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Chaotic Govt policy should not diminish Christian welcome to migrants

Chai Brady and Theo McDonald

Ireland's immigration issue could turn into a good news story if managed correctly, according to the Chair of Christian Charity *Tiglin* Aubrey McCarthy.

The residential and rehabilitation centre is currently offering services for refugees and migrants at The Light House on Pearse Street, close to where migrants had pitched hundreds of tents which were cleared last week.

"Where it goes wrong is when they come to towns and are put in towns by government, when the infrastructure is not there, and the communication is not there," he says.

"If your mother or father is short of a doctor because there's too many people in the town, that's what we need to look at."

Eugene Quinn, National Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Ireland said: "The reality is they have twice removed those tented encampments and now there's a third one building up on the Grand Canal. We need to find a durable solution, which is not only the right and moral thing to do, but actually is the only sound thing you can do to avoid other risks that come up by not responding in that way."

He added: "I think at the moment the Government is struggling, it's making statements and not following through on the ground on implementation."

"There are challenges for our own people who are in difficult situations, difficult housing situations, so there needs to be a choreography in responding to those needs. We have record numbers of homeless people in Ireland so there's huge needs on both sides and I suppose the fear is that becomes a polarising issue."

"The Christian response would be to try and find a way that we would respond to the needs of all people, Irish and international people, migrants and asylum seekers but also local people who are homeless and in difficult

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Little angels pray at St Eugene's



Some of the P4 Class with Fr Roland Colhoun having received 'Second Holy Communion' the day after First Communion, following Sunday Mass, May 5 at St Eugene's Church, Glenock, Newtownstewart, Co. Tyrone.

**THE CHURCH IS
EVER-GROWING**

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MARCHING FOR LIFE

Speaking boldly for a
cultural change

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**SCOTTISH CATHOLICS SEE
A PROTESTANT SAVIOUR**

Ian Dunn
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Chaotic Govt policy should not diminish Christian welcome to migrants

» **Continued from Page 1**
circumstances, that we would find a response to their needs and we would hear that call."

Mr Quinn said that the Christian call is clear and that "the Pope in the European context speaks about the cry of the migrant and is concerned about what he calls the 'globalisation of indifference' but also he is very concerned about the polarisation as well, that maybe we're starting to see in Ireland but has been seen in other countries where migrants have been set up as a scapegoat for all the ills in society and a kind of a lightning rod for other concerns and that has led to a lot of hostility. The Christian response is hospitality rather than hostility".

Mr McCarthy said: "It's 20 years ago today since Poland came into the EU. 120,000 Polish people have come to Ireland. They have become part and parcel of what we do in Ireland. I employ many of them myself, and they have become an absolutely essential part of the community."

"I think down the line, we look back at this and say, okay, maybe we handled that wrong, but by putting the proper infrastructure in place, the proper integration to the NGOs and the government departments, I think we look back and say okay, I can see how this was part of becoming modern Ireland."

Fr Niall Leahy of Gardiner Street Parish in Dublin said

that migrants bring a real generosity: "One thing I have noticed recently is that we have migrants coming here volunteering. It's one thing I've noticed with migrants coming to Ireland, they will come up and say 'Father, how can I help?' And literally willing to clean the church, to do whatever. We've had migrants here helping, living in temporary accommodation, coming here and singing in our choir, helping in our garden, sweep up the place after a Mass, so there's been a real generosity there and that is genuine. They bring energy, they bring generosity and a real fervent faith."

Councillor John Kingsley Onwumeh, Fianna Fáil councillor for Mulhuddart-Blanchardstown and member of the African Catholic Chaplaincy in Dublin says compassion should be at the heart of the response. "Compassion should be at the heart of this whole thing and making sure that there is an effective way of dealing with it. Ultimately it needs to be handled properly and we need to make sure that there are no knock on effects that will lead to other people picking the short end of the stick."

"We need to be looking at the overall picture – the housing situation and the ability of the system to cope with these new developments. The key thing is ensuring that there are no unpleasant consequences as a result of this."

Veritas in discussions with potential buyers

Staff reporter

Veritas Communications is in discussions with a number of potential buyers and part-buyers since it announced its wind-down by the end of the year. The announcement by the company which is owned by the Catholic bishops was made in February and it is believed that since then the company has been inundated with expressions of interest from around

the world but is in talks with a number of serious buyers who may take on all or part of the business.

One of the parties is believed to be a major religious publisher based in Ireland but Veritas management are remaining tight lipped. However those close to the discussions say there is a business as usual approach in the company amid a cautious optimism for its future survival.

Meanwhile in Letterkenny there is a

petition to save the Letterkenny Veritas shop.

The petition is believed to have garnered hundreds of signatures and is also being run online and locals have said there is a huge degree of local support for the shop and its staff, widely regarded as one of the more successful of the Veritas branches. Veritas management were contacted for comment but no response was received.

Crowning the Queen Of May



A group of parishioners from the Holy Rosary Parish, Ennis Road, Co. Limerick, gather at the Grotto of Our Lady, Fernbank, to say the rosary during the month of May.

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Multimedia Journalists: Ruadhán Jones, ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie
Brandon Scott, brandon@irishcatholic.ie
Renata Steffens, renata@irishcatholic.ie

Newsroom: news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

Books Editor: Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

Advertising: advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874027

Accounts: accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874095

Magnificat: magnificat@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874024

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Soc Dems candidate's deselection dubbed 'act of antisemitism'

Renata Steffens

The Social Democrats' decision to deselect a Jewish candidate for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown has been described as "an unprecedented act of

antisemitism" by the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland (JRC).

Orli Degani, a Jewish woman selected by the Social Democrats in July 2023 as the candidate for the local electoral area was deselected last

month.

Maurice Cohen, Chairperson of the JRC said the party's actions are "an unprecedented act of antisemitism which totally undermines the credibility of the party's espoused values".

In a statement on May 1, Ms Degani said it was an honour to be chosen as it meant she could work with causes she "believe passionately in, from the rights of disabled citizens of this country, to tackling the prolonged homelessness and poverty crises on our streets".

Ms Degani said that her deselection happened "for reasons which are an affront to the values of equality and inclusivity" she came to know since she immigrated to Ireland with her family.

She claimed the reason for her deselection was raising the growing concern of the local Jewish community of feeling "unwelcome and unsafe" in Ireland.

Mr Cohen said that the Social Democrats espouse the values of equality, democracy and progress, and that would represent the embrace of inclusivity.

"We would have understood them to embrace internal party discussion on issues of sensitivity and public concern and not result in an issue so raised resulting in the exclusion from the party's local elections ticket of a selected election candidate," said Mr Cohen.

Ms Degani, who will continue as an independent, said: "The issues I have championed on the campaign trail have not gone away, and I remain committed to being a voice for the people of Dún Laoghaire."

"It saddens me greatly that taking a stand about local people's right to be included and welcomed in our community has spiralled to me being deselected by the Social Democrats," said Ms Degani.

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Anthony Hopkins to play 'Messiah' composer in new film



Actor Anthony Hopkins gets a Handle on a complete piece of work.

Staff reporter

Anthony Hopkins who played Pope Benedict XVI in the Oscars nominee *The Two Popes* (2019), will play famous Baroque composer George Frideric Handel in a new biopic. The story will follow Handel during the summer of 1741 when he wrote the choral work *Messiah*.

The oratorio was premiered in Dublin on April 13, 1742, and includes the famous 'Hallelujah' chorus, which is today the most performed worldwide. Hopkins

is also a talented musician and has a close relationship with classical music.

The actor worked previously with Embankment Films on the production of *The Father*, when he won his second Oscar.

Named *The King of Covent Garden*, the film will portray the composer on the 24 days he took to write the famous piece. "Hopkins and Handel are maestros of their art and together they create a joyous and uplifting cinematic event," said the founder of Embankment Films, Tim Haslam.

Film director Andrew Levitas said: "The storytelling is hinged upon an unlikely pair, who meet each other at their lowest points, and together create a magnificent never-heard-before 'sound for the people'."

The King of Covent Garden is expected to be released in autumn 2025. Embankment Films considers the film "a powerfully majestic celebration of genius breaking all the rules to create an anthem inspiring the popular imagination of global audiences".

'Inevitable' more religious orders to hand over parish admin says Jesuit

Chai Brady

Unless there's an "overnight surge in vocations" more religious orders will relinquish parishes to dioceses, according to the PP of Gardiner Street Parish in Dublin which will soon become part of the Pro Cathedral parish.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Fr Niall Leahy SJ said the Jesuits' decision regarding Gardiner Street Parish is part of a plan to focus their resources on the fundamentals of their charism.

Asked whether he believes more religious will make a similar decision, Fr Leahy said: "They will have to, it comes down to numbers. They don't have the manpower. It's going to happen, it's inevitable."

"Unless there's literally an overnight surge of vocations to religious congregations it's going to happen. I think this is a rude awakening, we've known for so long that this was going to happen

and yet when it happens it comes as a shock to everyone. It always happens suddenly, so I get it when people are shocked or saddened. But I think in our case at least we can still say we're still here, we're not closing our church. Some churches will just have to close and that's really going to be a shock," he said.

The Church of St Francis Xavier will no longer be a parish church from August 1 but will continue to be run by the Jesuits with parishioners most likely not noticing much of a difference.

Currently there are only five Jesuits under the age of 50 in Ireland.

● **Correction:** In the April 25 edition of *The Irish Catholic* the headline 'Jesuits hand back Gardiner Street Church to Dublin diocese' was incorrect and should have read 'Jesuits hand back Gardiner Street Parish to Dublin diocese'.

See page 11

Irish Capuchins organise donations for flood victims in south Brazil

Renata Steffens

Brazilian Capuchin friars in Ireland are organising a collection at Mass which will be donated to the diocese most affected by the floods in southern Brazil, saying "Christ's love is not only words, but action".

The destruction has affected more than 800,000 people in 104 cities since April 29, and many parts of the state is still under water. The Church, government and community are coming together to assist those who lost everything.

Fr Flávio Corrêa de Lima, priest at the Santo Inácio de Loyola parish in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, has seen his church, church hall and parochial house completely submerged underwater.

When the floods started, Fr Lima received more than 200 people coming from a flooded area into the church hall, but less than 24 hours later everyone had to be reallocated as the water started to reach the church.

Fr Lima said: "It is an apocalyptic scene. There are not many good things to take from such suffering, but if something it is the community coming together to help each other. Those whose houses were not flooded and those who lost everything working together to minimise the overall suffering."

Ireland is home to thousands of Brazilian Catholics who regularly participate in Church events, and actively volunteer at parishes.

Fr Severino Pinheiro da Silva Neto OFM Cap., who celebrates Mass in Portuguese

every Sunday at St Mary of the Angels, Capuchin Friary, Dublin, said that some of the Brazilian Catholics in Ireland have families in the affected area and the church is providing emotional support.

"Prayers express the hope, but something needs to be done to express the Church's charity," he said. Fr Neto is organising a collection during the next Mass on May 12 to be donated to the Diocese of Novo Hamburgo, Brazil.

Fr Neto said the victims' families in Ireland are scared, but comforted by the love of God. "Now it is time for the Church to act and help," he said.

"Christ's love is not only words, but action. He loved us with actions and we should do the same."

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This is one of the two last projects I am working on as I wind down my mission in China. We are short about 50,000 euro to complete this Dictionary.

Fr Eamonn O'Brien ssc



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Recent court ruling welcomed but attacks against RE in North will likely continue

Staff reporter

Speaking in response to the verdict made by Northern Ireland's Court of Appeal last week, overruling a previous judgment by the High Court which characterised religious education in the North as not being sufficiently "objective" or "critical", Aontú Deputy Leader, teacher and advocate for Faith-based education Gemma Brolly said she welcomed the news but there are still battles ahead for Catholic schools.

"It's very welcome news because

we're living in a society where we're constantly coming under attack for our Faith," she said. "You can be whatever you want to be but you cannot have Faith."

Ms Brolly recalled the rhetoric and caricatures which marked the debates around the Integrated Education Bill that was passed in 2022 – a bill that placed a duty on the Department of Education to prepare, publish and maintain a strategy for the encouragement, facilitation, support for and provision of integrated education – and said that

those who wanted their children to attend a Faith-based school were led to believe that religious education was the cause of all of the North's problems.

"During the Integrated Education Bill debates a few years ago, people were made to believe that by taking Faith out of schools and having integrated education, this would solve all of the problems in the North and that this is where all problems in the North originated almost.

"We have nothing against integrated education but we believe in

a pluralist society where if there's a parent who wishes – and many do in the area I teach in – for their child to be raised with Faith then that is their right."

Ms Brolly commented on what she believes is an unduly negative perception of Catholic education coming from those who advocate for a more integrated model and the lack of balance in the discourse is leading to the positives going unnoticed.

"What I never hear is how Catholic schools have been welcoming

children from all backgrounds for so long", she said. "We have some of the highest standards pastorally and academically across the world. Yet we constantly hear in the North that it's almost as if we're standing children in the corner and driving Faith down their throats and it's the complete opposite.

"As much as it is very welcome news, unfortunately I don't think it will end or that it will be the last we'll experience of discrimination or attacks because of our Faith," she said.

Commitment to Catholic ethos among younger teachers in decline, conference told

Staff reporter

Addressing the annual meeting of the Joint Managerial Body, the umbrella organisation for faith-based secondary schools in Ireland, Professor Eamonn Conway of the University of Notre Dame Australia said that three out of

ten teachers under 29 years of age report not "witnessing" to Catholic ethos at all or doing so only to a limited extent.

There is an urgent need for a co-ordinated "whole sector approach across primary, secondary and tertiary levels to re-position Catholic education confidently here",

according to Fr Conway. "A surprising number of teachers are still open to an intelligent articulation of the Catholic faith but need to be provided with attractive opportunities both for personal spiritual formation as well as continuing professional development."

Professor Conway was responding to a recent report by the ESRI that identified schools as workplaces where staff are increasingly experiencing work overload and

burnout, and which, according to Professor Conway, is evidence that the technocratic paradigm which Pope Francis warns against is taking hold even in Catholic schools.

This, he said, "devalues human beings, sees only technocratic solutions to every difficulty and must be resisted above all in Catholic educational contexts."

Pilgrims in the 'Camino de Santiago' to remember beloved Irish priest



Fr Tony Coote.

Renata Steffans

To celebrate five years since the passing of Fr Tony Coote, a walk of remembrance is being organised for the 'Camino de Santiago' in Northern Spain. Dates and details are still to be announced.

Fr Coote died on August 28, 2019 due to motor neurone disease. To support research and awareness, the priest took part in a fundrais-

ing walk for The Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association (IMNDA) in July 2018.

The walk called 'Walk while you can' started in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal all the way to Ballydehob, Co. Cork, covering a distance of over 550 kilometres. Fr Coote did the walk in a wheelchair with the assistance of the pilgrims.

That walk still happens every year raising funds and awareness to the cause. "I suppose this is part of Tony's

enduring legacy," said Kieran Coote, Fr Coote's brother.

Mr Coote is organising the second pilgrimage in the Camino for this year. Last year, celebrating the fifth anniversary of the first 'Walk while you can', the walk in the Camino raised €10,000, said the priest's brother.

The walk will start in Triacastela and end in Santiago de Compostela, and happen over the course of six days covering 140km.

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Don't altogether dismiss 'clericalism'

There is a contradiction at the heart of much Catholic discourse over the future of the Church – and faith. Or so it seems to me.

The experience of synodality indicates that we must face a future in which there is more involvement by the laity, and less "clericalism". There is much criticism of times and traditions when priests dominated the control and direction of the parish.

Involvement

It looks as though the laity will have to step up to the plate, anyway, and become more involved in parish activity, because the numbers of vocations have been falling for some



Mary Kenny

time. In Leixlip, for example, two priests minister to a parish of 20,000 Catholics – that is work overload by anyone's measure.

“For many of us, life is already quite complicated without taking on more community duties”

And yet, do ordinary Catholics really want to be involved in the running of a parish? Some perhaps do,

but many, I think, don't. We support the parish when called upon, but for many of us, life is already quite complicated without taking on more community duties. (I have a neighbour who spends much of his free time just driving friends and family to hospital appointments.)

There's another point about "clericalism": in any organisation or endeavour, someone has to take charge; someone has to be the leader.

Leadership

Yes, I've heard complaints

about some parish priests being "control freaks", and seeking to supervise every possible decision within the parish. I've seen it happen too: a dedicated parish priest (now dead) nonetheless closed down devotions and a musical Mass that was on offer at a local convent chapel, although many people liked it and found it convenient. As far as I could see, he made that decision just because he wanted to assert his control.

“Some of these bosses were indeed 'control freaks', but that also formed part of their skill-set”

Such things happen. And certainly, there should be more consultation about decisions like this.

But the other side of the coin is leadership. In my long experience of working in secular situations, the

“The experience of synodality indicates that we must face a future in which there is more involvement by the laity, and less 'clericalism'”

most effective organisations were those headed by a decisive leader, who had authority. Some of these bosses were indeed "control freaks", but that also formed part of their skill-set.

Power

The French have a phrase about the complexity of character: a person may have "les qualités de ses défauts". That is, character faults may be part of character strengths: a prudent person may also be stingy, a brave person may also be reckless, and a person of leadership may also be bossy.

If we want to have

priests at all, then there has to be some "clericalism". Power can be abused, but there must be some power to generate leadership and authority.

“The fortunes of an organisation so often depend on its leadership”

The outcome of the synodality journey is still a work in progress. But bear in mind that in the secular world, business companies pay millions to hire an effective CEO. Because the fortunes of an organisation so often depend on its leadership.

In the land of saints and sinners



Actress Kerry Condon in the new release, 'In the Land of Saints and Sinners'. Photo: La Biennale Di Venezia.

Fighting Irish nationalists have been portrayed in a number of ways in movies, from heroic to misguided. But seldom has a woman dedicated to 'freeing Ireland' been as fierce as Kerry Condon in the new Liam Neeson movie *In the Land of Saints and Sinners*.

The brilliant actress – Oscar nominated for *The Banshees of Inisherin* – plays IRA commander Doireann McCann as a terrifying and ruthless termagant in

this film, (constructed like an old-style western, full of shoot-outs, and with little sign of the rule of law.) I've never witnessed such a portrayal of female heartless violence in the cause of Irish freedom – even if (spoiler alert), her last scene occurs in the sanctuary of a church.

But, as so often with Irish movies, it's the scenery which steals nearly every frame. Co Donegal has never looked so beguilingly radiant.

Students have every right to protest, but the students of Trinity College Dublin did not have the entitlement to shut down access to the Book of Kells, by barring the portal to this treasured and unique artefact of Irish Christian civilisation. The president of the student union, László Molnárfi, thought it a brilliant gesture to highlight the war in Gaza.

What it highlighted was that there's public resentment that TCD charges €19 entrance fee to view this exquisite document, which should surely be accessible to all.

It also highlighted the question as to whether the Book of Kells should repose

at Trinity College at all. Its proper place is in the National Museum in Kildare Street, along with other splendid archeological treasures from the Celtic Golden Age.


The Gaza-Israeli war is being reported by brave journalists, several of whom have died or been injured while doing their job. These men and women have risked their lives to genuinely highlight the course of a distressing conflict.

Students – who are rich enough to pay €20,000 a year in fees – should not bar access to our heritage; and poorer people should not be excluded by this entrance levy.


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Thousands told to vote for pro-life politicians at Dublin March For Life

Theo McDonald

Thousands gathered in Dublin City Centre on Monday for the annual March For Life where speakers urged attendees to vote for pro-life candidates in the upcoming elections.

The march began on St Stephen's Green and proceeded along outside Dáil Éireann on Molesworth Street.

Journalist Wendy Grace led chants throughout the march and

introduced speakers.

With local and European elections on the horizon, Eilís Mulroy of the Pro Life Campaign stated the group would "be publishing a comprehensive voter guide, featuring a list of all election candidates and where they stand on right-to-life issues".

Ms Mulroy highlighted how the number of abortions that took place last year may exceed 10,000 which, she said, represents a "massive

increase in abortions year on year since the new law took effect".

More than 8,100 abortions took place in 2022 under the provisions of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018.

Speakers included Deputy Carol Nolan TD who mentioned that "future generations" would "overturn" abortion in Ireland.

Ms Nolan, who represents Laois-Offaly, also mentioned how the recent so-called Family and Care ref-

erendum was the start of the public beginning "to ask questions about what our leaders in Government are presiding over".

Another speaker Dr Calum Miller stated that "abortion is not healthcare, pregnancy is not a disease and motherhood is not a disease".

Dr Miller, who is a practising UK medical doctor and teaches philosophy at the University of Oxford, specialising in abortion policy, also mentioned the health implications

of abortion: "Abortion has many physical risks and it causes higher rates of mental health problems like anxiety or suicide."

Regarding Barrister Marie O'Shea's call to remove the mandatory three-day wait period before an abortion is carried out Dr Miller said: "Erode conscience, and you remove the healthcare professionals with the most integrity, who are willing to do what is right rather than what is convenient."



A group of young people getting ready at St Stephen's Green on Monday for the start of the march.



Gabriela Lopes, Rachel Mahon, Christine Mako from Dublin and Ciaran Haden and Faith Haden from Donegal at the March for Life on Monday in Dublin.



Maria Herne, Zara Treacy and Faith Masterson from Holy Family Mission in Waterford at the March for Life.

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Lottie Conroy, Isabelle Kehoe, Louise Kehoe and Ezra Conroy at the March for Life on Monday in Dublin.



Pippa Byrne from Kildare and Esther McCrystal, Derry, at the March for Life.



Ronan O'Reilly, Jonathan (7) and Rachel Grimes (7).



Eleanor Freeney and Ines Lonergan enjoying an ice cream at the March for Life.



Eilís Mulroy, Lois McLatchie Miller, Calum Miller, Anna Buday (with Esther Buday), Wendy Grace, Carol Nolan TD and Peter Sands.



Brother Mulugeta, Eadaoin Hayes (3) from Meath, Sarah Hayes, Meath, and Mary Sheehan from Offaly.



Anna Buday with her daughter Esther Buday at the March for Life on Monday in Dublin. Photos: John McElroy



Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin and Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh at the March for Life.



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The remarkable untold story of the growth of the Church



Despite the challenges facing Christians in many countries, we need to keep hope alive writes **Michael Kelly**

Some of you will be aware that last week it was announced that I will soon take up a new appointment as Director of Public Affairs for the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland. It is a wonderful charity that works with some of the most vulnerable communities in the world supporting them both materially and spiritually. Part of the wider ACN International family, the Irish office works to express concrete solidarity with Catholics in difficulty in every part of the world.

In my new role, I hope to do what I love most: tell these stories. Readers of this newspaper will be acutely aware that solidarity with Christians in parts of the world where the Church is suffering has been a key theme of my journalism. It is something that I have returned to time and again in columns.

Perhaps because of our history as a Church that endured suffering and persecution, Irish Catholics are naturally empathetic to their brothers and sisters in troubled parts of the world.

Connection

Through our missionaries, our parishes and communities have been connected with the Church in developing countries.

It is both a rich legacy and a noble cause – and one that recent Popes have been keen to emphasise: that the Church

is a 'family of families' that stretches the globe.

While sometimes in Ireland, we're too used to reading stories that point to decline in the Church – fewer vocations, not as many people attending Mass – the rapid growth that the Catholic Church has experienced in the 20th Century has been phenomenal to witness. And it is a story that we need to repeat over and over again, particularly to a form of secular thinking that would consider Catholicism a thing of the past.

In 1950, there were 437 million Catholics in the world, a figure that grew to 650 million by 1970, and to around 1.4 billion today.

Think about it like this: the number of Catholics in the world has more than doubled since 1970, as the population of the world has increased. This growth has also been marked by the fact that we are increasingly a global Church, with much of the growth happening in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

“It is about helping people find an encounter with the God who loves them and coming to know, love and serve God”

Not that any of this is about market share. The Church is about evangelisation, not proselytism – it is about helping people find an encounter with the God who loves them and coming to know, love and serve God.

This is the sort of work that Aid to the Church in Need has been doing from the dark days after World War II when much of continental Europe lay in ruins. ACN understood then – and understands now – that people have both material and spiritual needs and sets out to try to nurture these dual realities.

It works to support and promote the Faith, especially in countries where Christians are suffering persecution or discrimination.

Each year Aid to the Church in Need makes grants to help



Pope Francis participates in a memorial prayer on March 7, 2021, at Hosh al-Bieaa, the church square, in Mosul, Iraq, for the victims of the ISIS war. Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic churches were all destroyed in the war between 2014 and 2017. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

fund over 5,000 projects, primarily in the following areas:

- provision of catechetical material and books.
- broadcasting the Faith.
- help with church buildings.
- support for the training of seminarians.
- grants for the formation of religious and catechists.
- subsidies for priests through grants and Mass stipends.
- emergency aid to refugees.
- provision of transport for those involved in the Church's mission.

