes content contrary to Catholic doctrine.

The Pope's March 13 audience with Caram and the Religión Digital journalists went unmentioned in the Vatican Press Office's daily news brief. In an article, Religión Digital, now in its 25th year, stated that the Holy Father met with its members for half an hour and reportedly encouraged the team: "Do not lose hope. Continue fighting for this living Church and making it known."

In 2023 she spoke out in favour of homosexual couples being able to "marry the Church".



Letter from Rome

Vatican says women deacons and LGBTQ+, not celibacy, on docket for synod



Elise Ann Allen

Organisers of Pope Francis's ongoing Synod of Bishops on Synodality have announced that ten different working groups had been formed in the Roman Curia to address specific topics that came out of last year's session. These topics, they said, are restricted to issues mentioned inside of the synod hall and include hot-button questions such as women's access to the diaconate and ways of welcoming the LGBTQ+ community.

Asked specifically whether the working groups would touch on issues of homosexuality and the women's diaconate, Msgr Piero Coda, secretary general of the International Theological Commission, said "of course they are on the agenda", and that various materials will be included in the reflection on these topics.

"If you look well at the issue of access to the diaconate, it's said specifically that it was a topic that emerged from the synodal assembly and is a question of agreeing on this need to have a study," he said, saying the results of the two past commissions established by Pope Francis to examine the issue, which were inconclusive, will be considered in the current study.

However, asked whether a working group dedicated to the relationship between the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches would address the disputed question of mandatory priestly celibacy, Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary general of the Vatican office for the Synod of Bishops, said no. "The topic of celibacy was never put on the table during the assembly," Grech said.

Similarly, Jesuit Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, general relator for the Synod on Synodality, stressed the importance of recalling that "these study groups don't treat all topics discussed in the Church".

People of God

"They only involve those points that were presented by the People of God during the synodal process," he said, saying, "We don't do ecclesial politics, we are servants of this synodal process". Cardinal Hollerich said he has tried and believes he has succeeded in the synod "to not put my own contents, but content that comes from people of God."

Organisers were also asked whether a working group dedicated



Pope Francis joins leaders of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops for prayer before a working session in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall October 20, 2023. Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, a president delegate of the assembly, is seen to the right of the pope. Photo: CNS photo/Lola Gomez

to examining "controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues" would revisit blessings for same-sex couples given the widespread backlash created by the Vatican declaration that allowed them.

The declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, was published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in December 2023 outlining methods for blessing couples in irregular situations and has generated enormous backlash and debate.

"I think that what the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pope have already decided is not a question to take up again in the synod"

However, Cardinal Hollerich told journalists Thursday that for him, *Fiducia Supplicans* "is a very important document", describing it as "very beautiful, because it means God loves everyone, even those who are in an irregular situation". The blessing given is a sign of God's love, he said, saying "It is a pastoral document, it's not a doctrinal document" and the synod has nothing to do with it.

"I find it very beautiful in my pastoral context, it helps me. I think that what the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pope have already decided is not a question to take up again in the synod," he said, but added that this was his personal opinion.

Last week the Vatican published two documents resulting from the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, which opened in 2021 and has

included consultations at the local, continental, and universal levels, culminating with the first of two Rome-based month-long meetings in October 2023. A second and final month-long meeting will be held from October 2-27, to further examine issues that arose from the various stages of consultation, as well as major discussion points that emerged during last year's meeting, bringing the multi-year process to a close.

The first document, titled, "How to be a synodal Church in mission?" offered five different perspectives it said required theological reflection ahead of this year's synod meeting. Those perspectives include the "synodal face of the local Church" examining local realities and ministries, including the question of women's involvement and the potential creation of new ministries, and "the synodal face of groupings of churches" on the relationship between national, regional and continental bishops' conferences.

Perspective

Another perspective is "the synodal missionary face of the universal Church", which the document said implies "a new way of exercising the Petrine ministry" and examines the relationship between bishops and the pope, as well as the topic of ecumenism.

The liturgical and sacramental roots of a "synodal Church" exploring the ecclesiology of participation of laity while respecting hierarchical authority is another perspective requiring reflection, as is the "synodal Church in mission", addressing the evangelisation of culture versus

the inculturation of the Faith and the need for "ecclesial communion" at all levels on major pastoral and moral questions.

A second document was also published outlining ten different study groups dedicated to specific issues that have emerged in the synod process thus far, and which will be addressed by the synod office in collaboration with competent dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

These study groups are:

- Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church Listening to the Cry of the Poor
- The mission in the digital environment
- The revision of the *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective
- Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms
- The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations
- Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to episcopacy, judicial function of the bishops, nature and course of *ad limina apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective
- The role of papal representatives in a missionary synodal perspective
- Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues
- The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices

In a February 22 letter from Pope Francis to Grech ordering the creation of these study groups, the Pontiff said the groups must be comprised of not only curial officials, but experts from all over the world, bringing not only their expertise, but "current experiences in the people of God gathered in the local churches".

These study groups have already begun their work and have been tasked with developing a working plan that they will present during this year's October synod meeting. They have been asked to conclude their studies and present results to the pope by June 2025.

"The groups, though established as a response to the synod, are not part of it, but are a personal initiative of the Pope that are designed to outlast the Synod on Synodality itself"

Given the broad spectrum of issues being addressed, the study groups are working in close collaboration with the International Theological Commission, the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and a Canon Law commission established in agreement with the Dicastery for Legislative Texts. Experts who form part of the study groups, the document said, must come from a variety of cultural and geographical backgrounds, they must represent different disciplinary fields, and must include both men and women.

The Vatican's office for the Synod of Bishops will also establish a "Permanent Forum" to further explore the theological, juridical, pastoral, spiritual and communicative aspects of "the synodality of the Church."

Organisers stressed Thursday that the groups, though established as a response to the synod, are not part of it, but are a personal initiative of the Pope that are designed to outlast the Synod on Synodality itself.

Speaking to the press, Cardinal Hollerich said the specific topic of the synod "is synodality. A lot of topics came up from people of God, but it's impossible to treat all of these topics in a synod". "There needs to be a certain reflection, so the Pope took up his responsibility as pastor of universal Church" to explore specific issues of broad interest, he said.

i Elise Ann Allen is a Denver native who currently works as a Senior Correspondent for Crux in Rome, covering the Vatican and the global Church.

Letters

Letter of the week

Mothers voted to ensure acknowledgement in Constitution

Dear Editor, When I first read the proposed amendments to our Constitution, I was enraged as I remembered by own lovely mother and the wonderful women who have gone before us. To try and remove the word 'mother' completely and the word 'women' in this instance, is an insult to us all.

The male of the human species will never suffer the pains of childbirth. Nor will he ever know the intense love and joy that fills your being as you look for the first time on the face of your little baby. It is the love that will sustain you as you endure sleepless nights and worried times as you rejoice and hurt with

your children.

Motherhood is a privilege that I have been blessed to receive and the Christian family is so strong and supportive. The great majority of men are great fathers and wonderful husbands. Why not acknowledge this in our Constitution?

The Government's efforts to try and opt out of their responsibility for our disabled and vulnerable people was cruel. These citizens and those, many of them close family members, mostly women, who with great love and attention care for them, are our present-day saints, heroes and heroines. Give them more help and sup-

ports... that is what you're expected to do when elected.

The Government is now seeking to explain why these two proposed amendments were so strongly rejected. They say that the electorate didn't really understand the proposals. How dare they!

The majority of 'No, No' voters understood perfectly. Some people who felt a bit confused clearly voted 'No, No'.

We Irish owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Peadar Kirby of Aontú, the only political party to reject the proposals and to Michael McDowell and others who came on television and spoke on radio on several occasions

explaining the complex and confusing questions, with far-reaching consequences, some of them unknown.

Likewise, those in opposition who say now that the Government used the wrong wording but encouraged us to vote 'Yes, Yes' are equally guilty as Government is. Say no more, please.

Mothers and women celebrated Mother's Day that Sunday, happy in the knowledge that our prayers and votes ensured that we are still acknowledged in our much-loved country's Constitution.

*Yours etc.,
Nuala Doran,
Raheen, Co. Limerick*

Will the Church lead a counteroffensive?

Dear Editor, The Irish people affirmed their support for the Christian family with their 'No' votes in the recent referendums even if many did so for reasons other than faith. It was a victory for the family and for all of society because the well-being of the latter depends greatly on that of the former. But this is not a time to sit back because the Marxist anti-family lobby will try again. When it comes to referendums we have seen how many previous governments have treated the people like small children who refuse to eat their dinner: they serve it up to them again tomorrow and the next day until eventually they have to eat it.

In the second amendment transgenderism got a blow: the people affirmed that the mother is not just any carer of any gender but special, and the value of her work in the home was recognised. The follow up to this should be that we root out transgenderism from our schools and demand that the mother be paid for the work she does in the home. Money thus spent would save the



State millions because most of our problems of delinquency and broken marriages would be forestalled. I wonder will the Church give a lead in any such counteroffensive? Pious sermons about St Patrick and the

faith need to be followed up by action if that faith is to survive.

