

# The Irish Catholic

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IRELAND CAN  
APPEAR STRIKINGLY  
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## Ireland is 'Re-Paganising'

### Traditional Christian faith is the resistance to despair, says priest

Brandon Scott

The "collapse" of Christianity in Ireland is "leaving a dangerous vacuum that is not being left vacant but being filled with other forms of pagan spirituality, religion and worship", the Administrator of Wexford parish has warned.

Fr Billy Swan said that "there is evidence that Ireland is 're-paganising' or reverting to the worship of false gods like it did before we accepted the Christian faith back in the 5th Century".

"Ireland has experimented with paganism and superstition before. Moving away from the light of Christ and into darkness is inevitably leading to a breakdown of civilisation, the family and chaos in society in general," according to Fr Swan.

"It leads to confusion about what is true and false, what is right and wrong and a bleaker future for our youth who are longing for hope. The way things are going, far from it being the established order to rebel against, traditional Christian faith is becoming the last countercultural force that has the confidence and resolve to resist this slide into despair."

Prof. Patricia Casey, professor emeritus of psychiatry at UCD, told *The Irish Catholic*: "The more serious thing, which isn't to do with Halloween directly, is the dabbling in the occult generally – and Halloween is linked in with occult tendencies."

"The occult is very dangerous because

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### Baby steps on the march for Jesus...



Marian and Ana-Maria Timoce with their children during the 'March for Jesus' in which over 10,000 Christians from various denominations across Ireland gathered on Saturday, October 26, in Dublin City Centre. Photo: John McElroy. See pages 12-13

**THE 1980'S: BROKE YES,  
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The Irish Catholic



## Ireland is 'Re-Paganising'

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it takes people into all kinds of things like devil worship, witchcraft, pornography – people actually working in tandem with the devil. It leads people into very dark things and into a very dark perspective on life that worships evil, because that's what devil worship is about, it's worshipping evil and that's obviously very concerning.”

Regarding the future impact this may have on young people Prof. Casey said that it “would certainly lead to psychological problems like nightmares, very negative thoughts, confusion about right and wrong, anxiety and those kinds of things. It could lead to depression as well, because if people are engaged in the occult they may well get into pornography and that's very much associated with depression and anxiety”.

Writing in this week's paper, columnist Breda O'Brien said: “Modern Hallowe'en strips the Christian meditation on the fleeting nature of life and the need to pray for the dead, and even the Celtic wariness of the dead and the need to appease them, from Hallowe'en. It leaves an ugly, commercial, and hollow substitute in its place.”

Quoting Pope Francis, Fr Swan said: “Our secularised world is teeming with magicians, occultism, spiritism, astrologers and satanic sects. If we kick the devil out the door, he tries to return through the window. If we overcome him with faith, he seeks to return through superstition.' Let's not be naïve about the presence and power of evil. May all forms of darkness, evil, deceit and worship of false gods be dispelled by the true light of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead for 'Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life' (John 8:12).”

See pages 8 & 40

# Cultural coercion could impact most vulnerable if assisted dying legalised – Bishop Hayes

Staff reporter

“If assisted dying is legalised then the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities are vulnerable to cultural coercion, i.e., to messages of 'you're no longer useful or wanted, ...you are a burden on society' Bishop Martin Hayes has warned. A member of the Irish Episcopal Conference's

Council for Life, he was responding to the Dáil vote to approve the Majority Report on Assisted Dying.

He added: “The final weeks of life are important and can be provided for with appropriate palliative care with the patient at the centre. It is critical that people who are ill have confidence in the medical profession; whom they trust to ensure and preserve life.

The Majority Report (MjR) relies on

the autonomy of the individual which is not absolute as it does not take account of the common good.”

Bishop Hayes also told *The Irish Catholic* that “the Majority Report fails to provide adequate safeguards for the vulnerable, the elderly, the sick, those with disabilities. It could enable funding being prioritised for assisted dying above that for palliative care thus leading to a devalua-

tion of palliative care.

“The dignity of the person is paramount, each of us is created in the image and likeness of God for a particular purpose which is being fulfilled until death comes. This central belief is illustrated by the video entitled 'Through the Valley' released in conjunction with the Pastoral Letter 'Freedom to live fully, until death comes', he said.

## Hate crime law is 'radical gender politics' in Statute book

Brandon Scott

Independent Senator Ronan Mullen has described last week's passing of the Hate Crime Bill in the Oireachtas as an example of “radical gender politics” entering the country's Statute Law for the first time, saying that it “sets a bad precedent for the future” as the new broad definition of gender comes from “a very ideological place”.

Speaking to *The Irish*

*Catholic*, Senator Mullen said that his concerns around the Bill arise from its intention to render certain crimes more serious than others based on individual “protected characteristics people have” and the Bill's recognition of “any form of gender expression”.

“I'm concerned because of the drift of it,” he said. “If people have committed crimes motivated by hatred against people on grounds of certain protected characteristics that those people

have, then it turns it into a more serious kind of crime. It suggests that you can have two different categories of victims for the same crime and that's not a great idea where we're all supposed to be equal before the law.

“But the real problem is that continuing with this very controversial definition of gender, which doesn't confine itself to male or female but instead transgender or any form of gender expression including a gender that's

neither male nor female, what you have is radical gender politics coming in for the first time into our statute law.”

The new definition of gender introduced in the Bill comes from “a very ideological place” according to Senator Mullen and his fear is that there will be a concerted push by future governments and specific NGOs to replace the traditional understanding of gender with this adapted one.

“My concern is by introducing this new definition of gender that it would be the Government's intention and NGOs who are very well-connected politically, to push to have that new definition of gender, which is coming from a very ideological place, to replace the time-honoured definition of gender in other areas of our law in the future,” he said. “Even if it's just in connection with hate crimes, it sets a bad precedent for the future.”

## 100 years of joyful service



Disciples of the Divine Master cutting their centenary cake to celebrate 100 years of joyful service last Monday after Mass of Thanksgiving for the centenary of their foundation in St Peter and Paul's Parish in Athlone. The sisters were joined by family and friends for the Mass and a reception afterwards. Photo: John McElroy

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# Irish priests welcome Pope's 'radical' Sacred Heart message

**Brandon Scott**

In response to Pope Francis' new encyclical on the Sacred Heart, *Dilexit Nos*, three priests have welcomed the Pope's re-exploration of the devotion and its "radical" message, with members of the Pioneer Association, an organisation that specifically devotes itself to the message of Sacred Heart, hailing its ability to help people overcome addiction and foster faith in a world where "belief has sunken".

Fr Robert McCabe, a priest based in St Mary's Parish Navan and Spiritual Director of the Pioneer Association, an organisation that encourages devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as an aid to overcoming alcohol addiction, said that this encyclical reaffirms the works of the Pioneers and the people committed to its mission, particularly those attempting to remain sober.

"The Pioneer Offering which we pray every morning and

evening speaks of 'good example, self-denial and reparation,'" he said. "It's a prayer which people have suggested that I should change as the concepts of 'self-denial and reparation' seem obsolete. *Dilexit Nos* is a letter which reaffirms the value of good example, self-denial and reparation.

"Pioneers continue to wear an emblem of the Sacred Heart so that anyone who is living with addiction can approach them and ask for their prayers. Many people take a short-term Pioneer pledge to assist a friend who is undergoing treatment for alcohol addiction. In the past year I've met one man who took the pledge because he wanted to give the best of attention to his new-born baby."

Fr John Hogan OCDS, a priest from the Diocese of Meath, encouraged Catholics to rediscover the "radical" message of the devotion which will help "buck" some of the trends that have become prevalent in soci-

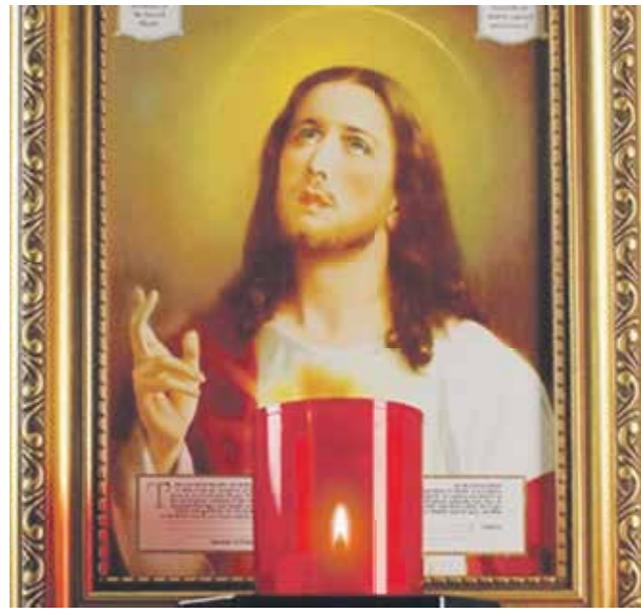
ety, particularly if the devotion's edge isn't "taken off".

"It would be wonderful if Catholics in Ireland were to rediscover the devotion and place the image in their homes," he said. "Devotion to the Sacred Heart is radical and challenges our humanity - a challenge that can buck the trend in society.

"What we've done in recent times with devotion to the Sacred Heart is take the edge off of it and that's not good because when you begin to take the edge off Christianity, you begin to dilute the Gospel and you refit it according to whatever particular ideology you like."

Former Spiritual Director of the Pioneers Fr Barney McGuckian SJ, described the document as "marvellous" and said that the Pope's idea is to present an "attractive concept of the Lord" in the hope of inspiring people to turn to the divinity amid periods of strife.

"It's marvellous," he said. "The document is very much



in line what the Pioneers have always taught. It hasn't been given much focus in recent years, that concept of reparation. I think the pope is hoping to talk to the world again about that concept.

"When the Pioneers started,

people believed. Now we're dealing with a world where belief has sunken. Today the problem is that people don't believe, they don't even turn to the divinity for help. I think that the Pope's idea is to present an attractive concept of the Lord."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Catholic Career Summit reminds laity of their role

The first Catholic Career Summit in Ireland was held recently, with Deacon Don Devaney, the new spiritual director of Radio Maria, who has 40 years' experience in career guidance, addressing listeners. He said, "When we find our nature, we find our purpose. We align with God's will... and that is true happiness. My invitation to each of you is to reflect on your abilities and aptitudes. Are we using our gifts as God intends?"

Senator Mullen described his experiences in politics and media, Neil and Maria Steen shared insights into balancing raising a family with busy careers, Fr Alan O'Sullivan OP talked about the Catholic conception of human rights and Tim Nichols explained the importance of lay vocations.

The event encouraged the faithful to thrive in their work and use their gifts in the world. Attendees took inspiration and knowledge from the event, as well as some new friends, explained organisers.

## Synod calls for a new 'Church culture'

**Chai Brady**

Irish bishops have underlined the necessity for a new "Church culture" that needs "a conversion that is personal, spiritual and pastoral", following the conclusion of the second major 'Synod on Synodality' in Rome.

The month-long session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality ended on October 26 and involved 368 delegates of lay women and men, clergy and religious orders from all over

the world who discussed the theme 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission'.

Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick and Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ of Down and Connor attended the Synod on behalf of the Irish Bishops' Conference.

Bishop Leahy said: "The fruit of this synod is not a new Church, rather a Church that is new. The synod is inviting us to move from a way of seeing Church in terms of a 'pyramid'

structure - a Pope at the top, and then all the way down through bishops, priests, religious, lay people - to be more collaborative and participative, with a community focus, and where each one is valued for her or his specific gifts and roles. "The Synod's final document is not just about structural changes. It invites us to go deeper. It involves a new Church culture that will need a conversion that is personal, spiritual and pastoral." He added: "The Synod has

brought home to us how the focus on renewing Church life is not about Church navel-gazing, but rather is directed towards being better able to promote justice and peace in the world as we ourselves grow in processes of listening and dialogue, sharing and reconciliation." This Synod in Rome follows a period of three-years when Catholics have been offering their views and suggestions on how best to be a 'synodal Church'.

**i** See pages 23-26

## Passing on the Faith



Dualta and Síle Roughneen venerating St Bernadette's relic during its visit to the Oblates Church of Mary Immaculate in Inchicore, Dublin on October 23. Photo: Rebecca Roughneen

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# Irish Times readers get a catechesis master class

Staff Reporter

In a reply this week to a letter writer in *The Irish Times*, Alan Hynes, who is Chief Executive of the Catholic Education Partnership says the writer “presents an understanding of faith all too often found among people of no religion: that the main appeal of faith is comfort or soothing, particularly in the face of death.”

He writes: “For Christians, this is not the promise at all. The only promise made to me was that if I truly live in accordance with God’s will, following the example of the

life and teaching of Jesus Christ, then I will face the opposition, or even hatred, of the world, even to death, to the Cross.

“Faith can be a comfort, and this is backed up by studies showing more positive mental health and general wellbeing outcomes for people of faith versus those without – St Augustine’s insight that we are made for God, and our hearts restless until they rest in God is a key insight into true human flourishing.

“But faith is primarily a challenge to Christians: it asks us not only to forgive those who do us wrong but to love them; we are required

to see Jesus in all who suffer or in the migrant among us, as the Irish bishops recently reminded people in their pastoral letter, *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?*

“We are required too to bear our own suffering, misfortunes or injustice with patience, joining them in prayer to Jesus on the Cross.”

The letter writer, says Hynes “rightfully understands the Cross to be a scandal – it is! Christians knew this from the start. Christianity has never been an easy religion.

“The human condition of having potential for greatness coupled with a capacity for evil, the reality of

suffering, but also the possibility of redemption, has always been there.”

Responding to the charge of the letter writer that the “indoctrination” received in a Catholic school did not work, Hynes replies: “I should be surprised if it did, given that the aim of a Catholic ethos school, in its life, its community and its teaching, is not to indoctrinate, but to propose the faith, hopefully mainly by example.

“It is a cause of shame that this was not always so, but many teachers and other school staff, religious and lay, did, and we are thankful for them.”

# Eco-protection ‘central to Christian identity’ says priest

Renata Steffens

Representatives of countries and institutions from all around the world are gathered in Colombia for the United Nations Biodiversity Summit, COP16 from October 21 to November 1. One of these organisations is the Columban Missionaries.

Talking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Sean McDonagh, Columban priest and ecologist, said “The COP for

biodiversity only takes place every two years, while the COP for climate change takes place every year. In fact, many will not even mention the COP for biodiversity, [which is] so very important,”

Amy Echeverria, Columban International Coordinator for Justice, Peace and Ecology is representing the order in the Summit. In a released statement, they explained: “The purpose of attending these

international summits is to bear witness to the global community that people of faith are committed to advocating for the protection and restoration of biodiversity.”

The priest said it is important to emphasise the importance of biodiversity now, to ensure it is not destroyed. “Because once a species is gone, it’s gone forever...if we destroy them, we destroy the future of everyone, including human beings,” Fr

McDonagh added.

Fr McDonagh said the involvement of the Church in biodiversity campaigns and eco-protection is “huge. The Church is concerned about life. This is about life, the continuation of life,” he added. “This is central to our Christian identity.”

“And if the religious people are not involved in that, what are they involved in? It’s so important for us, this is God’s creation...When it comes to biodiversity, the reality of who is causing the destruction of biodiversity [is] only one creature: humans.

## Irish-born priest recommended to become New York fire chaplain

Brandon Scott

Fr Brendan Fitzgerald, who was raised in Killarney, Co. Kerry, has been formally recommended by New York State Attorney General Letitia James to become the next chaplain of the Fire Department of New York (FDNY).

Fr Fitzgerald, a native of the Rockaways in Queens, is the pastor at St Barnabas Church in the Woodlawn neighbourhood of The Bronx, often known as ‘Little Ireland’.

In her letter, which was shared with *Irish Central*, Attorney General James wrote: “Fr Brendan is a pillar of the New York City Community, serving as the pastor of St Barnabas Church in the Bronx since 2016.

“In New York City, he has built a solid track record of building trust and community within the FDNY. As chaplain to the FDNY Emerald Society, FDNY Holy Name Society, and FDNY GAA, he has created strong and meaningful connections among members.”

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Fr Gustavo Gutiérrez’s death ‘great sorrow’, says President Higgins

The father of liberation theology, Fr Gustavo Gutiérrez OP has died aged 96 on October 22 in Lima, Peru. President Michael D. Higgins received the news with “great sorrow”.

In a statement released last Friday, the President said: “Seen as the source of what became a huge movement of reconciliation between the tasks of justice, equality and the message of Christianity, Gustavo Gutiérrez inspired so many”.

President Higgins concluded his statement by saying “He will always be remembered as the founder of the church of the people and for his encouragement of reconciling deep spirituality with the social changes that are necessary to tackle poverty and hunger.”

### Accused in Irish bishop murder case due in court today

A US court is to rule today on whether a handyman charged with the murder of an Irish-born bishop is mentally fit to stand trial.

Carlos Medina is charged with the murder of Bishop David O’Connell who was shot dead in his Los Angeles home in February 2023.

Mr Medina of Torrance in LA County previously pleaded not guilty to one felony count of murder.

The legal team for Mr Medina told a recent pre-trial hearing in LA that they were concerned about his fitness to stand trial. If he is found to be mentally incompetent he will be treated until he is deemed fit.

### Women of faith gather for climate justice

A new women-led, multi-faith climate action network was launched at an event held in Wilton Park, Frascati, Italy. Amongst the experts attending was Dr Lorna Gold, Chair of the Laudato Si Movement. Dr Gold is an advocate for climate action within faith groups.

The gathering aimed to unify female faith leaders, connecting religious and secular forces in the global effort to combat climate change and to foster climate resilience in communities worldwide.

Dr Gold’s participation in this event emphasised the importance of Laudato Si’s principles, which, inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical, asks for urgent environmental protection.

It was emphasised during the event that faith communities have a critical role in mobilising climate action, as over 80% of the world’s population partake in some form of faith group.

## Bringing new light to Ireland...



Syro-Malabar clergy and laity gather in Dublin with Fr Mathew Elavumkal, a Vincentian priest from Kerala, for their annual Family Renewal Retreat at the Church of the Guardian Angels Blackrock.

# Hallowe'en is commercialised paganism - but it has also replaced the burning of Guy Fawkes...

I was surprised to see a French supermarket – in the Bordeaux region – dedicate a whole section of its space to Hallowe'en costumes and assorted such decorations, from witches' hats to spooky skeleton costumes. Marking Hallowe'en had never, previously, been a French custom: but it has become one now, thanks to American merchandising tactics.

As we know – and as Martina Purdy pointed out last week – Hallowe'en is essentially a Celtic pagan custom, which lingered on in residual form in Christianity, but has now become much more pervasive.

## Childhood

In my childhood, Hallowe'en was rather simple and, I would say, harmless. We played games like apple-bobbing and pinning a tail, blindfolded, on the image of a donkey. We did call around to neighbours' houses and they gave us oranges or nuts, though the phrase "Trick or treat" wasn't then part of the vocabulary.

Then the idea got exported to America, where it was turned into something much more commercialised, hyped-up – and re-exported



Mary Kenny

to Ireland, Britain and now, Continental Europe in more intense marketised form. It's interesting to note how successful the marketisation of Hallowe'en has been in Britain, where it has virtually come to replace Guy Fawkes night on November 5.

**“Little by little, the tradition has declined, and you never see kids asking ‘a penny for the guy’ any more”**

It was common, back in the day, to encounter London urchins accompanied by their straw mannikin asking for 'a penny for the Guy', in the run-up to Guy Fawkes night. There was a chant to go with it: "Remember, remember the Fifth of November/Gunpowder, treason and plot!"

This wasn't pagan: it was

about burning in effigy a Catholic rebel who had been horribly tortured even before he was executed. Poor Guy! I saw it as part of English history, though I also thought it a little sectarian.

Indeed, in Sandymount, Dublin 4 – where inter-faith relations were harmonious – some of the local Protestant children did burn their 'Guy' on November 5. I remember envying their impressive fireworks, like rockets and Catherine wheels.

But fireworks have been part of Guy Fawkes' decline: Health and Safety has increasingly frowned on the mixture of bonfires and fireworks around children, and frightened pets. Little by little, the tradition has declined, and you never see kids asking "a penny for the guy" any more. Now, they're more likely to be focused on witches and warlocks for Hallowe'en.

The pagan roots of Hallowe'en are evident, and the marketisation slick. Yet I wouldn't take the whole event too seriously. As the evenings grow darker, spooky images can be seen as a reflection of nature's cycles. We can smile at Hallowe'en antics while turning our attention to the feasts of All Saints and All Souls.



**“The pagan roots of Hallowe'en are evident, and the marketisation slick. Yet I wouldn't take the whole event too seriously**

## A novelist makes things up

The short novel *Small Things Like These*, by Claire Keegan, has had a huge success with the book-buying public, and was generally highly praised. It is very well-written, in spare, skilful prose. The movie, starring Cillian Murphy, will be in cinemas shortly, and has been widely publicised in advance. It is garlanded with awards, and I'm sure it will be artistically admirable.

The storyline centres on an Irish Magdalene home for unmarried mothers in which the young women are kept as virtual prisoners by stern, sly, controlling nuns. A local man, Bill Furlong, played by Murphy, discovers this secret and tries to help one of the girls escape.

My problem with this narrative is the date in which it is set – 1985. I could believe the storyline if it were set in 1955, or even, perhaps, 1965. But 1985? How many sin-

gle mothers were kept against their will in Magdalene homes in the middle 1980s? Single mothers had the entitlement to claim child allowance benefits from 1973. The numbers of babies born out of wedlock were rising every year from 1980 (when it was 5%), and in 1985, the percentage stood at 8.5% – that is, some 5,282 infants born to unwed mothers. (This would reach one-third of all births by 2005.)

There had been a heated national debate in 1983 over abortion, in which conservative Catholics were heard to praise single mothers for having a baby rather than an abortion. Is it really plausible that at that time there were young women so bereft of civil rights, social support, family connections or recourse to the law that they were held against their will or consent behind convent walls? Very hard to believe. But then the job of a novelist is to make things up.

I came away from *The Apprentice* – Ali Abbas's movie about the rise of Donald Trump – thinking that he really is an unpleasant character,

who had also been corrupted by his mentor Roy Cohn. But an anti-Trump friend came away with the opposite view: that the movie showed Trump as

a vulnerable young man (with a horrible father) just aiming for the American dream. *De gustibus non est disputandum* – opinions differ.



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# No country for young children



Brandon Scott

Child protection should unquestionably be paramount to any institution or organisation, but the moralising from some of the Government TDs of late rings hollow when you examine the ongoing failures they've been presiding over, with some seemingly incapable of finding solutions even after a decade in Government.

The Government parties have suddenly become staunch champions for the rights of the child and protecting their safety as an election looms but this stance is simply incongruous with their performance in protecting children from homelessness and the provision of essential services, particularly over the last number of years.

Out of a total of 14,760 homeless people without a roof over their head in this State, 4,561 are children according to the latest statistics.