Persecution

Sadly, the issue of the persecution of Christians is one that has come more to the fore in recent decades. Pope Francis has used the term 'ecumenism of blood' to describe the situation facing some Christian communities in troubled parts of the world.

At an ecumenical evening prayer ceremony in Rome in 2015, the Holy Father said: "In this moment of prayer for unity, I would also like to remember our martyrs, the martyrs of today."

"They are witnesses to Jesus Christ, and they are persecuted and killed because they are Christians. Those who persecute them make no distinction between the religious communities to which they belong. They are Christians and for that they are persecuted. This, brothers and sisters, is the ecumenism of blood," he said.

So Red Wednesday – held in November every year – has become an important feature in the ACN calendar to remember and call attention to the plight of Christians who are persecuted for their Faith.

One of the other areas where ACN is particularly engaged is around the area of religious freedom. Published biennially, the *Religious Freedom in the World Report* informs on incidents

gathered over the period, revealing where the individual can freely choose and publicly express his or her faith without being discriminated, oppressed, or persecuted.

“As the Book of Proverbs reminds us, it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness”

The 'red' category, which denotes the existence of persecution, includes 28 countries which are home to 4.03 billion people who altogether make up more than half (51.6%) of the world's population. The 'orange' category, which denotes the existence of discrimination, includes 33 countries, home to almost 853 million people.

The challenges facing the Church throughout the world

are immense. But, as the Book of Proverbs reminds us, it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Support

I hope in some small way with ACN Ireland to be able to help shine that light in difficult circumstances and with the many friends, supporters and volunteers of ACN Ireland and in communion of mind and heart with ACN International try to make a difference.

I will be grateful for your prayers, dear readers, and please don't hesitate to get in contact with me if you have any suggestions, ideas or would like your parish to become involved in the vital work of ACN Ireland.

Michael Kelly is incoming Director of Public Affairs for Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland and can be contacted via info@acnireland.org calling +353 1 837 7516 or writing to Saint Joseph's, 151 St Mobhi Road, Glasnevin, Dublin, D09 HC82.

“Because of our history as a Church that endured suffering and persecution, Irish Catholics are naturally empathetic to their brothers and sisters”

Stand up for our mothers with your vote



Maria Steen

Motherhood – the relationship between a woman and her child – is one of the most basic realities of human existence. It transcends cultures, time, and geography. Artists in the western tradition have returned time and again to that most familiar and iconic image: that of the Madonna and Child. So accustomed are we to this subject matter that, as Europe sheds her Christian history and traditions, we risk overlooking its significance. Even in today's increasingly impoverished culture, this image continues to be regarded by many as transcendent and eternal.

What does that mean? Well, just this: that it transcends culture – and even religion. It is eternal because it transcends time. It is at the heart of the experience of every human being on this earth: we all were born into the world through a woman. We grew – both literally and figuratively – near to a woman's heart. Her heart's beating lulled us to sleep. Her voice soothed us. Her body was our home. This is a universal and fundamental human experience.

Reality

The image of a mother and her child, filled with warmth, intimacy and beauty, expresses the reality that any human society that wishes to flourish must give a special place of respect to mothers and babies. When that relationship of mother and child is not protected, everything falls apart.

The bond between mother and infant is the cornerstone of all human life, the foundation of civilisation. When we fail to protect this sacred relationship, we undermine society itself.

The recent failed referendum was a blatant attack on motherhood, on womanhood, and as a consequence on the family and ultimately society. It was an attempt by a government – and in fact, the whole political establishment – to erase the image of mother and child from the Constitution. It



was an attempt to downplay the unseen and unsung work women do in their homes out of love for their families by cynically referring to Article 41.2 as outdated, regressive, as “an embarrassment”. They said that it was about playing “constitutional catch-up”, of bringing the wording of the Constitution out of the dark ages and into the 21st century, using language like “equality” and “care”. They said this was about symbolism. On the last point, they were right; it was about symbolism.

“Mothers are more than mere functionaries, they are not simply another kind of carer. What they do and who are they are is of a different order”

In what was the largest No vote in the history of the State, the people sent a very clear message to the government – and to the unholy trinity of politicians, journalists, and members of the academy who together tried to foist these amendments on us: No thank you! Voters understood well the symbolism of erasing the words “woman”, “mother”, and “home” from the article of the Constitution entitled “The Family” right before Mother's Day. It was a grotesque proposal.

The experience of mothering and being mothered is so primal, so fundamental, that it goes to the core of every human heart. Motherhood is

difficult, it is hard, it involves risks and sacrifices, but it is also beautiful, fulfilling, and fills your heart with a love so powerful that sometimes it hurts. Mothers are more than mere functionaries, they are not simply another kind of carer. What they do and who are they are is of a different order. As a mother, you are irreplaceable to your child.

Being told you're sexist and regressive and bigoted if you don't do as you're told will take the establishment so far, but when people are told that they're all those things because they love their mothers and think motherhood is distinctive and special – that's where people seem to have drawn the line.

Futile

When the referenda were initially announced, faced with overwhelming consensus among the political class, to many it seemed futile to oppose what was being presented to us as the inexorable march of progress. But sometimes there are things that demand to be said. Not only that, but the democratic process requires an opposition. Classical republican government depends on the clash of ideas, the safety valve of mixed government, where an engaged people is afforded the opportunity to hear both sides of an issue in an atmosphere where civic virtue is valued, and differing voices and opinions are listened to with respect.

This is not the Ireland we live in. Nor has it been for many years.

The story of the 21st Century in Ireland has been one of oppressive consensus around the precepts of liberal orthodoxy. In the recent referenda, every major political party,

every major newspaper, broadcaster or organ of public opinion, and almost the entirety of the academy united not merely in support of the government-

backed progressive agenda, but in denying that good faith opposition was even possible; any dissent from the righteous liberal dogma was characterised as nothing more than a cover for latent bigotry of one kind or another.

“It is an opportunity to insist that our politicians respect the emotional, social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual work of women and mothers”

However, what this referendum highlighted was that the people might just about be fed up of this narrative. The threat of name-calling may no longer have quite the same effect. The privacy of the ballot box

allowed people to say what they, believing themselves isolated or out of step, might have feared to say out loud. The result, however, lets them know that they're not the only ones – that many others think the same way.

Elections

The forthcoming elections are an opportunity to stand up for our mothers and daughters: to reject the mindset that allows women to be degenerated, neutralised, and erased, and the sacrifices that women make be diminished. It is an opportunity to insist that our politicians respect the emotional, social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual work of women and mothers, and ensure that mothers should not be driven by economic necessity out of their homes and away from their children. In voting No, that's what the people demanded; and from those in power, nothing less will do.

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EU Migration Pact calls for a major statement from the bishops on asylum-seeking



David Quinn

Immigration and asylum-seeking continue to be two of the biggest issues now that concern Irish voters. They are not far below housing. At the last election in early 2020 they barely featured at all.

But perhaps that is because in 2019, the relatively small number of 4,781 people claimed asylum here, compared with over 13,000 last year, and at the present rate of arrival, 20,000 will do so this year.

In 2020, Covid-19 hit the world, and that essentially brought a halt to international movement.

Ukraine

But then in 2022 two things happened, the first one very good and the second very bad.

The good thing was the end of the pandemic, and the very bad thing was the Russian invasion of Ukraine. That triggered a huge movement of Ukrainians into Europe, including Ireland.

In fact, proportionately speaking, Ireland took in more Ukrainians (about 100,000 at the last count) than any other country in Western Europe. In absolute terms, more arrived here than into France or Spain with their much bigger populations.

“Those numbers have kept increasing, and the State has struggled mightily to find places for them”

The Government had to scramble to find accommodation in a country where housing is already in short supply. The religious orders, to their credit, helped the State a lot in finding places. Then, on top of that, would-be asylum-seekers began to move towards Europe again, some of them genuinely fleeing war and persecution,

and some of them not.

Those numbers have kept increasing, and the State has struggled mightily to find places for them. It's interesting to contemplate whether this would be much of an issue if the Ukrainian war had not happened, 100,000 Ukrainians had not arrived, and it was much easier to find accommodation for asylum-seekers.

Migrants

Last year, more than 1 million asylum-seekers reached Europe, on top of those already here, on top of the millions of Ukrainians now living in Europe. Just as a very high number of Ukrainians fled to neighbouring Poland, so have many of these asylum-seekers landed in Greece and Italy, which are just across the Mediterranean. Many are now arriving in the Spanish-owned Canary Islands, just off the North African coast.

A great many asylum-seekers pass through North Africa on their way here, often through war-torn and unstable Libya. They pay large sums to people-traffickers to get them to Europe. The routes are often dangerous, and so are the traffickers.



Migrants arrive by boat on the Italian island of Lampedusa September 15, 2023. Photo: OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters

One reason it is mainly young men who arrive in Europe claiming asylum is because they are at somewhat less risk on the journey than women and children and the elderly.

The movement of so many people is creating political turmoil across Europe, including here in Ireland. Many voters are worried about the impact so many new arrivals will have on their societies, especially when some are coming from countries with values that can clash with our own and might not easily integrate.

Strains are being put on infrastructure such as housing, as we can see in Ireland. There is no way to wish this issue away. Political tensions will only grow unless the situation becomes more manageable. This is simply a fact.

“The basic intention is to better coordinate the EU response to the growing numbers seeking asylum”

Into this relative vacuum, under voter pressure, has stepped the new EU Migration Pact. The basic intention is to better coordinate the EU response to the growing numbers seeking asylum. Each country, including Ireland, must decide whether or not to sign up to it.

The Government intend to, but Sinn Féin is opposed on the grounds that it will mean Ireland having to give up too much of its freedom to decide its own asylum policy.

In any event, the pact has several main aims. One is to better police the outer borders of the EU and to try and minimise the number seeking entry illegally because many would-be asylum seekers are really economic migrants in disguise.

A second is to ensure better information sharing between

member-states so that if someone has arrived in France, moves on to Ireland, and France has information on that person, we will receive it, enabling us to make a quicker decision about whether they can remain or should go.

A third aim is to make it much easier to return asylum-seekers to the first country in which they claimed asylum. This would mean that if someone claimed asylum in France, and then tried to claim asylum here, they would be returned to France for processing.

A third, and this is the one that most concerns some critics, is the burden-sharing mechanism. Countries like Italy and Greece have a disproportionately high number of asylum-seekers arriving on their shores, given their proximity to North Africa and the Middle East.

Balancing

The countries of Eastern Europe, generally speaking, have almost no asylum-seekers, and Italy and Greece think this in unfair. They believe countries like Poland and Hungary should accept more asylum-seekers or else pay member-states like Italy and Greece for the cost of accommodating and processing some of them.

Even under its new pro-EU government, Poland does not want to play along because it would be so unpopular with domestic voters.

Last year, Ireland took in around 1pc of new asylum seekers in the EU and that is about our share of the overall EU population. But the Migration Pact also takes into account a country's wealth, and because we are richer than most other EU countries, we would either have to take in more asylum-seekers than 1pc of the total, or else pay countries like Italy €20,000 per person per annum to keep them there. Who knows what this figure would amount to year-on-year?

There are critics who think the Migration Pact doesn't go

far enough, and others who think it goes too far. One of the latter is the commission of the EU bishops in Brussels which is called Comece.

Comece says there is a “real risk that with this Pact on Migration and Asylum the EU will fail to protect the right to asylum and other human rights”.

“The bishops, as a collective group, cannot be silent on one of the major issues of the day, one that touches on so many aspects of Church teaching”

My own view is that the Pact has the balance about right. Countries must do what they can to look after genuine asylum-seekers, while also protecting themselves against illegal migration and balancing the needs of immigrants against the needs of the local population. I believe this is what best serves the common good.

But what is essential is that the Pact is properly debated. The bishops can play their part in guiding Catholics, but whatever guidance they offer must consider the common good in the round. They cannot concentrate on one side of the equation only, namely immigration and asylum-seeking, and they should not listen to the Church version of NGOs alone, but also to ordinary, Mass-going Catholics.

We do hear occasional statements from individual bishops about the issue. But the time has come for a full-scale pastoral letter, and the Migration Pact debate might be the perfect moment to produce such a document. One way or the other, the bishops, as a collective group, cannot be silent on one of the major issues of the day, one that touches on so many aspects of Church teaching.

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Youth focus at heart of Jesuits decision to end parish admin



Chai Brady

The Jesuits' decision for Gardiner Street Parish to become part of the neighbouring Pro-Cathedral Parish is part of a determined plan to focus the resources they have to better minister to the community, especially young people, according to the parish priest.

The Church of St Francis Xavier will no longer be a parish church from August 1 but will continue to be run by the Jesuits with parishioners most likely not noticing much of a difference. It is believed more religious orders will go down this path as resources stretch and there are fewer and fewer vocations.

Currently there are only five Jesuits under the age of 50 in Ireland and there is only about one new vocation every two years.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Fr Niall Leahy SJ said there is already close collaboration between churches in the area, known as the Matt Talbot Partnership, which includes the parishes of the Pro-Cathedral, Sean McDermott Street, and Berkley Road.

Efforts

These types of relationships are "the way things are going – more and more collaboration and partnership with surrounding parishes. That's the only way we can continue with fewer resources," Fr Leahy explained.

"So we're reaching that stage as a province where you have to decide what do we really want to invest in going forward. We want to serve the most urgent needs of the community," he said.

"The greatest need here at present, in the Irish Church in general I would say, is not getting children as far as Confirmation – that conveyor belt. I'm not saying it's perfect, but it's working. On the

whole children are getting as far as confirmation but then you never see them again, or we rarely see them, or there's very little meaningful engagement with their faith after that. There's very little meaningful ministry to them as well. It's not all their fault, but the Church in the whole... ministry seems to be oriented toward getting them as far as confirmation," Fr Leahy said.

"We need to put energy and resources into pastoral care of teenagers and people as they move into adulthood and nourishing their faith, because it is not just teenagers who are walking away, it's older people as well. So that's a priority for us."

“We’ve developed a nice kind of young adult scene here on Sunday evenings”

As outlined in the Jesuits statement last month, the Church of St Francis Xavier will still provide public Masses, confessions, devotions, funerals, and the Blessed John Sullivan Masses. However, baptisms, confirmations, first communions, weddings, and the Easter Vigil will take place in St Mary's Pro Cathedral as the parish church, freeing the Jesuits from these duties.

Fr Leahy said: "We've developed a nice kind of young adult scene here on Sunday evenings. We've got a young adult Mass and with good music, preaching relevant for a younger congregation, tea and coffee afterwards. It's our second full year of doing it and we want to build on it but you need the energy and resources to do it."

He added they are also developing their offering of Ignatian spirituality courses, adult faith formation programmes and have

been investing more in the local primary school, which became a Jesuit school in the last five years and is part of the Jesuit Education Trust. It was previously a Sisters of Charity school.

Community

The total population within the parish boundaries of Gardiner Street Parish has risen but that Catholic population continues to decrease and is now a "significant minority" at around 2,500 people, according to Fr Leahy. The area is very multi-ethnic and that is reflected in the congregation that arrives to the church.

"The fact that they come here means that they feel welcomed and that's really important – Latin American, Indian, African. I think it's something that happens quite naturally in Catholic parishes, in urban centres. One thing we have to be mindful of is having readers and people who are prominent in the church, that it's not just the old Irish brigade that are the readers and ministers of the Eucharist. We could probably do a bit better on that, just having that diversity represented up there."

"One thing I have noticed recently, is that we have migrants come here volunteering. It's one thing I've noticed with migrants coming to Ireland, they will come up and say 'Father, how can I help?' And literally willing to clean the church, to do whatever. We've had migrants here helping, living in temporary accommodation, coming here and singing in our choir, helping in our garden, sweep up the place after a Mass, so there's been a real generosity there and that is genuine. They bring energy, they bring generosity and a real fervent faith. There are people who have suffered, there is a depth there. I don't know everyone's situation but I know there are definitely people who come here who have applied for international protection and they have made the connection through JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service).

While the changes in Gardiner Street Parish are expected to be small, there



Fr Niall Leahy SJ

are still changes needed, such as St Francis Xavier's having representation on the Pro Cathedral's new Parish Pastoral Council to be established in September 2024.

The church will continue to offer space to local community groups in an area that has suffered from the effects of homelessness, poverty, and drug addiction. There are three St Vincent de Paul groups as well as 12-step recovery groups: Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon, and Gamblers Anonymous.

“They donate to St Vincent de Paul to help alleviate those suffering from poverty in the area”

The church has experienced several break-ins in the last few years which has led to increased security measures being adopted, with Fr Leahy saying "you just have to have a kind of mentality of security consciousness, you're always a little bit on like orange alert".

"Everybody in the area is suffering from all the anti-social behaviour that goes along with drug-use and all of that, why shouldn't we? We're part of this place and we're going to suffer too, other people are getting broken in to as well."

He added they donate to St

Vincent de Paul to help alleviate those suffering from poverty in the area.

Vocation

Asked whether he believes more religious will make a similar decision regarding moving away from managing parishes and focusing more on their charism, Fr Leahy said: "They will have to, it comes down to numbers. They don't have the manpower. It's going to happen, it's inevitable."

"Unless there's literally an

overnight surge of vocations to religious congregations it's going to happen. I think this is a rude awakening, we've known for so long that this was going to happen and yet when it happens it comes as a shock to everyone. It always happens suddenly, so I get it when people are shocked or saddened. But I think in our case at least we can still say we're still here, we're not closing our church. Some churches will just have to close and that's really going to be a shock," he said.



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“There are only five Jesuits under the age of 50 in Ireland and there is only about one new vocation every two years”

Thousands of Dublin pilgrims flock to Knock

Ruadhán Jones

On a sunny afternoon on Saturday, April 27, over 3,000 people from across Dublin diocese joined Archbishop Dermot Farrell for the annual pilgrimage to Knock shrine.

Pilgrims took part in workshops on the meaning of the Our Father, preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Praying with Mary and Nurturing and Supporting the Ministry of Lay People.

In his homily, Archbishop Farrell said: “The apparition of Mary, St Joseph, and St John here in Knock is a call to acknowledge and welcome the silent faithful presence of the Lord in the very depth of our lives. It is in the centre of our lives, in our hearts—that our God reaches out to us and reaches out to us in mystery. What happened here is a profound outreach to God’s people.”

The Archbishop added: “the apparition is to

the 15 witnesses together. It is not to one, and then another. This is a profound witness to the reality of the Church: the Lord and his mysteries are revealed to us together. To come on pilgrimage to Knock together, is to proclaim that the Church happens when we are together”.

A large group from Leixlip and Confey parishes came as they celebrate Confey’s 40th anniversary, while others parishes attending including Balally parish, Dundrum, Balinteer and Meadowbrook; the Swords, River Valley, Brackenstown and Donabate Partnership; Ringsend, Maynooth, Donnybrook Partnership; Parish of the Travelling People, South City Partnership; Our Lady of Victories and the Glasnevin Partnership, Donaghmede and Ayrfield, St Benedict’s and St Monica’s Edenmore; Malahide and Portmarnock Partnership, Balbriggan, Finglas, Lucan, Cherry Orchard, Sandyford, Cabra and Navan Road, the Greystones partnership, Rathmines, Rowlagh and St Martin de Porres. Many other parishes were also represented.



Bus loads of pilgrims arrive in Knock for the annual Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage on Saturday, April 27. Photos: John McElroy.



A group of young adults from Rathmines Parish attend Dublin diocese’s Knock pilgrimage.



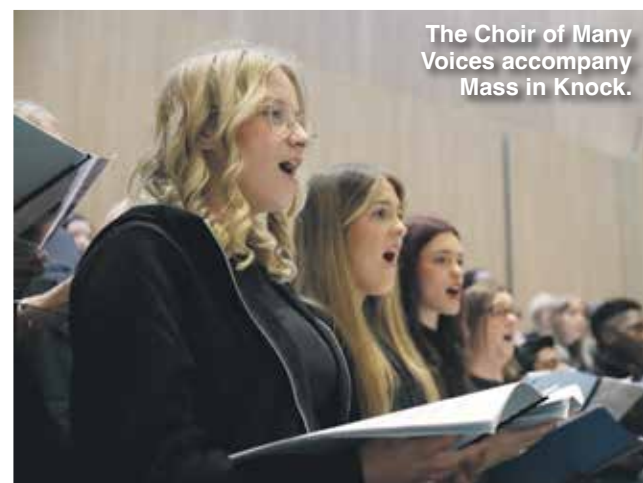
Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell gives the homily in Knock Basilica on Saturday, April 27.



Msgr Dan O’Connor leads a group from St Patrick’s Church Ringsend.



The blessing of the sick is offered to pilgrims from Dublin.



The Choir of Many Voices accompany Mass in Knock.



The Choir of Many Voices are pictured with Archbishop Farrell.



Parishioners from across the diocese of Dublin assembled in Knock Shrine for their annual pilgrimage, blessed by some April sunshine.



Archbishop Farrell enjoys a rare day of sunshine with pilgrims in Knock on April 27.



The archbishop of Dublin greets pilgrims after Mass.



Knock Basilica provides the background for a group photo.



Frs James Hurley and Declan Blake enjoy the Knock pilgrimage.



Pictured in Knock are Vincy Varghese, Jean Elises, Michelle Casey, Lenie Dabatos and Victoria Cruz.



Srs Fabiola Pak and Crescentia Kim from the Sisters of St Paul of Chartres take in the sights at Knock.



Marian Ryder and Imy Mullarkey from Confey Parish made the trip to Knock for the annual pilgrimage.



Nithin, Christina, Abine, Sukanya, Riya and Tomson enjoy Dublin diocese's Knock pilgrimage.



Peter O'Brien, Magno Di Murro, Maria Di Murro, Nuala Byrne, Michael Wall, Maureen Pender, Patsy McGlynn and Brendan McGlyn are pictured in Knock.

Does the devil exist?



Belief in the devil is persistent in the Bible, writes Fr Fintan Lyons OSB

The existence of evil in the world is an inescapable fact. This raises such questions as how its nature may be understood and its origin established. The issue of its nature are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of my book *The Persistence of Evil*; that of its origin will be discussed below.

As previously noted, what was traditionally a theodicy discussion has become a debate between theism and atheism, with the issue of evil itself left somewhat to one side. If atheism becomes dominant in intellectual

debate, there is in fact little logical basis for discussion of evil. If theism is dominant, as in the past, then it is very much a live issue, and opposition to God, especially when evidence from Scripture is taken into account, can be envisaged as some kind of being representing evil.

For theists it is hard to ignore the existence of a created being – discussion of an uncreated one has always found to be fruitless – ‘embodying’, so to speak, evil. The presence of such a being in the world has been recognised since the era of pagan and Jewish cultures, including evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and has been attributed to the existence of gods and demons of various kinds at the centre of cultic life.

As there was extensive influence of pagan practices on Israel’s life and worship, there was continuous need for purification from the evil endemic to them. Old Testament writers showed familiarity with the pagan gods of the Canaanite religion and its Baal worship.

In Leviticus 17, God gives detailed instructions for Israelite worship, “so that they



Linda Blair, Max Von Sydow and Jason Miller star in the 1973 film *The Exorcist*. Photo: CNS/Warner Bros.

may no longer offer their sacrifices for goat-demons to whom they prostrate themselves” (17.7). The Book of Judges condemned Israel

when it “lusted after other gods and bowed down before them” (Judg. 2.17).

Isaiah prophesied that God “will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent ... and will kill the dragon that is in the sea” (Isa. 27.1), a reference to the two monsters guarding the Ugaritic shrine of Baal, Tnn (the dragon) and Ltn (Leviathan), the serpent with seven heads.

The evil forces thus described ranged from gods to beasts, with no sense of personal existence. In the Psalms, apart from frequent reference to local enemies, there is also the presence of “the pestilence that stalks in darkness or the destruction that wastes at noonday” (Ps. 91.6), a reference, it seems, to natural evils, though underlying it there may be reference to the Mesopotamian demon-god Pazuzu, who controlled the west and south-west winds, which brought famine and malaria during the dry season and, in the rainy season, storms and locusts.

It is worth noting that the prayer book of the Hebrews, the Psalter, contains only one specific reference to demons, while there are eight or nine (depending on the translation) psalms containing references to angels.

Satan in the Old Testament

These forces lack personal characteristics, and it is difficult to give a chronology of the references in the mid-sixth-century texts to a spirit that came to be called a *satan* (a common not a proper name), with the meaning of an accuser or prosecutor.