*Yours etc.,
Fr Richard O'Connor,
Prof. of Theology, The Angelicum,
Rome, Italy*

Taoiseach's lack of consistency on value of life

Dear Editor, The Taoiseach's statements on the war in Gaza and the killing of children and adults and about the "Cries of the innocent" and that "The life of a child is the greatest gift of all", are to be com-

mended. These statements raise two important questions.

Could not the Taoiseach have used the same statements regarding the Regulation of Termination of

Pregnancy Act (2018) considering the lives of some 33,000 children aborted since 2019 and, if the life of a child is the greatest gift of all, from whom is the gift? I think some clarification from the

Taoiseach is needed on these questions as there seems to be a lack of consistency on the value of life.

*Yours etc.,
Herbert F. Eyre,
North Strand, Dublin 3*

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.

Porn study shows up the liberal lie

There is an effort these days to cleanse pornography of its dirty image, dressing it up as part of a healthy sexual life. But a new study from the Economic and Social Research Institute's (ESRI) should complicate that picture.

It shows that, among 17-20-year-olds in Ireland, consuming pornography is associated with aggression, "risky" sexual behaviours, low self-esteem (particularly around body image and sexual performance) and depression.

While the ESRI's report warns that it is hard to determine whether pornography is the cause or a symptom, the link is hard to ignore.

This is especially the case when recent surveys suggest that sexual assault and sexual violence in general is on the rise in Ireland, while rates of depression are also spiking.

The Central Statistics Office found that 65% of women aged 18-24 have experienced sexual violence, while a study by *TheJournal.ie* showed an uptick in reported rape cases in Ireland.

There are issues with these studies and how they were collated, but the bottom line is the signs aren't good and they match trends in the US and the UK.

The consumption of pornography may have broader impacts too, if Dr Abigail Favale is right in her supposing that exposure to the grotesque gender stereotypes of pornography is leading to a rise in gender dysphoria.

This is something the ESRI doesn't consider, but all the same it is good that their report makes tentative links between consuming pornography and poorer health, wellbeing and relations to others.

But it seems unlikely, based on the report's policy proposals, that it will ultimately do any good because our political and social elites have fallen for a modern myth – ethical pornography.

If only such a thing could be found, the study suggests, we could introduce young people to pornography in an age-appropriate, critical manner. It would just become another tool in their sexual self-expression.

Parents, teachers, and policy experts must help children develop 'porn literacy', so that it may be enjoyed responsibly.

It is this relativising attitude that permits pornography to harm so many young people. If we don't accept that it is objectively harmful, regardless of its so-called ethics, we will get nowhere in tackling the issue.

The ESRI's report points to truths about pornography the Church has been banging on about for ages – it enslaves our passions, treats men and women as objects and reinforces a culture that is waging a war against human nature, particularly in the sphere of sexuality.

The study acknowledges how pornography 'scripts' sexual encounters, fundamentally altering the way men and women expect to interact with each other sexually.

But it doesn't see, as Marshall McLuhan famously said, that the medium is the message.

By its very nature, pornography teaches those who consume it to view sexual love as a self-centred act, treating the other person as an object from whom we extract pleasure.

Once you begin treating a person as an object or a means to an end, you have dehumanised them and you have dehumanised yourself, something well captured in the ESRI's data. You would think this reality should form the basis of any effort to educate children about consuming pornography.

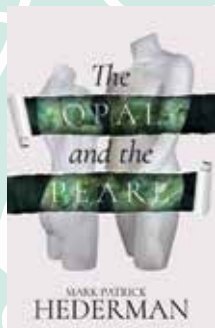
But as I say, for liberals such a fact can't be admitted. To do so would mean admitting that the sexual revolution was a lie, and a harmful one at that.



The Liberties in Pictures

Maurice Curtis

If you have ever wondered what stories lie in the stone walls of Dublin's oldest storefronts and cathedrals, this is the book for you.



The Opal & the Pearl

Mark Patrick Hederman

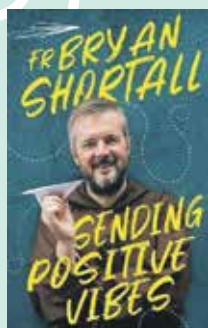
Benedictine monk and author Mark Patrick Hederman delivers a stimulating critique of the Catholic Church's monosexual stance in this best-selling book.



Tomorrow's Parish

Donal Harrington

This book is for anyone who has an interest in the future of the Church, particularly those involved in parish ministry and parish pastoral councils.



Sending Positive Vibes

Fr Bryan Shortall

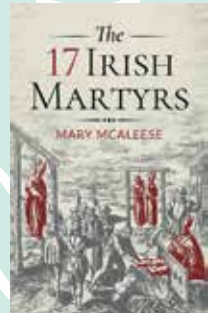
Dive into Fr Bryan's life – his vivid memories of childhood, his challenging experience as a hospital chaplain, and the difficulties of being a minister of Gospel in today's Ireland.



Early Irish Saints

John J. Ó. Riórdain

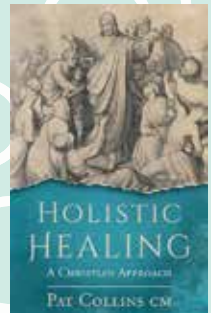
This collection of short essays on fourteen well-loved early Irish saints presents a very readable combination of historical fact, folklore and legend.



The 17 Irish Martyrs

Mary McAleese

An historical account detailing the inspiring stories of the 17 Irish martyrs beatified by Pope John Paul II and what made their causes for martyrdom stand apart from others.



Holistic Healing

Pat Collins CM

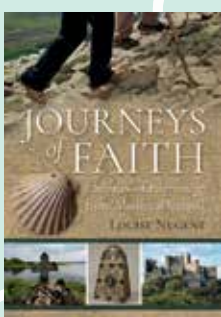
This timely book describes how the gift of healing has been rediscovered in recent years and stresses the therapeutic power of the Eucharist, while addressing questions like, 'why isn't everyone healed?'



The Elephant in the Church

Mary T. Malone

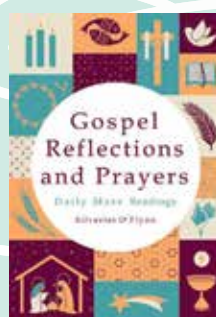
Women have long been the 'Elephant in the Church'. Christian feminist Mary T. Malone explores 'Woman Christianity' from a historical perspective in this revised edition.



Journeys of Faith

Louise Nugent

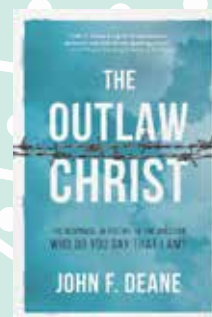
Embark on a journey with Louise Nugent as she uncovers the goals and destinations of faith with medieval Irish pilgrims. Includes colour photos and illustrations of archaeological evidence.



Gospel Reflections and Prayers

Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap

Let this book be your guide through Daily Mass Readings, the weekly liturgy providing food for the soul in the form of hope.



Outlaw Christ

John F. Deane

This book questions the evolving views of who the 'outlaw' Christ was and what he stood for by examining the great poetry that focused on answering 'Who do you say that I am?'



Easter SALE

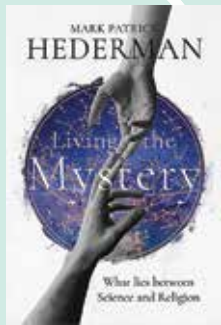
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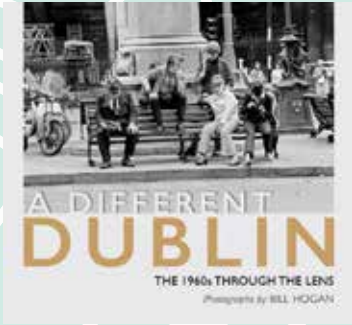
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Living the Mystery
Mark Patrick Hederman

is a mystery beyond the comprehension of our normal understanding. A Benedictine monk explains how to engage this mystery and bring a new sense of the sacred into it.



**A Different Dublin:
The 1960s Through the Lens**
Bill Hogan

'A Different Dublin' is a nostalgic collection that shows a Dublin that is familiar, despite the five decades that separate these photos from today.



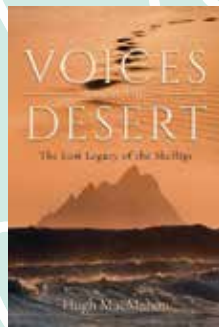
Awakening Inner Peace
Sr Stan

This beautiful book from Sr Stan is the perfect antidote to the stresses of modern life, providing readers with short but inspiring prayers, poems and biblical quotes.



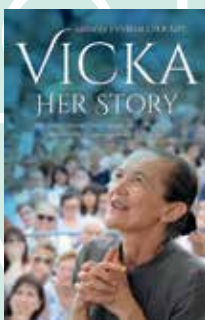
Rainbows & Windmills
Peter Tarleton Stewart

Written as a challenge to Christian churches' rigid focus on doctrine and practice, this book offers an introduction to personal spirituality.



