

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY

Nation-building requires a 'who we are' definition
Page 5



MANFRED WEBER MEP

A Europe without Christian values is without a soul
Page 18



BREDA O'BRIEN

Forgiveness is tough going but vital
Page 8



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Parishioners to take on leading funeral rites

Ruadhán Jones

Church leaders are hopeful that more and more parishioners will step up and preside at funerals to ease the burden on overworked priests, with two dioceses already commissioning laypeople to take charge where there is no priest.

More than 70 new lay leaders in Clogher and Down and Connor dioceses are undertaking training to preside over funerals in the two dioceses, with the dioceses praising participants for "stepping forward and embracing the ministry with enthusiasm, compassion and commitment".

In the coming months, the leaders will be commissioned and begin their work in parishes across the two dioceses.

"It's a very welcome development and flows from the initiative of Bishop of Clogher Larry Duffy, who sought to invite and involve more lay people in parish ministry including some liturgical ministry," Dr Gary Carville, communications officer for Clogher, told *The Irish Catholic*.

"It's very heartening that over 40 people have been nominated by their parish and volunteered to come forward for their training" which will be carried out in conjunction with the ministry teams of Down and Connor.

"What is envisaged is that it will be lay people leading the liturgy for the reception of the body at the church and the rite of committal at the graveside," Dr Carville explained.

» Continued Page 2

Blessed youth...



Fr Paul Farren offers a blessing with the relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis to one of the many young people who visited St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, to see the first class relic of the holy young man on the path to sainthood.

DAVID QUINN

The Church must be involved in Covid inquiry

PAGE 10



SR BRIEGE MCKENNA

Healthy families the answer to vocations dearth

PAGE 14-15



JOHN L. ALLEN JR

Proposed synodal secrecy could backfire

PAGE 26



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Inside this week

Books

Was Marshal Pétain a traitor to France?

Page 36-37



Brendan O'Regan

A lacklustre start for the iconic RTÉ flagship

Page 35



David Mills

The best worship isn't what you think

Page 31



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Key focus must be on sustaining faith in families

When we speak of the vocations crisis, we shouldn't speak of it in isolation from the wider crisis of faith that we are currently experiencing in Ireland and large parts of the western world.

Healthy and committed vocations only come from healthy and committed communities which can only be formed by healthy and committed families.

If, for example, only a handful of young men are active in parish life that will make for slim pickings when it comes to vocations.

If the Church's task in Ireland in the 19th and 20th Centuries was building infrastructure post Catholic Emancipation, the current and urgent task facing the Church is helping families to grow in faith and pass that faith on.

We can continue to invite priests from overseas to fill gaps in our parishes, but without an emphasis on discipleship amongst our families their labours will be in vain.

Think of the *kakure kirishitan* – the hidden Christians – in Japan who sustained their Catholic Faith for 250 years of intense persecution. They did not have the Eucharist, because they had no priests. The only sacramental grace they had was through Baptism which they administered to one another for seven generations and taught their children the Gospel in secret with the sword of martyrdom hanging over their heads.

What sustained them? Well, the fact is that the early missionaries had helped nurture strong families of faith. When persecution came and the missionaries were killed or expelled, these hidden Christians went underground and handed on the Catholic Faith during two and a half centuries of persecution – without the benefit of priests or the sacraments.

When religious freedom was restored to Japan in the mid-19th Century, one of the first missionaries was a Frenchman Fr Bernard Petitjean. The story is told that in 1865



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

Fr Petitjean was setting up a chapel in a remote village near Nagasaki, being keenly watched by some locals. He unwrapped a marble statue of Our Lady which he was going to erect in the new chapel. "Look," one local person said to another, "there is the Virgin Mary holding the Baby Jesus in her arms!" A woman then approached the missionary and said to him simply: "Our hearts are the same as yours."

To Fr Petitjean's astonishment, he discovered that there were as many as 30,000 hidden Christians in Japan who had held their Faith and longed for the day when they would once again see priests and be able to receive the Eucharist.

The strength of their lived Catholicism at home – the domestic Church – had kept the flames alive.

We are not, thank God, experiencing persecution of the Church in Ireland and while the number of priests is dwindling, we still have the Eucharist celebrated in most communities on a daily basis. We are not forced like

the Catholics of Japan to pass on the Faith without sacramental grace, but we would do well to learn the lesson that faith can be sustained even in the most difficult of circumstances if it is planted deeply.

As a Church we must help families to grow in faith, hope and love so that they can be missionaries to one another and support one another in growing strong faith communities that will, in turn, grow strong parishes.



Families attend the Festival of Families in Croke Park during the Pope's 2015 visit. Photo: CNS

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Parishioners to take on leading funeral rites

» Continued from Page 1

"This involves training and formation and ongoing mentoring and support. That is what is being provided to parishes and parish clusters and at a diocesan level."

At the heart of the new ministry lies "the call of Christ to serve the people of God," he added.

"This is ministry, this is serving, this is caring. We are very hopeful for the future," said Dr Carville.

Bishops have pledged their support to laity and parishes to develop "new ways" of preparing for and celebrating funerals. Thousands of funerals take place in the dioceses each year, placing a heavy burden on clergy at a time when vocations are dwindling. This is particularly acute

given the fact that funeral obsequies in Ireland traditionally occur quickly.

Bishop of Clogher Larry Duffy said that training, formation and ongoing support will be "absolutely necessary" to encourage more laity to take on the new ministries.

Parishes in Clogher have already established bereavement ministry teams, taking up the challenge "with great vitality", Bishop Duffy said.

In Down and Connor parishes undertook a "pilot project" over the summer of lay women and men helping families prepare for funerals and leading the prayers at gravesides or the crematorium.

Bishop Donal McKeown, apostolic administrator for

Down and Connor, predicted that "Very soon, it is also likely that in some parishes, the celebration of a Requiem Mass for every individual as part of the funeral rites may no longer be the norm" in a pastoral letter.

Many other Irish dioceses are planning to follow suit and establish, with Limerick diocese and Kildare and Leighlin making plans to provide formation to laypeople in leading communal prayer and liturgical services.

In Ireland's largest diocese, Dublin, ongoing training is already taking place for lay funeral ministers.

The move comes at a time when the Church is seeking to renew lay ministries, including those of instituted lectors, acolytes and catechists.

A happy friar in the Kingdom...



The Franciscans in Ireland celebrated the solemn profession of Bro. Philip McMahon OFM, which took place in the Franciscan Friary, Killarney on Saturday, September 17. Bro. Philip is pictured with his parents Bernard and Mary and the Minister Provincial Bro. Aidan McGrath OFM (right) after his profession.

Peace priest: 'Both communities' language in fund an oversight

Jason Osborne

A priest who has played a prominent role in peace-building efforts in the North has criticised as a "major oversight" the use of the phrase "both communities" in the announcement of the EU's 'Peace Plus' funding.

Fr Martin Magill of St John's on Falls Road said that the €1bn peace fund came as a "relief" to many organisations engaged

in peace work, but added that it came too late for many.

"There's a number of organisations concerned about the cutting back of funding and so I suppose hearing that news was actually very welcome. I suspect for some groups, it's probably come too late and some of the organisations may not have been able to continue on, but certainly for those on the ground it was welcome," Fr Magill said.

In the context of that wel-

come, Fr Magill said he regarded the use of the phrase "both communities" as a "major oversight" in the announcement of the fund, which overlooks changes in the demographics of Northern Ireland.

The sentence in question reads: "Across six different thematic areas, the Peace Plus Programme will build further upon the experiences of past programmes and will be heavily driven by grassroots organisations of both communities

and from both sides of the border."

"Northern Ireland is changing, and this idea of reducing us to two communities, Catholic-Protestant, Unionist-Republican, Nationalist-whatever, is actually hugely insensitive to people who are coming here to begin new lives, who will not identify with 'both sides' of the community, who will identify with neither," Fr McGill said.

"I think the European Union needs to take a look at their

understanding of our situation here, because our understanding of the situation is very different than it was 35 years ago."

With the number of people who are beginning new lives in the North, language like "both communities," is "unhelpful and insensitive," Fr McGill said.

The funding programme, 'Peace Plus', is designed to bolster prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

Brazilian star and world cup winner Ronaldo embraces Catholic Faith

Ruadhán Jones

Brazilian soccer star Ronaldo, nicknamed 'the Phenomenon', has been baptised at the age of 46, the retired footballer announced on Instagram.

"Today is a very special day. I was baptised," the two-time world champion wrote on social

media.

"The Christian faith has always been a fundamental part of my life, since I was little, although I had not yet been baptised. With the Sacrament I feel truly regenerated as a child of God, in a new, more conscious and deeper way," he said on his Instagram account, which has almost 30 million followers, on September

12.

In his message, Ronaldo also renewed his commitment to "follow the path of good, of my own free will, believing in the love of Jesus, in supportive love."

Ronaldo was baptised at the church of Fr Fabio de Melo in Sao Paulo in a low-key affair, witnessed by his godparents Amilcar and Malu.

Despite his successes on the soccer field, Ronaldo's life has not always been plain sailing, with hypothyroidism ending his playing days, while he has also faced relationship issues.

However, in June 2022, Ronaldo demonstrated his growing closeness to the Faith by fulfilling a promise to make the Camino de Santiago on bicycle.



A delighted Brazilian soccer star Ronaldo is pictured with his Godparents Amilcar and Malu after he received the Sacrament of Baptism.

Knock officially welcomes Capuchins to Shrine

Staff reporter

The Capuchin Friars were officially welcomed to Knock Shrine on Sunday by the Shrine Rector, Fr Richard Gibbons, with Capuchin Provincial Bro. Sean Kelly describing their new presence there as "a new chapter of our mission".

Pilgrims from all over Ireland travelled to Knock for the annual Padre Pio Retreat and Pilgrimage, with many queuing to receive a blessing from a relic of St Padre Pio's.

Speaking at Knock Shrine

as the Capuchin brothers were welcomed, Bro. Kelly said that the "Capuchin Franciscans have long been renowned for their dedication to serving the needs of others, for their compassion, and for their unwavering commitment to social justice.

"By establishing this fraternity in the blessed grounds of Knock Shrine, we are embracing a new chapter of our mission, spreading our message of love and hope to all who visit this holy place."

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Dominicans keen to share vocations' success

Jason Osborne

The Dominican Order in Ireland continues to see vocations' success as it recently welcomed two new novices and saw the first profession of three new brothers.

The Dominicans currently have 17 brothers in varying stages of formation with another man due to be ordained October 1.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, the order's vocations director Fr Colm Mannion OP said that the "Dominican tradition is very attractive for the times we're living in".

"I think a lot of young men now that want to go

for religious life, for the priesthood, they have a desire to apply themselves to learning about their faith and to look at the history of the Church, both in terms of its traditions and theology," Fr Mannion said.

"The Dominican way of life, to study and then with the goal of evangelisation, to preach the Word of God, I think that's a hunger now for young men."

They have a desire to learn about their faith with the view then to go out and share it with others, Fr Mannion told this paper.

At the same time, Fr Mannion said that they like seeing "the Church universally doing well

with vocations," and cautioned that not everyone with a vocation to religious life or priesthood is called to be a Dominican.

"Very often, people will get in contact with me about a vocation to the priesthood and sometimes I mightn't think that they're suitable for the Dominican way of life and we certainly encourage them to look at maybe diocesan priesthood or another way of life.

"So really what we want is what's best for the person, that if they're in the place where the Lord has called them to be," he said.

"We're not trying to take all the vocations and

make them Dominicans. That wouldn't be good for us and that wouldn't be good for the Church, so no, we like to see men going forward for the dioceses around Ireland and for different religious orders, too. The Church becomes more alive as the different charisms are represented through the religious orders and the different ways of priesthood.

"It's better for the Church that way," Fr Mannion finished.

If you're interested in contacting the Dominican Order about a potential vocation with them, you can email colm.mannion@dominicans.ie



Pictured (left to right) are Fr Philip Mulryne OP, Br Aidan O'Connor OP, Br John Melvin OP, Br David O'Donnell OP, Fr John Harris OP and Fr Maurice Colgan OP. Photos: Br Sean Blackwell OP



Pictured (left to right) are Br Eoin Brosnan OP, Fr Philip Mulryne OP, Fr Maurice Colgan OP, Fr John Harris OP and Br Adrian Fernandes OP.

Northern parish set to welcome newcomers with international Mass

Staff reporter

An international Mass is Aghalurcher parish's way of saying "welcome" to new parishioners from all over the world, according to parish priest Fr Jimmy McPhillips.

The parish is conscious of the fact that despite having had members of the international community attending for some time, there's a growing number to reach out to.

"I'm five years here now and we've a very good pastoral council here and it's an area we've been conscious of this last number of years,

the growing number of international people that are coming to church," Fr McPhillips told *The Irish Catholic* newspaper.

"They're with us on a regular basis during the week and especially at the weekend, and we've never made any effort, personally, to make them feel welcome or involve them in the liturgy and the different ministries, so we've been talking about it for a while and this is where the idea has come out of."

Planning to invite as many people as possible to the international Mass, Fr McPhillips said that "I'm also conscious too that of course living

here in the North, that old sectarian Catholic-Protestant thing is also breaking down and we have really a third Catholic and a third Protestant and then a third from the international community".

"Again, that's to be very welcome as far as I'm concerned, so it's another way just of including that new third in parish life," he said.

The Mass will take place Sunday, October 1 in Holy Cross Church Linskeake, followed by refreshments in the Parish Centre where an opportunity to meet and greet will extended. The parish office can be contacted for more information.

NI Parents want 'full consultation' on new sex ed regulations, polls shows

Ruadhán Jones

Six in 10 parents in the North want "full consultation" on new sexual education regulations, a new poll shows.

Seven in 10 parents also strongly oppose the idea that schools can refer children for an abortion

without their consent, according to the poll from the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC).

Asked if RSE regulations in Northern Ireland should not be changed without full public consultation, 55% agreed, including 58% of parents with non-adult children. Just one quarter

disagreed.

Michael Robinson, Executive Director of SPUC, said the survey lays bare the high level of concern about the heavy-handed approach taken by the Northern Ireland Secretary when he imposed new RSE regulations on the North last June without any prior consultation.

Some 56% of parents strongly oppose the idea that schools can refer children for an abortion without their consent, with 57% also supporting the idea that they should be allowed to withdraw their children from lessons that conflict with their moral or religious values.

Pro Life Campaign seeks future pro-life leaders

Staff reporter

The Future Leaders' Programme, an initiative of the Pro Life Campaign, is due to begin on Thursday, October 5. The course is aimed at equipping the next generation of pro-life advocates (aged 18-30) with the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to effectively articulate the pro-life message.

"This great opportunity for young people consists of a 6-week course, with one session per week. Sessions are delivered by Irish and international experts and consist of a blend of in-person and online sessions," a spokesperson for the PLC said.

It focuses on enhancing proactive and organised activism while improving personal effectiveness in communication and advocacy.

Participants have the opportunity to receive professional media training and to visit Leinster House, where they meet with politicians.

Sponsored places are available for students and young people who wish to apply. Prospective applicants are asked to apply online at www.prolifecampaign.ie/flp or email academy@prolifecampaign.ie to find out more.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Knock priests' retreats announced

Retreats for clergy will take place in Knock International Marian and Eucharistic Shrine during the months of October and November.

A retreat conducted by the Listening Heart Ministry team takes place Sunday October 1 to Thursday October 5 on the theme 'The priest as a man of God and for others'. Contact 0949388156.

Bishop of Ferns Ger Nash will lead a retreat for priests of the Second Millenium in Ballyvaloo Retreat House on Sunday October 8 to Thursday 12. To book contact 0539137160.

In November, a pre-Advent retreat will take place on Tuesday November 28 and conclude on Wednesday 29 on the theme 'The God who comes in Advent time'.

37 new recruits for Viatores Christi Ireland

Lay missionary organisation Viatores Christi Ireland recruited 37 new members in the past year, as the faith-based development organisation recovers after Covid.

At the VC's AGM, held over the weekend, CEO Shane Halpin stressed that "While it is clear that volunteering overseas generally has taken a knock as a result of Covid we are confident that solidarity for the poor and marginalised in an international context will continue to motivate volunteers.

"It may not be the same as in the past where individuals travelled for periods of years at a time, it will, however, reflect the changing needs for support emanating from our partner projects," Mr Halpin said in a statement.

Irish Vatican official on the move

One of the most senior Irish priests working at the Vatican has been moved to a new role co-ordinating the Holy See's diplomatic corps around the world.

Msgr Joseph Murphy, a priest of the Cloyne Diocese, has worked in the Vatican's Secretariat of State for many years. He was a longtime private secretary to Cardinal Angelo Sodano, effectively the Vatican's prime minister or Secretary of State under Pope John Paul II.

Most recently Msgr Murphy (55) has worked closely with Pope Francis serving as head of the protocol office at the Secretariat of State.

Pope Francis has now appointed Msgr Murphy as Under Secretary of the Section for Diplomatic Staff at the Secretariat of State.

Nation-building requires a 'who we are' definition

When former president Mary McAleese was asked – on *The Late Late Show* – about the prospects for a united Ireland, she was judicious in her reply: she would stick by the Good Friday Agreement, which stipulated that it must happen by democratic consent. But, she added, the demographics “were going in the right direction”.

Unionists

Indeed, at the last Northern Ireland census, it emerged that over 42% of people identified as Catholic and just over 37% as Protestant or other Christian. It was for long a feared prediction among unionists that Catholic/nationalists would ‘outbreed’ Protestant/unionists. In theory, it looks as though this has happened.

At the same time, things are often more complex in the detail than they appear in the outline. I favour a united Ireland but there are other factors which will also come into play. And one of these is the number of immigrants who have recently come to the Republic – and the many more who may yet arrive. (Ireland’s population increased by 387,274 between 2016 and 2022 – and immigration accounted for well over half of that increase.)

This is an issue all over Europe – the pitiful scenes at Lampedusa are witness to that – but each country has to address it in its own way.

A main concern in so many states is accommodation – there just isn’t enough available housing.

● You learn something every day, and recently I learned what ‘IRL’ stands for. I had previously identified it with the vehicle-recognition plate for Irish cars and trucks, and so it is. But it also now signifies ‘In Real Life’ in text or electronic messages. That is, when something occurs ‘in real life’, rather than online.

Very handy. Encounters ‘IRL’ are so often more rewarding than electronically.



Mary Kenny

But an aspect that the French often emphasise in their public conversation is that of cultural integration.

It’s not just necessary to provide migrants with the means for living and working: it’s imperative to ‘make them French’. This is an anxiety because there are worrying signs that France hasn’t always succeeded in cultural integration – the five million Muslims of immigrant heritage are among those most alienated, especially Algerians.

And so, looking at the contours of a future united Ireland – it won’t just be a question of integrating unionist and nationalist traditions, which is where the focus had usually been: it will also be about building a re-configured nation, in which those from very disparate backgrounds share a collective identity.

This is likely to include issues relating to religion and faith. (And the outcome can be surprising. Question: what’s the most religious

region of Britain today? Answer: London – because it contains so many people from immigrant backgrounds, who are more likely to be religious.)

A stable society needs to be built on shared ideas of values, history and culture. There also has to be some sense of a foundational narrative in a national identity.