Originally, it could be used of humans as well as of spirits. Its earliest use for a spirit occurs in the Book of Numbers (22.32) where the angel or messenger said he had come out as an ‘adversary’ against Balaam because his way was perverse. It could therefore date from the early settlement in Canaan.

One author claims that “it can be argued that the full-blown concept of Satan had already appeared in the Second Temple period prior to the rise of apocalypticism”, when Satan came to be presented in the context of a future final struggle. There is evidence in that Second Temple period of the activities of spirits predating the later identification of the Satan of the New Testament.

For example, from the time of Saul in 1 Samuel to Ahab in 1 Kings there are references to spirits with an evil purpose. In 1 Samuel (19.9) “an evil spirit from the Lord” came upon Saul and he endeavoured to kill David. In 1 Kgs 22.19-22, the prophet Micaiah had a vision of heaven. He saw the Lord seated on his throne with the hosts of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him.

“I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets”

“And the Lord said: ‘Who will entice Ahab so that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead?’. Then one said one thing and another said another, until a spirit came forward and stood

before the Lord, saying: ‘I will entice him’. ‘How?’ the Lord asked him. He replied, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets’. And the Lord said: ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.’”

In the early strata of the biblical texts and in the story of Ahab and later, God is responsible for both the good and the bad things that happen to humans. In Deut. 32.39, God says: “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand.”

Infidelities

In the Psalms, Israel acknowledges God’s goodness to his people, his justice, and his forgiveness of their infidelities. Overall, he is on their side, turning his face against their enemies, his eyes to the just, his ears to their appeal (cf. Ps. 34). But the total lordship of God goes beyond concepts of good and evil; in his plan that they should displace other nations, they angered him when they failed to destroy the peoples as he had given command (cf. Ps. 106.32, 34).

The situation is rather different in the Book of Job, where the Lord in the end vindicates Job, even though he yields to the promptings of Satan to allow great evils to befall Job. Still, a clearer distinction between good and evil emerges, and evil now has its origin in “one of the heavenly beings”: “One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and ‘Satan’ also came among them”(Job 1.6).

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The devil is portrayed in this stained-glass church window. Photo: CNS

Originally, these heavenly beings were "sons of Elohim", lesser divinities, but in this anthropomorphic representation of God on his throne they are God's ministers tasked with carrying out his commands. Satan is singled out, but is nonetheless one of them, with the role of a prosecutor or accuser, the translation of the Hebrew name.

“The account of creation in the Book of Genesis adds flesh, so to speak, to the character of Satan by his appearing there in the form of a serpent”

The story need not be read as assuming the tradition of the fall of some angels, as there is no account in the Old Testament of such a cataclysm. The dialogue between God and Satan reflects the anthropomorphic charac-

ter of much of the narrative, though Satan's wandering around the world takes away from the human imagery, while retaining the suggestion of personality.

The account of creation in the Book of Genesis adds flesh, so to speak, to the character of Satan by his appearing there in the form of a serpent; Milton's *Paradise Lost* will see Satan in the form of a mist entering a reptile's body.

The incident concludes with the prediction of the future conflict between the 'adversary' and the human race. In Job and in Zech. 3.1-2, Satan is not presented as God's enemy but in Wis. 2.24 he appears as the enemy of God's plan for humankind because of envy, only to be defeated in the future by Michael and his angels in the Apocalypse (12.7).

The final combat and defeat of Satan is by the angel Michael and is not presented there as a combat with God, despite the classic statement in Milton's *Paradise Lost* describing Satan as one "who durst defy the omnipotent to arms".

Christian culture added a profile or 'history' to this figure by regarding it as part of the creation process, the creation of non-corporeal or pure spirits, some of whom by the exercise of free will sinned against God through pride and disobedience.

This belief in the origin of Satan and of evil became part of the mainstream of Christian tradition, through relying on some references in Scripture that in fact give little support in relation to the origin of Satan.

The devil in the New Testament and New Testament times

In the Old Testament, Satan had already been seen as



Children chase a man dressed as a devil during a local festival called Fiesta del Demonio (Festival of Demons) in Pontevedra, Spain. Photo: CNS/Miguel Vidal, Reuters

God's enemy, and consequently appears in the New as the enemy of Christ and subsequently of the members of the Ephesian community who have to "stand against the wiles of the devil" (6.11).

The Church Father, Irenaeus (202AD), quoted Justin Martyr (160AD) to the effect that before the advent of Christ, Satan did not dare to blaspheme God as he did not know of his own condemnation, because it was concealed in "parables and allegories", but he learned clearly from the words of Christ and his apostles that eternal fire had been prepared for him.

“The term 'devil' is a Latinised version of the Greek, *ho diabolos*, used in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, to translate Satan wherever it occurred in the Hebrew text”

Hence, if any other explanation were needed, the adversarial nature of all references to Satan in the Gospels is clear. Mark, in the earliest of the Gospel texts, gives an account of Jesus' baptism and goes on to speak of his temptation by the devil. This is the first

naming of Satan as the devil and includes the forceful words that Jesus was 'driven' by the devil into the desert.

The term 'devil' is a Latinised version of the Greek, *ho diabolos*, used in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, to translate Satan wherever it occurred in the Hebrew text, for example in the Book of Job. In Wis. 2.24, a book not found in the Hebrew, it says that "through the devil's envy death entered the world", a possible reference to the serpent of Gen. 3.1-5.

Opposition

Having arrived in the New Testament text, the name devil will continue to be used to describe the opposition to Jesus, and will be used by Jesus himself to name opposition to him. In Mark's text, the temptation is presented simply as a fact, unlike the accounts of a triple temptation by the other two Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke. These latter provide a lively dialogue between the tempter and Jesus, though what source or sources there could be for such details cannot be established, except perhaps by analogy with Israel's forty years in the desert, especially as all three of Jesus' quotations are from Deuteronomy.

Commentators generally hold that the text was taken from the hypothetical document Q, on which Matthew and Luke, but not Mark, are said to have relied. There

were however, literary parallels in some writings of the time. The exegete Raymond Brown suggested that, though they preceded John's text:

"the parallels between the scene of the three temptation in Mt-Lk and ... individual passages of Jn 6-7 are interesting. They raise the question of whether or not the Mt-Lk common source has not filled in Mk's vague 'he was tempted by Satan' with a dramatic synopsis of the type of temptations Jesus actually faced during his life."

“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news”

Matthew's account ends with the devil departing from Jesus and angels coming to minister to him (4.11) before he begins his ministry in Galilee (one of the infrequent references to angels in the Gospels), while Luke's account of the temptation concludes with "the devil left him, to return at the appointed time" (Lk. 4.1-13), namely at the start of the Passion narrative (Lk. 22.3).

At the climax of the story Luke will say that "Satan entered Judas Iscariot" to finish his work by initiating Jesus' betrayal, arrest, torture and execution. But at the beginning, Luke has him entering on his mission filled with the power of the Spirit (4.14). Mark also records the beginning of his ministry and quotes Jesus saying, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news" (1.15).

That the kingdom of God had come near meant that this was the reality within

“They raise the question of whether or not the Mt-Lk common source has not filled in Mk's vague 'he was tempted by Satan' with a dramatic synopsis of the type of temptations Jesus actually faced during his life”



Anthony Hopkins stars in a scene from the 2010 movie *The Rite*. Photo: CNS/Warner Bros

“Establishing the name of the demon was considered the critical stage as it was believed to give power to the exorcist over the demon. Here, the answer ‘Legion’ may indicate that the man believed himself possessed by many demons – ‘for we are many’; it was well known that a Roman legion consisted of 6,000 men and it was also believed demons numbered in their thousands”

which people would live from then on, it would govern people's lives.

Existence

“The remainder of Mark's gospel will deal with Jesus' announcement of this new existence, with continuing resistance and the crisis into which it places those who hear the good news. ... Mark sees the exorcisms as a testimony to the authority of Jesus to announce God's reign; the unclean spirits recognise Jesus and his intent and cry out in an attempt at self-defence.”

But as John P. Meir pointed out: “What made Jesus unusual, if not unique, was not simply his role as exorcist, but rather his integration of the roles of exorcist, moral teacher, gatherer of disciples, and eschatological prophet all into one person.”

This means that Jesus' role as exorcist must not dominate the perception of his ministry; other aspects of his ministry include miracles that add credibility to his identity as the Messiah, for example

his miraculous feeding of large crowds. However, the exorcisms bear dramatic witness to his fundamental task of defeating the power of evil in which humanity was held and have a high profile in all three Synoptic Gospels.

In the case of a man in the Capernaum synagogue who had an “unclean spirit” (Mk 1.24) and testified to Jesus' identity as the “Holy One of God” (1.24), Jesus ordered the spirit to be quiet and come out of the man. After the temptations in the desert, which had no human witnesses, conflict with the devil, or demons – Mark uses the words interchangeably – will involve humans who are said to be possessed, and this type of incident will recur.

The term ‘holy’ in the Scriptures has implications of perfection and completeness, while ‘unclean’ indicates defect, so that the cry of the man, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” makes the opposition more pointed.

This incident, at the beginning of a Gospel deemed the

earliest of the records of Jesus' life and ministry, introduces the description of Jesus as an exorcist. It sets him apart from John the Baptist, his forerunner and from the preceding prophets, though there is evidence in the Gospels that there were other exorcists operating in the region.

“When Jesus exorcises, it is not always clear whether a healing from physical or psychotic illness is in question rather than demonic possession”

His exorcisms differed from those of his contemporaries by his use of single commands, rather than repeated incantations, and cannot always be distinguished from healings, but his ministry distinguished him from other healers by the obvious miraculous nature of

some healings, rather than being the exercise of a natural gift, which the human Jesus may have possessed.

When Jesus exorcises, it is not always clear whether a healing from physical or psychotic illness is in question rather than demonic possession; however, the fact that there is no instance in the Gospels of his words of command being unsuccessful, obviously because of his divinity, points to possession by a demon in some instances.

Unusual

The unusual case in Mk 8.24 of Jesus healing a blind man gradually by spitting on his eyes and putting his hands on them seems an example of the use of a power of healing. However, as the chapter continues with accounts of incidents that distinguish between the casting out of devils and healing of diseases, the cure of the blind man does fit into the general pattern of the bringing of good news, the advancement of the reign of God.

There is a broader context in which to consider Jesus' ministry. In a society that had no hospitals, people with psychiatric illnesses – and who manifestly had no control over themselves – wandered aimlessly about and were believed to be possessed by demons. The more disruptive individuals were bound with chains, as Mk 5.4 testifies, and in that particular case the individual's

extraordinary strength points to, but from a psychiatric perspective does not prove, demonic possession.

“In Judaism, the demons were regarded predominantly – but not exclusively (Mk 3.22b) as individual beings. They were named and known one by one, as the countless names for demons show”

Whatever might be true in particular instances, Jesus in his ministry did not make a distinction between what would now be recognised as mental illness and the demonic influence or possession people rightly or wrongly believed to be involved:

“In one respect, Jesus seems to have transformed contemporary ideas. In Judaism, the demons were regarded predominantly – but not exclusively (Mk 3.22b) as individual beings. They were named and known one by one, as the countless names for demons show.

Jesus, however, stressed the connection between the appearance of demons and Satan. He expressed this connection with a variety of pictures. Satan appears as a commander of a military

force (Lk. 10.19) or even rules over a kingdom (Mt. 12.26); the demons are his soldiers.”

There is a dramatic example in Mk 5.1-20 of an encounter with “a man with an unclean spirit”, which Mark says occurred on “the other side of the sea, the country of the Gerasenes”. Matthew's account of the incident describes it as occurring at a different location “on the other side of the lake ... the country of the Gadarenes” (Mt. 8.28).

Difficulties

Both locations present difficulties for the narrative. The man identifies Jesus as Son of the Most High God and begs not to be tortured by Jesus, “What is your name?”, the reply comes in the singular and plural: “My name is Legion, for we are many”, and he begs Jesus not to drive him out of the district.

Jesus gives permission and the spirits migrate into a herd of pigs, which forthwith charge down a cliff and are drowned in the lake. The man is then restored to his right mind, clothed, and wishes to become a disciple. Apart from location, this incident in the Gospels of Matthew (8.28-34) and Luke (8.36-39) has other variations: it is shortened, there are two men in Matthew's account and in Matthew's and Luke's accounts the local population panics and they ask Jesus to leave the area.

It is difficult in the circumstances to reach the historical core of the event, given the diverse locations, both distant from the sea, and other elements in the accounts, but “the sheer oddity of the geographical location ... may reflect a singular historical event”.

“It could be that the unique connection of one of Jesus' miracles with a particular pagan city in the Decapolis, at a good distance from the Sea of Galilee and Jesus' customary area of activity, may have stuck in the collective memory of Jesus' disciples precisely because of the exorcism's venue.”

In Mark, the story follows the pattern of exorcisms performed by exorcists of that time; establishing the name of the demon was considered the critical stage as it was believed to give power to the exorcist over the demon. Here, the answer ‘Legion’ may indicate that the man believed himself possessed by many demons – ‘for we are many’; it was well known that a Roman legion consisted of 6,000 men and it was also believed demons numbered in their thousands.

The suggestion by some commentators that the man may have become deranged through being ill-treated by Roman soldiers is less

“He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?” Others were saying: ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’”

likely as both Gerasa and Gadara were largely Greek cities in the Decapolis and would not have considered the Roman military presence as oppressive as many Jews did.

In Matthew's and Luke's accounts, the naming of the demons is lacking, but there is the same request from them to be sent into the pigs. In all three, there is the highly dramatic event of the pigs suddenly rushing down into the lake and being drowned, and while commentators link this with the Jewish revulsion towards pigs, such an extraordinary occurrence would be difficult to explain as a consequence of psychiatric illness.

Explanation

It seems easier to find an explanation for the incident recorded in Mt. 17.14-20, when Jesus cured a boy from whom the disciples had failed to “cast out a demon”. The NRSV version says that the father described the boy as an epileptic, while the Greek text has “a lunatic and in a wretched state”, testifying to the belief that the moon could be responsible for mental illness.

The symptoms of the boy's condition were in fact the same as those of

an epileptic. Nevertheless, in answer to the disciples' subsequent questioning, according to Mk 9.29, Jesus says that “this kind can only come out by prayer”.

References to the plural, demons, in the case of exorcisms – by Jesus or the disciples – seem to distinguish them from the devil, though these spirits are sometimes called devils also, for example in Mk 3.22, where Beelzebub is called “the prince of devils” or in Lk. 10.17, where the disciples say the devils are subject to them.

“Jesus heals illnesses such as leprosy or fever by a touch, with no mention of a demon; even the bystanders did not associate leprosy with demonic possession”

The whole issue of number in relation to demons/devils is a puzzling one in that there is no Scriptural warrant for or against them being considered numberless. In effect, demon in the singular or plural, or devil, all indicate the same dark power of opposition to

Jesus and the coming reign of God. Throughout the Gospels there are incidents where what is presented as the casting out of ‘a demon’ or ‘the devil’ may, in the light of modern psychiatric medicine, seem more likely to be a case of extreme psychiatric disorder.

Even though in the case of the boy, the text of Matthew (7.18) says that “Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out”, the case is more like others in which Jesus heals illnesses such as leprosy or fever by a touch, with no mention of a demon; even the bystanders did not associate leprosy with demonic possession.

Authority

When demonic possession was considered by the people to be the case, Jesus did not offer any other explanation, and in answer to the challenge of the Pharisees that he cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Mt. 12.24), he asserted his authority to exorcise demons. When he commissioned the 12 to proclaim that the kingdom was at hand, he “gave them authority over unclean spirits and power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness” (Mt. 10.1).

There were occasions when he implied that people who did not show signs of demonic possession were nevertheless in some way under the influence of Satan. These charges vary in intensity; for example, the noteworthy case in which Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan”, concludes with him saying, “the way you think is not God's way but man's” (Mt. 16.23).

Given the relationship of Peter to Jesus, this is very different from his saying in John's Gospel: “Have I not chosen you, you twelve, yet one of you is a devil” (Jn 6.70). He was referring to Judas, the text says, who was going to betray him. Later in this Gospel, at the Last Supper, he says that one of the 12 will betray him. He dips a piece of bread and gives it to Judas. “At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him” (Jn 13.27).

“This opposition is central to John's narrative, and causes the opponents to assert that Jesus has a demon, a charge already made when he challenged them about their descent from Abraham”

In John's Gospel, Jesus performs no exorcisms of demons, instead he per-

forms various kind of signs, including the healing of a paralytic (5.5-9) and the man born blind (9.1-7). Both events occurred on the Sabbath and led to his being challenged by the Jews, as John calls Jesus' opponents (the Pharisees in the latter case).

John

This opposition is central to John's narrative, and causes the opponents to assert that Jesus has a demon, a charge already made when he challenged them about their descent from Abraham. They replied: “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” The attitude towards him on the part of the people in general was divided:

“Many of them were saying: ‘He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?’ Others were saying: ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” (Jn 10.2-21)

The entering of Satan into Judas, in John's and Luke's Gospels, accords with Jesus' earlier saying that one of the twelve was ‘a devil’. It strikes a different note from the descriptions of Jesus' encountering people possessed with demons in the various accounts of exorcisms throughout the Gospel story.

It could of course mean that Judas at that point cast in his lot with the devil. That possibility needs to be borne in mind in discussion today of evil in people's

lives and of reports of possession.

“He never attributed natural phenomena such as a storm on the lake to demons, a belief that was in the culture and remained for many centuries”

Overall, it is clear that Jesus accepted the common belief that demons were active in the lives of the people and that he had power over them, while very often he simply healed people who were ill – sometimes at a distance – and he never attributed natural phenomena such as a storm on the lake to demons, a belief that was in the culture and remained for many centuries.

Jesus' description of his opponents as evil (Mt. 7.11, Lk. 11.13) is a further indication that beneath malicious attitudes and actions, as well as what were in fact psychotic conditions, he shared the belief of the people that a deeper force for evil was at work in their world and it was variously named as demon or devil or Satan.

i This is an excerpt from chapter 3 of *The Persistence of Evil: A Cultural, Literary and Theological Analysis* by Fr Fintan Lyons OSB, published by Bloomsbury and available at <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/persistence-of-evil-9780567710130/>

The late Pauline Fr Gabriele Amorth, a longtime exorcist for the Diocese of Rome who died in 2016, is pictured in a documentary performing an exorcism on a woman. Photo: OSV News/LD Entertainment



Youth are desperate for the Church to offer them faith and meaning



Eoin McCormack

During the recent visit of Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops to Ireland, I had the great privilege to participate in a focus group meeting with various representatives of the Church's life in Ireland. Drawing from a synodal framework, the group included female religious, priests, a deacon, a Catholic journalist, a catechist, and the cardinal. The diversity of the group allowed for a truly dynamic discussion surrounding the many issues facing the contemporary Church in Ireland as the cardinal listened intensely and offered some insights from a synodal standpoint.

Having just undertaken two full days of conferences in Knock before returning to Dublin, the first thing that struck me about the cardinal was the immeasurable stamina by which he was able to tackle all the issues presented to him with enthusiasm and sincerity. There was no sense that merely 'ticking boxes' was on his agenda, this was a man who meant what he said and was open to dialogue, a genuine example of the synod in action.

Consistent

In response to the various issues that were presented to him, the cardinal's message remained consistent; "Go and do it" he repeated. In other words, "Go and live the Christian message now", don't wait for some epiphany from this or that meeting in Rome, or for some hypothetical opportune moment within the culture, the time is now, in fact the time has always been now to be an evangelising Church. The Christian mission to "Go and make disciples of all nations" is as immediate in its challenge now as it was when Christ commanded it. With his repeated mantra "Go and do it", the cardinal was reminding all present that our shared baptismal calling, regardless of rank or place in the Church, is to actively partake in its evangelical mission, not in some imaginary time in the future when it will be easier, but to face the challenges of the secular age with confidence.

For this to be materialised however, the largest cohort which makes up the body of Church, the laity, needs to be adequately formed in the faith in order to truly live it out and give witness to it in the modern world. The idea that 'professional religion' is the remit of priests and nuns is no longer a viable one. With the highest literacy rates and access to education that has ever existed in the Western world, we now for the



Participants and speakers at the synodality conference, Knock Shrine, April 19. Photo: Sinead Mallee

first time in our civilisation have the capacity for an informed and educated laity. In fact, the demands of pluralist society necessitate it.

“The number one existential place people are going to upon leaving Catholicism is the ‘no-religion’ grouping”

Another Cardinal, John Henry Newman, recognised in the late 19th Century that the impending secularism would need a laity who do not just “know their creed, but can give an account of it”. If people do not have the ability to “defend their faith” in public life as St Peter urges in the Scriptures, the pressures presented by secularism runs the risk of pushing people away from religion. This is not just speculative opinion, the reality of this situation is already present in our society, in fact the number one existential place people are going to upon leaving Catholicism is the ‘no-religion’ grouping. This is now the second largest religious grouping in Ireland at 14% and alarmingly in England at 37.2%.

A thorough evaluation of our catechetical structures is therefore required to assess the quality of the faith formation we offer our people at all ages. How is it possible for example that in Ireland which

has over 90% of its schools under a Catholic ethos, also found its laity severely lacking in faith formation as established in the recent national synodal process?

One key area in this regard acknowledged by Cardinal Grech, is the Church's deficiency in its digital evangelisation efforts. This is why, as Cardinal Grech highlighted, Pope Francis has listed it as one of the key priorities for the universal synodal process. A recent survey carried out in the US found that 97% of young people use social media platforms daily, while 46% admitted to using them almost constantly. If Irish statistics on this issue are anything similar to that of the US, this perhaps in part explains why, according to a survey carried out by Amarách, only 8% of those under 35 in Ireland have even heard about the synodal pathway. We are quite literally living through a new age of communication more revolutionary than the invention of the printing press. The challenge for the Church, therefore, is to engage with these platforms or otherwise run the risk of being invisible to an entire generation of people.

Sources

In my own youth ministry work, one consistent remark I hear from young adults involved in the life of the Church is that they received their faith formation not from their parishes,

families, or Catholic schools, but from online sources such as Bishop Barron's 'Word on Fire' or other similar US Catholic figures. In the Irish context, we need to engage with these online platforms and tell the story of the Church in Ireland before we become invisible or forgotten by our own people. As Cardinal Grech challenged in his action-oriented framework, we must simply “Go and do it” and not wait for others to do it for us.

“In a post-scandal Church however, the younger generations with whom I work with in ministry, describe a Church that is virtually not present in the culture and dogmatically timid”

Another significant element very clearly on display from both the focus group discussion and in the realities present in the local synods, was the vastly different experience of Church amongst the age dynamic of participants. Older generations, which if Amarách's statistics are correct, made up a significant majority of synodal participants, described a Church that is unrecognisable to younger Catholics. This is a Church that was dogmatically oppressive and culturally dominant. Having

grown up in a post-scandal Church however, the younger generations with whom I work with in ministry, describe a Church that is virtually not present in the culture and dogmatically timid, to the point of being understood as relativistic.

Concerns

On the one hand, much of the older generations, who received a basic catechesis in their youth, called for a Church that was more in tune with social-justice issues and pastoral concerns, while younger people coming from an un-catechised background and a relativist-secular world are desperate for the Church to offer them faith and meaning.

The challenge therefore is for the Church to hear both of these voices within the generational gap but reach out with confidence to a new generation of people who are not only pre-catechised but pre-evangelised that are searching for truth and direction. The dominance of secularism has become a force for many in which they cannot withstand the challenges presented to them about the faith. This once again points to the great need to provide spaces to educate and form our laity, as Cardinal Newman and Cardinal Grech so greatly encouraged.

i Eoin McCormack is a Catechist and Pastoral Worker in the parish of Rathmines, Dublin.

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

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Becoming a synodal Church at All Hallows College

Almost 100 delegates were present at All Hallows on Wednesday May 1 for ‘Becoming a Synodal Church’ hosted by AMRI in cooperation with the All Hallows Trust. Fr Tim Lehane SVD, as President of AMRI, welcomed everyone. He quoted one of the AMRI’s banner ‘Journeying together on the synodal pathway... seeking wisdom.’

Sr Anne Codd who co-ordinated the day for AMRI invited Sr Mary T Barron OLA to pray the Synodal Prayer in solidarity with our universal Church and our world. Sr Mary, as Congregational Leader, is President of UISG and a Synodal Participant.

Later in the day she would remark that she is taking all the voices and echoes of the day in All Hallows to Rome when she will participate in the next phase of the Synodal Assembly in October 2024.

Throughout the day delegates were invited to follow a prayerful, dialogical, and reflective process. It was an ‘experiential’ day. There were no passive bystanders in the room. Everyone got an opportunity to listen, talk, reflect, and engage with the programme.