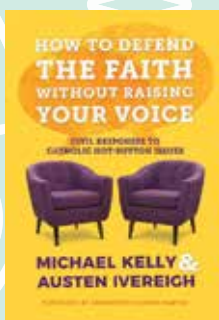
Voices from the Desert
Hugh MacMahon

Individuals looking for a fresh view of what it means to be a Christian, or to understand the Skelligs' legacy, will appreciate its authenticity, clarity and relevance.



Vicka - Her Story
Finbar O'Leary

In conversation with the eldest of the six visionaries, Vicka tells of her special relationship with Our Lady and relays many of the Messages which the 'Queen of Peace' has given to her.



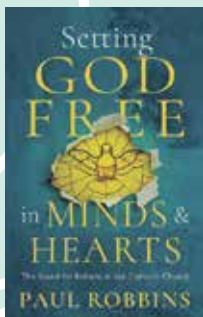
**How to Defend the Faith
Without Raising your Voice**

Michael Kelly & Austen Ivereigh
Answering some of the most common criticisms of the Church, this book aims to help people defend their beliefs in a calm and rational manner.



Dancing to my Death
Daniel O'Leary

piece, it is an account of cancer diagnosis and the rollercoaster of facing his own illness, Daniel found that his Faith meant to him.



Setting God Free in Minds and Hearts
Paul Robbins

In this book, laicized former priest Paul Robbins expresses the need for reform that should include changes to those aspects of the church's teachings and practices that currently restrict the freedom of the Holy Spirit to give life to the Church.



Hallelujah
Fr Ray Kelly

In 2018, Fr Kelly reached the semi-finals of Britain's Got Talent, demonstrating his ability to connect with people through singing. His memoir describes his fascinating journey from parish priest to fame..

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David Spesia

Page 32



Looking at the Oscar nominees for best picture through the lens of human dignity



The Oscars are associated with glitz but the films on show depict human dignity in a variety of ways, writes Sr Hosea Rupprecht

Awards season is particularly exciting for a film reviewer. I enjoy talking about the stunning work of actors, editors, directors, writers, make-up artists, composers and others. But as a Catholic film critic, I tend to focus more on the human quality of the story, while not neglecting the quality of the filmmaking that brings that story to life.

My number one criterion when reviewing a film is how the story upholds the dignity of the human person. As the first principle of Catholic social teaching, depiction of human dignity needs to be taken into account when judging (which is always subjective) whether a film is 'good' or not. Is the human person respected and shown with their God-given dignity? If so, then I can usually forgive other less desirable aspects of a film.

With the Academy Awards right just after coming to a close, here's my take on how the 10 nominations for best picture hold up in the human dignity department.

American Fiction

When his editors encourage him to write 'black' books, struggling author Thelonius 'Monk' Ellison (Jeffrey Wright) writes a stereotypical black story as a joke. But when the book becomes popular, he wonders what black culture is coming to.

I found this film fascinating as black filmmakers (with Cord

Jefferson as writer/director) explore the perception of what is 'black', and why African-American stereotypes seem to be so popular with white people.

I was pleased to see that Monk, and some of the people around him, resent common stereotypes, even though Monk chose to profit from those stereotypes (through the success of his mock-book) because he needed money fast to care for his ailing mother.

The character of Cliff (Sterling K. Brown) was challenged by his brother, Monk, to rise above his limitations and engage with the family. Overall, an interesting look at racism, family dysfunction and holding on to one's ideals.

Anatomy of a Fall

This French-language film is basically a courtroom drama. When Sandra (Sandra Hüller) wakes up from a nap and hears her blind son, Daniel (Milo Machado-Graner), yelling for her, she discovers her husband's body outside in the snow below their fixer-upper chalet. What follows, as she is put on trial for her husband's murder, is the laying bare of every aspect of their relationship.

The film is exquisitely put together. The judge's decision to let 11-year-old Daniel stay in court, especially as testimony about the couple's troubled marriage became more explicit, was most interesting, especially given that Daniel had argued

with the judge to be allowed to stay.

As Daniel listened, he was able to better understand some of his own experiences with his father. His newfound understanding propels him into insisting on speaking to the court - an action which leads to the film's conclusion. It was refreshing and joyful to see a child's perspective taken seriously in film as, let's face it, we adults often don't give kids enough credit for their insights.

Barbie

When I heard a movie about Barbie was coming out, I admit that I groaned - but I actually was pleasantly surprised at this film. The film depicts the perfect 'Barbieland', inhabited by every version of Barbie dolls living an ideal life.

But when one Barbie (Margot Robbie) has thoughts of death, she is sent to the Real World to find out what's wrong. Ken (Ryan Gosling) goes with her only to discover the Real World is run by men. He then takes this newly found power back to Barbieland.

When plastic meets real flesh-and-blood, Barbie learns about the pains and joys of real living. She discovers that relationships take work but that joy can be found amid pain. Returning to Barbieland, she leads the revolt against Ken's power-grab, and all the dolls learn something about what it means to have a true purpose. Pretty good for a movie about dolls.

The Holdovers

When an irascible teacher (Paul Giamatti) at a prep school is forced to stay on campus over the holidays with a few students and the grieving cook (Da'Vine Joy Randolph), he forges bonds he never thought possible.

This film is in my top favourites for this year. The human connection that each of the characters make over the holiday break transforms them into better people, even people

willing to make sacrifices they would have never imagined before spending quality time together. A tribute to the tenacity of the human spirit.

Killers of the Flower Moon

In the first half of the 20th century, the Osage Tribe strikes oil, and they become the richest Native Americans in the country. Filled with greed, white men plan to steal the tribe's wealth by first marrying Osage women and then killing them, thereby slowly siphoning off their riches.

Magnificently crafted by director Martin Scorsese, this film depicts the antithesis of human dignity and showcases the depravity that unadulterated greed can foster in the human heart. The conflicted moral compass of main character, Ernest Burkhart (Leonardo DiCaprio), gives the audience a needed glimmer of hope that he will be able to overcome the manipulation he experiences from his uncle (Robert De Niro) and choose to do the right thing.

Maestro

Audiences get a glimpse into the complex relationships of legendary composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein in this biopic, written and directed by Bradley Cooper. The private life of this amazing musician was complex and, honestly, quite sad. One of the film's great accomplishments is the make-up job that renders Cooper almost unrecognisable as Bernstein ages.

Married to actress Felicia Montealegre (Carey Mulligan), Bernstein (Bradley Cooper) could be considered bisexual. Felicia initially tolerated his dalliances with other men but eventually the couple's relationship became strained, and Bernstein lied to his children about his proclivity. The film remains morally ambiguous, allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions even as it shows that no one's life is



Dr J. Robert Oppenheimer, atomic physicist and head of the Manhattan Project, poses for a portrait in 1944. Photo: OSV News/Dept. of Energy/Handout via Reuters

“Is the human person respected and shown with their God-given dignity?”



Cillian Murphy stars in the movie *Oppenheimer*. The film won an Oscar for best picture in the 2024 Academy Awards. Photo OSV News/Melinda Sue Gordon, Universal

simple.

Oppenheimer

Before it became part of the 'Barbenheimer' phenomenon of last summer, this film was (and still is) a beautifully crafted biopic of physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, often called the 'father of the atomic bomb'. A brilliant scientist, Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) worked on the secret Manhattan Project to develop the weapon that would ultimately lead to the end of World War II.

The film has already won numerous accolades and awards, and rightly so. It's an amazing piece of filmmaking art. It challenges the audience to put themselves in the shoes of this controversial figure of American history. Can all the souls who lost their lives when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki be laid at his feet? Or does it belong to those who gave the order? It is a very human question that Oppenheimer himself wrestled with, as did those who persecuted him to escape their own guilt, as do we today.

Past Lives

A childhood crush gets reignited between two best friends 12 years later. But Nora (Greta Lee) breaks off the communication with Hae Sung (Teo Yoo). Another 12 years pass, and Nora is now married to Arthur (John Magaro) while Hae Sung has to come to grips that he let her slip away.

I can't call this my favourite out of all the best picture nominees, but I really loved it. It's a truly human story of people making choices in life and then having to deal with the consequences of those choices - something every human person experiences.

Poor Things

A very unconventional doctor (Willem Dafoe) reanimates Bella (Emma Stone) after she dies, and under the doctor's protection she is eager to learn - which she does.

With all due respect to the filmmakers' creativity and to the actors for some brilliant performances, I felt like I needed to scrub my brain with soap after watching this film. Contrary to what human dignity dictates, the story centres on the selfishness and self-discovery that comes only through sexual exploits that are abusive rather than loving.

The Zone of Interest

The Höss family is just like any other in the 1940s - except they live next door to Auschwitz. Husband and father Rudolf (Christian Friedel) is commandant at the camp. His family lives in the housing provided, and his kids go to school and play with their friends in the little backyard pool.

Hedwig (Sandra Hüller), the wife, cultivates a beautiful garden. But one of the servants sneaks off at night to hide food for the unfortunates in the

camp.

The film is poignant and upsetting as the audience wonders how the family could live such normal lives with the horrors happening beyond the garden wall. It challenges us with the thought of our own blindness to social wrongs happening within our sphere. Do we let the comfort of the status quo keep us quiet, or do we speak out, risking censure, or worse, to stand up for what is right?