The artist Kevin Sharkey spoke movingly, on Saturday, at a lively event sponsored by ‘Free Speech Ireland’, about growing up black in Killybegs. He found nothing but kindness, acceptance and tolerance among his Donegal community. And he perceived the foundational structure of an Irish identity among the Irish monks who had “saved civilisation” in the monastic period, often at great personal sacrifice. This was the basis of “who we are”.

A thoughtful point. A society melding north, south and migrants too must arrive at such a ‘who we are’ definition.

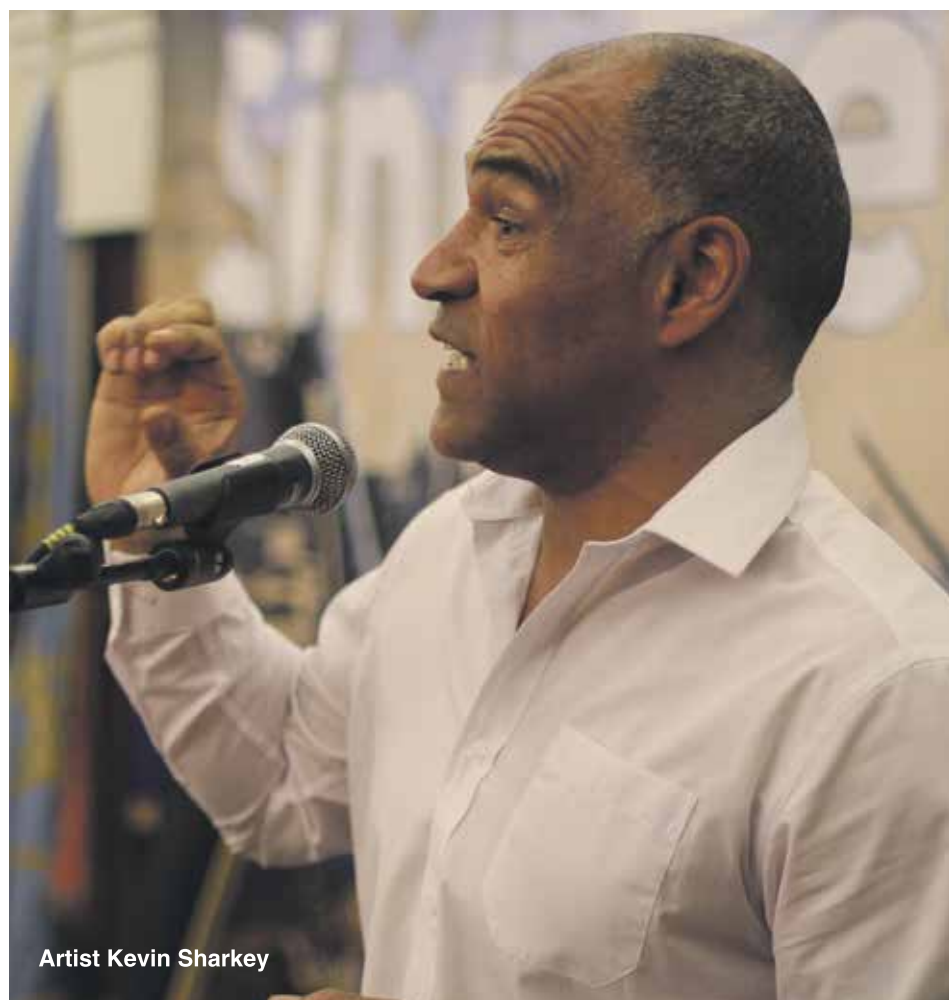
“A stable society needs to be built on shared ideas of values, history and culture. There also has to be some sense of a foundational narrative in a national identity”

Streamed Mass by Zoom is a helpful substitute for those confined to bed or to rest at home, but so much better if it can be experienced ‘IRL’.

By the way (or ‘BTW’, in textese), at St Teresa’s, Clarendon Street in Dublin, the priest now thanks, and names, the organist at the end of a Mass with music. And the congregation applaud. The organist deserves such a nice gesture of gratitude.

sometimes refer to it as “a foreign game”. If you were GAA, you had to regard rugby as alien! (There was also a class element in the rugby tradition, having originally being confined to ‘Varsity men’.)

Isn’t it terrific, now, to see that sports fans can celebrate rugby and GAA games together. I’m sure the enthusiasm and energy released by this more open approach has contributed to Ireland being, quite probably, the best rugby team in the world.



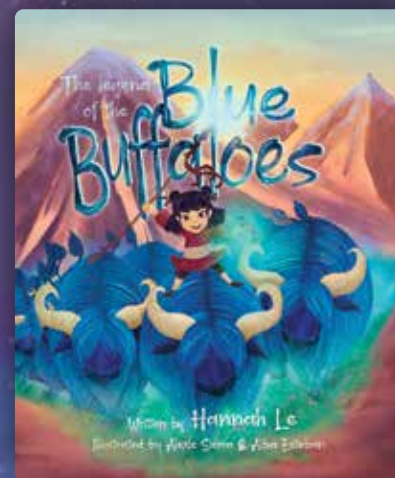
Artist Kevin Sharkey

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Igrew up next to Lansdowne Road (now called the Aviva) sports stadium. There was always a great buzz on the day of a rugby international, and lots of family friends would drop by after the match to discuss it all in great spirits, and lift a dram. I have very fond memories of those happy occasions.

But I also recall that one of my brothers, a strong GAA supporter, while being very hospitable towards the rugby fans, would still

Christian Brothers settle over 90 abuse compensation claims

Ruadhán Jones and Chai Brady

The Christian Brothers have settled over 90 claims for compensation from victims and survivors of abuse, the head of the order has said.

Bro. David Gibson wouldn't disclose the amount the congregation has paid out, and also defended the congregation's controversial approach to responding to claims of abuse in a statement.

His comments come after the freedom of Drogheda was revoked from Bro. Edmund Garvey, a former head of the

congregation, in response to criticism of the congregation's legal strategy in dealing with the issue of abuse.

Councilors in Co. Louth voted to no longer acknowledge a previous award granting the freedom of Drogheda to Bro. Garvey earlier this month.

The vote followed a campaign by a group of survivors, who were sexually abused as children by members of the Christian Brothers, opposing a legal strategy adopted when Bro. Garvey was head of the congregation which makes it more difficult for claimants to advance civil cases.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the current head

Bro. David Gibson said the congregation has "rightly acknowledged past abuses and sought to make reparation".

This has been done through State schemes, "substantial voluntary contributions to redress, special outreach and service and through individual settlements", he said.

"To date, over 90 claims for compensation have been settled," he added.

In relation to the congregation's legal strategy, Bro. Gibson said the congregation continues "to encourage those who have been abused to come forward without delay.

We fully respect the rights of all parties in litigation

to progress their case in accordance with the law and best legal practice".

However, he added, "we view mediation and non-adversarial fair agreements as the best means of achieving resolution without the stress of a court appearance".

The legal strategy of refusing to provide a nominee to act on behalf of the congregation has been strongly criticised by survivors and their legal representatives as obstructive.

In refusing to provide a nominee in civil cases, survivors of historical child sexual abuse seeking compensation from the order must sue all brothers from the time who are still alive.

WRC intervenes in Catholic college complaints case

Staff reporter

An independent investigator is to be appointed to investigate a complaints case in Mary Immaculate College (MIC), following the intervention of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), *The Irish Catholic* understands.

The WRC led a conciliation process between the parties, who agreed on the appointment of an independent investigator, a source told this paper. It is unclear how long it will take to appoint an investigator.

The case relates to three formal complaints lodged with MIC over the recruitment process for the Head of Theology role.

The recruitment process has been suspended indefinitely,

pending the result of the investigation, this paper understands.

The process went through three rounds of interviews in the past year without finding a suitable candidate, with sources suggesting that there were "substantive issues" with the process.

The investigation is likely to take some months, sources familiar with the process have said.

With a new academic year about to get underway, it appears likely that the theology department will face a second year without a head. The position became vacant in June 2022.

Staff morale is reported to be "very, very low" as a result of the failure to appoint a new head.

Archbishop Martin visits Lough Neagh as lake languishes



Archbishop Eamon Martin is pictured with Conor Jordan of the Lough Neagh Partnership and Dean Shane Forster at Lough Neagh. Photo: X

Jason Osborne

Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin visited Lough Neagh as the largest freshwater lake in Ireland succumbs to toxic blue-green algae and as the Archbishops of Armagh issued a joint call for a Lough Neagh taskforce to tackle the issue.

The algae is killing fish, birds and dogs, with concerns about public health arising too as the lough provides 40% of

the North's drinking water.

In a statement Tuesday, Archbishops Eamon Martin and John McDowell asked that "a Task Force comprised of experts and relevant agencies be formed immediately and instructed to submit a report outlining procedures and actions required to avert a disaster within a short timeframe".

"Our primary concern is that the response is too slow and is tied up in multi-agency bureaucracy. Whilst multiple stakeholders debate the remit of

responsibility, Lough Neagh and those who live near and around it suffer. There is a clear need for decisive leadership. We must identify the causes of pollution and devise an Action Plan capable of arresting the decline.

"Lough Neagh ought to be the jewel in our tourism and recreational crown and not a danger to life, flora and fauna. We will not be forgiven for our inaction or inability to come up with workable solutions," the archbishops' statement read.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bon Secours' comes to an end presence in Limerick

Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy celebrated Mass in St Pauls Nursing home to mark the final chapter of the Sisters of Bon Secours De Troyes in Limerick.

The convent closed following the death of Sr Breda McDermott on August 23. Sr Margaret Costello, from the leadership team, had accompanied Sr Breda during her final illness.

To mark the convent closing and in a spirit of thanksgiving for the life and commitment of the Bon Secours sisters to the residents and patients since 1965, Bishop Leahy celebrated Mass in the chapel on Monday September 4.

He offered prayers of thanksgiving for the life and dedication of the sisters, while the current owner of St Paul's, Ms Daveen Heyworth pledged that under her leadership the ethos and charism of the Sisters would be continued.

Ireland's Church heritage gets grant boost

The National Churches Trust has announced that the Treasure Ireland project has been awarded a grant increase of £248,200 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in support of its work on church heritage in Northern Ireland.

The boosted funding will help support places of worship to maintain, showcase and share their heritage over a three year period to 2026.

Angela Lavin, Senior Investment Manager at The National Lottery Heritage Fund said that the funding will be directed "to where it's most needed, protecting and caring for some of our most precious and fragile heritage, at the heart of communities and providing tailored advice and support".

Irish NGOs team up at Ploughing 2023

Sightsavers, Trócaire and Dóchas have teamed up together in one tent at this year's National Ploughing Championships in Co. Laois to speak to as many people as possible about the work they do in vulnerable communities across the world.

Trócaire CEO, Caoimhe de Barra said, "Trócaire are thrilled to be heading back to the Ploughing this year, and joining forces with Dóchas and Sightsavers to increase awareness on vital overseas development work.

"We have a range of exciting activities and inspiring stories to share with visitors as we mark Trócaire's 50th anniversary," Ms de Barra said.

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Breda O'Brien

The View



Forgiveness is tough going, but absolutely vital

Forgiveness is an endangered virtue in our society, which seems addicted to the cancellation of people judged to hold unacceptable views. Instead, something like Orwell's 'Two Minutes Hate' is triggered, where people foam at the mouth in anger in programmed ways.

However, something unusual happened on Twitter recently, (I refuse to call it X, which makes it sound like some kind of porn site.)

The unusual event was that one Irish celebrity issued an unasked-for apology, and even more unusually, the other celebrity accepted it.

Writer John Boyne was the one who apologised. He is well-known for the book based at the time of the Holocaust, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. He has also written a book about a transgender teenager, *My Brother's Name is Jessica*.

Past event

About five years ago, Mr Boyne wrote a piece for *The Irish Times* about why the viewpoint character is not the transgender character. It brought down a firestorm on his head, including for his defence of Martina Navratilova who had been questioning why transgender women were allowed to compete in women's sport.

In passing, he took a swipe at Graham Linehan, best known as one of the creators of *Father Ted*. Mr Boyne said that Mr Linehan, who had been critical of aspects of transgender activism, seemed at best like one of Mr Linehan's comedic creations, "while at worst he comes across as someone masking intolerance by promoting himself as a champion of women".

Mr Linehan was naturally incensed and took several retaliatory swipes at Mr Boyne.

Defence

Recently, Mr Boyne came to the defence of Róisín Murphy, the singer-songwriter, who was vilified for stating in a Facebook post, using unparliamentary language, that "Puberty blockers are...absolutely desolate. Big pharma laughing all the way to the bank. Little mixed up kids are vulnerable and need to be protected".

Predictably, social media went berserk. Ms Murphy



Author John Boyne and Graham Linehan sparred online.

“Apology accepted, obviously. I said some things in anger to John that must have made this doubly hard to write, so my particular thanks to him for looking past that. Very decent of you, John, thank you”

apologised profusely and said she would remove herself completely from any further conversation about it. The BBC music radio station '6' mysteriously removed five advertised hours of highlights from Ms Murphy's career, replacing them with rapper Little Simz. The BBC denied that the change in scheduled programming had anything to do with Ms Murphy's remarks. Some of Ms Murphy's concerts were also cancelled.

The Guardian gave Róisín Murphy's latest album, *Hit Parade*, a rave review - after several paragraphs of condemnation of her views,

and a headline which read: 'Róisín Murphy: *Hit Parade* review - a masterful album with an ugly stain'.

Support

The stain, of course, was Ms Murphy's comments on puberty blockers. Despite the alleged stain, the album is selling very well.

While many supported Ms Murphy, using the hashtag #StandwithRóisín Murphy it was sadly predictable that her apology would not be accepted and her motivation would be questioned.

That is why the exchange between Messrs Boyne and Linehan is so refreshing.

Mr Linehan had sneered at Mr Boyne's hypocrisy in defending Róisín Murphy: "Seeing John Boyne virtue signal about Róisín Murphy when he enthusiastically joined in my cancellation is quite the spectacle."

Mr Boyne went away and reflected. Instead of lashing back, he said instead:

"Graham Linehan - who is without question one of our best screenwriters - has sacrificed enormous amounts in his support of women, children, gay men, and lesbians. He's experienced trauma in his personal life, been vilified for his views online, in newspapers, and on

television. He is currently unable to work in the industry he loves.

"There is no legal reason for me to post this message - in fact, Graham will be as surprised by its appearance as anyone - but I've given a lot of thought to this and realised that all I did in that piece five years ago was add to the pile-on of a decent man in a vulnerable place, when I could have used my platform to defend and support him.

"Graham, without equivocation, without excuses, and without evasion: you were right, I was wrong, and I apologise."

Gracious

It was a gracious apology and even better, was matched by Mr Linehan, who said: "Don't know what to say. Apology accepted, obviously. I said some things in anger to John that must have made this doubly hard to write, so my particular thanks to him for looking past that. Very decent of you, John, thank you."

The online world, described by Mr Boyne as "a place where adults go to scream at each other" for once has produced a model of how to ask for and give forgiveness.

Forgiveness has been the subject of recent Sunday Mass readings. It is important not to downplay how difficult it is, and equally important not to mistake it for excusing bad or even evil behaviour.

Nonetheless, we need more sincere apologies and gracious acceptances modelled by public figures. The alternative is too frightening - more and more spirals of anger and hatred.

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Church leaders need to take part in coming Covid inquiry



We can't forget that in our lifetime, the Government actually criminalised going to Mass, writes **David Quinn**

Dr Tony Holohan became probably the most famous face in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the country's Chief Medical Officer, it was he the Government turned to in order to steer us through the crisis. He chaired the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and was on our screens nightly.

He was a reassuring presence with his calm, no-nonsense, authoritative manner. He was just what many of us wanted at that time. We felt we were in the safe hands. He was like the best kind of local GP, except this time on the national stage.

Incidents

Now Dr Holohan has a new book coming out called *We Need to Talk*. It does not deal with the pandemic alone, but also with his life story, including other incidents from his period as CMO, such as the cervical check crisis, and his marriage to Emer, who he tragically lost to cancer as the pandemic was still raging.

There is to be an inquiry into how we dealt with Covid-19 (which is still with us) in due course, and Tony Holohan's role will obviously come under close scrutiny including his rows with the Government over pandemic restrictions.

It was always obvious that Leo Varadkar felt the restrictions were going too far at times, although Dr Holohan was also under huge pressure to go even further, not least



Pews are taped off and social distancing markers are pictured at the Church of Mary Immaculate Refuge of Sinners during Mass in Dublin in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: CNS

from large sections of the media, the opposition parties, and the group of influential academics who wanted us to pursue a zero-Covid strategy, which would have been incredibly difficult to achieve, if not impossible.

The Churches ought to take a keen interest in any inquiry. They had to stop public worship for longer periods than anywhere else in Europe. Was that really necessary, and did Church leaders object strongly enough to the restrictions?

When public worship was allowed again for certain periods, with social distancing, limits on numbers who could attend, as well as other safety measures, there were no reported outbreaks of the disease.

But NPHE never seemed to take this into account. They always seemed to regard the Churches as a very soft target and restrictions could be placed on them without fuss and without pushback.

Perhaps Church leaders were aware of the age of many of their congregations and also wanted to be seen as socially responsible team players, and that is fair enough. But Church leaders in other countries were faced with the same considerations but still pushed back more strongly against restrictions they considered unfair and

unjustified. Court cases were taken, sometimes successfully.

Criminalised

In Ireland, businessman Declan Ganley tried to take a case, but could never get his day in court. Disgracefully, his hearings kept being put off until the pandemic ended and his freedom of worship plea was deemed moot.

But we seem to have forgotten that at one point you could be criminalised for attending Mass, or in the case of priests, allowing the public to do so. No other country in Europe did such a thing, and nothing like it had been seen since penal times.

In 2021, Fr PJ Hughes was fined €500 for allowing a limited number of people to attend Mass at his church in Co. Cavan. He refused to pay. If the State had pursued him and been ruthless enough, he could have ended up in prison.

The result of the pandemic and the long ban on public worship has been a big and seemingly permanent drop in Mass attendance of about one third. In America, the drop has been more like 10%.

Mass attendance was obviously trending down anyway, but Covid-19 greatly accelerated the trend. It was a disaster for the Churches, and not just the Catholic Church. (It

would be interesting to see Church of Ireland figures).

It also helped to drain parish coffers. A lot of people mistakenly believe the Church is 'rich'. It might have a lot of property, but a look at the accounts of most parishes would quickly disabuse the public of the notion that the Church is cash rich. Now the high cost of energy is putting a further big strain on resources.

During the pandemic as a whole, the key question was always about what measures were proportionate to the problem and which ones went too far, even allowing for our imperfect knowledge at the time.

In his book, Tony Holohan attacks the Government for reopening pubs and restaurants (albeit with lots of restrictions) in December 2020.

He blames this decision for the huge outbreak of Covid-19 over the following month when we had more cases per head of population than anywhere else in Europe.

NPHE wanted the hospitality sector to remain closed over Christmas, or if it opened, it was to be for a fortnight only and household visits would have to be further restricted to make up for that.

In the end, the Government decided to let pubs and restaurants reopen for a few

weeks, but not allow household mixing for a bit longer than the NPHE recommended.