There were a series of conversation-starters and opportunities to listen to panellists reflecting the conditions for Synodality, the ecological context and crisis, and the marginal peripheries.

Dr Eamon Conway, Theo-

logical Advisor to the Synodal process, spoke about the background to the current sessions of the Synod. He noted how participation at the Synodal Assembly in October 2023 was quite different from his previous experiences of Synods.

This time lay people and religious, male and female, also had voting rights. His experience this time, he recalled, was of profound mutual listening by all the people participating in the Synod Hall.

Eamonn noted the impressive moments of silence and prayer each day of the Assembly. He also spoke of the ‘conversion’ that may be experienced when we, as people of faith, speak and listen well.

Change

Chapter 10 in the Synthesis Report speaks specifically of the importance of evolving and emerging charisms in the Church. Fr Eamonn drew attention to synodality as bringing to life the vision of *Lumen Gentium* and the Second Vatican Council. He spoke about the consecrated life and its role within the life of the Church.

Noting that by 2025 the majority of Catholics will be in the Global south, he invited us to take a global perspective on our faith. ‘We are in a change of ‘epoch.’ Synodality is not a plan B for the Church – it much more than that. It is a way of listening to the call to be there for the world with



Ger Gallagher, Ronan and Fr Eamonn Conway. Photo: AMRI

a much wider presence. ‘How are we to be Church in this new epoch?’

We are in moment of change not just decay. This time is a new appropriation of Vatican II. ‘We are still living in a time of ‘ongoing revelation’ (*Dei Verbum*) How do we discern what God is asking of us at this time?’

In response to questions concerning outreach to young people, Fr Eamonn spoke about creating ‘sanctuary’ spaces – thin places where points of contact and conversation can take place, and the presence of the divine can be discerned.

Throughout the day Fr Gerry O Hanlon SJ provided valuable pointers to Theological Reflection, responding to each of the topics and themes as they arose. He reflected on the prophet being counter cultural – not just in the world but also within the Church.

We need to discern this. He too spoke about *Dei Verbum*, ‘seeing faith as an encounter with a person not a series of propositions.’ We need to create ‘spaces of encounter.’ Justice is a constitutive dimension of the Gospel and is an essential aspect of Church life in mission if it is to be an ambassador of the good news.

Fr Gerry referenced Pope Francis on ‘marrying discernment with diplomacy.’ He also noted we should not be afraid of conflict. ‘Stick with it.’ We must try to hold polarities and live with tension while we journey on. He spoke about the issue of women in the Church and how it is still a major challenge, including to Pope Francis.

It cannot be ‘off the table’ until the people are at peace and the theologians are united in their understanding. The point is that Pope Francis has initiated a synodal process



Srs Anne Codd and Mary T Barron pictured at the event. Photo: AMRI.

– that is what he is open to – people speaking and listening to the common pain. We need to be open to encounters that can change us.

Synodality

Particularly good group conversation time was spent exploring the ‘necessary conditions for synodal experience’ as well as the call to Church in our time to respond to the ‘cry of the universe’ and the reality of exclusion in all its manifestations.

Testimonies and conversations evoked a sense of what it means to ‘be’ synodal, to act synodally at every level – community, church, local as well as universal, in all aspects of life as well as in pastoral outreach.

Of course, delegates too spoke to areas of concern including the basic equality of all in the community of the baptised, recognition of the role of women in the Church,

ordination, and fuller participation and recognition of the role of Religious. Some tensions are important and need to be kept alive in open conversation. What must be said? What must be heard and what disturbs us?

Julieann Moran, General Secretary of the Irish Synodal Pathway, told everyone: “it was a privilege to spend the day with so many religious women and men preparing to respond to the next part of the Synodal process.” In our own context, the Irish Synodal Pathway will continue well past the second Synodal Assembly in Rome in October of this year.

After the event in All Hallows a report will be prepared and submitted to Rome as one of many from around the world.

NEXT WEEK: WE INTERVIEW CARDINAL MICHAEL CZERNY, PREFECT OF THE DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED BY POPE FRANCIS IN 2016.

‘Fiducia’ polarisation visible but African bishops still enthusiastic about synod



Fredrick Nzwili

As the Synod of Bishops on synodality resumes in five months in Rome, Catholic bishops in Africa are enthusiastic about the second part of the process, with some leaders however anxious that the Vatican document allowing blessings of same-sex couples had poisoned the environment, making it difficult to implement the synod's outcome.

Rwandan Jesuit Fr Marcel Uwineza, who is an enthusiast of the synodal process said the bishops are “on board”, and that there is a clear change of mindset that synodality is the way of being Church today.

“When I judge from the people I have met ... I think there is a change (in) mentality. You know that this is a hard thing to get,” Fr Uwineza, rector of Hekima University College in Nairobi, told *OSV News*.

“I saw a lot of enthusiasm that Pope Francis is pointing us to Christ,” Fr Uwienza said.

He added that the Synod of Bishops on synodality is a clear implementation of the Second Vatican Council and that Pope Francis is steering the Church into embracing the council's outcome 60 years later.

He explained that St Paul VI established the world Synod of Bishops to help the Church renew itself and deal with future challenges.

Blood

“Broadly speaking, the Synod on Synodality is a call to say: Synodality is the life and blood of the Church, is the way of being church, and there is no other way,” said Fr Uwineza. “The hierarchical model, where the priests speak ... and others listen, is not sustainable. We are all members of the body of Christ, and so everybody has a say to participate.”

At the same time, the priest said *Fiducia Supplicans* (“Supplicating Trust”) – the Vatican's December 18, 2023, declaration allowing priests and other ministers to give non-liturgical blessings to same-sex and other couples not married in the Church – had caused some obstruction,

Congolese Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo of Kinshasa, right, elevates the host alongside concelebrants during Mass at the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican October 13, 2023, as part of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Photo: CNS



especially in the African continent.

He said the bishops had complained that the Vatican had dropped the document on them, departing from a tradition of consultations seen with other documents.

After *Fiducia Supplicans* was issued, citing cultural differences and doctrinal confusion, the bishops' conferences across Africa ruled that same-sex blessings will not be carried out in the continent. To date, the African bishops have been the strongest in voicing opposition to the document.

“We, the African Bishops, do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples”

In a statement released January 11, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo of Kinshasa, Congo, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, or SECAM, said the decision to not bless homosexual couples was made in agreement with Pope Francis and Cardinal Vic-

tor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

“We, the African Bishops, do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities,” he said.

Fr Uwienza suggested that “there could have been wider consultations” on the document and that the presidents of bishops' conferences “should have at least had an idea (it was planned to be released). Not all of a sudden and then a document drops,” he said, questioning why the declaration could not have waited until the synodal process was completed and then be released as a resolution.

Understand

However, the priest urged Catholics to understand the declaration as a pastoral document.

Later in January, in a joint news conference with representatives of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, Cardinal Ambongo said *Fiducia Supplicans* had “damaged” the synodal process. Its timing, the cardinal said, had created a view that the decla-

ration was an outcome of the gathering.

“In the first session, the synod dealt with these issues, but the synod did not decide,” Cardinal Ambongo said January 25. “So the publication of this document between the two sessions of the synod was seen by most people as if it was the fruit of the synod, when it had nothing to do with the synod.”

“They see it (synod) as a threat to the church, especially the issue of opening the Church door to gay people”

According to Fr Joachim Omolo Ouko, an Apostle of Jesus priest in the Archdiocese of Kisumu, Kenya, many Catholics in Africa perceived the synod negatively after the release of *Fiducia Supplicans*, and for them, implementing the synod outcome may not have a big impact.

“They see it (synod) as a threat to the Church, especially the issue of opening the Church door to gay people,” he told *OSV News*, adding that “this has made many people develop cold feet” while

awaiting the second session of the synod.

Modernisation

“We are losing the taste of the salt because of too much modernisation of the Church and too much materialism,” he said, highlighting that those factors were resulting in diminished vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa, Kenya, said the idea of the synod is for the Church as a whole to look at itself and the areas where they think something needs to be done. And for African prelates the family is a number one issue to fight for.

“In Africa, we are championing the family for the simple reason that if the family does not form its own children, does not teach them and does not support them, they will ... become a problem,” Archbishop Musonde told *OSV News*.

“You see, in the ways of the West, some things that are being proposed will in the end kill the family. In fact, if you listen to (delegates from) Europe, America and other places, churches are empty. What happened? The population is going down and there are no new births,” he pointed.

When the second phase of the Synod of Bishops on syno-

dality convenes, Fr Uwienza, who works with African students on a daily basis, wants the African delegates to focus more on instilling the Faith among young people because many were losing it.

“Our challenges are beyond polygamy. We have challenges of dictatorship, we have bad governance, challenges of corruption”

He also wants African bishops to take seriously the role of women in the Church, rethink the formation of priests as a process that is more holistic and not isolated from the rest of the world, and prioritise the challenges facing the people of the continent.

“Our challenges are beyond polygamy. We have challenges of dictatorship, we have bad governance, challenges of corruption, and these affect our people and reduce their dignity,” Fr Uwienza said.

Frederick Nzwili writes for OSV News from Nairobi, Kenya.

Reports show synodal hopes, concerns of parish priests



Cindy Wooden

As more than 200 priests from around the world met to share how their parishes experience a sense of shared mission and shared decision-making, many of them spoke of the essential bonds of priests with their parishioners and priests with each other.

The pastors met at a retreat centre outside of Rome April 29-May 2 to provide input to the Synod of Bishops on synodality; most of their work took place in small groups divided by language: Spanish, English, French and Italian.

The priests were chosen by their bishops' conference or Eastern Catholic bishops' synod to attend the meeting, and the Vatican had asked the bishops to select parish leaders who had had "significant experience in the perspective of a synodal Church".

The questions they were asked focused on ways they have experienced synodality – processes for praying, listening, discerning and making decisions together for the good of the community and for evangelisation.

But the working group reports April 29 also often mentioned loneliness and burnout in the life of pastors, a need to recognise the contributions of women to church life and a need to promote a sense of brotherhood and mutual support among a diocese's or eparchy's priests.

One group mentioned the need for "mutual care among brother priests."

Fraternity

A group report from April 30 spoke of "a deficit of fraternity and communion among us priests" and a lack of care from the bishop. "One person commented that in 30 years of ministry, a bishop never asked him how he was doing, but only told him what to do," the report said.

Another said that many priests are just trying to survive "and rarely feel valued in what they do."

The same group said that "the ministry of women is not a problem of the laity but of the priests."



Parish priests who are part of an international gathering to provide input to the Synod of Bishops on synodality meet in small groups April 29, 2024, at a retreat center in Sacrofano, outside of Rome. Photo: CNS.

Many of the groups reported that while their parishioners were eager to share and to listen to one another, the word "synodality" and many of its associated themes, like "discernment," were unclear or confusing to people.

“While there is a positive outlook on synodality, it's evident that some parish priests may lack interest in embracing new initiatives along this path”

And one of the French groups submitted a basic question: "If synodality helps us to discern, the fact remains that a decision has to be taken in our parish communities. But ultimately who decides? This remains a strong ques-

tion in our group, and we look forward to further exploration of this open-ended issue."

One English group said, "While there is a positive outlook on synodality, it's evident that some parish priests may lack interest in embracing new initiatives along this path. Therefore, ongoing formation for parish priests becomes imperative to effectively implement the principles of synodality at the parish level."

Positive

Another group said that while the synod process "has been more positive than negative," sometimes the parish listening sessions were used "as a place to vent, complain about the perceived state of the Church or to bring up the ways in which they felt they have been hurt by the Church. But again, all in our group found that these were occasions to walk with the people and listen."

Many of the groups ech-

oed what synod-related sessions on the parish, diocesan, continental and universal levels have emphasised: lay-people want and need more education about the Christian faith and more guided experiences of prayer and discernment.

“One of the Spanish groups said that with parishioners often expressing different needs and preferences, a parish might best become “a community of communities”

One of the Italian-language groups said that priests are afraid to entrust their parish councils with certain decisions because

they fear the members do not have enough theological and pastoral background to understand what is at stake. At the same time, the group said, the priests "are afraid of losing power," and they know it is easier to give orders than to reach a consensus.

At the end of the day April 30, one of the Spanish groups said that with parishioners often expressing different needs and preferences, a parish might best become "a community of communities," and synodality could be the key to preserving unity and peace while allowing diversity.

Spirit

Another group said that just coming together to share their stories has helped the priests, "because the Spirit blows in different ways, and God is at work. We see that in one place there are seven priests for one parish and in others there are seven chapels for one priest."

Most of the 18 working groups mentioned at least once a need to change seminary formation and to give candidates for the priesthood more practical help in learning what discernment

is and how to exercise leadership in a way that values the baptismal dignity and gifts of the laity.

“Pope Francis' emphasis on synodality “has allowed us to start dreaming about the Church again after the crisis”

Several of the reports also mentioned the clerical sexual abuse crisis and how it has led many people to leave the Church and many others to look at priests with suspicion or at least caution.

One Italian group said that Pope Francis' emphasis on synodality "has allowed us to start dreaming about the Church again after the crisis," and, in fact, "the synodal journey pays attention to overcoming the logic of abuse of individual power and gives us the antibodies to overcome the contagion from oppressive and controlling dynamics."

i Cindy Wooden is Rome Bureau Chief for Catholic News Service.

“The priests ‘are afraid of losing power,’ and they know it is easier to give orders than to reach a consensus”

The curious case of the Pope, Rome and Rupnik



Luca Attanasio in Rome

Some say that behind it all there is the very difficult Rupnik case, others an unconvincing management of the Diocese of Rome from the pastoral and financial points of view, and still others refer to the misunderstandings that arose between the pontiff and the Cardinal Vicar at the time of the pandemic. Certainly, Pope Francis' decision to shake up the leadership of the diocese of Rome is raising many doubts and questions.

At the beginning of April, in an absolutely unusual move, the Pope removed his Cardinal Vicar Angelo De Donatis and Jesuit Daniele Libanori, the auxiliary bishop for the 'Centre' sector of Rome, in one fell swoop.

The gesture immediately caused a stir both for its political weight and for the unusualness of the choice: it sounds really atypical to dismiss a Cardinal Vicar, especially if, as in the case of De Donatis, there are no biographical data behind it since he is 70 years old and the canonical limit for a bishop to resign the leadership of a diocese is 75 years old, without considering that, if there are no particular obstacles, the Pope often grants a few years' extension.

The two, in a classic gesture, to put it in Latin, *Pro-moveatur ut amoveatur* (to promote in order to remove) were 'promoted' respectively to Major Penitentiary (a decidedly minor role in the Curia), and personal advisor to the Pope for consecrated life, a post created *ad hoc* because it never existed: Libanori will have to deal with all institutes of consecrated life. All this less than eight months before the start of the Jubilee.

Cardinal

Cardinal De Donatis, appointed bishop by Pope Francis himself in 2015 and made auxiliary bishop of Rome for the permanent formation of the clergy, ended up just two years later holding one of the most important posts in the Catholic Church – cardinal vicar – precisely



Pope Francis greets Fr Marko Rupnik, then a Jesuit, during a private audience at the Vatican in this January 3, 2022, file photo. Fr Rupnik has been accused of sexually, spiritually or psychologically abusing some two dozen women and at least one man – most of them religious – over a 40-year period. Photo: OSV News

“It sounds really atypical to dismiss a Cardinal Vicar, especially if, as in the case of De Donatis, there are no biographical data behind it”

at the behest of the pontiff (despite much reticence in the Curia).

But, in a gradual turn of events, he went from hero to zero. That esteem that De Donatis enjoyed in the very early days has been slowly waning soon after his appointment as Cardinal Vicar and turned into a mistrustful relationship in 2020, at the start of the pandemic when Cardinal De Donatis ordered the closure of all the churches in Rome to avoid contagion at the “request of the Pope”, only to be disavowed by Francis who had that same decree revoked the following day.

“Problem within problem, moreover, was the strained relations between De Donatis and Libanori. The two never got on with

each other”

At the time, rumors claimed that De Donatis' days were numbered and that Libanori himself might even have already taken his place less than three years after his appointment. It did not turn out that way, but relations between the Pope and his vicar soured severely.

Problem within problem, moreover, was the strained relations between De Donatis and Libanori. The two never got on with each other and the management of a diocese as complex and as fundamental as Rome, gripped as it was by the Pope's mistrust of his vicar and quarrels between the vicar and one of his auxiliaries, suffered.

At the moment, the unease among Roman parish priests is quite evident and the affair of the sudden and unexpected removal of the two prelates from their posts only exacerbates it.

Rupnik

Remaining on the relationship between De Donatis and

Libanori (but also between them and the Pope), the straw that literally broke the camel's back was the case of the Jesuit artist Marko Rupnik, accused by some nuns, which is well known, of sexual harassment and violence.

The case, which is still very controversial, has seen De Donatis, Rupnik's long-time friend, tirelessly placed on the side of the former Jesuit (Rupnik was expelled from the order last June, ed.) while Libanori has sided with the accusers.

“Where Pope Francis stands at this stage on the Rupnik case, therefore, is not at all clear”

Those who say, therefore, that De Donatis is paying for his never-renounced friendship with Rupnik should explain why Libanori was also sent away. But above all, one should better investigate the Pope's own position on the former Jesuit, both past and present.

When Rupnik's excommunication seemed certain, in fact, the Pope himself intervened to avert it. Francis res-

cued Rupnik and reinstated him, cleaning up his image somewhat.

Still raising deep perplexity about the Pope's position on the Rupnik case is the meeting the pontiff had last September with Maria Campatelli, a faithful follower of Marko Rupnik and his staunch defender, for a private conversation in the Apostolic Palace that did not go unnoticed. Where Pope Francis stands at this stage on the Rupnik case, therefore, is not at all clear.

Audit

Among the reasons that may have led to the decision to relieve the Cardinal Vicar, there could also be the financial aspect. In 2021, in fact, an audit was launched by the Holy See's Auditor General's office on the diocese of Rome to assess, among other aspects, the final and forecast budgets, as well as the financial investments and the management of assets.

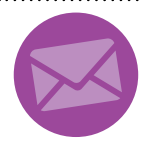
There is not much information about the outcome of this audit. Rumors have been

circulating for some time (unverified) that, in any case, the financial situation of the Pope's diocese would be on the brink of bankruptcy.

What will happen now? The diocese, between Easter just past and Pentecost on the way, is left with two very important positions vacant (Msgr Pesce has been chosen as a substitute for Liborio, but he has not been appointed bishop and will take the position of 'coordinator' of Rome Centre for the time being, ed). There are those who bet that the nomination of the next Cardinal Vicar may fall on the former auxiliary bishop of Rome and current bishop of Siena, Paolo Lojudice, recently appointed cardinal, those who bet on another former Roman, such as the current bishop of Bologna and president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi.

But there are also those who say that Francis, at the moment, trusts only a few and prefers an extended holiday. We shall see.

“There are also those who say that Francis, at the moment, trusts only a few and prefers an extended holiday”



Letter from Florence

The running of the motorbikes in Florence



Michael Sanfey

A leading art expert friend of mine – speaking with a degree of Roman hauteur – declared that while she sometimes needed to be in Venice, she didn't need to be in Florence. Quite frankly she just didn't seem to like Florence very much, if at all.

Scrambling for examples in Florence's defence, I mentioned the Uffizi Gallery – in an 'isn't it amazing' sense. Her response was that, while she liked what was in the Uffizi, she didn't like the building itself.

Florence was the first place abroad that I ever visited. I was 14 years old and my parents and I went to see my sister, Anne, who was studying at the University of Florence at the time.

In that sense, Florence made an immense impression and I've visited it countless times since. By the way, age-wise I'm now... not sayin'.

It's true that Florence is not on the huge scale of Rome, but I know a number of people from Rome who prefer living here mainly for that very reason.

It's more manageable, it's akin to a '15-minute city' – but organically and historically so, not the creation of woke planners. It's a very walkable city – that's if you discount the ever-present danger of being run down by a scooter (of the Vespa type or the adult kiddie ones) or car, which really is an issue.

I observed recently, with just a hint of exaggeration, that everyone has heard of 'the running of the bulls' in Pamplona, but that's nothing compared to 'the running of the motor bikes' while crossing a street like Florence's Via Masaccio on a weekday morning.

A truly pleasing feature of Florence is that at virtually all times one is absolutely surrounded by art and beauty. You're walking along and turn a corner, to be met with a



breathtaking view of buildings, sky and hills in the background.

A hidden secret

More prosaically, but importantly nonetheless, the city has a very good tramway network and it's expanding (though should I mention traffic chaos on that account?).

The T2 line gets you to Florence airport at Peretola in about 25 minutes. That airport is one of Florence's hidden secrets – ok that's tautology, but you know what I mean?

In the last six months or so, I've flown from there to Lisbon and back a couple of times, and to London once, and each time has been very relaxing, and largely hassle-free.

However, I would grant that, from an Irish perspective, Florence is not all that easy to get to, lacking any direct flight from

Dublin. Could that be a blessing in disguise, he asked cryptically?

Colleges abundant

I already mentioned the University of Florence and the city has no lack of higher-level educational institutions. The European University Institute (EUI) is 'my' college in that I'm a Visiting Fellow at its Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

The EUI's main campus is located at San Domenico di Fiesole, about a 20-minute bus ride from the centre.

The EUI's School of Transnational Governance (STG) is to be found at Palazzo Buontalenti on Via Cavour. The former Director of the STG, Alexander Stubb, was elected President of Finland earlier this year and assumed office on March 1.

Numerous American universities have a base in Florence. Few would argue with the proposition that the most beautiful is Harvard's Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at Villa i Tatti.

Personally I tend to associate this jewel with Sir Isaiah Berlin, who took part in a conference there in 1969, marking the 500th anniversary of Machiavelli's birth.

Aaaah, Machiavelli – the political theorist with the highest level of

name recognition in history?

Savonarola

Speaking of history, I wanted to mention another historical figure associated with Florence, albeit born in Ferrara: the Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), described critically by Machiavelli in *The Prince* as an "unarmed prophet".

Savonarola railed against corruption and is associated with the term 'Bonfire of the Vanities' – the burning of lifestyle items, luxuries, mirrors and so on, certain books"

My apartment is only a few minutes' walk from the square that's named after Savonarola, with a statue of him in the centre of the park there. Savonarola railed against corruption and is associated with the term 'Bonfire of the Vanities' – the burning of lifestyle items, luxuries, mirrors and so on, certain books – that could be considered as being or leading to occasions of sin.

While he became very powerful for a time in Florentine politics of his day, ultimately he lost favour, was

excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI in 1497, and was hanged and burned at the stake in Piazza della Signoria the following year.

Fashion and shopping

Speaking of luxuries, in the world of fashion, Florence is no slouch. Its two most famous houses are Gucci and Ferragamo, and one could also mention Pucci and Cavalli, the latter's founder Roberto having passed away on April 12.

Florence is a fashionable city, in the best sense of the word. That said, the journalist Hannah Betts has written in a recent issue of *The Critic* about how unaffordable fashion has become: "There's no longer a sense that a civilian might save up for some element of a designer collection".

Citing Jess Graves, Betts noted that it seems that designers have become ever more highly focused on the top three per cent of EIPs (Extremely Important People). Well, that rules me out. I'm happy to content myself with the occasional pricey T-shirt and items from the OVS tech range.

i Michael Sanfey is a Visiting Fellow at the EUI's Robert Schuman Centre, working on a research project entitled *'The Liberal International Order and Global Governance: Ramifications of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine'*.

"I would grant that, from an Irish perspective, Florence is not all that easy to get to, lacking any direct flight from Dublin. Could that be a blessing in disguise, he asked cryptically?"



World Report

IN BRIEF

US priest: Pro-Palestine campus protests pushed by 'explicitly communist' outsiders

● Fr Roger Landry, a Catholic chaplain at Columbia University, said last week that the protests making national headlines at the New York City school are being organised in part by "explicitly communist" outside forces.

"There is an instrumentalisation of what's going on in Gaza to advance an agenda," he said. "And that is to deconstruct our present world order at which the United States is considered the top of that order."

Speaking on EWTN's 'The World Over with Raymond Arroyo', Fr Landry said that he had been walking through the encampment nearly daily, conversing with student protesters and other "outside agitators".

Uganda's Dioceses told to 'regulate use' of altar wine amid delays in shipment

● Catholic Dioceses in Uganda have been notified of a limited stock of wine for Holy Mass occasioned by delays in the shipment process. In an April 30 letter to financial administrators of Uganda's various Episcopal Sees, the leadership of JW InterServices Ltd, a company under the auspices of the Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC) that is involved in the procurement and shipment of wine alongside other goods and services, provides details of the altar wine shortage.