“That's why we live our lives. Some stories contribute nothing to it, but many do”

Which of these 10 films will win the coveted statue on March 10? Nobody will know until that day. But which film would I like to win? 'Killers of the Flower Moon' or 'The Holdovers' - the most effective stories at capturing the essence of human dignity or the struggle to hold onto that God-given dignity against all odds. That's why we live our lives. Some stories contribute nothing to it, but many do. And I hope those are the ones honoured at the Oscars this year.

i Sr Hosea Rupprecht, a Daughter of St Paul, is the associate director of the Pauline Centre for Media Studies.



Producer Charles Roven, director Christopher Nolan and the cast and crew of 'Oppenheimer' look on and applaud as producer Emma Thomas speaks after the film won the Oscar for Best Picture during the Oscars show at the 96th Academy Awards in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles March 10, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Mike Blake, Reuters

Looking for signs and Nineveh

A recently restored fresco of the biblical story of Jonah and the whale is seen at the Pontifical Sanctuary of the Holy Stairs in Rome October 8, 2020. Photo: CNS Paul Haring



Effie Caldarola

“This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah”

a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah”.

Jonah became a sign to the city of Nineveh; Jesus is telling the crowds that he, Jesus, is the sign, the only sign we need. And he, Jesus, is greater than Jonah, whose fabulous tale involves being swallowed by a large fish, and greater than Solomon.

Lessons

Although probably not an historical character, Jonah's story carries lessons. God asked Jonah to perform a mission - go to the pagans in the vast city of Nineveh and proclaim the true God. Understandably, Jonah's terrified.

Instead of heading for Nineveh, he boards a ship going the other direction. When the sailors on board decide that Jonah's rebellion against God is the cause of a devastating storm, they pitch him overboard. Hence, the fish, who eventually decides he doesn't want Jonah either and coughs him up on shore.

Jonah gets the point. He heads to Nineveh and proclaims the Lord. He becomes a sign of God. A good deacon friend said this years ago: “You may be the only Gospel someone reads today”. We're called to be signs, too.

But this sign business still challenges me. The Gospels are full of the marvellous deeds of Jesus. The blind see, evil spirits are expelled, the multitudes are fed, the lepers cured. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead after days in the tomb.

Hopefully Jesus' message of love, mercy and inclusion was attracting crowds to him. But let's be honest - many of

those crowds were attracted by the amazing stories they had heard of healing. They saw and hoped for signs and wonders.

“It takes spiritual maturity to become the sign rather than, like a hopeful child, demanding one”

Jesus' incredible love and mercy propelled him toward helping those in need. Often, he would instruct the healed to tell no one. But people inevitably blabbed.

But these works also drew the crowds to hear his message. How many who listened to the Sermon on the Mount had come for miracles but stayed to hear the real message of how we are called to be the miracle, to be the sign.

It takes spiritual maturity to become the sign rather than, like a hopeful child, demanding one. We're in the midst of 40 days to ponder that. 40 - a sacred number. The rain fell for 40 days on Noah, the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus was credited with 40 days in the desert.

During our 40 days, may we seek to see how God sends us out, like Jonah, to be a sign of Christ's limitless mercy.

i Effie Caldarola is a wife, mother and grandmother who received her master's degree in pastoral studies from Seattle University.

Embrace the Eucharistic dynamic: change the world



David Spesia

Jesus' entire existence was Eucharistic. If you and I are going to live as his disciples and respond wholeheartedly to the gift of his grace, our lives need to be marked by a Eucharistic dynamic.

Dynamic

This Eucharistic dynamic is as simple as it is profound. It emerges most clearly on the night before Our Lord enters into his passion, but it marks Jesus' whole life, death and resurrection. In a catechesis on the Road to Emmaus, Pope Francis observes that:

"[Jesus] repeats for the disciples the fundamental gesture of every Eucharist. He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it. Does not Jesus' entire history perhaps lie in this series of gestures? And is there not in every Eucharist, also the symbol of what the Church should be? Jesus takes us, blesses

us, 'breaks' our life - because there is no love without sacrifice - and offers it to others; he offers it to everyone" (General Audience, May 24, 2017).

Jesus received every day of his earthly life as a gift from the Father and raised it up in blessing; then he allowed himself to be broken open and given away for others. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus takes who and what is before him, blesses them as they are, breaks them open to a new experience of the kingdom of God which is at hand, and then offers the fruit of this encounter back to the Father in and through the Spirit.

“Let's watch Jesus deliver light and new life where it seems like there is only darkness”

Jesus wants us to enter into this dynamic and dramatic love story. He deeply desires that we offer him our very selves - our sometimes put-together but often messy selves, our broken and yet repaired, limping and yet loving selves. He

wants to take and bless all of it, and then break it open so that we might be able to make our own sacrificial offering for others - giving away what we have received.

This might all sound nice in the abstract, but here's a concrete way that it would change the world: Let's ask Jesus to take that one person or situation that poses the greatest challenge for us right now into his holy hands. Let's dare to let Jesus bless that person or situation (yes, that one).

Let's invite Jesus to break open our hearts to offer some prayer or some penance, some gesture or some grace, for that person or that situation. And then let's watch Jesus deliver light and new life where it seems like there is only darkness and even death.

Redemption

Jesus wants to change the world. Jesus wants to transform all those relationships and situations which cause us pain, and he waits for us to invite him into this redemptive work. Jesus wants us to know that we are infinitely loved, and he waits for us to embrace the fact that "there is no love without sacrifice".

Our Lord longs to empower us to embrace this Eucharistic dynamic through the bread which he gives - his flesh for the life of the world (Jn 6:51).

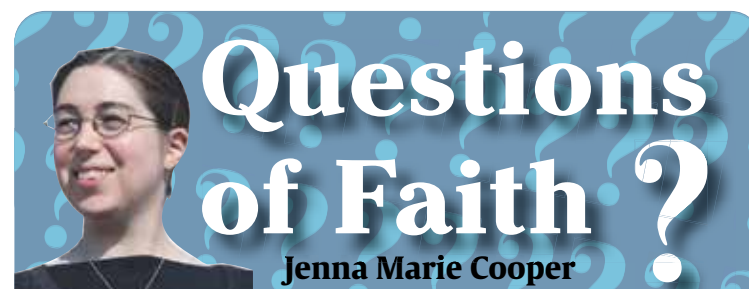
Jesus, loving in the Eucharist, come and love in us!

David Spesia is the executive director of the secretariat of evangelisation and catechesis for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“Our Lord longs to empower us to embrace this Eucharistic dynamic through the bread which he gives - his flesh for the life of the world”



Photo: OSV News



Questions of Faith ?

Jenna Marie Cooper



Does the Polish National Catholic Church have a valid celebration of the Eucharist?

Q: If our Orthodox brothers and sisters have a valid celebration of the Eucharist, can the same be said of the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC)? Given your logic about the Orthodox churches a few weeks ago, it would seem to me that the PNCC also has apostolic succession, given that the founder of the church, Bishop Hodur, was ordained in the Catholic Church. I attended a PNCC liturgy, and it is nearly identical to our liturgy.

A: Yes, the Polish National Catholic Church does have a valid - but illicit - celebration of the Eucharist. The validity of the Eucharist means that the sacrament 'works', 'illicit' means that it is nevertheless celebrated contrary to the Church's law.

For those who may be unfamiliar with this group, the Polish National Catholic Church was founded in the late 1800s in Scranton, Pennsylvania, by Polish immigrants who were dissatisfied with their experience of the Catholic Church in the states for a number of reasons, including the lack of Polish clergy and concerns about parish property ownership.

This group, led by Fr Franciszek Hodur, who had served as a priest in their parish, broke away from the established Catholic hierarchy. Fr Hodur eventually sought and received ordination as a bishop from another illicitly ordained bishop from a so-called 'Old Catholic' group. ('Old Catholics' separated themselves from the Church following the first Vatican ecumenical council.)

The Old Catholics did have bishops who were ordained via apostolic succession, meaning that the bishops were ordained by other bishops who were ordained in an unbroken chain going back to the time of the Twelve Apostles, who were given their sacramental authority by Jesus himself.

Thus, Bishop Hodur would have also been validly ordained a bishop, and was in turn able to validly ordain other men as priests. These priests therefore could validly consecrate the bread and wine at Mass, turning it into the body and blood of Christ.

However, while the validity of the Eucharist is obviously an important consideration, this is not the only factor we should take into account when discern-

ing whether to be involved with a particular group or to attend Mass at one of their chapels.

In our lives as Catholics, we are not only obligated and privileged to partake in the Eucharist, but we are also called to maintain communion with the body of Christ, which is the Church, which is united visibly under the teaching authority of the Holy Father in Rome.