“I suspect a lot of Irish people let their guard down completely over that period regardless of any Government decision because they were tired of the restrictions”

Is Dr Holohan correct that the Government decision led to disaster? We might never know. What we do know is that lots of other countries allowed pubs and restaurants to operate with safety measures in place and did not have huge outbreaks over Christmas of 2020.

I suspect a lot of Irish people let their guard down completely over that period regardless of any Government decision because they were tired of the restrictions.

But what we can see is that it was extremely hard to know exactly how to respond to the pandemic. It was judgement calls all the way. The science was never clear enough to allow absolutely clear-cut deci-

sions.

However, we do know that we kept public worship, schools and the construction industry closed for longer than anywhere else in Europe, including countries that did better than us overall in terms of Covid-related deaths. This includes the likes of Norway.

I don't think what we did to Churches and schools was justified, and in the case of schools, a lot of pupils, especially in disadvantaged areas, never came back to class. Mental health problems among young people also increased.

In addition, excess deaths in Ireland (that is, deaths above the expected norm) have been among the highest in Europe for quite a long time now, which is not due to Covid-19 as such, but in part is down to lots of medical procedures and diagnoses being missed during the pandemic with so many GP and hospital visits cancelled.

Tony Holohan's book is, naturally, a defence of his record as CMO. But it cannot be the last word. All sorts of voices need to be heard in the eventual inquiry, and that includes the Churches. Church leaders must consider taking some part in it, even if it is only via written submissions. It would be remiss of them to say nothing about restrictions that were so severe and so damaging compared with almost all other countries.








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Mission Sunday 23

“Being the Heart of God, in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon”



Luis Carlos Araújo Moraes MSC, a member of the Brazilian Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart shares his experience as a missionary working in the Amazon region.

The Amazon is the largest tropical rainforest in the world, covering 5.5 million square kilometres. It is home to a vast array of biodiversity, including a wide range of plants, animals and people. The Amazon is also a major source of timber and other natural resources. However, the Amazon is also facing a number of challenges, including deforestation, climate change and the loss of biodiversity. The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are working to address these challenges and to help the people of the Amazon to live in a more sustainable and just way.

Luis Carlos Araújo Moraes MSC is a member of the Brazilian Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. He has been working in the Amazon for over 10 years. He is currently working in the state of Pará, where he is responsible for the spiritual care of the people. He is also involved in various social and educational projects. Luis Carlos is a dedicated and passionate missionary who is committed to the service of the people of the Amazon.

Email: vocations@missionaries.ie

Half Page

Mission Sunday 22

Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Beatification of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice



The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the beatification of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice. Blessed Edmund was a member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and was beatified on October 22, 1997. He is known for his work in the Amazon and for his commitment to the people of the Amazon. The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are proud to have Blessed Edmund as one of their members and are celebrating his beatification with a number of events.

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50th anniversary of church at the heart of Dublin community

Ruadhán Jones

Members of St Fintan's parish community, Sutton, Co. Dublin, were joined by Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell as they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the church at the heart of their community.

Archbishop Farrell was principal celebrant at Mass on Sunday, September 17, joined by priests who have served in the parish over the past 50 years.

After the Mass, refreshments were served and a plaque was unveiled to the late Msgr John Fitzpatrick who served in the parish up until his retirement.



Fr Paul Hampson, Moderator of St Fintan's Church, Sutton, and Rev. Philip Heak, Church of Ireland Rector of Howth Parish.



Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell is pictured with Eamonn McKiernan, Patricia McKiernan and Stephanie Goode. Photos: John McElroy.



Audrey Dunphy and Fr Bernard Zong of St Fintan's Parish.



Edel Tyndall and Ciara O'Tiarnaigh.



After Mass marking the 50th anniversary of St Fintan's Parish Church, Sutton, members of the family of the late Msgr John Fitzpatrick, who was Parish Priest in St Fintan's for a number of years and was instrumental in the building of the pastoral centre, unveiled a plaque to his memory.



Con and Miriam Egan with Eamonn McKiernan.



Fr Cyril Mangan is pictured with Bernie Cregan, Parish Secretary St Fintan's, and Sr Jacinta, the Parish Sister.



Denise Twohig and Maureen Maher keep the teas and sandwiches rolling.



Elise (4) and Anna (2) MacDermott enjoy the parish's celebrations.



Principal of St Fintan's National School Sutton Cora Farrell joins in the celebrations with the Iaccarino brothers Conor and Liam.



Jessica and Barbara Carberry are pictured with Philip Lynch.



Susan, Deirdre and Ethel Doherty are pictured at the Mass in Sutton on Sunday.



Ray and Eileen Walsh and Frances O'Shea are pictured after Mass on Sunday, September 17.



Carmel MacCanna is pictured with Fr Enda Cunningham, who served in Sutton Parish between 1996 and 2000.

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Healing nun: Healthy families not female priests are the answer to vocations dearth



Many people nowadays see the Eucharist as a prize rather than an extraordinary gift, but it's not their fault, Sr Briege McKenna tells **Chai Brady**

Well-known healing nun Sr Briege McKenna OSC (77) is well aware that nowadays if you speak about an experience of Jesus, many people will think you are “a nut-cracker”, but that certainly does not stop her travelling the world spreading hope and proclaiming the Gospel.

Hailing from Newry, Co. Down, Sr Briege is certainly no stranger to religious life having joined the Sisters of St Clare aged 15. After three years of suffering from rheumatoid arthritis she was transferred to Florida in the hopes the change in climate would help her condition. Readers will be familiar with Sr Briege's story after that: when she was 24 years old, during Mass in Tampa, her affliction was miraculously healed.

Retreats

Since then, she has been associated with the miraculous healing of people and has travelled the world. It was in 1974 that Sr Briege felt a calling to minister to priests and did so with Fr Kevin Scallion CM for more than 42 years until he died in 2018. Sr Briege continues to give retreats with Fr Pablo Escrivá de Romani, a priest of the Archdiocese of Madrid.

Ireland's bishops are currently pushing to promote vocations to diocesan priesthood with their ‘Year for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood’ which began in April, 2023. In a landscape in which younger people are increasingly apathetic towards the Church and religion in general, the task of presenting the priesthood as a viable option is an uphill battle.

Female ordination

The Second Vatican Council and the direction it has taken the Church is a source of heated debate on a range of issues. It is clear that subsequent popes felt it was necessary to act, as



the Church and its teachings were being overshadowed by the modernity of the time.

“We press the panic button, and we think we have to ordain whoever, that women need to be priests, but I think, personally, that the reason for the shortage of priests goes back to families”

For Sr Briege, Vatican II was an answer to a Church that needed renewal and it empowered laity, but for decades her focus has been on priesthood, vocations to which “don't grow on trees” and start within the family.

She says that when gifts are given by God and are rejected “they don't go away, they die”.

“I've heard Irish mothers discouraging their sons [from joining the priesthood], if we don't want vocations then they're going to die, and we are going to suffer,” she says, adding that people are looking for solutions in the wrong places. “We press the panic button, and we think we have to ordain whoever, that women need to be priests, but I think, personally, that the reason for the shortage of priests goes back to families,” she says.

Giving examples of the surge in religious vocations of young women to the Dominicans in the US and priestly vocations in countries such

as Indonesia, she insists these can be traced back to “healthy families... families who practice their Catholic Faith”.

“Here, and in many countries, you look at Catholic countries, what happened to them? It's not surprising that there's a very big shortage of priests,” she says.

During the retreats for priests around the world which Sr Briege is involved in, she speaks about how priests get tarred with the same brush and young people are discouraged from joining the priesthood, and that this is down to a culture that has “turned away from the Faith, the Church and the priesthood – and then of course people want to put a band aid over it, they want to ordain everybody then because we need priests, but that's not going to change it”.

Motherhood

As far as she is concerned, the issue is “clearly defined”, adding that “you don't change the Church's teachings to suit culture”. Within the Church she also remarked on the work women are currently doing in motherhood and “when I go to Africa and go out into the bush and all over and I see what women accomplish in building hospitals, doctors and clinics and caring for the little children”.

She added: “Jesus founded the Catholic Church to go into the world and evangelise and I think we have to pray, pray for the synod, and we have to pray for what is motivating it. I pray a lot, I pray for the Pope and I pray for all these bishops and cardinals and I pray for the lay people

because I think the lay people do have an important role, but we all have different roles. But now men want to have babies and we want to be different, so you say to yourself ‘it's so mixed up’. The more you think you know the less you know.”

“But I do believe that there is a lot of angry voices coming forward which is not good either because then everybody else that has something to say stays quiet.”

Defeatist

Sr Briege recently led a healing service on the Hill of Slane at the ‘Light the Fire’ event which was held on August 6 to coincide with World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal. Asked about the challenge of engaging youth in the Church, Sr Briege said: “I know there is a great attack on youth, and I know that many young people have no time for the Church but we can't give up because of that. Jesus told us if you're going to follow me, you're going to have to carry the cross, you're going to be knocked – look at the suffering the Irish went through before.”

“It's very hard to have faith if you don't communicate with the Lord and that's why young people are left to the wolves because they don't pray at home”

Sr Briege insists that you can't blame the majority of young people

in Ireland for their lack of faith because there is an “absence of God in the homes, in the families” and they don't see faith in practice in a secular society.

She said: “It's very hard to have faith if you don't communicate with the Lord and that's why young people are left to the wolves because they don't pray at home and all they hear is the criticism of priests and how bad they are and all these hair-raising stories which I hear all the time in different places.”

However, the nun is quick to challenge doom and gloom about the Church's situation in Ireland, saying: “Living in America people say ‘Oh my God, what is happening to Ireland? It's terrible!’ I remember I was speaking in New York and people came up to me at a big Divine Mercy conference and they were saying ‘I'm so sorry about Ireland’, so I just looked at them and said ‘Well I've just come back from a Divine Mercy conference in Dublin with 4,000, you only have 1,000’, and they looked at me, and I said, ‘You know, it's not all bad!’”

“You have to evangelise the people we have in the Church and of course a lot of that is to do with our own way, how we live as religious and priests as well, I tell the clergy, ‘Happy priests attract people to the Church and to vocations’, I believe that myself.”

Smaller Church

Speaking about Pope Benedict XVI's concept of a smaller but more committed Church, Sr Briege said that there is an overemphasis on num-



bers, and that “people like to see a full church, but you have to evangelise the people, you have to talk to them”.

“To be religious, and to have experiences of Jesus, to talk about that, they will think you’re a nutcracker, that you are not all there”

“I meet people at the parish missions, I make it a point of sitting down and talking to the people. I pray, I give them a medal... it only takes two minutes to smile, put your hand on a person and pray, and I’ve done that for years – and the difference that can make with young people,” she said.

“I think in evangelising, we also must be approachable, we must be normal, you have to market the Gospel as something that is normal. I’ve been around such a long time and I’ve been on all types of shows and everything, and people think you’re somebody up on a broom flying through the air.

Humour

“To be religious, and to have experiences of Jesus, to talk about that, they will think you’re a nutcracker, that you are not all there. I tell people the two best gifts I have is a good sense of humour and common sense, which is very important. I love life, I enjoy community – my congregation has been very good – but you have to be able to talk,” Sr Briège insisted.

Despite fame, that does not stop

her giving retreats to 10 people as she reiterates that numbers do not matter, and the Church being in “maintenance mode” will not lead to effective evangelisation. Regarding the US context, Sr Briège said they are talking about a three-year revival for the Eucharist, “But all the brochures in the world are not going

to bring a revival, you have to get up and speak about what the Eucharist is and why the martyrs died”.

“We have to not have a defeatist attitude: ‘There’s nobody coming to church’, people will come to church and there are opportunities. We give missions here in Ireland and we get a full church, why do they come? Of

course, they know I’m known as the healing nun, but my mission is not just to talk about physical healing, it’s to evangelise them,” she said.

While having great respect for other religions, Sr Briège “is not ashamed” to speak about her Catholic Faith and says that many people don’t know the fundamentals of their own Catholicism – such as the Eucharist really is Jesus.

“I tell them ‘Talk to Jesus’. People say, ‘I don’t like to say this’, I say ‘Jesus doesn’t need to be made feel happy, he’s happy, he loves you, just tell him if you’re fed up’. And I see miracles”

“I say to young people who are in all kinds of problems, ‘go in and sit in the church and just look at the tabernacle, or go to adoration and just sit there’...” she says, adding however that “a lot of people don’t really believe in the person Jesus, body, blood, soul and divinity, that he is in our churches – the young people have no idea. Oftentimes they come up to receive Holy Communion and they don’t have an idea that this is the most extraordinary gift, to be able to receive the Eucharist. Now it’s like a prize, people don’t care what you do, you can go to Communion, all of that is part of the loss of the Faith. They just go to funerals and weddings. They

are not to blame if you don’t tell them.”

Hope

Asked what she would tell someone who has given up hope and trust in God, Sr Briège said that when approached by people who are desperate, perhaps with a physical sickness or whose children have difficult problems, she tells them that the only way to generate hope is by going to the Lord.

“I tell them ‘Talk to Jesus’. People say, ‘I don’t like to say this’, I say ‘Jesus doesn’t need to be made feel happy, he’s happy, he loves you, just tell him if you’re fed up’. And I see miracles,” she says.

“The Gospel gives hope but if we don’t preach it who’s going to? If you get half a truth, who wants half a truth? And so that is why I say to people, when they come to me and say, ‘I have no hope’, I say ‘don’t give up, Jesus will not disappoint you. There’s no promise in the Bible that is ever broken by Jesus, it’s broken by us because we don’t believe it’.

She adds: “There’s a lot of false hope that can be given, people say to me, ‘you talk about healing, but you could give false hope to people’, but I tell the priests you don’t have to defend Jesus, he feels wonderful, he can defend himself, he didn’t say go out and defend me, he said go out and proclaim the Gospel. You might not get what you’re looking for, but Jesus will never disappoint.”

Sr Briège’s books *Miracles Do Happen* and *The Power of the Sacraments* have been translated into many languages throughout the world and continue to be hugely popular.



Sr Briège McKenna

Omagh sees Derry's newest ordination

Jason Osborne

Fr Stephen Ward is Derry's newest priest following his ordination to the priesthood in Christ the King in Omagh, Co. Tyrone by Bishop McKeown, September 10.

The eldest of two children, Fr Ward was born to Patricia and the late Paul Ward, of Killyclogher, Co Tyrone.

In January, at Fr Ward's ordination to the Diaconate Bishop of Derry, Donal McKeown said "Stephen... your ministry is not merely doing a job of helping people to know Christ. Your ordained lifestyle and radical choice to be chosen by Christ – these are signs, sacraments that point to the primacy of God's actions in all of our lives. Your decision today also points to the fact that following Jesus means taking Christ on his terms, and not merely on our terms.

"Stephen, may God bless you today and bless many people through your ministry. And let many people bless you in your ministry. You need them as much as they need you."

Fr Ward has been appointed curate to Long Tower.



Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown performs the laying on of hands during the ordination of Fr Stephen Ward in the Church of Christ the King, Omagh, Co. Tyrone on September 10. Photos Stephen Latimer.

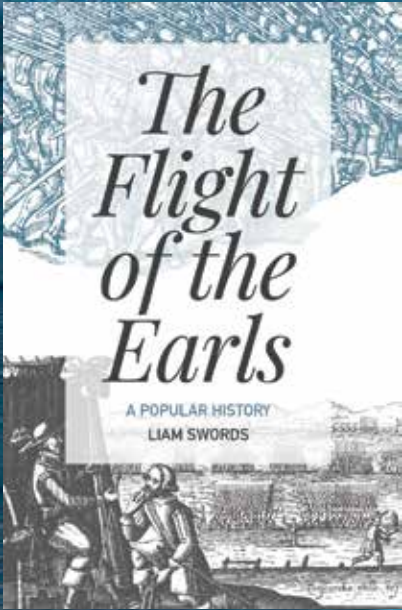


Fr Ward's family are pictured during his ordination, which was attended by a large congregation.





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A Europe without Christian values would be a Europe without a soul



Christian democracy means putting the human person at the centre of our political action writes **Manfred Weber MEP**

The world has been in crisis management mode for more than a decade: we experienced a global financial crisis and a pandemic. Now we are witnessing what it means having a bloody and ruthless war right on our doorstep. At the same time, the world is changing faster than ever with rapid technological progress yielding both opportunity and challenges. However, not everyone benefits from the progress to the same extent, with many struggling to keep up with the pace. More and more people feel lonely, abandoned and left behind in our societies. Europe must shield its citizens in difficult times of crisis and rapid changes. Times of crisis turn the focus back to the essentials. What connects us Europeans and guides us as our moral compass? As not everything can be explained with facts, only the assessment of facts creates clarity. For such an assessment, values are indispensable. It is up to us to uphold our Christian values, and keep the political idea of Europe alive - a Europe founded on our Christian democratic values.

Commitment

Christian democracy means making politics according to Christian values. Christian democracy brings people together instead of excluding them. Christian democracy is not a political dogma or an ideology. It is the effort of putting the person at the centre of our political action. As Don Sturzo and the Catholic social teaching taught us, man is not a means to an end, but an end in himself. Our commitment to freedom - to giving human beings every chance to fulfil themselves - gives us great responsibility. We are responsible for each other, for our communities. In the words of Pope John Paul II: "committing ourselves to the good of all



Pope Francis accepts a gift of a candle from Manfred Weber, head of the European People's Party at the European Parliament, during an audience with representatives of the transnational party at the Vatican in 2022. Photo: CNS

and of each individual, because we are all responsible for all." Being a Christian Democrat is about political ideas based on responsibility, personalism, freedom, subsidiarity, and pluralism. This guiding philosophy achieved more concrete policies for Europe than any other did.

“We did not build just a powerful engine of progress, but we put it at the service of our society”

Without convinced Christian Democrats, the Europe we know would not be what it is today. They built a Europe that works for the people. Six years after the end of the Second World War, De Gasperi, Schuman and Adenauer chose European integration despite all the odds. We built a Single Market that unlocked our potential from coal to cargo ships to data, we have built our success by breaking down the barriers between the peoples of Europe. We did not build just a powerful engine of progress, but we put

it at the service of our society. Our social market economy - an invention of Christian Democrats - allows us to run fast without leaving anyone behind. We have built welfare states within Europe based on solidarity and responsibility. We united Europe because it was our best hope for a future based on the values we all share - and we were successful.

Divisive

These achievements were decisively shaped by values specifically inspired by Catholic social teaching. Faithful Christians and their churches have always been advocates of overcoming social divides and resolving conflicts between countries peacefully. Especially at a time when we see more and more divisive tendencies in Europe - be it between East and West, urban and rural, young and old, globalisation winners and losers - we need value-based institutions, we need lively churches that bring people together. The next years are decisive years for European Christian democracy. We must continue to make tough choices to build a people's Europe. We must be the voice

of reason, of compassion, and of hope. We must not be afraid of secularisation. Europe's demographic landscape is changing. Nevertheless, we will continue to choose democracy over technocracy, solidarity over egoism, tolerance over hate, and hope over fear. This is the beauty of Christian democracy: building bridges where others see only divisions. When others saw only class struggles, we brought together workers, employers and artisans. When Catholics and Protestants sent children to different schools, we joined forces together - Catholics and Protestants. When the war destroyed our homes, we built a common, European house.