"This is to inform you that due to the Middle-East wars, the ship's usual passage through the Mediterranean and the Red Sea were suspended and cancelled," the Director of JW InterServices Ltd, Fr Asiku Alfred Tulu, says.

Fr Tulu adds, "The ships have been diverted to take longer and safer routes through the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean which has caused a major crisis and delays of their arrival to Mombasa Port (Kenya)".

Spanish archbishop slams government's obsession with the Catholic Church

● "They have done it again. It is a kind of obsessive mantra every time they need a smokescreen to distract from the real problems we have and to which they so clumsily and insidiously apply their tortuous governance."

That is how the archbishop of Oviedo, Jesús Sanz Montes, began a letter released last week titled 'The Accusing Rattle' in which he responds to the socialist government's announcement of an exclusive plan to address sexual and power abuses committed within the Catholic Church.

In the opinion of the prelate, the country's executive "has tried to focus in a biased and manipulative way on the problem of paedophilia as something attributable only to the Catholic Church, which represents an exclusive and improper singling out and leaves unprotected the majority of those who have suffered this terrible scourge".

New report urges better response to clerical abuse in English and Welsh Church

● A new report on the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in England and Wales says the Church's response to the victims and survivors of abuse "is not yet adequate or complete". The report issued on April 30 by Durham University is titled The Cross of the Moment, and opens by saying it explores "the impact and implications of clerical child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Catholic Church in England and Wales."

The Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse was observed on April 30 in England and Wales. A government-established inquiry into sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales said in 2020 that "real and lasting changes to attitudes have some way to go if the Roman Catholic Church is to shake off the failures of the past".

Chilean Catholic bishops fearful as three policemen murdered

In the wake of the brutal slaying of three police officers in Chile, an act that shocked the conscience of the South American nation, the country's Catholic bishops stressed the themes of violence and public fear in an April 30 meeting with Chilean President Gabriel Boric.

Archbishop René Rebolledo of La Serena, who heads the episcopal conference, said the encounter began with a mention of the tragic attack and the general insecurity felt by many Chileans.

The murders occurred in the early hours of April 27, on a rural road, as a police car with three carabineros headed to a house to verify that a local resident had complied with precautionary measures decreed by authorities.

Their armoured car stopped at some point, and the three men exited in circumstances which are still unclear. They were shot dead and put in the back of their truck, and the criminals who shot them then set their corpses on fire.

The atrociousness of the crime shocked many in Chile, a typically peaceful country where violence has been experiencing unprecedented growth over the past few years. While Chilean violence rates are still lower than those of its neighbours, the number of crimes such as kidnappings and murders have been rapidly increasing, along with drug trafficking. The tally of homicides in Chile, for instance, rose from 845 in



A riot policeman uses pepper spray on a demonstrator during a protest against the Chilean government in Santiago a number of years ago. (CNS photo/Ivan Alvarado, Reuters)

2018 to 1,322 in 2022.

President Boric's administration has been taking measures to combat violence, raising the budget for security by 5.7 percent in 2024 and passing several laws to increase the penalties for felonies connected to organised crime. Despite that, a survey recently showed that 90 percent of people believe the government's actions haven't stemmed the tide.

The entrance of criminal groups from other South American nations – especially

from Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela – is believed to be one of the factors of change in the security scenario in Chile.

Catholic churches are targeted and set on fire because they're seen as landmarks of colonialism. Over the years, some of those entities also began to take part in crimes like wood theft and drug trafficking, increasing the overall violence in the region.

The killing of the carabineros has been seen by analysts as a turning point in Chile's security history,

having attained an unprecedented degree of violence. Bishop Juan Ignacio González of São Bernardo, who took part in the meeting with President Boric, said that the encounter began with the subject of the three carabineros' deaths, given the enormous commotion it caused among the Chilean people.

"We talked about the criminality that has been provoking fear in the population. Our country wasn't used to that kind of violence," Bishop González told Crux.

Catholic woman to lead prestigious Israel university for first time

For the first time, an Arab Christian woman has been elected as the rector of an Israeli university – the University of Haifa. The announcement of Professor Mouna Maroun's appointment was made earlier in April amid tensions with Iran and while anti-Israel protests were mounting at universities around the world.

Ms Maroun belongs to the Arab minority in Israel, the Christian minority among Arabs, and the Maronite minority among Christians. No other Arab, Chris-

tian, or woman has held the position of rector before at the University of Haifa. (In the Israeli system, the rector is the head of the university.)

For this reason, Ms Maroun said in an interview with CNA, "my election is an important message that everything is possible in the Israeli academia. It is a message for the Christian minority that we are rooted here, that we can succeed here; and it is also a message for the young Arab generations: If you have a dream you can really realise it within

the Israel society and especially in universities".

Ms Maroun has embraced that belief as well. "My childhood was around being very active in the Church and studying, knowing that only through studying I could have succeeded in Israel."

Regarding this prestigious position in academia, she said: "I have always believed that the emancipation of the Arab minority in Israel is through higher education. I don't believe in politics; I do believe in higher education".

US priest blesses same-sex 'spouses,' says Fiducia Supplicans allows it

A priest in Chicago last month blessed a same-sex couple, saying that the Vatican's recent document Fiducia Supplicans authorised such blessings.

Fr Joseph Williams, the pastor of St Vincent de Paul Parish near downtown

Chicago, is seen in an April 22 video shared on Instagram by Kelli Knight, a Methodist minister and self-identified "queer" community organiser.

In the video, Williams is seen in the parish with Kelli and Myah Knight.

"Myah always wanted to get married at the chapel of her alma mater, so I surprised her with a blessing of our marriage!" Kelli wrote in the post. The parish is affiliated with the Catholic DePaul University in Chicago.



Edited by Brandon Scott
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

Inspecting the Pope's protectors



New recruits of the Pontifical Swiss Guard stand at attention while an officer inspects their uniforms during a training session at the Vatican April 30, 2024, ahead of their swearing-in ceremony May 6. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

Stark growth of countries considered to be in breach of religious freedoms

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a new report last week highlighting the countries with the worst religious persecution in the world.

This year, the countries topping USCIRF's list of the world's most egregious religious freedom violators were Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, India, Iran, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

Here are some of the countries with the most concerning religious freedom trends in the last year.

Afghanistan: Religious freedom and free expression have continued to deteriorate in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, according to the report. The country is violently enforcing an apostasy law

that bans conversions from Islam.

Azerbaijan: A majority Muslim country, Azerbaijan was included in USCIRF's CPC list this year for the first time. The country has been increasingly encroaching on the religious rights of both Azerbaijani Muslims as well as of ethnic minorities, such as the Armenian Christians.

China: The most populous country in the world, China is a mainstay of USCIRF's CPC list because of its continued "sinicisation" program, which subjects all its citizens and all religions in the country to the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Under China's communist government, all religions are strictly controlled by the state and any unauthorised religious activity is dealt with severely.

India: The second-most

populous country in the world, India is increasingly emerging as a leader on the world stage. According to the report, thousands of Christians and Muslims were subjected to attacks and intimidation in 2023 while hundreds of churches and mosques were destroyed.

Iran: Citizens in the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to suffer "extremely poor" religious freedom conditions, according to the report. In 2023, protesters against the government's mandatory hijab laws and other restrictions on religion were systematically harassed, arrested, raped, tortured, and, in some cases, executed.

Nicaragua: Nicaraguan dictators Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo intensified their persecution of the Catholic Church and other religious groups in 2023. In

the last year, the dictatorship seized the assets and properties of Catholic churches, monasteries, and schools and arbitrarily imprisoned and exiled hundreds of Catholics and political dissidents.

Nigeria: More than 8,000 Christians were killed across Nigeria last year, according to the report. On Christmas weekend alone, a series of attacks resulted in the deaths of 190 Christians in Nigeria's Plateau state.

Pakistan: Terrorist attacks against religious minorities and places of worship increased significantly in Pakistan in 2023, according to the report. The government moved to further strengthen prohibitions against "blasphemy," which observers say is a method of targeting religious minorities.

Murder of priest highlights rising violence in South Africa

In an incident that highlights the grim reality of South Africa's deteriorating security crises, another priest has fallen victim to violence. Fr Paul Tatu Mothobi, former Media and Communications Officer of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), was found dead on April 27.

According to Fr Jeremia Thami Mkhwanazi – the Provincial Secretary of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata (CSS/ Stigmatines) to which Mothobi belonged – his body was found in his car with bullet wounds along the road that runs from Cape Town through Bloemfontein, Johan-

nesburg, Pretoria and Polokwane to Beit Bridge, a border town with Zimbabwe.

The priest, who comes from Lesotho's Catholic Archdiocese of Maseru, was studying for his Doctorate in Communication at the University of Johannesburg when he met his death.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis to world's parish priests: The Church could not go on without you

● Pope Francis published a letter last week addressed to all parish priests in the world with his advice for building a missionary Church in which all the baptised share in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

"Parish communities increasingly need to become places from which the baptised set out as missionary disciples and to which they return, full of joy, in order to share the wonders worked by the Lord through their witness," Pope Francis wrote in the letter.

The Pope presented the letter to 300 priests participating in the Synod on Synodality's "World Meeting of Parish Priests" during an audience at the Vatican, saying that their meeting is "an opportunity to remember in my prayers all of the parish priests in the world to whom I address these words with great affection".

Armed man arrested in St Peter's in Rome was on US' 'Most Wanted' list

● A man arrested earlier this month in St Peter's Square while carrying three 8-inch knives is a former convict and fugitive from the law in New York state.

Moises Tejada, 54, is on the Most Wanted Fugitives list of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision because, authorities there say, he violated the terms of parole from state prison on kidnapping and robbery

convictions.

Mr Tejada twice immobilised real estate agents and stole from them while posing as a home buyer, according to New York state authorities.

More recently, he was arrested on Wednesday, April 10, the same day Pope Francis gave a general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. The man attracted the attention of authorities, who found the knives, *Reuters* reported.

Pope to speak at event on Italy's record-low birth rate

● The Vatican announced last week that Pope Francis will speak at an event on Italy's demographic crisis as the country's birth rate sits at a historic low.

The Pope will address 'The General State of the Birth Rate' conference on May 10 at the Conciliazione Auditorium close to the Vatican.

The two-day event organised by the Forum of Family Associations and the Foundation for Births seeks to address the 50 years of steady decline in births across Europe, and especially in Italy, and what can be done to reverse it.

Births in Italy dropped to a historic low in 2023. Italy's national statistics bureau recorded 379,000 births last year, a 3.6% decline from 2022 and a 34.2% drop from 2008.

Latin patriarch of Jerusalem takes possession of Rome titular church

● Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Catholic patriarch of Jerusalem, finally took possession on May 1 of his assigned titular church in Rome after having postponed the ceremony due to the war in the Holy Land.

Part of the process of becoming a cardinal is being assigned a titular church in Rome known as his "title" or "deaconry" in accordance with his role in assisting the Pope, the bishop of Rome.

The ceremony at St Onuphrius, the titular church of the papal order of the Holy Sepulchre, was scheduled for April 15 when the conflict in the Middle East worsened with the Iranian attack on Israel.

Scottish Catholics see a Protestant saviour



After centuries of religious sectarianism, Scottish Catholics have taken an unlikely fancy to the deeply Presbyterian Kate Forbes. Ian Dunn explains the shift.

Scottish politics is a shambles. A decade on from losing a historic referendum on independence, the Scottish Nationalist Party remains in charge of the devolved government in Edinburgh. A decade of scandals, criminal charges for former leaders, and stagnation hasn't yet convinced the Scottish people to give up on them.

Humza Yousaf, the most recent First Minister, resigned two weeks go after ending a power sharing deal with the Scottish Greens.

It emerged this week that he would be succeeded by John Swinney, a party veteran and party leader. But the more interesting figure is the one who decided not to run to replace him: Kate Forbes, a former finance minister and deeply devout member of the Free Church of Scotland.

The Free Church is as Presbyterian as it gets in a country where that used to mean something.

Themes

Over the last two centuries, one of the strongest themes in Scottish life has been the persistent hostility from the native Protestant majority towards a Catholic, largely Irish infused, minority. While the national Church of Scotland and the country as a whole are generally regretful about the decades of Catholic mistreatment, there are still pockets of bigotry.

It's only very recently

that a majority of the Catholic minority felt able to shed their lingering suspicion of Scottishness, which can be seen in their evolving attitude towards the SNP. Once seen as suspiciously 'orange' and hostile to Catholics, by 2014, Catholics were more likely than not to support independence.

However, not as likely as Scots who had left the Church of Scotland. For Caledonia has shed its Christianity with haste this century, with the majority professing no religion and the once-dominant Church of Scotland becoming increasingly irrelevant.

The avatars of this new secular Scotland are the Scottish Green Party. They have previously campaigned for the eradication of Scotland's 350 or so Catholic schools, and for the last three years were in government with the Scottish National Party. During this time, they seemed less concerned with the climate than pushing forward a variety of divisive culture war legislation around hate speech and gender recognition.

“It has been suggested that Kate Forbes MSP is unsuited to leading her party and becoming First Minister because of her religious convictions”

When Nicola Sturgeon resigned last year, the police in pursuit, the Greens were among the most vocal that Kate Forbes, her erstwhile finance secretary, could not succeed her.

Forbes had said her Christian faith meant she would seek to change the law on issues like abortion and gay marriage, as she could not personally support them. This brought forward a howl of rage from the Greens and liberal members of the Scottish political classes. The criticism became so intense that the Scottish bishops, who have been a quiet voice since the humbling of Cardinal O'Brien a decade ago, made a rare intervention into public affairs.

“It has been suggested that Kate Forbes MSP is unsuited to leading her party and becoming First Minister because of



Scotland's presumptive Deputy Minister Kate Forbes waves to press. Image: Andrew Milligan/PA Wire)

her religious convictions. We feel obliged to restate the well-established civic principle that holding or expressing religious beliefs and values does not and should not debar any individual from leadership in public office,” they said. “Regarding the silencing of conscience in general, we are particularly troubled by the increasing prevalence of political parties removing the right of conscience from their parliamentarians on votes involving contentious moral issues. Such actions inhibit freedom and are insidiously conformist in nature. They compromise open and honest debate and risk marginalising minority groups.”

Kate Forbes lost narrowly to the Muslim Humza Yousaf, the first Muslim leader of a Western European country.

Resigned

A year later, Yousaf resigned. He had booted the increasingly unpopular Scottish Greens from government but failed to do the parliamentary math and could not find a way forward.

Kate Forbes was immediately seen as a front-runner to replace him. And once again the secular machine leapt into action to condemn her and stop her ascending to the

top job.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum. This time the attacks were met with a robust defence. One particularly vicious piece in *The Times* declared Forbes could not be allowed to be First Minister under any circumstances. The backlash was so strong that the author declared he was leaving social media. (Obviously, he returned a few hours later).

“500 years of bitter division over worshipping Mary, justification, sola scriptura, transubstantiation, predestination, and atonement, all now in the bin”

The oddity was that many of the strongest defenders of Forbes were Scottish Catholics, and plenty of them did not share her politics.

The writer Ross Ahlfeld waggishly said it was ‘fascinating to watch Scots Catholics rally behind Kate Forbes like some kind of modern-day Mary, Queen of Scots. 500

years of bitter division over worshipping Mary, justification, sola scriptura, transubstantiation, predestination, and atonement, all now in the bin.’

“We are beginning to witness the death rattle of this kind of unreflective and rather self-righteous progressivism”

There's also been a general breakdown of the Scottish clannishness that leaves many reluctant to publicly go against the powers that be. The nationalists have been in power for nearly two decades, and there's a sense that their time is over.

But this may be linked to a shift that goes beyond Scotland. Nick Spencer, director of the religious think tank Theos, suggested ‘we are beginning to witness the death rattle of this kind of unreflective and rather self-righteous progressivism.’

“The sheer level of public bemusement, frustration, and anger at the SNP's spectacular mishandling of gender recognition and free speech; the sense that progressive leaders are fixating on these culture war issues while most people are far more worried about economic insecurity, casual crime, and the like; and the belief that tolerant progressives are ever more likely to try to close down, cancel, deplatform, or otherwise silence those with whom they disagree, is growing,” he said. “For many people now, it is not Kate Forbes who scares them. It is those who insist that she, and people like her, are unfit for office.”

In the end, Kate Forbes did not run again to be leader of the SNP and Scotland's First Minister. John Swinney, a much-loved party veteran, was lured out of retirement with a promise to unite the party and the country.

That required winning over Forbes, and the suggestion is she will be his deputy. Having said in the last leadership contest that her views were disqualifying, he now praises her to the hilt. Much to the irritation of many, she will re-enter government.

A leader in waiting and a sign that the religious divisions of the past can disappear surprisingly quickly when new enemies appear.

“For many people now, it is not Kate Forbes who scares them. It is those who insist that she, and people like her, are unfit for office”

Letters

Letter of the week

We are witnessing a culture of death

Dear Editor, Listening to the Gospel the other morning I was struck by the words "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you" (John 15:18). These words struck a chord with me because the previous day I was accused of lacking compassion by opposing assisted dying as a compassionate response to the suffering of people facing a painful death. It comes naturally to be moved by the pleas of people such as Dame Esther Rantzen. But I wonder if we are being misled under the banner of compassion to accept death and the destruction of life as solutions to the problem of human suffering.

Michael Kelly [*The Irish Catholic* – May 5, 2024] described how members of the Oireachtas ridiculed and castigated legal, medical and psychiatric experts who voiced opposition to euthanasia. We must be vigilant because people can argue that evil is good and good is evil, and the word 'compassion' is being redefined to convince us that abortion and euthanasia are compassionate acts. St Ignatius cautioned us that the Evil One will confuse us by suggesting good thoughts while intending to lead us to do his will.

Abortion and euthanasia must not be seen in isolation. They are part of a more pervasive issue: evil's influence

in our world. They should not be seen as separate from global warming, the destruction of ecosystems, violence, the oppression of the poor, the mistreatment of asylum seekers etc. We are witnessing a culture of death. Politicians look at problems in isolation to be solved. We see the presence of evil to be opposed.

In this secular age, when many are ashamed to call themselves Christian, we need the spirit of truth to give us the wisdom and courage to see and oppose the influence of evil.

*Yours etc.,
Brendan Kennedy
Belfast, Co. Antrim*

Real examples of synodality in action

Dear Editor, Congratulations to the author of 'Formation is important but not everything' [*The Irish Catholic* – May 2, 2024].

Ideas on synodality often come across as abstract and simply aspirational. The article points out that many lay organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, Youth 2000 and Net Ministries are real examples of synodality in action. They operate on a 'master and apprentice' system and new members easily learn on the job.

*Yours etc.,
Katherine Buggle
Stepaside, Dublin 18*



Shockingly inappropriate RSE for Catholic schools

Dear Editor, You will be aware that the recent Stormont motion concerning Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) was carried by a clear majority of 49 vs 33, with voting largely along party political lines. Sinn Féin, SDLP and PBP all voted in favour of the motion. Media coverage mainly concerned some childish and puerile behaviour by a DUP minister.

From a Catholic perspective, however, the debate and the result are both remarkable and concerning. Simple analysis of the vote would imply that all nationalist/republican voters support an extremely liberal programme of RSE in schools. Indeed, the tenor of the debate in Stormont suggested that parents and families are not to be trusted to provide RSE to their children because it requires 'experts' to deliver this. On the face of it, the vote suggests that only Catholics who vote for Unionist/loyalist parties have any concerns or reservations

about the current RSE programme being promoted in our schools. While some parents from the nationalist/republican community may be content with liberal RSE in schools, it simply cannot be the case that they all do.

At a time when young people are exposed to much malign and hideous information, graphic imagery and negative ideologies, appropriate RSE is more important than ever. Families of all faiths and none have the right for their children to be taught in compassionate and moral terms consistent with their own values. This is not happening in many Catholic schools.

RSE programmes that are both consistent with Catholic values and culture and compliant with the basic requirements of legislation are available and easily accessible.

Unfortunately, school managements too often appear too to be adopting 'off

the shelf' RSE programmes, some of which are shockingly inappropriate for Catholic schools. Lack of resources and funding cannot be used as an excuse for this negligence.

Perhaps we should remind ourselves that parents are the first and primary educators of their children. Parents and families have the right to have their children educated in a tolerant, compassionate Catholic environment. Parents and governors have more rights than perhaps they realise and could certainly exercise their right to question schools on the important subject of RSE policy. Parents do have the means to influence how their children are treated in the maintained sector and should be reminded of the fact rather than succumb to despair.

*Yours etc.,
Michael Murphy
Magherafelt, Co. Derry*

Synodal Church can play vital role in migration crisis

If you were to boil down the vision for a renewed 'synodal' Church in Ireland to one key aim, it would be listening.

True listening means treating each person as an individual beloved by God, who has called each by name. That may sound pious, but it requires courage as well as humility, particularly when it comes to contentious issues like migration.

The scenes we are seeing in Ireland are truly shocking, both the mistreatment and condescension of Government towards local communities – and their cavalier treatment of asylum seekers, bussing them here, there and everywhere, without regard for the effect on their lives.

The voices of those directly affected by migration are often given the least attention, both Government and by our media culture.

But if they aren't listening, the Church could and should be; its efforts in this area could truly model a synodal Church, allowing both local communities and asylum seekers to air grievances, and then discerning a Christian – and therefore truly humane – response.

The fact that the Church is an all-island body at a time when relations between North and South are strained by the question of illegal immigration only further strengthens the point.

In fact, this was one of the key goals of the Irish synod when announced by our bishops' conference back in March 2021. The bishops stressed the need to promote a "culture of welcome and integration for migrants and the many newcomers who have arrived to live on this island".

Many local communities and Catholic charities are already at the forefront in this mission, offering English language classes, spiritual support and necessities like food and funds.

They are also listening to the concerns of local communities – many of them rural and quite distant

from the centres of political power – who express genuine grievances and fears.

Parish priests across the country have the finger on the pulse on many of these issues, as do local charities. They may not be willing to give public statements out of respect for those who speak to them; but what if they were given an opportunity to gather for a conversation, to raise their voices and be listened to?

It is scandalous that the Government and many NGOs have scorned the voices and input of parishes.

But if the Government isn't doing it, why can't the Church? This is not an issue we need to wait for Rome to move on; bishops could facilitate synodal-style opportunities for forgotten or marginalised voices to be listened to.

The bishops have in the past given quite strong and balanced perspectives on concerns around migration. For instance, in 2023, just after the November riots, the conference appealed for "all people of goodwill, to stand up against all forms of racism, violence division, hatred, misinformation and fear. They also bring to the fore the need for concerted efforts to foster a culture of encounter between immigrants, immigrant communities and Irish society."

However, they also called for "redouble[d] efforts towards a responsible management of the current situation. This necessitates fulsome consultation on the planning and delivery of adequate accommodation and associated healthcare, educational and social services for the entire community, and to ensure that issues concerning multiple levels of deprivation in different parts of the country are tackled, so that no one can perceive themselves as disadvantaged".

The Government aren't willing to do it – but the Church can and should be. Cardinal Mario Grech in his visit to Knock stressed the need for the Church to speak with a "prophetic voice" on such hard topics and now is our chance.

Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's

publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.

Catholic women writers are 'bold, creative, and inspiring'



Female Catholic authors tackled modern themes with an awareness of God, Ruadhán Jones hears

Catholics drawn to finding beauty in the written word will be delighted by the unearthing of some forgotten contributions to the Catholic literary revival in England in a new series.

The series on women writ-

ers from the early to mid-20th Century has been released by Catholic University of America press (CUA), under the editorship of Maynooth's Dr Julia Meszaros and Cambridge academic Dr Bonnie Lander Johnson.

“I started looking for a literature that had an awareness of God and was asking the questions that were so important for me”

The series – which includes Irish author Mary Beckett – showcases the skill with which these authors tackle “the big questions” about God and suffering, while situating them in modern life and literary styles, Dr Meszaros tells *The Irish Catholic*.

The series was partly

born out of a desire to find literature that looked beyond the “nihilism and materialism characterising so many novels”, the Maynooth academic continues.

“I started looking for a literature that had an awareness of God and was asking the questions that were so important for me: what are we here for, how do we find God in our lives, why do we suffer. That kind of stuff, big questions.”

Dr Meszaros search led her to “the usual suspects”, including Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and Flannery O'Connor, but she was hungry for more.

“At some point I came across Caryl Houselander, her novel called *The Drywood* and found it deeply moving but realised it was out of print... At the same time a friend and colleague at Cambridge Bonnie Lander Johnson discovered the same thing about another

Catholic writer called Alice Thomas Ellis. People who were alive in the 70s would probably know her but she was quite infamous then.”