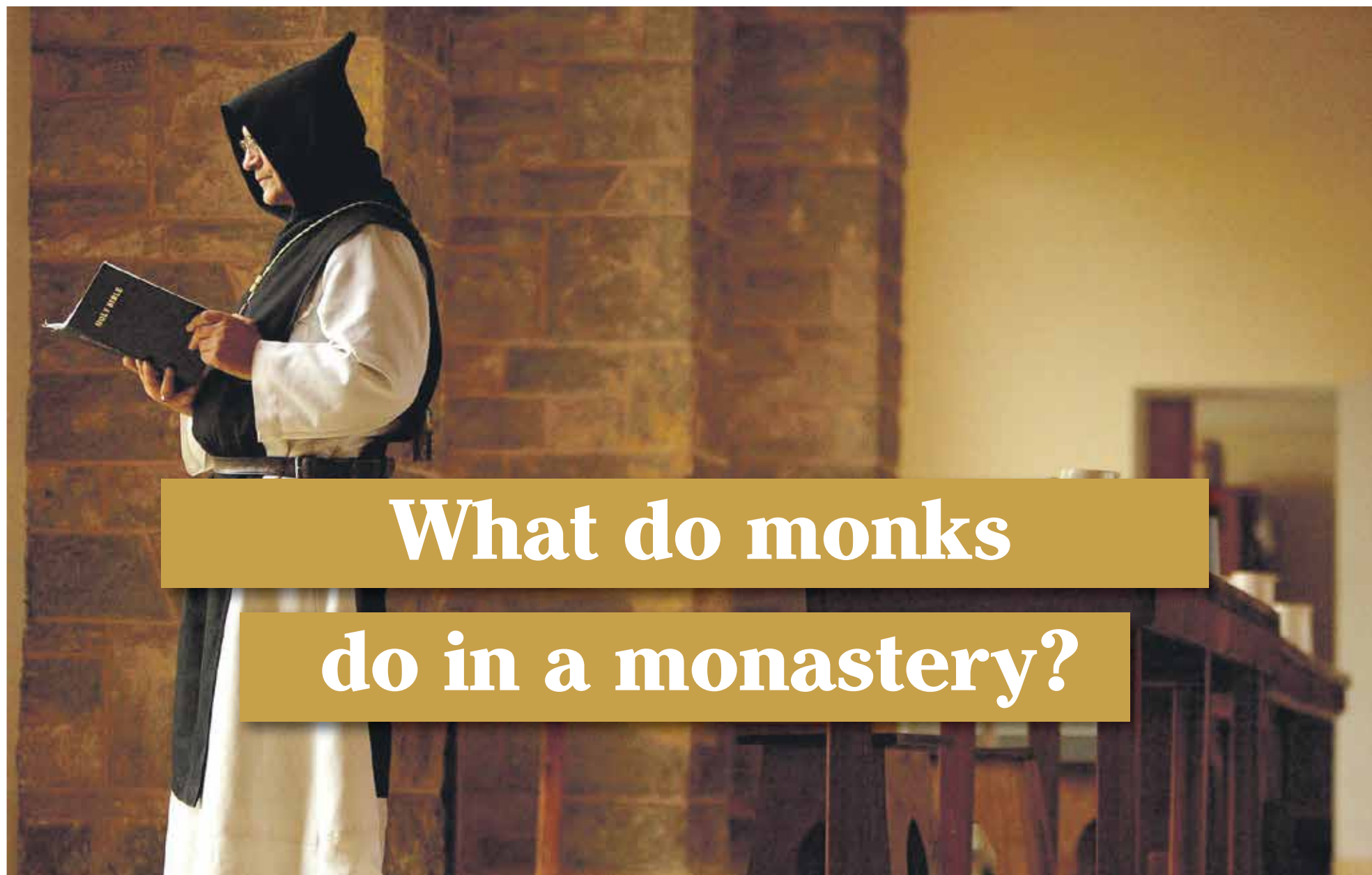
The bishops and clergy of the Polish National Catholic Church and other similar groups - and also, depending on the particular circumstances of their involvement and their level of understanding and intention, those lay Catholics who consider themselves members of such groups - are guilty of the canonical crime of schism, which Canon 751 of the Code of Canon Law defines as: "the withdrawal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or from communion with the members of the Church subject to him".

Schism is such a serious sin that in our current canon law any bishop who ordains another bishop without a mandate (i.e., a direct commissioning) from the Holy Father is automatically excommunicated, along with the new bishop he just ordained. This excommunication can only be lifted by the authority of the Pope himself (see Canon 1387).

It's also good to keep in mind that just because a group has a valid Eucharist, it doesn't follow that their priests can celebrate all the sacraments validly. For example, apart from a scenario involving immediate danger of death, with a few exceptions even a validly ordained priest needs a faculty from the legitimate bishop of the local diocese to absolve sins validly in the sacrament of penance (see Canon 966, Paragraph 1).

Since the Polish National Catholic Church has separated themselves from the 'mainstream' Catholic diocesan structure, their priests would not normally be granted this faculty by the proper authority.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.



What do monks do in a monastery?

I recently finished reading John Mark Comer's new book *Practicing the Way – Be with Jesus; Become like him; Do as he did*. By way of a recommendation, I offer a series of sound bytes from the book which I hope will give you a nice taste of both the language and substance of the book.

Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Sadly, this tragic misunderstanding tends to produce consumers of Jesus' merit rather than disciples of Jesus' way.

Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not. And, as Thomas Keating says, the chief act of the will is not effort but consent.

The great enemy of the spiritual life is hurry. We must eliminate hurry from our lives. Most of us are just too busy to live emotionally healthy and spiritually vibrant lives. (In an attempt to slow down, Comer twice quit his job. His only regret is that he didn't do it sooner.)

Salvation

Salvation is a communal experience. Jesus called disciples, not a disciple. Living in community is not easy but worth it. We can all tell horror stories of living in community when things go terribly wrong but when it goes right, it's a glimpse of eternity.

What do you want as the substance of your eulogy at your funeral?

Are you growing in love not just for your friends and family but also for your enemies? When you are hurt, wounded, and treated unjustly (as we all are), are you



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

finding yourself increasingly able to emotionally release the bitterness, to absorb the pain and not give back in kind? Can you pray for and even bless those who curse you?

“When the devil came to Adam and Eve in the garden, he didn't come with a stick, he came with an idea”

The genius of Jesus' ethical teaching was that you cannot keep the law by trying not to break the law. Don't weigh a possible behaviour with 'Is this sinful or not?' but rather with the question, 'does this move me toward Jesus or away?'

On healing: only one thing is required, open your pain to God. The beginning of salvation is to

honestly face your own weaknesses. The more we hide, the less we heal. Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced. Generally, we sin alone, but we heal together.

Struggle

Why do you struggle? Because Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones! When the devil came to Adam and Eve in the garden, he didn't come with a stick, he came with an idea. Pay attention to your jealousy. Push back on the forces that deform you.

Our generation is witnessing a cosmic shift in human history, the shift from the industrial revolution to the digital world. The digital age has us more connected than ever before. But sociologists tell us that we are the loneliest generation ever. Could the way forward be as simple

as meeting people in the place of pain? Regarding the use of electronic media: Choose your own constraints or they will be chosen for you.

Our great cultural illusion is that our growth can be: easy, fast, and controllable.

In fasting you are literally praying with your body.

You can't think your way to Christlikeness.

“You don't run a marathon by trying hard, you do it through training. Training, not trying, is the secret to becoming more like Jesus”

You cannot apprentice under Jesus and not have it interfere with your life. To follow Jesus requires that you leave something behind. For Peter it was fishing nets. What is it for you? Following Jesus will cost you, but not following him will cost you more, that is, it will cost you happiness and peace. Quoting missionary/martyr, Jim Eliot: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that

which he cannot lose.”

Most people think they will grow to be more like Jesus through trying hard rather than through training hard when the exact opposite is true. You don't run a marathon by trying hard, you do it through training.

Training, not trying, is the secret to becoming more like Jesus. What do monks do in a monastery? They fall and get up again, fall and get up again.

There are four levels to prayer: Talking to God, talking with God, listening to God, being with God.

If you want more of God, give him away.

We cannot die on every cross, nor are we expected to.

Quoting Isaac the Syrian: “Speech is the organ of the present world. Silence is the mystery of the world to come.”

His nine rules of life for practicing the Way:

1. Practice Sabbath in a culture of hurry and exhaustion.
2. Practice solitude in a culture of anxiety and noise.
3. Practice prayer in a culture of distraction and escapism.
4. Practice community in a culture of individuality and superficiality.
5. Practice scripture in a culture of ideological infection and compromise.
6. Practice fasting in a culture of indulgence.
7. Practice generosity in a culture of consumerism.
8. Practice service in a culture of injustice and division.
9. Practice hospitality in a culture of hostility.

But this series of sound bytes is no substitute for reading the book!

“Quoting missionary/martyr, Jim Eliot: ‘He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose’”

Obedience always trumps treason



A woman prays with a rosary at a stone cross during a pilgrimage to the holy well of St. Brigid in Liscannor, Ireland, February 2017. Photo: OSV News/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion
Is 50:4-7
Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24
Phil 2:6-11
Mk 14:1-15:47

The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



The sacred events of Holy Week beg the question: Why did Jesus, the Son of God, have to suffer a cruel, unjust death on a cross? Was Jesus' suffering the only means by which humanity could be reconciled to friendship with God?