“Christian Democracy has never meant to be a catchall party with no identity; it means value-oriented politics that solves people's problems and leadership providing hope and vision”

This is our approach to save the political idea of Europe. Christian values hold significance for Christians themselves, but the principles they embody, such as love, compassion, and justice, are valued and embraced by individuals of various religious and philosophical backgrounds. Christian Democracy has never meant to be a catchall party with no identity; it means value-oriented politics that solves people's problems and leadership providing hope and vision. Times are changing and we must change with them. We must shape our European way of life as something to be proud of - as the distinctive character of a Europe that works for the people. By doing so, we must cherish and uphold our values. Without these Christian values, our European way of life would lose its soul; Europe would lose its soul.

i Manfred Weber MEP is a German member of the European Parliament and Chairman of the European People's Party.

Out&About

One big, Catholic family



WEXFORD: The religious Family of the Incarnate Word hosted a 'Family Day' in Bunclody on Sunday, September 3. The day was hosted by the sisters of the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara, based in Bunclody. Priests of the Institute of the Incarnate Word travelled from Clonmel and Ashbourne.



USA: Pictured during the annual Mass at the Milwaukee Irish festival in Wisconsin are (from left) US Deacons Dan Kehrer and Brent Enwright, Bishop of Madison Donald Hying, Bishop of Spokane Thomas Daly, who was Chief Celebrant, and Deacons Leonard Cleary (Cloyne Diocese, Ireland) and Scott Wiese (US).



USA: Deacon Leonard Cleary of Charleville Parish, Cloyne Diocese and Director of Tourism Development with Clare County Council blesses baby Elijah during the distribution of Communion to the 7,000 strong congregation.

INSHORT

Irish Prison Service honoured by Pieta House for promoting mental-health

The Irish Prison Service has become the first public or private employer to be awarded the prestigious Amber Flag by Pieta House for its work in promoting mental well-being.

This recognition highlights the Service's commitment to fostering mental well-being and creating a supportive environment for those engaging with it.

Pieta House's Amber Flag initiative, originally designed for educational institutions, has now expanded to honour organisations that prioritise mental health.

This year, the Irish Prison Service, through the efforts of its local committees in various locations, successfully met the criteria set forth by Pieta House to earn the Amber Flag annually.

Meath Franciscan school to get new building

Franciscan-run Gormanston College

has been given the green light for a new school building after an appeal against the decision of Meath County Council to grant permission was rejected by An Bord Pleanála.

The Board of Management applied for the construction of a two-storey, 37-classroom building with a total floor area of 10,753sqm, on the opposite side of the road to Gormanston College and Gormanston Castle.

Included in the building is a general-purpose hall, a multi-use hall, a special needs unit, library, staff rooms and

photovoltaic roof panels.

The school said that the existing school building was no longer fit for purpose.

The development also provides for three grass sports pitches, five hard surface ball courts, outdoor seating and breakout areas, a sensory garden, a tech yard, and all associated hard and soft landscaping, as well as 96 car parking spaces, among them five disabled spaces and 10 electric vehicle charge points and 360 cycle parking spaces.

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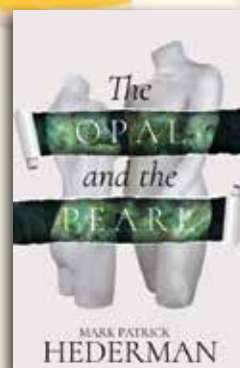
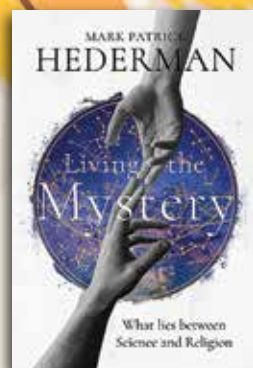
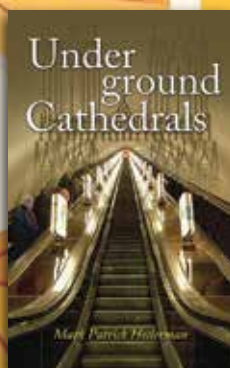
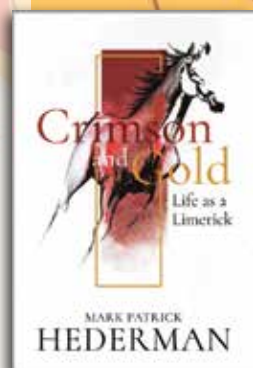
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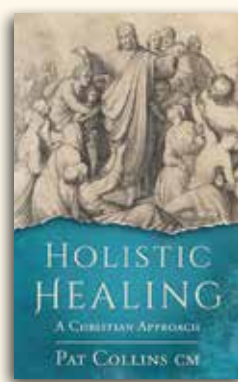
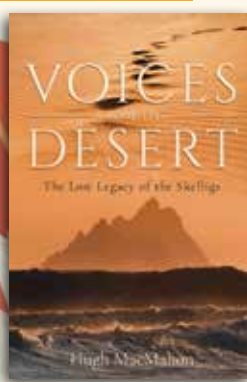
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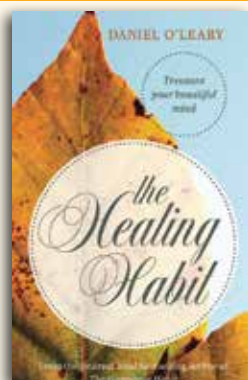
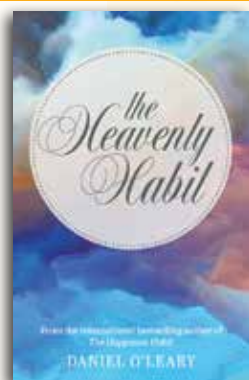
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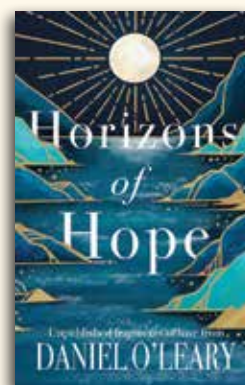
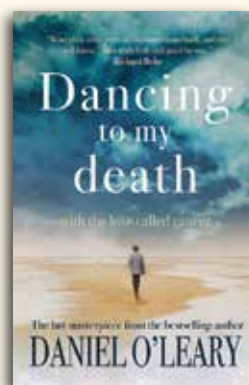
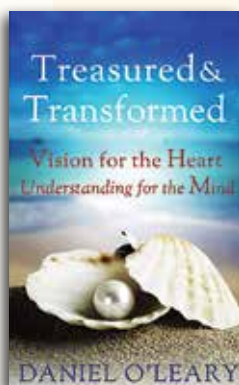
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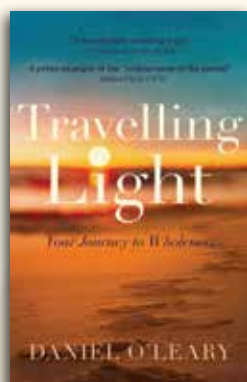
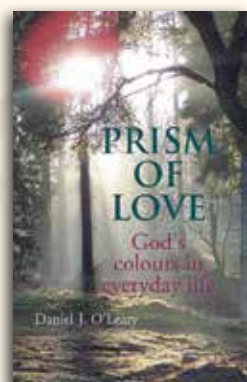
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WEXFORD: Following the election for the council of the Secular Franciscan Order (Third Order) Fraternity Wexford, the newly elected members Noel Strahan, Debbie Furlong, Terry McNamee and Stephen Bryan receive a blessing from Fr John Delaney OFM Conv.



CARLOW: Graiguecullen-Killeslin parish welcome their two newest members of the Christian community Jolanta and Dónal, whom Fr John Dunphy has been helping prepare to receive the sacraments of initiation. They were officially welcomed into the Christian community at the end of August.



DERRY: The young men and women who participated in Long Tower parish's 'God Club' for those wanting to learn more about our Catholic Faith are pictured having completed their course after a year of meeting every Saturday morning after Mass.



KERRY: Wedding anniversary celebration Mass at St Agatha's church Glenflesk recently. Photo: Seamus Healy



LAOIS: Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty launches a new campaign to find Ireland's favourite saint at the launch of this year's National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska on August 5.



ARMAGH: Parishioners gather in large numbers to say farewell to Fr Peter McAnenly who has been administrator in St Patrick's Cathedral Parish for the last 11 years



MAYO: Fr Pat Lennon is pictured celebrating the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood. He celebrated Mass with his family in Castlecourt Hotel in Westport late last month. His 50 years includes seven in Zambia and seven in Zimbabwe. Seated from left to right are: Kathleen Lennon, Bridie Reilly, Rosemarie Lennon Mellody, Fr Pat Lennon, Michael Lennon and Celine Lennon.



ANTRIM: Antrim parish celebrate Cemetery Sunday in glorious sunshine on Sunday, September 3.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



KERRY: Fr Bernard Healy, St John's Church, is pictured with couples celebrating significant anniversaries after a Mass for married couples from five to 50 years at St John's Church, Tralee, on Saturday night. Photo: John Cleary.



LOUTH: An African choir performs at the Augustinian Church in Drogheda during Sunday Mass.



BELFAST: Aontú deputy leader Gemma Brolly speaks at a rally in Belfast on Saturday, September 2, where hundreds gathered to protest against legislation that forces Catholic schools to teach about abortion.

ANTRIM

Beginning experience is offering a programme of bereavement support in St Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Ave., Belfast on three Saturdays, September 30, October 28 and November 25. Booking essential. Contact Marie at bel-fastbe@yahoo.com.

Eucharistic adoration takes place 10am-7pm every Tuesday and Thursday in St Peter's Cathedral's adoration chapel.

CAVAN

Cavan Town Mens Shed meet at rear of Cana House, Farnham St. Monday, Wednesday & Friday 10am – 1pm. New members always welcome.

CLARE

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place daily 3-7pm, with Benediction and evening prayer at 5.30pm on Sundays in the Poor Clare's oratory.

CORK

Vocations weekend October 28-29 for the Adores of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of Montmartre, Order of St Benedict. Takes place in St Benedict's Priory, Cobh. Contact cobhtyburnconvent@gmail.com.

DERRY

The Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, host a monthly talk on different elements of the faith. The talks will be led by Fr Cajetan Ikedi Apeh OCD and are open to everyone aged 18 and above. For more information call: 0044 (0)28 7126 2512 or 0044 (0)79 3312 3633. The talks are aimed at leading the participants towards personal development through meditative prayer and convivial discussions of the Church doctrines.

DONEGAL

Rosary on the coast for world peace and the protection of unborn babies takes place at Lisfannon Beach, Buncrana, on the first Sunday of every month at 3pm, and at Benone Strand on the third Sunday of every month, at 3pm.

DOWN

Lectio Divina in Newry Cathedral has restarted after the summer break and takes place in the Parish Centre on Thursday after 10:30am

Mass, usually getting underway by 11:15am.

DUBLIN

First Friday vigil devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary takes place in Morning Star Hostel, beginning with Mass at 9pm and concludes with Mass at 8am on Saturday. Contact 01 872 3401.

FERMANAGH

Holy Cross Lisnaskea to host an international Mass on October 1 at 11am. If you would like to play a role in the celebration, contact 028 677 21088.

A novena Mass to St Peregrine, patron of those who have cancer, is celebrated every Tuesday at 7pm in Holy Cross Church in Lisnaskea. It is also live streamed at Churchservices.tv/lisnaskea.

GALWAY

Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Saturday evenings from 7-8pm and on Monday evenings from 6-9pm in Galway Cathedral.

Emmanuel House Clonfert: An afternoon of reflection with guest speaker Father Chris Alar MIC, author of 'Understanding Divine Mercy' and 'After Suicide: There's Hope for Them and You' on Thursday, October 5 at 2pm. Monthly first Saturday Fatima devotions led by Eddie Stones and team in Emmanuel House Clonfert, October 7 at 11am with talks, adoration, Confession, music, Mass and healing service. Please bring a packed lunch.

KERRY

Killorglin parish to host a 'Season of Creation' event on September 30 at 11am in collaboration with the diocesan JPIC committee in the garden behind the church.

KILDARE

A Medjugorje Prayer Group meets every Monday at 7pm for 40 minutes in the Dominican Oratory, Newbridge.

KILKENNY

St John's Parish Scripture group meets in the presbytery at 7.30pm each Thursday to reflect on Scripture texts for the following Sunday's Mass.

LEITRIM

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

LIMERICK

Young adult study group takes place every second Sunday 6.30-8.30 in St Saviours Dominicans parish hall. Meetings will focus on the human person and our call to love, according to the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas and St John Paul II.

Blessing of pets for the feast of St Francis of Assisi takes place in the garden by St Lelia's Church on Wednesday, October 4, at 11am.

LOUTH

St Peter's parish youth group for people aged 13-17, meet in the family room at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Hardmans Gardens, Drogheda for fun, faith and friendship every first and third Friday of each month from 5-6.30pm. Contact Sr Jacinta MMM on 089 987 7046 or Clare 086 850 8955.

MEATH

Navan parish novena in honour of the Sacred Heart takes place Fridays in St Oliver's Church with 7.30pm Mass and devotions.

ROSCOMMON

Eucharistic adoration takes place the first Friday of each month in Drumboylan Church (Ardcarne Parish) from 9am-10pm.

TIPPERARY

A Medjugorje prayer night takes place the second Thursday of every month in Glencomeragh house, beginning with the rosary at 8pm during which Confession will be available, followed by Mass, adoration and prayers for healing.

WATERFORD

A 'Theology of the Body' study group, subtitled 'Discovering God's master plan for your life' to take place in the Foyer of Charity, Dunmore East, on Mondays at 7.30-9pm, beginning October 2. Registration essential, contact hellywilliams@gmail.com.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Chinese priest convicted for refusal to recognise state-sanctioned Church

● A Catholic priest in China was convicted of “fraud” and “impersonating religious personnel” on September 13, ChinaAid reported.

Fr Joseph Yang Xiaoming of the Wenzhou Diocese in Zhejiang, China — south of Shanghai — was found to be in violation of the law after he refused to register with the state-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA).

The court-imposed administrative penalties on Fr Yang include “the cessation of his [priestly] activities, the confiscation of illegal proceeds of 28,473.33 yuan (€3,659), and a fine of 1,526.67 yuan (€196),” UCA News reported. In May 2021, shortly after his ordination, the Longwan District Religious Affairs Office started legal proceedings against Fr Yang.

Seriously ill UK teen dies fighting mental competence ruling

● A 19-year-old UK woman with a rare disease has died during a legal fight to circumvent a ruling that she was not competent to make decisions about her care, despite her desire to go abroad for experimental treatment.

“I want to die trying to live,” the woman told a psychiatrist evaluating her. “We have to try everything.”

The woman, known anonymously as “ST” due to legal restrictions on reporting, died from cardiac

arrest late on September 12. She had been dying from a progressively degenerative mitochondrial disorder. She had hoped to travel to Canada to take part in medical trials for nucleotide therapy to help her survive.

However, legal challenges obstructed this effort. On August 25 a judge agreed with an unnamed National Health Service trust’s doctors and ruled that she was unable to make decisions for herself.

India’s govt invites Christian rights watchdog to discuss concerns

● Amid a wave of anti-Christian incidents taking place in India, the government’s National Commission for Minorities (NCM) in India has invited a national Christian network monitoring atrocities to engage in a discussion.

“We are happy that the government has called us to discuss our various concerns,” A C Michael, national coordinator of the United Christians Forum (UCF), told CNA September 14. The UCF documents atrocities and issues of discrimination against Christians.

The NCM, Mr Michael said, sent an email with the “invitation for meeting regarding issues related to [the] Christian community” on September 21 at the commission office in New Delhi.

The invitation also acknowledged that “your letter dated 21.4.2023 addressed to Hon’ble Prime Minister raising issues regarding the Christian community, which has been received in NCM from the Ministry of Minority Affairs”.

Seminar puts a face on reality of human trafficking in Latin America

● Women religious from throughout Latin America gathered in person in mid-August for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic to learn more about human trafficking, share experiences about their ministry to trafficking victims and collaborate on anti-trafficking efforts at a seminar in Guatemala City.

It was organised by the Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Religious (CLAR), which is part of worldwide anti-human-trafficking efforts by Catholic sisters, according to the Global Sisters Report.

Trafficking is a well-organised crime, from top to bottom, said Sr Verónica Cortez Méndez, a Carmelite Missionary from San José, Costa Rica.

Legal group pleads on behalf of imprisoned Bishop Álvarez

A Christian legal group has filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on behalf of Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez, who is serving a prison sentence under the regime of President Daniel Ortega for criticising the dictatorship’s human rights violations.

Bishop Álvarez, the bishop of Matagalpa, began serving a 26-year, four-month prison term in February, charged with being a “traitor to the homeland”.

The regime’s police trapped him in his chancery for more than two weeks in August 2022 and entered by force in the middle of the night to take him to Managua and hold him under house arrest.

Bishop Álvarez later refused to leave the country with 222 other political prisoners who were being deported by the dictatorship to the United States, including four priests, a deacon, and two seminarians.

The bishop’s sentence was received with great concern by Pope Francis, who compared Ortega’s Nicaragua to Nazi Germany. As far as is known, Bishop Álvarez is being held in La Modelo prison, reportedly without contact with his family or access to legal advice.

ADF International announced the filing of



Imprisoned Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez appears unexpectedly on Nicaraguan television March 24, 2023, more than six weeks after refusing to head into exile and being sentenced to 26 years behind bars. Photo: OSV News screenshot/Canal 4 Nicaragua

its petition September 14, saying there are “no effective avenues for legal recourse available in Nicaragua” under Ortega, who has effectively ruled the country as a dictator for years.

“Those concerned with basic human rights should be outraged by the crisis endured by people of faith in Nicaragua,” said Kristina Hjelkrem, legal counsel for Latin America for ADF International and lead lawyer on Bishop Álvarez’s case.

“For simply fulfilling his duties as a bishop and preaching the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church, Bishop Álvarez has been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to 26 years in

prison. This is a clear violation of not only his human right to freedom of expression but also to profess his faith and share his beliefs as a pastor. ADF International is honoured to bring this crucial case to the commission, and we look forward to securing justice for Bishop Álvarez, and hopefully, an end to religious persecution in Nicaragua. No one should be persecuted or imprisoned for sharing their faith.”

ADF says Bishop Álvarez’s charges were based on homilies he had delivered as a result of what he considered a “religious duty to preach about governmental human rights violations”. He was convicted after a trial that

he did not know was taking place, and at which he, therefore, could not testify nor cross-examine witnesses.

The IACHR is a principal and autonomous organ of the Organisation of American States, whose mission is to promote and protect human rights, according to its website. The IACHR and Inter-American Court of Human Rights have previously condemned his imprisonment and urged Nicaragua to immediately release Bishop Álvarez and to adopt the necessary measures to effectively protect his life, health, and personal integrity. Ortega’s government has so far ignored the commission.

Swiss bishops pledge action after damning abuse report

Switzerland’s Catholic bishops have vowed firm action against sexual abuse in the Church, after a pilot study identified over 1,000 victims and 500 perpetrators, as six bishops faced accusations of covering up clergy crimes.

“Too many Church leaders have acted irresponsibly for decades. They have failed to take the victims seriously and protected the perpetrators,” the nine-member bishops’ conference said September 12.

“This guilt cannot be brushed aside. It must be dealt with by attacking the mechanisms of power, the image of women and priests, and the sexual

morality of the Church.”