Surprised

Drs Meszaros and Johnson started digging around and were surprised to discover that there were loads of Catholic writers, mostly women, who were successful in their day but forgotten today.

They approached CUA, who told them they had a potential series on their hands, and from suggestion came the Catholic Women Writers series.

The series can reestablish a balance in the canon of Catholic literature, Dr Meszaros hopes, “because it is true that most of us when we think of Catholic writers, we mostly have male names at the forefront of our minds. Flannery O'Connor is probably the big exception.”

“Female authors are often tainted with the idea that they are all just angry Catholics, critical of the Church and its patriarchal structures... we did find that that's not really true, they are a lot of other more happily Catholic female writers.”

Many of the authors they discovered form part of ‘The Catholic Literary Revival’, a period of renewed Catholic life and culture primarily in Britain and France the 19th and 20th Century.

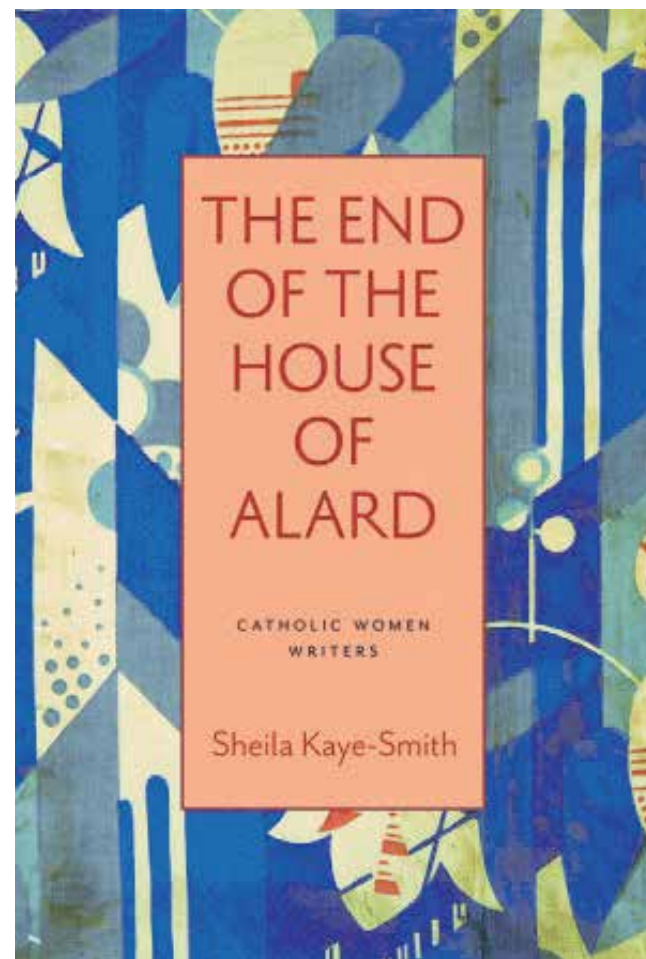
Aside from the usual suspects already mentioned, the revival includes such luminaries as JRR Tolkien, Hilaire Belloc and non-Catholic writers like CS Lewis in England.

In England, this renewal had to do with Catholic emancipation and then the direction in which St John Henry Cardinal Newman took the Oxford Movement, Dr Meszaros explains.

“After Catholic emancipation, Catholics ventured into the public sphere including the arts and letters and there was a whole wave of conversions among intellectuals and artists who flocked to the Church in the early decades of the 20th Century,” she says.

While the revival is traditionally thought to have ended in the mid-20th Century, with a suggestion that the tail off coincided with Vatican II, Dr Meszaros contests this.

Literary output “probably did reach its climax in the first half of the 20th



Century, but we would venture to say that it didn't stop with Vatican II”, Dr Meszaros says.

“Actually if we look for it and want to find it, there is great Catholic literature being written all the way up until today. It's just the way the publishing world developed in the second half of the century, it was harder for Catholic writers to be placed within the big commercial presses.”

“Catholic literature is a little more hidden, but it does exist still and continued to exist throughout the 20th Century and especially yes if we put the women into the frame.”

The first novel released in the series is a prime example of a Catholic woman writer disentangling modern issues through the lens of ‘big questions’.

“It's very realist novel, it doesn't embellish the realities of a postwar working-class parish”

The Drywood by best-selling English spiritual writer, poet and mystic Caryl Houselander traces the nine days of a novena as parishioners at a work-

ing class docklands parish in London pray to their recently deceased priest, who they think is a saint.

It's unlikely material for what is, it could be argued, a ‘modernist’ novel, combining realism with a God's-eye view of proceedings.

“Houselander takes us through the different members of that parish and their different, and in some ways desperate, disconnected, broken lives,” says Dr Meszaros.

“It's very realist novel, it doesn't embellish the realities of a postwar working-class parish... At the same time, she allows us to see them through God's eyes.”

Techniques

That sounds a bit simplistic, Dr Meszaros admits, but she explains that Ms Houselander uses literary techniques “in such a way as allows us to actually see divine grace at work in these lives. It's a very moving reflection on human suffering and how God is at work in the world.”

What makes the novel so clever is that it makes use of modernist techniques without falling into modern conclusions about human meaninglessness and the isolation of modern life, she continues.

“She really gives it a

Dr Julia Meszaros





Author Caryl Houselander

very Catholic spin," says Dr Meszaros. "She gives us an equally modern and a Catholic perspective of modern life.

"Her novel is probably the most explicitly spiritual novel in the series, even pious perhaps to some extent. It is evident that she was a spiritual writer up until then. Unfortunately she died right after writing that novel, so she wasn't able to develop her style as a writer of fiction."

“The novel looks at how we can live meaningful lives in relation to God in the midst of worldly chaos around us, and in the midst indeed of difficult family relationships”

There is one Irish author on the books for the series, that being Mary Beckett, from Belfast but Dublin based for most of her life. CUA are to publish her novel set during the Troubles in the North, *Give Them Stones*.

The Catholic novel didn't take root in the same way as Ireland, with Dr Meszaros speculating that being a minority faith seemed to be "stimulating and inspiring" for English writers. But for Ireland, where Catholicism was the majority religion, it was harder to write Catholic fiction that was interest-

ing and alive without being simply critical.

Mary Beckett's novel tells the story of Martha Murtagh, a home baker who tries to support her family in the midst of the violence erupting around her.

Meaningful

"The novel looks at how we can live meaningful lives in relation to God in the midst of worldly chaos around us, and in the midst indeed of difficult family relationships," says Dr Meszaros.

Despite being realistic, they are never negative or downcast and that's what makes them so authentically Catholic, the Maynooth academic says.

"They are all very hope filled and that's partly because they are very sacramental. The protagonist in Beckett's novel – there's a whole theme there that it's through the breaking of the bread that grace comes to her and that she actually retains the divine, the ability to face what she needs to face.

"There's an encounter with God with this mundane, practical, everyday task that she has to perform."

For Dr Meszaros, the book's message it still "so relevant" because resembles the simple lives the majority of us live.

"I find a lot of these women authors, having lived quite domestic lives themselves, are really good at exploring that theme – where is God in those ordi-

nary, perhaps repetitive everyday lives and everyday labour that we need to perform."

Though the novels first publication dates range the 1890s to the 1980s, they all maintain a relevance to our own day.

One theme the authors dwell on, which transcends time, is the cost of religious faith.

"Faith in none of these novels is an easy thing. It often comes at quite a high price for its protagonists," says Dr Meszaros.

In that sense, they are realist, but they move beyond what would be typically considered a 'realist' style.

"They never present the faith as something unattractive but always as beautiful and enriching," she says.

"The workings of grace in these characters' lives always add a richness and complexity and beauty to these lives that couldn't be found otherwise."

“The women authors respect that aspect of the genre, at the same time they ‘boldly try to depict faith and holiness as also being a human reality’”

Dr Meszaros suggests that the women authors, more so than their male counterparts,



are willing to be explicit about the reality of faith in human lives.

"They are interested in exploring what faith looks like concretely and how it might inform human actions," she continues.

"I think that's a rare thing because the novel tends, because of its form, to want to depict difficulties and all that is hard and broken in human lives. It is easier to portray a bad character than a good one."

But while the women authors respect that aspect of the genre, at the same time they "boldly try to depict faith and holiness as also being a human reality."

Inspiring

"I think that's quite bold and interesting and creative and inspiring. And that we need," Dr Meszaros avers.

Another issue that the series addresses tangentially is the question of how Catholic can approach novels as writers and readers.

American Catholic author Flannery O'Connor frequently complained that Catholic readers – and readers in general – were not equipped by their education or culture to appreciate fiction as it was intended to be.

In a collection of her essays, the famous author recalls St Thomas Aquinas' definition of art as a thing

that is good in itself, saying that both as an artist and a reader you must have that holistic appreciation for a work of fiction.

Specifically as a Catholic writer or reader, you have to understand that a Catholic work of fiction is still primarily a work of fiction and stands the test of time based on if it is a good one or not.

“This is of course reflected in the arts. The arts are not always deeply inspired by divine grace or by supernatural faith”

Dr Meszaros suggests that this was something that O'Connor was frustrated about, noting that "as Catholics we can be overly afraid of the world, especially where – which is usually the case – it is not faith filled".

"This is of course reflected in the arts. The arts are not always deeply inspired by divine grace or by supernatural faith," she says.

She wonders if a suspicion of the arts has grown among Catholics, adding that the writers of the CUA series "help to relieve us of that suspicion".

"They are all women who lived in the world boldly and without fear and who depict the hidden presence of Christ in the world and therefore teach us to see that as far removed from God as the world may seem, or as empty of God, it actually isn't that," says Dr Meszaros.

Hope

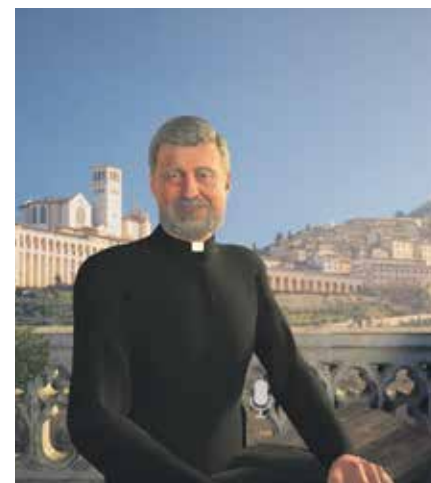
"Literature in general and these books in particular can help us approach the world with love of and hope and help us discover God's love in it and help us discover the beauty even of the brokenness of the world.

"Not just the beauty, but the particular theological or religious relevance of that. Because after all, God is particularly present in human suffering or in all that is seemingly removed from him."

Dr Meszaros finishes, saying: "So we need to relearn to find Christ in our fellow human beings. I think a lot of these writers, and Flannery O'Connor is herself one of them, are really good at seeing that.

"And that is maybe something that artists in general can teach us. Because artists after all are people who are perceptive, who are good at observing things closely and seeing beyond appearances," she concludes.

“Literature in general and these books in particular can help us approach the world with love of and hope and help us discover God's love in it and help us discover the beauty even of the brokenness of the world”



Afraid of Marian apparitions?



Adriana Goncalves, 6, left, her brother Matias, 10, and Diana Lima, 7, portray Our Lady of Fatima visionaries Jacinta Martos, Francisco Martos and Lucia dos Santos during a candlelight rosary procession at Corpus Christi Church in Mineola, New York. Photo: CNS



Pope Francis prays in front of a statue of Our Lady of Fátima before beginning his celebration of the closing Mass for World Youth Day at Tejo Park in Lisbon, Portugal, August 6, 2023. Photo: CNS



May is a chance to celebrate Mary's many appearances, writes Gretchen Crowe

Seven years ago this May, the Church celebrated the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Mary to three shepherd children at Fatima. To commemorate the event, Pope Francis visited Portugal, as did thousands upon thousands of pilgrims.

Apparitions

It was a time of great rejoicing and a time of remembering, especially Mary's urgent plea to the children to pray the Rosary for peace in the world and for 'an end to the war'. But Mary's apparitions in Fatima, of course, form just one apparition event among many.

Earlier this year, in February, the Church marked 166 years since Mary appeared to St Bernadette near a stream in Lourdes,

France. It's been 165 years since she appeared in Champion, Wisconsin; 493 since Tepeyac Hill; 91 years since Belgium – and the list goes on.

And though Catholics are not required to believe in these apparitions, the Church has found many worthy of official approval.

For me, to believe that Mary, our queen of heaven and earth and our mother, continues to come to us in humility and love, calling us to conversion and into a deeper relationship with her son is quite moving. And it makes sense, for it is what she has always done.

In her descriptive and eminently readable book *Those Who Saw Her: Apparitions of Mary* (OSV, \$19.95), now in its fourth edition, Catherine Odell describes how Marian apparitions "have

always had something to do with her heart and the world's needs".

Ms Odell's highly researched text places you at the setting of each apparition, describing the 'main characters' and giving context and even dialogue. She shows that what Mary brings, in her apparitions, is 'part of the larger plan of her Son, who gave and continues to give salvation'.

It was to this text that I turned when visiting two Marian apparition sites earlier this year – the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in southern France and the Shrine of the Miraculous Medal on Rue de Bac in Paris.

Revitalisation

Reading the accounts of the events and being in those two locations reminded me that Mary comes among us to inspire the hearts of believers then and now. She wants us to be active disciples of her son and, in so doing, to change the world.

As Odell writes: "It is not just individual hearts and spirits that are the goal of her conversion efforts. The Virgin is interested in the revitalisation of communities and of the Church."

What does that mean for us, then? How can we respond to Our Lady's call?

As we enter into this Marian month of May, perhaps we could spend some time not only praying the Rosary, singing Marian hymns or crowning images of Our Lady – all very worthwhile activities – but reading about and reflecting on Mary's appearances here on earth.

What did she tell us? Who did she talk to? How should we be responding? How can we be keeping her message, and that of her Son, alive in our hearts, homes and communities?

Ms Odell's text is a great place to start, and it contains a helpful bibliography for further reading. It would be perfect for book club or other small group reading.

Very practically, we could also take note of Marian apparition days on the calendar and commemorate them with a novena or another prayer. We could read up on the Miraculous Medal, or even start wearing one.

Maybe we could even plan a pilgrimage – either in person, or of the armchair variety – to an apparition site. In the US, there

is an approved apparition site in Champion, Wisconsin, that is quite beautiful.

Assurance

Approaching these apparitions with open hearts, as well as with prudence – we should be most attentive to those apparitions the Church has approved – could reap great rewards.

As Ms Odell writes, "With all apparitions, there is a tension between authority and prophecy (the Church and apparitions) that must work itself out again and again."

"The tension will continue, but there is little need to be concerned that it will damage the Church, theologians assure us. Mary has assured us that she is indeed Mother of the Church."

"It is safe – and even necessary – to believe that she will always be near. And when the time is right and the needs of the world warrant it, she will be close enough for some eyes to see and many hearts to know."

Gretchen R. Crowe is the editor-in-chief of OSV News.

One mom-theologian's take on keeping kids Catholic



Charlie Camosy

Raising faithful Catholic kids in today's society is not easy. Holly Taylor Coolman, assistant professor of theology at Providence College and adoptive mother of five, recognises the many challenges and recently spoke with OSV News' Charlie Camosy about her new book *Parenting: the Complex and Beautiful Vocation of Raising Children*.

Why yet another book on the topic of parenting? Aren't there enough such books?

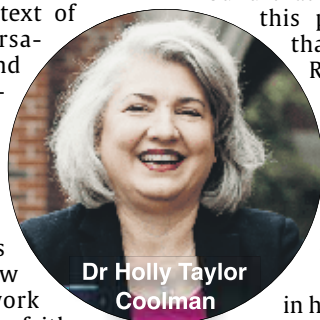
Holly Taylor Coolman: There are quite a few! This book came out of experiences I had, though, that suggested a real need. My husband and I have five kids, most of whom are now grown. I found I was hearing regularly from younger parents who wanted advice – or sometimes just a listening ear.

In the context of those conversations, I found myself stepping back to consider some bigger questions. What are we really up to as parents? How does this work connect to the faith we profess?

That approach – combining personal, 'on-the-ground' experience with big picture ideas – runs throughout this book. And maybe this is just what you get when a theologian writes a parenting book?

Theology certainly involves both of these things: it brings us in contact with some very big ideas, but also revolves around a God who knows us and loves us, who came to share our human life in all its everyday detail.

Many of us are concerned about how to best raise our kids Catholic, particularly in the current culture. A new study came out on this topic recently. Any thoughts on the study? Ideas that you think are worth highlighting?



Dr Holly Taylor Coolman



Taylor Coolman: Recent data shows that about a third of those raised Catholic will walk away from the Church (even though most of these report that they were very involved as children, attending Mass at least once a week).

The study you are referring to is really helpful, I think. It found that the key is not this programme or that programme. Rather, those who remained in the Church tended to have had a foundational experience in their families.

They grew up in homes that were warm and connected, where children were invited to talk about their faith, including voicing doubts and sharing struggles. Parents and children spent time together in prayer and service to others – and also in just having fun together.

My book invites readers to move more deeply into a vision of this sort of family life. I don't think that we necessarily need more faith-related 'activities'. We need ways to imagine the everyday stuff of life – eating together, driving to school, even things like discipline or chores – as places where this vision can be lived out.

Just one example: in the book, I talk about the family table as a crucial place of formation. I think it's worth it to be intentional about

doing a daily meal as a family, including sharing prep and clean-up, even if it means saying no to other things.

You seem to be drawing a significant amount from your personal experience. Can you tell us a bit about your history of being a parent and how that history informed your writing of this book?

Taylor Coolman: My husband's and my parenting story is an adventure, to be sure. I mentioned that we have five children. All five came to us via adoption, and in most cases, they came with connections to their birth families, as well.

Our youngest two came to us later when they were tweens, and so we have had to do a lot of learning and growing as we become part of their stories, and they become part of ours.

Our kids have a huge variety of gifts, challenges, interests, etc. In the process of raising them, we have had to be creative as we try to accompany each of them and build a larger family culture at the same time.

All of this has required the

big picture thinking I mentioned. There are no simple 'tricks' or 'strategies' that could work with all of our kids in our big, unpredictable family!

Our family experience has also made me pretty suspicious of the drive for 'perfection' that I see all around me. In our image-driven world, it's easy to fall into focusing on kids who say the right things, do the right things, or at least can be collected into a winsome, colour-coordinated photo. But I think we are called to bigger things.

Your experience provokes me to ask the following: it is one thing to think about parenting in the context of a mother and father in a healthy first marriage with biologically-related children. But quite another in the context of divorce or separation, single parenthood, and other ways of being family in our messy, fallen world. Can you speak to this a bit?

Taylor Coolman: I talk about this at length in the book. I envision two primary approaches here, approaches that I think ultimately com-

“Nuclear families have become more and more isolated. It's so normalised that parents don't even realise how much the challenges of their day-to-day life are created by it”

plement each other. The first is just to be sensitive to varying family configurations and to affirm that these families, too, have a place in the Church. We can celebrate the goods of marriage and birth while also meeting people where they are.

The second is to be unfraid in noting the real losses and absences that are present. Any family will have to face loss, but for some these are persistent.

As an adoptive parent, for example, it's important to me to say that I don't simply replace a birth parent. I believe that part of my call is to come alongside my children in processing the losses involved in their adoptions. These are complex matters, but we can begin by building habits of honouring those who are absent and by welcoming the more difficult emotions of anger and sadness. That can be scary, but the risk is worth it if we want to love one another fully. And we can have a certain boldness, knowing that we all are supported by a love much greater than ourselves.

What responsibility does the broader church have to help parents in such situations?

Taylor Coolman: I'm convinced that it's impossible for parents to do all this on their own, but, sadly, nuclear families have become more and more isolated. It's so normalised that parents don't even realise how much the challenges of their day-to-day life are created by it.

This is another way that I think my book is somewhat unusual: it's not simply giving parents more advice about how they can do it alone, but is about finding and building community. This, of course, is central to what the Church is about. And there are so many specific ways that parents can be supported: parent gatherings with childcare provided, family retreats or mentorship with more experienced parents.

The challenges are huge, but we have so many opportunities to meet those challenges with courage and love.

Charlie Camosy is professor of medical humanities at the Creighton School of Medicine in Omaha, Nebraska, and moral theology fellow at St Joseph Seminary in New York.

“In our image-driven world, it's easy to fall into focusing on kids who say the right things, do the right things, or at least can be collected into a winsome, colour-coordinated photo. But I think we are called to bigger things”

Guarding our hearts' desires



Sr Anne Marie Walsh SOLT

We tend to like a lot of things. The more we like something, the more attached we can become to it. This can be good, bad, or indifferent. Being attached to our families, our spouses, our children, etc., is a good thing so long as it is a healthy attachment and doesn't usurp the primary place God should hold in our lives.

If everything were so straightforward, we wouldn't have to worry about what we are attached to. But as it is, we need a lot of purification to bring order and healing into our fallen nature, which is drawn to so many things that are not life-giving and not helpful to deepening our relationship with God.

Attachment

Oftentimes, we can become attached to things that are morally neutral in and of themselves but which become problematic because of the power they exert over us.

For instance, you may love to listen to music because you appreciate its beauty and its capacity to touch the soul or spirit of a person. But if you find yourself compulsively listening to music, spending hours daydreaming or fantasising, then there is a problem.

The affection for something can begin to take over and control other

vital areas of life. Our heart begins to demand what it wants when it wants it. Allowing our likes and dislikes to lead us begins to compromise our freedom and disorient our hearts away from God.

God has designed our hearts in an interesting way. They want to be entirely filled with that which they love. And they are meant for this.

But the attention of the heart is fickle and easily deceived because upon obtaining that which it thinks it loves, it becomes disappointed quickly, discovering that it still has a great emptiness inside.

“They will never be at peace until they take God in and allow Him to fill the emptiness with Infinite fullness and infinite Love”

And so, it looks for something else. It allows itself to be captured by many different things that will, in the end, also fail to satisfy it to the depth it craves.

How else can you explain the number of people who have 'made it', who have acquired everything this world has to offer, fame and notoriety included, and then suddenly end their own lives?

People are always shocked by this, but if the heart is starved too long of the authentic love it is really seeking, it comes to a point where it finds life no longer worth living.

God works hidden miracles when it comes to our hearts. The secret is that our hearts, though finite, were created for the infinite. They will never be at peace until they take God in and allow him to fill the emptiness with Infinite fullness and infi-

nite Love.

St Augustine discovered this after allowing his own heart, his affections, to wander down pathways of grave sin in search of what would finally appease the restlessness that continually dogged him.

His most famous quote is the result of discovering the answer: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee O Lord."

Challenge

The challenge today is to guard our hearts, first and foremost, from any affection for sin, to remind ourselves that, ultimately, the human heart cannot digest the world's offerings.

Any attachment to mortal sin must be severed. And any affection for venial sin (ie, liking to gossip, liking to overeat or drink too much, etc.) must also be banished from our hearts.

This does not mean that we won't occasionally fail. But it means that generally, we don't allow our affections to engage with what we know either offends God as our loving father or is a poor substitute for the true inheritance he wills for us.

Only the Triune God should inhabit our souls. There is no room for the infinite God to dwell within us if our hearts are filled with finite 'treasures', the vain attractions of the world.

Pope Paul VI noted that today, even believers are enamored of the marvels of the modern age and diverted from attention to the one thing necessary.

If we are to attain to God himself and avoid the utter destruction of our own hearts in Hell, we must do the hard work of uprooting affections and attachments that block God from mastering our hearts to the more abundant life.



If we don't guard our hearts, legitimate desires like those for good food can get out of hand.

Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

What role might AI play in catechesis?

Q: Can an artificial intelligence program licitly receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders? And regardless, what role do you think AI might be able to play in catechesis, if any?

A: No, an artificial intelligence program cannot receive the sacrament of Holy Orders (or any other sacrament, for that matter). Sacraments can only be received by humans, as only human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore only human beings are capable of becoming more closely configured to Christ, healed and redeemed from sins or ordained to serve God's people as an image of Christ in the sacramental priesthood.

In contrast, an artificial intelligence programme is fundamentally just a very sophisticated computer application. While there have been some interesting philosophical and scientific discussions about whether it might be possible for AI to eventually become advanced to the point of becoming dangerous, or to the point of developing something that resembles self-aware consciousness, this would not change the fact that AI is something entirely man-made and lacking the human immortal soul that only God can create.

An AI creation cannot be validly ordained, meaning that any fanciful attempts at 'ordaining' a computer programme simply wouldn't work. And although our current Code of Canon Law never discusses AI explicitly, my thought is that it would also be illicit – meaning not permitted by law – for any bishop to attempt to ordain an AI program in earnest.