Addressing the latest rise in homelessness in the country, up by 384 when



compared to last month's figures and also representing a 15% rise when compared with the statistics from September 2023, Focus Ireland, a charity founded by Sr Stan that provides services for people who are homeless, said that the country's "extreme" homeless problem demands that future governments make

a radical shift in housing policy to decisively tackle it. CEO of Focus Ireland Pat Dennigan said: "Too often the political debate on housing and homelessness has been characterised by point scoring and finger-pointing, what people want are realistic and deliverable solutions. The future of over 4,000 children trapped in

homelessness depends upon the ability of our political parties to rise to this challenge." DePaul's Chief Executive David Carroll, another service at the coalface of combatting homelessness, said that the latest homeless figures indicate that young people are some of the most disadvantaged by

the Government's housing market and called on the Government to change its approach to its housing policy to ensure that people have "a secure, affordable, decent place to call a home". Catherine Kenny, CEO of Dublin Simon Community said, "The lack of an integrated response by the Government is one of, if not

the, key issue with today's record numbers". "Since the Dáil was last dissolved in 2020, homelessness has increased by 41%". She added: "Despite the tireless work of Dublin Simon accommodating over 1,200 men, women and children per night in accommodation, homelessness continues to escalate".

One in every seven children now lives in poverty.

Children languish on waiting lists for scoliosis surgery, mental health appointments or special needs classes.

4,651 children are homeless, many moving between hotels and B&Bs.

Another 5,000 immigrant children are living in direct provision.

Last year, 29 young people died while they were in care or aftercare or were known to Tusla.

The scarcity of special care beds for children at risk is severe.

4,400 children are waiting for first-time appointments with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Some schools in the country are still segregating Traveller children.

The Department of Children has stopped funding the Child Law Project, a court reporting service that has exposed numerous failures in the system.

The Ombudsman for Children said in his annual report that "funding has not been forthcoming" to provide independent oversight of elements of the domestic, sexual and gender-based violence strategy that affect children.

Social Justice Ireland's analysis of Budget 2025: Government "failed to provide adequate resources to Tusla for child protection and increased social provision for children and families".

Gardaí have been searching for a little boy who went missing two years ago when he was six and is believed to be dead. Nobody in authority seems to have noticed in all that time that the child had vanished.

There's a total of 33 children missing from State care, as per latest reports.

# Life-changing range of gifts launched by Trócaire

**T**rócaire has launched this year's range of sustainable and ethical gifts for Christmas. The 'Gifts of Change' range receives incredible support every year from people in Ireland and is a fantastic way to contribute to Trócaire's work in some of the world's most fragile countries. Over one million life-changing gifts have been purchased by the public in Ireland, north and south, since the initiative launched in 2000. With 24 gifts in the range starting at just €5 there is sure to be something of interest.

With the horrific situation in Gaza obviously still front of mind for many people, a new gift has been introduced that will help children caught up in conflict this year including in Gaza. Children caught up in conflict witness horrors every day that no child should see. Hard as it is for adults to cope, it's harder still for children. To process the trauma of war, they need help and the **Gift of Play & Healing** (€40) can provide this. Through the power of play therapy, including storybooks, photo puzzles, art and more, this gift will give children who are hurting a way to find calm and resilience in the storm.

## Hunger

Hunger can be a constant companion for children caught in conflict. When food is scarce, children under five are at huge risk of malnutrition. Saida and her two-year-old son Tiranus are among those families in Sudan affected not only by an escalating conflict but by failed

harvests due to climate change and where people are now facing what is being called the worst humanitarian crisis on earth. Saida depends on farming but due to a lack of rains last year, the family ran out of food and had nothing to eat. They had been surviving on nutritionally inadequate leaves and roots that led to Tiranus being malnourished. Saida brought Tiranus to the malnutrition clinic in Thobo county which is run by Trócaire. She received food supplements high in nutrients and vitamins which saved his life.

**“The Gift of Seeds and Tools (€15) provides families with everything they need to plant, tend and grow healthy, nutritious, fresh fruit and vegetables”**

Your Gift of **Food & Nourishment** (€50) this Christmas will help children with special food that nourishes growing bodies and saves lives.

For those looking for something that will help the planet this Christmas, Trócaire has a range of climate gifts. The **Gift of Seeds and Tools** (€15) provides families with everything they need to plant, tend and grow healthy, nutritious, fresh fruit and vegetables. The **Protection from Climate Change Gift** (€100) will help struggling families respond to

the effects of extreme weather by providing drought-resistant seeds, equipment to store limited rainfall and trees that help to reduce flooding and enrich the soil. This is the ideal gift to help restore hope and justice for families and communities who have been devastated by climate change.

## Water

Everyone should have access to safe, clean water for drinking, washing and helping to grow the food they need. **The Gift of Water Systems**

(€100) provides filters for safe drinking water, as well as irrigation systems for growing food in harsh, dry conditions. This life-changing gift helps families to be healthier and happier, both now and in the future. In a time of crisis, the **Gift of Emergency Water** (€25) is a lifeline. This gift provides essentials such as a jerry can and water purification tablets to help prevent deadly diseases like typhoid and cholera and gives families in places like South Sudan and Ethiopia the peace

of mind that their water is safe and clean.

In 2023/2024, Trócaire's work enabled more than 2.2 million people in some of the most fragile countries in the world to improve their lives thanks to the generous support of the public here at home. This included supporting over 1.6 million people in humanitarian crises, promoting access to justice and defending the human rights of 80,444 people in Central America and Palestine, and supporting women and girls

through empowerment programmes in countries including Myanmar, Zimbabwe and Rwanda. Last year, Trócaire's climate and environmental justice work supported over 288,000 people.

With 24 gifts to choose from, ranging from €5 to €1,400, each Trócaire gift will support critical programmes across the world where Trócaire works. The gifts can be purchased online at [www.trocaire.org/gifts](http://www.trocaire.org/gifts) or by calling 1800 408 408 (0800 912 1200 in NI).



Saida brought her son Tiranus to the malnutrition clinic in Thobo county which is run by Trócaire. She received food supplements high in nutrients and vitamins which saved his life. Photo: Achouth Deng/ Trócaire

## List of Worldwide Gifts 2024

- Soap €5
- Chicks €10
- Menstrual Dignity €10
- Seeds and Tools €15
- Solar Lamp €20
- School Lunches €25
- Emergency Water €25
- School Kit €30
- Gift of Play for Healing €40 NEW
- Gift of Food and Nourishment €50 NEW
- Goat €50
- Help for Grandparents €50
- Mental Health Lifeline €60
- New Mother's Care Kit €60
- Honey Bees €75
- Water Systems €100
- Protection from Climate Change €100
- Women's Empowerment €100
- A Just World €100
- A Safe Home €150
- Ox Plough and Farming Tools €225
- Fix a Well €1,000
- Solar Panel Water Pump €1,400



Elen (6) washes her hands at a water tank provided by Trócaire, DR Congo. Photo: Garry Walsh/Trócaire

# A wasteland of tacky and pointless gory imagery



Breda O'Brien

I have lovely neighbours of whom I am very fond. However, I am not fond of their Hallowe'en display, which consists of two ugly witch-like figures sitting somewhat incongruously on deck chairs.

A motion-activated sensor sets off vicious cackling and screaming while the figures bob up and down as though possessed, including in the middle of the night when urban foxes pad past.

## Decorations

I am growing less fond of Hallowe'en decorations every year. Recently, my husband and I passed what could only be described as a gibbet, with grisly figures twisting in a row in the breeze.

Hallowe'en decorations have become increasingly macabre and ghoulish. Some people would say that is the point. Life

is not all sugared violets, and it is important to face the reality of evil and death.

But do the nastier Hallowe'en decorations help us to acknowledge that reality, or render it remote by making it cartoon-like? Is there any evidence that modern Ireland is more comfortable with death than our forebears?

Furthermore, most Hallowe'en decorations are plastic and destined to end up in landfills but honestly, that is not my primary objection.

The Church's ceremonies at this time of the year are all about death, too, but within a context of Christian hope, the kind of hope that is markedly absent from the dark displays we witness.

**“Here in Ireland, we are fond of saying that Hallowe'en grew out of the Celtic feast of Samhain. It is probably a bit more complicated than that”**

Hallowe'en itself (and I am a stickler for the apostrophe) comes from All Hallows' Eve – the vigil of All Saints.

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that 'hallow' as a noun comes from Old English, and its first recorded use was pre-1150 and it disappeared by 1500. As a verb, in the sense of to make holy, or to consecrate, it lasted longer but was already seen as somewhat archaic by the early 20th Century.

After All Saints, there is the feast of All Souls, a day of prayer and remembrance for all the faithful departed. Here in Ireland, we are fond of saying that Hallowe'en grew out of the Celtic feast of Samhain. It is probably a bit more complicated than that.

## Remnants

Remnants of folk customs no doubt persisted in Ireland and other parts of Europe long after Celtic culture was no more.

The Church believed in the communion of saints since the earliest times. There is some evidence that by the

year 800, churches in Ireland were praying for the dead in early November, possibly due to memories of Samhain, but the universal Church had different dates.

**“The idea that Hallowe'en had pagan origins seems to stem more from the Protestant Reformation”**

In 609, Pope Boniface IV rededicated the pagan Pantheon to St Mary and All Martyrs on May 13. This date was an ancient Roman feast dedicated to the dead. From then until the early 8th Century, when Pope Gregory III dedicated a chapel to relics of the saints, it continued to be the day of remembrance of the saints. It then moved to November 1.

This casts doubt on Sam-

hain being the definitive influence on the date for the universal Church. Surely it would have been more likely to have been an influence the closer we were to Celtic times and certainly earlier than the 8th Century?

The idea that Hallowe'en had pagan origins seems to stem more from the Protestant Reformation. Puritans disliked Hallowe'en. Let's face it, they hated most Christian festivals and tried to ban the celebration of Christmas.

When the Puritans made their way to the New World, enter the Irish again, fleeing famine in the mid-19th Century, but bringing with them customs like carved turnips and what looked to the Puritans like other reprehensible 'popish' nonsense.

## Retreated

In the face of Protestant outrage, US Catholics retreated from their traditional customs, which ironically left the field wide open to the growth

of secular Hallowe'en.

We know less about Celtic culture than we pretend. There is a lot of cherry-picking and embellishing in modern paganism, for example, the conflation of the real person, Brigid of Kildare, with a Celtic goddess scarcely mentioned in myths. Something similar seems to have happened with Samhain.

The little we do know, however, shows respect and awe for the world of the dead, who were perceived to have the power to harm the living.

Modern Hallowe'en strips the Christian meditation on the fleeting nature of life and the need to pray for the dead, and even the Celtic wariness of the dead and the need to appease them, from Hallowe'en. It leaves an ugly, commercial, and hollow substitute in its place.

I am not against people dressing up or kids collecting sweets. I even understand the thrill of being frightened in a safe context which is part of the appeal of ghoulish imagery.

I just wonder whether commercial attempts to sell more costumes and decorations, far from helping us deal with life's ultimate realities, have led us into a literal wasteland of tacky and pointless gory imagery instead.

**“Modern Hallowe'en strips the Christian meditation on the fleeting nature of life and the need to pray for the dead, and even the Celtic wariness of the dead and the need to appease them, from Hallowe'en. It leaves an ugly, commercial, and hollow substitute in its place”**

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# Simplistic to present the 1980s as a dark and repressive time



David Quinn

The phrase “Ireland’s dark past” has well and truly entered the national consciousness. We come across it in articles, hear it on the radio, in TV documentaries, in movies and in general conversation.

Our “dark past” used to refer mainly to the period from the foundation of the Irish State in 1922 until maybe the 1960s, or at a push into the 1970s. But now I notice that it is being brought ever closer to the present and has reached the 1980s. In due course it will probably be pushed closer still, until perhaps it finally reaches May 2018, the month we repealed the 8th amendment and so were finally ‘liberated’ from the clutches of our Catholic past.

The idea of Ireland’s “dark past”, which is always associated with the Catholic Church, is now commonplace abroad. There was a recent BBC series called ‘The Woman in the Wall’. It is set in the present and focusses on a woman traumatised by her time in a Magdalene laundry. You could tell by reading the reviews that the reviewers particularly associated the Magdalen laundries with (a) Ireland and (b) the Catholic Church.

None seemed aware that such institutions were common in Britain and elsewhere once upon a time, were mainly run by Protestant organisations, or that the first one in Ireland was founded by a member of the Church of Ireland, a Lady Arabella Denny, in the late 18th century when the Catholic Church still operated under the penal laws. Incidentally, Lady Denny was genuinely trying to get ‘fallen women’ back on the straight and narrow when she founded her Magdalen home.

In any event, I mention all this because a new movie has just opened in our cinemas called ‘*Small Things Like These*’. It stars Cillian Murphy as the hero of the story and is based on an award-winning book of the same name that came out in 2021.

The setting is New Ross in Co. Wexford. The year is 1985. Murphy plays local coal

A scene from *Small Things Like These* (2024)

delivery man, Bill Furlong. He is disturbed by what is going on in the local convent and the treatment of the young women in its Magdalen laundry.

The villain of the story is the head nun, Sr Mary, played with ‘authoritarian menace’ by Emily Watson. Can you remember the last time a movie or TV series set in Ireland depicted a nun in a sympathetic way? Nuns have all been reduced to horror movie caricatures, the one group of women we are allowed, no, often encouraged, to hate.

“‘*Small Things Like These*’ does not look like it is set in the mid-1980s. It looks more like the 1950s”

What caught my attention about the movie, other than the theme, is the time period in which the story is set, that is the mid-1980s. This is because I came to adulthood in the 1980s. I left school, when to university and got my first proper job. Therefore, I have a strong living memory of the time. When I read and hear that the 1950s (say) were a very dark time, I cannot answer this with any first-hand knowledge. I have no doubt that aspects of the 1950s were dark, and for some,

very dark. On the other hand, when I used to listen to my parents and their contemporaries speak about their time as young adults in that era, most of their memories seem to have been happy ones. So, simply speaking about “Ireland’s dark past” does not capture the full story of those years.

‘*Small Things Like These*’ does not look like it is set in the mid-1980s. It looks more like the 1950s. There was a Magdalen home in New Ross, but it was no longer operating in 1985. In fact, it has closed down in 1967, almost 20 years before. So why not set the story then, which would have made more sense?

Perhaps the idea is precisely to bring our “dark past” closer to the present.

## Darkness

I do not associate the 1980s with ‘darkness’ and ‘repression’, or a ‘cruel and authoritarian’ Church. Some people will say this is because I was a middle-class male growing up in that time and therefore I had

a different experience to many other people, and that is obviously true. But in every era different people will experience their time in different ways.

“Looking back on the 1980s, few of my contemporaries, either male or female, seemed repressed, quite the reverse in many cases”

For example, in years to come, how will all those people who are young now remember this time? There will be plenty of stories of rampant anxiety, depression and self-harm. If we are so liberated now, why is that happening?

But looking back on the 1980s, few of my contemporaries, either male or female, seemed particularly

repressed, quite the reverse in many cases. The Church was far more dominant back then than now, but the era of severe corporal punishment was more or less a thing of past, in my school at any rate, and in the one my sisters went to. The priests I remember from my school were a benign bunch in the main, with one notable exception who later turned out to have sexually abused boys, although he presented himself as benign, as child abusers tend to.

## Stigma

The stigma of being a single mother was also lifting during those years. In 1980, only 5% of children were born outside marriage, but by 1990 this has trebled to about 15%. By 2000, the figure had reached one birth in three.

Some of my friends had strict parents, and plenty did not. You did hear stories of strict nuns, but few enough of properly cruel ones.

But for the most part we barely spoke about the

Church at all. Divorce and abortion referendums took place in the 1980s, but a proposal to legalise divorce went down by a two-to-one margin, and the 8th amendment became part of the Constitution by the same margin. That was the democratic will.

I do remember plenty of arguments about Charlie Haughey and Garret FitzGerald and Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, but very few, if any, about John Paul II and whoever happened to be the local bishop.

The 1980s was when big music acts began to come to Ireland regularly and play at Slane Castle, hardly a scene of darkness and repression. These concerts were a dominant image of the 1980s for many young people.

What was the big dark cloud that seemed to loom overhead of a lot of the time? It wasn’t the Catholic Church, and it wasn’t some terrible lack of sexual freedom. It was the dismal state of the economy. By far and away, this was the big negative we talked about at the time. We wondered when we left university whether we would ever get a decent job.

“But was the 1980s in general repressive? I do not believe it was, and it is disservice to that time to present it as such”

This was another of our eras of high emigration. Many young people went off to England or America. I went to Australia at the very end of 1986. Back in those days Gay Byrne used to joke that the last person to leave would have to turn out the lights.

Yes, there were obviously people who would have experienced the 1980s as repressive, including gay people, and there still would have been some women experiencing the stigma of having a baby outside marriage, even if that stigma was declining.

But was the 1980s in general repressive? I do not believe it was, and it is disservice to that time to present it as such. It is both simplistic and inaccurate to reduce the 1980s to stories such as ‘*Small Things Like These*’.

If there is a movie set in the Ireland of that time which does capture the era a bit better, then try out the Commitments again. Not much repression on display there.

# Love in the age of anti-Catholicism



Martina Purdy

It was a summer's day in Mayo, and the heavens were weeping, when I first heard the story of John's conversion. He had been raised in a family who lived without faith, a family with a father who drank too much.

John grew up hating his father, but like him, developed a thirst for that which cannot satisfy, a thirst, not for drink, but for money. God was not at the centre of his life for many years, but still there was an echo from his childhood, the sound of faith, from a loved one who spoke with the rhythmic prayer of his ancestors. He never forgot the words his grandmother spoke each time he visited her home: "May all the blessings of the saints of Glendalough be on you, John."

## Language

This was once the language of the faithful in Ireland. And as we come to mark the feast of all Irish saints on November 6, how desperately we need the inspiration of these treasures of the past: Patrick, Brigid, Colmcille, Dichu, Enda, Malachy, Bronagh, MacNissi, Declan, Kevin, Canice, Brendan and so many more. This is a date in the Christian calendar that should rival St Patrick's Day, but I find few are even aware of it.

Treasures of the past was

a key theme in Pope Francis' new encyclical on the Sacred Heart, *Delixit Nos* (He loved us), which coincided last week with a statement by Archbishop Eamon Martin. While Peter's successor spoke of our wealth, Patrick's successor acknowledged our poverty. Ireland after all no longer honours the Sacred Heart as it once did, when this holy picture adorned nearly every parlour wall.

The archbishop warned that dioceses and parishes will disappear because we simply cannot meet the cost of maintaining them. Nor, he added, can we pay compensation to abuse victims without rationalisation, a grim reality that is unlikely to woo anyone back to the Church.

**“Let's face it, Ireland, once the land of saints and scholars, can appear strikingly anti-Catholic”**

Even so, the archbishop spoke with hope about the mission Jesus left us. "We must," said Archbishop Eamon, "ensure the next generation believes in God."

Persuading the next generation may be easier than reaching their parents and grandparents, as many seem quite determined to reject the faith. "It's a generation that is hostile to the Church," a priest friend told me a few years ago. "But the good news is the next generation are not hostile. They just don't know anything."

Let's face it, Ireland, once the land of saints and schol-

ars, can appear strikingly anti-Catholic.

Living in the north of Ireland for many years, the anti-Catholicism could be deadly. But this manifested itself in gun-toting loyalist 'protestants' who vented their rage by shooting at random in bars frequented by Catholics. Thank God, those days are gone, but in the new Ireland, it is baptised Catholics who are raging, and venting, and seeking to kill the Spirit.

These anti-Catholics, who are found in all corners of Ireland, wallow in their own narrative, and scapegoat the Church for all society's ills, while sinking more deeply into a kind of nihilism that replaces faith, hope and love with fear, hopeless and indifference. They seek a new identity, a diversity and inclusion, that does not extend to Catholicism. Faith, they insist, is a private matter.

## Identity

In the past the Irish could hardly speak without mentioning God because the Irish language, an expression of our identity, was so deeply entwined with faith. Remember when Mary McAleese, who speaks rather more critically these days, was publicly chastised as Irish president for using the phrase, "God willing"? That was 20 years ago this month.

The other day I came across a reflective article written a decade ago by former Irish diplomat, Eamon Delaney. He had described himself as an agnostic, non-churchgoer who, desiring a pluralist Ireland, had welcomed the emerging liberalisation. But in a case of 'be careful what you wish for' he was lamenting the fact that the churches were now under

pressure – and that faith itself had "almost become the love that dare not speak its name". Delaney was annoyed that an army chaplain, who had criticised Michael D. Higgins for not referencing Christmas in his Christmas message, had been forced into an apology. I sought out a few more of Delaney's articles and was not surprised to read in 2018 in the *Irish Central* that he had returned to the faith, brought back by his children, who were attending Catholic school.

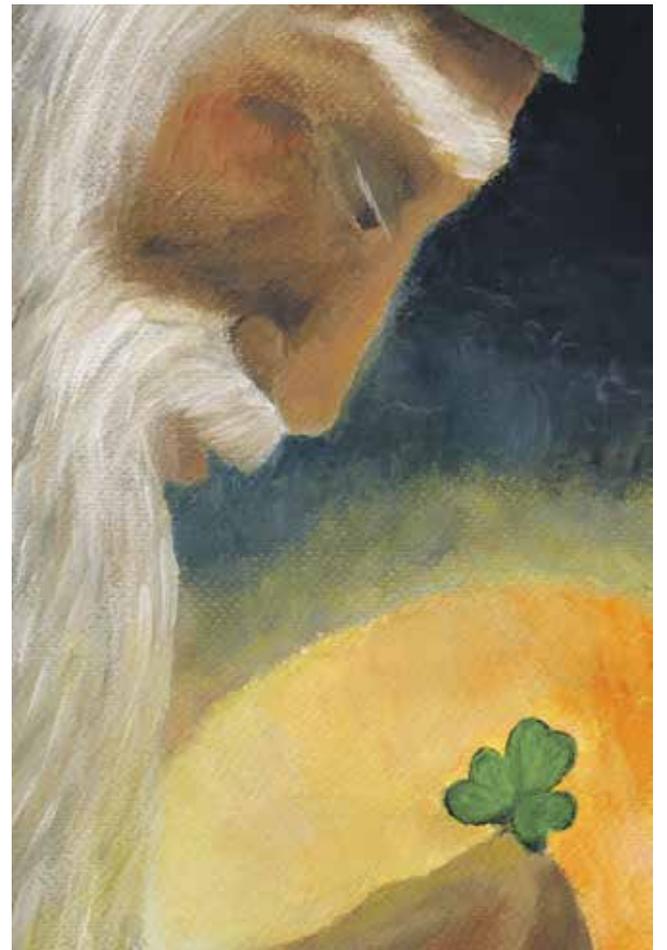
**“What is striking about John's journey is the transforming grace of the lay faithful”**

So, the Archbishop of Armagh has every reason to hope. Christ after all came not to save the righteous but sinners and Jesus is the love that cannot be silenced. It is a love, St Paul tells us in Ephesians, that will grow a Church, rooted and grounded in love.

