

The Irish Catholic

**EASTER IN THE
GLENS: HURLING,
FAITH, AND
IDENTITY**

Antrim's Neil McManus
Page 42

**TRY TO PLEASE
THE MODERN
WORLD? EMPTY
YOUR PEWS**

Ann Widdecombe
Pages 26-27

**A LIFETIME IN
NEWS, GUIDED
BY FAITH**

UTV's Paul Clark
Pages 30-31

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Ireland is losing its Faith and language – George Hook



Chai Brady

The veteran broadcaster George Hook has said the current approach to religious education is so general it risks undermining the country's religious heritage, adding that it is a "great pity".

"What upsets me greatly is they don't teach Catholicism in schools anymore. They teach religion. My grandchildren know as much about Islam as they do about Catholicism," Mr Hook told *The Irish Catholic*.

"Most of our schools are still Catholic, most of our junior schools are still under the aegis of the Catholic Church, why are we not teaching Catholicism? Why are we teaching 'religion'?" he asked.

The retired 83-year-old commentator connected the decline in Catholic education to the erosion of national identity, saying that "we're in danger of losing our language... and then you couple with that the great heritage of our Faith".

"I talk to my grandchildren about the hedge schools, that when Catholics were disallowed their religion, they taught in the hedges with the Penal laws. We had Mass in the hillsides to carry on. We can't lose that. If we lose that, we can throw our bloody hat at it.

» Continued on Page 2

The Way of the Cross alone defeats death...



Students from the P7 class in St Malachy's PS, Armagh led the Stations of the Cross liturgy in St Patrick's Cathedral on April 14.

**FIVE CHURCHES, ONE ROAD AND
AN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN RITUAL**

Martina Purdy

PAGE 10



**IS RORY MCILROY A HERALD
OF A UNITED IRELAND?**

Mary Kenny

PAGE 5



**THE EASTER HOPE THE
'DISAPPEARED' WILL BE FOUND**

Nuala O'Loan

PAGE 6



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Ireland is losing its Faith and identity – George Hook

» Continued from Page 1

If we lose that, we can throw our bloody hat at it. We are no longer Irish. And we cannot lose that," he said.

He recalled being raised in an Ireland where Lent and Easter were central parts of the year, saying "without Easter, there would be no Christianity. It is the single most important feast in the calendar because of Jesus rising from the dead. Easter week was a big deal, Spy Wednesday and Holy Thursday and Good

Friday and you have the stations of the cross. My problem is I talk to my grandchildren about this and I'm talking gibberish – they have no idea what I'm talking about".

Although he acknowledges that Christianity does not hold the same place in society today, he said he believes it will return. "That is what is happening now. I actually believe that what goes around will come around... I don't know how it is going to come back, but it will come back," he said.

❖ See pages 12-13

New film 'Sins of Ireland' calls Ireland to confession

Pedro Esteva

A new documentary, *Sins of Ireland*, premiering on Good Friday, April 18, explores the complex legacy of the Catholic Church in Ireland through the lens of confession, an idea which came to filmmaker Alex Fegan at his son's first confession. It follows fifteen priests as they go about their lives, reflecting on a sacrament that once shaped Irish identity but has since faded from view in many places.

The sacrament of for-

giveness has distinctly Irish roots. In the 7th century, Irish monks pioneered 'private' confession, a practice they brought to Europe. Rather than confessing publicly before a whole community, the monks would speak their sins to a trusted companion – their *Anam Chara*.

"That was the original idea behind confession," Fegan explains. "It came from the *Anam Chara* – the soul friend. Someone you could tell your story to. Someone who could help you unburden yourself."

But as *Sins of Ireland*

shows, this deeply personal practice was later overshadowed by fear, shame, and control. A sentiment made clear from the first line of the film and one which all the priests hope to overcome.

Fr Pat Collins, a Vincentian priest, psychotherapist, and expert in deliverance ministry, pointed to the influence of Jansenism. However, Fr Collins is clear: confession's original purpose still has power. "There's something we've lost, but there's something to recover which is precious."

Be Easter people 'especially in times of troubles', Ukrainian priest



Renata Milán Morales

The pews of Donnycarney Church, Co. Dublin, were full as the Ukrainian community celebrated Palm Sunday.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Vasyl Kornitsky explained that "the Mass was attended by hundreds of people. And the big church in Donnycarney was full. I was very happy to see so many children in the church last Sunday".

"It was a joyful celebration. But at the same time, for us Ukrainians, there was a very deep sense of loss and sadness because we received this terrible news from Ukraine that 34 civilians were killed, and hundreds were injured." Fr Kornitsky explained that grief and sorrow were present emotions during the Mass. "Every time we gather to celebrate Mass and pray together, we always remember how important it is for us Ukrainians to remain

strong and to be strong in our prayers at a time when the war is causing so much division and sorrow and suffering."

Fr Kornitsky encourages the faithful to "never lose hope, even though there is so much pain and sorrow. We always remain very strong in our faith and always ask God to help us and to bless the people of Ukraine and just to bring the peace that we have been longing for so many years."

"Our Easter message is always a message of great hope and deep joy," the priest said. "Because we rejoice in Jesus because he rose from the dead. He has given us new eternal life. New life and new hope. And we should always, especially in times of difficulty in our lives, keep this message of Easter and live it every single day of our lives. That after Good Friday always comes Easter. And we should always rejoice every single day of our life."

A 1000 Brazilians gather for Palm Sunday



The biggest Palm Sunday procession for the Brazilian community in Dublin happened this year, with an estimate of close to 1,000 attendees. The procession led by Fr Severino Pinheiro da Silva Neto, Chaplain to the Brazilian Community started in the car park at the Capuchin Friary, Church Street followed by Mass in St Mary of the Angels Church. Photo: Católicos em Dublin.

Statue of Irish saint sold for ten times estimate

Renata Steffens

A rare statue of the Irish saint of gardening and gardeners was sold for ten times the estimate at auction on April 9 in the UK. The value of the 15th Century medieval elm carved figure of St Fiacre was firstly estimated at £1,000-£1,500 but sold for the total

of £15,750.

The 83cm tall statue portraying the saint wearing a hood over his habit and holding a bible and spade was offered at 'The Howard Collection of Oak and Works of Art' in Woolley & Wallis' Furniture and Collections sale.

Even though he was born into an aristocratic family in the 7th century, St Fiacre

chose to dedicate his life to religion and became a monk. While in servitude he developed the ability to make plants grow with ease and developed healing skills with the herbs he grew. His passion for nature led to him being granted the title of the Patron Saint of Horticulturalists and his feast is celebrated on August 30.

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'Massive celebrations' in Rory McIlroy's parish after historic win

Chai Brady

The parish priest in Rory McIlroy's hometown of Holywood in Co. Down has hailed the golfer following his historic victory in the US Masters, describing him as "a really great kid and very caring in every respect".

Fr Stephen McBrearty told *The Irish Catholic* he mentioned McIlroy at every Mass over the weekend before he became the first player in a century to complete the career grand slam.

"At all the Masses at the weekend, I mentioned that we were having an event up at Holywood Gold Club, and then I said 'and talking about Gold clubs, here's for the wee fella today' and everybody laughed and cheered. We are all behind him, he's so likeable," Fr McBrearty said.

"Everything you hear about Rory McIlroy is all true, he is a really great kid and very caring in every respect," he said.

The priest knows McIlroy's family well, including his father Gerry and mother Rosie, saying that he recently celebrated the wedding of the daughter of Rory's uncle. Fr McBrearty said that the wedding was a "great event" but Rory's win was "equally up there with it". "They are just ordinary people, he has done so brilliantly and he has certainly not forgotten his roots



US Masters champion Scottie Scheffler of the USA places the green jacket on Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland during the green jacket ceremony after the final round of the Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia, US. Photo: Kyle Terada/Imagn Images via Sportsfile.

here that is for sure," the priest added.

Upon the world-famous golfer's return Fr McBrearty said "there will be massive celebrations" and the whole of Holywood will be involved but "especially the parish, he belongs to the parish, as do the family – not that we would make a selfish claim on

him – but he is a Holywood kid who does not forget the place".

McIlroy's Catholic primary school were also thrilled after his victory. Speaking to the paper, Principal Chris O'Neill of St Patrick's Primary School in Holywood said: "What an amazing achievement by Rory. He really made

it an emotional roller coaster for everyone watching here in Holywood.

"The staff and pupils are so proud of all his achievements over the years but to become the first European Grand Slam winner is fantastic and so inspiring for our pupils. Congratulations, Rory!"

EASTER PRIZES BUMPER CROSSWORD

This Easter edition of *The Irish Catholic* offers several big prizes for completion of the Easter bumper crossword. Please send your name and address along with a cut-out of your fully completed and correct crossword and you will be entered into a raffle to win a prize.

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Please see Page 47

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'WHOM SHALL I SEND?'
(IS. 6:8)



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Easter witnesses a resurrected Church new studies show

Renata Milán Morales

The UK and France have reported a remarkable increase in young adults interested in attending Church. Recent surveys from France and the UK have revealed a growth in young people's interest in the Catholic faith.

A recent study by YouGov on behalf of the Bible Soci-

ety reveals a change in the spiritual landscape of young adults in the UK and Ireland. The study, David Quinn explains writing for *The Irish Catholic*, shows an increase in the number of young people aged 18-24 who identify as Christian and regularly attend church. "Since 2018, the number of young people aged 18-24 who describe themselves as Christian and attend church regularly has

risen from 4% to 16%, a 400% rise in just six years. Something similar is happening about the 25-34-year-olds. The increase here is from 4% to 13%."

In Ireland, over 80 catechumens are set to be welcomed into the Catholic Church this Easter, in the Archdiocese of Dublin. Additionally, more than 60 lay leaders have been commissioned to serve in the Killala

Diocese.

Writing for this paper, David Quinn explains that "the young people coming to the Church will hopefully deepen in their faith as time goes on and see that Christianity is not only a religion of belonging, but also a religion of serving."

Similarly, a French report released by the French Bishops' Conference reveals the highest numbers ever

recorded since the same survey began over 20 years ago. The report shows a demographic shift — young adults now constitute the largest number of converts. The 18-25 age group, made up of students and young professionals, now represents a 42% of adult catechumens, surpassing the 26-40 demographic that had previously dominated the statistics.

i See page 11

NEWS IN BRIEF

Holy Week in Westland Row

Easter ceremonies at the heart of Dublin City Centre will see Archbishop Dermot Farrell celebrating Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday in St Andrew's Church, Westland Row at 7pm. On Good Friday afternoon, Auxiliary Bishop Paul Dempsey will be in Westland Row at 3pm for the Solemn Liturgy of the Lord's Passion. The Easter Vigil in Westland Row will begin at 8pm on Holy Saturday.

Army chaplain forgives teenage attacker

A 17-year-old who stabbed Army chaplain Fr Paul Murphy outside Renmore Barracks in Galway apologised in court, as the priest publicly forgave him.

The boy pleaded guilty to attempting to murder Fr Murphy by repeatedly stabbing him on August 15, 2024. Despite enduring severe injuries and lasting impairment to his left arm, Fr Murphy expressed profound forgiveness, describing the attack as "filled with blessings." He said he was grateful he was the one hurt instead of a younger soldier, and that he considered bearing the scars "an honour and a privilege."

After proceedings, in a remarkable moment, Fr Murphy embraced the boy, encouraging him to learn from the experience and use his talents positively. The boy, who had been radicalised online, apologised again personally. Fr Murphy stated his sincere hope was for the young man to eventually return to society as a "whole-some, happy and loving person."

Former All Hallows professor to be made Liverpool archbishop

There has been joy on the All Hallows Campus of Dublin City University after a former student and professor was appointed the Archbishop of Liverpool.

Bishop John Sherrington's installation will take place in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King on Tuesday, May 27 at noon.

On hearing of his appointment earlier this month, Archbishop-elect Sherrington said: "I look forward to serving as shepherd of the historic and faith-filled Church in the Archdiocese of Liverpool which is rich in its heritage of the English martyrs, Irish immigration, and now looks to the future."

Vocation presented as a possibility to students during career night

Renata Steffens

The Vocations Team in Ferns Diocese provided information on this lifepath to students during a 'careers night' in St Peter's College Secondary School, Wexford on March 12. Fr Billy Swan, Vocations Director and Breda Murphy from the Parish of Kilrush, a member of the Ferns Diocesan Lay Vocations Council represented the diocese in the event.

Having Vocation among career

options in those events is not standard practice, but Fr Swan said it is important to show "the young people that there's another possibility... for one's life that involves dedication to people, service for people, but also total commitment to Christ and to His kingdom."

Learning about vocations can affect even those students who are not "called to the priesthood." The priest said: "The Church is not just priests or religious, it's also the faith

community... It's not a model of priesthood from the past that we're advocating, but it's actually being a priest in a Synodal Church, which is the way of the present and the future. It's not going back to the past."

Having clergy and a lay person representing the team showed the students that Vocation concerns the whole Church. "Every lay vocation is a gift to every priest, so every priest and religious vocation is a gift to every lay person, family and parish

community," the priest said.

Fr Swan said "for most of them [students], it was a strange concept. I think that in the culture in which we live, the whole concept of a Vocation is becoming less common. We must not assume that everyone knows what it means, and that whole idea of God calling a person to a life of service. To clarify the difference, I suppose, between a career and a vocation was important to the students."

Irish faith to go from 'convention to conviction' in upcoming Evangelium conference

Renata Milán Morales

The 11th edition of the Evangelium conference will be held in Maynooth in April 26 with the aim to bring together "excellent speakers from outside and inside of the Catholic Irish Church."

"It is very Catholic, ethical and educational... It's about helping people to understand and learn about the Catholic faith," explained Evangelium's Public Relations Officer, James Bradshaw.

Main talks include 'Understanding the contemporary mind' and 'Can Catholic teaching change?'. "There are lectures and workshops, so every attendee gets the three different lectures and workshops. There will be a Q&A session. The religious aspect, with Mass in the College Chapel is at heart of the event," said Mr Bradshaw.

"If you look at their attendance year on year, good proportion of other people are coming back. But then a good proportion of also people who we've never had any contact with.

We're getting a good broad attendee base... There is lots of opportunities for tea and coffee breaks. And we also have the big lunch all together."

"A lot of people would have felt that there was an anti-intellectual strain in Catholicism. It was certainly the case in Ireland: Catholicism by convention, rather

than by conviction. In recent decades, you have a shift in how people think about this. There's an appetite for these events. People are clearly eager to learn more. People

who come to the conference want to learn more and dig deeper," Mr Bradshaw concluded.

i Tickets are available on Eventbrite.

A piper, palms, and one proud donkey



Parishioners of Long Tower in Derry joined for the Palm Sunday procession from the Brandywell Grotto to the church, with the presence of Thomas, the donkey. Leading the procession along with Thomas was Daniel, the lone piper from St Chomchille's Pipe Band. Photo: Stephen Latimer.

Is Rory a herald of a united Ireland? And is golf now revolutionary?

One of the most famous quips that Bernadette Devlin – as a young and fiery Member of Parliament at Westminster – ever made was: “There’ll be no rioting in the golf clubs!”

She was responding to concerns about civil unrest in Northern Ireland, which arose to confront the discrimination that prevailed in its governance.

It was a shrewd remark – because it alluded to the fact that the problems in the North made a lesser impact on more affluent,



Mary Kenny

middle-class groups. The golf clubs represented the epitome of bourgeois comfort, if not downright complacency.