As a corollary, an AI application also cannot confer any sacraments validly. As we learned from the recent short-lived Catholic AI 'Father Justin' programme, even if an AI program 'listens' to one's sins and generates the words of absolution, this would not constitute a valid confession.

And although a lay person (or even a non-Catholic) can validly and licitly baptise in an emergency, if there was a hypothetical AI robot that could pour water while broadcasting the baptismal formula over speakers, this would not result in a valid baptism.

But to address the second part of your question, I think AI could certainly have some legitimate catechetical uses. The Catholic community has already benefited from things like search engines for the Catechism of the Catholic Church or other magisterial documents for many years. In a similar vein, an AI program based on the catechism could potentially share the riches of the catechism in an even more user-friendly way.

That being said, I also think we need to be realistic about what AI can and cannot do for our catechetical efforts. For one thing, while AI can share information on a given topic in perhaps a more accurate or more efficient way than would be possible for many humans, nothing can replace the value of a person-to-person relationship in evangelising and handing on the faith.

Human beings can bear a personal witness to the reality of Christ in their life, which is something that no computer program – no matter how sophisticated – will ever be able to do.

Additionally, while I myself am not a computer scientist, my understanding is that AI, like all computer programs, can essentially only repeat information that it has been 'told'. AI might be able to search the internet in general, and it might be able to recognise patterns in highly sensitive ways, but it will lack the creativity and intuitive insight of a human mind.

So for example, while AI might be able to quickly generate the relevant catechetical facts in response to a question about Catholic doctrine, AI will not be able to take into account all the pastoral nuances of why a person is asking such a question and what information is really going to be helpful to them in their life of faith.

Sometimes bare facts are what is needed in answer to a question, but an experienced priest or skilled human catechist will be better able to pick up on the 'questions behind the question'.

❗ 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.

An invitation to a liturgical prayer



We are all priests from our baptism, and with that comes an invitation, namely, to pray for the world as a priest through the prayer of Christ and the Church. What does that mean exactly?

Everyone who is baptised as a Christian is baptised into the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The priesthood is given to all baptised Christians and is not just the prerogative and responsibility of those who are officially ordained for ministry, and with this comes an invitation to all adult Christians.

Prayer

This invitation is something very concrete. We don't have to think about what we are meant to do or invent something. Rather, we are invited to join in a practice that began in the early apostolic community and has come down to us today, that is, the practice of daily praying two sets of prayers out of a ritual set of prayers that are variously called: *The Divine Office of the Church*, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, *The Canonical Hours*, or *The Breviary*.

Since the time of the earliest Christian monastics, these prayers have been a key element in the prayer of the Church, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

There are eight such sets of prayers, each meant to be said at a different time of day and linked to the mood and light of the hour. The eight sets of these prayers are: *Lauds* (prayed as morning prayer); *Prime* and *Terce* (prayed at various times during the morning); *Sext*



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

(prayed at noon); *None* (prayed mid-afternoon); *Vespers* (prayed as the workday ends); *Compline* (prayed as a night prayer); and *Vigils* (prayed sometime during the night). Note the appropriateness of the name, *The Liturgy of the Hours*.

“These prayers need to be distinguished from our private prayers. These are not private meditations”

While there are eight sets of these prayers, only monks and nuns inside contemplative orders pray all eight of these. Priests, deacons, men and women in religious orders that are fully engaged in ministry, Protestant and Evangelical ministers, and laity who pray these “hours”, normally pray only two of them, *Lauds* (Morning Prayer) and *Vespers* (Evening Prayer).

And these prayers need to be distinguished from our private prayers.

“In praying these prayers, we are assuming one of our responsibilities as adult Christians, that is, to pray with the Church, through Christ, for the world”

These are not private meditations, but are what is called public prayer, liturgical prayer, the Church's prayer, the prayer of Christ for the world. Ideally, they are meant to be prayed, indeed celebrated communally, but they are still the public prayer of the Church even when they are prayed alone.

The intent in praying them is to join the official prayer of the Church and pray a prayer that is being prayed at that same hour by thousands (perhaps millions) of Christians around the world who, as the Body of Christ, are praying Christ's priestly prayer for the world.

Moreover, since these are the prayers of the Church, and not our own prayer, we are not free to change them or substitute other prayers for them according to our temperament, piety, or theological taste.

These prayers don't have to be personally meaningful to us each day. We are praying as priests, offer-

“This invitation is something very concrete. We don't have to think about what we are meant to do or invent something. Rather, we are invited to join in a practice”

ing prayer for the world, and that is deeply meaningful in itself, independent of whether it is affectively meaningful to us on a given day or even during a whole period of our lives.

Fulfilling a responsibility isn't always affectively meaningful. In praying these prayers, we are assuming one of our responsibilities as adult Christians, that is, to pray with the Church, through Christ, for the world.

The two hours (*Lauds* and *Vespers*) that we are invited to pray each day follow a simple structure: three psalms, a short scriptural reading, an ancient Christian hymn (the *Benedictus* or the *Magnificat*), a short series of petitions, the Lord's Prayer, and a concluding prayer.

Invitation

So, this is the invitation: as an adult Christian, as a priest from your baptism, as a woman or man concerned for the world and the Church, I invite you to join thousands and thousands of Christians around the world and each day pray the Church's morning prayer (*Lauds*) and the Church's evening prayer (*Vespers*).

Then, like Christ, as a priest, you will be offering sacrifice for the world. Subsequently, when you watch the world news and feel discouraged and helpless in the face of

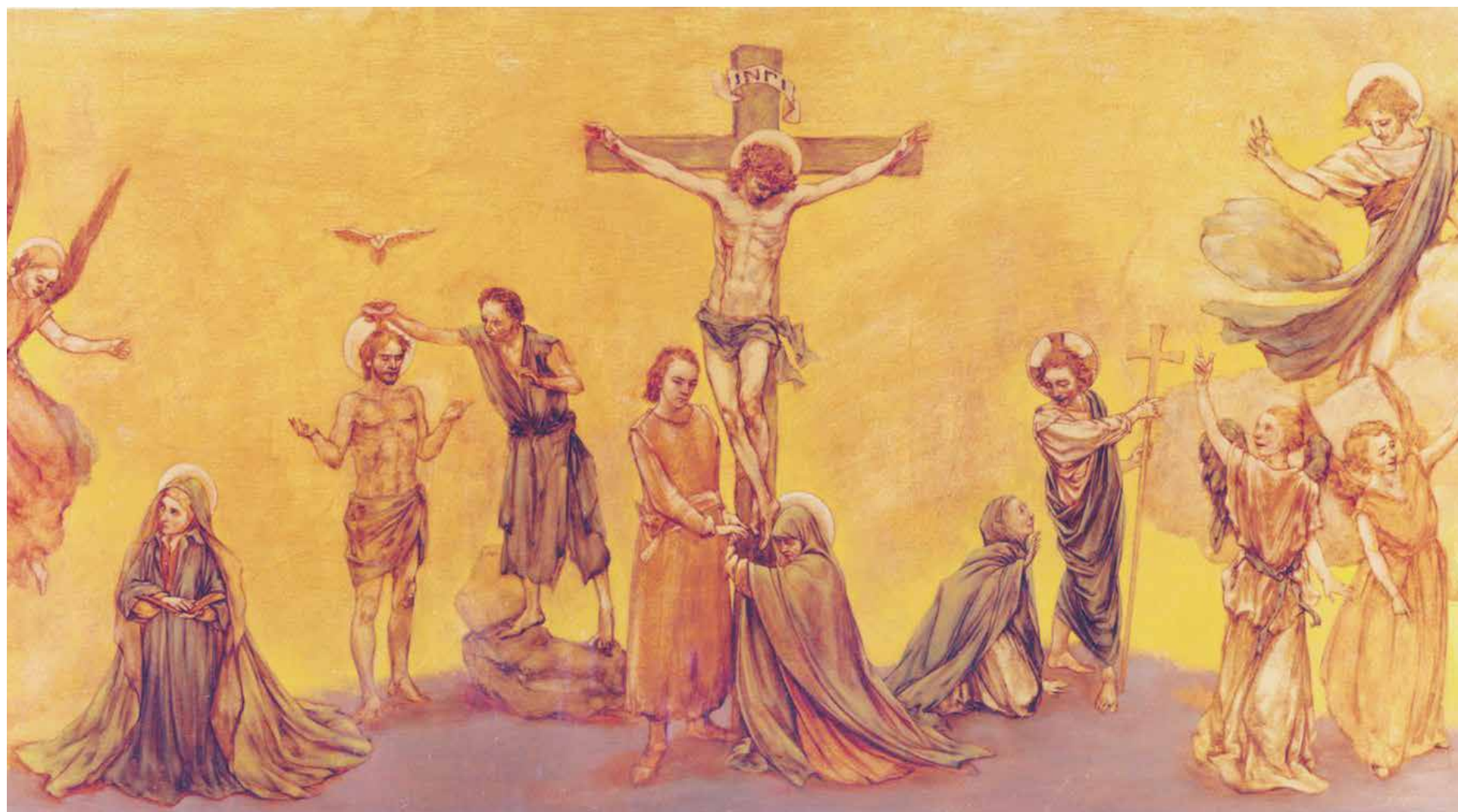
all that isn't right in the world and ask yourself, what can I do? Well, you will be doing something that's very real, praying with Christ and the Church for the world.

“Praying these prayers each day, whether alone or (ideally) with others, you will be assuming a special power and a responsibility given to you”

Where do you find these prayers, *Lauds* and *Vespers*? Books containing them can be purchased from almost any religious publishing house, Catholic or Protestant. Indeed, they need not even be purchased. Today they are available (free) online. Simply engage your search engine and type in *The Liturgy of the Hours* or *ibreviary* and you will find them.

In praying these prayers each day, whether alone or (ideally) with others, you will be assuming a special power and a responsibility given to you in your baptism and will be giving an important gift to the world. And you will never again have to struggle with the question, how should I pray today?

The epic adventure of evangelisation



Catholic artist Gloria Thomas's painting shows the Annunciation, Christ's baptism, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Photo: CNS

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Acts 1:1-11
Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9
Eph 1:17-23 or Eph 4:1-13
or 4:1-7, 11-13
Mk 16:15-20

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon
Greg Kandra



This is a Sunday of beginnings and endings. We hear the very first words of the Acts of the Apostles – and then, moments later, the last words of the Gospel according to Mark.

Both focus on The Ascension – a moment that ties together two remarkable parts of our salvation, marking the end of Christ's earthly ministry but the beginning of an epic adventure that will change the course of history.

And it starts with just one word: 'Go.'

Forward

This is what it's all about.

What we hear in Mark's Gospel is nothing less than Jesus giving the first Christians their marching orders. "Go into the whole world," he told them, "and proclaim the Gospel to every creature."

He urged them to baptise, to teach, to carry on the work that he had begun.

The world is waiting. Act on what I have taught you, Jesus said. Put it into prac-

tice. Go!

If that weren't enough, the account in the first reading, from Acts offers another challenge – to the disciples and, importantly, to us.

After his followers watched Jesus disappear into the clouds, two men appeared and asked a question: "Why are you standing there looking at the sky?"

The apostles didn't have a ready answer. But that question hangs in the air and seems to be asking, really: what are you waiting for? Get going.

“The followers of Christ were not supposed to spend their time staring at the clouds”

(I don't think it's an accident that there are two men carrying this message. Scripture tells us elsewhere

of how Jesus sent the apostles into the world as missionaries two-by-two. As much as these two were telling apostles what to do, I think they were also reminding them how to do it.)

The followers of Christ were not supposed to spend their time staring at the clouds.

Meaning

There was a world waiting to hear the Good News. So the apostles left the mountain, went into the city, and days later launched the greatest missionary undertaking in human history – one that has never ended.

And it started with just one word. 'Go.'

Go! Transform the world. Preach the Gospel. Leave the world you know. Put out into the deep! Baptise. Heal. Carry out this abiding mission of love.

Or, as the familiar dismissal puts it at the end of

“A moment that ties together two remarkable parts of our salvation, marking the end of Christ's earthly ministry but the beginning of an epic adventure that will change the course of history”

Mass, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord with your life."

Do we understand what that means?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians – one of the options for this Sunday – puts it eloquently: "Live in a manner worthy of the call you have received," he wrote, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

“So much of the world is still waiting to hear the Good News – to truly understand Christ's message of hope”

The disciples did that. Next Sunday, we celebrate the moment they began to

“‘The Kingdom of God upon the earth' needs to be built. The Ascension, we realise, was just the beginning. The rest is up to us”

answer Christ's command, with hearts blazing on Pentecost.

But it begs the question: what about us?

How will we heed Christ's order to 'go'? How will we carry out our great commission? Some 2,000 years after Christ returned to his father, and his followers stood on a mountaintop staring into the clouds, so much of the world is still waiting to hear the good news – to truly understand Christ's message of hope, redemption and resurrection, to grasp what it really means to call oneself 'Christian'.

Ascension

How will we make that known to those we meet this week?

Dorothy Day – a modern-day disciple who lived out Christ's call with selfless abandon and compassion for the poorest of the poor – once wrote: "Our faith is stronger than death, our philosophy is firmer than

flesh, and the spread of the Kingdom of God upon the earth is more sublime and more compelling."

“Look around. Look at what lies before you”

The message of the Ascension, I think, is very simple: do not stay too long on the mountain, looking up. Instead, look around. Look at what lies before you.

Get ready. There is work to do. Go!

What Dorothy Day called "The Kingdom of God upon the earth" needs to be built. The Ascension, we realise, was just the beginning.

The rest is up to us.

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

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Protests that get too close to the bone are silenced

Often there's a TV series that is very good in its first season, but instead of leaving it at that they capitalise on the success and produce a second series. Sometimes it's just inferior, perhaps because original ideas have run out, or the novelty value has worn off.

Recently I've been keeping up with the second season of **Blue Lights** (BBC One, Mondays). It's a police drama set in Belfast and I'm conflicted about it. On the plus side it has some likeable, well-developed characters, and shows an understanding and an appreciation of people. Moral dilemmas abound, but they can be clichéd – in last Monday's episode two policeman patrol together. One cuts several corners to get results, even to the point of violence, the other is more idealistic and is frustrated by the other's excess 'flexibility' with the law. At least the moral one is the one shown more sympathetically – it's often the opposite.

However, the show gains nothing from the rather gratuitous bad language, and seeing as how it's set in the North, it's surprising that religion doesn't figure – no devout churchgoers, no peace-making clergy, not even a religious extremist



Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly.

(we should be thankful for that I suppose!). There is a loyalist feud, plenty of drug dealing and some sinister elements from Dublin. Dublin gangland-related has become so clichéd! In last week's episode an assisted suicide plot is shoehorned in and though a potential suspect is arrested, it does feel like the show is pushing the expected agenda. Plot-wise it rambles, and I'm not sure the sub-plot about an unlikely lawyer trying to solve a chip-shop bombing from the Troubles really gels.

Overall, it hasn't maintained the standard of the first series.

On **Oliver Callan** (RTÉ Radio 1, Thursday) there was an interview with John Crotty who has written a book, *Spike Island: The Rebels, Residents and Craft Criminals of Ireland's Historic Island*. Among his stories is that of 'Little Nellie'. Her father was a soldier on the island in the early 1900s. When Nellie herself contracted TB it was regarded as miraculous how she bore her illness and reportedly had visions. Though only four

years old she requested to be able to receive the Eucharist. Her request was taken seriously, and the Pope at the time saw this as a sign that he was right about wanting to lower the age of First Communion. Nellie's request was granted and the age, generally, was lowered from twelve to seven years old. Oliver Callan regarded this Spike Island story as "an amazing connection".

The early sacraments featured in a positive item on **Moncrieff** (Newstalk, Friday), particularly in the context of related pledges taken by young people to refrain until specified ages from alcohol, drugs or even vaping! Simon Tierney's comprehensive report covered the history of the pledge and its manifestations today. He also spoke to Fr Robert McCabe, Central Spiritual Director of the Pioneer Total Abstinence – organisationally separate from the Confirmation Pledge but obviously aligned in terms of values. Fr McCabe said the PTAA was breaking new ground in engaging with people.

Meanwhile, the first of May, dear to many in Ireland because of devotion to Mary, was marked by another grim reminder of how much we've sold out our traditions – the passing of the Safe Access

PICK OF THE WEEK

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday May 12, 1.15pm

For Dementia Action Week, Rev Canon Kate Bottley explores what part faith can play for people facing the profound challenges presented by dementia.

STORYVILLE: PRAYING FOR ARMAGEDDON

BBC 4 Tuesday May 14, 10pm

A Storyville documentary that explores the power and influence of American Evangelical Christians as they aim to fulfil the Armageddon prophecy.

MUSIC AND BEAUTY IN HEAVEN

EWTN Wednesday May 15, 8pm

A mother reflects on what life in heaven will be like and how the faithful will experience music and beauty there.

Zones legislation – the 100-metre buffer around all healthcare premises, to protect abortion providers and those who would avail of their grim 'services' – no safe zones for the unfortunate unborn babies. Health Minister Stephen Donnelly appeared on **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk, Wednesday) and seemed pleased with what he called a "modest measure". Now, he said, women will be able to access abortions without intimidation, bullying or coercion. His evidence for this being a problem was thin – some anecdotes about "sporadic" occurrences and some female politicians "feeling" intimidated. Of course, intimidation,

bullying and the like are objectionable, but banning peaceful protest and offers of help? And what about the women intimidated, bullied and coerced into abortion? Presenter Kieran Cuddihy was concerned this could be a "slippery slope" in the sense that other protests could be banned. I would like to have heard more challenging questions on the matter, but I was disappointed.

Those who would do evil don't want to be reminded of the harm they do, and so, protest that gets too close to the bone (or the clinic) has to be ignored or silenced.

Music

Pat O'Kelly



Variety is the spice of life...

Castletown House, in Co Kildare, was the founding venue for the Music in Great Irish Houses Festival in 1970. It was soon joined by other stately homes, not least Russborough near Blessington in Co. Wicklow that was at the time the home of Sir Alfred and Lady Clementine Beit. Generous supporters of the arts, they donated a large number of their paintings to the National Gallery.

The house continues to be part and parcel of the country's musical endeavours and is the centre for the annual West Wicklow Chamber Music Festival curated by founder and artistic director, Fiachra Garvey, who is also one of our leading younger generation pianists.

Another of the festival's principal locations is St Mary's Church in Blessington itself.

The festival opens next Thursday (May 16) at Russborough with Korean violinist Inmo Yang and French pianist Yannick Rafamilanan in a varied programme that will conclude with César Franck's monumental Sonata. Besides music by CPE Bach, Mozart and Schumann, the duo also brings a lesser-known piece – Nocturne et Cortège – by Lili Boulanger who died in 1918 aged 25.

Staying in the French repertoire, Cécile Chaminade's 2nd Piano Trio Op 34 opens tomorrow evening's concert at Russborough by visiting violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky, cellist Isang Enders and pianist Wu



Visiting ensemble Quatuor Arod, due to play at this year's West Wicklow Chamber Music Festival.

Qian. Before concluding with Tchaikovsky's marvellous Op 50 Trio, the artists offer a contemporary work – Freakshow – by Cork's Sam Perkin, which the composer tells us was inspired by the Rat Circus at Frongoch Camp in Wales where many Irish prisoners were held in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising.

Saturday (May 18) morning's venue moves to St Mary's Church in Blessington for young musicians Maria O'Dea, bassoon and Luke Lally Maguire, piano. Both are studying at London's Guildhall School and both have played in London's prestigious Wigmore Hall as part of an Irish Heritage Music

Bursary event. Their interesting programme includes sonatas by Hindemith and André Previn.

At Russborough on Saturday afternoon (May 18) visiting ensemble Quatuor Arod separates two classical works – Haydn's Sunrise Quartet and Beethoven's C sharp minor Op 131 – with the contemporary Koran inspired Al'Asr by Benjamin Attahir (b 1989). It is said the French composer's piece brings to mind "glaring light, sweltering heat, diffraction of the air as it touches the ground".

Saturday evening (May 18) has another change of scene when US singer/song writer Judi Jackson appears in Blessington's Tramway Theatre. Described as "a compelling

live performer and burgeoning songwriter, blessed with a pitch-perfect voice", her programme will comprise songs by jazz greats Nina Simone, Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald.

Aimed at young people, Sunday morning (May 19) has a quintet of musicians from the Irish Chamber Orchestra for a short programme with Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf at the Tramway Theatre.

The West Wicklow Chamber Music Festival ends on Sunday afternoon (May 19) in St Mary's Church when soprano Claudia Boyle, baritone Gyula Nagy and Fiachra Garvey join forces for a programme of songs and arias as well as a blend of Irish and Hungarian folksongs. Variety is the spice of life!



BookReviews

Peter Costello



Voices from Ireland's lower depths

Spirit of Revolution: Ireland from below 1917-1923, ed. John Cunningham and Terry Dunne (Four Courts Press, €24.95 / £21.95)

Peter Costello

The cover of this book is graced by a 1934 watercolour by Harry Kernoff, entitled *Liberty Hall, Dublin, night*: the street is scattered with a selection of typical working class Dubliners, a social group with which the artist was very familiar and saw himself as one of.

It shows the need for these individuals to unite and work together. Nothing could be a more appropriate depiction of what many radicals and progressives felt in those years between the wars about social justice in Ireland. This is the theme which this book addresses.

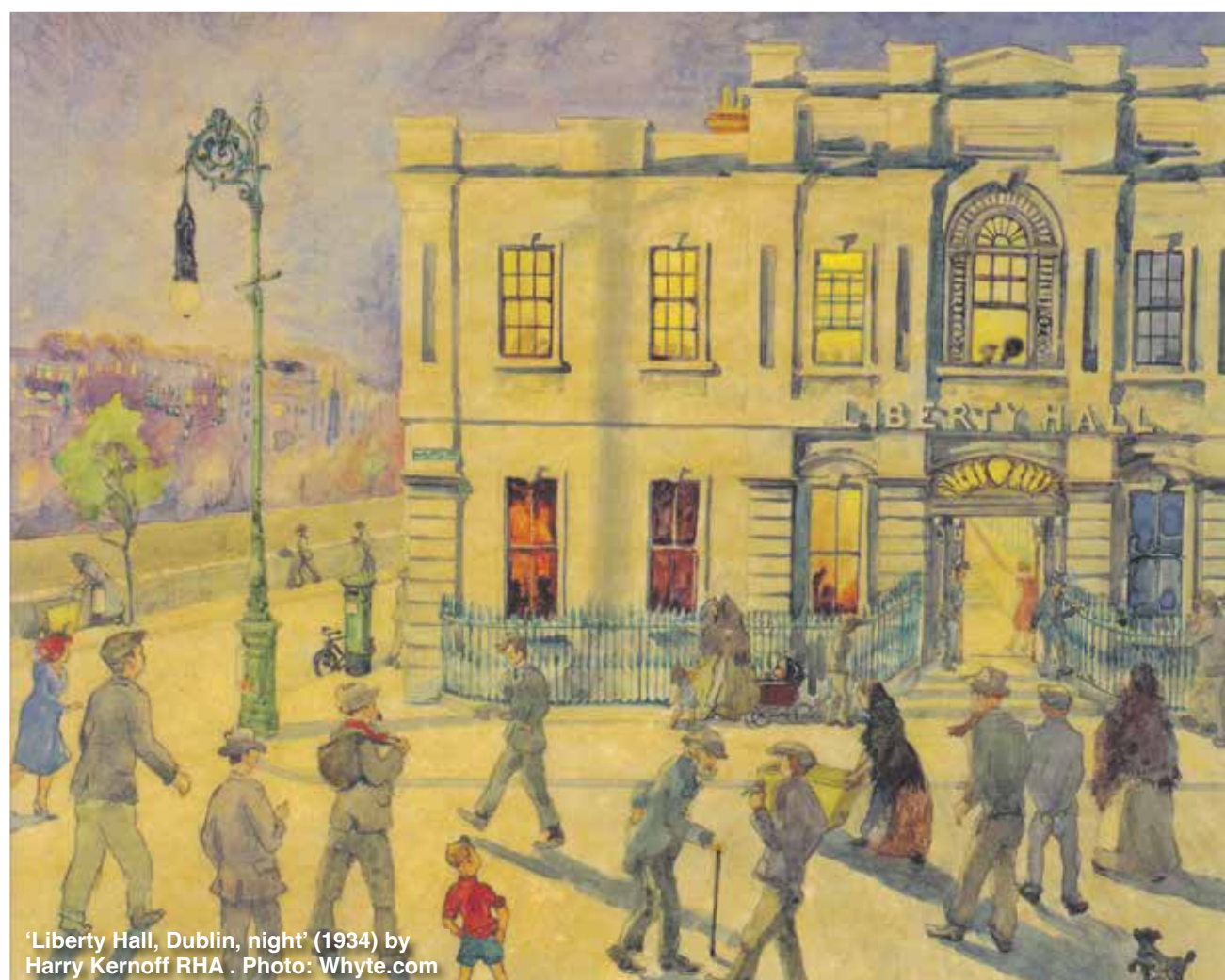
The fate of the Left in the Irish revolution is a sad one, as I became aware of when writing a biography of Liam O'Flaherty. During the first days of the Civil War he was one of a small armed radical group, holed up in a Talbot Street hotel.