As for John, he is now Deacon Taaffe, and a founding member of the Apostles of Love (Ireland) in the Archdiocese of Armagh. The Apostles of Love manage a diocesan initiative called The Oasis of Peace Centre in Drogheda, where lay people and clergy are partners in a mission of prayer, love and healing. What is striking about John's journey is the transforming grace of the lay faithful.

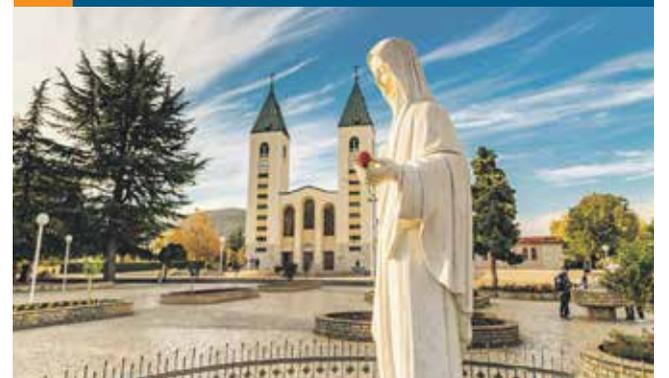
John's conversion was no doubt rooted in the love and prayers of his grandmother as well as the kind invitation of a friend who asked him to a prayer meeting. His conversion to Christ was deepened by the love of our Blessed Mother, and crowned with the grace of forgiveness, as he ultimately reconciled with his father, who also returned to faith.

As we mark the feast of all Irish saints, all of whom were once sinners, let us celebrate. Because we have every reason to hope – and as St Patrick himself wrote in his *Confessio* – to "be amazed".



St Patrick.

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**“Remember when Mary McAleese, who speaks rather more critically these days, was publicly chastised as Irish president for using the phrase, ‘God willing’? That was 20 years ago this month”**

## Stevie Nicks saving her career...

Singer-songwriter Stevie Nicks has opened up about her abortion, as this seems to be the defining issue of the US presidential election. She said her birth control failed in 1977 just as Fleetwood Mac was about to record their third album. "Oh no, no, no, no, no, no," she had said, recalling her "choice" on CBS Sunday morning. She claimed that having her baby would have destroyed the band. How very sad that she ended up having four abortions. Feminists, said one commentator, describe abortion as empowering. But how many men have announced that they had to kill their child to 'save' their career.

## The cake reflected the moon

Having just celebrated a birthday I was aghast to read in St Martin's Magazine that the tradition of round cakes with candles is rooted in an ancient Greek offering to the goddess of the moon, Artemis. The cake reflected the moon, and the candles not only symbolised its light, but were a form of communication with the goddess. The hope was that the smoke from the candles would carry prayers to the deities. This won't do at all! Thank God for square cakes – and frankly I can live without the mounting number of candles!

# March for Jesus, 'a desire for something greater'

**Renata Milán Morales**

Over 10,000 Christians from various denominations across Ireland gathered in Dublin for the 'March for Jesus' last Saturday, October 26. Starting from the Garden of Remembrance, the faithful walked through the heart of the city before reaching Leinster House, where prayers, hymns, and speeches took place. Jennifer, one of the

attendees of this march shared her reflections on the day.

"The public response was incredibly positive," Jennifer said. "People were excited. Some had tears in their eyes, while others looked on in amazement. It's clear that, as a nation with strong Christian roots, there's still a deep sense of faith among the people. With the direction our politicians have taken in recent years, many feel disheartened and are turning

back to God for guidance."

The impact of the event was felt not only by participants and spectators but also by those responsible for overseeing it. "One of the Gardai mentioned that it had been the best shift they'd had in a long time," according to the insights shared by Pastor John Ahern, key organiser, during a service Jennifer attended the day after the march. "They said they'd go home feeling fulfilled and happy to

have covered the event." The atmosphere throughout the march was described as one of unity, mutual respect, and spiritual upliftment.

Over 40 churches took part in the march, representing a wide range of Christian denominations, including the Catholic Church, with bishops such as Bishop Phonsie Cullinan of Waterford and Lismore encouraging faithful to be part of this initiative days before the event took place, "we want

to show and shine the light of Jesus Christ" the bishop explained, "walking together side by side for Jesus... Walking to the Dáil Éireann where so many sad decisions have been taking over the last few years, decisions which are not according to the mind of God."

"There was such a strong spirit of collaboration," Jennifer said. "No one was there to take the spotlight. There were no divisions, no denominations – just one name, one

purpose. We came together for one reason only."

The event marked a meaningful moment of solidarity among Ireland's Christian communities, as thousands walked side-by-side in an expression of shared beliefs and a desire for spiritual renewal. "It was an extraordinary day," Jennifer shared, "not just for the Church but for the country. People are yearning for something greater, and the march was a testament to that desire."



The march for Jesus making its way down O'Connell Street on Saturday. Photos: John McElroy.



Nayra Rosales and Irish Paulo at Molesworth St in Dublin where the march culminated with prayer, speeches and song.



Peppy and Rachel Fitzgerald from Kerry.



March for Jesus making its way down O'Connell Street on Saturday.



The March for Jesus outside Leinster House on Saturday.



Thais Braga, Tiago Silva and Mariana Silva at Molesworth St in Dublin.



Sinan and Denisia Gurler with Jacob (7 months).



The March for Jesus outside Leinster House on Saturday.



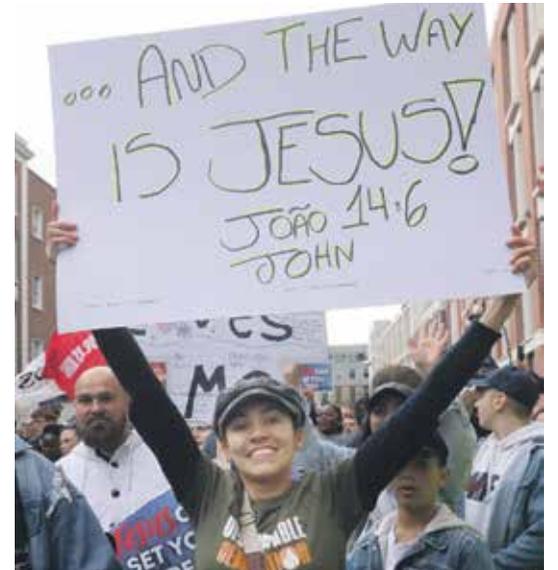
Lizette and Judit from Bolivia.



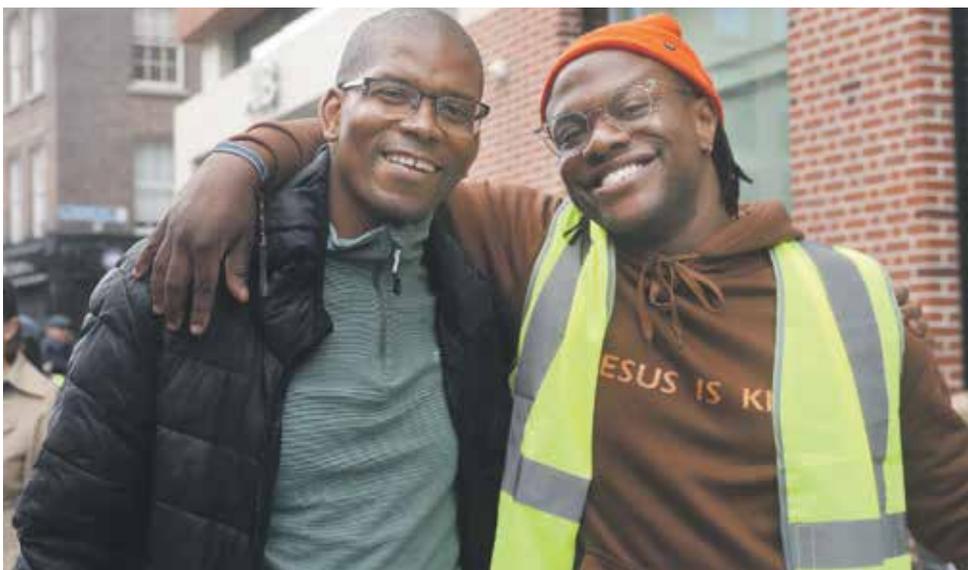
Cameron Jamison, Rachel Todd, Rebecca Hermin and Anna Mc Ateer from Belfast.



The March for Jesus making its way down O'Connell Street on Saturday.



Alexandra at Molesworth St in Dublin.



Charly Charles and Kefuwe Ntsamai.



Filip Yanis during the march for Jesus.

# Teacher training and women's rights

## The work of an Irish sister in South Sudan



Solidarity Teacher Training College (STTC) students created puppets in their art class for use as teaching aids with younger learners. Photo: Solidarity with South Sudan.



Sr Jacinta Prunty in class on March 1, 2019. Photo: Sr Jacinta Prunty.



Renata Steffens

**G**ender inequality and women's rights in South Sudan are still a great issue. According to UNESCO, the literacy rate in South Sudan for women aged 15+ was 28.9% in 2022, compared to 40.3% for men. Many charities and missionaries are working tirelessly to improve women's rights in that country.

Sr Jacinta Prunty, a Holy Faith Sister of Ireland is one of those people. She has been working with teacher training education since October 2020. Speaking with *The Irish Catholic*, Sr Prunty explained she went to South Sudan for four months in 2019, during a 'sabbatical leave' from her work as head of department in History at Maynooth University.

Sr Prunty went to the Solidarity with South Sudan Teacher Training College (STTC) as a volunteer for a semester. "I taught there from January 1 to the last day of April 2019. Then I came back to work at the university. I loved South Sudan so much

[that] I resigned from my university role and went back full-time on October 1, 2020."

She just renewed her contract to teach in South Sudan. The first contract was for three years and the recently signed one guarantees she will be there for another four. "I think what they like about us is that we're there to stay," the sister explained.

She said she went to meet the Director General for Education when she first arrived for her ministry, however, "it took me day, after day, after day of doorstepping to get to see him." Sr Prunty went to the director's office every day for a week.

### Training

When he finally decided to meet with her, the first thing the director asked was: "Well, sister, how long are you here for?" to which she replied, "I'm here for 10 years, please God." The second thing the director asked were Sr Prunty qualifications. "I told him I was already doing head of

department and lecture and I got qualifications. 'Sit down', he said [and] we are the best of friends since ... What they don't like is this coming and going."

The sister explained that she knew about the dangers in South Sudan, but she never felt safer. She "couldn't face north, south, east or west. I didn't know what direction I was walking and I would get a bit lost.

**“That means that we are part of building up the country on a solid foundation for the future. So this teacher training will continue”**

"There would always be some of the others that were laughing, 'but just ask, they will know where you're coming from,' and you will be escorted back to the gate of

**“We're not there for our own power and glory. We're there for service and we're there to leave it, to set it up in a way that will continue into the future. And I think we're getting there”**

the college. [The natives are] extraordinarily welcoming, kind, appreciative.

STTC is affiliated with the University of Juba. "I'm very proud of this," Sr Prunty said. "This took a long time, its paperwork takes forever. We were already working with them, but now we have the final thing. That means that we are part of building up the country on a solid foundation for the future. So this teacher training will continue."

There are three teacher training colleges in that area, she explained. STTC, one supported by the Anglican Church and another which is supported by the government of Norway.

"My job has been to push this college forward into third-level structures," she explained. "we're not there for our own power and glory. We're there for service and we're there to leave it, to set it up in a way that will continue into the future. And I think we're getting there."

### Women

The sister explained that when she arrived at the college for the first time five years ago, most of the teachers in training were men. The college principal Br Chris Soosai arrived just a few months ahead of Sr Prunty and "he moved it very strongly to bringing in more women.

"And even though every-

**“Equality is not a common thing in South Sudan “and some of the boys were so angry about this, they boycotted and there was all kind of hassle”**

body said it couldn't be done, we wouldn't get enough girls, we'd have to have a special stream for girls who are much slower or haven't enough background, we have proved that the girls are the match of the men once they get a chance.

**“I think it's probably one of the single most important achievements so far, and there has been opposition”**

"Some of our best students are women and that's very, very nice. Now we've made it up to the 50/50 of the intake and we're now going for 60% girls to 40% men, and to try and push to get more girls into primary school teaching.

"Until you get more women into primary school teaching, you will not have more girls registering in school. So the women are needed to get more girls attending school.

"I think it's probably one

of the single most important achievements so far, and there has been opposition. But I think by holding firm and saying 'no, this is the way it's going to be' will have results. These results can be already seen, as "we had our first female college [student] president."

"Chris organised that one semester it will be a male president, the next semester [it] will be a female president, the next semester male," the sister explained. However, equality is not a common thing in South Sudan "and some of the boys were so angry about this, they boycotted and there was all kind of hassle."

### Equality

Mr Soosai held firm and said "The college is committed to gender equity. This is the way we're doing it and if you don't like this, nobody's imprisoned here. You can go." Sr Prunty agreed that it could be extreme to tell the students to go, but they were determined to have equal rights for all students, independent of



Students at the nursery school in Riimenze. Photo: Solidarity with South Sudan.



Blessing of new classrooms in the St Joseph's Block at the STTC college on May 3, 2024. Photo: Sr Jacinta Prunty. Photo: Sr Jacinta Prunty.



The community members (brothers and sisters) celebrate with Sr Prunty her birthday on June 2024. Photo: Sr Jacinta Prunty.



Celebration of Sr Prunty's birthday. Photo: Sr Jacinta Prunty.

their gender.

"The first girl who was elected turned out to be the best president we have ever had, at least to my knowledge. Superb, tiny little girl," the sister said.

**“They quote Pope Francis and Church documents, which gives them some authority to argue with the men who disagree with gender equality in the college”**

The difference of having a female president, Sr Prunty explained, was that the girls now had a voice. "The girls started speaking up better, more strongly. And we thought we sorted out a few important things when we had a female president," she said.

Working with such a focus on gender equality, one could

**“Even though women are now making 50% of the students in the college, the mentality of the whole country is more difficult to change. To guarantee the security of these girls, they have two separate programmes**

consider the sister a feminist. "What else would I be?" Sr Prunty commented on her 'feminist actions'. "I have had chances.

"My mother and my father gave us equal chances. My father worked with cars, I mean, I was driving trucks and cars before I joined the convent. I was 17 and I was able to drive a lorry." "They didn't use those words, or they didn't talk about feminism, but they had a great, active sense of equality, so nothing would hold you back."

In her personal life and her career, Sr Prunty "was personally very lucky, very fortunate to have some very good mentors, men and women who could really be described as feminists, but they may never have used that language about themselves."

Sr Prunty explained the teaching at STTC also includes "a lot of Catholic Church teaching." She said they quote Pope Francis and Church documents, which gives them some authority to argue with

the men who disagree with gender equality in the college.

"We say 'No, no, this isn't Western, this isn't Europe, this isn't Ireland. This is actually equality, respect. All of these things are coming from [the] Catholic Church teaching', which is powerful, and it's very difficult then for people to quarrel with this or dispute it."

### Programmes

Even though women are now making 50% of the students in the college, the mentality of the whole country is more difficult to change. To guarantee the security of these girls, they have two separate programmes.

The residential learners are girls aged around 19 to 21, who just left secondary school. "Because that makes it safer for young women...it's very hard if you have young girls of 19/20, and then you have a load of men in their 40s." In special cases, they admit older women, in their mid-twenties.

The other programme is an in-service, non-residential course, which "takes a little bit longer." The non-residential programme is thought for older people, "especially older men. We put them towards the in-service."

"These people are madly patriotic and these people are committed to South Sudan," Sr Prunty explained. When

**“A qualified female teacher carries a lot of status...I think that's going to help and that will inspire little girls too.” The sister also believes that by having female teachers in their villages, little girls feel inspired to attend school”**

they graduate most of them go back to their home villages. "They are literally going back to be teachers in very, very difficult places," even though they are not paid to teach in those villages.

**“The women have very little voice, very little autonomy, very little. They have them on paper, but culturally they haven't got many rights”**

"A qualified female teacher carries a lot of status...I think that's going to help and that will inspire little girls too." The sister also believes that by having female teachers in their villages, little girls feel inspired to attend school, as they make school grounds safe for females.

"The women have very little voice, very little autonomy, very little. They have them on paper, but culturally they haven't got many rights...But with the bit of education and with the status as a teacher, you can see this improving very, very much."

### Basics

Something curious Sr Prunty noticed when visiting one of these village schools is how small things, like basic needs, are improved when having female teachers in the school. "I called in and they were mad keen to show me the toilet.

"It's the poorest place in the world and one of the girls, Theresa, had organised one toilet. Perfectly kept, perfectly clean with the padlock and she had made [it] a women's toilet...She kept the key in her pocket and it was handed out to the girls."

"I was just watching this and I'm saying to myself, 'this is what makes girls able to come to school.' The rest

of the place was a disaster, but this one toilet was for the women teachers and the girls...

"This is just what you do as a woman teacher. And then you wonder, 'why are the girls coming to school?' Well, just have a look at the toilet situation and see if there's any females on the staff."

**“If you come with a good heart and you come with an openness to learning, you can still learn. You can still share. You can still serve and you, yourself will be enriched”**

This experience working in South Sudan "certainly changed" Sr Prunty "in a lot of ways". "I've become more patient," she said. "I realised, I suppose, the things we have in common."

"If you come with a good heart and you come with an openness to learning, you can still learn. You can still share. You can still serve and you, yourself will be enriched massively," she said. "Even if you come old as I did. I was 58 when I first came, and then I was 60 when I came on my full-time contract."

# Out&About

## Greta Thunberg of Africa visits Cork



**CORK:** Ineza Umuhoza Grace, known as the Greta Thunberg of Africa addressed pupils at Mount Mercy College, Cork, outlining some insights on the global climate struggle. Included is Janet Twomey of Trócaire. Photo: Mike English.



**DONEGAL:** Members of the 'Letterkenny Youth Group' and the 'Youth 2000 Letterkenny' Prayer Group, who led the 'Youth Prayer' Holy Hour in the St Eunan's Cathedral, on October 12.



**MAYO:** Members of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia in Ireland's Frassati Youth Club visited Knock on October 13 for the 800th Jubilee for the Dominicans. They joined other youth groups, went to Mass, confession and bowling.

## INSHORT

### Ukrainian artist honours Dominican school

A Ukrainian teenager created a mural as a symbol of appreciation for Newbridge College, Co. Kildare. Yeva Muravchuk fled Ukraine with her mother and has been studying at the school since 2022. She completed her Leaving Certificate this year and will study art at the National College of Art and Design.

Talking to the school chaplain, Fr Anthony Kavanagh OP, while working on her final exam, the teenager said she wanted to give something back to the school which looked after her for the past two years. The mural contains the Dominican Crest and a crucifix in the centre. It also includes lilies representing Kildare and a sheep representing the Curragh plains.

Ms Muravchuk worked on the mural for over four weeks. The artwork received great admiration locally and nationally. It was also appreciated during the Gerard Manley Hopkins festival.

### Keralan religious gather in Kildare to receive their native bishop

Recently, the Bishop of Kottapuram, Kerala, India, Bishop Ambrose Puthenveetil visited Ireland and was received by Keralan Capuchin Franciscan Friars and Keralan priests working in Ireland.

The bishop was welcomed by a group of 20 Keralan priests at the Kildare Carmelite Ashram, marking a memorable occa-

sion for all present.

The bishop celebrated the Holy Eucharist with the gathered priests and delivered a message on the theme of love emphasising the importance of compassion, unity and faith in our daily lives.

Following the Eucharistic celebration, the bishop joined the priests to share a meal and a chat. They discussed topics such as religious activities and spiritual growth within Ireland.

"The Bishop's humility, simplicity, and down-to-earth demeanour left a lasting impression on all who had the privilege of spending time with him," said the Irish Capuchin Franciscans on a Facebook post. "Br Angelo Joy said: 'We are truly grateful for Bishop Ambrose's visit and the inspiration he brought to us.'"

Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**CORK:** Ineza Umuhoza Grace from Rwanda with staff members, Orla Kelleher, Mary Brosnan, Mary Campbell and Orla Morton, pupils, Roisin Martin, Aoife Cuthbert, Aine Leahy and Zosia Switaj and Trócaire's Janet Twomey during her visit to Mount Mercy College, Cork where she addressed pupils on the global climate struggle. Photo: Mike English



**LAOIS:** Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty met with the Programme Board for the diocese's Pastoral Ministry Programme which will be based in Mount Saint Anne's Conference and Retreat Centre.



**WEXFORD:** A Mass was held in the Church of the Holy Trinity on October 13 to celebrate the perpetual profession of Sr Merciful Love, SSM. The sister was joined by friends and other members of her religious family (priests and third-order members of the Religious Family of the Incarnate Word).



**AUSTRALIA:** John Leonard visited the grave of his cousin Msgr. William Leonard in Rookwood cemetery, Sydney. Msgr. Leonard, a native of Limerick, held triple doctorates in divinity, philosophy and sacred scripture and was a professor of biblical studies at St Patrick's College.



**DONEGAL:** Fr La Flynn, Prior of Lough Derg was the first guest speaker of the Parish of Bunrana's Novena in honour of Pope John Paul II for a renewal of faith. The first night of the novena happened in Cockhill on October 27, the Novena will be happening every Sunday until December 22.



**CAVAN:** Kingscourt farming family, Barry and Brenda Reilly with their children following participation in the recent Harvest Mass of Thanksgiving at The Church of the Immaculate Conception.



**WATERFORD:** Members of the Waterford Branch of the Knights of St Columbanus, CK 15, pictured with Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, right, and Brian Mc Carthy, Supreme Chancellor of the Knights, left, following a recent investiture ceremony of four new Knights at the Blessed Edmund Rice Memorial Chapel, Mount Sion.

## CORK

Two days of prayer, praise, worship and healing on November 2-3 from 9.30am to 5.30pm at the Charleville Park Hotel, Charleville, the key speaker is Ros Powell. Confessions, spiritual accompaniment and Mass on both days. Free admission. No booking is required for the conference. For more info contact Pat on 0872505528.

## DERRY

Women's laugh and craft group happens every Monday from 7.30pm to 9pm in the Kildare room beside St Brigid's, Carnhill. Classes cost £3.

## DONEGAL

Bowling in the Mevagh Parochial Hall happens on Thursdays at 8pm. New members are always welcome.

## DOWN

The Parish of Magheralin's Remembrance Mass takes place on November 10 at 11am in St Patrick and St Ronan's Church. If you wish to have a loved one remembered at this Mass, contact the Parish Office or a member of the Pastoral Council before November 3.

## DUBLIN

The Redemptoristine Nuns 'Solemn Novena through the intercession of our Mother of Perpetual Help' will be led by Fr Ivel Mendana CSSR from November 5 to 12. Masses at 10am and 8pm. Confession available after Mass. For more info contact rednunsweb@gmail.com or 018305723.