Jokes

The ‘golf club bore’ was the butt of jokes about cardigan-wearing middle-aged men for whom ‘the 19th hole’ (the club bar) was the main purpose of the game. A friend of

mine described golf as ‘a good walk ruined’.

As it happens, there was discrimination in golf clubs, but as Bernadette observed, it was never a cause for ructions. Jews were not admitted to some clubs (or there was a secret ‘quota’ for the numbers allowed), in both Britain and Ireland. And women were given lesser status, paying a

lower subscription fee with the proviso that they could only play in daytime slots reserved for ‘housewives’.

It would be rare indeed to see a person of colour – or a Traveller, or Roma – playing golf.

When I was asked to support a feminist lobby for ‘Women in Golf’, I must admit that my response was somewhat tepid. Weren’t plenty of ‘housewives’ quite happy to occupy a lesser position, and pay lower fees? It didn’t seem to me a very compelling cause.

But maybe I was just prejudiced against what I perceived was a cosy, middle-class hobby best suited to retired bank managers.

Changes

Well, everything changes in this life – if you wait long enough – and things so often work out quite differently from how you might have expected.

The perception and image

of golf has greatly altered in recent years, first with the emergence of Tiger Woods, a mixed-race champ, and now, most especially, with the celebrity of Rory McIlroy as a monumental golf ace (and from a modest background). Golf is now a mainstream sport, infused with drama, high emotion, and touchy-feelie hugs all round. Birdies, bogeys and play-off putts are reported with the breathless excitement of a nail-biting football final.

“In covering all bases, he projects an eclectic menu of inclusiveness. Everyone on the island of Ireland is proud of him”

I never imagined that this sedate game could be played ‘flamboyantly’, but apparently Rory’s golf swings are inspiringly flamboyant.

Even more amazingly, Rory McIlroy is now heralded as an emblem of a future united Ireland.

Rory was raised a Catholic in Holywood, Co. Down – and had family associations with the GAA. But he is now equally claimed by Ulster Unionists as a Northern Irishman. Emma Little-Pengelly, Unionist leader, was euphoric in her praise of this exceptional golfing hero, as representing communities north and south, and of every affiliation.

Mr McIlroy has identified himself as being Irish, Northern Irish, and British. In covering all bases, he projects an eclectic menu of inclusiveness. Everyone on the island of Ireland is proud of him.

The golf clubs never triggered riots, but could it be that they have, in an unexpected way, helped shine a way forward towards a reconciled Ireland? Sometimes it is the optimistic events, the unlikely people, that become catalysts for change.



Good Friday is not just a ‘Bank Holiday’

I was invited to a reception on Good Friday, offering the usual drinks and canapés. I like to observe the reflective devotions of the day, but sometimes, as St Paul tells us, the spirit is more important than the letter of the law, so I wasn’t going to rule out popping into the event to please

a friend.

What’s significant is that those organising the jolly didn’t realise that Friday, April 18 was Good Friday: or that it meant anything other than the ubiquitous ‘Bank Holiday’. It does cast my mind back to the days when the day was collectively observed in sombre mood, and broadcasting

was restricted to the sacred, or at least the respectful.

And yet, anecdotally, I hear that many more young people are now attending Mass and other church services. So, while the public realm may not acknowledge Christian feasts as was once the case, faith has its own way of attraction, and renewal.

Any reader seeking a comforting, relaxing book for the Easter holidays may find Anne Tyler’s latest short novel *Three Days in June* just the ticket.

It is the story of a mar-

riage – two marriages – in modern America. But this is not the America of abrasive political conflicts and social divisions. This is ordinary, everyday America of quiet neighbourhood life and school attendance, where

families meet together for a wedding party conducted in church. Divorce, though it happens when people make mistakes, is seen as a regrettable step. A very nice read by a veteran writer, with a thoughtful sub-text.

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The Easter hope that the Disappeared will be found



The families of people who were murdered during the Troubles face new horrors too regularly, writes **Nuala O'Loan**

Last Sunday I attended the annual Remembrance Mass for the Disappeared at Armagh Cathedral. As I listened to St Luke's account of the seizing, interrogation, torture and crucifixion of Jesus, I contemplated the horror and terror of the experiences of those who sat around me in the Cathedral –

many of whose loved ones were seized, interrogated, tortured and killed during the Troubles by the IRA. Great though their grief and loss still is, they sat there, quietly supporting each other through the great sacrifice of the Mass.

Fourteen

Fourteen bodies were recovered between 1984 and 2017. It is eight long years since the last body was recovered. I do not believe that those involved in abduction and murder could forget where they left their victims. There must still be those who have information to give about those who are still lost:

- Joe Lynskey, 40 disappeared in the summer of 1972.
- Seamus Maguire, 26, disappeared in 1973/74.
- Columba McVeigh, 17, a child, disappeared in November, 1975.
- Captain Robert Nairac, 29, was abducted in May, 1977.
- Lisa Dorrian, 25, disappeared in February, 2005.

All but Lisa Dorrian are victims of Republican terrorists. It is vital that their bodies are found so that their families can give them Christian burial and be relieved of the horror of not knowing what happened and where the lost son, brother, daughter, sister is.

The first to be found was Eugene Simmons, who was 26 when he disappeared in January 1981. His body was recovered by accident three years later in May 1984 in a bog at Knockbridge, Dundalk.

Jean McConville was 37, the widowed mother of 10 children, when she was abducted in December 1972. Her body was discovered after a storm on Shelling Hill beach in County Louth.

Kevin McKee was just 17 years old, still a child, when he was abducted with Seamus Wright, who was 25, in October 1972. Their bodies were recovered in June 2015 in Coghals-town, Co Meath.

Peter Wilson was 21 when



“The purpose of investigating the past is to establish what happened and once established the truth must not be buried again, but told”

he was abducted in August 1973. His body was found on Waterfoot Beach in Co Antrim in 2010.

Eamonn Molloy was 21 when he was abducted in July 1975. His body was found in May 1999 at Old Faughart Cemetery, Dundalk.

Brian McKinney, 22, and John McClory, 18, were abducted the same day in May 1978. Their bodies were found in June 1999 at Colgagh, Inis-keen, Co. Monaghan.

Brendan Megraw, 23, disappeared from his home in Twinbrook, Belfast in April 1978. His body was recovered in October 2014 in Oristown, Co. Meath.

Gerry Evans, 24, disappeared in March 1979 on his way home to Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh. His body was found in Carrickrobin, Co. Louth in October 2010.

Danny McIlhone disappeared in July 1981. His body was discovered in 2008 in bogland near the Blessington Lakes in Co. Wicklow.

Charlie Armstrong was 54 when he disappeared in August 1981 as he went to collect a neighbour and take her to Mass. His body was found in County Monaghan in July 2010.

Gareth O'Connor, 24, disappeared on 11th May 2003. His body was found June 12th 2005 at Victoria Lock, just outside Newry.

Seamus Ruddy had been working as a teacher in Paris when he went missing in 1985. His body was found near Rouen in northern France in 2017.

Remembered

As we remembered them and prayed for them and those who loved them, all but Lisa, Catholic, and all but Lisa murdered by those who grew up

as Catholics, I pondered on the ongoing horror inflicted by those who were in any way involved in the abductions and murders, and those who spread and continue to spread false rumours about them and so many others who died in the Troubles.

The Troubles did not stop when the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. Many people have been murdered since by terrorists. The families of people who were murdered during the Troubles face new horrors too regularly – they wake up and find an unexpected and often untrue story about their loved one on a newspaper front page, in a newly published book, in a television programme. The stories are sometimes lurid, very offensive, designed to help sell the book or programme. The dead have no rights in law. They can be libelled and slandered and there will be no redress. Those who loved them suffer anew.

“They deserve the truth, and everyone who can facilitate the provision of facts, of truth, has a duty to tell what they know”

Surely the work of healing the past in this still divided society should include a general recognition of the need to reject those who fabricate stories to sell their products, and to try and ensure that the truth of the atrocities of the past becomes known.

The families of all those involved in what we now refer to as “Legacy Cases” often

need to know what happened to their loved ones. They have many questions, especially those who were little children when their parents or siblings were murdered. They deserve the truth, and everyone who can facilitate the provision of facts, of truth, has a duty to tell what they know.

There are those who think that it is better that people do not hear that which may cause them pain, that they should remain ignorant of the facts of torture and murder, but this is wrong. The purpose of investigating the past is to establish what happened and once established the truth must not be buried again, but told.

Constant grief and loss will very often be the experience of those who mourn for those whom they loved. The road which they must travel can be so very hard. Yet their painful pilgrimages so often enable them to help others, just as the families of the Disappeared are magnificent in their constant support for each other.

At this Eastertide as we contemplate the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, we encounter again the reality of hope. My hope is that I too will one day hear the words Jesus spoke on the cross to the good thief, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” God who made us and who loved each of us even before we were formed in the womb, has surely taken to Paradise all those who died in such terrible circumstances during the Troubles. May their families experience renewed hope and peace this Easter and let us pray that may those who can do so are moved to tell what they know, so that Joe, Seamus, Columba, Robert and Lisa may finally be found.

The Irish Catholic

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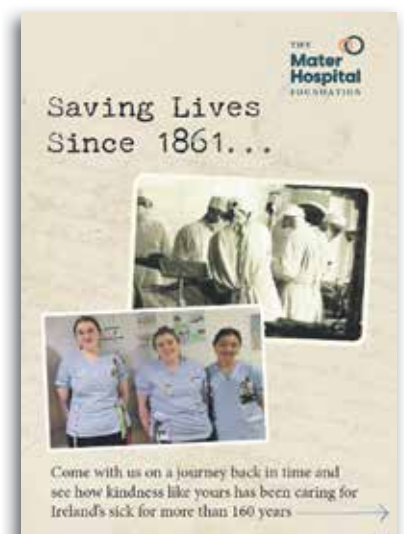
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Senator Rónán Mullen

A view from the Seanad



Freedom to protest and the extreme left vs diversity

I am writing this article from Strasbourg where I am attending the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Most people are aware of the European Parliament and how it decamps each month from Brussels to Strasbourg (at great expense) to hold some of its sessions. That monthly convoy is a legacy of the establishment of the EEC and the negotiations around 'Who Gets What?' France wanted its bit of the pie. And so Strasbourg, on the French-German border, (and indeed part of Germany for some of its history) got the gig.

But there is also the Council of Europe here – an organisation made up of 46 member states from western to eastern Europe and including the former Soviet states. Established after the end of WWII the Council is there to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Its most well-known institution is the European Court of Human Rights. But the Council's Parliamentary Assembly brings together MPs from the 46 member states to debate human rights and democracy problems, to introduce and vote on reports, make recommendations about how different countries are faring, and participate in election monitoring.

I am one of eight members of the Oireachtas chosen this year to attend the sessions.

When you see some of the issues being raised, for example the arrest of the Mayor of Istanbul by the Turkish authorities, arbitrary arrests and detentions in Georgia, and alleged corruption of elections in Albania, you realise, and not for the first time, that we are



not too badly off in Ireland all things considered.

This week we heard from the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, an Irishman (and incidentally a former priest of Galway diocese), Michael O'Flaherty. The Commissioner gave an impressive overview of his annual activity report for 2024. Most of his concerns I would agree with though we might differ on a few aspects of the narrative. But does he share my concern about the rights of people who want to protest peacefully about abortion and to engage, near abortion clinics, with women who may be in two minds? I was ready to ask him about the recent case of Livia Bolt who stood with a sign saying 'Here to talk, if you want' within a 'Public Spaces Protection Order zone' in Bournemouth.

She was convicted of a criminal offence and hit with a £20,000 bill for legal costs.

“Council of Europe debates frequently focus on the plight of peaceful protesters up against the heavy hand of the State”

Article 10 of the European Convention protects freedom of expression and the right to receive information. So how can it be right to criminalise a person like Ms Bolt? I don't know if Commissioner O'Flaherty thinks that unborn children have human rights which should be protected. (He certainly wouldn't have got the job he holds if he expressed such a view.) But

Council of Europe debates frequently focus on the plight of peaceful protesters up against the heavy hand of the State. Surely those who would offer, in public, and quietly and respectfully, a positive alternative to abortion, deserve similar protection?

The Commissioner's time ran out before he got to me, but he has kindly agreed to respond in writing to those who weren't included. I will keep you posted.

The right to educate

I never heard of the Eblana Club in Dun Laoghaire until I was invited to speak there recently. 'Religion and Education' was to be the topic and the opposing speaker was to be Richard Boyd Barrett TD. Richard is ill however and we wish him the best. He was replaced by former People Before Profit TD, Brid Smith.

The Eblana Club goes back to 1910 and was set up for the stated objective of providing a meeting place for people of all faiths and none. It is located in the quaint old 'Eblana Lodge', formerly the home of

various parish priests of Dun Laoghaire, including the late Cardinal Edward McCabe who died there.

The event was well-flagged earlier in the day when Brid Smith and I debated the topic on *Newstalk*. Brid hasn't much time for the voice of faith in Irish education. I don't find that remarkable. Though it was Mao Zedong who said, "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend", my experience of most politicians on the extreme left is that they are not interested in diversity when it involves facilitating points of view that are diverse from theirs. (Perhaps it would be the same with the extreme right, but there are so few of them in Irish politics that it is hard to come up with a representative sample.)

The gripe from the hard Left is not simply that there are more Catholic schools in the country than there are Catholic parents who want them. No. Pressed on whether she supported State funding for faith-based schools for those who avail of them, she argued that if parents were

properly consulted, they wouldn't want faith schools at all.

Which seems like a wishful thinking on Brid's part.

Faith-based schools rooted in Christianity should only be there for those who want them. Other parents' choices should be supported by the State. But a faith-based school has a secret sauce. It combines the search for truth with a commitment to goodness and beauty. And it proposes that we are not mere casual products of evolution but that "each of us is the result of a thought of God, each of us is willed and each of us is necessary". In so doing, it offers children a deep, interior security that can help them navigate the storms of life. And there will be storms. That's why many non-Christian parents, and some whose Christian faith is lukewarm, would still choose a Catholic or Protestant school for their child.

“It's not so clear that the Department of Education fully gets this, or is willing to respect the role of faith”

As citizens of our Republic, that is their right. The State is not there to dictate our education system but to guarantee certain minimum standards and to facilitate parental choice. That much is clear from the Irish Constitution. But it's not so clear that the Department of Education fully gets this, or is willing to respect the role of faith communities in determining how their values must shape the education they offer.

So people who want faith-based schools to thrive should opt for teaching if they have that vocation and accept roles on school Boards of Management even if they don't.

“Does he share my concern about the rights of people who want to protest peacefully about abortion and to engage, near abortion clinics, with women who may be in two minds?”



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Five churches, one road and an ancient Christian ritual



Martina Purdy

Throughout the Troubles, when buses were being burned or hijacked in Belfast, the Black taxi became a popular way of getting in and out of town. Men, women and children from the west of the city, often five or six at a time, would pile into the back seats, prams in the boot, and fly down the Falls Road. Along the way, the West Belfast cabs would sail past a remarkable number of Catholic Churches between Andersonstown and Castle Street: St Michael's, St Agnes', St John's, St Paul's, and St Peter's.

And when I first moved back to Belfast in 1987, I was struck by the number of people who blessed themselves each time they passed one of these places of worship.

Both young and old, male and female, would lift their right to their forehead, bring it down to their chest and then across to each shoulder, in a remarkable rhythm.