Across the railway bridge beside it they hung a huge banner supporting the *Industrial Workers of the World*, the radical group well-known in the USA as 'The Wobblies' (with which the writer B. Traven was also connected).

Ill-focused

I have never seen this episode alluded to in any other book of the period, which was an indication to me of how ill-focused much that was written about that period is.

In O'Flaherty's novel *The Informer* the 'Revolutionary Group' to which the protagonist 'Gypo' Nolan belongs is a far-left one. The spring of the action which leads to the shooting by the police of Frankie McPhilip whom Gypo had informed on for a reward, was the shooting down in Waterford of a leader of the strong farmers against the striking farm labourers. This too



'Liberty Hall, Dublin, night' (1934) by Harry Kernoff RHA. Photo: Whyte.com

was a moment in rural life unknown to the larger histories.

The Informer was truth-based fiction. It is these sorts of episodes in real life that the contributors to this book concentrate on, though one chapter by Moira Ledon does deal with the mobilisation of the agricultural labourers in Maugherow in Co. Sligo.

“They saw the Church's role was to defend property, whatever the injustices caused”

The collections of chapters might too easily be seen as a collection of local history items with little bearing on the great things being achieved by those who later became the two parties of the Free State, Fine Gael and

Fianna Fáil.

This left both Labour and labourers out in the cold, despite the achievements of the Labour Party under their leader Thomas Johnson.

Dismaying

This was dismaying, of course, for progressive Catholics who were seeking social justice for workers and others in 'lower depth' of rural and urban Ireland in the light of the insights of *Rerum Novarum*, the encyclical of Leo XIII of 1891 on 'Capital and Labour'.

But by the merchant and business classes in the New Ireland it was largely

disregarded. They saw the Church's role was to defend property, whatever the injustices caused.

“Few in the Irish Diaspora who had been happy to buy guns for the war wanted actually to invest in the new state”

The events of 1913 and the continuing social unease through the period up to the middle of the

1950s all too easily fell into the hands of those conservative elements in Irish society who felt 'the lower orders' should keep their place.

In the early years of the Free State this was especially true with a government which even chose to reduce the state pension in order to pay off the debts of the country put down to the cost of the revolutionary years.

Beyond the Ford Motor Company perhaps, few in the Irish Diaspora who had been happy to buy guns for the war wanted actually to invest in the new

state. Many Nationalists and Republicans identified the labour movements as an enemy akin to Britain, just as later they would speak ominously of 'secret societies', meaning Freemasons, and 'alien elements' meaning Jews.

“Trade unions are in abeyance and many of the most hardworking people in this country, the equivalent of the hod carriers of other times, are without union support”

Little changed in this respect until the end of the 1950s. What had been taught at school, technical college and universities as 'Commerce' turned almost overnight, it seemed, into 'Economics' and Ireland entered upon a new era.

The trade union movement had a moment or two, but now, as we are all aware, trade unions are in abeyance and many of the most hardworking people in this country, the equivalent of the hod carriers of other times, are without union support.

This book consists, with the chapters and the introduction, in some 14 essays which will be read with great interest by those seeking a clearer view of the past at the micro level and will hopefully encourage similar investigations.

These inquiries are often difficult to do because the personal papers and archives of the very poorest in their own voices simply do not exist.

Explorations of those areas in Irish life and history are passed over, or worse still, glossed over to hide the stark brutality in the last century.

If justice failed to be done in the past to the living, the present owes it to the dead to see it is done now.

“Explorations of those areas in Irish life and history are passed over, or worse still, glossed over to hide the stark brutality in the last century”

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.

St Joseph: the patron saint of fathering



Fr Donald H. Calloway spreading his message about St Joseph

Consecration to St Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father, by Donald H. Calloway MIC (Marian Press, £13.60)

J. Anthony Gaughan

This is a book promoting devotion to St Joseph, making it very suitable reading in this week after the celebration of the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. The steadfast member of the Holy Family, Joseph was always present, especially when he was most needed.

It seems to me that patience was St Joseph's outstanding virtue and quality. His mission required a lot of waiting.

If St Joseph did not accompany Mary on her journey to Elizabeth's house, he had to wait three months to see his wife again. When St Joseph observed that his wife was pregnant, he had to wait for the Lord to reveal what he wanted him to do in response to that wondrous happening.

Challenging

Such trials of patience must have been extremely challenging for St Joseph. But he used them as an opportunity to grow in patience and holiness.

St Joseph exhibited heroic patience in Egypt. Taking his wife and newborn child to a country with a different language, culture, religion and currency must have filled him with anxiety.

Finding work in Egypt and providing food and shelter for his family would

not have been easy. He had no idea how long he had to stay there, yet in every difficult situation he remained peaceful, calm and resigned.

The author provides quotations from a number of well-known saints and popes to indicate how they viewed St Joseph. They refer to his many other virtues.

St Brigid of Sweden wrote: "So perfectly was St Joseph dead to the world and the flesh that he desired nothing but the things of heaven."

Pope Pius XI stated that "St Joseph won for himself the title of 'The Just Man' and thus serves as a living model of that Christian justice which should reign in social life".

“The position of St Joseph as husband and foster-father gives witness to the dignity of fatherhood”

For Blessed Gabriele Allegra St Joseph was: "The flower of Israel who had the faith of Abraham, the piety of David, his ancestor, the wisdom of the prophets, a patience more heroic than that of Job and of Tobias and a zeal greater than that of Elijah for the glory of God."

Venerable Joseph Mindszenty highlights St Joseph's crucial role as the foster-father of the Holy Family, writing: "The position of St Joseph as husband and fos-

ter-father gives witness to the dignity of fatherhood."

Regrettably that fatherhood is absent from too many of today's families hence, as sociologists claim, this has led to much of the criminal activity in society today.

Wonderful

This is a wonderful handbook on St Joseph which reaches out to the wisdom of the saints, the teachings of the popes and the reflections of theologians. It would be an excellent present to give to any young couple setting out on their married life.

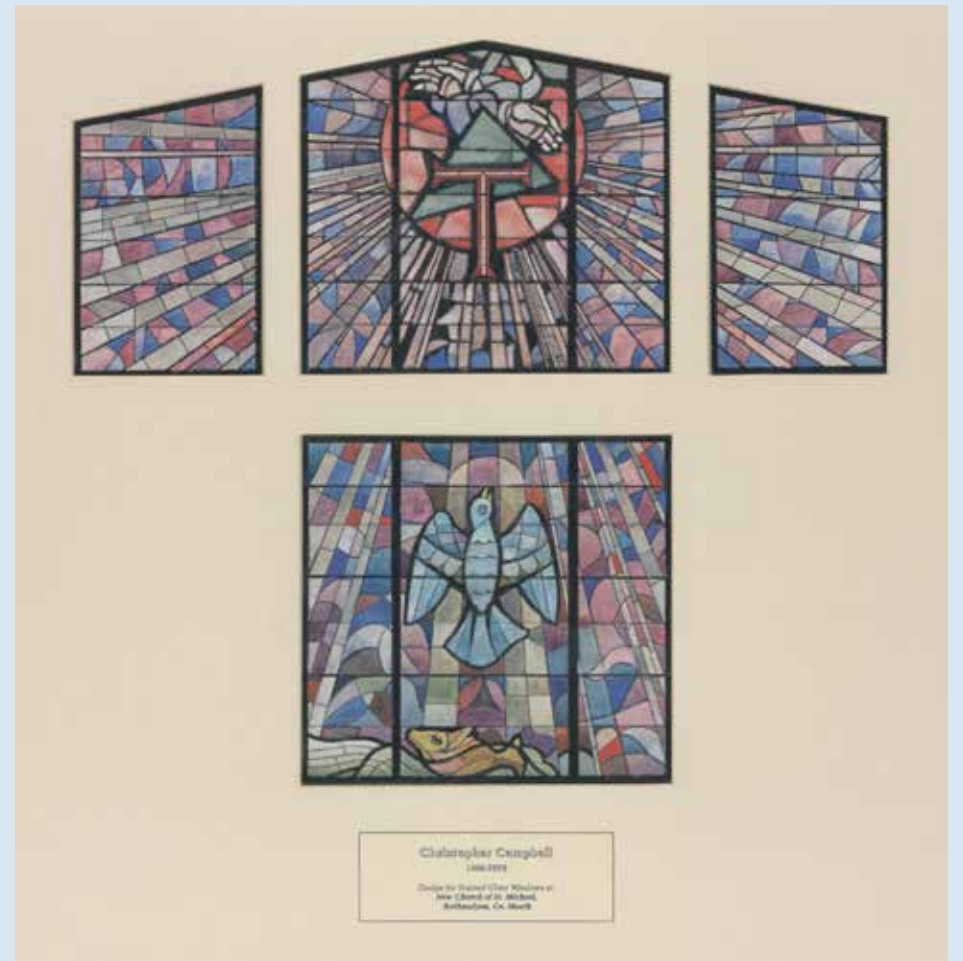
Fr Donald Calloway MIC is the vicar provincial and vocation director for the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy Province of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, as well as the author of a number of earlier books.

These include *Champions of the Rosary: The History and Heroes of a Spiritual Weapon*, *No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy*, and *Under the Mantle: Marian Thoughts from a 21st Century Priest*, all Catholic bestsellers.

This book under review has sold more than one million copies worldwide and is now available in over 15 languages. A website is maintained for the book at www.consecrationtost-joseph.org.

Fr Calloway also published a follow-up entitled *Consecration to St Joseph for Children and Families* with co-author Scott L. Smith, Jr., a book which opens up his ideas and spirituality for a much wider audience.

The Centenary of the Friends of the National Collections



Design for a stained glass window by Christopher Campbell, presented to Irish Architectural Archive by the FNCI (Courtesy IAA)

Peter Costello

This year marks the centenary of 'Fund for the National Collections of Ireland', which may well be for many readers a little known organisation. But nevertheless it is an important body working for the preservation of the arts in Ireland and the records of the past.

Recently Dr John Turpin outlined the history of the Fund in a speech opening an exhibition of a selection of items it has presented to the Irish Architectural Archive, in Merrion Square Dublin, since 1981, which are now on display.

"The Fund for the National Collections of Ireland," he explained, "was founded a century ago in 1924 by the painter Sarah Purser and other art lovers. Its aims, which remain unchanged, were to acquire and present works of art and objects of historical importance to the public galleries of Ireland, north and south.

"At a time of economic difficulty at the foundation of the new state, with few resources available for the arts, the FNCI stepped in. Initially we concentrated on assisting the Dublin Municipal Gallery where we sought to continue the work of Hugh Lane in acquiring modern continental art and promoting the case for the return of the disputed Lane collection of continental paintings to Ireland.

"Also from the 1920s we began to assist the National Gallery, the National Museum, the National Library and the Ulster Museum by presenting work.

"After the Second World War, as the regional galleries began to develop, the Fund focused increasingly on helping them to build up their collections of Irish art. The Crawford in Cork benefited, as did the art galleries in Sligo, Limerick, Waterford and Drogheda among others, including the Irish Architectural Archive."

The first gift of the Fund to the IAA, for instance, was in 1981 when they presented four Dublin sketches by Raymond McGrath. Though the captions in the current exhibition does not say so, these sketches are associated in my mind with a project that McGrath had with Penguin

Books in the early 1950s to write and illustrate a King Penguin on Dublin, to match one already in print on *The Isle of Wight* by Barbara Jones and John Piper on *Romney Marsh*.

Among the many other items over the years is the design prepared for a stained glass window by Christopher Campbell, which is very affecting (above).

Dr Turpin also remarked that "Looking at the range of items that we have presented, now going on public view here in the IAA, we can see a great diversity of subjects from designs for houses great and small to commercial premises, town plans... These drawings are now part of the resources of the IAA available to scholars and all interested people. As someone who has used the Archive in my own researches in the history of Irish art I know what a treasure it is."

In the course of his remarks Dr Turpin also paid a well deserved tribute to the late Dr John Gilmartin, the former chairman of the Fund. He will be a familiar memory to many as a genial man of culture, artistic taste, and effective tradition – especially in matters relating to his Catholic faith, as this reviewer recalls.

Dr Gilmartin endowed the *John Maibeen Gilmartin Award* at the Irish Georgian Society, worth €5,000 annually. It is "to support research into the history of Irish art, architecture and designed landscapes and of the culture and society of Ireland of the long 18th Century".

The exhibitions in Dublin are only a part of a series of shows across the country, and even in Belfast over the rest of the year. There is room here to note only few; but all find be found online at the Fund's website (honsecretary@fnci.ie or postal address FNCI, PO Box 11481, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, Ireland).

Of special interest are the five institutions in Waterford and Cork; but there are also exhibitions in Limerick, Drogheda, Sligo, Kilkenny and Tipperary town. Crossing the border to 'another jurisdiction' there is also a related show at the Ulster Museum in Belfast's Botanic Gardens.

And I should also add that the FNCI through its membership has also a well developed social side which will appeal to many.

Classifieds

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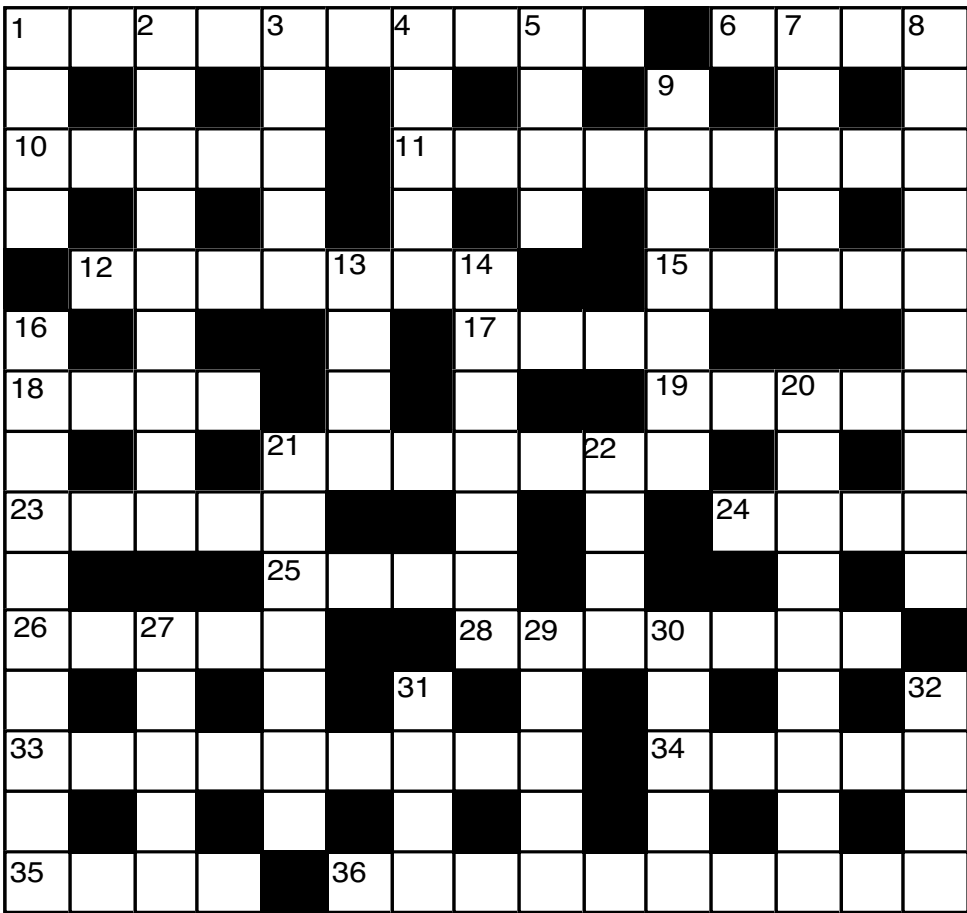
Gordius 662

Across

- 1 Hindsight (10)
6 Traditional Irish dish (4)
10 Number of a ser-
geant's stripes (5)
11 Show reverence by
bending the knee (9)
12 Office to be read in
the evening (7)
15 Britain's only venom-
ous snake (5)
17 Young sheep (4)
18 Deciduous trees (4)
19 Depart (5)
21 Ask someone to marry
you (7)
23 Passenger ship (5)
24 Reverberation (4)
25 Skilful, competent (4)
26 Relating to the
seaborne section of the
defence forces (5)
28 Organized contem-
plative seclusion (7)
33 Species of spider (9)
34 Trumpet (5)
35 Cranny (4)
36 Merchant who sells to
retailers (10)

Down

- 1 Ceremony or ceremo-
nial procedure (4)
2 In football, a 'physical'
forward to whom long
passes are sent (6,3)
3 A goal ahead (3,2)
4 It bleeps to prompt you



- to contact someone (5)
5 One-hundredth of a
euro (4)
7 What gives a tyre grip
(5)
8 Large, succulent fruit
(10)
9 Pleasant, charming (7)
13 Middle-Eastern poten-

- tate (4)
14 Item of bedroom foot-
wear (7)
16 New Zealand's capital
(10)
20 Heavenly being (9)
21 Variety of sweet con-
taining nuts (7)
22 Fired a gun (4)

- 27 Star sign of those
born in late August or
early September (5)
29 Computer-based form
of communication (1-4)
30 Ceremonial garments
(5)
31 Shove (4)
32 Dread (4)

SOLUTIONS, MAY 2

GORDIUS No. 661

Across

- 1 Imp 3 Fingerprint 8 Vienna 9 Argonaut 10 Stand 11 Fruit 13 Blank 15 Endless 16 Traffic 20 Chain
21 Smash 23 Wager 24 Basilica 25 Bishop 26 Appropriate 27 Put

Down

- 1 Investments 2 Prepared 3 Fined 4 Gravlax 5 Proof 6 Icarus 7 Tot 12 Teacher's pet 13 Basic 14
Koran 17 Flagship 18 Basmati 19 Catsup 22 Hello 23 Write 24 Boa



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Sudoku Corner 532

Easy

5		7	3		1		4	
3		8		2				9
4				8			5	
	7					2		
		4	2		9	5		
		2					3	
	8			3				1
2				6		7		8
	9		8		7	3		5

Hard

				4	8		6	
	1	9					4	
					6			3
				5		2		8
7		6				4		9
8		2		9				
5			3					
	3					5	1	
	2		4	6				

Last week's Easy 531

2	1	5	4	8	9	6	7	3
7	4	8	3	6	2	9	5	1
9	3	6	5	1	7	2	4	8
3	2	1	8	4	6	7	9	5
4	8	9	1	7	5	3	2	6
5	6	7	9	2	3	8	1	4
1	7	4	6	9	8	5	3	2
8	5	2	7	3	1	4	6	9
6	9	3	2	5	4	1	8	7

Last week's Hard 531

5	8	6	7	1	4	9	3	2
4	2	9	3	5	6	8	1	7
3	1	7	9	8	2	4	6	5
6	5	3	1	4	8	2	7	9
2	7	4	5	6	9	1	8	3
1	9	8	2	7	3	5	4	6
7	3	5	4	9	1	6	2	8
9	6	1	8	2	7	3	5	4
8	4	2	6	3	5	7	9	1

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



Wanted: Catholic politicians

In the run up to the upcoming local elections and the next general election, a significant number of sitting TDs and local councillors have announced that they will not be running again. Many of them were Catholic. Who will replace them? Probably candidates who are less Catholic or not Catholic at all.

If we don't see this as a problem then we are failing to appreciate the essential contribution of Catholic politicians to society – not just because they are Catholic but because of the cohesion and wisdom of Catholic Social thought they bring to their role as servants of the common good.

All the more reason therefore to encourage our young people in schools and universities to consider a career as a public representative or as Pope St John Paul II put it “to embrace the noble vocation of politics” (Mass at Drogheda, 29th September 1979). The influence of their faith on Catholic

politicians has long been held in suspicion. It is argued that the Catholic faith of politicians should be a private affair and left at the door of meetings that decide policies and laws.

Otherwise, people argue, we would end up in a theocracy where legislation would not be governed by the will of the people and their needs but by divisive religious beliefs. The example of Sharia law in places like Nigeria is a case in point.

Response

There are a number of robust responses to this criticism. A basic presupposition of Catholic Social teaching is that it is intelligible to all human beings. For this reason, Pope Francis and his predecessors address many of their encyclicals “to all people of good will”.

They appeal to the light of reason and rational argument to evaluate the validity and soundness of their teaching and to show



A picture of the interior of Dáil Éireann.

how a particular teaching upholds human dignity and supports the common good.

This does not mean ‘imposing’ one’s beliefs but ‘exposing’ the truth and values that such teaching offers. Very often the protest of “imposing your values on me” is a visceral protest that follows being exposed to a truth we don’t want to hear.

It is important for the Church at this time to encourage Catholic politicians, condemn abuse of them and empower them with the cohesive vision of Catholic Social teaching. Urgent too is ongoing faith formation that helps all the baptised appreciate how our faith is called to shape culture and the society we inhabit.

In the words of Pope Francis: “An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it” (The Joy of the Gospel, 183).

Retreating from politics will not fix anything. If we do retreat from the political realm then Catholics will become victims rather than protagonists. To evangelise is to go where people are. The coherence and wisdom of Catholic Social thought is needed now more than ever to reach people increasingly trapped in dead-end political ideologies.

Love in the heart of the Church

St Therese of Lisieux famously prayed that there be ‘love in the heart of the Church’. I was reminded of this in recent days with the beautiful passages from John’s Gospel where Jesus

asks us to love one another as he has loved us.

It also reminded me of a less known but wonderful paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which invites us to see everything the Church teaches as a proclamation of the love of God that saves: “The whole concern of doctrine and its

teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love” (CCC, 20).

Nothing engages the human heart more than love. We were created to love and be loved. To evangelise is to proclaim the availability and accessibility of this gift of love offered by Christ through his Church.

This is the love that saves, the love that alone is credible. Everything else is commentary.



YOUR EASTERTIDE GIFT TO OUR RISEN SAVIOUR

HELP TRAIN A YOUNG MAN FOR THE LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY PRIESTHOOD IN MYANMAR

The Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese were founded in Myanmar by Archbishop Mang Thang with the assistance of the late Miss Mary Dooan, founder of The Little Way Association. There are now 27 LWM priests, six major seminarians and 77 minor seminarians in various dioceses in Myanmar. Two LWM priests are now serving in Cambodia and four in Papua New Guinea, in tribal areas. Our Association has funded the Little Way Priests since their inception, especially with the costs involved in training and maintaining them as seminarians, paying for food, medical aid, clothing, housing and other needs.

It costs approximately €84 a month (€1,000 per year) to feed and educate a student for the priesthood.

The great majority of young men who come forward to offer their lives to God, and His people, come from poor families. Their parents do not have the means to support them financially.

These young men are Myanmar’s future priests, carrying the Gospel and message of Christ’s love to people who would otherwise have little or no opportunity of hearing it.

His Grace asks you urgently, our faithful supporters, for any donation you can send this Eastertide to help with the heavy costs involved in training and supporting a seminarian for the priesthood.

Archbishop Nicholas and our Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese remember all Little Way friends and benefactors every day in their prayers and Masses. On their behalf, we appeal to you wholeheartedly this Eastertide for ANY gift, large or small, you can send us. They will be forever grateful to you. Please pray for them, for Myanmar and for all its people, in the ongoing conflict.



“True glory is that which will last eternally, and to reach it, it isn’t necessary to perform striking works but to hide oneself and practice virtue in such a way that the left hand knows not what the right is doing.” – St Therese

HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the thousands who die each year of hunger and disease. Your donation will be forwarded intact to enable a missionary to provide food and medicines for the needy..

WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER AT OUR THERESIAN HOUSE IN KNOCK?

The work involves general house-keeping duties, providing guests with a light breakfast, prayer and welcoming pilgrims. If this work appeals to you, and you could offer one month of your time, please write to Maria Grcar at the address in the coupon, giving details, experience and a contact telephone number.

Email: contact@littlewayassociation.com



The Little Way Association



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

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **TRAINING LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY PRIESTS OF ST THERESE**

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€..... **REPAIRING MISSION CHAPELS**

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We ask for a minimum of €6.50 or more for each Mass

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☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

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DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

IC/05/09