## KERRY

Confessions in preparation for November, the month of the Holy Souls, will be held after the Vigil and Sunday Masses at St John's Parish, Tralee during the weekend of November 2-3.

## KILDARE

Newbridge Parish's Cemetery Prayers will take place on Sunday, November 3 at 3pm in St Conleth's Cemetery. Remembrance candles can be purchased in the cemetery on the day.

## LEITRIM

Life in the Spirit Seminars happens at St Brigid's Church, Drumcong, N41 CK74 at 8pm. The event started on October 10 and happens every Thursday until November 21. Every talk counts with a different special guest. All welcome.

## LIMERICK

St Martin Triduum from November 1 to 3 at St Saviour's Dominican Church. Each day has Mass at 1pm, confessions, adoration, rosary, blessing with relic, etc. Triduum preached by Fr Philip Neri Reese OP. For more information contact 0852255796.

## TYRONE

Rosary prayer every Tuesday at 12.15pm followed by Mass at 12.30pm at St Patrick's Church, Gortin. Adoration happens from 1pm to 5pm on the same day.

All Saints Party on November 2 with Mass in St Mary's Chapel, Killyclogher at 12pm followed by party in the parish hall. Come dressed as your favourite saint! Light lunch and refreshments provided. Donations on the day. To book contact 0851471516 or catholicmothers@outlook.ie.

## WATERFORD

St Joseph, St Benildus and St Mary's Parish's coffee morning happens every Wednesday at 11am after 10.30 Mass in the parish centre. Everyone welcome and no booking is required.

## WEXFORD

All Souls' Day Mass in St Michael's Church, Gorey will take place on November 2 at 6.30pm followed by a candlelight service in St Michael's Cemetery.

Wexford Parish Archive talk on Friday, November 1 at 7pm in the pastoral centre, beside St Michael's Church. With the theme 'The history of the six religious orders who lived and worked in Gorey Parish between 1843 and 2022.'

## WICKLOW

The Parish of Rathdrum's Annual Remembrance Mass will take place in Rathdrum Church on November 16 at 6pm.

# St Bernadette's visit encourages thousands to 'believe beyond miracles'

Renata Milán Morales

The veneration of St Bernadette's relics in Ireland has seen thousands of the faithful gather, moved by the life of the young saint who once saw the Virgin Mary in Lourdes. This week with stops in Christ the King Cathedral in Mullingar, Oblate Church of Mary Immaculate in Inchicore, Dublin, Adam and Eve's, Dublin, Kilmore and Cork and Ross.

Approximately 4000 people descended to the Oblates Church of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore, Dublin, and thousands of faithful venerated St Bernadette's relics in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar.

In his homily for Mass with Anointing of the Sick during the visit of the Relics of St Bernadette in Mullingar

Cathedral, Bishop Tom Deenihan of Meath encouraged the faithful to believe beyond miracles.

**“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, he must take up his Cross and follow me.” Faith, he said, ‘promises no primrose path’”**

“We look for miracles, signs, anything, any heavenly thread to grab onto,” he said, acknowledging the desire for proof. “We don't always get it, or at least in any dramatic fashion.” Bishop Deenihan noted that true faith is founded on a quiet, persistent belief. He observed that even those closest to God's

mystery often struggled. The apostles saw miracles, yet most met violent deaths. And Peter, the rock of the Church, denied Christ. The bishop reminded his listeners of Christ's words, “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, he must take up his Cross and follow me.” Faith, he said, “promises no primrose path.”

Bishop Deenihan's explained that, though St Bernadette received powerful visions, they did not free her from difficulties. Her life was marked by rejection and suffering. “Would Bernadette have been better off if Mary had not appeared to her at all?” the bishop asked.

The bishop described Our Lady as a “courageous young lady who surrendered herself to the will of God. ‘Be it done unto me according to thy word.’ Was not that the supreme act of faith?”



Girls from the Children's Rosary pictured under Lourdes Grotto replica in the Oblates Church of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore, Dublin. Photo: Rebecca Roughneen

Bishop Deenihan invited his audience to consider what it means to surrender entirely.

The bishop reminded the faithful that Faith is not a

“magic wand” to erase life's struggles but a source of resilience that sustains through them. Through “the intercession of Mary and Bernadette,”

he prayed, “may we all have the faith to see the hand of God at work in our lives, even when it works silently and undramatically.”



Faithful venerating St Bernadette's relic in Inchicore, Dublin. Photo: Rebecca Roughneen.



Oblate Youth Service Members pictured with parishioners in Inchicore, Dublin. Photo: Rebecca Roughneen.



Fr Phil Gaffney incensing St Bernadette relic in Mullingar's Cathedral. Photo: Cathedral of Christ the King.



Procession for Mass during St Bernadette's relics visit to Mullingar's Cathedral. Photo: Cathedral of Christ the King.



# Christmas

GIFT GUIDE

— 2024 —

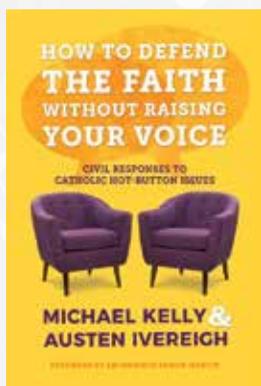
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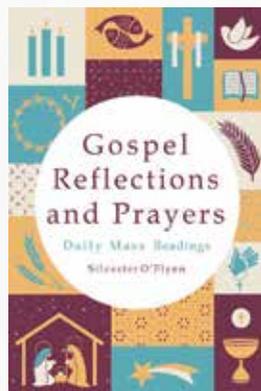
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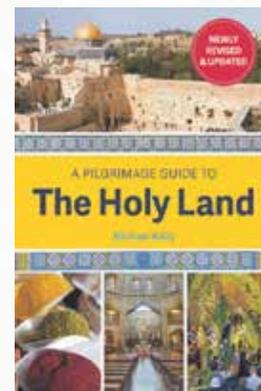
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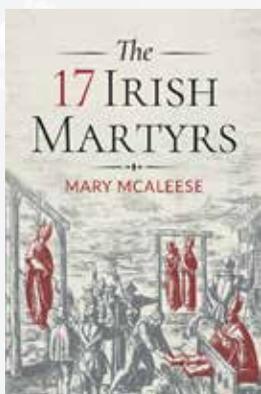
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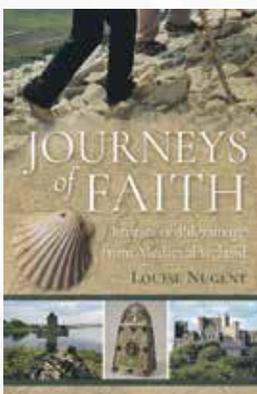
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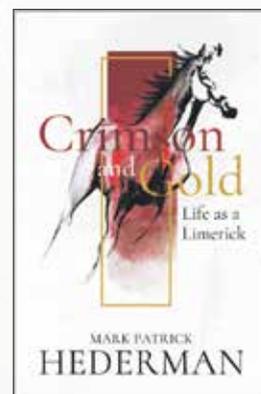
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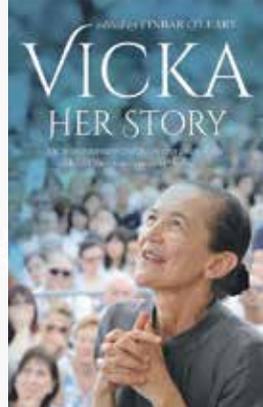
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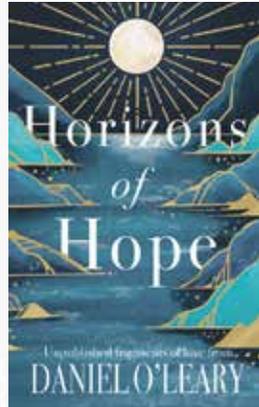
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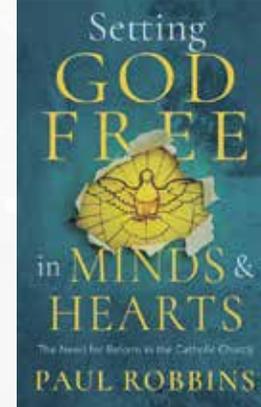
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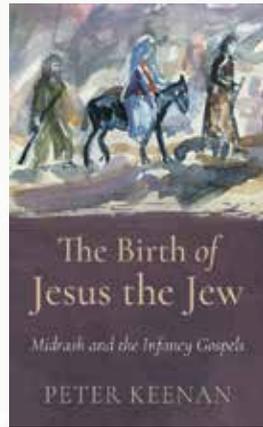
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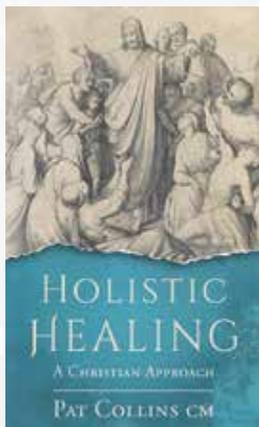
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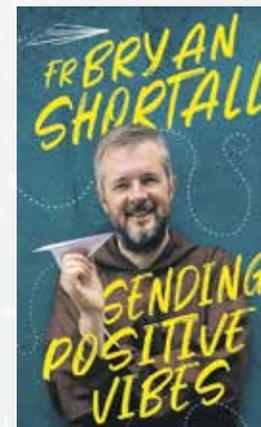
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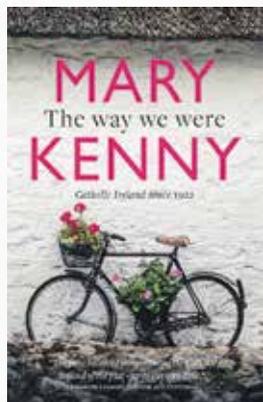
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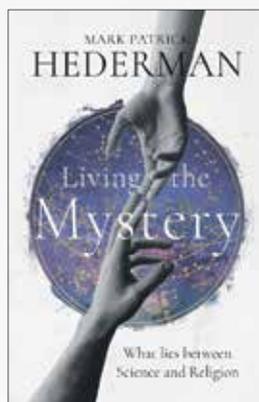
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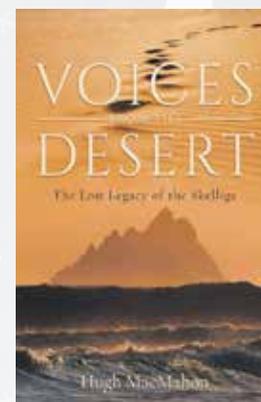
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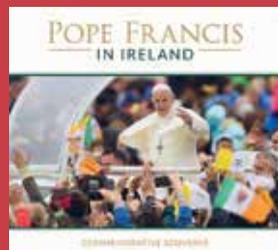
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# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

**A VIEW FROM ROME:  
THE SHIP HAS SAILED -  
NO TURNING BACK FOR A  
SYNODAL CHURCH  
SAYS FR EAMONN CONWAY**

**EOIN MCCORMACK**  
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**IN THE END, POPE  
FRANCIS STEERED  
HIS SYNOD TOWARD  
A SOFT LANDING**

**JOHN L. ALLEN JR.**  
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## No going back says Irish Synod Expert and Theologian



### Staff Reporter

**P**ope Francis' decision not to issue a Post-Synodal Exhortation, which has been criticised by some, but instead to expressly approve the Final Document of Synod 2021-2024 represents a major shift in the empowerment of lay people in the Church

accordingly to theologian Fr Eamonn Conway, who was one of the experts at both Synods. “For the first time, certainly since Vatican II, lay people have formally co-drafted a document that “participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter” (*Episcopalis communio* 18 #2). These are guiding principles indicating a course of action the Pope believes should be

taken” he said.

Dr Conway added: “The Synod is a Synod of Bishops, but this time lay people, 41 in all, had the same speaking and voting rights as bishops. They were present as “witnesses to synodality” drawn from seven different regions worldwide, along with some priests and religious. In the past, non-bishops, lay people among them, have assisted in

the formulation of Church teaching and may well have written parts of them behind the scenes. This time, however, lay people, as baptised faithful, have formally and equally participated in writing a magisterial document. The significance of this is not to be downplayed.”

“Also, to counteract magisterial self-protectionism, the Final Document mandates that sys-

tems for transparency, accountability and evaluation are to be implemented at all levels; again, a major shift, long overdue.

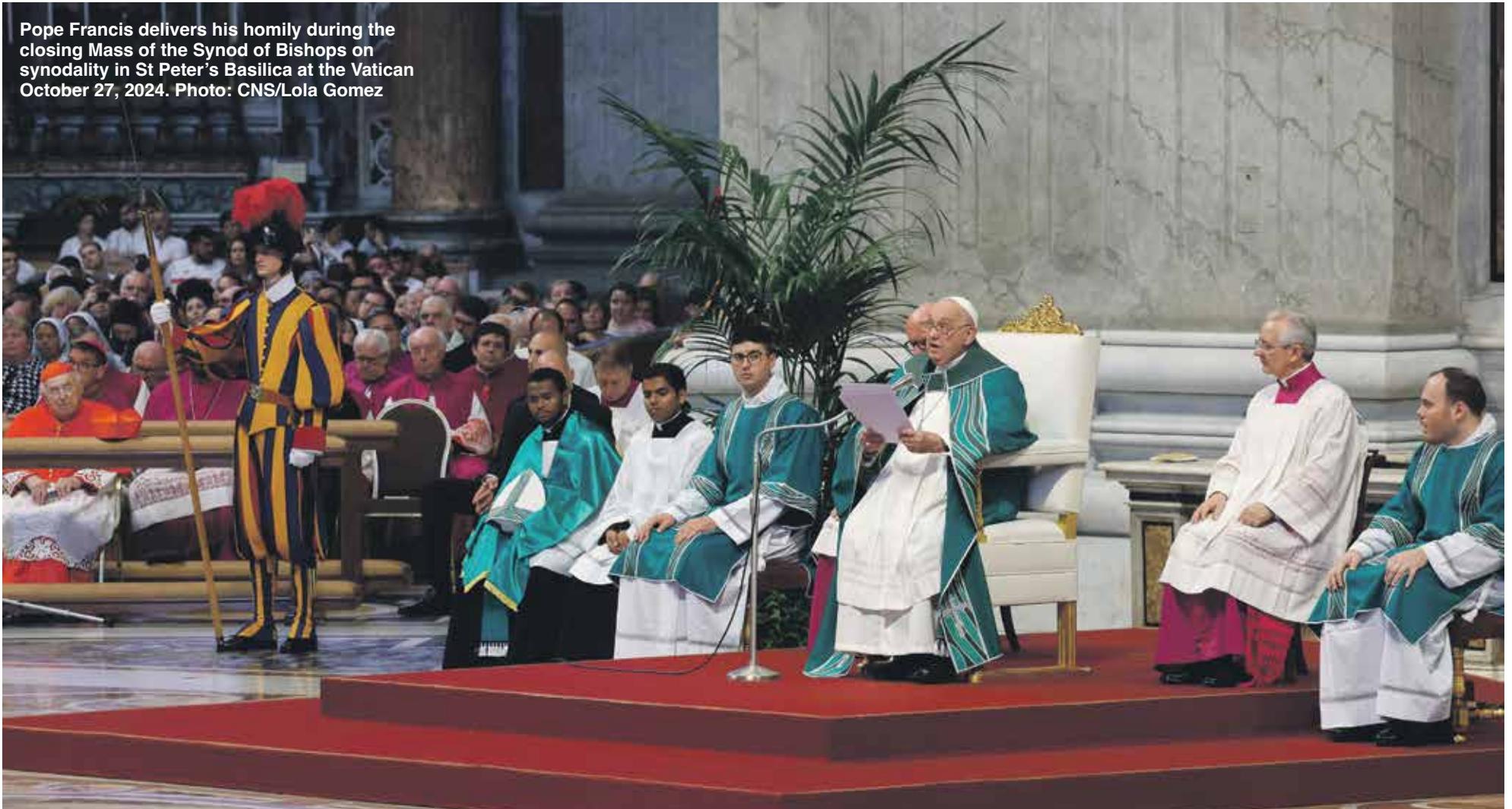
It is true that the Synod did not deliver everything that some people wished for. It was a synod on synodality, and in this regard it delivered what it set out to do. Synodality is now a constitutive dimension of the Church. There's no going back.”

**NEXT WEEK: THE SYNODAL TIMES SPEAKS TO DONATA HORAK, A PROFESSOR OF CANON LAW AT THE ALBERONI THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE IN PIACENZA, AFFILIATED WITH THE PONTIFICAL ANGELICUM UNIVERSITY AND ONE OF THE WOMEN WHO ATTENDED C9 MEETINGS. HORAK WAS THE ONLY EXTERNAL MEMBER TO GIVE A TALK AT A SESSION OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY. SHE REFLECTS ON THE ISSUE OF WOMEN DEACONS AT THE SYNOD AND WHY THE POPE HAS NOT CLOSED THE DISCUSSION.**

# A view from Rome:

## The Ship has sailed - No turning back for a Synodal Church

Pope Francis delivers his homily during the closing Mass of the Synod of Bishops on synodality in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican October 27, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez



**Eoin McCormack in a conversation with Theological expert to the Synod Fr Eamonn Conway**

As the second and final session of the Synod came to close on Sunday with a Mass presided over by Pope Francis in St Peter's Basilica, he reflected in his homily on what he described as "the urgency of evangelisation...[We need] not a static Church, but a missionary Church that walks with her Lord through the streets of the world." In one sense, for anyone that's visited Rome over the past month,

**“Synodality is first and foremost trying to listen to that experience and discover best how the Church communicates the unchanging mystery of God's presence and love in the world; to make that love real and tangible”**

the Synodal process has been a lived demonstration of a Church that “walks through the streets” as the wide range of delegates and bishops from all over the world can be seen coming and going from their 10-hour long days in the Vatican. One cannot help but draw parallels to similar images from Vatican II, and appropriately so. As the storm begins to calm and the excitement comes to an end, I had the opportunity to reflect with theological expert Prof. Eamonn Conway on the methodology of the Synod which he describes as a turning point for the Church to which – like a ship on a definite course - there is no going back. This image he describes, however, is not a ‘turning away’ from tradition, but rather as a ‘turning toward’ the truth and purpose of Vatican II's mission; to embody a Church where all the baptised are fully

conscious and active participants on the Christian path. But what does this practically mean for both the universal Church and at the Church at home particularly as the Irish Church embarks on a synodal process of its own. I reflect on these issues and more in conversation with Fr Eamonn.

**After being involved in this process over the past 18-months, do you think this method of ‘Synodal gathering’ will be the model for future decision making in the Church at all levels?**

I do. And I think it is the logical outcome of the teaching of Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council's document on Divine Revelation (*Dei verbum*), tells us that “out of the abundance of His love, God speaks to us as friends.” So, rightly we look to scripture, liturgy and the sacraments to experience God, but what Vatican II also said is that the ordinary everyday

lived experience of your life and mine, in all its joys and sorrows is also a privileged place in which God's presence is manifest. Synodality is first and foremost trying to listen to that experience and discover best how the Church communicates the unchanging mystery of God's presence and love in the world; to make that love real and tangible in the ordinariness of people's lives. To do this, therefore, we need to understand what is going on in people's lives.

**Having said all that, what do you say to those who say that the Synod is an abuse of the ‘sensus fidei’ (sense of the faith)? That rather than, let's say, focusing on the truths of Church teaching, the Synod risks over-emphasising the necessity of consultation. That it could consult the unqualified at the risk of losing clarity, potentially allowing ‘democratic’ opinion to dominate?**

There's a number of things to say on this. First of all we have to understand that the *Sensus Fidei* is not an insight you have by virtue of your education or scholarship or theological expertise, but

rather by the fact that you are doing your best to respond to the experience of God in your life – however fragile that experience might be – that you recognise the love of the Lord for you and you want to respond to that love. That is a kind of a knowledge – a *sensus* – an intuition of the faith. The true ‘experts’ in the Church will always be those who know themselves to be loved by Christ and therefore seek to love others in his name. If you live your faith within the Church community, practice the sacraments and so on, the gift of being able to appreciate the Church's faith you received at baptism remains vibrant. What synodality is saying is that those who have this gift of appreciation or insight into the Church's faith must be listened to and their insights taken into account when decisions are being

made in the Church. It is saying that people who have this have a right to be heard.

The ‘*Sensus fidei*’ is nurtured though the practice of one's faith, through prayer, though celebrating the sacraments, through living this life of discipleship. It's not simply to be identified with expressions of opinions on how the Church should change. It's certainly not to be identified with the views of people who say, ‘I think might join the Church or practice my faith if they change XYZ’. It's not that.

This question has arisen because at the outset of the Synodal process, everyone was invited - including those who for many understandable reasons feel distant from the Church, who've been hurt or wounded by it, to have their say. What emerged in that listening process is very important and must also be

**“What synodality is saying is that those who have this gift of appreciation or insight into the Church's faith must be listened to and their insights taken into account when decisions are being made in the Church. It is saying that people who have this have a right to be heard”**



Fr Eamonn Conway pictured with the Pope

Pope Francis celebrates the closing Mass for the Synod of Bishops on synodality in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican October 27, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

listened to but it isn't simply to be conflated with 'listening to the *sensus fidei*'. That wider consultative process was needed because listening is the first step towards healing so many need and deserve.

**With this in mind for the Irish context, looking forward to 2026 when we have our national synod, how do learn from this? Practically speaking how do we consult and who do we consult?**

I think we're in an interesting and fortunate situation now because at the fruits of World Synod can be brought to bear upon the Irish Synodal Pathway that is now in the preparatory stage. The Synod's Final Document published last Saturday, states that "participatory bodies represent one of the most promis-

**“Where not present, these bodies need to be introduced. They are meant to have people on them who represent parish and community life broadly and who will practice what Pope Francis gave us as the two key characteristics of discernment: Deep listening, both to the Gospel and to one another, and courageous speaking”**

ing areas in which to act for rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines, bringing about perceptible changes speedily." By participatory bodies it means, among others, Parish and Diocesan Pastoral Councils and it goes on to say that these are now mandatory. They are called "participatory" because they are means by which lay people formally participate in decision-making in their parishes and dioceses. How their role and that of priests and bishops collaborate is carefully detailed in the Document. In many places these bodies are already up and running, in which case their effectiveness could be reviewed; there's a lot in the Document on the importance of evaluating. Where not present, these bodies need to be introduced. They are meant to have people on

them who represent parish and community life broadly and who will practice what Pope Francis gave us as the two key characteristics of discernment: Deep listening, both to the Gospel and to one another, and courageous speaking. The effective functioning of these bodies will be both a fruit of the Irish Synodal Pathway – because so much training and effort has gone into (re-) establishing them already – and be important in shaping the Synodal Pathway.