Occasionally it was the gesture of just one passenger that reminded the others who would swiftly follow suit.

Often, grannies would still be in mid-sentence, telling a tale of joy or woe for all

to hear, and without missing a beat in their story, would trace, with their hand, the sign of the cross effortlessly - as many as five times in a single journey.

Alas, the Black taxis expired, a casualty of the peace process, killed off by the sleek new glider buses. And while the churches remain alive, they are rather less full, and this extraordinary Catholic tradition, of Signing the Cross while passing a church, is no longer commonplace.

“How far we have travelled from the early days of the Church”

With Good Friday and Easter nearly upon us, I glided into town on 21st Century transport the other day, lamenting that not a single passenger made a move to partake in the ancient Christian ritual, nor did they even seem aware of the church along the way. “Don’t it always seem to go,” sang Joni Mitchell so long ago. “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.”

How far we have travelled from the early days of the Church.

Tertullian, a prolific Christian writer, born around 160AD in Carthage, North Africa, described how the Sign of the Cross played a central role in the lives of the first followers of Christ: “In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in

putting of our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupied us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross”.

The blessing developed over the years and instead of signing only their foreheads, Christians began to trace the cross over their whole bodies.

St Basil of Caesarea, a fourth century bishop, described how these beliefs were rooted in a tradition handed down from the apostles. Regrettably, the Sign of The Cross was dropped at the reformation by Protestants because it was not specifically referred to in scripture, though the cross itself continues to unite us as a sign of hope.

Trinity

Yet through this ancient practice of blessing ourselves, with the movement of our hand over our bodies, we invoke the name of the Trinity, a word that does not appear anywhere in the bible either.

Perhaps the ritual has become too routine, even for regular mass goers. I know I need to think a little more about what one modern evangelist called “an elegant summary” of our Christian faith.

Clem Harrold, of the St Paul Centre in the United States, reminds us that when we bless ourselves, we invoke the name of the Trinity, and honour the three divine persons in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “And we recall,” he said, “that the second per-

son, Jesus, took on flesh and died for our sakes.”

The Sign of the Cross is a wonderful signpost that we live through Christ. “We have grown so used to this that we have ceased to be amazed at what took place and the astonishing scandal of the cross,” said Harrold.

Notably, there was a strange story doing the rounds of Catholic social media this past few weeks that drew outraged comments: fourteen people were being prosecuted for “blatant acts of religious fervour” in Waterford. It was alleged that eight offences were committed in the vicinity of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity on Barronstrand Street. Their offence? Making the Sign of the Cross which was causing offence under new laws!

“Why not renew and indeed resurrect this ancient practice of blessing ourselves each time we pass a church?”

Of course, it was published on April 1 - but the fact that so many people were fooled is perhaps a sign of the times.

Thank God we are all free to exercise this sign of our faith - and to proclaim the Gospel with the trace of our hands - without having to utter a word.

Why not renew and indeed resurrect this ancient practice of blessing ourselves each time we pass a church?

As in the Black taxis of old, sometimes all it takes is one hand to remind and inspire the others.



Photo: Ivan Samkov/Pexels

“Thank God we are all free to exercise this sign of our faith - and to proclaim the Gospel with the trace of our hands - without having to utter a word”

BETRAYAL is a strong word, but one that Christians understand in the context of Christ this Holy Week when Judas, with a kiss, became a traitor to the truth. And ‘betrayal’ has been the buzz word in the latest “rainbow row”. Stormont Executive parties, currently on a break for Easter, are no longer welcome to walk in this year’s Pride parades. It seems Sinn Féin, Ulster Unionists, DUP and Alliance caused offence when they voted recently to ban puberty blockers in Northern Ireland.

The Green Party had led the charge against these parties, insisting they had “betrayed the LGBTQ+ community”.

The row was reignited the other day at Belfast City Hall when the DUP questioned whether public money should be going to the Pride march this summer.

Surely it is wise that we do not give children drugs, especially during confusing teenage years? Puberty blockers interfere with their natural development and risks include damage to fertility.

The politicians made the right decision in washing their hands of puberty blockers. They should embrace it whole-heartedly.

Astonishingly, the Alliance Party, which has two seats at the Executive table, only made the decision to favour

the ban “reluctantly”. Where vulnerable children are concerned, we have a duty of care that goes beyond this ‘ideology’.

This micro-drama between politicians and Pride activists is a poor reflection of the theo-drama that Christians are about to celebrate. But the shades are all there.

Christ, who is Truth itself, was rejected. Because the Truth, before it sets us free, can often enrage us.

The row has calmed down a bit through an odd compromise. The politicians can still attend Pride parades in a “personal capacity” but their parties are officially banned.

“Abishop doesn’t have a magic wand.” So declared Bishop Phonsie Cullinan on a recently released YouTube video. The Bishop of Waterford was speaking about his response to a good Catholic man who had proposed a 17-point plan for renewal. It included adoration in every parish church. Bishop Phonsie asked the man what his own role in the renewal would be. “Ah, but that is your job, Bishop.”

“Unrealistic!” replied the bishop. And he was right. It is all our jobs as baptised Christians to renew the faith in Ireland. And we all have something better than a magic wand: we have the power of the cross. Let us remember that Simon of Cyrene was with Jesus on Good Friday as he carried His burden. Every parish and diocese is in need of active Cyrenians!

A mini-religious revival is underway in Britain



David Quinn

A major new survey from Britain shows there is a mini-religious revival underway in that country. For the first time since anyone can remember, the survey shows that the number of young people attending church on a regular basis, that is, monthly or more, is on the increase. This challenges the long-standing idea that eventually religious practice will simply die out in the face of secularism.

The survey, conducted by polling company YouGov on behalf of the Bible Society shows that since 2018, the number of young people aged 18-24 who describe themselves as Christian and attend church regularly has risen from 4% to 16%, a 400% rise in just six years.

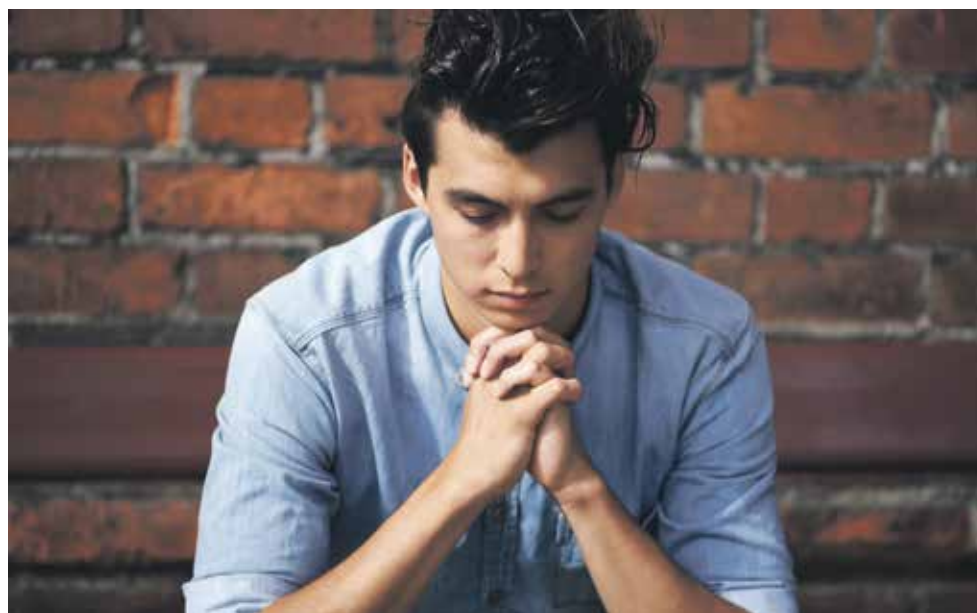
Something similar is happening about the 25-34-year-olds. Here the increase is from 4% to 13%.

The only age groups that have seen a fall are the 45-54-year-olds and the 55-64-year-olds. They have gone from 6% to 5% and from 10% to 8% respectively over the six years from 2018 to 2024.

Fall

This happens to be my age group, and the fall doesn't surprise me. My age group is probably the most cynical of all about religion. We have been raised on a steady diet of anti-religious criticism and that has an effect. Some of my age group also experienced the bad side of religion, although fewer than you think because it is truly plausible that the average person born in say, 1970, meaning they reached their teens in the 1980s, really experienced the authoritarian side of religion, especially if they lived in Britain? The answer is, No.

My age group also took for granted that the good side of



religion, namely the sense of community, of transcendence, of wonder, of meaning and purpose, would all remain without religion itself and for many people this is not the case at all. My age group has benefited much more from the good side of religion than they think.

But an awful lot of young people have grown up in a society with very little trace of religion. They have grown up in a society that is ultra-individualistic, explicitly tells us that life has no intrinsic meaning and purpose, and in which there is growing anxiety and depression. In the face of this, some young people are seeking an antidote, and alternative, and it turns out that for a growing number, that is religion, and not just 'spirituality' but organised religion, community-based religion, where you encounter a church and a community of worship. Religion can never be ultra-individualistic. That destroys its very meaning.

But an awful lot of young people have grown up in a society with very little trace of religion. They have grown up in a society that is ultra-individualistic, explicitly tells us that life has no intrinsic meaning and purpose, and in which there is growing anxiety and depression. In the face of this, some young people are seeking an antidote, and alternative, and it turns out that for a growing number, that is religion, and not just 'spirituality' but organised religion, community-based religion, where you encounter a church and a community of worship. Religion can never be ultra-individualistic. That destroys its very meaning.

“In the case of 18-24-year-olds, for example, 12% of young women are attending regularly, but 21% of men in this age group”

Drilling down into the figures from the British survey,

we find other interesting developments.

For example, it is young men more than young women who are turning up at church.

In the case of 18-24-year-olds, for example, 12% of young women are attending regularly, but 21% of men in this age group.

Traditionally, it has been women more than men who have attended church. Why would this now be changing? We can only speculate at this stage, but perhaps one reason is that young men feel more 'got at' by modern society which continually depicts maleness itself as somehow suspicious, and even toxic. A lot of young men find this intensely alienating.

If, in response, they are starting to attend church rather than turning to genuinely misogynistic social influencers such as Andrew Tate, that can only be a good thing.

Adolescence

A series that has recently caused a sensation, namely *Adolescence* which is streaming on Netflix, depicts a very alienated 13-year-old boy who is influenced by people like Andrew Tate and kills a girl he feels has humiliated him.

If that boy instead started going to church, that would be a vastly more constructive response to his feeling of alienation.

The survey also discovered that there are now more

young Catholics attending church regularly than there are young Anglicans, even though Britain is still nominally an Anglican country.

Among the 18-34-year-olds who attend church, 41% are Catholic, whereas only 20% are Anglican (that is, Church of England).

Some of the change is immigrant-driven, but even among the white population of Britain there is an increase.

Why are young people being drawn more to the Catholic Church than to the Church of England? Maybe the message of the Catholic Church is stronger and more certain. Churches that change their message too much to fit in with the times, tend not to attract new worshippers.

Funnily enough, the increase in church attendance among young people may have something to do with social media. In the mainstream media it is incredibly hard to find anything positive about religion, especially in this country.

“Secularism is being found wanting. Can we really say it is making people happier?”

But on social media, you can find the likes of Bishop Robert Barron and his Word on Fire ministry which is continually producing new and excellent Catholic material.

Christianity also seems to be growing again in intellectual respectability, thanks in part to historians such as Tom Holland.

In addition, secularism is

being found wanting. Can we really say it is making people happier?

The Bible Society survey, like many other surveys and studies before it, confirms that Christians are simply happier on average than their secular counterparts. That counts for something.

Ireland

What of Ireland? What is happening here? We have probably not worked our way through the anti-religious phase yet. There is probably still too much anger out there at the Church for a sensible discussion to take place, and secularism has not yet been revealed as the empty vessel it is because it hasn't been the dominant force in Ireland for all that long.

But if you go forward another 10 or 20 years, what might we see? The Domini-

cans already have a successful youth ministry, and a lot of young people attend Latin Mass. Some in the Church might not like that, but it still shows something is stirring.

The young people returning to church will hopefully deepen in their faith as time goes on and see that Christianity is not only a religion of belonging, but also a religion of service.

I think that if you were able to get a sneak preview of Ireland in 2040 or 2050, you might see something of a religious revival among young people underway, just like in Britain at the moment. What is happening in Britain shows that the Church shouldn't be counted out just yet. We are here for the long haul, and we have come through much worse periods than this one.



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“Why are young people being drawn more to the Catholic Church than to the Church of England? Maybe the message of the Catholic Church is stronger and more certain”

The Faith of a nation in flux



The real meaning of Easter has disappeared into a cataclysmic, calorific extravagance of chocolate eggs, George Hook tells Chai Brady

In the ever-evolving landscape of Irish Catholicism, few voices articulate the generational shifts with the same candour as George Hook. A veteran broadcaster and commentator, Mr Hook's reflections on faith, culture, and national identity are not something he is shy about sharing.

"I don't give things up for Lent anymore," Mr Hook admits. "But growing up, Lent was a big deal. It wasn't just about giving up sweets – it was a real commitment. You felt like you were joining all these other Catholics who understood that Easter was huge. Someone once said, and I think it was St Paul, that without Easter, there would be no Christianity. It is the single most important feast in the calendar because of Jesus rising from the dead. Easter week was a big deal, Spy Wednesday and Holy Thursday and Good Friday and you have the stations of the cross. My problem is I talk to my grandchildren about this and I'm talking gibberish – they have no idea what I'm talking about."

Reflections

But Mr Hook's reflections on Easter aren't just nostalgic. He laments how its significance has been overshadowed by consumerism. "Now it disappears into a cataclysmic, calorific extravagance of chocolate eggs. The real meaning gets lost."

Turning 84 years old in May, the Ireland of Mr Hook's childhood was one where faith was deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life. Catholic education was the cornerstone of moral instruction, and the Church played a guiding role in personal and public morality. That, he believes, is no longer the case.

"What upsets me greatly is they don't teach Catholicism in schools anymore. They teach religion. My grandchildren know as much about



George Hook in conversation.

Islam as they do about Catholicism," Mr Hook said. "I think that is a great pity."

This, he insists, represents a broader cultural shift – a move away from the distinctiveness of Catholic education toward a more generalised approach.

Mr Hook, while no longer a regular Mass-goer, still considers his belief in God essential, saying "I believe passionately and intrinsically in an afterlife, and I believe in God."

“My father brought me to Hyde Park Corner in London and I saw all these people – communists, radicals, all sorts – voicing their opinions”

Along with his concern for the decline of Catholicism, he also has strong unease about what he sees as an erosion of certain fundamental values, including free speech. He recalls a seminal moment in his childhood with his father that occurred during a visit to relatives in England during the war, when he was aged eight.

"My father brought me to Hyde Park Corner in London and I saw all these people

“The Presentation Brothers in the 1950s taught us that Christianity has always gone through cycles in history. Like the Reformation for arguments sake, where it looked as if things might change. That is what is happening now”

– communists, radicals, all sorts – voicing their opinions. My father told me that this is what free speech is, and this eight-year-old suddenly saw that free speech was one of the most important things we had. And then he said to me, if you have an opinion, hold to it. And now, in Ireland, I see that free speech is at risk," Mr Hook said.

Parliament

He said that "never have we seen it more dramatically than in our own parliament. Democracy is the most prized thing on the planet and free speech is being destroyed in our parliament – if they can literally shut people up and shut them down by shouting louder – that's really worrying, that worries me greatly. I have a huge regard for our political system and never more is it important".