The Fribourg-based conference was reacting to the study, commissioned from Zurich University in 2021, which was presented September 12 in the northern Swiss city.

It said the 135-page document highlighted grave injuries caused by “personal misconduct,” but also revealed “systemic problems”. Those responsible for Church policies that led to abuse “stood on the wrong side,” the bishops added.

However, a former abuse victim told OSV News a “much stronger focus” on victims was needed, and warned that some dioceses and religious orders

remained unwilling to open their archives.

Daniel Pittet, a university librarian and author of *Father, I Forgive You*, detailing his story of childhood abuse by a Catholic priest, added that the “restorative justice” principle could offer an alternative to “complex legal and penal processes,” by enabling abuse perpetrators to reach an agreement with their victims.

Monika Dommann and Marietta Meier, researchers who conducted the research for the University of Zurich, warned September 12 that the abuse cases included in the pilot study were “only the tip of the iceberg”.

Bishops’ commission voices ‘deep concern’ over proposed EU ethics law

A commission representing the European Union’s Catholic bishops has expressed “deep concern” over a draft EU law on the use of embryos, cells and “substances of human origin,” warning it could facilitate genetic and gender interference across the bloc’s 27 member-states.

“Unequivocally, this

regulation will set the course for future discussions regarding prenatal human life ... and will raise numerous ethical and constitutional conflict issues,” the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) said in a joint statement with the German Church’s Catholic

Office in Berlin.

“(It) degrades unborn human life to a mere ‘substance of human origin,’ equating it on the same level as skin cells or blood plasma. ... Human subjects are thus subdued to be mere objects in disregard of their inherent dignity,” the statement said.

The Brussels-based commission was reacting to the European Parliament’s September 12 approval in a 483-52 vote, with 89 abstentions, of the draft law on “Quality and safety standards for substances of human origin intended for human use,” referred to by legislators as “SoHO”.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Colour in the Catholic capital...



A dance troupe from South Korea performs in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

Russian official: Papal envoy to return to Moscow after Beijing in peace efforts

After meeting with a Chinese official in Beijing to discuss paths toward peace in Ukraine and ensuring grain exports from the country, Pope Francis' special envoy is expected to return to Moscow, Russia's foreign minister said.

"The efforts of the Vatican, whose envoy is going to visit once again, are continuing," Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, said during a roundtable discussion on the war in Ukraine September 15 with diplomats representing more than 30 countries. "We are ready to meet with everyone, we are ready to talk to everyone," he added.

The minister's comments came as Cardinal Matteo

Zuppi, archbishop of Bologna, was in Beijing September 13-15 for the latest leg of a peace mission that has also taken him to Kyiv, Moscow and Washington to meet with government and Church officials on Pope Francis' behalf.

The Vatican said September 14 that the cardinal's meeting with Li Hui, China's special representative for Eurasian affairs, "was dedicated to the war in Ukraine and its dramatic consequences, underscoring the need to unite efforts to favour dialogue and find paths that may lead to peace".

"The issue of food security was also addressed, with the hope that grain exports could

soon be ensured, especially for the countries most at risk," the Vatican statement said.

Cardinal Zuppi had visited Moscow in June and met with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow; Yuri Ushakov, a Kremlin foreign policy adviser and former Russian ambassador to the United States; and Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's commissioner for children's rights, accused by the International Criminal Court of aiding the abduction and deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. The cardinal had discussed the repatriation of Ukrainian children from Russia – an initiative welcomed by the

Ukrainian government – during his meetings in Moscow as well as in his meeting with President Joe Biden in July.

Yet the Vatican's September 14 statement did not include the repatriation of Ukrainian children among the topics Cardinal Zuppi discussed with Li in Beijing.

Speaking about their meeting, Mao Ning, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, said September 13 that China "is always committed to promoting peace talks" and is "ready [to] work with all sides and continue to play a constructive role in deescalating the situation".

Despair mounts following flooding in Libya

As authorities in Libya announced a three day mourning following a deadly flood disaster, a Catholic bishop in the North African country expressed the Church's closeness to the people, many of whom are injured, missing or trapped by the storm waters.

On September 13, the authorities were estimating that over 5,100 people had died and 10,000 were reportedly missing. Some media outlets already put the death toll at 6,000.

The high number of those missing has provoked fears there will be a sharp

rise in the number of deaths from the tsunami-like storm.

"For the time being, we are praying and keeping all in God's mercy," Bishop George Bugeja, a Maltese, who is the apostolic vicar of Tripoli, told OSV News.

"I am in Tripoli (Libyan capital) and the situation here is very calm (but, the) information we have is that the storm happened in Cyrenaica (region), particularly in (the city of) Derna, where there were two dams that did not manage to hold the water and broke."

As a consequence, the bishop said,

"the water that came out with mud destroyed anything that was in its way: houses, streets".

Powerful Mediterranean Storm Daniel, including catastrophic rainfall in a short time, triggered the heavy flooding in eastern parts of the country.

As the storm pounded the coast September 10, residents said they heard loud explosions when the dams outside the city collapsed, *The Associated Press* reported.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis meets close collaborator of Rupnik

● Pope Francis had a private meeting September 15 with the theologian Maria Campatelli, a close collaborator of Fr Marko Rupnik, who was dismissed from the Jesuits in June for failing to obey the directions of his superiors.

Ms Campatelli, 61, has been the director of the Aletti Center – an art and theology school founded by Rupnik in Rome – since 2020.

In June, Ms Campatelli published a letter defending Rupnik against "a media campaign based on defamatory and unproven accusations" and claiming the Jesuits had withheld documents "which would demonstrate a truth different from that which was being published".

The Vatican did not provide any information on the meeting between Pope Francis and Campatelli other than to state it had taken place.

The Jesuits dismissed Rupnik on June 9 after the priest and artist had been accused of spiritual, psychological and sexual abuse, as well as abuse of conscience, spanning more than three decades.

Vatican allows a peek at historic palazzo in heart of Rome

● The Vatican invited journalists to a special tour of the Palace of the Chancery, a centuries-old building that the Holy See refers to as "one of the most prestigious palaces in Rome".

The Administration of the Heritage of the Apostolic See (APSA) opened the building to journalists for a special tour, according to *Vatican News*, in part in order to offer what APSA president Bishop Nunzio Galantino described as "a less commercial look at the realities that belong to the Apostolic See".

The palace was built over a roughly 25-year period at the end of the 15th Century and into the 16th. It was originally home to Cardinal Raffaele Riario,

a prelate known for having invited Michaelangelo to Rome after being impressed by the latter's artistic abilities.

Claudia Conforti, a professor of history of architecture at the University of Tor Vergata, told *Vatican News* that the palazzo is home to "some centuries of the most vivid history of Roman art, painting, and architecture".

The home was built atop ancient ruins. Prof. Conforti told *Vatican News* that the basement houses "an artificial canal that served the thermal baths of Agrippa" as well as the tomb of Aulus Irtius, "one of the commanders of the Roman army in Gaul of Julius Caesar".

Pope Francis appoints Fr Spadaro to culture and education post

● Pope Francis September 14 announced the appointment of Fr Antonio Spadaro as the undersecretary for the Dicastery for Culture and Education, a position the Jesuit priest will take after over a decade leading an influential Catholic journal in Rome.

Fr Spadaro will assume office on January 1, 2024, the Vatican said in an announcement. The priest had previously served as the editor of the Jesuit-run *La Civiltà Cattolica* for 12 years.

Fr Spadaro, known popularly as "the Pope's mouthpiece" for his regular outspoken defence of the Holy Father, had announced early that he was leaving *La Civiltà*, a decision he said came about from his "Jesuit superiors" that had been "agreed upon one year ago".

As editor, the priest has sometimes generated controversy such as with his co-authorship of a 2017 article in which the writers criticised so-called "value voters" in the United States who traffic in an "ecumenism of hate".

The Dicastery for Culture and Education was formed last year after the merger of two other departments, the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Congregation for Catholic Education.



LetterfromRome



John L. Allen Jr

As first reported by Loup Besmond of La Croix, Pope Francis apparently is considering imposing pontifical secrecy on the upcoming Synod of Bishops on synodality, not simply on opinions and votes, as was past practice, but on all issues addressed during synod discussions.

The stated aim would be to protect the frankness and honesty of those discussions. According to Mr Besmond, such a provision is currently in the draft regulations for the synod being considered by the Pope.

Assuming that report is correct, one certainly understands the underlying concern.

Consensus

If something controversial or challenging is said inside the synod and then immediately broadcast to the world, it will be swiftly fed through the sausage grinder of left v. right ideological cat fights on social media and whipped up into a cause célèbre before anyone's even had a chance to think about it, likely hardening positions and making consensus more difficult to achieve.

“On the other hand, it's reasonable to ask whether an imposition of pontifical secrecy would counteract that risk, or actually make it worse.”

Anyone who hasn't been living under a rock for the past decade must recognise that's a real fear, suggesting that a defining challenge for the synod will be to resist the danger of ideological weaponisation of its proceedings.

On the other hand, it's reasonable to ask whether an imposition of pontifical secrecy would counteract that risk, or actually make it worse.

To begin with, there's a question of optics. Pope Francis is a reforming pope, and one cornerstone of his clean-up campaign from the very beginning has been a pledge of transparency. In a 2015 session with the world's cardinals ahead of a consistory, for example, Francis called Vatican officials to a commitment to “absolute transparency” as the only way to overcome the dubious legacy of past scandals.

For the Pope to begin a summit designed to be the crowning achievement of his papacy with an imposition of secrecy, therefore, would seem in stark contract with those pledges. To put the point differently, in an effort to prevent division, he would risk stirring con-

On synod secrecy, does Pope Francis risk destroying the village in order to save it?



Bishops pray at the start of a session of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment at the Vatican in 2018. Photo: OSV News

trovery from the outset – a classic case, perhaps, of destroying the village in order to save it.

On a more practical level, there's a good argument that an imposition of pontifical secrecy just won't work.

When I first arrived in Rome more than 20 years ago, Synods of Bishops ended with a set of propositions to be submitted to the pope, each one of which was voted on by synod participants. The content of those propositions and the vote totals were covered by pontifical secrecy, and the bishops and other participants were given strict warnings not to divulge them.

“Benjamin Franklin famously said that three people can keep a secret, but only if two of them are dead”

Like clockwork, however, Italian news agencies would publish the full text of the propositions along with the vote totals immediately

after the balloting took place, in some cases just hours later.

Very little has changed over the years. During the 2018 Synod of Bishops on youth, for instance, pontifical secrecy allegedly applied to opinions expressed during synod discussions, yet news reports every day were chock full of detail on precisely the opinions voiced during the previous day's session.

Benjamin Franklin famously said that three people can keep a secret, but only if two of them are dead. In a Synod of Bishops, we're not talking about just three people but more than 400, counting not just the bishops and other participants but also aides, staff, translators, and others who for one reason or another are present in the synod hall.

Dangerous

The idea that you're going to bring such a large group of people together for almost a month and keep a lid on what's being said and done is little more than a fantasy, and one that's arguably dangerous

to indulge.

In truth, the most obvious effect of a decree of secrecy is to ensure that the narrative regarding the synod will be dominated by its most extreme voices, meaning people with agenda to push and axes to grind, who will talk about what's happening regardless of what the rule book may say.

“The bottom line is that however infallible a pope may be on matters of faith and morals, it's not within his power to prevent public disclosures about a Synod of Bishops”

The people most likely to take a secrecy requirement seriously, by way of contrast, are those moderate voices inside the synod genuinely trying to enter into its spirit and to play a constructive role. If you gag those individuals, the only voices left will be precisely the

ones whose penchant for ideological combat organisers most fear.

To be sure, these voices won't necessarily speak out loud, in full public view. Instead, they'll do it through well-timed leaks and third parties, but that will be more than enough to fill column inches, air time and social media posts with all sorts of fodder for criticism and snark. Such a dynamic would put synod spokespersons on the defensive from the beginning, struggling to counteract a poisonous narrative with both hands tied behind their backs, because, officially speaking, they wouldn't be able to offer any information to the contrary.

The bottom line is that however infallible a pope may be on matters of faith and morals, it's not within his power to prevent public disclosures about a Synod of Bishops. The only real choice is whether those disclosures will happen on his terms or someone else's, and we'll see in short order which way Pope Francis opts to go.

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

Gabon Catholic leaders hope for better conditions following coup



Fredrick Nzwili

Two weeks after the military seized power in Gabon, a Catholic priest there said ordinary people feel more secure and hopeful, even as some analysts warn of a “contagious coup pandemic” in the former French colonies in West and Central Africa.

On September 4, General Brice Oligui Nguema was sworn in as the transition president for the tiny central African country.

General Nguema seized power August 30 after overthrowing the incumbent president, Ali Bongo Ondimba, moments after an announcement that he had been re-elected. The bloodless overthrow drew wide condemnations from the international community.

The Catholic Church took note of the change, while observing with caution the evolution of the situation, according to Fr Serge-Patrick Mabickassa, coordinator of the Gabon bishops' Commission for Social Communication and Culture.

Sacredness

He stressed that “this takeover took place without bloodshed or other forms of violence. This act of the defence and security forces was and remains welcomed by the population,” Fr Mabickassa told OSV News through social media messaging. «It should be noted that this act of bravery and high responsibility on the part of the military brings back a feeling of hope and security in the public opinion.»

According to the priest, during consultations with religious leaders which General Nguema had initiated, Archbishop Jean Patrick Iba-Ba of Libreville had stressed to the authorities the sacredness of life and respect for human dignity.

Archbishop Iba-Ba, Bishop Mathieu Madega Lebouankehan of Mouila and Msgr Ruffin Ngoubou, the vicar general of the Archdiocese of Libreville, attended Mr Nguema's swearing-in, alongside other religious leaders, heads of diplomatic missions and other dignitaries.

The former president's prime minister and vice president attended the ceremony, during which the coup leaders were wildly cheered by supporters. Bongo Ondimba, who had urged the international community to make some noise for him, had remained under house arrest until September 6, when the military freed him on medical grounds.

“In faith, hope and charity, the Church follows with keen attention the evolution of the situation, while



General Brice Oligui Nguema is sworn-in as Gabon's interim president during a September 4 ceremony in Libreville, the nation's capital. Photo: OSV News/Reuters

hoping that all the active forces of the nation will show wisdom and moderation for the best interests of the nation,” said Fr Mabickassa.

Mr Nguema's rise to power ended a 55-year reign of the Bongo Ondimba's family in the majority Christian and Catholic country of more than 2.3 million people. Omar Bongo Ondima, the country's second president ruled for more than 40 years, from 1967 to 2009. When he died, his son Ali took over and ruled for 14 years, from 2009 to 2023.

The coup in Gabon is the eighth since 2020 in countries in the West and Central Africa and Sahel regions. On July 28, Abdourahmane Tchiani, the general commander of the presidential guard and a former UN peacekeeper, proclaimed himself the leader of a new military junta in Niger, after seizing power and detaining President Mohamed Bazoum. Recently, similar coups have occurred in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

The Catholic Church in Gabon

“In faith, hope and charity, the Church follows with keen attention the evolution of the situation, while hoping that all the active forces of the nation will show wisdom and moderation for the best interests of the nation”

has not issued an official statement on the coup, but African bishops – under the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar – said Gabon's recent coup is just one in a series that have marked African history since the 1960s.

Conquest

In a September 7 statement signed by Cardinal Fridolin Besungu Ambongo of Kinshasa, the bishops observed that during the post-independence period (1960s to 1980s), coups d'état were part of a dynamic of power conquest with the aim of establishing dynasties.

“Those carried out in the Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina, Niger) and in Gabon,” it said, “seem to have something in common ... according to the proponents, their aim is to put an end to the system of predation and widespread corruption instituted by deposed regimes under the guise of a democracy supposedly meant to bring prosperity to African countries.”

According to the bishops, Africa has the potential to achieve social and economic development with its mineral wealth, but the reality is that the continent faces endemic poverty, the causes of which are to be found in the system of economic colonialism.

“Thirty years on, has that model failed? What are the lessons and where are we going as Africa?”

“This raises the question whether these coup d'état are part of a new continental and global geopolitical order,” said Cardinal Ambongo in the statement, which recommended “constructive dialogue,” “mediation” and “reconciliation” to foster “understanding” and “healing” of the people.

According to Fr Innocent Halerimana Maganya, the director of the Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and Islamic Studies at Tangaza University College, the coups are a setback of the democratic process that was started in 1990 in La Baule, France, at the Franco-African summit where the late French President Francois Mitterrand announced a symbolic reduction of debt repayments to France by four African countries.

Mitterrand hosted African leaders

in a summit that resulted in a wave of multiparty democratic systems that also ended the coups.

Security

“Thirty years on, has that model failed? What are the lessons and where are we going as Africa?” asked Fr Maganya, a doctoral candidate in security and sustainable peace. He said the return of the coups of past decades indicated that something “was wrong” with the political systems. He feared that democratically elected leaders in the countries did not work for the interest of the people, giving room for the militaries' comeback.

The coups, according to the priest, told of the people's aspirations, since wild celebrations had greeted the juntas' arrival in the streets of cities and towns in Gabon and Niger.

“(There is) hope that the military camps will restore power to the people, but obviously, there is a risk of contagious (spread). People are talking about the ‘pandemic of coups’ and why is this happening in the former French colonies is the question,” said Fr Maganya.

In West Africa, Catholic bishops have been warning against any military intervention in Niger, fearing that sending troops to the country would plunge the whole region into chaos.

i Frederick Nzwili writes for OSV News from Nairobi, Kenya.

Letters

Letter of the week

Fostering respect and understanding in Jerusalem

Dear Editor, Your recent front page article [*The Irish Catholic* – September 7, 2023] highlighting Tánaiste Micheál Martin's warning to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about the harassment faced by the Christian minority in Jerusalem, has stirred my concern.

As Christians, we are called to embrace love, compassion, and solidarity with our fellow believers, regardless of their nationality or creed. It is disheartening to learn of the Christian residents and pilgrims who have endured verbal abuse, spitting, and other forms of

harassment. These acts of hostility not only violate the principles of coexistence but also tarnish the sacredness of Jerusalem, a city revered by Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike.

I wholeheartedly echo Tánaiste Micheál Martin's call for the Israeli government to preserve the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. The uniqueness and sanctity of this city should serve as a testament to peaceful coexistence among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. It is imperative that all parties involved take decisive actions to ensure the safety and dig-

nity of Christians living in this cherished land.

Furthermore, I believe that the Palestinian Authority also bears a significant responsibility in protecting the rights of Christians in the West Bank. The decline in the Christian population there is a cause for great concern, and their presence should be valued and safeguarded. We must work collectively to create an environment where Christians can flourish, practice their faith freely, and contribute positively to their communities.

In these times of increased tensions in

the Holy Land, it is crucial for leaders and individuals from all faiths to condemn acts of harassment and persecution. I commend the voices of Jewish leaders, such as Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who have spoken out against such behaviour. Together, we must stand united in denouncing intolerance and fostering an atmosphere of respect and understanding.

Yours etc.,
Matt Brady
Belarmine, Dublin 18

Church should support young Catholics

Dear Editor, It is essential to acknowledge and adapt to the evolving needs and struggles of young people. The high cost of housing, coupled with a limited supply of affordable options, has become a formidable barrier to independence for many young adults and is a huge factor in the increase in cohabitation. The Church should acknowledge and address this crisis, offering guidance and support to help them navigate these difficult circumstances in order to be relevant. Many Church-funded charities invest in helping the homeless and refugees, including with the provision of social housing. What about young Catholics who are trying to start a family and not live in squalor?