One of the things to consider here is the status of the proposed gatherings in the Irish Church. In the past we've had a lot of assemblies that haven't had anything binding coming out of them and it will be a measure of how seriously we're taking synodality that we are prepared to trust a process to produce decisions that we are willing to be bound by. It would be important, in discerning what kind of assembly or assemblies of the Church in Ireland, to be guided by the contents of the Final Document.

**Moving away from the process of synodality and reflecting on the outcomes**

**“The priest is the one who enables a variety of services – some of which will be formalised as ministries, not all – but creating an order that can be at the disposal of community as a whole. Baptism is the primary commissioning for service in the Church”**

**of the Synod that has just taken place here in Rome, what are the main outcomes or take-aways for the ordinary Catholic should know about now that Pope Francis has published the Final Document?**

"The first thing is that, exercising a new provision in regards to Synods, as Pope Francis has expressly approved the Final Document "participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter". As this is a new procedure, we have yet to understand it fully but in any case it means that the content have to be taken very seriously indeed. Among other things this means that those in authority now have an obligation to create processes whereby the laity can be heard. The second thing is that being a Christian, being baptised, is no longer to be

understood as a like a 'membership card', or something that is meant to be lived passively, it's meant to be lived actively, we're meant to actually see that as a way of bringing gifts at the service of Church and hopefully avail of the opportunities to engage in the new ministries that will be created in the life of the Church. The idea of clergy 'providing' for the laity – that's no longer part of the Catholic Church and seeing lay people working in the parish as 'father's helpers' is no longer and shouldn't be part of the Catholic Church. The priest is the one who enables a variety of services – some of which will be formalised as ministries, not all – but creating an order that can be at the disposal of community as a whole. Baptism is the primary commissioning for service in the Church. We're also going to have to

form people properly. We're going to have to look at the whole Catholic education system. My own view is that we can probably only sustain only about 1/3 of the schools we now have, but we need the right and the freedom to operate a curriculum in accordance with the Catholic faith. We need the right to train and prepare teachers to work in those schools and to have the proper governance structures. There are many other countries where faith based education is part of the publicly funded education system – and that could continue to be the case in Ireland. Frankly my own view is that we do not divest property owned by the Catholic Church without reaching some arrangement that the schools that remain Catholic are resourced properly. We need to make the necessary changes to Catholic education provision in order to remain faithful to the mission of the Church. Not change for its own sake but changes to be faithful.

**i** Interview conducted by Eoin McCormack

# In the end, Pope Francis steered his synod toward a soft landing



John L. Allen Jr.

From the beginning, one of the most persistent charges against Pope Francis' Synod of Bishops on Synodality, which got underway in 2021 and wrapped up last night in Rome, is that the deck was stacked with progressive voices, creating an unrepresentative sense of the totality of global Catholic opinion.

To cite a classic for-instance, critics have noted that plenty of advocates of women clergy and LGBTQ+ outreach were included among the official delegates, but no devotees of the traditional Latin Mass and few prominent pro-lifers. (Notably, the word "abortion" never appears in the 51-page concluding document.)

A superficial look at the voting on the concluding document, adopted Saturday night, could support an impression of false conformity. Most of its 155 paragraphs were adopted by an overwhelming majority of the 355 participants casting votes, with a typical result being 352-3 or 350-5.

## Women

The lone case in which the "yes" vote dropped below 300 was for paragraph 60, which deals with women deacons, but even the 97 contrary votes it drew do not necessarily represent a register of conservative dissent.

Consider the wording: "The question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue." That might have displeased a conservative who would prefer a straightforward "no," but it equally might have irritated a liberal frustrated



with all the talk who believes the time has come to pull the trigger.

The left-leaning ethos of the synod was perhaps most clear on Oct. 24, when Argentine Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery of the Faith, held an open meeting with roughly 100 participants to discuss the role of women, including an earlier statement by Fernandez that "there is still no room for a positive decision" on the diaconate.

**“He was forced to spend most of the hour and a half discussion last Thursday convincing synod insurgents that he’s progressive enough”**

To be clear, Fernandez is hardly anyone's idea of a traditionalist. He was the ghost writer of 2016's *Amoris Laetitia*, opening a cautious door to communion for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, and the official drafter of *Fiducia Supplicans*, the December 2023 text authorizing blessings of persons in same-sex relationships.

Yet he was forced to spend

most of the hour and a half discussion last Thursday convincing synod insurgents that he's progressive enough.

(We know the contents of this discussion because the Vatican released an audio recording of it, despite a general information blackout on internal synod discussions.)

## Criticism

During the discussion, Fernandez took a total of 12 questions, almost all of which, to one degree or another, were critical.

One questioner, for instance, asked why of the ten study groups established by Pope Francis to ponder sensitive matters raised by the synod, the group dealing with ministry, including female deacons, is the only one entrusted to a Vatican department, suggesting it's not a terribly "synodal" arrangement.

Another mockingly asked about repeated claims that conditions are not "mature" for resolving the issue of women deacons. With fruit, he said, one determines maturity by looking at color, aroma and texture. What, he asked, are the indicators for the church? Without such clear criteria, he warned, "We could be doing this for the rest of our lives." (That line drew one of just three rounds of applause during the session.)

Another questioner noted

that a 1997 study by the International Theological Commission which was favorable to the idea of women deacons was never published, and said "there are suspicions something similar" is happening now.

**“I’m not famous in the church for being stuck in the Middle Ages,’ he insisted at the end. ‘You can relax, knowing I’ve got an open heart for seeing where the Holy Spirit takes us’”**

The final questioner pointed to Pope Francis's recent decisions to open the ministries of acolyte, lector and catechist to women, saying that when he started out in the church decades ago, his local community already had women playing those roles. How long, he wondered, will we have to wait for the pope and the Vatican to recognize that once again, they're fifty years late?

Throughout, Fernandez often seemed a bit on the defensive, trying to assure everyone he's not the stereotypical

Vatican official of years past.

"I'm not famous in the church for being stuck in the Middle Ages," he insisted at the end. "You can relax, knowing I've got an open heart for seeing where the Holy Spirit takes us."

## Mediation

Given all that, the real question about the 2024 synod may how such a seemingly skewed assembly nevertheless produced a basically cautious and non-revolutionary result. Examining the final document, on most points it seems to bend over backwards to strike a balance between innovation and continuity, and never actually endorses radical change on any front. In effect, the earthquake many expected three years ago turned out to be a minor tremor.

One explanation may be that the more conservative minority in the synod punched above its weight, another a general fatigue among participants with the arguments that erupted last time and a desire to end on a pacific note. Mostly, however, one has to say it was Pope Francis who steered the synod toward this soft landing, taking most of the hot-button issues off the table and sending signals that he wanted the focus to be on the journey, not the destination.

Francis also announced

Saturday night that unlike in past synods, this time there will be no apostolic exhortation to draw conclusions – the final document will stand on its own as the closing act. In this way, Francis has short-circuited the possibility that activists disappointed with the lack of breakthroughs from the synod might hope to get them from the pope.

**“Perhaps the pontiff didn’t want the jubilee year in 2025 to be overshadowed by narratives of a Catholic civil war”**

As to why the pontiff chose this path, a variety of explanations are possible. Perhaps the example of the German synodal way, with its seemingly real risk of schism, provided a cautionary tale; perhaps the pontiff didn't want the jubilee year in 2025 to be overshadowed by narratives of a Catholic civil war.

Whatever the reason, Francis has engineered a denouement to his synod that may not stir anyone's imagination, but neither will it create many new fault lines. To put the point differently, the conservative wing of the church may not have been well represented in the synod hall, but it did seem to be present in the calculations of the synod's founding father.

So, is the outcome of the synod a letdown – a case of going out with a whimper rather than a bang?

Perhaps, although there is another perspective to consider. In a deeply divided and polarized age, the fact the Catholic church could stage such a massive consultative exercise and still somehow manage to hold everyone together at the end, even if no one's fully satisfied, has to rate as a minor miracle – and, come to think of it, maybe not so minor after all.

## McAleese says final Synod report 'one big wordy yawn'

Asked for a comment on the Synod Report, former Irish President Dr Mary McAleese told *The Synodal Times* that "The final Synod report is one big wordy yawn signifying absolutely nothing, so much nothing it is not worth the Pope's while to issue a post

synodal exhortation. Nothing to see here, folks. Not one single thing has shifted even marginally. There is nothing in the report that could not have been written in a half day by DDF before the synodal circus started. The Magisterial Church is now on course to bore the faithful to death peddling

this awful trite protectionist waffle every word designed to avoid acknowledging the full God ordained equality of all Church members."

Dr McAleese said the outcome reminded her of an Irish diocesan synod held a few years ago: "The outcome reminds me of a recent two year diocesan synod in

Ireland the main recommendation of which was that there should be a cup of tea after mass. It has more merit than the final report of the Synod on Synodality." She added: "Anyone who thinks this will energise the faithful to new levels of ecclesial engagement and commitment is deluded.

Only a Church committed to equality can do that and the Catholic Church is manifestly not yet that. Will it ever be? Can we be bothered to wait and see? I hear a resounding "no" forming in the hearts and minds of all those who believe in a liberating God and not a self-protecting Magisterium"





## World Report



Edited by Brandon Scott  
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

# Murdered priest in Mexico remembered as 'tireless apostle of peace'

Fr Marcelo Pérez, a priest of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the Mexican state of Chiapas, died on October 20, killed by two men who shot him after he had celebrated Mass. His diocese now remembers him as a "tireless apostle of peace".

According to information provided by the diocese through a statement shared on October 21, Fr Pérez was born on January 17, 1974, in San Andrés Larráinzar in Chiapas state.

From a young age he felt the call to the priesthood and entered the Our Lady of Guadalupe seminary in 1990 in the Archdiocese of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. He was ordained a priest on April 6, 2002.

During his ministry, Pérez worked in various parishes. In his last two years, he served as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

His pastoral work included tasks such as coordinator of the Social Ministry of the Province of Chiapas. According to the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas: "His life was spent in search of justice and peace, especially in Simojovel, Pantelho, and San Cristóbal de las Casas".

The diocesan statement



Fr Marcelo Pérez shows a monstrance to a resident of Simojovel, in Mexico's Chiapas state, June 13, 2020. Photo: OSV News/courtesy David Agren

noted that this commitment earned him consequences. "All this service he performed led him to suffer a long period of threats, persecution, harassment, slander, defamation, even an unfounded arrest warrant, which put his personal safety at risk, to the point of his life being taken."

One of the most difficult moments of his ministry occurred in 2021 when 21 young people were kidnapped by the self-defence group "El Machete" with whom Pérez was said to have

ties. According to local media, the attorney general's office of the state of Chiapas issued an arrest warrant for him, but it was never carried out.

The Mexican Bishops' Conference lamented in a statement the "brutal murder" of the priest, noting that this act "not only deprives the community of a dedicated pastor but also silences a prophetic voice that tirelessly fought for peace with truth and justice in the Chiapas region".

The Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas also issued

a statement in which it demanded that the three levels of government "completely halt the violence" affecting Chiapas, describing it as the result of "impunity, complicity, and corruption".

The diocese reiterated its demand for the "immediate disarmament and dismantling of crime gangs" operating in the region. It also called for the murder of Fr Pérez to be solved and for "justice be done until those truly responsible are found".

# Catholics in US pray amid planned 'Satanic black mass'

Catholics in Atlanta fervently prayed and made reparation ahead of and during a recently held "black mass", a sacrilegious event that occurred on October 25 by the so-called Satanic Temple.

Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer of Atlanta urged all Catholics to counter the Satanic Temple's "attack on the faith" through prayers of reparation and penance, calling the event "a blasphemous and obscene inversion of the Catholic Mass".

The Satanic Temple, which, according to its website, denies the existence of God and Satan, is a political activist group

known for protesting religious symbolism in public spaces and mocking Christianity by offering "unbaptism" and hosting "black masses".

A direct mockery of the Catholic Mass, a so-called "black mass" sometimes entails the desecration of the Eucharist, stolen from a Catholic church. The Satanic Temple website briefly describes the "black mass" as "a celebration of blasphemy, which can be an expression of personal liberty and freedom".

The Atlanta Satanic Temple sold tickets to the "mass", which was held at a perfor-

mance venue in the city.

Bishop Hartmayer reiterated that Catholics must respond to "this attack to our faith through prayer, penance, and prayers of reparation". He said that he had asked each Atlanta parish to conduct a Eucharistic Holy Hour with Benediction to honour the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist on the same day of the "black mass".

"Using a consecrated host they claim they obtained illicitly from a Catholic church and desecrating it in the vilest ways imaginable, the practitioners offer it in sacrifice to Satan," the archbishop said.

## Vatican-China bishop deal renewed for four more years

The Vatican announced last week that it has renewed its agreement with China on the appointment of Catholic bishops for an additional four years.

The renewal comes days after a report from the Hudson Institute detailed how

seven Catholic bishops in China have been detained without due process, while other bishops have experienced intense pressure, surveillance, and police investigations since the Sino-Vatican agreement was initially signed six

years ago.

With the extension, the Sino-Vatican agreement will now remain in effect until October 22, 2028.

The English translation of the official statement from the Holy See said that "the Vatican party remains

dedicated to furthering the respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese party, in view of the further development of bilateral relations for the benefit of the Catholic Church in China and the Chinese people as a whole".

## IN BRIEF

### Indonesian bishop declines cardinal appointment to 'grow in priestly life'

● The Vatican announced last week that Pope Francis had accepted the request of Indonesian Bishop Paskalis Bruno Syukur, OFM, not to be made a cardinal in a December consistory as had been previously announced.

The bishop's request "was motivated by his desire to continue growing in priestly life and in service to the Church and the people of God", a brief message from the Holy See Press Office said.

At the beginning of October, Pope Francis announced he would create 21 new cardinals, including Syukur, at a consistory to be held December 7.

### Father of liberation theology dead at 96

Fr Gustavo Gutiérrez was a pioneer of liberation theology, a movement advocating for social justice and the liberation of the poor. He died on October 22 at the age of 96.

Emerging in the 1960s as a response to massive social inequalities in Latin America, liberation theology emphasised that the Christian faith must tackle social issues of poverty and exclusion in order to remain credible.

Fr Gutiérrez's 1971 book *A Theology of Liberation* was foundational to this movement and has deeply shaped theological thought in Latin America and beyond.

### Church in Venezuela demands release of minors jailed in election protests

● At the conclusion of the 45th Extraordinary Plenary Assembly of the Venezuelan Bishops' Conference (CEV, by its Spanish acronym), the bishops published a statement that included an analysis of the current state of the country along with a demand that the government release thousands of detainees, including minors, who were arrested in the demonstrations following that country's July 28 presidential election.

The assembly, which concluded October 17 in Caracas, was led by Jesús González de Zárate, archbishop of Valencia and president of the CEV.

The prelates sharply criticised the repression by the state security agencies against peaceful demonstrations as well as "arbitrary arrests and violations of human rights that occurred after the elections" and demanded the release of those detained, "among whom are minors".

### French diocese to hold ordinations after two-year halt by Vatican

● The Diocese of Fréjus-Toulon in the south of France will ordain six men to the transitional diaconate on December 1, ending a Vatican suspension on diocesan ordinations to the priesthood or diaconate that has lasted over two years.

Ordinations were halted by the Vatican in June 2022 following a fraternal visit to the diocese by Archbishop (now Cardinal) Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseille.

The ordinations of six seminarians from the traditionalist community Missionaries of Divine Mercy will take place in the Collegiate Church of Saint-Martin in Lorgues, according to an October 21 announcement from Bishop François Touvet.

The Vatican requested the suspension of ordinations in the Diocese of Fréjus-Toulon in summer 2022 due to "questions that certain Roman dicasteries were asking about the restructuring of the seminary and the policy of welcoming people to the diocese," according to an announcement by Bishop Dominique Rey at the time.

### South Sudan cardinal says problems have increased

● In the 14 years after South Sudan gained independence from Sudan, problems have increased in Africa's newest country, says the leading Catholic in the Horn of Africa country.

Cardinal Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla said despite the hope that independence brought, South Sudan is still reeling from the unfulfilled promise of peace, accusing the country's authorities of mismanaging the country's natural resources.

"We got this independence from Sudan. We thought that we were going to solve our problems. But it seems that problems have increased," the cardinal said while at the Synod on Synodality in Rome.

# Letter from Rome

## Sacred Heart shows path forward says Pope in new encyclical

AC Wimmer

Pope Francis released a new encyclical *Dilexit Nos* ("He Loved Us") last Thursday, calling for a renewed understanding of devotion to the Sacred Heart in the modern era and its many pressing challenges.

In the document, the Pope argues that the spirituality of the Sacred Heart offers a vital response to what he calls a "liquid society" dominated by technology and consumerism.

Pope Francis writes: "Living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart."

Subtitled "Letter on the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ," the document is the first papal encyclical dedicated entirely to the Sacred Heart since Pope Pius XII's *Haurietis Aquas* in 1956.

### Concerns

Throughout the document, Pope Francis weaves together traditional elements of Sacred Heart devotion with contemporary concerns, presenting Christ's heart as the principle unifying reality in a fragmented world.

The document's release fulfils an announcement made by the Pope in June, when he noted that meditating on the Lord's love can "illuminate the path of ecclesial renewal and say something meaningful to



Pope Francis greets visitors as he speaks during his general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, October 23, 2024. Photo: CNS photo/Lola Gomez

a world that seems to have lost its heart".

**“The approximately 30,000-word encyclical draws extensively from Scripture and tradition, featuring insights from St Thérèse of Lisieux, St Francis de Sales, and St Charles de Foucauld”**

At a press conference presenting the document on Thursday, Italian Archbishop Bruno Forte said the encyclical expresses "in a profound

way the heart and the inspiring motive of the whole ministry and magisterium of Pope Francis."

The theologian added that in his opinion, the text is "the key to understanding this Pope's magisterium".

Archbishop Forte, who is a member of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, presented the encyclical together with Sr Antonella Fraccaro, superior general of the Disciples of the Gospel (Discepoli del Vangelo).

The approximately 30,000-word encyclical draws extensively from Scripture and tradition, featuring insights from St Thérèse of Lisieux, St Francis de Sales, and St Charles de Foucauld.

### Deliberations

Released as the Synod on Synodality is concluding its

monthlong deliberations in Rome, the document emphasises both personal spirituality and communal missionary commitment.

**“The algorithms operating in the digital world show that our thoughts and will are much more ‘uniform’ than we had previously thought”**

Pope Francis develops his vision across five chapters, beginning with a philosophical and theological exploration of "the importance of the heart" before moving through reflections on Christ's actions and words of love, the theological meaning of Sacred Heart devotion, its spiritual dynamics and social implications.

"The algorithms operating in the digital world show that our thoughts and will are much more 'uniform' than we had previously thought," the Pope writes, arguing that technological solutions alone cannot address the deeper needs of the human heart.

He emphasises that the meaning of the word "heart" is not sufficiently captured by

biology, psychology, anthropology, or any other science.

"In this age of artificial intelligence, we cannot forget that poetry and love are necessary to save our humanity. No algorithm will ever be able to capture, for example, the nostalgia that all of us feel, whatever our age, and wherever we live," the Pope writes.

The Pope emphasises that devotion to the Sacred Heart is not merely a private spiritual practice but has profound implications for social life and human relationships.

"The world can change, beginning with the heart," he writes, connecting individual transformation with broader social renewal.

### Challenges

The encyclical builds on centuries of Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart while offering fresh insights for modern challenges. Pope Francis cites extensively from previous papal teachings, particularly from St John Paul II.

"Devotion to the Sacred Heart, as it developed in Europe two centuries ago, under the impulse of the mystical experiences of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, was a response to Jansenist rigor, which ended up disregarding God's infinite mercy," the late

Pope writes.

"The men and women of the third millennium need the heart of Christ in order to know God and to know themselves; they need it to build the civilization of love."

In a significant theological and philosophical development, the encyclical engages deeply with modern thought, particularly through its discussion of German philosopher Martin Heidegger's understanding of human emotion and understanding.

The Pope cites Heidegger's insight that "philosophy does not begin with a pure concept or certainty but with a shock", as "without deep emotion, thought cannot begin. The first mental image would thus be goosebumps".

For the Pope, this is where the heart comes in as it "listens in a non-metaphoric way to 'the silent voice' of being, allowing itself to be tempered and determined by it".

"The heart is also capable of unifying and harmonising our personal history, which may seem hopelessly fragmented," the Pope writes, "yet is the place where everything can make sense".

"The Gospel tells us this in speaking of Our Lady, who saw things with the heart."

The document calls for a renewal of traditional Sacred Heart practices on this understanding while emphasising their contemporary relevance.

"Our communities will succeed in uniting and reconciling differing minds and wills, so that the Spirit can guide us in unity as brothers and sisters. Reconciliation and peace are also born of the heart. The heart of Christ is 'ecstasy,' openness, gift, and encounter."

The Pope concludes by connecting this spiritual vision to the Church's broader mission in the modern world, calling for what he — following St John Paul II — terms a "civilisation of love" built on the foundation of Christ's love.

This vision also connects directly to previous social encyclicals by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, presenting Christ's love as the foundation for addressing and solving contemporary challenges.

**i** Hanna Brockhaus contributed to this report.

**“The heart is also capable of unifying and harmonising our personal history, which may seem hopelessly fragmented’ the Pope writes, ‘yet is the place where everything can make sense’”**

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Engaging youth is not just about retention

**Dear Editor,** As parishes face financial challenges, we must focus on reaching the next generation as Archbishop Martin says [The Irish Catholic – October 24, 2024], particularly at the parish level. The future of the Church depends on young people feeling not only welcome but also actively involved in the life of the Faith community.

Many young Catholics feel disengaged, often viewing the Church as irrelevant to their lives. To bridge this

gap, parishes could introduce youth-centred programmes, such as mentorship groups where older parishioners guide young people in their faith journeys, creating bonds across generations. Youth-friendly liturgies or music ministries, where young people help shape worship experiences, would provide a space for them to connect with the Faith in a way that resonates with their lives and culture.

Retreats or pilgrimages, specifically for younger parish-

ioners, offer transformative experiences to explore beliefs outside formal structures. Small group discussions—focused on relevant topics such as social justice, environmental stewardship, and mental health—could foster a deeper connection to Catholic teachings in ways that feel personal and actionable.

Engaging with young people isn't just about retention, it's about nurturing leaders who will carry the Faith forward. As the

Church addresses its financial and structural constraints, perhaps the true renewal lies in empowering young people to feel valued and integral to the Church's mission. Investing in their spiritual growth can ensure that, regardless of diocesan mergers or church closures, the Faith remains vibrant and alive in Ireland's next generation.

*Yours etc.,  
Declan Healy  
Rathmines, Dublin 6*

## A rich and successful America

**Dear Editor,** The US election is about the economy and immigration, but it is also about culture. Trump espouses traditional American values, freedom, self-help, hard work, less compassion, more admiration of success, just like what you all believe in sport today.