Mr Hook extends this concern to global events, particularly the resurgence of geopolitical tensions, saying: "We're on the cusp

of World War III. Without a doubt we have the most dangerous president in the history of America, who knows what is going to happen to our children and grandchildren. If free speech is prohibited, or destroyed, what happens to democracy?"

Asked if he is concerned about potential trade wars following President Donald Trump announcement of the US putting new trade tariffs on countries across the world – Mr Hook said he was not as concerned about that.

“I would be far more concerned that we are now in a position not unlike 1938 and that worries me far more”

He said: "He [Mr Trump] is absolutely entitled to put tariffs on whatever he wants, like Eamon De Valera

put tariffs on imports into Ireland...so as a kid you had buy second rate football boots from Drogheda because football boots could not come in from England because of his tariffs.

"The economic war between us and England is famous, so economic wars will continue. I would be far more concerned that we are now in a position not unlike 1938 and that worries me far more. When guys in Dáil Éireann starts going on about neutrality... I think it's incredible that we seriously think that if Vladimir Putin invaded England, he would look at little old Ireland and say 'I won't bother with Ireland'. We're now part of Europe and we have to cop on, Europe must defend itself and we are part of that, and to be bleating about bloody neutrality is horse manure."

Christianity

Asked whether Christianity still has a place in modern Ireland, Mr Hook's response is unequivocal: "No, it

doesn't." But he doesn't believe that's the end of the story.

"The Presentation Brothers in the 1950s taught us that Christianity has always gone through cycles in history. Like the Reformation for arguments sake, where it looked as if things might change. That is what is happening now. I actually believe that what goes around will come around, and that while there is a threat posed to Christianity now in Ireland, and Catholicism in particular with its Church, priests, nuns and religious, I believe it will come back. I don't know how it is going to come back, but it will come back," he said, adding that he would "absolutely" like this to happen.

“We don't have a Catholic education anymore, we have the education of religion, we're not teaching our children Catholicism”

For Mr Hook, the core principles of Catholicism – especially the Ten Commandments – remain essential to raising good citizens. "I teach my grandchildren

“We could be back to the point of emigration. I think it is a terrifying scenario. I am scared out of my wits, not for myself, it does not affect me. I am scared out of my wits for what it means for my children and grandchildren”

about the Ten Commandments. If you're bringing up a child and you say 'it is a good idea to obey your father and your mother, not tell lies, it is a good idea not to kill somebody', that's a good way to live your life," he said.

His frustration lies in what he sees as the dilution of Catholic teaching: "Because we don't have a Catholic education anymore, we have the education of 'religion, we're not teaching our children Catholicism. Most of our schools are still Catholic, most of our junior schools are still under aegis of the Catholic Church, why are we not teaching Catholicism? Why are we teaching 'religion'?"

"We're in danger of losing our language – you can go out to some psychiatrist, and he will give you a certificate which says you can't learn Irish because you can learn German, French and Italian: it's horse manure. If we turn around and turn around our great heritage of our language, and then you couple with that our great heritage of our Faith. I talk to my grandchildren about the hedge schools, that when Catholics were disallowed their religion, they taught in the hedges with the Penal laws. We had Mass in the hillsides to carry on. We can't lose that, if we lose that we can throw our bloody hat at it, we are no longer Irish. And we cannot lose that."

He adds there are more Welsh people speaking Welsh than there are Irish people speaking Irish.

Convictions

On contemporary moral issues Mr Hook remains firm in his convictions, adding that "I am a product of my Faith and my age". He opposed the legalisation of abortion in 2018 and views the growing push for euthanasia with trepidation.

"I voted against the abortion refer-

endum. That's where I stand. As for euthanasia, that's a difficult one. I don't know how I would react if somebody said to me 'you are now going to be a burden on your family for the next number of years' but if you go to Zurich they will sort you out that is a very difficult one."

“If I have, God forbid, some disease and I think I'm going nowhere, and if I could get an injection which is going to end it all, I would be tempted”

Mr Hook explained that to understand him, having met his mother would have helped. "My mother convinced me that not only did de Valera plan Béal na mBláth [the ambush of Michael Collins during the Irish Civil War in Cork in 1922] he actually pulled the bloody trigger that killed Michael Collins. She also said to me she did not want to be a burden on the family. So that we wouldn't have to pay for her funeral she deeded her body to a university so there wouldn't be any funeral costs. I'm a bit like that."

Mr Hook is no stranger to despair. He recalls a moment in his own life when he went to the end of Dún Laoghaire pier, took his clothes off and was about to jump in to take his own life. "I still don't know why

I put my clothes back on but I certainly intended to jump in," he said.

"There's a difference I think between suicide [and assisted suicide], people who die by suicide very often... it's depression and everything else. If I have, God forbid, some disease and I think I'm going nowhere, and if I could get an injection which is going to end it all, I would be tempted. Thanks be to God I'm not tempted because I am not at that point, but I can't answer that question."

Hopes

As Ireland faces economic and cultural challenges, Mr Hook believes the nation is at a crossroads and that each generation has had to fight its own battles.

"For my parents' generation, it was unemployment and emigration, 100,000 people a year leaving this country. The population went down to something like two and a half million. I am not sure what battles this generation is going to fight. But one thing is certain, literally as we speak today, Ireland is at its most difficult economic period in 50 years, there's no doubt about this," he said.

"We could be back to the 1960s in short order – we have no idea what could happen."

Unemployment could be a word we use again. We have looked at migration for 30 years, we've looked at people coming to this country, we could be back to the point of emigration. I think it is a terrifying scenario. I am scared out of my wits, not for myself, it does not affect me. I am scared out of my wits for what it means for my children and grandchildren."

On immigration, Mr Hook is pragmatic, saying: "Poor people have always moved to where there is a better future. The Irish did it for generations. Now people are coming here. It's not going to stop unless we stop being a rich country. And we are very rich at the moment and therefore they come here."

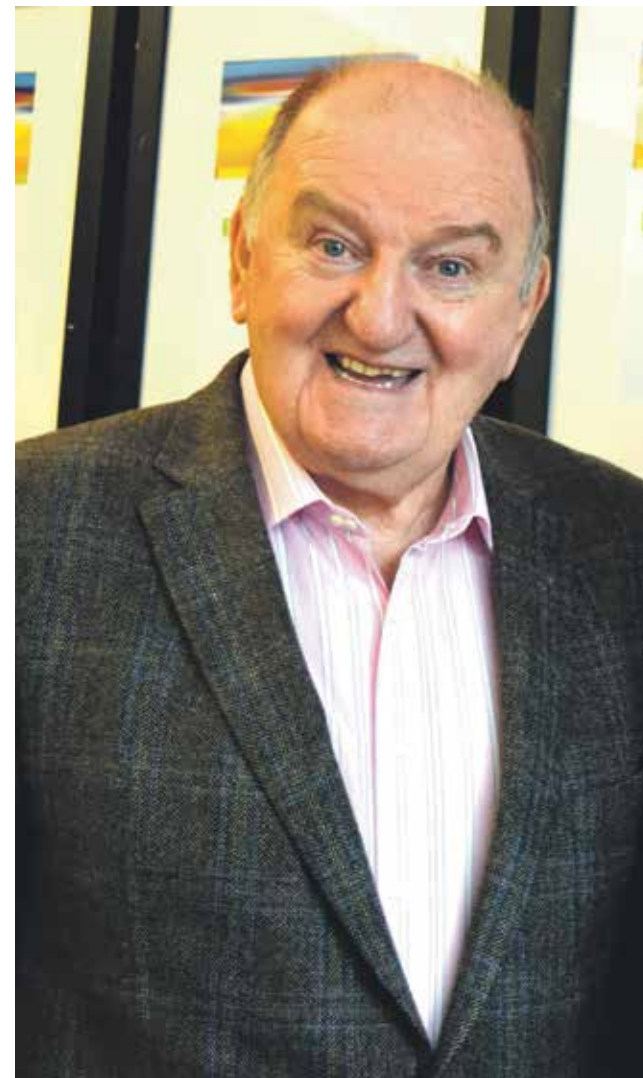
“I look at my pension and it is only heading one direction, downwards”

"What will change is if we become poor pretty pronto. Then nobody is going to come here and we're not going to have any money to spend on putting people in hotels and Pascal Donohoe knows that, he's wetting himself in his office because he has no idea what is likely to happen. 60,000 houses a year out the window if the economy takes a dive – we do not know. This is a scary time as I have ever been in."

He adds that for those with a self-funded pension that is invested in shares, he says "I look at my pension and it is only heading one direction, downwards".

George Hook is a man unafraid to speak his mind, whether on faith, politics, or culture. His concerns reflect those of many who has watched Ireland transform in recent decades. While he sees challenges ahead, he holds out hope that faith will find its way back into Irish life. With all these problems, he concludes that "we are in a very worrying situation".

"It is also interesting, I think in terms of Catholicism, that when the s-h-l-t hits the fan, I think people will go back to traditional values – and therein lies the faith."



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Myanmar's Cardinal Bo: 'We are the people of Good Friday'



In a devastated country, I am sure that this earthquake will open the way for peace Cardinal Charles Maung Bo tells **Paolo Affatato**

“Our people have a strong faith. They have suffered a lot.

They are the people of Good Friday. But they also know that the silence of Holy Saturday will end in the joy of the Resurrection. We are in the middle of a devastated country, but I am sure that this earthquake will open the way for everyone to understand that peace is possible, that peace is the only way.” These are the words of Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, President of the Myanmar Bishops' Conference, as work continues in the south-east Asian nation to deal with the aftermath of the terrible earthquake that struck the centre of the country on March 28, caused by the tectonic fault that runs through it like a spine, from north to south.

While an international mobilisation has been activated, even the Catholic community - about 700,000 souls in a country of 51 million inhabitants with a Buddhist majority - finds itself in mourning with hundreds of families affected, takes stock of the damage, dedicates itself to charity work towards the homeless, takes in and cares for abandoned children wandering the streets, shares the fate of refugees.

“The central part of Myanmar,” reports Cardinal Bo speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, “is completely devastated. Almost 20% of our people are on the streets, still frightened and traumatised by what geologists are calling the biggest earthquake of the century. More than 3,000 people have already died and the toll is steadily rising. So many others were trapped



Displaced people in Myanmar are seen at a shelter in a makeshift tent camp near a railway track in Amarapura, a township of Mandalay city on April 4, 2025, following a devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake. Photos: OSV/Reuters



A rescue worker stands in front of a destroyed building in Mandalay, Myanmar, April 3, 2025.



A displaced family in Myanmar is seen inside a shelter at a makeshift tent camp in Amarapura, a township of Mandalay city on April 4.

under the rubble and died without the embrace of their loved ones. Bodies continue to be extracted from under the ruins. It is terrible, the tears continue unabated.”

The earthquake, the Cardinal recalls, came like a fury to strike a population already afflicted by a multidimensional crisis, generated by the civil war: “The earthquake has exacerbated

the tears and wounds. Thousands have no food. Thousands have no drinking water. Fear makes them sleep in the streets, under the scorching sun and on nights of merciless heat. They are in a state of physical and psychological prostration,” he notes, while “there is an urgent need for food, water, shelter and medicine for thousands of wounded. But there are also

spiritual needs: “People who are suffering need to feel the warmth of other human beings who share the pain, the weeping and care for them. We are in a traumatised and wounded nation that does not want to give in to despair and tries to react.”

High price

The Catholic Church has also paid a high price for the disaster, seeing churches, institutes, seminaries, pastoral structures damaged or collapsed: “Many churches and religious houses are destroyed. Especially in the Diocese of Mandalay, which has already been through war, the current disaster is a heavy

blow. Many buildings will have to be torn down and rebuilt. But the greatest challenge, more than the construction of new brick buildings, is to rebuild the Christian community with the ‘living stones’ of God’s people. This will require a long journey and patient work, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the one who creates the Church, in this Jubilee year and in the future.”

A good starting point for this work, emphasises the Archbishop of Yangon, is something that suggests deep hope: “Our people have no burden of faith. Every time we open the church, it fills up. In front of the tabernacle in every church there is someone praying. They have

The Lord as their source of consolation. Today, the people of Myanmar seem like the modern version of the biblical character Job: God has given so much to our people, but man-made and natural disasters oppress the spirit and place us in an abyss of sorrow. But people continue to walk the way of the Cross hoping and knowing that the way of the Cross leads to resurrection. In pain they live hope.”

The example, and a valuable source of inspiration, in the context of this precarious situation, is given by “priests, religious and catechists who have borne the brunt of various forms of violence over the past four years: “Many of them,”

“Many churches and religious houses are destroyed. Especially in the diocese of Mandalay, which has already been through war, the current disaster is a heavy blow”

reported Cardinal Bo, “are displaced. We have four displaced bishops, out of their cathedrals or bishop’s houses. Ours is a Church in full exodus, facing enormous challenges with courage and trust in God. Many church buildings and pastoral centres are destroyed. But the spirit of our people is not broken. I am happy to see and to be able to say that presbyters, consecrated men and women, and pastoral workers are faithful companions of our people in a time of trial. They are dedicated to serving their neighbour and dispensers of mercy and hope.”

“Young people are deeply hurt by this war. I would like to recall that in every disaster, the youth of Myanmar were the first to roll up their sleeves and save people”

It is precisely of hope that the Year of the Jubilee, which the universal Church is celebrating, speaks. But how can hope be nourished in a time of such great suffering? The Cardinal answers with meekness and clarity: ‘To experience faith and hope at first hand, one must not stay indoors, in the comfort of a secluded room. You have to come here and see people praying, in their jungle camps; you have to listen to the songs, the hymns, the adoration. Our people are generators of hope. They have suffered a lot but have a strong faith, believing firmly in the Easter Resurrection. This year, in the Jubilee Year of Hope, our people will have the resurrection of hope. I firmly believe this’.

Myanmar’s hope is first and foremost an end to violence and a just peace: “We were the first to call for a ceasefire, all the more so now that it is urgent to allow humanitarian aid,” recalls the Cardinal. “Young people are deeply hurt by this war. I would like to recall that in every disaster, the youth of Myanmar were the first to roll up their sleeves and save people. But war and compulsory conscription have strangled that generous spirit and the youth have disappeared from the streets. I called for a ceasefire on the day of the earthquake, but so far the call has not been heeded. Now is the time to silence the guns, take the food supplies, the medical supplies and go to the people and heal them,” he notes.

He concludes: “I would like to remind you that after Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the country was back on the road to democracy. This time too, the earthquake will pave the way to show everyone that peace is our common destiny, peace is the only path we must wholeheartedly pursue to shine again as a nation.”



Displaced people wait in line for food and relief supplies in Mandalay, Myanmar, April 3, 2025, following a 7.7 magnitude earthquake that hit midday on March 28.



Patients lie on beds inside the compound of Sagaing Hospital in Myanmar, April 2.



Rescuers work at the site of a damaged building in Mandalay, Myanmar, March 30.



A displaced mother holds her child as she stands on a roadside waiting for a donation of relief supplies in Sagaing, Myanmar, April 2.



Displaced people wait in line for food and relief supplies in Amarapura, Myanmar, April 1.



Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon, Myanmar.