Jesus was obedient

to the point of death, even death on a cross. With these words, St Paul focuses on the ultimate reason that Jesus embraced his passion and crucifixion. Obedience to the will of God that opened the way for an outpouring of divine love on the world led Jesus to his suffering and death on the cross.

“Take this cup away from me but not what I will but what you will”

Obedience was the foundation of Jesus' life. In Jesus' obedience we come to understand who God really is and who we

“God's love and mercy is the final word that speaks louder than every small or great human infidelity and betrayal”

really are, made in the image of God who loves us to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Betrayal

In the Gospel account of the Lord's passion, we follow in the footsteps of the way of the cross. Soon after Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples, he arrives in Gethsemane to pray. During a time of deep, anguished prayer, Jesus speaks to his heavenly Father with words of obedient love: “take this cup away from me but not what I will but what you will”. Obedience to the will of God becomes the fullest

expression of divine love.

After Jesus expressed his obedience to God, the startling event of his betrayal follows. Judas arrives in Gethsemane with a crowd armed with swords and clubs. With a traitorous kiss, Judas betrays Jesus into the hands of those who seek to kill him in exchange for silver. Betrayal takes centre stage in the final encounter of Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus' obedience and Judas' betrayal present opposite poles of the divine-human relationship. For Jesus' obedience reveals the fullness of divine love, while Judas' betrayal reveals the

corrupting depths of humanity's sinfulness and self-love. Human sinfulness, weakness and pride are forms of betrayal as humanity turns away from friendship with God to lesser things or self-love.

“Thanks be to God that betrayal is not the final word on the human condition”

Thanks be to God that betrayal is not the final word on the human condition.

God's love and mercy is the final word that speaks louder than every small or great human infidelity and betrayal. This is the good news of these holy days we prepare to enter.

This Holy Week may we find in Jesus' passion, death and resurrection the victory of God's love turned to us personally as we bring our weaknesses and betrayals before the redeeming cross of Jesus Christ, and say with gratitude and faith, “speak to me, Lord”.

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

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



A blurry mix of devotion, ritual and superstition

It is customary around this time of year for us to go all Celtic, with a focus on all things Irish, or even Oirish!

I wouldn't accuse the new series *Ag Triall ar an Tobar* (TG4, Thursday) of that latter charge. I felt it was an enjoyable exploration of Irish holy wells with the personable Manchán Magan. It seems there are over 3,000 holy wells in Ireland, more than in any other country in the world. Many of them are associated with saints, even if some have pre-Christian origins.

In this first episode we visited holy wells on Achill, in Connemara and in Co. Waterford, where Magan spoke with locals who were well informed about the heritage of their areas.

At each well he collected a sample of the water – in case he needs it, he said. I think he will seek scientific analysis to determine the chemical makeup of the water – perhaps this will suggest a natural reason for healing properties.

The presenter comes at the subject with an open curiosity and respect for his subject matter. The approach is not devotional or evangelical – more from a social history perspective.

At one stage he said that these are “places that connect us to the land, to antiquity and to our ancestors”. He might well have added



Presenter Manchán Magan pauses at a holy well TG4's *Ag Triall ar an Tobar*. Photo: TG4.

‘to God’. Contributors did reference prayer and there was footage from the past of pilgrimages to the wells.

It was a blurry mix of genuine spirituality, devotion, ritual and superstition – eg having to walk around a well seven times with seven stones in your hand. I suppose it just shows the crucial role ritual plays in our lives, giving meaning to the mundane.

There was also an Irish flavour on *Songs of Praise* (BBC One, Sunday), when the show paid one of its visits to Northern Ireland, so central in the history of St Patrick.

We met Noel Hughes

who was fascinated by the story of the saint and tried to walk in his shoes along Pilgrim paths with Patrick's *Confessio* as his spiritual guide. We learned that St Patrick is also the patron saint of Nigeria and heard from Fr Cajetan Apeh, a Nigerian priest currently serving as a missionary in Ireland. He could relate to St Patrick as he too had been kidnapped in his home country.

Fr Eugene O'Neill introduced us to a relic of St Patrick – reputed to be a bone segment from the saint, encased in a most unusual reliquary shaped like an arm. The latter is kept in a

museum, the former in St Patrick's Church in Belfast, and once a year they are reunited for the feast day.

Parishioner Eilish McAuley, a regular attendee at this event, spoke of how she can feel the presence of God on these occasions. Fr O'Neill explained how relics were not central to the Christian faith, but in a religion of incarnation they were a physical and intimate contact with the divine and with holy personages.

The music was predictable enough, with church congregations singing the beautiful but familiar ‘Christ Be Beside Me’ and ‘Be Thou My Vision’, along with the

PICK OF THE WEEK

IN AINM AN ATHAR

BBC Two NI Sunday March 24, 10pm

With Mass attendance declining, and a shortage of priests, Kevin Magee examines if the Catholic Church in Ireland can weather one of the most challenging storms in its history.

GIVE UP YER AUL SINS

RTE One Good Friday March 29, 2.55pm

The Death of Jesus: Children retell, in their own imaginative way, the story of when Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate and his crucifixion on the hill of Calvary.

PILGRIMAGE: THE ROAD THROUGH NORTH WALES

BBC Two Good Friday March 29, 9pm

Seven celebrities of differing faiths and beliefs experience an emotional journey on a pilgrimage in north Wales, a route linked by churches dedicated to early Celtic Christian saints (part one of three).

more interestingly unfamiliar ‘Immortal Invisible’ and ‘I Bind unto Myself’. In a seaside setting the Celtic Woman group sang a rather over produced and glossy version of ‘Amazing Grace’.

If you were missing the spiritual uplift of ‘Dóchas Linn Naomh Pádraig’ and ‘Hail Glorious St Patrick’, you would have got it on the *Mass for St Patrick's Day* (RTÉ One) which came from the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Oranmore, Co. Galway. The fine singing was provided by the United Voices of Oranmore and Maree Co. Galway under the musical direction of Anne-Marie McGreevy.

On a sad note – on Tuesday morning of last week

the news broke of the death of journalist Charlie Bird. Touching tributes poured in all day. Daniel O'Donnell spoke from Australia of his shock and grief on *Today with Claire Byrne* (RTÉ Radio 1).

The presenter remembered his giving rosary beads to Charlie when they met on *The Late Late Show*. Charlie said he kept this gift with him always and wanted it in his hands when he died. He said Charlie told incredible stories during his years as a journalist but there was no story like the one he told in his last few years – that of his struggle with Moter Neurone disease, his own story.



Aubrey Malone

Film

Child death fractures friendship in absorbing drama

The devil – and angel – is in the detail. Great movies come from moments. *Mother's Instinct* (15A) is threaded together like a labyrinthine tapestry of ominous vignettes where every slight movement or gesture becomes charged with an opaque threat. It's a horror film that plays out like a symphony. Stanley Kubrick would have known all about that.

When the 8-year-old Max dies in a tragic fall from the balcony of his house in suburban America in the 60s, the fatality causes ripples that extend through the lives not only of his parents Celine (Anne Hathaway) and Damien (Anders Danielson Lie) but also their close friends

Alice (Jessica Chastain), her husband Simon (Josh Charles) and their son Theo, who was friends with Max.

Based on a Barbara Abel novel, it's a reworking of a 2018 film directed exquisitely by Benoit Delhomme. He crafts a four-hander exploring these ripples in a manner that's so clever you can't help thinking of Alfred Hitchcock. The film is a slow-burning fuse where ostensibly negligible events acquire ponderous reverberations.

Celine is understandably inconsolable in the aftermath of Max's death. She had a difficult birth with him and was informed after it that she wouldn't be able to conceive again.

A series of events, not



Anne Hathaway and Jessica Chastain in *Mothers' Instinct* (2024).

least the bonding of Celine with Theo, follow the tragedy. We get to a point where Alice, who saw Max about to fall and blames herself for not doing more to prevent him doing so, begins to suspect

that Celine also blames her, and indeed wants to exact a kind of revenge on her. Is this paranoia on her part or the eponymous ‘mother's instinct’?

Delhomme keeps us

guessing until the last reel, building the tension to an almost unbearable degree as he heaps pregnant scenarios upon one another like building blocks leading to a catastrophic finale.

Who's going to crack first – Alice or Celine? We find ourselves trying to ‘read’ their every expression for a sign of what it might tell us about them or what it might presage. Delhomme gives us a plethora of sumptuous close-ups that act like leisurely counterpoints to the thunderous climax.

The four leads in this incredible film give phenomenal performances. I hadn't seen Charles or Danielson Lie before. I hope I do so again soon. We all know how bril-

liant Chastain and Hathaway can be. Here they excel even by their own formidable standards, making something out of nothing over and over again as they agonise about the traumatic events that shattered their friendship.

Don't miss this film. It's gorgeously shot as well as acted, calibrating the decline of a seemingly perfect quartet in leafy suburbia in a manner that puts one in mind of everyone from Norman Rockwell to John Updike.