Trump wants continued honouring of American heroes like George Washington and more toleration of religion, and of course lower taxes.

Kamala wants higher taxes, more state control, more free stuff, less personal freedom,

more censorship, full state control of schools – with no choice given. Kamala wants to clamp down on religion, American traditions like honour for its founders, and respect for America's successful capitalist vision. She supports minorities ahead of the majority.

Will the new Americans vote to ditch the things that made America the richest and most successful country in the world? I think not.

*Yours etc.,  
J. Hyland  
Killiney, Co. Dublin*



## Unification of pro-life groups

**Dear Editor,** The annual Pro-Life (PLC) conference was held in Cork recently and, in the workshops, there were some calls for the unification of the different pro-life organisations.

The main business of the conference however contained no report from HQ that talks to this end had ever been initi-

ated, though we have heard the public call for such unification over the last 30 or 40 years.

It therefore appears that supporters will continue to receive envelopes in the post from various pro-life groups.

I wondered also if the movement could have, in the run up to the 2018

referendum, introduced to the public a unity candidate to head up the campaign, say somebody like Declan Ganley.

Was such a move contemplated at the time, and if so, why did it not gain traction?

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

## Step up for life

**Dear Editor,** The upcoming general election presents an opportunity to ensure that pro-life voices are strongly represented in the Dáil. It is essential that each of us takes personal responsibility to advocate for pro-life candidates and not assume that others will do the work for us.

The Pro-Life Campaign's 'Voter Guide' is an invaluable

resource for identifying and supporting candidates who are committed to defending life at all stages.

Dr Margaret Naughton's remarks on the moral imperative to protect the vulnerable underscore the gravity of the situation. With potential changes to euthanasia laws on the horizon, our collective action is more important than ever. We must defend

the voiceless and those on the margins, ensuring that our society upholds the dignity of every human life.

The conference also highlighted the importance of engaging young people in the pro-life movement. The large youth presence and the efforts to attract more young supporters are promising. Our future depends on their involvement and their willingness to stand up for life.

The support from religious leaders, such as Bishop Raymond Browne and Bishop

William Crean, along with representatives from other faith communities, demonstrates the broad-based commitment to this cause.

Now is the time for action. I urge everyone to contact their local representatives and advocate for pro-life policies – to step up for life. Do not wait for someone else to step up. Each voice matters, and together, we can make a difference in this election.

*Yours etc.,  
Mary McCarthy  
Limerick City, Limerick*

## State weakening voice of civil society that holds it to account

**T**he 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic, in some ways the country's founding document, commits to cherishing 'all the children of the nation equally'. The Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2012 inserted clauses relating to children's rights and the right and duty of the state to take child protection measures. This amendment was argued to be necessary to ensure the State would have the powers to protect children from its failures of the past.

It was also argued that there was a need to have a counterbalance for children within the Constitution where it was felt 'family rights' impeded the state in intervening where there were child protection concerns.

The tragic background to the Referendum included a now seemingly forgotten case of abuse in Roscommon where a mother-of-six from Co. Roscommon was sentenced to seven years in prison after being convicted on ten counts of incest, sexual abuse and neglect of her children after multiple failures of the State to intervene.

Children and their protection is an easy clarion call for government. Who can argue against it? But the reality is that even when the State's objectives are well intentioned there are risks when individual, vulnerable children are expected to claim their rights against a State without intermediaries both to protect them and to advocate on their behalf.

Whether by omission or by commission the state, like any other institution, is vulnerable to failure when there is an asymmetry of power and accountability at play. Researchers from the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) at UCD conducted a study that revealed teenagers in the care of the State are being targeted and sexually exploited by co-ordinated "gangs" of predatory men hanging around hotels and emergency accommodation.

Justine McCarthy in the *Irish Times* highlighted many of the failures of children in State care. She noted that "Last year, 29 young people died while they were in care or aftercare or were

known to Tusla. The scarcity of special care beds for children at risk is so severe that one High Court judge has warned "a tsunami [is] about to reach shore and nothing is being done".

Peadar Toibin gave further harrowing evidence to the Oireachtas: "42 children died while actually in state care and 164 children died while known to child protection services. Half of the children who died while in State care died either by suicide or drug overdose. Twelve children were murdered while known to child protection services over the past decade. During the same period 62 children known to child protection services died by suspected suicide."

At the same time, the Government has been reluctant to continue to provide funding to the Child Law Project, which reports on child and family law cases usually closed to the public, a necessary transparency mechanism that attempts to hold the State to account in its Constitutional responsibilities to children.

Only this week, Tanya Ward, chief executive of the Children's Rights Alliance, called for an extra €20m in funding for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, amid a 46% increase in referrals for child protection services and a 13% drop in the number of social workers in Ireland.

There is much energy in Government – and much of civil society – to pound its fist about failures of the past that can be attributed elsewhere; there is energy, time and money devoted to expanding abortion of unborn children; there is determination to introduce extraordinarily graphic and age-inappropriate sex-education at all school levels, and the Irish government has become an outlier in Europe in approving a surrogacy arrangement that gives no considerations to the rights of the child being commissioned.

The Proclamation attempted to guarantee to cherish all the Children of the nation, equally, but it appears that with the 2012 Constitutional Amendment, the State sought all of the power, but little of the responsibility, to live up to the Irish founders' commitments.

### 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.

# Your Faith

**A double  
primordial  
branding  
within**

Fr Rolheiser

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The Irish Catholic, October 31, 2024

Queen's University Belfast

## Being a young Catholic at university

**T**here are many things associated with modern university life in today's world, parties, drinking culture and a broad range of activities that are better left undiscussed. As a student at Queen's University in Belfast, you soon come to find that 'the Holylands', the area right beside the university that is densely populated with young students, isn't so 'Holy' after all.

Nevertheless, I believe that to brand the modern university experience as one with no use to an individual's faith and their own religious development, would be inaccurate, and in my own personal experience, completely wrong. Coming from Derry, I have to humbly boast that our diocese has had a great increase in ordinations in recent years, and this is matched with the amount of fervour and active organisations that are present in the diocese. There are various youth groups, Rosary groups, Eucharistic Adoration times and events on for all ages, and it would be my belief that when there are more things to do and get involved with in parishes, the laity will come. The supply creates the demand. I was lucky to attend a phenomenal secondary school in the city, St Columb's College, an institution and community that not only recognised the value of academic success, but also one's own personal and religious development. It is the alma mater of individuals such as John Hume, Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel and the current Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, Eamon Martin, who attended, taught and was principal of the school! With a strong Catholic ethos and plenty of religious activities to get involved with, it



was truly a place that helped foster the faith, with our own Chaplain, Fr Sean O' Donnell playing a big role in that.

**“To be a Church-going teenager is to be going against the way of the pack - it wouldn't be a great rarity to see that at 18-19, I'd be the youngest attendee at a weekday or even Sunday Mass”**

For young people, it isn't always so easy to explore and nurture their faith, in an increasingly secular world, religion is often looked down upon in the years of adolescence. “Sure, it's all just a story anyways”, or “Why would you care about that stuff, it's too boring and stops you from living your life”, are phrases a young practicing Catholic will probably hear from their peers, if it is to actually be said to their face at all. Most definitely, to be a Church-going teenager is to be going against the way of the pack - it wouldn't be a great rarity to see that at 18-19, I'd

**There's something brewing amongst the youth in the Church says, James Tourish**

### Welcome

However, I don't want to sound pessimistic, there's definitely something brewing amongst the youth in the Church, more and more have no problem, and even welcome the fact that they are doing things that set them apart from the rest of their peers. This makes complete sense of course, if you take the biblical standpoint. 2 Timothy 3:12 states “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”, and it is Christ who says in John 15:18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” It is not my insinuation that teenage Catholics in the West are persecuted in any way comparable to those of the Apostles, or the Christians of the Pre-Constantine Roman Empire, who could find themselves facing the jaws and claws of a lion in front of thousands of spectators. I just wish to make the point that these assurances and teachings give comfort, in that whatever challenge, exclusion or insult that one may receive as a result of their faith or their beliefs in accordance

to Church Doctrine, it is nonetheless part of God's almighty plan and is a sure test of our faith.

**“The God fearing Protestants I've met and become friends with here, would concur with me that the biggest challenge to the faith here is not the Protestant-Catholic divide, but actually the secular culture that is so commonly associated with life at university”**

Moving to Belfast, I wasn't most sure on what to expect in the religious aspect, of course everyone knows the sectarian part in the history of the city, which Derry experienced too but not to the magnitude that Belfast has in recent history, however it's been my pleasurable experience to say that the God fearing Protestants I've met and become friends with here, would concur with me that the biggest challenge to the faith here is not the Protestant-Catholic divide, but actually the secular culture that is so commonly associated with life at university.

While it may be true that secularism and everything that comes with it, has become more visible in society, and at university, there still exists pockets of hope, glimmers of light and faith. I'm very glad to say that at Queen's, the Catholic Chaplaincy is a lively community of Catholics from all walks of life, bringing

together the shared experiences and stories of all the members and helping each other navigate through this time in our lives, in hope of reaching the narrow gate. Headed by our Chaplain, Fr Dominic McGrattan, it is a lively group with Bible studies, daily Masses as well as groups for male and female students, and a big community night that brings everyone together for prayer (and snacks!). As a member of the men's group, which is assisted by and a branch of the Knights of St Columbanus, I will be formally invested as a Knight for the Order on St Columbanus' Feast Day, November 23. With pilgrimages organised to places like Rome, Cologne and elsewhere, the Chaplaincy provides a tremendous opportunity for young Catholics in their 'uni' days to develop their faith and make friends with likeminded people.

### Fellowship

The aspect of fellowship is integral to any religious youth group, and the importance of these groups and Chaplaincies cannot go unstated. We are called to build what is important on solid foundations, like the wise man, as it is the foolish who think the sand will not be washed away by the incoming tide. Having places to go to in order to explore your faith as a young person is necessary, and it is a real privilege to say that I have this in my life through the Chaplaincy. It is also delightful to see that Pope Francis has taken such an interest in fostering the faith among young people, and making sure that our voice is heard too, with the Holy Father saying in the closing days of the Synod, that young people should have courage and “keep moving forward”.

# The actress who left everything for God



Fr Adrian Crowley

**E**ve Lavalliere was born in France in 1866. She had the worst, most tragic beginning to life which any child could have. Her father, an alcoholic, in a drunken rage shot her mother and then himself... and she saw it happen. As a teenager she ran off to Paris in pursuit of her dream to be a famous actress, and she got it.

Paris was her dream and, also her ruin. She fell into an immoral life. Kings and queens used to come to see her. Her great gifts were unquestionable. Her voice and beauty were exceptional. She described it, "Gold ran through my hands, I had everything the world could offer... Nevertheless, I regarded myself as the unhappiest of souls. Fame, stardom, money, these things do not satisfy the hungry soul, only God does. The love of this world is not enough. Only the love of God is enough. I threw myself into a sea of sin." She became the mistress of a nobleman, then of a theatre director. Happiness eluded her. She learned bitter lessons and ended up deeply disappointed and hurt. Still her career soared, and audiences threw flowers at her feet and stood in ovations! Yet once she went offstage, she was plunged in misery. Three times she came to the brink of despair and decided to end her life, and three times by the grace of God, she refrained.

## Conversion

In 1917, America wanted her. A special tour was arranged. Yet, exhausted, she rented a chateau in the French countryside and went to rest there. There she met a good priest who spoke with her. He commented "What a pity you have no faith!"

"But what is faith?" she replied. She had made a pact with the devil, and when it failed, she concluded that the devil did not exist. "Well, I assure you that he exists," the

Eve Lavalliere



priest said and went away. His words were like an arrow which reached her heart. She began to question, "If the devil exists, God also exists. And if God exists, what am I doing in this world? What am I doing with my life?" This was a great turning point in Eve's life. The following morning, the priest called. "Mademoiselle, what you told me yesterday disturbed me. I spent the better part of the night in prayer, asking God to inspire me in your regard. I also celebrated Holy Mass for the same intention. Here I have brought you the Life of St Mary Magdalene read this book on your knees, and you will see what God can do with such a soul as yours."

"After lunch" her servant described, "Eve settled down near the kitchen and opening the door so the servants might hear, began to read in a loud voice." Enthusiasm seized her. Never had I heard her read with such conviction. Sitting at her feet I began to cry. The servants were likewise moved. Eve continued reading, her voice broken by sobs." Mary Magdalene, the subject of the book, had also been a sinner. She had met Jesus, and her life was transformed. She loved the Lord and became His most ardent follower. She stayed beside the cross as Jesus was dying, and she was the first one to see Jesus

alive on Easter morning. Something about this really captured Eve's heart. If Jesus had been merciful to Mary Magdalene, then... maybe to her too. A great change came over her. During these restful weeks in the countryside, she too met the living Lord and found mercy and happiness.

## New page

Eve turned a new page. Something wonderful happened for her. She forgot her proposed tour of America; she never went back to Paris. She began to spend hours in prayer. She thought about God. Her servant was 23 had not yet made her first Holy Communion. Eve asked the kindly priest if she could prepare. He agreed. Then she added - "And I, Father? I hope I still have the right to return to God."

Leona later wrote, "I can still see Eve on the main avenue of the chateau walking decisively at the pastor's side and, in a loud voice accusing herself publicly of her sins.

She could return to the sacraments. She was thankful to God. Her servant wrote

"For the rest of my life I will never forget her great cry of joy, thankful to God." For a week the two friends prepared themselves for confession and Holy Communion. Each morning, they walked through the wheat fields learning their catechism. In the afternoon the priest would visit and speak of Heaven and the things of God. He gave them a rosary each which they prayed.

**“My resolution is made. From now on, only Jesus has a right to my life”**

Eve always considered that day in June 1917, her first Communion, as the most special day of her life. She considered it the day her life really began. She renounced the theatre forever and cancelled her contracts.

She wrote, "My resolution is made. From now on, only Jesus has a right to my life." She left Paris and lived in Lourdes to be safe from its

dangers and distributed her money to the poor, the missions and religious houses. She tried to enter a Carmelite convent but was rejected because of her notoriety. For 4 years she devoted herself to nursing in Tunisia, but poor health forced her to retire. Back in France she led a life of prayer, meditation, charity.

In her new life, she prayed for more than an hour, before breakfast. She gave up all luxuries and laziness and began to live simply. She did ordinary simple work, not relying on servants. In this way she kept close to Jesus, her new-found Friend.

## Love

She bought a little house with a garden and lived there a quiet life of love and prayer, giving away most of her money to the poor. Old friends coming to visit her, were moved to tears. A journalist described her "I listened with emotion and respect as she spoke... her words breathing genuine simplicity. The perfection of her

interior life was noticeable." "

**“I am in God's hands. Tell my friends of days gone by that you met the happiest person on Earth”**

In 1929 a large Paris newspaper published an interview with her. It gives us a clue to her quiet life with God. The interviewer asked about her illness and suffering.

- But I am so happy! You cannot imagine how great is my happiness.

- Even with so much suffering?

- Yes and because of it. I am in God's hands. Tell my friends of days gone by that you met the happiest person on Earth.

In her last letter she wrote "All my being is turned towards the last end, to love God who loves me so much despite my past... my God, I love You with all my soul. Even if I wished to love something other than You, I could not do it."

She died in July 1929 and on her grave are written her own words: 'I HAVE LEFT ALL FOR GOD. HE ALONE IS SUFFICIENT FOR ME'.

*Fr Adrian Crowley, parish curate of The Parish of St Luke the Evangelist, writes from Co. Dublin.*

**“All my being is turned towards the last end, to love God who loves me so much despite my past... my God, I love You with all my soul. Even if I wished to love something other than You, I could not do it”**

# Judith, a model of courage for women



Christine Mako

Many are familiar with the story of Judith. She is one of the well-known Biblical women, renowned for her courage in helping rescue the Israelites from the Assyrians. With her virtue and trust in God, she was able to deliver the head of Holofernes, the leader of the Assyrian army, to her people, before the Holy City, Jerusalem, would be invaded.

Judith is often cited -alongside Esther- as a woman who had developed courage to help the Israelites to achieve one of their countless victories, and as such, it is important that many women in this era take example, because courage and femininity has grown to be an odd juxtaposition today. It seems like most girls now sadly believe that to be strong is to forgo their innate femininity. For many, to be strong is to use heavy mannerisms, and act like they're one of the men.

But what does this mindset then

**“We need to realise that our strength comes from our femininity. If we develop our feminine identity in obedience with the precepts of the Church, we can never go wrong. We will move many mountains”**

Judith, School of Guido Reni (1575–1642)



imply about historical women like Judith, who gloried in their womanhood while remaining firm in their principles, characters, and ideals? Judith displayed courage in standing for her faith and by her people, but by no means did she throw away her femininity in doing so. She remained in all things, a virtuous woman.

## Fortitude

When Holofernes' camp had surrounded the walls of Israel, Judith, after consulting the ancients, had quietly retired into her chambers, and with fasting and prayer, she begged God to give her the virtue to confront Israel's enemies. Her feet and hands must have been trembling as she later walked down the valley to the enemies' camp, but possessing this virtue of fortitude, she persevered.

Fortitude is not the vain type of courage where you trust in your powers and strength, but a way of having courage by trusting God, who can guarantee His unfailing help.

Many people, not just women, possess courage, but lack fortitude. And it is for this reason that most ladies believe they have to be something else other than woman to be strong. However, Judith didn't have to change herself. All she needed was God. And what better way to be confident?

## Modesty

It was very easy for Judith, while embarking on this mission, to become swayed by all the attention and stain her purity. The account of her testifies that she was very beautiful, and that in fact, she had dressed well in order to trap the eyes of Holofernes. However, whilst all this, she never sinned. In all her beauty, she prayed God to give her purity of mind, heart, and will.

The Church teaches that the virtue of purity does not just mean purity of the senses (chastity). It includes, purity of the heart, mind and will. That is, in all endeavours, pleasing God should be the foremost priority. Moreover, the practice of purity ensures the practice of all other virtues like modesty, humility, prudence and fortitude, which Judith embodied as she recognised the duty of keeping herself sinless, among the company of her enemies.

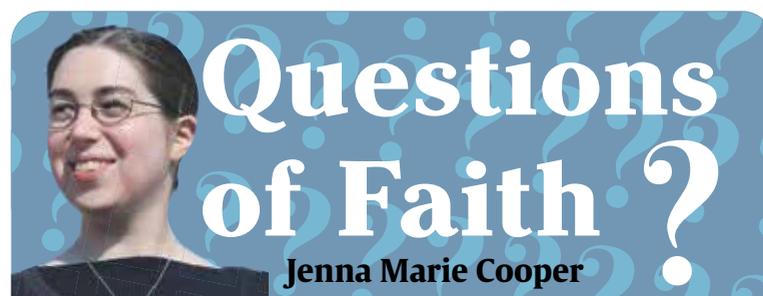
## Femininity

Never did Judith use force of hand or harsh words to achieve her victory. She harnessed the power of her femininity, in a virtuous way, while keeping in accordance with the mission God wanted her to fulfil. In the end, she achieved the victory.

As Judith did, we need to realise that our strength comes from our femininity. If we develop our feminine identity in obedience with the precepts of the Church, we can never go wrong. We will move many mountains.

Judith as a role model for women is much needed in this age. She is an example of a Christian woman, who remained resigned to God's role for her, while basking in her true identity. Imitating the virtues she lived is one key to unlocking the gift of authentic femininity and its societal benefits.

*Christine Mako writes from Ireland and is a Catholic student at UC'D Dublin.*



## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



**Q: When I was evangelical, we said a 'saved' person went immediately to Heaven at death. In a recent homily our priest said most Christians, including himself, will likely go to purgatory at death. How can Jesus' shed blood pay for a person's sins, but they not go to Heaven at death?**

**A:** Your priest is probably right that most people will do a stint in purgatory after they die. But going to purgatory does not mean that a person isn't 'saved' - it's quite the opposite, actually. A person in purgatory is one who is ultimately and surely destined for Heaven.

Jesus' passion, death and resurrection did indeed save us from sin, making Heaven possible for us. That is, whereas the original sin of Adam and Eve alienated humanity from God, Jesus' perfect obedience to God's will even to his death on the cross broke the bond original sin had over us. Through our baptism, by which we share in Jesus' death and resurrection, we are personally freed from original sin in our own lives.

But just because we can go to Heaven, sadly it does not automatically follow that everyone actually will. Freedom from original sin makes us in principle capable of entering into Heaven, but it is of course still possible for us to commit our own sins after baptism. We never cease to be creatures endowed with free will, and if we choose to distance ourselves from God through serious sin, he will respect our choice. This is what happens when souls go to hell because of mortal sins for which they had not repented.

We can never know for sure what happens between God and a soul right at the last moments of life. Still, it is common knowledge that while few people would seem to be incorrigibly wicked at the time of their death, the majority of us are not saintly paragons of virtue, either. Even those of us who take our faith seriously and sincerely seek to follow God's will may stumble and fall, and the holiest among us can struggle with stubborn venial (that is, less serious)

sins.

And as the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes: "It is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life. ... On the other hand, every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on Earth, or after death" (CCC 1472). Or in other words, even those who are saved through baptism and who have actively embraced their salvation may not be ready to enter into God's direct presence immediately upon their death, because sin can leave lasting spiritual effects upon a soul.