For over 75 years, Rehab Group, has been a steadfast presence in communities across Ireland. What began as a small initiative in Dublin has grown – guided by compassion and purpose – into one of Ireland’s leading disability charities. Today we are proud to support more than 12,000 people every year, in over 257 locations nationwide, to live rich, independent, and fulfilling lives.

The values of our founders – dignity, inclusion, and hope – continue to shape everything we do. We strongly believe in the potential of every individual, and work tirelessly to ensure that people with disabilities are truly integrated into their local communities.

Whether it is gaining new skills, finding employment, or simply enjoying a trip to the cinema, we believe that connection, and belonging matter. These moments of togetherness are lifelines that enrich the lives of our service users.



Decades of life-changing support

Today, Rehab Group continues to offer personalised, life-changing support while championing the rights and voices of people with disabilities in Irish society.

Our RehabCare and National Learning Network centres are at the heart of many communities, offering vital services that empower people every day. Through our social enterprise division, Rehab Enterprises, we create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities – proving that inclusive workplaces are not only possible, but powerful.

We believe every person deserves the chance to live a life of their own choosing, to make their own decisions, and to flourish. This belief fuels our unwavering commitment to equality, dignity, and inclusion and one we are committed to continuing.

But our work is far from finished. We have ambitious plans for the next five years and for decades to come through our care, education, and employment programmes so that every individual who comes through our doors is met with dignity and possibility.

For a person-centred charity like ours, leaving a gift in your will is one of the most profound ways to leave a lasting impact. Legacy gifts have already transformed lives within our services. If you are considering leaving a legacy to Rehab Group, we can assure you that your kindness will make a profound difference long into the future.

We are deeply grateful for the generous support we receive from individuals, families, businesses, and communities alike. Every donation, brings real, tangible change.

Your support could provide innovative assistive technology to help a child in our autism service in Louth develop communication skills. It could fund a new adapted bus in Clonmel, ensuring that people with limited mobility can attend weekly horticultural programmes.

Your compassion not only empowers an individual. It also lifts up their entire family, care giver and community. With continued support, we will build a more inclusive Ireland – one where everyone belongs.

Nurturing the career potential of people with disabilities

At our National Learning Network (NLN), we believe that every person – regardless of ability – has gifts to offer the world. With over 84 locations, we are the largest provider of inclusive education, offering specialised training for people with disabilities, physical and sensory conditions, autism, mental health issues, long-term illness, acquired brain injury or other support needs.

In these centres, we offer more than courses. We nurture confidence, build skills, unlock potential, as well as friendship, encouragement, and the belief that they belong.

Repeatedly, we have witnessed how the right support can open up a whole new future. Thousands of individuals have gone on to secure meaningful employment with companies including Eir, Cook Medical, Meta and Mr Price.

These successes are more than just job placements – they are stories of lives transformed, and independence regained.

Addressing the shortage of respite care

Across Ireland, families are crying out for respite care. Families who are exhausted, overwhelmed, and in desperate need of support. RehabCare is committed to meeting this urgent need by expanding our respite services.

Our fourteen respite centres are already making a life-changing difference. For children and adults with disabilities – many of whom lead isolated lives – respite care offers more than just a break. It is a chance to grow in independence, to form friendships, and to take part in joyful, community-based social activities. For them, it is a true home away from home.

Looking ahead, we are determined to develop new facilities that will offer high-quality care in purpose-built environments. These centres will support hundreds of families every year, with features including comfortable, fully accessible bedrooms; sensory friendly spaces to promote calm and well-being; and welcoming communal areas that encourage connection and inclusion.

The impact of these services cannot be overstated. Families often face tremendous strain without access to respite care. Our new centres will offer much-needed relief, peace of mind, and a trusted place of care to thrive, knowing their loved ones are in safe hands.

With your support, we can bring these essential services to more communities across Ireland and ensure that no family ever feels alone on their journey.

Be part of the Rehab community

At Rehab Group, we are more than just a service provider – we are a community – of courage, compassion, and hope. For over 75 years, we have stood beside people with disabilities and their families, walking with them every step of the way.

None of this would be possible without the support of people like you. Your kindness has helped children speak their first words, given adults the tools to find meaningful work, and offered families the precious gift of rest and reassurance.

But our journey is not yet complete. There are still too many lives waiting to be changed, too many dreams waiting to be fulfilled. And so, I invite you to stand with us.

Whether through a donation, a legacy gift, or by simply sharing our story, your support will make a lasting difference.

Together, we can create an Ireland where every person, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to live a life of purpose, connection, and joy.

Join our vision for a flagship training college.



A powerful new chapter began in early 2025 when the sod was turned for our brand-new National Learning Network college in Ballyfermot, Dublin.

This flagship campus represents more than just bricks and mortar – it is a bold step forward to break down barriers and open doors.

Once completed, the college will welcome 200 students annually and will stand as a beacon of progress, inclusion, and possibility. The total cost of the project is over €4 million, and thanks to the extraordinary generosity of key supporters, much of that has already been raised.

But now, we need your help to raise a final €500,000 to create a truly excep-

tional learning environment. With your support, we can provide innovative adaptive technologies and teaching resources; dedicated equipment and spaces for our performing arts students, as well as calming indoor and outdoor sensory areas.

Construction is well underway, and we are on track to open in September 2025. Your kindness could be the reason a young person with autism finds their confidence on stage, or a student with a sensory condition feels truly at home in their learning environment.

Together, we can build not just a college – but a future filled with promise and opportunity.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

Barry McGinn

Barry McGinn
Chief Executive Officer,
Rehab Group



RehabGroup

Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

Ann Widdecombe: ‘I felt relief when I v

Joanne Savage

Earlier pilgrims of the faith donned sackcloth and ashes during the Lenten period, whereas in today's Ireland it's arguably more a question of giving up Kit-Kats or Guinness and saying extra Hail Marys – which is not to trivialise the Lenten sacrifices of the faithful but rather to set them in context against the serious privations observed long ago.

The former Conservative MP and cabinet minister Ann Widdecombe, who has had a many-storied career in British politics, and is well known as an outspoken advocate for the right in British politics, as well as being a forthright moralist of a media darling, wrote a book on the very subject of penance, *Sackcloth & Ashes*, in 2013, wherein she remembers the history and meaning of penitential behaviour as a mark of Christian faith in the run-up to the most important feast in the liturgical calendar.

The now Immigration and Justice spokesperson for the pro-Brexit party Reform UK, 77, speaks to us from her home in Dartmoor about what penance means to her, having converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1993, after growing increasingly frustrated by what she saw as the growing tendency of the Church of England to kowtow to what was fashionable as opposed to a rigorous devotion to Christian doctrine.

Penance

First of all, what has Ann, a former MEP and graduate of Oxford, whose paternal grandfather hails from Cork, given up for Lent this year?

“Alcohol and biscuits. I haven't fallen so far. What sustains me in moments of temptation is that I have made a vow to God and, you know, if you've made one of those, you keep it. And the other thing is that I never observe Sundays as an exception, I observe it the whole way through.”

She adds: “If I exempted Sunday, I'd find it harder, you know, to get going again

on Monday, so it's actually easier to do the full 45 days rather than 40.”

Ms Widdecombe, who is utterly devout in her Catholic faith, explains her understanding of penance as a sharing in Christ's journeying toward Calvary. Compared to what He suffered on that final journeying, what we are asked to endure might seem risibly slight, yet, still, it is at least some attempt to enter into a spiritual commonality with the approach toward Golgotha that Christ endured.

“The idea of penance is first of all based upon a consciousness of sin. We are all sinners, everybody sins and most people sin every single day,” she explains in her brisk, always straight-talking, way.

“Penance is an outward sign of an acknowledgement of that sin. We are in the lead up to Calvary, the lead up to Good Friday, so what you're actually doing is you're saying, it was for our sins that Christ died at Calvary and therefore we show or engage in some form of self-inflicted punishment – I don't really like that phrase. But penance is a way of showing that we are sorry and in a small way, in the smallest of ways really, that we are joining Christ on that journey towards Calvary.

“The concept of actually hurting yourself or endangering your health or the body that God gave you doesn't seem to me to be what penance is about”

“Our journey is nothing like His. In my book *Sackcloth & Ashes*, I compare the kind of penance we do now compared with what our ancestors were comfortable with. We don't have to take it that far today, I am not saying we should start donning sackcloths again, but our ancestors were comfortable with the concept of penance and considered it absolutely normal and fit-

ting during the Lenten season.”

I ask Ann if she has ever heard of the kind of penance that the Irish Catholic faithful choose to freely undergo at Lough Derg, in Co Tyrone, and not just during the Lenten season but during the months of the year when the weather allows for the faithful to visit, wherein they proceed to walk with bare feet over stones, praying, going without sleep, resting on pallet boards, and eating burnt toast washed down with black tea.

Ann scoffs at this. “No thanks. The concept of pain is not one that I associate with penance. I mean the concept of actually hurting yourself or endangering your health or the body that God gave you doesn't seem to me to be what penance is about. Penance is about deprivation I would say, but not about damage. Things like self-flagellation, I mean Opus Dei can keep that.”

Anglican

Ann was not simply raised an Anglican. Her family is steeped in it. Her late brother was an Anglican vicar and today her nephew remains one. But when the Church of England began to push for the ordination of women and in her mind to increasingly dilute the absolutes of Christian faith in order to be seen to appease what she regards as an increasingly lax secular society, she decided that a conversion to Catholicism felt like a natural transition.

“The final straw for me with Anglicanism was the debate about the ordination of women. The debate was not about, is this theologically sound, it was about the Church of England and the then Archbishop [of Canterbury George Carey] saying that if they didn't agree to this reform then they wouldn't be acceptable to the modern world. The debate was about trying to appease the crowd and for me that was the last straw.

“I was confirmed as a Catholic in 1993. I felt relief when I was received into the Catholic Church.”

The former MP for Maidstone and the Weald, who



served as both British Minister for Employment and Minister for Prisons under then Prime Minister John Major adds: “It was a momentous decision for me. My family was very deeply Anglican.

“I wouldn't even say that the Church of England had become too liberal, I would say that it no longer had any sense of direction”

“I was very grateful to have made the decision that I made – it was the right decision for me and my family were supportive. My brother was, at the time, an evangelical Anglican vicar, so never in a million years would he have become a Catholic, but at the time of my conversion even he was fed up with the Church of England and its inveterate

“Penance is a way of showing that we are sorry and in a small way, in the smallest of ways really, that we are joining Christ on that journey towards Calvary”

desire to please the modern world, and the more it tried to do that the more the pews emptied, in my view.”

Ms Widdecombe has gone on record many times as a staunch opponent of abortion and this was also an important reason for her pivot from Anglicanism to Catholicism.

“You know, the Church of England has no position on abortion, which I completely oppose, no position these days on assisted dying (to which I am opposed), it was allowing not only divorce but also blessings for divorced couples, and similarly, at the time the fourth most senior Bishop in the Church of England,

the Bishop of Durham, was even questioning articles of creed. If a Catholic Bishop had done that he would have been out. I wouldn't even say that the Church of England had become too liberal, I would say that it no longer had any sense of direction.”

Alignment

On becoming Catholic, what did Ms Widdecombe feel that she had gained?

“First of all, I felt aligned with and part of the early Church. I felt as if I was in a Church that always put faith in doctrine first and fashion second, as opposed to fashion over faith, that I was with a Church that

“Something can be very popular but not right, and something can be very unpopular and generally opposed by the world, but it can still be right. What matters is truth, not popularity, and that for me was the essence”

was received into the Catholic Church'



knew exactly where it was going, and what it believed, and that was confirmed for me shortly after I joined the Catholic Church when Pope John Paul II published *Veritatis Splendor*, 'The Shining of Truth', where the central thesis was that something can be very popular but not right, and something can be very unpopular and generally opposed by the world, but it can still be right. What matters is truth, not popularity, and that for me was the essence."

“The interests of big business are increasingly what dictates governmental policy and societal structures”

There is no question that a growing tide of rampant secularism if not to say an outright rage against God, as

“I don't think the Church should be involved in direct political decision making, the Church is there for religious and moral guidance”

the journalist Peter Hitchens has diagnosed it, means that any kind of Christo-centric moral paradigm is arguably no longer informing British and Irish politics today, that the cult of self-interest, of consumerism and the interests of big business are increasingly what dictates governmental policy and societal structures and attitudes.

Association

Ann agrees that more must be done to make a Christian moral consciousness more salient to what she-calls the “me, me, me society”.

She adds: “Christianity is certainly out of fashion, there is no doubt about that

lar society? Yes, you can. But the danger is that when you take away the influence of the Church, what you have is the ‘me, me, me society’ wherein people are guided by and prioritise their own self-interest all the time.”

What can be done to supplant secularism with a more Christian philosophy, or to cure a society that has largely been seduced by a competitive individualism that has limited time for any consideration of God in the domain of government?

“I don't think the Church should be involved in direct political decision making, the Church is there for religious and moral guidance,” Ann continues.

“The Church is about souls and their redemption. Its business is not politics. So, you do not have the Church as an institution involved in political decision-making, rather, it is there to give moral commentary on political decision-making.”

“Modern British politics is scarcely informed by Christian morality at all. To a certain extent, maybe, but not in any fundamental way”

She adds: “Individual Christians are the people who can make the difference in politics as in all areas of society.

“But we rarely hear them speak about God at all. Yet if we don't invoke God, how can we promote a Christian message not just within politics but in society in general?” Having been a stalwart of the Conservative Party for so many years, before her defection to Reform UK, I wonder what she thinks of the current Conservative cabinet headed by Kemi Badenoch?

She doesn't miss a beat. One senses that this is a woman who early does.

“When I look at it [the party] I feel despair.

“I think that modern British politics is scarcely

informed by Christian morality at all. To a certain extent, maybe, but not in any fundamental way, and I don't think there is any way to change this other than by galvanising individual Christian politicians to expound and follow a Christian ethic that then informs their political decision making so that their Christian moral compass is then deployed in matters of policy. But there is no overarching systematic way of doing this.” She adds: “If the early Church had shown the level of enthusiasm which today's Anglican church and politicians show, we'd all still be worshipping Zeus. It's down to individual Christians. Nobody has a duty to do it for us, it is down to us.

“Do we have enough robustly Christian politicians in Westminster today to drive policy? We do have some outstanding Christian politicians, but are there enough of them as a force? Well no, of course we don't have that kind of momentum in modern British politics. I can't speak with the same authority about Irish politics.

“I think that Christian politicians, whether Conservative, Labour, or other, need to be more active, campaign more, need to speak out more and be more overt.

“The early Church did not depend on an organisation. It was down to individual Christians to make a difference.”

Changes

She observes, trenchantly: “You know, St Paul was not an organisation when he went off on his missionary journey.”

Ann continues: “Largely it is not moral considerations or Christian considerations that are driving politics or society, but instead the rampant tide of modern secularism has instituted the cult of self-interest above all else.

“There's no magic wand, no snap formula for changing this.

“The early Church built itself up from nothing, simply from individuals who followed Christ. Again, I say that the onus is on individuals to shift the paradigm of

British and Irish politics so that it supplants the cult of the ‘me, me, me’ society with one that prioritises Christian and moral considerations.”

The Catholic Marxist critic Terry Eagleton has gone on record as diagnosing Widdecombe's Conservatism and implicit support for big business as being at odds with what he sees as the left-wing or communitarian dogma preached by Jesus, lambasting Ann for the support of capitalist orthodoxy that enshrines the kind of structural economic inequality he sees, much as the late Tony Benn saw it, as absolutely central to the wisdom of the Gospels.