Everything is perfect – the houses, the dresses, the parties – until a snake enters the Garden of Eden, causing everyone's life to spiral out of control in a manner that's a masterpiece of understatement.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



Religion in modern Ireland: a patchwork of faiths old and new?

The Oxford Handbook of Religion in Modern Ireland, ed.

Gladys Ganiel and Andrew R. Holmes (Oxford University Press, £130.00 / €153.00)

Rev. Robert Marshall

The opening paragraph of the editors' introduction notes that "Ireland's centuries old reputation as a land of saints and scholars (and sinners) is well established".

They continue that two decades into the 21st Century the island's association with religious devotion is increasingly considered something of an historic artefact – a kind expression for something reputedly consigned to the past.

The editors assert their handbook – which runs to some 622 pages – complicates this assumption about religion north and south as the volume explores the significance of religion in society, politics and everyday life of modern Ireland.

Handbook

Before going further, we should be clear on what this book is. It is a handbook rather than a history: an introduction and guide to how religion in a series of issues has shaped our island over 220 years.

This exploration is the work of 36 contributors in 32 essays exploring the period from the Act of Union to date. These thought-provoking essays, each easily read as stand-alone pieces, are grouped in three parts. The milestones which separate the parts are Partition and 1968 – that year of protest across western society. In Ireland it marked the outbreak of the Troubles.

The contributors' interests and viewpoints are naturally reflected in their contributions. They come from different backgrounds. Predominantly they are associated with Irish universities, but also from Great Britain and New England. As one would expect historians are involved, but so too are theologians, lawyers, educationalists, sociologists, and social anthropologists.

The first part consists of a broad survey of 'Religion, Politics and Society in the aftermath of the Union'.

The shortest section, it

covers the rise of Catholic Nationalism, Emancipation and the accompanying long process of disestablishing the Church of Ireland amidst the Victorian religious revivals. The differing religious revivals led to so much of our built environment.

Two essays demonstrate how revival and development were part of wider movements outside Ireland and that the century must be understood in its own terms rather than in a historian's mirror.

The second part covers the "aftermath of partition". The main Christian Churches were not fractured by partition and have retained their unity since 1922, albeit with tensions in the case of the Protestant denominations, now reflecting different political aspirations north and south. Some of the essays are parallels as contributors explore similar issues in the two jurisdictions.

“Paisley's political values informed by his fundamentalism, transcended traditional Orange Order ideology”

Strangely at a time when the Catholic Church is engaged in a worldwide synodical process, the experience of the Protestant Churches is not examined. This is unfortunate, as the symbolism of the General Convention of the Church of Ireland in 1870 was one of the spurs to the establishment of Isaac Butt's Home Rule Movement. Whether they meet as Synods, Assemblies, or Conventions, these modern ecclesiastical bodies confront religious issues at an All Ireland level.

The third part deals with "contemporary times". This is the longest section covering the period dominated by Ian Paisley's popularity as a politician, greatly exceeding that of his Free Presbyterian Church.

“This book is enhanced by discussion of Orthodox Christian communities, the various Islamic traditions and the traditions of Eastern spirituality”



Sunrise over the ruins of medieval Clonmacnoise.

One essay argues that Paisley's political values informed by his fundamentalism, transcended traditional Orange Order ideology.

This made sense to many within a formerly secure Unionist community. While his Free Presbyterian Church remains as a small denomination, in secular terms Paisley "routed the Ulster Unionist Party after the Good Friday Agreement in an electoral response which owed nothing to religion... and everything to a rational response to British Government Policy".

Another essayist argues that the idea of the Orange Order always getting its own way obscured how "the order mainly worked to conceal fissures [between] Protestants of different kinds."

There is much in this handbook which will make uncomfortable reading. That discomfort will not be con-

finely to any one tradition or jurisdiction. A Northern Ireland civil servant who was a Catholic provides an example. "[Catholics] feared their Protestant neighbours with the anger of a people who had been subdued by force and left without any means of retaliating against their persecutors."

Responsibility

Similarly, drawing on the reports of the Ryan (Ireland) and Hart (Northern Ireland) enquiries, this essay perceptively considers the abuse crises. The author comments that the mechanisms for dealing with the past have proved largely unsatisfactory to victims and survivors.

He raises deep questions concerning the responsibility of the Churches and the two states, commenting that the former may have the theological resources to more mean-

ingfully address their past.

This book is enhanced by discussion of Orthodox Christian communities, the various Islamic traditions and the traditions of Eastern spirituality. It remains to be seen, however, if they will have the influence of the Jewish Community in Ireland during the long 20th Century?

“Those born outside, or who have moved to Ireland often have different religious focuses or perceptions”

A warning is sounded, those born outside, or who have moved to Ireland often have different religious focuses or perceptions (not necessarily all Christian), or little interest in religion.

A new paradigm is developing as a political doctrine in the face of secularism, immigration and the emergence of new religious affiliations, not least 'no religion'. In this reconfigured public square religion continues to play a

complex part.

In conclusion, it is impossible to do justice in a short review to the refreshing, thought provoking breadth of analysis in this imaginative and worthwhile handbook. It is a reference source for anyone seeking a broad perspective concealed behind the simplified assumptions of received wisdom.

The overall picture is of a patchwork quilt of many religious and political colours now covering the entire island. The patches, to which many could be added, reflect controversies, some solved, not necessarily in both jurisdictions, to form part of the status quo.

The handbook is an essential reference source which will assist everyone seeking to understand the complexities of religion across modern Ireland, particularly those studying religion in society whether in pursuit of a vocation or as a phenomenon.

i The Rev. Robert Marshall is Registrar of the Church of Ireland United Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough and writes in a personal capacity.

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.

Irish born and at large in the wider world



Taoiseach Enda Kenny unveils the tombstone memorial to Louis Brennan on Kensal Green Cemetery.

The Irish: Tales of Emigration, Exile and Imperialism, by Turtle Bunbury (Thames and Hudson, £12.99 / €15.20)

Peter Costello

This I suspect is the sort of book that many families have been looking for, a compact, highly readable and adroitly written narrative of the Irish abroad.

Author Bunbury makes vivid use of all the human parts of a 2,000-year-old history that academic historians resolutely leave out in favour of a more austere impersonal narrative.

It is altogether a great read and will answer many questions. However, I have a little difficulty not so much with what he puts in, as with what he chooses to leave out.

Audience

He has in mind two audiences (or perhaps his publishers have) British and North American readers. So there is a concentration on North America and the spread of the British Empire, as in India.

But running my eye down the list of names I exclaimed "What, no Ned Kelly!" No indeed: that premature Australian republican patriot is absent, as are people from Australia and New Zealand.

“So here are many notable Irish from the past, the sort of people so often excluded from general histories.”

In part this is made up for by an excellent chapter on inventor Louis Brennan, nicknamed 'the Wizard of Oz', though his inventions a wire-controlled torpedo and a monorail were great accomplishments made back home in Europe.

Another blank is Latin America. 'Chile's Irish Patriot's' are discussed, but not the far more important Irish settlement in Argentina, where from the 1880s on many middle-class Irish were involved, not so much in farming, as in the development of railways and urban trams, or in editing newspapers. (I speak about members of my own family).

“It is worth emphasising that the Irish were not always victims”

Also his brief presentations of complex historical facts at times go astray. He seems to suggest that Ireland was a source of slaves for Europe, when it was the other way around, Europe was a source of slaves for Ireland.

The wealth of ancient Ireland was not based on slavery, however popular that theme may be today, but on its connection since early prehistory with the Atlantic coast-wise trade.

Ireland had copper from Kerry and gold from Wicklow, and exported these; the copper, together with tin from Celtic Cornwall, being essential for making bronze in the Bronze Age.

The real wealth of Early Christian Ireland is evidenced in the superb metal work of the Derrynaflan hoard. So it is worth emphasising that the Irish were not always victims, were not always a poor downtrodden race.

Notable

But these comments are not to deny the great value of this book for its intended audiences, and to suggest that for a great many readers in Ireland these 42 chapters, ranging from St Columbanus to Vietnam hero Patrick 'Bob' Gallagher (a decorated hero, he was killed in March 1967) will be most informative.

Also, in this important election year in the USA a section is devoted to Ireland in the White House, including the Presbyterian patriots that founded the state to Al Smith, the Kennedy brothers, and Joe Biden.

So here are many notable Irish from the past, the sort of people so often excluded from general histories. Turtle Bunbury shows them in all their teeming, energetic vitality in a fascinating range of roles.

In the past many of the Irish-born put their great talents to work for other nations. Now they can at last stay at home and build the sort of nation their ancestors could not even have conceived of. This is a book which will be warmly welcomed.

The rise to respectability of New York's Irish Catholics



President Kennedy speaking to the Dáil and Seanad presents the Irish people with the banner of the Fighting 69th.

The Unstoppable Irish: Songs and Integration of the New York Irish, 1783–1883, by Dan Milner (University of Notre Dame Press, \$30 / €28.00 / £24.00)

Felix M. Larkin

Every March since 1991 has been designated Irish-American Heritage Month in the United States. President Biden has continued the practice again this year, and a proclamation to this effect was signed by him on February 29th.