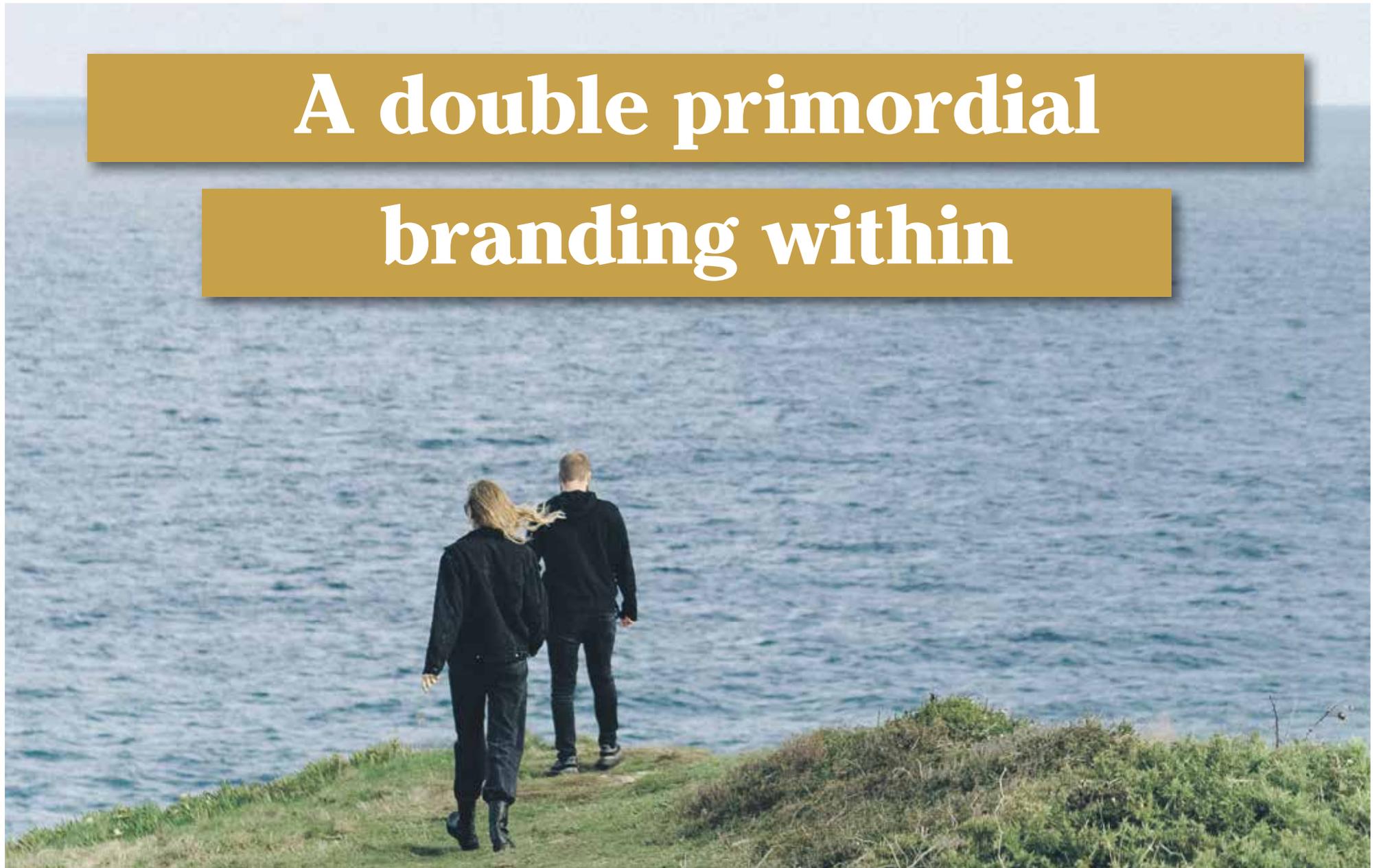
The catechism also tells us: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1030-1031).

Although purgatory is not exactly a 'punishment' in the way we would tend to use the term today, traditionally purgatory has been understood to involve a degree of suffering. One common image for understanding purgatory is as a cleansing or purifying fire. This image is also very scriptural.

For example, St Paul references a saving fire in his First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:15). And even in the Old Testament the prophet Malachi proclaims that the coming Messiah "will be like a refiner's fire, like fullers' lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the Levites, refining them like gold or silver, that they may bring offerings to the LORD in righteousness" (Mal 3:2-3).

*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.*

# A double primordial branding within



From Pierre Teilhard de Chardin we get these words: “Because, my God, though I lack the soul-zeal and the sublime integrity of your saints, I yet have received from you an overwhelming sympathy for all that stirs within the dark mass of matter; because I know myself to be irremediably less a child of Heaven and a son of Earth.”

These words, like the words that open St Augustine’s famous Confessions, not only describe a lifelong tension inside its author. They also name the foundational pieces for an entire spirituality. For everyone who is emotionally healthy and honest, there will be a lifelong tension between the attractions of this world and the lure of God. The Earth, with its beauties, its pleasures, and its physicality can take our breath away and have us believe that this world is all there is and all that needs to be. Who needs anything further? Isn’t life here on Earth enough? Besides, what proof is there for any reality and meaning beyond our lives here?

## Embrace

But even as we are so powerfully, and rightly, drawn to the world and what it offers, another part of us finds itself caught in the embrace and the grip of another reality, the divine, which though more inchoate, is no less unrelenting. It also tells us that it is real, that its reality ultimately offers life, that it needs to be honored, and that it may not be ignored. And, just like the reality of the world, it presents itself both as



Fr Rolheiser

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promise and threat. Sometimes it’s felt as a warm cocoon in which we sense ultimate shelter and sometimes we feel its power as a threatening judgment on our superficiality, mediocrity, and sin. Sometimes it blesses our fixation on earthly life and its pleasures and sometimes it frightens us and relativises both our world and our lives. We can sometimes shield ourselves from it by distraction or denial; but it stays, maintaining always a powerful tension inside us: we are irremediably children of both Heaven and Earth; both God and the world ask for our attention.

That’s how it’s meant to be. God made us irremediably physical, fleshy, Earth-oriented, with virtually every instinct inside us reaching for the things of this Earth. We should not then expect that God

wants us to shun this Earth, deny its genuine beauty, and attempt to step out of our bodies, our natural instincts, and our physicality to fix our eyes only on the things of Heaven. God did not build this world as a testing place, a place where obedience and piety are to be tested against the lure of earthly pleasure, to see if we’re worthy of Heaven. This world is its own mystery with its own meaning, a God-given one. It’s not simply a stage upon which we, as humans, play out our individual dramas of salvation and then close the curtain as we leave. It’s a place for all of us, humans, animals, insects, plants, water, rocks, and soil to enjoy a home together.

## Tension

But that’s the root of a great tension inside us. Unless we deny

either our most powerful human instincts or our most powerful religious sensibilities, we will find ourselves forever torn between two worlds, with seemingly conflicting loyalties, caught between the lure of this world and the lure of God.

**“I have always found myself in the grip of another reality - the divine, faith, religion. Its reality too has always commanded my attention - and, more importantly, dictated the important choices in my life”**

I know how true this is for my own life. I was born into this world with two incurable loves and have spent my life and ministry caught and torn between the two. I have

always loved the pagan world for its honouring of this life and for its celebration of the wonders of the human body and the beauty and pleasure that our five senses bring us. With my pagan brothers and sisters, I too honour the lure of sexuality, the comfort of human community, the delight of humor and irony, and the remarkable gifts given us by the arts and the sciences. But at the same time, I have always found myself in the grip of another reality - the divine, faith, religion. Its reality too has always commanded my attention - and, more importantly, dictated the important choices in my life.

## Choices

My major choices in life incarnate and radiate a great tension because they’ve tried to be true to a double primordial branding inside me, the pagan and the divine. I can’t deny the reality, lure, and goodness of either of them. It’s for this reason that I can live as a consecrated, lifelong celibate, committed to religious ministry, even as I deeply love the pagan world, bless its pleasures, and bless the goodness of sex even as I renounce it. That’s also the reason why I’m chronically making an apology to God for the world’s pagan resistance, even as I’m trying to make an apology for God to the world. I have torn loyalties.

That is as it should be. The world is meant to take our breath away, even as we genuflect before the author of that breath.

**“My major choices in life incarnate and radiate a great tension because they’ve tried to be true to a double primordial branding inside me, the pagan and the divine. I can’t deny the reality, lure, and goodness of either of them”**

# The first of all the commandments

Dt 6:2-6  
Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51  
Heb 7:23-28  
Mk 12:28b-34

**The Sunday Gospel**  
Fr Joshua J. Whitfield



The theology of this passage from Mark matters. Obviously so does its place within the extended debates of rabbis and theologians, arguments now millennia old. "Which is the first of all the commandments?" the scribe asks Jesus (Mk 12:28).

His answer, woven together from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, is profound and powerful. To interpret it properly one must dive into the deepest seas of the Scripture. This is one of those passages one studies, meditates upon and takes deep into mind and heart. It is an awesome passage, as exegetically rich in its meanings as it is mystical in its power.

But that isn't what I want to talk about, not this time around at least. Sometimes, you see, what I find more urgent is not the context of the reading but the context of the reader. Now, as I said, the context of the reading is not to be neglected; without it, there simply is nothing to understand. Yet sometimes it happens that a certain passage of the Scripture confronts a certain place and time with such force that it seems as if the Scripture is speaking immediately in the present.

## Directly

That is, sometimes when reading the Scripture, it seems as if the passage is speaking directly into my world, directly to me. That happens sometimes with the Scripture. It just hits you like that, like when St Antony of Egypt heard that passage from Matthew about being perfect and then immediately disappeared into the desert (The Life of Antony, 2). It's as if the Bible is speaking just to you.

What I am talking about is what the Church calls the 'moral sense' of the Scripture (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 115-118). It's a sense that causes one to think the Scripture is somehow speaking directly to you, confronting you, convicting you. Like when reading Matthew 25, St Gregory of Nazianzus said, "I stand in terror of his left hand, and the goats" (Oration 14.39). He read the passage as if Matthew was warning him, calling him to change, calling him to serve the poor.

**“Which is the first of all the commandments? It is to love God with everything you have - heart, soul, mind and strength. But it's also to love your neighbour as yourself”**

The moral sense of the Scripture does not allow us to read the Bible as bystanders. Interpretation and theology are not discarded in this experience; rather, they are converted into urgency and action. All the safety of speculation is gone, replaced with the brute demand of obedience. Again, that's the way I encounter this passage from Mark, at least this time around. I read this dialogue between Jesus and the scribe as a contemporary moral call. "Which is the first of all the commandments?" It is to

love God with everything you have - heart, soul, mind and strength. But it's also to love your neighbour as yourself. This, I suggest, is God's word for November 2024. This is what God is saying to us today. This is exactly what he wants us to hear.

Which, if you ask me, is a powerful word for us to hear right now. Here in a divided world, this is what God wants us to hear: that we should not forget that the greatest commandment is to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. Whatever our party, whatever the issue, no matter the frustration, to love God and our neighbour is our first task, the first thing God commands us to do.

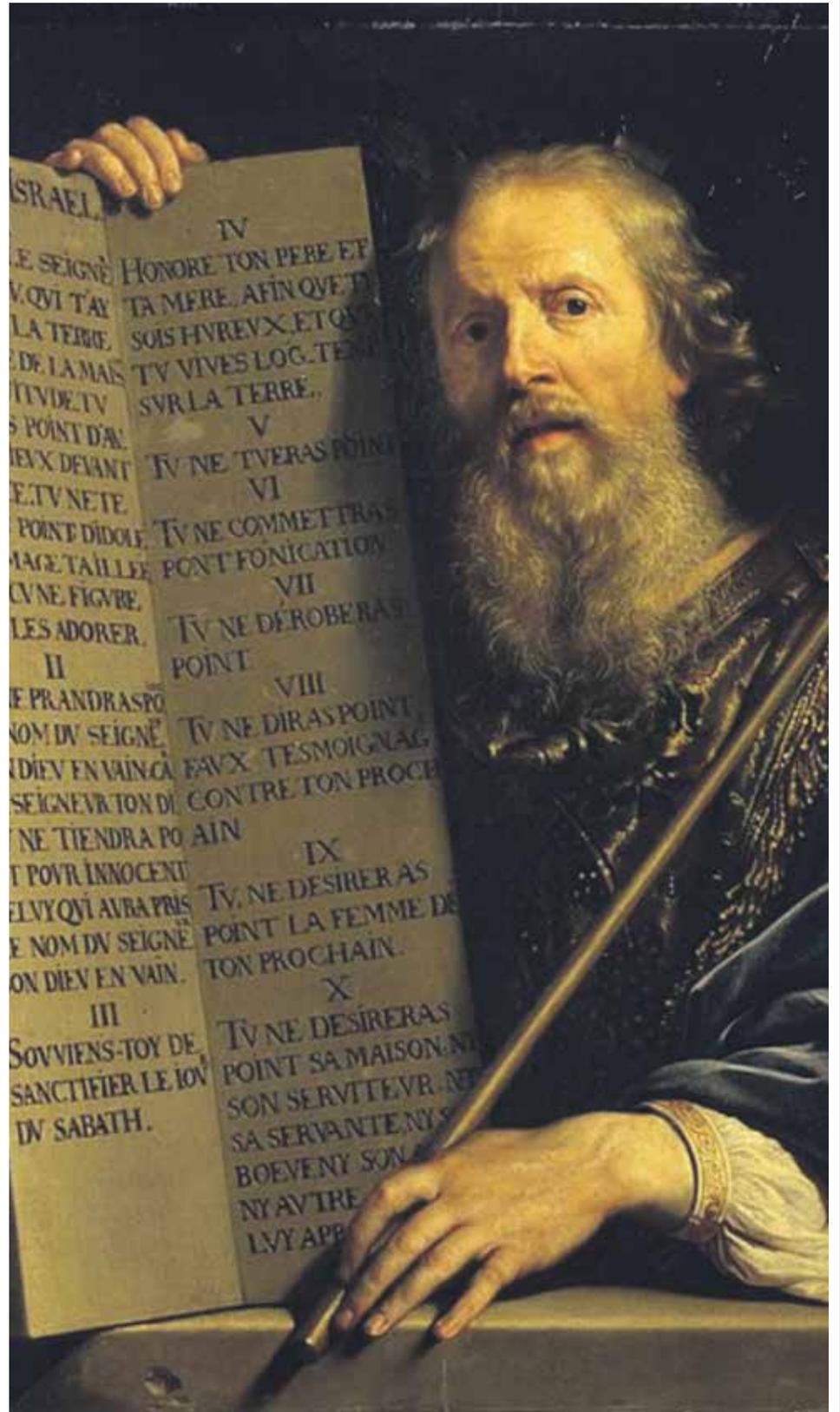
## Contribution

Which is, for we Catholics, our primary civic contribution. This - aside from the innumerable misinterpretations of Romans 13 - is fundamentally what St Paul meant. "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another" (Rom 13:8).

A few years ago, the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Marion called it our "Catholic moment." He said it was the "political originality of Christians," the way we bear witness to the world, what "communion" really is, by the way we love God, each other, and the stranger. Again, this is your graver responsibility - what and who you love.

Really, it may be a miracle, providence at least, that this is what Catholics all over the world will hear this Sunday, that their most important task is to love. It's as if this is exactly what God wants to say to us right now, what he wants to give us - a word of love so different from the loud worldly words that are wearing us down. The only question is whether we will listen.

**Fr Joshua J. Whitfield is a priest of St Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of The Crisis of Bad Preaching**



Moses with the Ten Commandments, Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674)

## Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milan Morales



St Charles Borromeo

## St Charles Borromeo: True pastoral care

Patron saint of bishops, cardinals, seminarians, and spiritual leaders, St Charles Borromeo's life of sacrifice, devotion to pastoral care, and reform is a model for bishops and clergy today of holiness. Through his efforts, priests and laity were inspired to live as true disciples of Christ.

Born near Milan in 1538, Charles was made a cardinal at a young age by his uncle, Pope Pius IV. He was entrusted with the governance of the Archdiocese of Milan, which had been without effective leadership for eighty years and had fallen into serious spiritual decline. It took six years before he could fully dedicate himself to the diocese due to his involvement in the final session of the Council of Trent.

Upon arriving in Milan, St Charles

implemented a plan of reform that focused on teaching his clergy and laity how to be authentic followers of Christ. Understanding that he had to lead by example, he lived a life of simplicity.

St Charles' greatest act of charity happened during the plague of 1575, when he used all his resources to aid the afflicted. He also fed thousands of people during a famine.

St Charles cared for the spiritual wellbeing of his people. Upon arriving in Milan, he discovered that many of the clergy were ignorant and corrupt. Recognising that reforming the clergy was essential for the renewal of the Church, he provided spiritual and doctrinal formation. He was also a model for his priests, leading by example in

his dedication to personal prayer, regular confession, and retreats.

St Charles emphasised the importance of the liturgy, believing that how one prayed influenced belief and behaviour. He was known for celebrating the liturgy with great care and devotion, never rushing through any aspect, no matter how busy he was.

In our own times, St Charles Borromeo's life exemplifies the balance between the simple, service-oriented approach and the doctrinal and liturgical integrity. St Charles shows us that serving the world and preserving doctrinal truth are deeply interconnected. His legacy reminds us that true pastoral care involves a deep love for God and a selfless love for neighbour.

## TVRadio

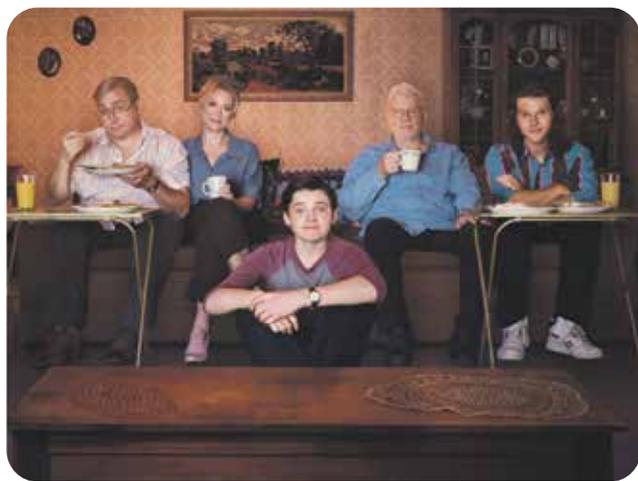
Brendan O'Regan



# The spirit of the age

Is a crime motivated by hate worse than one motivated by greed, or anger, or lust or indeed any one of the other deadly sins? What if motives are mixed, as they often are? Should the law treat a perpetrator more harshly depending on the motivation? I'm not convinced.

Such questions became very pertinent last week when the new hate crime legislation was accepted by Dáil Éireann. As was suggested by presenter Ciara Kelly on **Newstalk Breakfast** last Thursday, there was an issue around what some regarded as a 'poor definition or lack of definition' of gender in the legislation. Indeed, it's quite a word salad, that is, according to Ms Kelly, leaving most people 'utterly confused'. She drew attention to an Irish politician saying in Scotland that there were nine genders, and the SNP (Scottish National Party) making out that were 24 genders! Are you 'utterly confused'? I didn't find Minister Helen McEntee's explanation very clear or convincing - this wasn't a gender identity bill she said, and her aim was to protect vulnerable minorities. I find politicians rather selective about which vulnerable minorities they seek



Son of a Critch

to protect (#repealthe8th). Does dodgy gender ideology, highly contested in society, have to find its way into the law? Surely that's where we should find the clarity that politicians so often boast about.

That show also saw coverage of another and even more offensive piece of legislation getting a boost on its way through the Oireachtas. 'Assisted dying' is a euphemism for assisted suicide or deliberate killing, and a Dáil committee report on the matter, recommending legislation, was accepted, effectively getting a nod of approval. Reporter Sean Defoe described it as a deci-

sion to 'note' the report or agree a principle. Thankfully the majority in favour of accepting the Dáil report on the matter was small enough to give hope. Michael Healy-Rae, chairperson of that committee, had dissented from that report, was very much against the idea, but pointed out that any legislation on the matter would be up to the next Government and its priorities. Hopefully those priorities will be more life affirming.

**Son of a Critch** (RTE One, Friday) is a new Canadian series, a coming of age comedy drama on the lines of **The Wonder Years**, but without the charm and wit of that

series (currently on repeat every evening on TG4). The Critches are a Catholic family in the 1980s and Mark is the narrator, reminiscing on his early teenage days. In last week's episode he got a notion to become a priest, though more because he liked the idea of giving sermons and spotlight. He was impressed by Fr Moore, an old-style priest, who is mysteriously transferred overseas. The story is set against the background of clerical abuse scandals in Church-run orphanages - when Mark hears about this, his faith, in people at least, is shaken, but he still goes ahead with Confirmation, choosing his irascible grandad (Malcolm McDowell) as sponsor. That was a touching moment, but overall, the tone of the show is very uneven - sometimes respectful, sometimes crude and very irreverent, fitfully funny. There are too many stereotypes - the guitar-picking nun, the trendy new priest, all singing and dancing, whose approach is cringy though well-meaning and whose style of Confession leaves a lot to be desired. It's a scattershot approach. I'd say it's a mixture of interesting and uncomfortable for Catholic viewers.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### THE SIMPSONS

Channel 4 Saturday November 2, 10.50am and Friday November 8, 2.25am (night)

Homer the heretic: Homer has a vision from God and decides to start his own religion, with hilarious and thought-provoking results.

#### THE MEANING OF LIFE

RTE One Sunday November 3, 10.35pm

Joe Duffy speaks with Brookside and Royle Family actor, writer and trade unionist Ricky Tomlinson.

#### US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SPECIAL

RTE One Tuesday November 5, 11.20pm, EWTN Tuesday 2am (night), and most other channels.

Live results coverage of the US presidential election, presented by Miriam O'Callaghan in Washington and David McCullagh in Dublin. Followed by CBS news coverage.

Even worse is **Everyone Else Burns** (Channel 4, Thursday) recently returned for a second series and as far as religion goes it's pretty offensive. A comedy, it features an extreme Christian group that practices arranged marriage and cult-like behaviour. The drama focuses on a particular family where the underlying human desires bubble up to conflict with the oppressive rules. It is funny in spots and humane in others, but mostly it is mean-spirited - mockery without any sense that there can be a religion that is genuine, compassionate, clear-

thinking, life-enhancing and committed to the service of others. Though it takes on the extremes, I suspect this may be just a sneaky way of attacking religion in general, or at least religion that doesn't conform compliantly and conveniently to the spirit of the age as defined by media folk. There's a lot of pressure on programme makers these days to commit to visibility for minorities, pressure to tick the diversity boxes, but people of genuine religious faith rarely get a look-in.

## Film

Aubrey Malone



# Convent abuse in 1980s Ireland revisited

The Church comes in for a roasting in *Small Things Like These* (12A), a film based on Clare Keegan's novel of the same name dedicated to the "56,000" girls sent to Magdalene laundries for "penance and rehabilitation."

Trailing clouds of glory from his Oscar turn in *Oppenheimer*, Cillian Murphy gives a sensitive performance as taciturn Wexford coal seller Bill Furlong. In the course of his deliveries to a convent he encounters a distressed girl, Sarah (Zarah Devlin), who's clearly being mistreated.

Her suffering calls up painful memories of his own youth. He's the child of an unmarried mother who could have ended up like Sarah were it not for the intervention of a

kindly Protestant woman.

When Furlong tells his wife Eileen (Eileen Walsh) about Sarah she isn't inclined to do anything about it. "It's not our business," she says, "Stay on the right side of people. If you want to get on in this life, there are things you have to ignore."

Though we're in 1985, a culture of silence still surrounds matters like this. As another character in the film puts it, "Keep the bad dog with you and the good dog won't bite."

But Furlong continues to brood. He's like a dormant volcano waiting to erupt. The film carries a sense of ominousness in its every tense, intense frame. He washes his hands like Lady Macbeth to



Small things like these

try and work off his anger.

The film is very well made but it will be a hard watch for readers of this paper. There's a sense of 'good Protestant/bad Catholic' about its 'woke'

approach.

The nuns are presented in an unremittingly cruel light. In the case of the 'sheep in wolf's clothing' Mother Superior of the convent (an

almost unrecognisable Emily Watson) there's even bribery involved. She presents the cash-strapped Furlong with a 'gift' to ease him into the imminent Christmas season.

He has five daughters in his humble but happy home. If he 'rescues' Sarah he may be in danger of compromising the education Eileen is anticipating for them in the convent.