“If you want to pay the in-keeper in order to help the vulnerable party then you obviously need to have money”

But in Ann's view it is in the interests of the welfare of all in society that governments should promote the accumulation of profit.

“Big business is a good thing because without the profits we can't supply the services that we expect the state to supply. We wouldn't have an adequate health service, social services, a pension system or a welfare system or universal education in Britain if we were a poor country.

“My model and that of Mrs Thatcher's model was that of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan had to be able to pay the inn-keeper in order to help the man who was in need. He had a beast, he had the means. If you want to pay the in-keeper in order to help the vulnerable party then you obviously need to have money.”

Ann concludes: “Conservatives have always understood the necessity of doing that in the sense [that they] appreciate the benefits of capitalism. Labour have got umpteen very kind sounding policies, but their problem has always been that they simply don't have the money to put them into practice.”

i Sackcloth & Ashes by Ann Widdecombe is published by Bloomsbury Continuum and was the Bloomsbury Book of Lent 2014. It is available to order from Amazon.

You can follow Ann Widdecombe's Substack at annwiddecome.substack.com.

“If the early Church had shown the level of enthusiasm which today's Anglican church and politicians show, we'd all still be worshipping Zeus. It's down to individual Christians. Nobody has a duty to do it for us, it is down to us”

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

Synodal process in Ireland

A Church learning to walk together



Young people gathered together - file photo



I experience a Church full of hope and willing to learn, engaged at all levels. From the bishops to the lay movements, there is a real commitment to walk together, writes **Janet Forbes**

The Irish Catholic Church is at a crucial juncture in its synodical journey. With Cardinal Mario Grech's recent letter to bishops around the world on the implementation

phase of the Synod on Synodality, the worldwide Church now has a roadmap and timeline for integrating synodality in the coming years.

The key question now is: How should each local Church respond? Synodality is not about applying top-down directives, but about receiving, discerning and adapting the insights of the Final Document in ways that reflect local culture and reality. For Ireland, this means building on our National Synodal Journey, which began in March 2021, as we learn from the synodal experience of the worldwide Church since September 2021. However, the challenge for all is to ensure that synodality takes root in the daily life of the Church, not just as a concept, but as a way of being.

As someone working at the heart of the Irish synodal process, I see the opportunities and challenges ahead. My role, in the Archdiocese of Armagh, focuses on pastoral

ministry with young people, digital evangelisation and, through my work with the Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh, Michael Router, I am responsible for synodality in the archdiocese. I am also a member of the National Synodal Coordinating Team for the Irish Synodal Way, which is guiding the Church in Ireland along its own unique path of synodal renewal. Studies at Boston College have given me the opportunity to focus on the “how” of synodality. For me, Cardinal Grech's letter to bishops around the world raises what I see as the central question facing us now: how do we move from talking about synodality to actually living it?

My work and studies have given me a broader perspective on how different countries are embracing synodality and alerted me to the challenges each faces. It is encouraging to see that many local Churches around

the world are facing the same issues, and I am comforted by the fact that Churches are facing similar challenges to ours here in Ireland.

Welcoming the Vatican's call for accompaniment

Cardinal Mario Grech's letter on the implementation phase on Saturday, March 15, is a welcome step. It provides much-needed scaffolding and support for national and local Churches, affirming the great need throughout the worldwide Church for ongoing formation, discernment and accompaniment at all levels. What stands out most about Cardinal Grech's letter is that it focuses more on accompaniment than rigid implementation. This is good because in making this point Cardinal Grech himself accompanies the Church and helps it to truly accept and internalise synodality as a way of life.

Personally, I am excited about what this means for Ireland in the coming years. Spring Meetings are currently taking place across Ireland, which will allow us to discern the priorities of the Irish Church and reflect on how to root synodality here in Ireland. In October 2025 there will be a pre-synodal assembly, which will be a key moment when we will seek to align our national reflections with the insights of the global Synod.

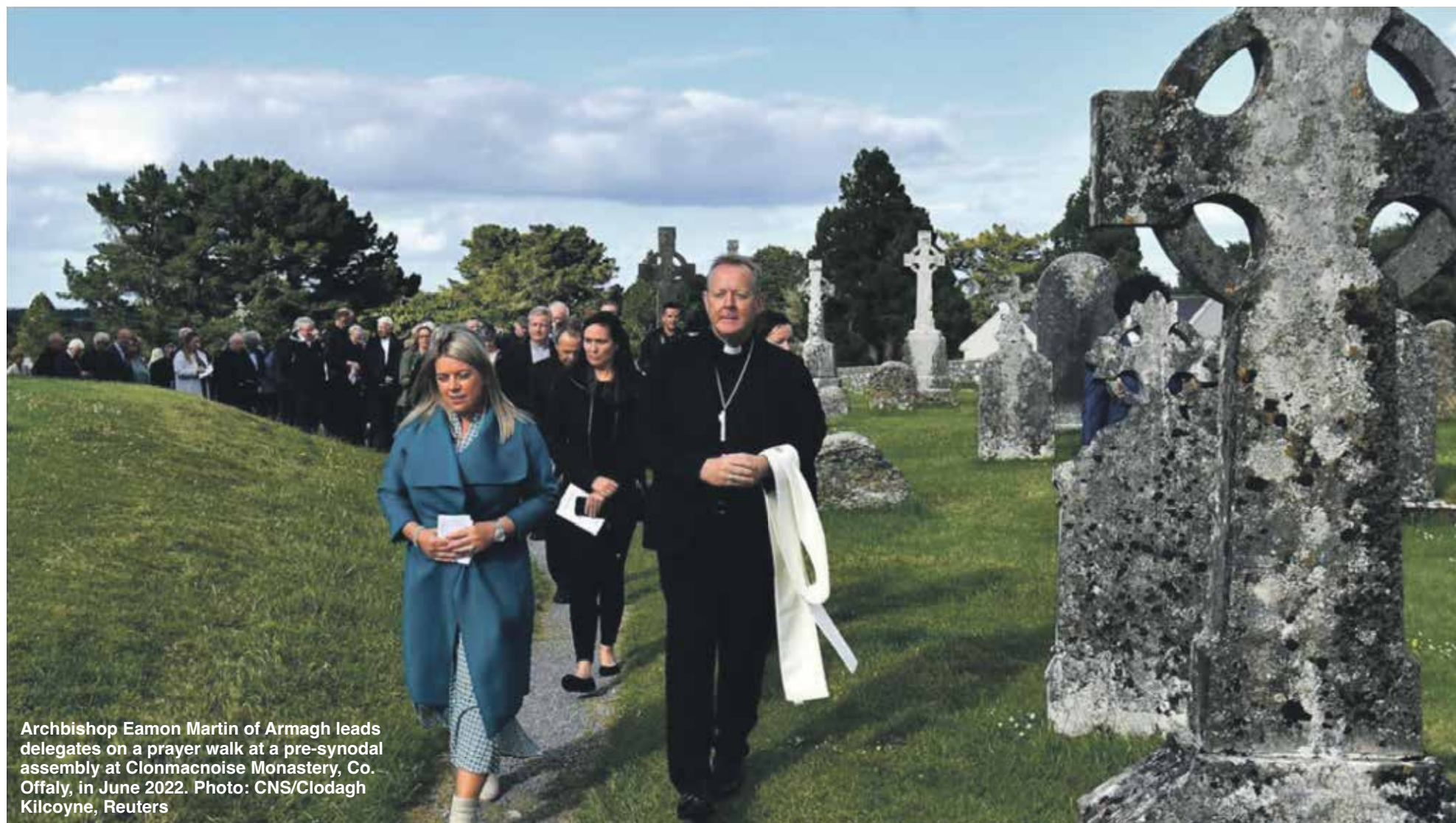
At the same time, this is a particularly challenging moment because we must now discern how to integrate the universal into this process. While there is great enthusiasm for synodality, there is also impatience; many Catholics want to see concrete action immediately. Others struggle with the conceptual shift that synodality requires. It is one thing to talk about participation and co-responsibility

and quite another to restructure decision-making and governance in ways that authentically reflect those principles.

The Role of Young People: A vital presence

One of the most urgent priorities for the Irish Church is to ensure that young people are at the heart of synodal renewal. Young Catholics bring vitality, optimism and creativity, qualities that the Irish Church desperately needs. They are willing to ask difficult questions, challenge outdated structures and push for a more inclusive and authentic Church.

Many young people struggle to find their place within traditional Church structures. Recently, while recovering from a serious car accident, I witnessed firsthand the skill, generosity and compassion of young



Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh leads delegates on a prayer walk at a pre-synodal assembly at Clonmacnoise Monastery, Co. Offaly, in June 2022. Photo: CNS/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters

doctors, nurses and health-care workers. This made me wonder: why does the Church often struggle to offer young people the same sense of purpose and contributions that secular institutions seem to do so naturally?

If synodality is really about walking together, then we must ensure that young people are not only invited into the conversations, but are shaping the future of the Church.

If synodality is really about walking together, then we must ensure that young people are not only invited into the conversations, but are shaping the future of the Church. I see this reality first hand in my work with young people in the Archdiocese of Armagh. When given real opportunities for action and leadership, they thrive, especially in digital evangelisation. Young Catholics around the world are already creating online faith communities, using social media to share their experiences of God and the Church. The real question is: are we prepared to let them lead?

Challenges of implementing synodality

Despite the momentum of the synodal journey here in Ireland, there are real tensions and barriers that need to be addressed.

First, there is the challenge of changing mindsets. In principle, many people are willing and enthusiastic about synodality. However, when it comes

to implementing participatory decision-making and reimagining authority, doubts arise. Moving from a hierarchical model to a more synodal and co-responsible Church requires a profound change of mentality, which requires a lot of time and patience.

“In Ireland we face the important and often insurmountable barrier of trust. The wounds of the abuse crisis, scandals and other institutional failures continue to cast a long shadow over the Irish Church”

Secondly, here in Ireland we have been affected by the impatience of some sectors and the demand for action. Some, particularly those who have been deeply involved in the synodal process, are frustrated by the slow pace of change. They want to see structural reforms now, especially in areas such as lay leadership, the role of women and Church governance. However, I believe that transforming deeply entrenched structures requires careful and sustained effort.

Third, here in Ireland we face the important and often insurmountable barrier of trust. The wounds of the abuse crisis, scandals and other institutional failures continue to cast a long shadow over the Irish Church.

Many Catholics, particularly survivors of abuse, find it difficult to trust Church leaders. Without trust, synodality becomes even more difficult. I believe that rebuilding trusting relationships between the faithful and Church leaders is an essential part of this journey.

How do we move beyond reports and consultations to ensure that synodality is lived out in the daily life of parishes? How do we integrate collaborative decision-making processes, listening structures and share responsibility for the daily life of the Church?

Fourthly, translating synodality into everyday parish life remains both a real challenge and a profound aspiration for the Irish Church. One of the most important questions that, in my view, now faces the Irish Church is how to make synodality a reality at the grassroots. How do we move beyond reports and consultations to ensure that synodality is lived out in the daily life of parishes? How do we integrate collaborative decision-making processes, listening structures and share responsibility for the daily life of the Church?

Having recognised the challenges, I see and experience great signs of hope here in Ireland. In my own work I experience, yes, a wounded Church, but also a Church united and committed to the journey. I experience a Church full of hope and willing to learn, engaged at all levels. From the bishops to the lay movements, there is a real commitment to walk together. The pre-synodal assembly of 2025 will be a sig-



Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, poses April 20, 2024, with Father Richard Gibbons, rector of Ireland's National Marian Shrine in Knock, Co. Mayo. Photo: OSV News/Sinead Mallee, courtesy Knock Shrine.

nificant moment to consolidate what we have learned and set a course for the future.

“The work ahead will not be easy, but it is a grace-filled journey and will be carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, it seems, the General Secretariat of the Synod”

I also see a lot of passion, creativity and faith among

young Catholics. They are not afraid to re-imagine what the Church could be. If we really listen to them and let them lead, I believe the future of the Church in Ireland will be vibrant, inclusive and full of hope.

My sense is that the Irish Church has accepted and committed itself to the implementation of synodality as a long-term process of transformation. It will certainly take patience, perseverance and a willingness to embrace change, but the Irish Catholic Church is learning - step by step - what it means to be a synodal Church. The work

ahead will not be easy, but it is a grace-filled journey and will be carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, it seems, the General Secretariat of the Synod.

As we continue to walk the synodal journey together, may each of us trust in the work of the Spirit among us. This is not just a time of renewal; it is the beginning of a new way of being Church and I am excited about what this next part of the journey will entail.

i This article was originally published in Religion Digital, digital Spanish Magazine.

Paul Clark - A lifetime in news guided by Faith



Veteran broadcaster Paul Clark speaks to **Chai Brady** about Easter, assisted suicide, women's potential, and the meaning of journalism

For more than five decades, Paul Clark has been a familiar face and voice in the North of Ireland. Behind the calm presence on screen is a man whose life is anchored not only in journalism, but in a deep Christian faith, works of mercy, defence of the vulnerable, and a relentless curiosity.

Now aged 71, Mr Clark remains the longest-serving broadcaster at UTV. Yet he is far from winding down. In fact, as he reflects on Lent, Easter, and the personal journey that continues to shape him, it is clear that his story is still unfolding.

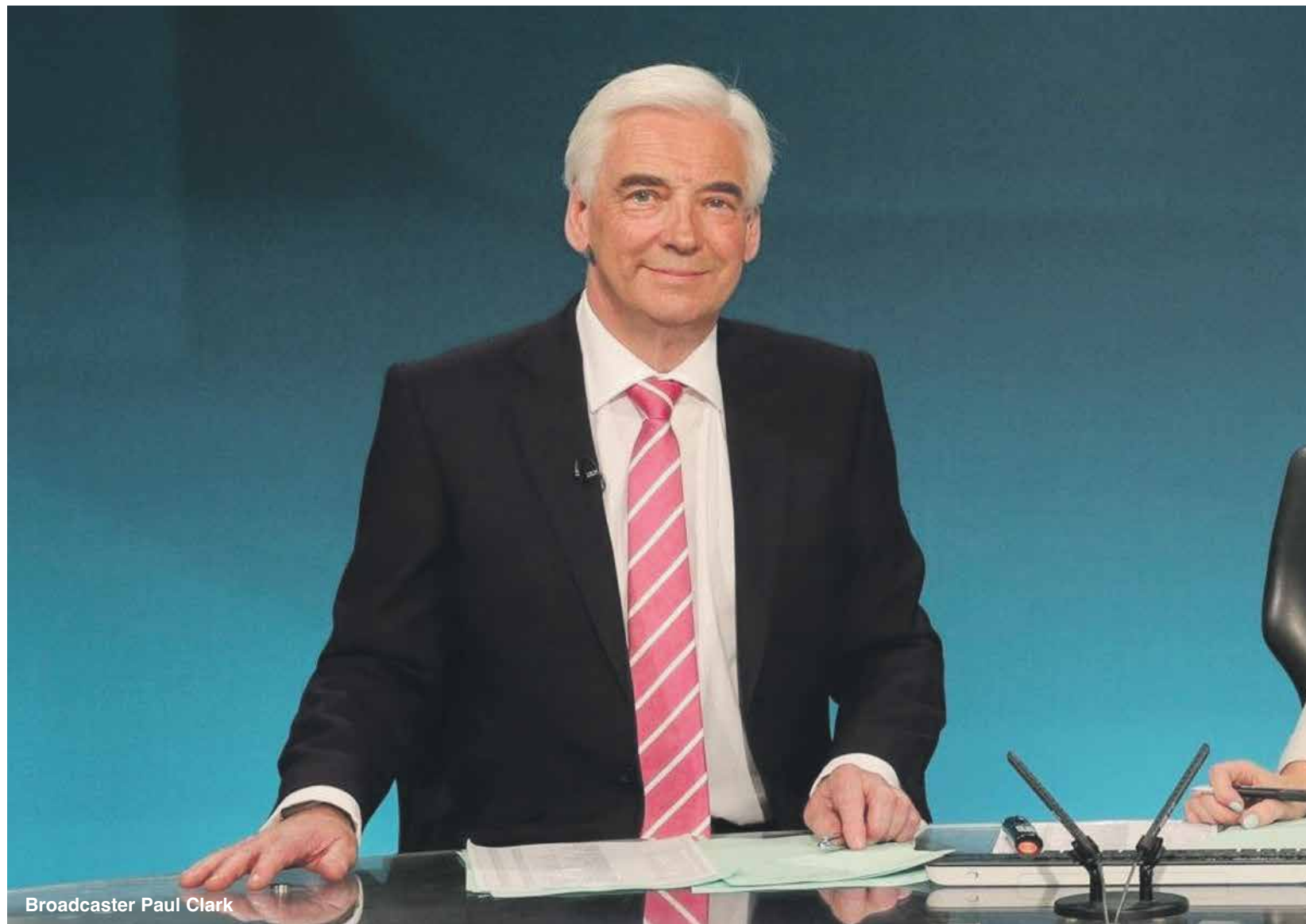
For Mr Clark, Easter stands as the pinnacle of the Christian calendar – far surpassing the festive glow of Christmas, “Easter is the big one. It’s about the Resurrection, and that’s what our faith is all about”.