America has not always been so sympathetic towards Irish immigrants and their descendants, as this book illustrates. Written by Dan Milner, an American historian and musicologist, it was first issued in 2019. A paperback edition has been published for a wider readership.

Integration

The theme of the book is "the changing fortunes of New York's Irish Catholics" between 1783 – the date of the Treaty of Paris, ending the American Revolution – and 1883 when the first term of New York's first Irish Catholic mayor, WR Grace, comes to an end.

As explained in the introduction, it is the story of how the Catholic Irish gradually integrated within the city, rather than assimilated. In order to assimilate, they would have had to adopt the mainstream Anglo-Protestant culture.

Instead, as Milner writes, "the same virile strain within the Hibernian psyche that had overwhelmingly rejected the abandonment of Gaelic Catholic being in Ireland continued to hold forth

“The commitment of the New York Irish to the cause of the Union in the Civil War waned after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863”

in Manhattan”.

The Irish in New York in the years of this study suffered “discrimination, intimidation and physical hostility”. They are overwhelmingly poor, lower working class and living in tenements.

“Their real significance lies perhaps in their place in the evolution of the folk music tradition”

Their story is told in this book not just as a conventional historical narrative – based on documentary evidence – but also through the medium of popular songs. Milner claims that such songs “are important because they articulate issues and voice points of view from a street-level perspective” and so they “make the act of integration vivid and its steps more discernible”.

They add colour – though, in fairness, little substance – to the story of the Irish in New York. Their real significance lies perhaps in their place in the evolution of the folk music tradition.

A milestone in the progress of the New York Irish towards integration – what Milner calls their “road to respectability” – was the

participation of the 69th New York State Militia in the American Civil War. A regiment of the Irish Brigade under Thomas Francis Meagher, it comprised almost entirely Irish Catholics.

The valour of the 'Fighting 69th' in the early battles of the Civil War is the stuff of legend, but their casualties were enormous. Many readers will recall that President Kennedy referred to their feats in his address to the Dáil and Seanad in June 1963, and he presented one of the regiment's battle flags from the Civil War to the people of Ireland.

Slavery

Curiously, Milner argues that the commitment of the New York Irish to the cause of the Union in the Civil War waned after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. They were prepared to fight for the Union, but not for the abolition of slavery.

They feared that freed slaves would compete for their unskilled jobs and that wage levels would fall as freed slaves joined the workforce. There are, however, obvious parallels between the struggles for integration of the Irish and Black communities in the United States, including that both communities are rich in popular songs.

As quoted by Milner, *Harper's Weekly* noted in 1889 that “they are the two races who care the most for song and dance”.

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Leisure time

Crossword Gordius 655

- Across**
- 1 Something nice you might say about someone (10)
6 Salt Lake City is in this American State (4)
10 A little extra in your pay-packet (5)
11 Television drama such as 'Fair City' (4,5)
12 The first sacrament one receives (7)
15 Bend (5)
17 Part of the vehicle upon which wheels spin (4)
18 Cereal crop (4)
19 Municipal tax (5)
21 Hillside fern (7)
23 Small change in the UK (5)
24 Presently, soon (4)
25 Travel on horseback (4)
26 River which flows through Rome (5)
28 They are often cited as examples of hibernants (7)
33 Aboriginal Australian throwing weapon (9)
34 Motored (5)
35 Whirlpool (4)
36 One who works with granite, for example (10)

1		2		3		4		5			6	7		8
										9				
10						11								
	12				13		14			15				
16							17							
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26		27					28	29		30				
						31								32
33										34				
35						36								

- Down**
- 1 Dice-shape (4)
2 Island in New York (9)
3 Franz, 'Hungarian Rhapsodies' composer (5)
4 Prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt (5)
5 Tidy (4)
7 Belonging to them (5)
8 Opportune, timely (6-4)
9 Anxiety (7)
13 Mr Novello, perhaps (4)
14 Walked in military fashion (7)
16 Of welcoming nature (10)
20 Determined not to give up (9)
21 Small fruit - you may pick some of them from hedgerows (7)
22 Large water jug (4)
27 Wide (5)
29 Musical instrument most associated with church music (5)
30 Female term of address (5)
31 In time gone by (4)
32 Blood vessel (4)

SOLUTIONS, MARCH 07
GORDIUS No. 654

Across
1 Acceptance 6 Itch 10 Panda 11 Overdraft 12 Summons 15 Awash 17 Town 18 Rail 19 Cases 21 Tremble 23 Manse 24 Sago 25 Roan 26 Taper 28 Athlete 33 Colmcille 34 Torch 35 Seat 36 Ex cathedra

Down
1 Asps 2 Confusion 3 Psalm 4 Acorn 5 Crew 7 Tiara 8 Hit the spot 9 Advance 13 Oder 14 Stamina 16 Drumsticks 20 Scattered 21 Terrace 22 Lash 27 Polka 29 Theta 30 Latch 31 Flex 32 Shia

Sudoku Corner

525

Easy

	7	2		1		6	3	
1			4		3			2
	6			2			4	
9			6		2			3
5			3		7			9
	9			7			5	
6			8		5			7
	3	5		4		8	2	

Hard

4		8	9		2			5
	2		6			8		7
6	5					9	2	
					1	6		4
		5	4		6	2		
3		6	2					
	3	4					8	6
5		1			8		3	
9			3		4	5		2

Last week's Easy 524

9	3	2	6	1	4	8	5	7
1	8	4	3	7	5	6	9	2
5	6	7	8	2	9	4	3	1
8	9	5	1	6	2	7	4	3
6	7	3	5	4	8	1	2	9
2	4	1	9	3	7	5	8	6
3	5	9	7	8	6	2	1	4
7	2	8	4	9	1	3	6	5
4	1	6	2	5	3	9	7	8

Last week's Hard 524

9	6	3	2	4	8	1	7	5
2	1	5	7	3	9	8	6	4
7	4	8	1	6	5	2	3	9
6	3	4	8	9	7	5	2	1
5	2	9	3	1	4	7	8	6
8	7	1	6	5	2	4	9	3
4	8	6	5	2	3	9	1	7
1	9	7	4	8	6	3	5	2
3	5	2	9	7	1	6	4	8

Notebook

Fr John Harris OP



We need to rediscover the beauty of our Faith

Now that all the partying

is over and the 'Paddy's' day celebrations are litter, maybe we as Catholics can look more soberly at our patron saint and see what he has to say to us in our present situation. In this the second decade of the 21st Century of the Christian era modern secular Ireland seems to be saying to the Catholic Church if not to all Catholics: "Go away, we want no more of your religion here." That is the new reality, one the Church in Ireland may have played no small part in bringing about.

The Ireland that Patrick came to as a hostage and then again as a missionary was also a hostile environment. He came to these shores initially unwillingly as a slave. This was a place he didn't want to be just as maybe for us Catholics it may not be a place where we want to be either. But this is our place and our time, just as Patrick had to inhabit his place and time.

Legacy

How does Patrick's legacy help us to be Church in this our time? Maybe it's Patrick the slave on Slieve Mish for six years that should be the focus of our attention at this period. It was



during this period he recounts in his *Confessions* that he discovered God. Without these years of prayer and penance Patrick would never have been able to be the courageous missionary that he was to become. Here in the many vigils when he had no one to speak to only God he discovered the beauty of his faith, a faith he had grown up in but one which he hadn't taken seriously.

At the present time for us in Ireland maybe we need this time

on our own Slieve Mish when we need to rediscover the beauty of our Catholic faith and begin to take it seriously. The age of the cultural Catholic is now gone in Ireland as it was for Patrick on Slieve Mish. He could no longer be part of a comfortable believing community as he had been in his family. But in the cold and isolation of the Co. Antrim mountains he had to go deep within himself and there remembering the words of the

Gospel learn how to pray and to trust in God.

On Slieve Mish Patrick came to know the true God as he had not known him back home. Before Patrick could preach to the Irish he had to take Christ to himself and learn to be with Christ in the silence of his own heart. There in the silence he learned to love Christ as he had never done before. Now maybe is the time for us to dig deep into our Christian faith and learn to meet Christ personally as we have never done before.

Aspect

On Slieve Mish for six years of prayer Patrick came to realise that Christ wasn't just an added aspect of his life, something for an hour on a Sunday. Patrick discovered that Christ was his everything, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me..."

When the Irish asked Patrick to come once more among them it was for him to bring Christ. The Christ that he had discovered personally, the Christ believed in by the Church, the Christ truly present in the sacraments. Patrick returned to the Irish to begin his mission as a believer in the faith he

had in a strange way discovered in the wilderness of his captive country.

If we, the true successors of St Patrick in the faith, are to be true to his legacy, it is not about re-establishing a powerful organised Church of the 19th and 20th Centuries, rather we must be as convinced as was Patrick that it is Christ who is the one who we preach. Now is our time to love Christ more deeply, as did Patrick.

Who am I a neighbour to

Maybe we need to ask now, who am I called to be a neighbour to. We can a times wait for the neighbour to come to us but maybe we need to be more proactive. The emphasis, no longer on the other, but on myself.



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