By actively engaging with issues like affordable housing and providing a moral compass in these challenging times, the Church can become more relevant. It's crucial to bridge the gap between timeless values and the contemporary challenges young people face, fostering an environment where they can find spiritual guidance and support on issues that directly impact their lives.

Yours etc.,
Jen Connolly
Mallow, Co. Cork



Great discrepancies in reports on abortion

Dear Editor, Mike Gallagher was rather dismissive of those who voted for Repeal of the Eighth Amendment without acknowledging that there was saturated coverage of the issue but only from the point of legalising abortion so we were indeed 'all brain-washed' [*The Irish Catholic* – August 31, 2023]. Practically no voice against repeal was allowed to be heard and we were bombarded with stories about those who were 'forced' to go abroad for an abortion when they were told their baby had a life-limiting condition.

Mr Gallagher is correct in stating that all media is biased to some extent but it would be difficult to find any media outlet more biased than RTÉ on the issue of abortion and other important issues. I have long since stopped watching RTÉ and have to rely on some newspapers, which, as he pointed out, are biased but, generally not to the extent that it is. I have also asked many times for factual and balanced debates here but, again, this is not happening. As

your paper often reports, there is a great discrepancy in the reporting on issues such as abortion and a great lack of questioning of those promoting abortion. Where is the coverage of the three-year review of abortion legislation? Where is the coverage of the shocking increase in abortions since legislation when we were assured it would be rare? Instead we have efforts being made to actually increase the number of abortions with the removal of the three-day wait, which has saved thousands of babies, and the continuation of women being given abortion pills without seeing a doctor.

It is so sad that our national broadcasting station has followed the 'politically correct agenda' of other countries instead of providing a balanced and robust presentation of the consequences of legalising abortion here as was evident in so many other countries.

Yours etc.,
Mary Stewart
Ardeskin, Donegal Town

Disappointing decision to revoke 'Freedom of Drogheda'

Dear Editor, The recent decision to revoke the 'Freedom of Drogheda' award from Bro. Edmund Garvey, the former head of the Christian Brothers, is disappointing. This decision, motivated by a desire to reckon with the past, raises critical questions about the principles of justice, forgiveness, and redemption.

It is essential to acknowledge the historical challenges associated with institutions

like the Christian Brothers. However, it is equally crucial to recognise individuals who have sought to reform and atone for past wrongs. Bro. Edmund Garvey, through his actions, has shown dedication to addressing the injustices and failures of the past, and he has played a role in the efforts to bring about healing and reconciliation. Of course, it is also important to acknowledge the feeling of

victims, who were unhappy with the congregation's approach to redress, however, removing an honour from someone who has worked to make amends sends a troubling message that redemption is unattainable, undermining the very principles of forgiveness and restorative justice that our faith upholds. Instead, we should encourage and support individuals who strive to

right the wrongs of the past and contribute positively to society.

I implore the authorities to reconsider this decision and to engage in a constructive dialogue that takes into account both the history and the transformative efforts of individuals like Bro. Edmund.

Yours etc.,
John Murphy
Dundalk, Co. Louth

Respecting diversity in teaching about sex

Dear Editor, The Government's proposed sex education curriculum appears to be heading down a similar path to the controversial legislation recently protested in Belfast [*The Irish Catholic* – Septem 7, 2023]. The peaceful demonstration by more than 1,000 concerned parents against the imposition of abortion education in Northern Irish secondary schools serves as a reminder of the importance of parental rights and values in education.

The call for transparent consultation

with parents before implementing any new Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) programme is not only reasonable but crucial. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, should have a say in shaping the content and approach of sex education in schools. It is their right to instil their values and beliefs in their children's education.

Parents, teachers, and schools should work together to create an environment that respects the diversity of perspectives while upholding the values that

are essential to the moral and ethical development of our youth.

As the Northern bishops rightly emphasised, there is no such thing as a neutral view on matters as sensitive as abortion. Any sex education curriculum respects the rights and beliefs of parents and allows for open dialogue that reflects the values of Catholics.

Yours etc.,
Tim O'Kelly
Galway City, Co. Galway

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

The Irish Catholic, September 21, 2023

Questions of Faith?

Do I have to accept apparitions like Fatima and follow its rules?

Page 32



How to heal after your parish merges or closes



Fewer priestly vocations. Shrinking Catholic populations. An influx of immigrants bringing with them different religious traditions. Aging Church structures that need cost-prohibitive repairs. These are just a few of the reasons parishes throughout the western world are facing mergers or closures.

Some dioceses are just closing three or four parishes at a time. Others are creating large groups of cluster parishes. The result is the same. Our Catholic people are grieving over the loss of their beloved churches. This painful grief can lead to anger, isolation, fear, bad decisions and even illness brought on by too much negativity in the body. How can we help one another face the grief of a closing parish in a way that is holy, good



It can help to have a plan of action for parish closure in these trying times, writes Susan Erschen

and healing? Here are a few suggestions.

1. Recognise the great loss

Some people will be able to respond to a parish closure or merger easier than others. We should not judge. Some of us are like mighty oaks. We put down deep roots. We live in the same house, work the same job and belong to the same parish

for years. Others of us are like wild-flowers. We are happy to go where the wind takes us. We like the thrill of a new job or a new house.

Those who can accept change easily should be sensitive to the tremendous pain a parish change can be causing for others. Since we cannot always know who is an oak or who is a wild flower, it is best for us to be kind and compassionate to everyone. When parish boundaries change, each of us

suffers some loss, even if it is just the fact that someone else has now had the audacity to sit in the pew we always thought of as ours. Some of us may be missing a better Mass time, a favourite song or the peace brought by a beloved statue that seemed to smile down upon us. Because we do not know how much others might be hurting, let us bring an extra dose of kindness with us to every Mass and parish event!

2. Be willing to live with uncertainty for awhile

One of the hard parts about grief is that many of the regular patterns of our lives will change. When we lose a person dear to us, we may not know how we will celebrate holidays or who will kiss us good-

night or watch the match with us. A grieving person must learn to live with uncertainty for a while until new traditions can be established.

It is the same for us when we form a new parish. The questions are endless. What time will the Masses be? Where will I park? What will be the name of the parish? Will we still have an autumn festival? It takes time to answer all these questions. Building a "new normal" when a loved one has died can take well over a year. And so it will also be with a new parish. All the questions will not be answered immediately. A weekly "What People Are Asking" column in the bulletin might be helpful.

Change is not easy for anyone. However, getting angry or annoyed will not help our grief. Instead, it



will take away our own peace while having little or no effect on changing the situation. Learn to look to the future with hope and joy rather than living in the past with anger. Surrender to the “I don’t know yet”.

3. Expand the charitable work done in the community

It is often true that those who are suffering from grief will be able to forget their own pain when they begin to help someone else. Therefore, rather than moaning about what we have lost, this might be a good time to start something new and good.

A parish is not meant to be our forever home. It is meant to be the place that helps us get home to heaven. And Jesus told us very clearly how it will be decided who will be united in heaven: “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me’” (Mt 25:34-36).

As members of a parish community, we are called to do more than just feed ourselves with the Eucharist. We are responsible for helping one another get to heaven by doing exactly what Jesus told us to do. We are called to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, give clothing and shelter to the needy and visit

those who are lonely. Doing any of these things will quickly help us forget our own grief and find, instead, the true joy that comes from being united in the work of the Lord. Our Lord never told us we needed to have the best bingo, the best picnic or even the most inspiring church windows. He simply told us to love and care for one another.

4. Reach out to one another

Part of the grief over the closing or merger of parishes comes from discomfort. Things are not the same. We do not know one another as we once did. There are strangers among us. This is great news! We have a chance to make new friends. A good goal would be to introduce ourselves to one new person each week. It is as easy as saying, “I don’t think we have met. I am Sue”. The more people we get to know by name, the more our parish will feel like home to all of us. Name tags at all parish events during the transition year could be a helpful way to facilitate that effort.

5. Be patient

Give people the time they need to heal. But never give up on them. Some people seem to heal quickly from loss – especially if it was expected. Others can take much longer. Everyone grieves differently.

Generally, grief can last for at least a year. Even when it seems we are doing well, a special event, holiday or anniversary can bring back all our sadness. It is especially important to be conscious of this

during the first-year celebrations of Christmas or Easter. We must recognize the different traditions people once had. One way is to incorporate favourite songs from closed parishes into our own great feast day liturgies.

6. Remember, every parish is God’s home

We tend to think of a parish as “ours”. Thus, whether the parish we call “ours” is closing or is being joined with another, we can feel a sense of loss and anger. However, a parish is not “ours”. It is not “theirs”. All parishes are God’s. So, when a group of people come together to form a parish with new boundaries, a new name or even new buildings, we must realize nothing that was ours has been taken from us. Instead, what was God’s has shifted a little.

Since all parishes belong to God, we can trust that God has a plan and it is good. He is ready to welcome all of us into this new parish. Let us not be like the invited guests in the Gospel who were too busy to come. Whether we were extremely active in our past parish or whether we did not have the time or energy to be involved before, that slate is wiped clean. We are all getting a fresh chance to be involved in a new community. We are all called and welcomed equally by God to be part of something different, yet potentially wonderful. Let us not miss that opportunity because of anger, shyness or any other emotion that might be holding us back.



The best worship isn't really what you think



David Mills

You want to start a vigorous discussion among Catholics, make a definitive statement about what 'good worship' is. Be as specific as possible. Every level of detail will double the emotional investment other Catholics will be feeling.

Arguments

Which is to say: Don't do that. It won't get you anywhere, it won't change anyone's mind, and it won't change the Church, except to make our shared life slightly worse. Making the various sides even more intransigent is the problem that arguments over worship stand in for arguments over the nature of the Church and of our life together.

Arguing about Catholic worship usually doesn't get us far and doesn't do much to renew the Church. It can do a lot to divide the Church, and certainly individual Catholics, given how angry people can get. I have been one who's made people angry and gotten angry in return.

“Public worship requires much care, much nurture: does it deserve all these pains? Why, of course, yes, and YES again”

It's a conversation we can have sometimes, but only with care and thought, the way you can blow up something like an old football stadium with a controlled explosion, but not on the spur of the moment. Still, we can do something practical to improve the Church's worship.



We can define 'good' and 'the best' in a useful way.

It does matter, of course. The answers matter and need to be thought about. In his marvellous book *Letters to a Niece*, the theologian Friedrich von Hügel explains to the young woman to whom he's giving spiritual instruction: "History teaches us quite plainly that there exists no such thing as strong and persistent religion without public worship."

Worship

And therefore "public worship requires much care, much nurture: does it deserve all these pains? Why, of course, yes, and YES again".

(The all caps "yes" is his. He must have felt strongly about this, because he was not an all caps kind of guy.)

On the other hand, not thinking about worship doesn't help. Worship can't be what it should be, Hügel says, suffering either "pure contemptuous toleration or cheery matter-of-courseness". We can't retreat from difficult subjects because just saying either "Let's just get through it" or "Who cares?" will destroy as much as angry arguments.

As someone who once eagerly argued about worship and has gotten older and less combative, I feel the attraction of being cheer-

ily matter-of-course. I want to tell other laymen to stop arguing. Just get to Mass and don't ask for better than you get.

That is the easiest answer. Just deal. It's the more mature answer, I think, speaking as an old guy, but even if it is, it's not the complete answer. We can do something ourselves. We can up our game.

“We should bring the best. But the best we can bring is our best. That's the kind of liturgical change and renewal we can effect”

People arguing about worship talk about bringing 'the best' to worship, often meaning their preferred music style but often a real reverence that's sometimes missing. We should bring the best. But the best we can bring is our best. That's the kind of liturgical change and renewal we can effect.

Concentration

What that means in practice I can only address from my own experience. My mind is wired to wander. I can't manage the complete, sustained concentration some people can, like the people sitting next to me who look straight ahead and don't move a muscle except to perform the expected gestures.

I try to bring my own best to worship by paying better attention, by keeping my thoughts in order and on target, by not looking around at the people in front of me, and by trying not to fidget. This I do, or try to do, by keeping my eyes on the crucifix, in our Church above and behind the altar, except when the priest holds up Jesus in the elements.

We're assisting at Mass, and assistants pay attention. No one wants a helper who's thinking about something else. I'm not saying I'm not assisting when my mind wanders, because I'm there and trying, but I could do better. I can bring my best, which is the me who's more focused on the Mass.

The rest of you will have your own struggles and your own answers. The lovely thing is that whatever we do will work to our own good. To go more deeply into worship, to bring your best, is to grow closer to the God we worship.



Empty words: AI homilies might sound good, but...



Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

With all the talk about ChatGPT, and Pope Francis' ongoing criticism of bad preaching, a dark question crossed my mind: What if the homilies we heard at Mass were composed by artificial intelligence? Would they be better than what the average Catholic hears in the average parish every Sunday, or somehow, even worse? Opening the ChatGPT window, I typed in my request: "Write a seven-minute Catholic homily on John 6, emphasising 'I am the Bread of Life'."

Strangely, clicking the send button made me feel like I was doing something subversive. In only a few seconds, the reflection appeared – complete with title and subheadings.

Preaching

To be honest, it wasn't bad. From a purely content point of view, it was in the B to B+ range. Unlike standard parish fare, the homily was well organised, accessible, relevant to daily life and brief.

And a little scary. While we'd all like to hear inspiring homilies at Mass, there's more to effective preaching than skill with words. As a professional writer and editor, it's hard for me to say that content isn't everything and style is even less. But as a Catholic, I'm grateful that's the case.

An experience I had in Boston some years ago clued me in to this fact. In the late 1960s, Redemptorist Fr Edward McDonough became interested in the Catholic

Charismatic Renewal and ended up holding monthly healing services at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Roxbury for more than 30 years. Known as a "healing priest," he produced local television and radio programs, and he was sought out by people with every kind of illness imaginable. Numerous healings were attributed to his ministry, but Fr McDonough was a quiet and extraordinarily humble man who never took credit for anything.

He was also one of the most boring homilists I have ever heard. It didn't matter. People flocked to Fr McDonough from all corners – even from other countries. Why? Because it was evident that God was using him as an instrument of compassion. Father always made time to pray for and with people. And people listened to him because he was a holy priest. The words he spoke weren't memorable, but his loving life of service was.

“She was recognised for the kind of gritty fidelity to Christ's call that drew her out of the classroom and into the slums”

This is not unlike St Mother Teresa of Kolkata's attraction. A Nobel laureate, no one would have ever proposed giving her a prize for public speaking. She had a few very quotable gems, but Mother wasn't known for magnetic speeches dripping with inspiration. She was recognised for the kind of gritty fidelity to Christ's call that drew her out of the classroom and into the slums. She was famous for bringing God's mercy to the poorest of the poor by choosing to share their poverty. Her life witness spoke more eloquently than words ever could.

Engaged

That was why people listened to whatever she had to say.

Artificial intelligence may draft a good sermon, one that keeps a congregation interested and engaged. The words may be well chosen and inspiring, but they will also be like the program that creates them – sufficient but empty. Real preaching is more about the person and the lived life behind the words, than the words themselves.

“The first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life”

Which is why spiritual integrity is so important.

It is impossible for any of us to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ without putting our lives behind the message, just as he himself did. Though valuable tools, computers will never be more than soulless machines. These days, Pope St Paul VI's observations have never rung truer: "The first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life," he wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (41), adding, "The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching" (76).

His words are worth remembering: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (67).

In an increasingly "virtual" world, the Church will not survive without genuine faith and authentic virtue. Facsimiles will not do. That's why I'd rather listen to a lacklustre homily offered by a true but struggling disciple than anything a lifeless silicon chip can devise.

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Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

Do I have to accept apparitions like Fatima and follow its rules?

Apparitions such as Fatima and Lourdes, along with mystical writings of various visionary saints such as St Faustina's diary, are considered "private revelations". This is as opposed to "public revelation," which is the Word of God contained in Sacred Scripture as it has been interpreted by the Church's teaching authority down through the centuries.

Ongoing public revelation via Sacred Scripture ended with the death of the last apostle. As the Second Vatican Council document *Dei Verbum* states: "... we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (No. 4).

Definitive

The Catechism of the Catholic Church acknowledges the existence of private revelations, while still noting that "they do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history" (No. 67). Or in other words, private revelations do not fall into the Church's core doctrinal teachings but are only meant to help us deepen our faith in the publicly revealed truths.

Naturally, belief in the content of public revelation is obligatory for Catholics. But since private revelations are not a part of the deposit of faith, they are essentially optional. Therefore, no Catholic is obligated to follow any of the devotional "rules" accompanying a particular private revelation or to take on any of the prayers urged by the seers of an apparition.

Of course, the Church does approve some private revelations. We see this in an especially striking way when feasts such as Our Lady of Fatima are included in our liturgical calendar. However, the fact that a private revelation is approved only means that we can assent to it with human faith – i.e., that the Church has discerned that we can safely use our human reason to conclude that it is likely a particular private revelation is genuine and of heavenly

origin. This is in contrast with the supernatural faith with which we assent to the doctrines set out in our creeds, such as Christ's resurrection or the Holy Trinity.

Visions

As one might imagine, the Church takes the approval of new purported apparitions or other forms of private revelations very seriously. Not everyone claiming to be graced with private revelations will actually be experiencing them. Since visions are usually inherently subjective, would-be seers might simply be misinterpreting something within the realm of normal human psychology with respect to imaginative religious experience. But potential fraud and even demonic involvement would also need to be ruled out.

One of the main issues investigated is the specific content of the revelations. Namely, if anything in an alleged private revelation contradicts the public revelation of Scripture or established doctrine, then it cannot be approved or accepted.

The general credibility of the visionary also is examined. The Church will investigate questions such as whether the supposed seer generally has a good grip on reality, if they have any potential ulterior motives (e.g., if they stand to benefit financially from their would-be visions, this is a negative sign), and whether they are striving for holiness in their life outside their visions.

This brings us to another important point: While approved private revelations may be truly inspiring and devoutly helpful to many of us, the humble day-to-day work of growing in holiness is far more important than enthusiasm for any particular apparition. And we already have everything needed for our Christian journey of holiness in our Scriptures, the Church's teachings, our liturgy and the sacraments.

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A single line says it all!



You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

No single line, outside of Scripture, has ever spoken to me as powerfully, as persistently, and as hauntingly, as that line from St Augustine. In essence, it's Augustine's life story – and the story of each of our own lives as well.

As I read and study, I am often struck by a powerful line in some author which I immediately underline and copy. I have a whole booklet of quotes from Shakespeare, Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, Teilhard, Einstein, Albert Camus, Steven Hawking, Doris Lessing, Milan Kundera, John Steinbeck, Karl Rahner, John of the Cross, Ruth Burrows, James Hillman, Anne Frank, and Ivan Illich, among others. Yet, Augustine's haunting line stands out among all these.