Evolving

Faith has always been present in his life, never absent, just evolving. “In truth,” he says, “my story has always been one of a journey. I’ve never not believed in God. And the older I get, the more I see the primacy of God and the people he places in our lives to guide us”.

Looking at Lent this year Mr Clark decided to take on a long-neglected book given to him by a friend that had been sitting on his shelf for two decades: *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. It has 40 chapters.

“Having blown the dust off just before Lent – mindful that Lent is 40 days and that the number 40 appears many times in the Bible – I thought to myself I’m being told to read this,” he says, and has



Broadcaster Paul Clark

been reading a chapter a day in the lead up to Easter.

“My view on all of this is that life is given and life is taken by God and we in the hospice movement, we will work to preserve life until the very, very end”

“It’s what has been my driving force this Lent. And it’s not just about reading it, but it’s about making changes. It has made me a less intense person, a more relaxed person, I hope. Certainly a less judgmental person, because it’s very easy in our lives to be judge when in fact we’re all judged in that sense, but by God.”

Alongside his media work, Mr Clark serves as President of the Northern Ireland Hospice, a local charity offering specialist respite, symptom management and end of

life palliative care to 4,000 infants, children and adults each year across Northern Ireland. It is a role he carries with modesty, saying: “I’m the President, yes, but I’m no more or less a volunteer than anyone else. There are people who do more than I do – I just lend my profile to the cause.”

It is a cause that is close to his heart, particularly as his father passed away in hospice five years ago.

“My view on all of this is that life is given and life is taken by God and we in the hospice movement, we will work to preserve life until the very, very end. And there are no shortcuts to that,” Mr Clark insisted.

Privileged

“I’ve been privileged to have been with people very, very close to the end, not least my father, who died in the hospice five years ago, and I feel very strongly that we should not be interfering. We have gifts, indeed, there are many, many able people these days, but I think that there’s an

“I feel very strongly that we should not be interfering. We have gifts, indeed, there are many, many able people these days, but I think that there’s an intervention too far if we try and play God. And I’d rather let God be God”

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“I suppose death might have frightened me once upon a time. It certainly does not now, but it may well have been an opportunity for me to come to terms with my own mortality”

With the ongoing discussions and debates in Ireland and Britain about assisted suicide, England and Wales continue to get closer to legalisation. Mr Clark specifically mentioned

the ongoing debate around assisted suicide in the House of Commons in Westminster.

The House of Commons next debate on assisted suicide laws was delayed until after their local election. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill returns to the Commons on May 16 for its next stage. MPs have been urged to voice their opposition by Christian leaders.

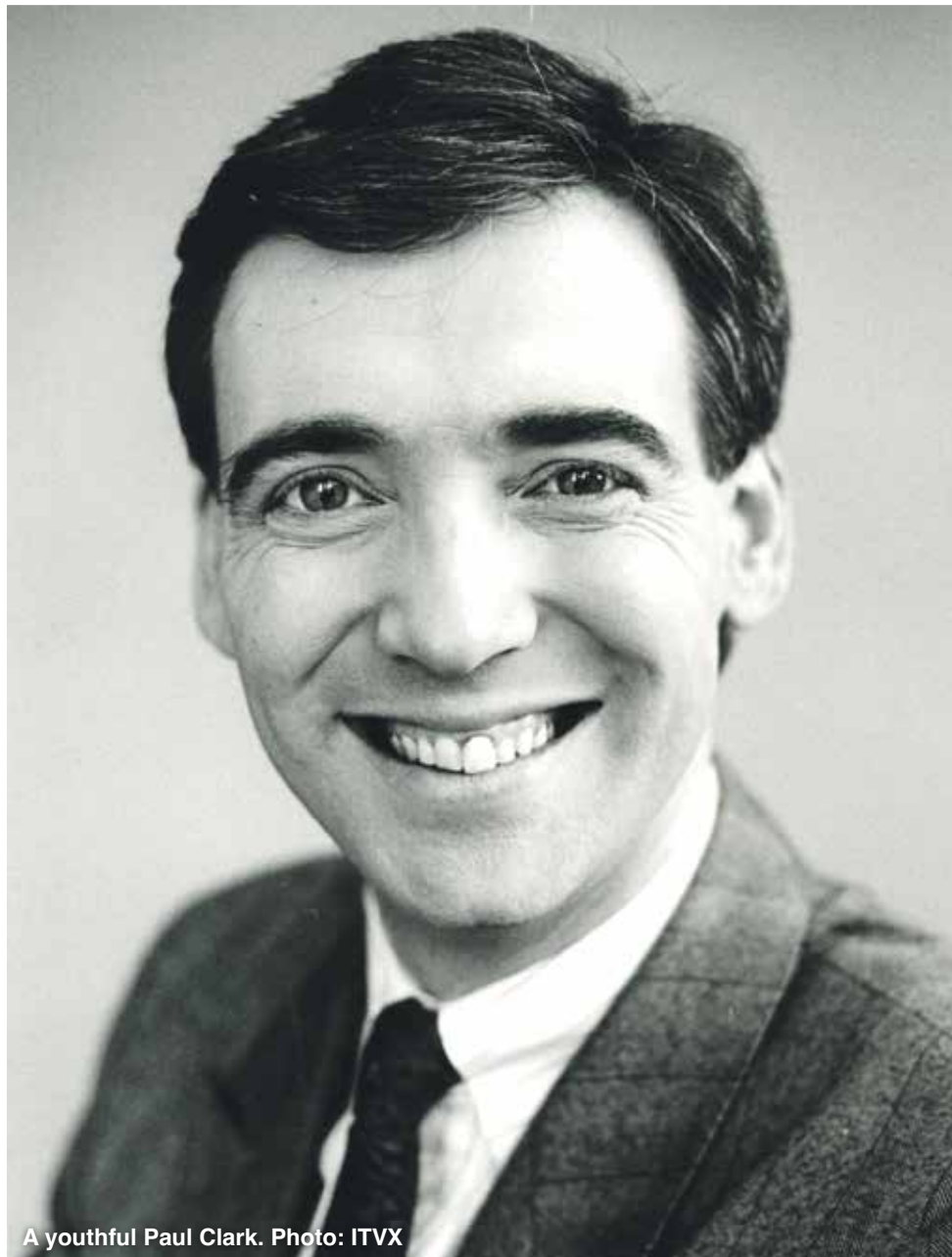
Mr Clark’s hospice experience has definitely changed him. While many would have discomfort or even terror faced with even the idea of death, it is not the case for him, having had so much first-hand experience as well as a steely faith.

He explains: “I suppose death might have frightened me once upon a time. It certainly does not now, but it may well have been an opportunity for me to come to terms with my own mortality. The jour-

ney is not just about what I do with others in the hospice, but it’s what that means to me and how that has changed me and so I feel very strongly about that. It’s a two-way street you know, Faith is a two-way street as well.

“I think one of the nicest things that I heard from the chaplains at the hospice at the end of my father’s life – and it summed my dad up big time – my father ministered to them as chaplains, rather than them ministering to him. He was ready to meet his God, a very devoutly Christian and Catholic man. And maybe not everybody was.”

Mr Clark added: “I hesitate to use this language – resigned to his fate – because it sounds like a negative, but the reality is that he knew what was coming next and he believed it. It shone through



A youthful Paul Clark. Photo: ITVX

his life particularly at the end.

"In truth it is a reflection of my own life because I do not believe that death is the end and I never have. We live in a fallen world, we live in an imperfect world and a world in which God gets a bad press whenever things go wrong, but actually it is what we do with the things that go wrong in all of our lives that is the making of us."

Women and justice

Mr Clark's advocacy doesn't stop with end-of-life care. A former UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, he speaks openly about the plight of children in the developing world – and about the underestimated strength of women.

"I've travelled in the developing world, I have seen the evidence for myself how children are very much at the bottom of the pile and we ignore them. We ignore children at our peril. And we ignore the potential of women at our peril too. Because more often than not, a mother and child are one – they're bonded. I have seen in my own experience how women and children are knitted together. So if you help one, you're helping the other."

Mr Clark says that he has seen with his own eyes that it is actually safer to give women a loan for a start-up business than a man.

He explains: "I've done a bit of work overseas, not for television, but because of my interest in mission, and I have discovered that women are a much better credit risk than men whenever it comes to being given startup grants for their business."

"I saw something I hadn't seen before – women being allowed to grow, to fly. That changed me"

"Invariably the reason is that if a man reaches a brick wall he will tend to go off with other men and drink, they will sort the problem out by spending the money on alcohol. But a woman, who is the one charged with having to put bread on the table, thinks of it in a very different way. If she is given a loan to make a business work, a small enterprise, shall we say, if she reaches a brick wall, she will try and get over it rather than stopping dead because there is much more going on in her life."

He credits *RTÉ* in the early 1980s for opening his eyes to women's potential in broadcasting, saying that he moved from the *BBC* in Northern Ireland to *2FM* in Dublin and

"I saw something I hadn't seen before – women being allowed to grow, to fly. That changed me".

Elaborating, he says: "I had been working previously in an environment where a woman knew her place, in that a man decided where the woman had her place, so most of the women that I was working with, they tended to be secretaries or copy takers, that was that was my life experience working in broadcasting in the *BBC* in the 1970s. Whenever I went to Dublin in 1980, I found that *RTÉ*'s attitude was so very, very different."

Masculinity

Mr Clark doesn't shy away from introspection – even when it comes to masculinity.

"I've seen toxic masculinity. I've been part of it, in a way, when I wore a younger man's clothes. But we need women in positions of power. Imagine if women had been running the banks during the crash—maybe it wouldn't have been so bad. My wife is certainly better at balancing the books than I am."

Despite his long career, Mr Clark remains committed to journalism not as a platform for ego, but as a vocation.

"I've been privileged to have met President Clinton. I've met the Pope in 1979 when he came to Ireland. I've interviewed prime min-



Paul Clark presenting. Photo: ITVX

"Given the health, I can't ever see a time when I will not want to be asking questions and interviewing people rather than being interviewed myself"

isters, I've interviewed taoisigh, and first ministers and all of that. The people who have impressed me most, and the people whose stories live with me always, are those that I have interviewed who have been affected by the Troubles, those people who have had a relation murdered," he says.

"Be it a Catholic or Protestant, be it a brother, a father, a sister, a daughter there's a common denominator in all of the interviews that I have done, and this is what lives with me: We don't want this to happen to anybody else," he recalls, adding that "Unfortunately, it did for too many years, but the truth is that they had a story that I was privileged to be able to tell, and it wasn't about me, but it was about them."

Mr Clark is still showing up, still asking questions, and still finding meaning in the stories that don't always make headlines. While some may expect talk of retirement, Clark has other ideas, "God hasn't finished with me yet."

"I get so much out of the work that I do. I know it's a cliché, but if you enjoy what you do, you never work a day in your life. I've discovered that it's true"

Though realistic about the fact that he won't read the news forever, he remains committed to journalism, saying: "Given the health, I can't ever see a time when I will not want to be asking questions and interviewing people rather than being interviewed myself."

That drive is rooted in something deeper than habit.

Clark still finds challenge and fulfilment in reporting – even in short two- or three-minute pieces that others might overlook.

"I get so much out of the work that I do. I know it's a cliché, but if you enjoy what you do, you never work a day in your life. I've discovered that it's true," he says

To young journalists entering the field, Clark offers a clear message: don't try to be someone else. "Be yourself. That is the best that you can be. But also be curious. Very often in life we model ourselves on somebody else. But the truth is that that person's already spoken for." What matters, he says, is having the confidence to follow your own path – and to keep asking questions, even when it's uncomfortable.

"I have found myself in very uncomfortable situations. You have to knock on doors, and you know that somebody has been murdered. Whoever answers the door is not necessarily going to want to talk to you because you're the media," he says, but this is a responsibility journalists share with others in public service: the gardaí, the police, ambulance crews – "They are all in the same situation."

Message

His message to younger colleagues – many of whom are decades his junior – is to embrace uncertainty, "Don't be afraid to take risks. Don't be afraid to be in an uncomfortable zone. The reality is that others may wish to live your life for you, but you've got to do it yourself."

Quoting both Steve Jobs and the Bible, Clark sees a moral imperative in that: "There's no point in living somebody else's dream because you've got your

own to live... We spend so much of our time trying to live a life that other people have planned for us and we miss what it's all about – which is living the life that God has planned for us."

"I'm not so sure that journalism should ever be about the people who are writing. Surely it is about the people you are writing about?"

That sense of purpose also informs how Clark sees journalism itself – not as a platform for ego, but as a service. "It isn't about me and it never was," he says. "I'm not so sure that journalism should ever be about the people who are writing. Surely it is about the people you are writing about?"

He's clear, too, on the importance of accuracy. "I was trained the old-fashioned way," he explains, "I began in newspapers, then graduated to radio and television. We are trained to deal with facts – and the facts, as I was brought up with, are sacred." In a time when misinformation can spread faster than ever, Clark's advice remains the same: "Check, and check, and check again."

While he knows the profession is changing, he believes the core values haven't. Truth, curiosity, integrity, and humility still matter. And as long as he can, he intends to keep showing up to tell the story.

After finishing all the chapters of *The Purpose Driven Life*, Mr Clark steps into Easter who he has always been: a truth-seeker, a servant, a storyteller, and above all, a man who believes.

"I'm still learning," he says, "and I always will be."

Your Faith

The sacred power of the religious habit

Bro. Oman Ashraf OSA

Pages 36-37



The Irish Catholic, April 17, 2025



Three ways to Golgotha

Christ carrying the Cross, Titian / Blessed Columba Marmion

Well, how has your Lent gone? Forgive me if I'm not surprised if your record isn't exactly pristine. I've always noticed that by the time Good Friday comes around I've often been practically brought to my knees trying (and failing) to keep my resolutions - but perhaps this was the point all along, to realise how much we need saving.