"The nuns have a finger in every pie," she tells him when he suggests exposing Sarah's plight. There's only a wall, she points out, separating "that place" from the school.

The film is shot in an almost crepuscular darkness, its sepia-tinged frames resonant of the period. This is captured excellently by direc-

tor Tim Mielants. Murphy also conveys Furlong's awkwardness - and helplessness - convincingly.

Enda Walsh's script has a minimalist effectiveness: "The whole world looks pretty under snow." "Didn't Christmas come in quickly all the same?" The faces and fashions of the characters are faithful to the time.

But is the mood? Were things really this conspiratorial in 1985?

None of us should condone the failings of the Magdalene Laundries but as the Church continues to reel from bad press, is *Small Things Like These* - despite being evocatively shot and acted - not another example of kicking it while it's down?

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



# Permanent Reds

**Hotel Lux: An Intimate History of Communism's Forgotten Radicals**, by Maurice J. Casey (Footnote Press, £20.00 / €24.00)

J. Anthony Gaughan

The Communist International, which became widely known as Comintern, was founded in Moscow 1919. In the tangled politics of the left since 1848 there had been two other international movements, which had failed; but this new organisation was created to gain Moscow control of the universal communist movement in the turbulent post WWI years.

It advocated world communism and was an agent of the Communist Party in Moscow. It promoted and attempted to control and direct Communist parties and governments elsewhere in the world, particularly in Europe.

## Revolutionaries

The Hotel Lux, haunt of legendary Marxist revolutionaries, was a large building in Moscow, where those who worked in the Comintern were accommodated, and where the endless meetings beloved of the Left could be held in comfortable salons. It is in the forefront of this narrative by a Belfast based historian, because it was there that May O'Callaghan and Nellie and Rose Cohen cemented their life-long friendship.

May O'Callaghan was born on August 14 1881 in Wexford where her father was the Head Constable in the Royal Irish Constabulary. Soon afterwards, the family moved to Ballinsesker, a village nearby. Following her education locally May travelled to Vienna where she attended the university and subsequently provided public lectures on the writings of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw.

By 1914 she was sub-editor of Sylvia Pankhurst's, then recently launched *The Woman's Dreadnought*. Later Sylvia Pankhurst placed her in charge of her propagandist People's Russian Information Bureau.

Thrilled by the fall of the Tsarist Empire, she learned Russian

and in 1924 travelled to Moscow. She joined the staff of the Comintern as manager of the English translation department and was allocated a room in the Hotel Lux.

Five years later, fearing for her life in the sinister and murderous atmosphere in Moscow, she departed to New York where she acquired work in an organisation promoting Soviet films in the US. A few years later she returned to London where she ended her working life in Collet's, the then well-known left-wing bookshop on Charing Cross Road. She died in 1973.

Nellie and Rose Cohen were the daughters of Maurice Jacobovskiy, a Polish Jew. He had been forced by anti-semitic violence and political persecution to transfer his family from the Tsarist empire to Whitechapel in the East end of London, where the family changed their name to Cohen.

**“Rose in addition was involved in tasks of a conspiratorial nature, married a comrade and was known to be an admirer of the exiled Leon Trotsky”**

The sisters were enthusiastic supporters of Sylvia Pankhurst's Feminist Movement. Nellie acted as Pankhurst's personal assistant and was also actively involved in her propagandist Peoples Russian Information Bureau. By 1923 the Cohen sisters were resident in the Hotel Lux and working in the Comintern. Rose in addition was involved in tasks of a conspiratorial nature, married a comrade and was known to be an admirer of the exiled Leon Trotsky (later murdered in Mexico by an agent of Stalin). Nellie returned to London in 1929.

She subsequently married a former English colleague of hers at the Comintern and settled in England. She also had a daughter, named Joyce, whose father was Liam O'Flaherty, the distinguished Irish writer and sometime revolutionary,



The Hotel Lux in Moscow, from a contemporary French postcard



Joseph Stalin at the height of the “Red Terror” in Russia

who had fought in Talbot Street group in the early days of our Civil War.

## Dominant

The ‘Stalinist Terror’ was a dominant feature in the lives

of May and the Cohen sisters. In his successful campaign to seize and retain absolute control over the Communist Party in Russia and later the Soviet Union, Stalin set out to ‘eliminate’ all his enemies or suspected enemies.

As a result of his paranoia one million people were executed by firing squad and another two million were locked up in the Gulag. And a palpable cloud of fear was left hanging over the Soviet Union until the dictator died on March 5 1953.

In 1937 Rose Cohen and her husband, David Petrovsky, were arrested by the NKVD (secret police), taken before a show-trial and executed. At this time also hundreds of acquaintances and friends who May and the sisters knew in the Hotel Lux simply disappeared.

## Disillusioned

Seemingly May or the Cohens were not known to have expressed disappointment or to being disillusioned at what became of the ‘New Jerusa-

lem’ to which they had committed their lives!

Author Maurice J. Casey, born in Tipperary, studied at Trinity, Cambridge, and Oxford, and now lectures at Queen's University in Belfast, where he specialises in the more human aspects of 20th century revolutionary activity in Europe.

Apart from being a fascinating read, his book is a well-written superb piece of historical research into an era whose grim secrets have not all been revealed as yet.

**“As a result of his paranoia one million people were executed by firing squad and another two million were locked up in the Gulag. And a palpable cloud of fear was left hanging over the Soviet Union until the dictator died on March 5 1953”**

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

## The 'Black Arts' in Ireland



Poet W. B. Yeats, the great magician in a more relaxed moment in the 1920s

**A History of Irish Magic**, by Sally North and James North (Holythorn Press, limited hardbound edition € 60.00; paperback edition, €30.)

**Peter Costello**

When the remains of the poet W. B. Yeats were brought back to Ireland in September 1948, they were interred as he had intended in Drumcliffe Churchyard in Sligo, according to the ritual of the Church of Ireland.

Yeats by culture might have been a Protestant, but having been a life-long pagan in his own mind, he was most certainly a keen devotee of esoteric beliefs of many kinds. This thinking often flavours his poetry.

Here, however, we must be clear about the difference between "creed" and "cult". A creed is a faith open to all largely by adherence or by a simple rite of adhesion. But a cult is something exclusive, it is for the elected few, the chosen ones of special insight, often with undisclosed secret doctrines.

### Important

Yeats' mystical ideas are important, and for many of those concerned with his work at any level, anything that throws light on what he actually believed would be very important. This new book contains a great deal about Yeats, one way or the other, but alas after all the detailed research of people like George Mills Harper and Ellic Howe, not to mention

R. F. Foster, it says nothing novel about his beliefs.

The authors describe their book as "A unique exploration into Irish druidism, fairy lore, miracle-working saints, sacred kingship, witchcraft trials, the Celtic Order of W. B. Yeats, the Theosophical circle of "AE", and mystical artist Art O'Murnaghan, *A History of Irish Magic* is the first book of its kind - deeply researched yet highly readable."

**“Their themes are important ones for any student of religion, folklore and literature, but they have to be approached with caution. Take those ‘renowned druids’ for instance”**

If that seems to cover a great deal of ground, it is dismaying to find that the authors, products of Oxford University and the Warburg Institute in London, provide no references and no bibliography. Reading an undocumented book of this kind leads nowhere as the authors do not provide the reader with the means to explore further, to grow beyond this text, or even to challenge the truth of what the authors have written.

Their themes are important ones for any student of religion, folklore and literature, but they have to be approached with caution.

Take those "renowned druids" for instance.

What we know about the druids and what is written about them today derives almost entirely from the remarks of Julius Caesar in his *Gallic Wars* (the *De Bello Gallico* of our school-days), circulated from 58 BC onwards while the war was being fought. This is a biased account, in which the gods of the Gauls are identified with those of the Roman pantheon (itself derived from the Greeks, the Romans not being a naturally religious race).

### Speculation

Nearly everything that is written about the druids outside of this is speculation, wishful thinking, often pure invention. The substance of what we can know has been carefully expounded by T. D. Kendrick, Stuart Piggott and a few others. But what we see in Wales and Scotland and now in Ireland involving white robed initiates at mid-summer is the creation of the last few centuries. It does not come down from the ancient past.

Readers of this book will have to be careful in accepting much of what they are told in these pages. But the true focus of the authors is not on anthropology and archaeology, but on the various mystical, often semi-Masonic, cults that have emerged since the 17th century.

Here perhaps they are on more certain ground, but readers will have to be careful of what cultists say about themselves. Take the Dub-

lin Theosophists. A central figure in this group was the poet, painter, social activist, editor and true patriot George Russell, rightly regarded by many as a man of almost saintly character.

**“For an aspiring student of the esoteric in Ireland it will make an entertaining start, if read with great caution and many a suspecting glance”**

He was exceptional. The reputation of Theosophy in the wider community was a little more charged a century ago. We can recall that the school teacher Mr Bentham "from Rathmines", in *Juno and the Paycock*, is the theosophist responsible for writing the will that impoverishes the family and who seduces and abandons young Mary Boyle. He is seen by the socialist Sean O'Casey as a foppish, posturing rogue, too clever by half, who flees responsibility. No genial kindness, no secret wisdom, there.

In a short review I have hardly room to discuss in detail all that is included in this briskly written book. For an aspiring student of the esoteric in Ireland it will make an entertaining start, if read with great caution and many a suspecting glance; and, of course, the realisation that much of what it says will have to be unlearned.

## The curious secrets of ancient Irish manuscripts



Marco Polo and his party crossing the wilds in inner Asia on their way to China.

**Peter Costello**

We are all aware of the great importance of ancient Irish manuscripts to our knowledge of the past and the history of the peoples that have lived in Ireland.

But the prominence of the *Book of Kells* has distorted this tradition. The *Book of Kells* is a liturgical set of the gospels, but the text is unimportant compared with its decorations. The book is a work of art, and it has become one of the country's great tourist resources -- which seems very strange as to many of those who visit it the nature of the text has little or no meaning.

Irish manuscripts are scattered around Europe. It is a surprise to many that an important manuscript relating to St Columcille was preserved in the monastery Schaffhausen in distant Switzerland -- an outcome of the effect of the Irish Diaspora.

Here at home the manuscript with the most curious history is perhaps the great *Book of Lismore*. This was discovered in 1814 on the reopening of a walled up doorway in Lismore Castle, the great Waterford mansion of the Duke of Devonshire. It is a magnificent book written on vellum sheets of the largest size. Along with it was found a bishop's crosier.

Like so many books of its kind it contains a variety of texts, the most important in the eyes of some being a collection of the lives of the saints; but there was also a romance Charlemagne, a history of the Lombards, and tales of Irish history. Among the texts was also, surprisingly, a version of the inner Asian travels of Marco Polo, translated into contemporary Irish.

The book was created about 1460 for Finghin MacCarthy and his wife Catherine Fitzgerald, the daughter of Gerald, eighth Earl of Desmond. The Marco Polo text is of uncertain date as

regards the translation into Irish, but is a version of the Latin text by Friar Francisco Pipino, created before 1322. It lacks, however, the beginning and end, suggesting that recording it was an effort to preserve an interesting text that had made its way to Ireland, but was damaged.

As it stands the text describes Lesser Armenia, Greater Armenia, Mosul, and other places in the vicinity of Persia. It breaks off after a description of Abaschia. This forms roughly pages 20-42 in the old Penguin paperback translation. In *The Book of Lismore* it fills twenty pages of the closely written Irish script, which was later edited for a German philological journal by Whitely Stokes.

However, for the general reader it was described by Eugene O'Curry in his lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history, which he gave in public in his role as professor of archaeology at Newman's university, the first ever post of its kind in these islands.

We all too often think of the archives of Irish manuscripts as being important to Irish affairs, but as this version of Marco Polo shows, this was not the case.

Medieval Irish lords were as interested in the wider world as they were in their island's past. All kinds of materials unrelated directly to Ireland, such as Arthurian romances, interested them. But the narrative of Marco Polo, when read aloud to them, would have carried them in their imaginations off to distant Asia, at much the same time indeed as the same text in Italian was inspiring the imagination of Christopher Columbus.

Perhaps Ireland and its leaders were more connected with the greater world than we sometimes think. Such at least was the opinion of Sir Henry Yule, the great expert on the intricacies of Polo's travels and Asia generally. Our present day concerns about the Middle East, India, and even China, have deep roots.

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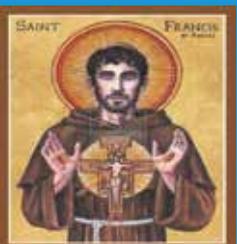
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### Crossword

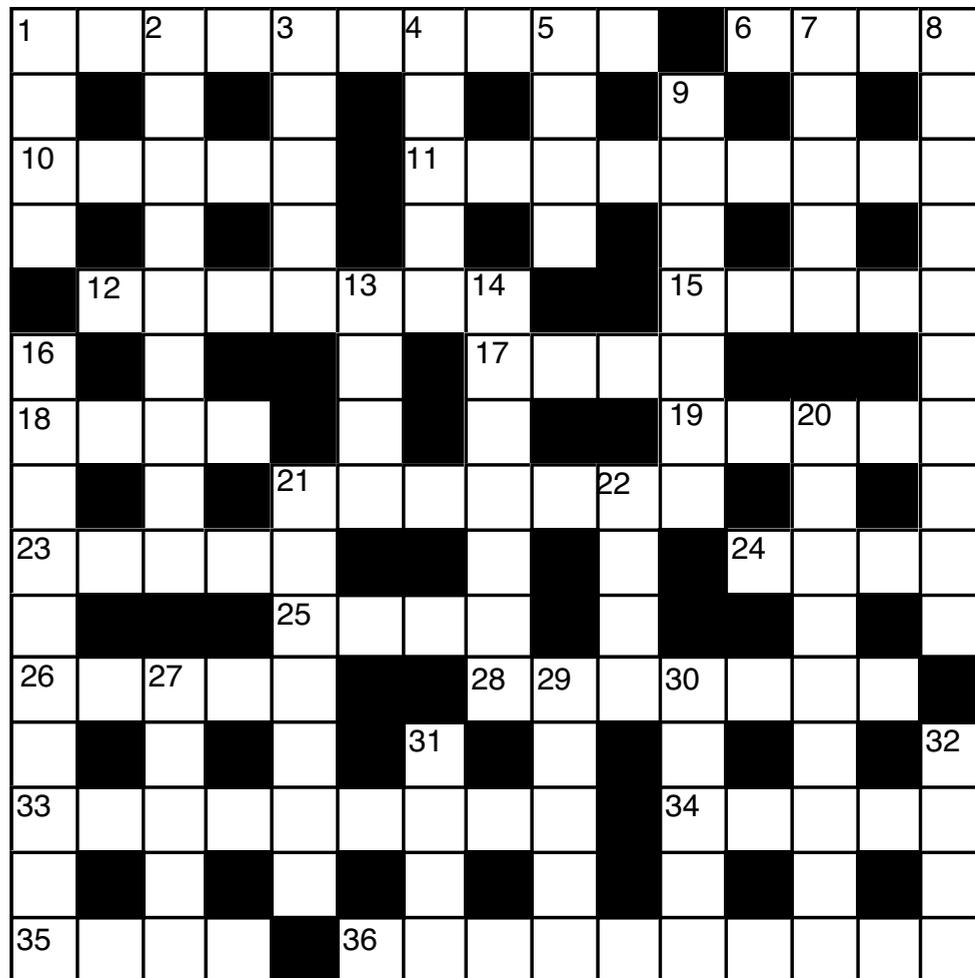
Gordius 687

#### Across

- 1 Gymnastic act (10)
- 6 Use a spoon (4)
- 10 Becomes less colourful (5)
- 11 Sheds (9)
- 12 Large breed of dog (7)
- 15 Get down on your knees (5)
- 17 Precipitation (4)
- 18 Detest (4)
- 19 Precise (5)
- 21 Bold, misbehaving (7)
- 23 Greek island (5)
- 24 Sport played on horseback (4)
- 25 Cuticle (4)
- 26 Reasoning (5)
- 28 Protective companions (7)
- 33 Type of flag such as that of the Irish or French republic (9)
- 34 One who intimidates people perceived as weaker (5)
- 35 Travelled at high velocity (4)
- 36 Oriental alternative to cutlery (10)

#### Down

- 1 Out of danger (4)
- 2 Fictional milliner created by Lewis Carroll (3,6)
- 3 Take the test again (5)
- 4 Reserved, distant (5)



- 5 Overdue (4)

- 7 Flavour (5)

- 8 Formal expression of opinion arising from a meeting, often after a vote (10)

- 9 A native of London (7)

- 13 Historic Peruvian native (4)

- 14 Easily broken (7)

- 16 Popular confectionery (10)

- 20 & 21 Papal legates (9,7)

- 22 Fragrant powder (4)

- 27 Cunning (5)

- 29 Sweet, sticky liquid (5)

- 30 Heavenly path (5)

- 31 Each of the two (4)

- 32 Organs of sight (4)

### SOLUTIONS, OCTOBER 24

#### GORDIUS No. 686

##### Across

- 1 Pod 3 Bolt upright 8 Castel Gandolfo 10 Eclat 11 Nooks 13 Hosta 15 Everest 16 Treacle 20 Scary 21 Ember 23 Petra 24 Acoustic 25 Anorak 26 Subtropical 27 Ayr

##### Down

- 1 Picket fence 2 Desolate 3 Bleat 4 Tigress 5 Radon 6 Gallon 7 Two 12 Safecracker 13 Husks 14 Array 17 Criteria 18 Malachi 19 Absorb 22 Riser 23 Panel 24 Ass

## Sudoku Corner 557

### Easy

9	6	4			8	3		
							5	
	1							2
	8		4	2	6			3
6								1
5			7	1	9		4	
3								7
	5							
		2	5			4	6	9

### Hard

		9	7					4
				9		7	2	1
	1			6	5			
7	5	3						
		8				3		
							1	8
			6	7				1
5	8	4		1				
6					3	8		

### Last week's Easy 556

6	5	8	7	4	2	3	9	1
3	1	7	9	8	5	6	4	2
9	4	2	6	3	1	5	8	7
2	3	1	5	7	8	9	6	4
7	8	4	2	6	9	1	5	3
5	6	9	3	1	4	7	2	8
4	7	5	8	9	3	2	1	6
8	2	3	1	5	6	4	7	9
1	9	6	4	2	7	8	3	5

### Last week's Hard 556

3	8	7	9	1	5	4	2	6
5	9	2	4	6	8	1	7	3
4	1	6	3	2	7	8	5	9
8	3	4	7	9	1	2	6	5
6	2	9	8	5	3	7	1	4
7	5	1	2	4	6	3	9	8
1	7	8	6	3	9	5	4	2
9	4	5	1	8	2	6	3	7
2	6	3	5	7	4	9	8	1

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



# Halloween and the worship of false gods

**Like many of you reading this,** I remember Halloween nights of my childhood with 'Trick or Treating', songs, games, apples and monkey-nuts. It all seemed innocent fun. But things have changed. Today, celebrations of Halloween have taken a darker turn that ranges from exaggerated decorations and costumes in schools to clear evidence of the rise of the occult in our culture. Online, there is a virtual subculture known as WitchTok. Content with hashtag WitchTok now has a staggering 30 billion views, consisting mostly of young people teaching their followers how to perform various magic rituals. Last week, in the French city of Toulouse, the local archbishop consecrated the city to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in advance of a street performance featuring satanic imagery that took place there over the weekend.



**Courageous**

The courageous leadership of this archbishop warns us against the danger of complacency when it comes to the powers of darkness that Christ came to conquer. And although his victory is certain and complete, there are still remnants of this darkness in our world

that the light of Christ needs to repel. This happens through us and through the Church. On the day we were baptised, we were entrusted with the light of Christ through our parents, taken from the paschal candle. This is the gift of God's life within us that either dims or gets brighter. It is the light that doesn't just repel the darkness but chases it too.

For us, this means that our Christian witness never remains the same. It's like the love between two people that is seldom static but either gets stronger or weaker. So too with the divine life within

us. It needs to be nourished and fed (with prayer and the Eucharist), healed (Confession, Anointing of the Sick) and shared (on mission). As Jesus reminds us, we are to be "light to the world", bearing his life of truth, goodness and beauty to transform lives including our own. At times this light will need to be protected and defended; at other times we need to chase the darkness by challenging falsehoods, unjust laws, facing addictions and bringing love where there is none.

For those who think this language of battle is too dramatic,

St Paul reminds us: "For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle against but the principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens" (Eph. 6:11-12). It is the spiritual world where the real battle is for it is from there that all our words and actions arise.

**Collapse**

The collapse of Christianity in Ireland and in the West in recent decades is leaving a dangerous vacuum that is not being left vacant but being filled with other forms of pagan spirituality, religion and worship. There is evidence that Ireland is 're-paganising' or reverting to the worship of false gods like it did before we accepted the Christian faith back in the 5th Century.

Ireland has experimented with paganism and superstition before. Moving away from the light of Christ and into darkness is inevitably leading to a breakdown of civilisation, the family and chaos in society in general. It leads to confusion about what is true and false, what is right and wrong and a bleaker future for our youth who are longing for hope. The way things are going, far from it

being the established order to rebel against, traditional Christian faith is becoming the last countercultural force that has the confidence and resolve to resist this slide into despair.

I conclude with recent words of Pope Francis who said: "Our secularised world is teeming with magicians, occultism, spiritism, astrologers and satanic sects. If we kick the devil out the door, he tries to return through the window. If we overcome him with faith, he seeks to return through superstition." Let's not be naïve about the presence and power of evil. May all forms of darkness, evil, deceit and worship of false gods be dispelled by the true light of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead for "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life" (John 8:12).



## A bishop in Mozambique badly needs funds to construct a parish church

Bishop Diamantino Antunes IMC of Tete in Mozambique has written to The Little Way Association to tell us of the situation in the new parish of St Martin de Porres in Mpadue. A parish church will be an immense blessing to this parish where Catholics now pray in the open air, and Bishop Diamantino earnestly hopes The Little Way can help him.

"Located in central Mozambique the population of the diocese is estimated to be 3 million, of whom 700,000 are Catholics," the bishop writes. "Evangelization began here with the arrival of Jesuit Fathers in the sixteenth century. The future parish church of St Martin is located in the surroundings of the city of Tete. The people here suffer from poor housing and much poverty, both material and spiritual. Our Catholics have to pray under trees in the parish grounds and there are many sects here which prey on the faithful, making them false promises of healing and prosperity.

"The new church will improve pastoral care and provide a proper setting for the celebration of the Eucharist, catechesis and formation meetings. The new church, when finished, will make it possible to carry out more effective religious and social work among the children, young people and the poorest, in particular.

"May Saint Therese, whose great desire was always to be childlike in her approach to God, inspire your supporters in that spirit to give generously to our appeal. I assure you that all donations will be much appreciated and will help us greatly with this project."

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*"A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul." - St Therese*

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