What he asserts is that there is an incurable restlessness inside each of us that keeps us perpetually dis-eased. I have always felt this strongly in my own life and, while still in my 20s, wrote a book, *The Restless Heart*, in which I tried to articulate a spirituality for the restless (and perhaps mostly for myself) on the basis of this line from Augustine. Through the years, I have kept my eyes open for comparable and complementary expressions of Augustine's famous



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

axiom. Here are some:

Karl Rahner, a renowned theologian of the late 20th Century, in writing to a friend who feared he was missing out on too much in life, offered this counsel: In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we learn that in this life there is no finished symphony.

Rhythm of nature

The biblical author, Qoheleth, expresses it this way. In a passage familiar to most of us ("there is a season for everything") he lays out for us the rhythm of nature as God set it up. He tells us there's a beautiful rhythm to time and nature and that everything has its proper time and place. However, he then ends with this stunning statement: God has made everything beautiful in its own

time, but God has put timelessness into the human heart so that we are out of sync with time and the seasons from the beginning to the end. We never peacefully fit into the rhythm of things because something inside us is outside of time.

And who can forget the haunting words of Anne Frank, writing as a teenager locked away in an attic, hiding from the Nazis, jumping out of her skin with the restlessness of an adolescent and the anxiety of an artist, sharing that she simply can never be fully in the moment because I want to be everywhere all at the same time.

Doris Lessing, the British novelist, asserts that inside each of us there's a powerful, relentless energy ('1000 volts') which keeps us perpetually dis-eased. Writing outside of a faith perspective, she

asks, what is this energy for? Her answer: For everything and for anything – creativity, love, sex, justice.

Albert Camus

Nobel prize winning writer, Albert Camus, also writing outside of any faith perspective, had this interesting way of understanding the human spirit. He compared being inside human nature to being a prisoner trapped inside a medieval prison. Medieval prisons were designed to break the prisoner's spirit by putting him in a room too small for him to ever fully stand up or to ever fully stretch out. The ceiling was too low and the room was too narrow. The intent was that eventually this would break a prisoner's spirit. For Camus, that's how we experience ourselves inside our own nature. The world is simply too small for us to ever really stand up or to ever really stretch out, and this wears away on our spirit.

These are some poignant expressions of this dis-ease, but there are expressions of it everywhere. Hinduism speaks of a

certain "nostalgia for the infinite" inside us; Plato speaks of a "divine madness" at the centre of the soul; Shakespeare speaks of our "immortal longings"; Ruth Burrows opens her autobiography by confessing that she was born with a pathological complexity which has made her life a struggle; James Hillman, in a brilliant book, *Suicide and the Soul*, submits that most suicides occur because the soul is not being heard and consequently kills the body; and Philip Roth speaks of the blizzard of details that constitute the confusion of human biography.

Instability

Literature, philosophy, poetry, art, psychology, biography, theology, and spirituality are replete with expressions of this insatiability inside the human soul which ultimately cannot come to full peace with anything in this world.

But this is as it should be. For Augustine, writing some 1,700 years ago, this restlessness, this timelessness, this homesickness, this divine madness, these 1,000 volts of energy inside us, this pathological complexity, and this confusion of human biography which keeps us perpetually restless, is at the end of the day, our greatest attribute; it's God's gift to us of immortality and divinity as a constitutive part of our soul.

“We never peacefully fit into the rhythm of things because something inside us is outside of time”

God's generosity cannot be outdone



Is 55:6-9
Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18
Phil 1:20c-24, 27a
Mt 20:1-16a

The paradox we encounter in Gospel parables is meant to open us up to a deeper understanding of who God is and who we are in relationship to God. To unpack the deeper meaning of the parable takes time, reflection and silence. We are challenged to “think outside the box” to understand the meaning of God’s word. This is particularly true of today’s Gospel parable that invites reflection on how different God’s ways are from our ways, as the prophet Isaiah reminds us in the first reading.

Unfair

On the surface, the scene in the Gospel appears unfair,

The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



come at the eleventh hour are paid the same as those who work all day. From a purely human standpoint this scenario makes little sense. And that’s when we realise something deeper is unfolding.

Jesus does offer a lesson on how to run an ethical business or payroll. In fact, the parable has nothing to do with economics. To understand we must look at

the deeper meaning of Jesus’ imagery – which his audience would have grasped.

When the crowds heard Jesus speak of a vineyard, they knew it pointed to the people of Israel. And the vineyard owner was an image for God’s generous love revealed in Jesus’ ministry of healing, preaching, and teaching. Those who worked the entire day were like the many devout, pious people of Jesus’ day. They would receive their just reward at the right time. Those who were hired at mid-day were like those who lived on the margins of society and responded

in faith to Jesus’ message. Finally, there are sinners, tax collectors, and outcasts. They are getting much more than they deserve or have worked for. They are receiving the overflowing generosity and compassion of God’s love. Because God is love.

Generosity

This parable invites us to look with the eyes of Jesus as he extends God’s mercy and generosity, especially to sinners and outcasts, to the poor and the defenceless. When we come into God’s presence, we resist the temptation to focus on our rights and our expectations.

God cannot be outdone in generosity. God is generous in a way that far surpasses our best human standards of justice and fairness. This generosity of God is highlighted in the message conveyed by the prophet Isaiah: “my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”

God is superabundantly generous in ways that go beyond human standards of fairness and justice. We often measure out compassion and love, according to spoken and unspoken rules. God’s love does not work that way. God’s love is limitless generosity, as the prophet Isaiah affirms when he invites the people of Israel to turn to the Lord for mercy, to God who is abundantly generous and forgiving.

The word of God challenges us to make generosity and compassion a way of life, rather than something done only in times of crisis and

turmoil. Scripture opens our hearts to God’s deep, generous love poured out for us on the cross of his son Jesus. Having encountered the healing power of that divine love, we let Jesus’ cross serve as the model for how we treat others.

Each one of us has been forgiven and loved immeasurably, beyond human standards or expectations. Knowing God’s generosity, I can become a channel of God’s love to others as I pray in faith, “speak to me, Lord”.

Question: How does Jesus’ parable help you understand the immensity of God’s love and mercy?

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“God cannot be outdone in generosity. God is generous in a way that far surpasses our best human standards of justice and fairness.”

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



A lacklustre start for the iconic RTÉ flagship

It's the time of year for new programmes and the return of old shows.

The most high-profile return was **The Late Late Show** (RTÉ One, Fridays). The pre-publicity was mighty, but some just said 'meh' and were bored. I'd say a huge audience tuned in just to see how the new host, Patrick Kielty, would do. Others will just catch snippets on the RTÉ Player, especially if they hear of any controversies.

Overall, I thought Mr Kielty did well but he was ill-served by the content. I liked the opening patter, where he had some topical jokes about the RTÉ crisis – e.g. he introduced the house band as Grant Thornton and the Flip Flops, and said he was glad of a show where the host got to ask the questions instead of being quizzed by an Oireachtas committee.

With the weight of expectation, I thought RTÉ would have a high-impact show to start the new season but it was lacklustre, with some pretty predictable guest recycling – having Tommy Tiernan and Hector wasn't exactly ground-breaking. What next? Patrick Kielty on Tommy Tiernan's show?

Laurita Blewitt, who co-hosts a podcast with the two lads, was more interesting and I'd like to have heard more about her work supporting the hospice



The new host of *The Late Late Show* Patrick Kielty.

movement. At one stage the host put an icon of Jesus on the table and it turned out that Mr Tiernan had purloined it from RTÉ when they were dismantling the studio used for broadcasting Mass. It was in poor taste, as was Mr Tiernan's F-word.

Next there were more comedians – 'The Two

Johnnies' – and I wasn't laughing. Comedians having a good laugh with each other isn't inherently funny. Far better was the interview with soccer player James McClean. Mr Kielty was empathic with him about the abuse he gets online and on pitch. His experience of having a child with autism was revealing,

with Mr Kielty showing he could deal well with a serious issue.

There was some rebranding, with new design and graphics, but many of the flaws of the old show were still there – competition commercialism, a great house band woefully under-used and some silly banter with audience members. One of the slogans of the new sponsor, TSB, was 'time well spent'. I'm not so sure.

The new series of **The Meaning of Life** (RTÉ One, Sundays) continues to impress. Last Sunday Joe Duffy interviewed Alice Taylor, author of Ireland's bestselling book ever – *To School Through the Fields*. She described her mother as a "fierce rosary woman", and still liked it herself. She loved prayer in general and going to Mass too. She believed in God as "divine creator" and saw in creativity "evidence of the divine". As for the abuse scandals fallout, she thought the Church deserved it and was the better for it – there had been too much corruption and triumphalism. She was strong on the need for kindness. She believed in "a wonder beyond" after death, and if she arrived at the 'pearly gates', would say to God "I'm glad to be here and I'm glad you're here". Then she'd want to meet her 'A-Team' – the loved ones that

PICK OF THE WEEK

FILM: INVICTUS

RTÉ Two Saturday September 23, 10.30pm

Nelson Mandela finds himself the leader of a racially- and economically-divided nation, and seeks a means to unite the people. Topical context of the South African rugby team.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

RTÉ One Sunday September 24, 10.30pm

Joe Duffy speaks to Nigerian-born Irish singer songwriter Tolú Makay.

LEAD KINDLY LIGHT: REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

EWTN Wednesday September 27, 9.30am

Deacon Stephen Morgan and Fr. James Bradley discuss John Henry Newman's call to the Catholic Faith and the many sacrifices he made to follow God's will.

had gone before her.

Upfront With Katie Hannon (RTÉ One, Mondays) is back too. The first episode featured a debate on RTÉ's woes (still!) and the future of broadcasting. Because I'm a media head I was interested, without getting any blinding new insights. I liked Ivan Yates' distinguishing between public sector and public service broadcasting, but the show didn't tackle inherent biases in RTÉ's coverage of news and current affairs. A lady in the audience was concerned about that and challenged RTÉ's "Covid narrative". Katie Hannon said "That's a whole other night's programme". Indeed, but will that other programme ever happen?

Sophy Ridge has moved

from her Sunday morning slot to a weeknight show, **The Politics Hub** (Sky News). She's well-informed, a good interviewer, cheerful and incisive, and she has interesting panel guests along with her main interviewees. **Sunday Morning** (Sky News) is now hosted by Trevor Phillips and I've enjoyed what I've seen so far – he's a good-humoured and respectful interviewer and gives his guests a good chance to speak, while asking challenging question as well.

Also new on the media landscape is Cúla 4, a new children's Irish language channel, and it's great to see the addition of TG4+1 – great for catching up if you've just missed a show.

Music

Pat O'Kelly



The beginning of a new season brings new treats

As the saying goes, *tempus fugit* and with the arrival of September a new season has begun for a number of musical institutions not least the National Concert Hall, National Symphony Orchestra, Irish Chamber Orchestra and Music for Galway among a plethora of others.

The NSO's 2023/24 events got under way on September 9 with principal conductor Jaime Martín in music by Brahms and Berlioz – his marvellous stand-alone *Symphonie Fantastique* – surrounding a new piece by one of our own composers – Brian Byrne's amusingly titled *The NSO's Bus Journey Through Scotland (That may or may not have happened)*. This NSO commission celebrated the orchestra's 75th birthday.

The neatly threaded nine-movement piece that the composer calls 'a light hearted tone poem' brought a number of not too over-burdened soloists – Aoife Ní Bhriain, fiddle, Jack Talty, concertina and Tim Farrelly, highland pipes with Mark Redmond, uilleann pipes, making a grand entrance through the orchestra towards the end. But for me NSO leader Elaine Clarke made her *Air* the expressive centrepiece of this imagined Scottish expedition.

Jaime Martín will be on the NSO's podium again on September 29 with another Irish piece, Gerald Barry's *Aus Die bittern Tränen der Petra von Kant*, which is actually a double bass concerto.

The soloist, Australian-born Matthew McDonald, is



Principal bass Matthew McDonald

principal bass of the Berlin Philharmonic that actually commissioned the work. Its first performance took place in Berlin's Philharmonie on June 4th 2022 indicating the regard with which Gerald Barry's music is held beyond our shores.

The programme also

includes Stravinsky's *The Firebird* in its complete version and paves the way for his *The Rite of Spring* on December 1st with Marin Alsop and *Petrushka* on May 10th 2024 under Lio Kuokman, conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic.

As might be expected, the

classical and romantic repertoires are well represented. There is a Beethoven evening on October 13th with his 5th Symphony and Mass in C having the National Symphony Chorus (NSC) joining the NSO. The composer's 7th Symphony forms part of the programme on March 22nd 2024 with Maxim Vengerov conducting.

Tchaikovsky is being acknowledged through his 6th (*Pathétique*) Symphony on January 26th with his *Rococo Variations* bringing Spanish cellist Pablo Ferrández on April 12th.

The centenary of the death of Charles Villiers Stanford is also being remembered in 2024. Born in Dublin's Herbert Street on September 30th 1857 the influential composer was

professor of music at Cambridge University from 1887.

Carol McGonnell plays his Clarinet Concerto on February 2nd while Finghin Collins brings his 2nd Piano Concerto to the NCH on February 16th and Waterford's SERU Arena the following evening. Young Dubliner Killian Farrell conducts both concerts.

As well as its involvement in Beethoven's Mass in C, the NSC joins the NSO for Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* on November 24th; Fauré's *Requiem* on January 8th; Mahler's 2nd Symphony (*Resurrection*) on February 9th; Bach's *St Matthew Passion* on Good Friday, March 29th and concludes the season on May 31st with Verdi's *Requiem* under the baton of Jaime Martín. For further information see www.nch.ie.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Disciples in a synodal Church? Part II



Jesus conversing with his disciples, 19th Century painting by J. J. Tissot

Thomas O'Loughlin

This week we continue the exploration we began in the first part of this essay, published in the last issue.

Disputes and churches

If it were not for the conflicts in the Aegean churches we might never have had the genuine letters of Paul. There were disputes about practices and unwillingness to welcome one another as equals (I Cor.) but also about what was to be believed and expected (I Thess).

We know of arguments between Jewish followers of Jesus and gentile followers, about both circumcision and sharing resources. It was the abuses by 'apostles and prophets' of hospitality and support that generated the first Church regulations within, and they coined the term 'christmonger' for ministers greedy for money: there were 'clergy on the

make' within a few decades of the crucifixion and several centuries before 'clergy' emerged!

Far from holding all in common, the wealthy kept their slaves, and did not like practices that challenged the social status quo.

The first followers were as challenged as we are by the Word, but they tried. Far from being plaster-cast saints, it was their willingness to keep at it in a culture which did not understand them and perceived them as fools and odd-bods that was their claim to being 'among the saints' (Eph. 5:3).

Looking towards the fulfilment

Graeco-Roman civilisation looked back to 'a golden age' since when things had been going downhill. Back then was 'the age of the heroes' and it was described with nostalgia. The Jews looked to the future: the coming of the Son of Man. The heavenly banquet when people will

be gathered from north, south, east and west is the destination towards which we journey.

This has a direct implication for our thinking about the Church. We do not imagine that there was a happy time back then which we seek to recreate, but we, confident in God's help, ask what should we become – if we are to bear witness to what we have seen in the life and teaching of the Word made flesh.

“We shall not see their like! But in making the first followers a group on a higher plane than us, we are disempowered”

We are not engaged in a restoration project, the vision offered to us in the Gospel is not yet. We look forward as the pilgrim Church to hearing: “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit

the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:34-6).

False expectations

Luke's device of imagining a perfect past as a blueprint – a technique he borrowed from Greek history writing – is powerful rhetorically because it engages the human propensity for a nostalgic: ‘we shall not see their like!’ But in making the first followers a group on a higher plane than us, we are disempowered.

Our sense is that it was easy for them: they belonged to the ‘age of the saints,’ ‘the springtime’ – but we are lesser beings! Inherent in this is a lack of faith that God loves each of us and that our moment is as beloved of the Creator who holds it in being, and as challenging to us as those

called to witness as in the first days. The times have changed, the call to follow and witness – and all the difficulties – are the same. Those early Aegean churches and our churches today are one in hearing: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe’ (Jn 20:29).

Members/disciples

Another element distinguishes the pilgrim people walking forward from the *societas perfecta* presenting itself triumphantly to the world: discipleship. Until the 1930s most mainstream churches were united in thinking of belonging as identification and acceptance of specific beliefs.

The matter of identification was seen in churches' desires to be recognised within legal frameworks: ideally, establishment, but at least giving bishops a say on education or 'social policy.' It was seen as significant if a country could be described as 'a Catholic country' which meant more than a majority of

Catholics in the population.

Likewise, individual belonging was presented as assent to certain propositions. The churches held out 'truths to be accepted' (the *credenda*) and you were a member of a particular church, if you accepted them. They were a list of boxes to be ticked. Then came movements like Nazism. Identification and assent were no longer enough – as was recognised by theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). One had to become a disciple.

The disciple – more an 'apprentice' than a 'student' – knows that one does not just talk the talk, but walk the walk. That is the walk of the pilgrim. Discipleship costs.

Or as our formal memory (Mk 10:38) presents the desire of disciples looking towards their destination: “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptised with the Baptism that I am baptised with?” (Concluded)

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.

Judging Marshal Pétain: was he a traitor to France?

France on trial: The case of Marshal Pétain, by Julian Jackson (Allan Lane, £25.00/€29.50)

Felix M. Larkin

Marshal Philippe Pétain, head of the collaborationist Vichy regime in France during World War II, was put on trial for treason at the end of the war in 1945. It was essentially a show trial, ordered by the provisional government newly installed in Paris under Charles de Gaulle.

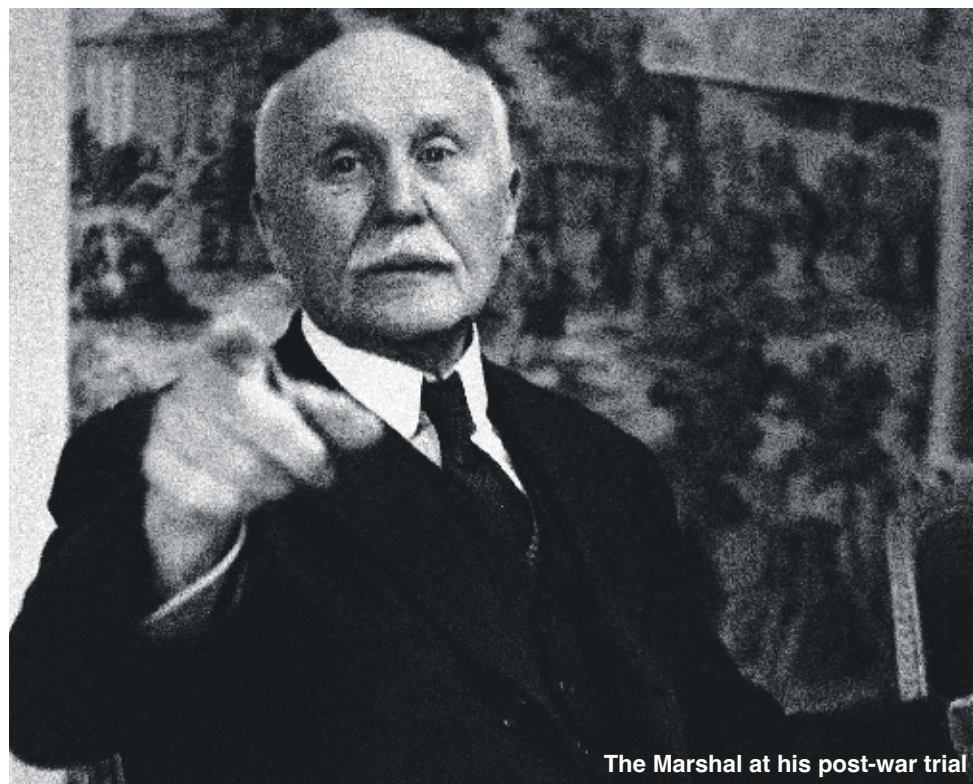
The outcome was preordained: Pétain was found guilty and condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He spent the rest of his days in prison on the tiny island of Île d'Yeu, some 20 kilometres off the coast of Brittany. He died there in 1951, aged 95. His grave is still there, to this day a place of pilgrimage for his surviving admirers.

This excellent book – by Julian Jackson, emeritus professor of history at Queen Mary University of London and author of an acclaimed biography of de Gaulle – revisits Pétain's trial in forensic detail and, by extension, the history of the Vichy regime. Prof. Jackson's verdict is that Pétain was indeed guilty, but so too was France – hence the title of his book, *France on trial*.

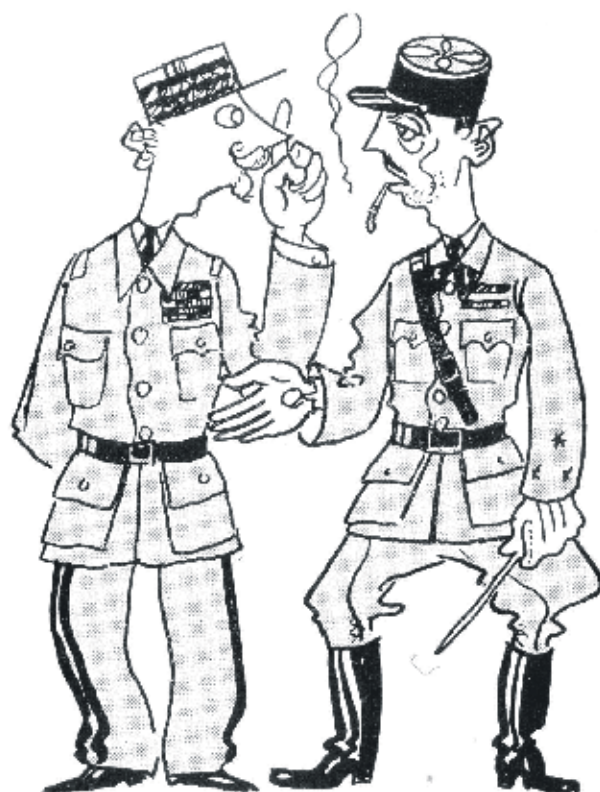
Revered

A French hero, revered as the victor of the Battle of Verdun in 1916, Pétain had been a severe critic of the ineffectiveness of successive French governments in the interwar years. In particular, he held them responsible for France's lack of preparedness for war in 1939.

Aged 84, he joined the government when Germany attacked France in May 1940. He became prime minister in June 1940, after which France signed an armistice with Germany. That gave Germany control over the north and west of France, including Paris and the Atlantic coastline, but left the rest unoccupied – albeit subject to Germany's suzerainty. The seat of government in the unoccupied area was the town of Vichy, and Pétain immediately assumed near-dictatorial powers as “Head of State”. The French colonies



The Marshal at his post-war trial



“Undoubtedly, mon général, the Marshal's policy is right, but it's very expensive. Each time French honour is saved, another colony is lost.”

A wartime British cartoon published in the *Daily Express* in 1941, satirising the view of an officer in defeated French army view of the Vichy government in discussion with his general (Osbert Lancaster, *New Pocket Cartoons*; London, 1942).

in Africa were left under the control of the Vichy government.

Pétain and his apologists would defend his actions by

claiming that he negotiated the best deal possible with the Germans after the fall of France in 1940, and that as a result the German treat-

ment of France was relatively benign compared with, for example, their treatment of Poland, Belgium and Holland under occupation. However, any initial advantages that may have flowed from collaboration had evaporated by 1943. His defence looked hollow in 1945.

“The Vichy regime would never itself have initiated a policy to murder Jews. Vichy's antisemitism was exclusionary, not exterminatory”

Vichy's treatment of the French Jews is today the most common ground for condemning the regime; not so in 1945. The fate of the Jews was a peripheral matter in Pétain's trial. Unlike in the Nuremberg trials later on, the prosecution avoided reference to “crimes against humanity”.

Prof. Jackson opines that “the Vichy regime would never itself have initiated a policy to murder Jews. Vichy's antisemitism was exclusionary, not exterminatory.” Thus, by October 1940 Vichy was enacting laws excluding Jews from participation in many social and professional activities – but,

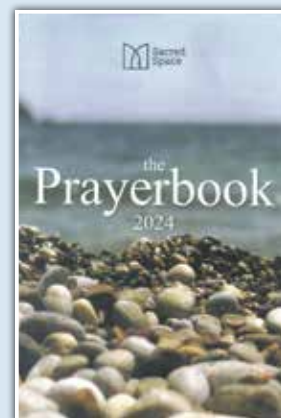
Recent books in brief

Sacred Space: The Prayerbook

(Messenger Publications, €14.95/£12.95)

A sure sign that the year is beginning to draw to an end is the early appearance of *Sacred Space: The Prayerbook*, the manual derived from the astonishing, globally popular online prayer site. This book has been appearing for many years and is always a sure-fire option for many as a Christmas present if such a thing can be mentioned at the moment with the children only just back in class, and the colleges only warming up, but in good time for the opening of the new liturgical year on the first Sunday in December.

The material in the book derives from the website, and provides reading material for every day. There is the Scripture reading, points of reflection, as well as a weekly topic, all intended to facilitate the readers' conversations with God. Long recognised as a good thing, it is well worth buying.



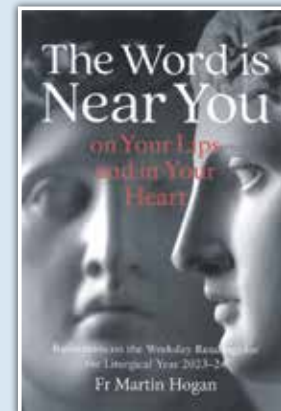
The Word is Near You: on your lips and in Your Heart: Reflections on the Weekday Readings for the Liturgical Year 2023-24,

by Fr Martin Hogan (Messenger Publications, €19.95/£18.95)

Fr Hogan is presently a curate in Finglas West, and so on a daily basis is faced with the trials of life in a modern urban society. He knows what ‘real life’ is like. His emphasis is on what we can find for ourselves in the scriptures, particularly the Gospel, “that the Word of God resides deep with those open to receive it when we listen to it, we are listening to the Lord speaking to us from deep within our heart”.

Unlike the book above, this is not a collection of the readings, but a commentary on them. By supposing the readers are already in possession of the texts, he uses all his space to explicate them.

But he is very concise in what he writes. He tries always to be to the point, there is no often confusing information overload. By getting his readers to concentrate their attention on the actual words of Jesus himself in the gospels he avoids all those other issues of who is telling us all this. For Fr Hogan it is not the commentator, but the man of destiny himself.



yielding to German pressure, the Vichy government was facilitating the arrest and deportation of Jews in the occupied area from the summer of 1942 onwards.

Doubt

There can be little doubt that Pétain felt the actions he took in 1940 and afterwards were in the overall interests of the French nation. France had been defeated, and in 1940 Germany appeared to be winning the war – so it was not unreasonable to seek terms for peace.

Far from betraying the French people, Pétain seems to have had the support of the majority of them – and especially of the French establishment, including, be it noted, the Catholic Church. [Place cartoon around here if possible] It is for this reason that Jackson views Pétain's trial as France's trial also. While focusing blame on Pétain and his associates

in the Vichy government, France was judging its own past.

Of Pétain's associates, Pierre Laval – prime minister briefly in 1940 after Pétain became “Head of State”, and again from 1942 until the fall of the Vichy regime – was the most enthusiastically pro-German. His reappointment as prime minister in 1942 was at the insistence of the Germans and it inaugurated a period of much deeper collaboration than theretofore.

He too was tried for treason, found guilty and sentenced to death. Unlike Pétain, he was executed – though only after a failed suicide attempt.

Prof. Jackson reveals in his book that Laval was offered the chance to move to Ireland at the end of the war and that the Irish government had agreed to take him. Inexplicably, he turned the offer down.

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HEAVEN'S MESSAGE

IRELAND is mentioned in 17th June message to Luz de Maria de Bonilla. Also Marian Basilica in 7th Aug message. Fr José Mariá Rojas, her spiritual director since 2009. www.revelacionesmarianas.com/english

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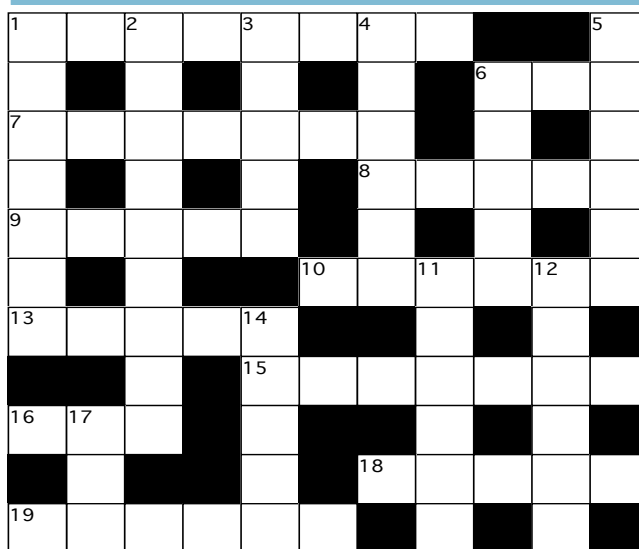
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Crossword Junior

Gordius 50



Across

- 1 This animal helps a shepherd (8)
- 6 A golfer is advised to try to hit this score at a hole (3)
- 7 The USA is the United States of _____ (7)
- 8 Sometimes, you need to change a baby's _____ (5)
- 9 A bar of precious metal (5)
- 10 Underground place for storing things (6)
- 13 They're at the ends of your arms (5)
- 15 A painting or photograph (7)
- 16 Secret agent (3)
- 18 Special table in a church (5)
- 19 A fight between armies (6)

Down

- 1 Coming from Madrid or Malaga, perhaps (7)
- 2 Please let me through quickly - this is an _____! (9)
- 3 You put it on with a brush (5)
- 4 Citrus fruit (6)
- 5 The Our Father or Hail Mary, perhaps (6)
- 6 Schoolchild (5)
- 11 Small (6)
- 12 Out of the country (6)
- 14 Let something pour out accidentally (5)
- 17 Vegetable which grows in a pod (3)

SOLUTIONS, SEPTEMBER 14

GORDIUS NO. 628

Across - 1 Tim 3 Cardiograph 8 Cantor 9 Sergeant 10 Fifth 11 Trial 13 Handy 15 Needles 16 Habitat 20 Aloft 21 Swell 23 Screw 24 Beauvais 25 Museum 26 Water sprite 27 Nun

Down - 1 Tactfulness 2 Man of the cloth 4 Distant 5 Gigot 6 Aramis 7 Hut 12 Little Women 13 Hyena 14 Yeast 17 Thirteen 18 Coarser 19 Repast 22 Lover 23 Sauce 24 Bow

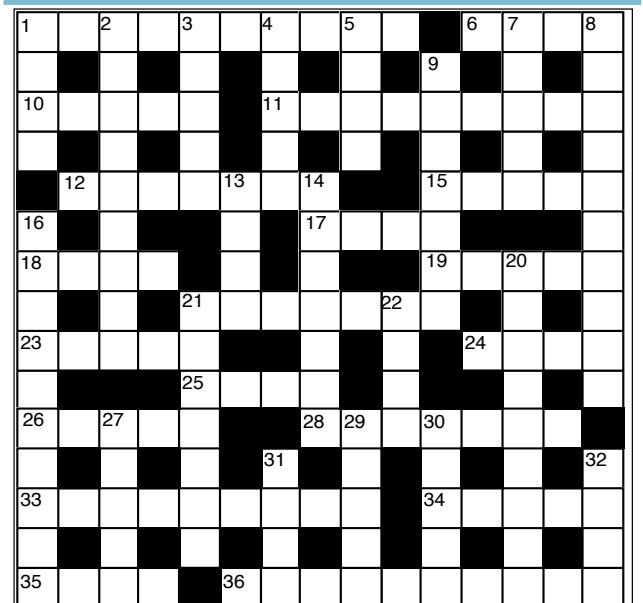
CHILDREN'S No. 500

Across - 1 Five hundred 6 Ring tone 7 Ape 9 Hammers 12 Talk 14 Elevator 16 Earth 19 Hyena 21 Lava 22 Sleet 23 Slept

Down - 1 Furniture 2 Vandal 3 Hutch 4 Dream 5 Eager 8 Pest 10 Amen 11 Servant 13 Kettle 15 Any 17 All 18 Hat 19 Has 20 Ewe

Crossword

Gordius 628



Across

- 1 Pharmaceutical products in mini coated form (10)
- 6 Stay until someone or something shows up (4)
- 10 Tool used by turners (5)
- 11 City in Australia that hosted the 1956 Summer Olympics (9)
- 12 Tread on in a crushing way (7)
- 15 Fabric associated with Donegal and Scotland (5)
- 17 Seaweed that is part of Japanese cuisine (4)
- 18 Regrets (4)
- 19 Roughage or material (5)
- 21 Piece of foliage, the symbol of Derry (3,4)
- 23 Exercised one's franchise (5)
- 24 See 4 down
- 25 A sign of tiredness or boredom (4)
- 26 Efts (5)
- 28 Cul-de-sac (4,3)
- 33 What the 'I' stands for in the police ranks DCI and DI (9)
- 34 Fire, conflagration (5)
- 35 Smaller or fewer (4)
- 36 Scientific procedure to test a hypothesis (10)

Down

- 1 Dairy product (4)
- 2 Cleaning fluid or powder (9)
- 3 Ointment (5)
- 4 & 24 Chennai is in this state in the south-east of India (5,4)
- 5 Sole, solitary (4)
- 7 Consent, concur (5)
- 8 The first of the twins created by Lewis Carroll (10)
- 9 Pope (7)
- 13 Great cat, or Argentine Rugby player (4)
- 14 The largest traditional country in the island of Great Britain (7)
- 16 Senior figure in one geographical part of a religious order (10)
- 20 Inspirational idea (9)
- 21 Epic poem by Homer (7)
- 22 Danish band best known for the song 'Barbie Girl' (4)
- 27 Striped insects (5)
- 29 Eagle's nest (5)
- 30 City in the UAE, site of the world's tallest man-made structure (5)
- 31 River in the Greek Underworld (4)
- 32 Retained (4)

Sudoku Corner

501

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 500

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

Last week's Hard 500

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

Notebook

Donal McMahon



To you glory and praise for evermore...

It's strange but in all my years of reading at Mass I had never read the psalm for Trinity Sunday (Year A) until this year, on June 4. In case the choir wasn't there to sing it, I studied it at home. I saw immediately how different it was from the usual format. It wasn't from the Book of Psalms at all, in fact, but from the book of Daniel (3.52-56): 'The Song of the Three Young Men' rescued from the fiery furnace by "an angel of the Lord". Instead of the psalm's usual three or four stanzas with the response at the end of each, the song had just twelve lines, six for reader and six for congregation. A mis-salette, of course, would have made everything clear. "Today's psalm," I ended up saying as guidance for the congregation, "is made up of lines that alternate, reader first, then the congregation with the response".

"You are blest, Lord God of our fathers," I began. "To you glory and praise for evermore," they replied.

"We certainly have wholehearted praise of God in this song, the God of the Old Testament and the God of the Jewish people today"



Anton Chekhov

"Blest your glorious holy name", "To you glory and praise for evermore". And so it went on, a kind of momentum or crescendo building up all the time. By the end, we were carried away by the sheer rapturousness of the language, the repeated ringing out of our praise

of God.

I did the reading as genuinely and as expressively as I could (and as it called for) but I couldn't help asking myself afterwards what was I saying and how much my heart was really in it.

Wholehearted

We certainly have wholehearted praise of God in this song, the God of the Old Testament and the God of the Jewish people today. From the three young men in the Babylonian east, my mind moves on in time to the three wise men, also from the east,

kneeling in worship of the infant Jesus, the Son of God, Redeemer and Light of the World whose glory we proclaim at the Sanctus as we join in the angels' "unending hymn of praise".

Then I think of a third group of three nearer our own time whose words I first heard many decades ago in a theatre in London. Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* come to the front of the stage at the end of the play and utter the piercing cry: "If only we knew why we live, why we suffer! If only we knew!" No peal of praise here, only yearning for a meaning to life, and hope

that it will be revealed one day.

Desperate

The young men, it seems, know and praise God the Father, the wise men his Son, the sisters...are desperate to know. Faith believes and hopes in God and in his will or providence always being there for still-journeying, ever-faltering man. But faith, by its very nature, lacks knowledge – it is 'searching for understanding' in St Anselm's words (*fides quaerens intellectum*). What the sisters need – and what I see I, too, need after that 'song' – is to see something in our world today that would move us to wholehearted praise of the Creator the way those young and wise men of old were moved. How fully and freely then would the whole of mankind sing with one voice: "to you glory and praise for evermore"!

Engaging in Faith...

The big questions raised by the three fictional sisters in 1901 were to be those that a young Frenchman, in formation that year with the Jesuits, was to spend his whole life grappling with as a priest and scientist. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was caught up in the great events (e.g. serving as a stretcher-bearer in World War I) and intellectual movements of the twentieth century. Restricted by the Church authorities to writing on scientific subjects, his religious writings were only published after his death. The mere titles show the range and depth of his thought, e.g. *How May We Conceive and Hope that Human Unanimisation Will be Realised on Earth?* (1950). Always exploratory and tentative, his writing is a vivid and highly-engaging example of faith still (and ever more urgently with the passage of time) seeking understanding, still seeking knowledge of Jesus and the precise nature of the saving Good News that he brings.



Please help The Little Way to bring clean water to remote villages



Bishop Barthelémy Yaouda has written to The Little Way Association from Cameroon telling us that the far north of his country is the driest and poorest area: "Women and children have to walk miles each day to collect clean water, sometimes making the journey several times a day." The bishop continues: "This has a bad effect on the children's education and is a severe burden for their mothers. Many villages use unsafe water from ponds and poorly-maintained wells for domestic purposes. These waters are teeming with bacteria, parasites and mosquito larvae which are propagators of several waterborne diseases. A well-constructed borewell will improve the health of the whole population. The village of Konkorong has 1,012 inhabitants and its current water point is used for both human and animal use."

The Little Way Association receives many requests for help with the cost of digging borewells to bring clean drinking water to remote villages. Any donation you can send us "for clean water projects" will be forwarded without deduction and will help to make one village's dream, of clean water, a reality.



PLEASE HELP FEED HUNGRY CHILDREN

Fr Eamonn Gowling is a Redemptorist priest working in a favela/shanty town in the Brazilian city of Fortaleza. He reports of the great poverty there and how more than 200 children benefit from a feeding programme he has started which provides a nutritious meal each day. For many of the children it is the only regular meal they receive. Fr Eamonn is one of the many missionaries The Little Way Association supports with funds to feed hungry children.

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