We have only a few days left. We're going to join our Lord tonight with a Dublin man for our guide, Blessed Columba Marmion.

Gethsemane

We find Our Lord sweating blood and praying in great fear over our sins in Gethsemane. "He foresees that for many men His blood will be shed in vain," Marmion says, "and this sight raises the bitter suffering of His sacred soul to its highest pitch."

"Yet, Father, let your will be done, not mine." And so the Passion begins. Marmion gives us three ways we can participate in Christ's Passion - except, why would we want to do that in the first place? Since we've just heard how terrible it was! - Because, inasmuch as we share his sufferings we also share his glories. 'If we have died with Him, then we shall live with Him; if we suffer



Although suffering is unavoidable, we can see in it an ultimate meaning and value, says Jason Conroy

with Him, then we shall reign with Him.' The principle holds true that in whatever extent we have solidarity with Jesus in His human lot, so He shares with us His divine lot, and the prizes of His victory.

We should do these three practices especially during Holy Week - but also all year round too, because Lent and Holy Week are supposed to push us to actually do all the things we mean to do but put off. Rather than just going 'back to normal' afterwards, we're trying to make lasting progress, Lent after Lent, Passion after Passion, Easter after Easter, over the course of our whole life.

Passion

The first way is by thinking often about Christ during His Passion. In the years after the events of Holy Week, the mother of Jesus and the first Christians must have often retraced from memory that path Jesus walked to Calvary, and this is the origin of our Stations of the Cross today. Why is this important? Mar-

mion explains:

When Christ lived on Earth, there emanated from His divine person an all-powerful strength which cured bodies, enlightened minds and gave life to souls... Something analogous happens when we put ourselves into contact with Jesus by faith. And when, in a spirit of faith, we follow Him from the Praetorium to Calvary and take our place at the foot of the cross, He gives us those same graces.'

Columba Marmion recommends taking time now and then throughout the day to pause, silence the soul, and accompany Jesus by making an interior stations of the Cross.

The best part is that you can do this anywhere - during your commute, for a few minutes during your working day, while you're walking to lunch or stuck in traffic, or - dare I say it! - before you switch on to your preferred form of electronic screen for the evening. I call them Guerilla Stations because,

just as guerilla fighters can fight anywhere and appear behind enemy lines, so in this way we can pray the stations anywhere, thereby making Christ's passion present in the most unexpected times and places.

'It is enough, in order to gather the precious fruits of this practice, that you pause at each Station of the Cross and there meditate on the Passion of the Saviour. No formula of prayer is prescribed, no form of meditation is imposed. Full liberty is left to the taste of each person and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.'

Mass

The second way is by going to Mass! 'To be present at this Holy Sacrifice or to offer it with Christ constitutes an intimate and very efficacious participation in the Passion of Christ....'

Many say, "Oh, if only I had been at Golgotha with the Virgin and St John and Mary Magdalene!" But faith puts us in the actual presence of Jesus immolating Himself on the altar.'

I call this practice "going to Mass at Golgotha", because it sums up that we are already with Christ on the Cross at Mass - we just need to be conscious of it.

Finally, we can also associate ourselves with this mystery by bearing, for love

Good Friday in song

Jesus was an only Son - so runs the opening line and title of Bruce Springsteen's little-known song about the Passion of Christ, from Mary's perspective, as she walks beside Him on the way to Calvary, and remembers the happier days in Nazareth when He was a child; but He comforts Her in the final line of the song with these mysterious words; 'Mother, stay your tears, for remember the soul of the universe willed a world and it appeared'. It's not a name we would use for God, but it does say something good: However bleak everything seems, just remember that someone unthinkably good set it all in motion from the start - so there must be some good purpose behind it all, despite appearances.

The famous 'Stabat Mater', one of the great latin hymns of the Middle Ages, also follows by Mary's side, but my favourite version of it is the wild Corsican chant found in L'Arpeggiatta's album 'Via Crucis', a beautiful album which follows the life of Christ in jazzy-baroque-folk music.

Caoineadh na dTrí Muire or *The Lament of the Three Marys*, is also very touching - something about the perspective of the mother resonates particularly with Irish people I think. During the Triduum, the 'Lamentatio Ieremiae Prophetarum' is sung at 'Tenebre' in St Saviours Dublin - also a very solemn and plaintive tune. During Holy Week our Eastern brethren sing the lament of the Bridegroom over His Bride, for whom He will be crucified. Arvo Part's 'Passio', which follows the Passion according to John, has an austere grandeur right until the moment of the Lord's death, at which point the tone and atmosphere are totally changed to one of comfort, with the final triumphant, relieved lines: "You who suffered for us, have mercy on us. Amen!"

Finally, I must mention Sting's legendary tongue-and-cheek, Newcastle sea shanty about the end times, *The Last Ship*, which opens with Mary Magdalene's discovery of the empty tomb-- but it's too soon for that yet!

of Christ, the sufferings and adversities that, in the designs of His providence, He gives us to undergo. The third practice is to see, by faith, that our little crosses in life are in fact His cross.

“He unites our sufferings to His sorrow, and by that union He confers on them an inestimable value”

To us also God gives a cross to carry, and everyone thinks his own cross to be the heaviest. We ought to accept our cross without argument, without saying "God could have changed this or that circumstance of my life."

Our Lord says to us: "Accept that part of my sufferings which, in my divine prescience, on the day of my Passion, I reserved for you."

Doesn't this turn our atti-

tude to hardships upside down? Right there on the Cross, Christ pictured and reserved this cross for me - 'This is the one I picked for you, not another.'

Marmion goes on: 'He unites our sufferings to His sorrow, and by that union He confers on them an inestimable value.' One of the things that sets us apart as Christians, is this fact, that though suffering is still unavoidable, we can see in it nonetheless an ultimate meaning and value. 'We shall find there,' in the Cross, not only strength, but also 'that peace and that inner joy which knows how to smile in the midst of suffering: "I overflow with joy in all our troubles", declares St Paul.

'Indeed when He mounted to Calvary aided by the Simon of Cyrene, Christ Jesus, God-man, thought of all those who in the course of the centuries would help Him carry His cross by accepting their own.

The Catholic crisis in Ireland

The need for a more realistic understanding of the Irish Church



Emily Nelson

Our experience, understanding and relationships are important in helping us to lead others to Christ. Since our experience is limited and can be subject to bias, real-life data supplements this to strengthen and clarify our approach. This article focuses on factors that influence religiosity and uses these to consider how to respond to our current culture in a positive and constructive way.

Reasons behind individual irreligiosity are multifaceted. Studies in Australia, in America and England, such as *Why Catholics Leave, What They Miss, and How They Might Return* by Prof. Stephen Bullivant have explored such questions. These works provide important insights into what is truly happening in our culture and inform our response.

Trends

There is a growing body of research focusing on religious trends in Ireland. Recent work by Dr Hugh Turpin uncovered major reasons for the disaffiliation of ex-Catholics. As shared in the 1st article in this series, his 2017 survey data allowed ranking of 11 known factors for rejecting Catholicism on a scale from 0 (not at all important) to 6 (extremely important). These were in order; moral conservatism (4.8), clerical abuse (4.69), authoritarianism (4.45), everyday hypocrisy (4.22), irrational beliefs (3.9), inauthentic practice (3.75), personal irrelevance (3.53), boredom with services (3.5), scientific knowledge (3.12), secularist/atheist intellectual influence (2.59) and knowledge of other religions (2.58). This research also uncovered those who considered themselves non-religious often possessed



Sixth-grade students Oisín Lee and Sophie Hannon of St Brigid's Primary School in Kildare, Ireland, are pictured in 2019 making St Brigid's crosses for Irish President Michael D. Higgins. Photo: CNS/Kenneth O'Halloran, Office of the President.

profound moral objections not only to the Church but also cultural Irish Catholics for supporting the Church by their apathy.

“It has also been shown that Ireland in comparison to 13 other European countries had both the greatest support for religion and conversely the greatest anti-religious ideology”

Many cultural Catholics regarded their religious practice as “marked by experiences of boredom, irrelevance, and transparent social conformism,” and expression of religion isolated to use of sacraments for other means. It has also been shown that Ireland in comparison to 13 other European countries had both the greatest support for religion and conversely the greatest anti-religious ideology. This highlights areas of focus for evangelisation which will be explored further below.

The statement “I stopped believing in Catholic teaching” attracted most participants agreement. This was very much reflected

elsewhere in the survey in which participants expressed their dissent from Catholic Church teaching. For most participants this extended to Church doctrine on homosexuality, abortion, birth control, fertility treatment, divorce/marriage and women being priests on their disaffiliation, with most selecting strongly agree on these issues. One participant expressed that they: “Disagree with the Church's stance on contraception/abortion/sex before marriage/LGBTQIA+ - feel that they are out of step with modern issues e.g. financial and environmental pressures of having larger families” Female, 38.

At odds

These responses illustrate the results of the Church being at odds with societal norms. It demonstrates the need to be able to share the reasons behind Church teachings. We can improve our own understanding using the variety of resources available: courses, websites and books. In addition to informing our knowledge, it is important to learn how communicate effectively. Even with those whom we disagree, there are most often shared values such as compassion, respect, jus-

the Irish government and their perpetuation.

Studies show that in the republic of Ireland, ex-Catholics on average estimated that 39% of priests are paedophiles, in comparison to the 36% estimated by liminal Catholics and 20% for orthodox believers. Although these estimates are extremely over-inflated (and best research indicates that priests are significantly less likely to be so than an average man) this perception maintains significant influence on behaviour. We should never downplay the moral depravity of these actions and effect on victims. But it is difficult to determine the extent to which all participants are expressing this as something they dislike rather than something that caused their distance the Church. Perhaps for some, there are other reasons without which they would be able to overcome these issues.

Realistic

This highlights the need for a more realistic understanding of the scale of abuse within the Catholic Church achieved through media representation and word of mouth, as well as sharing about all of the good the Catholic Church has brought: through charity work across the world and the ages, providing education and healthcare for those who would otherwise not have access. Importantly too, you can share with others the good that your faith and Catholicism has brought to your life.

So far, we have focused on the dominant themes behind religiosity, some more of which will be explored in the next article including the impact of COVID-19. Now we will turn to other factors which respondents shared on. For many leaving the Church was a gradual process, with a variety of factors contributing. As with the Portsmouth study, a minority attributed their disaffiliation finding a denomination or religion they preferred, lack of availability of Latin Mass or unfriendliness of a priest. Some felt work and/or personal schedule an obstacle. A few correspondents wanted a “simple” or “quiet” Mass, others a livelier Mass, some a more traditional and solemn liturgy or for certain individuals a child-friendly Mass was called for. Options varied on whether “The Catholic

Mass is too ritualistic or formal”, though nearly half felt that “What is said during Mass is of no relevance to me”. Music was far more often mentioned in a positive light. Answers to “The parish and diocese make too many requests for money” were reasonably evenly spread, with the majority (nearly one third) remaining neutral/no opinion, though it was mentioned by some outside this question as contributing to their disaffiliation.

When asked if there was a time when they attended Mass more regularly, some shared:

“Such responses indicate the multi-factorial nature of irreligiosity”

“Attended every Sunday with my parents until I was about 14/15 when they let me choose to keep going or not. I stopped going as I felt it was a pointless chore.” Male, 25

“I have distanced myself from the church because I believe that you don't need to go to church to be a Christian.” Female, 60.

“There were several things about Catholicism and religion in general I always thought didn't make sense...” Male, 31.

Such responses indicate the multi-factorial nature of irreligiosity. While many participants offered a mix of poor personal experience and/or distance from experiences outside church contributing to doubts on the validity of Church teaching, amongst other factors. This reality can bear fruit in our response. We know that God reaches out to all these individuals regardless of their reasoning. Through understanding of what impacts irreligiosity in our culture, we can prepare ourselves in our knowledge and prayer to be instruments of His grace.

“A qualified pharmacist, following volunteering roles Emily Nelson pursued her interest and completed a Master's in theology at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. She set up Faith Versed through which she supports Christian organisations in the UK and Ireland in event organisation and research. Alongside this Emily is completing a PhD in Sociology at Queen's University Belfast, in Catholic Disaffiliation on the Island of Ireland.”

“Over two thirds of participants agreed that there are too many scandals in the Catholic Church, significantly higher than found in an English study that inspired this work”

The ambitious mission of placing the 'far-centre' within reach

The role of the faithful in maintaining the balance



For Christians, the challenge is to be careful of patterns of thought or habits of communication that too readily divide the world into 'us' and 'them', writes **Fr Chris Hayden**

We live in a time of name-calling, pigeon-holing, and labelling. Perhaps, given our flawed human nature, this has always been the case. But with today's technology, the old name-calling virus goes viral, the perennial human tendency is put on digital steroids. Another difference today is that much of the name-calling is self-directed, and a great deal of self-directed name-calling falls under the heading of identity politics: 'This is what I am, and this is what I demand to be called.'

In the realm of political name-calling, two adjectives have become quite common: 'hard' and 'far.' They are rarely if ever used in a self-directed way, but as a way of expressing disapproval or disdain. Consider the notion of 'far right.' This term is used not so much to describe, as to distance. 'Far right' means 'not like us,'

“In our current, increasingly polarised social and political climate, it's easy to fall into extremes, and considerably more difficult to maintain balance and charity”



'at a great remove from our politics,' 'outside the Pale.' The very same applies to the term 'far left.' The use of such labels does not so much describe others, as convey the user's visceral reaction to them.

Polarised

But honestly, how far away is the far right, or the far left? In our current, increasingly polarised social and political climate, it's easy to fall into

extremes, and considerably more difficult to maintain balance and charity. With the far right and the far left looming ever closer, is it not the centre that is receding? Should we not, rather, be speaking of, and aspiring to, the far centre?

“While the centre recedes; we readily tip over into craziness, while struggling to retain our balance”

A host of algorithms is waiting to transport us, quickly and effortlessly, to whatever extreme has been fascinating us, or simply arousing our curiosity. This happens off our field of vision, through algorithmically curated newsfeeds, push notifications, and various other components of the digital environment. The philosophy of the algorithm, like that of the cancer cell, is 'more of the same.' Over time, this naturally leads to undesirable extremes. How many innocent online searches regarding dieting, for instance, have led within a few clicks or visits, to sites where eating disorders are celebrated!

“The far centre is a more difficult place to inhabit; its occupants are vulnerable to attack from both right and left”

And so, the extremes draw ever closer, while the centre recedes; we readily tip over into craziness, while struggling to retain our balance. It is the centre that proves distant. A couple of lines from WB Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming*, could have been written for our 'algorithmic' world: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."

Recognition
What to do? Simple recognition is half the battle: the recognition that it is easier for us to be drawn to extremes than to hold the

ground of good sense; the recognition, furthermore, that our communications technology and habits exacerbate this tendency, and that we need to be mindful and watchful.

For Christians, the challenge is to be careful of patterns of thought or habits of communication that too readily divide the world into 'us' and 'them.' Of course there can be serious differences regarding serious issues, and the 'far centre' is not located halfway between the truth and the lie. But increasingly, the 'far right' and the 'far left' are being reinforced by digital communications and political commentary, and it behoves the followers of Christ to have our view of others coloured by His wisdom and His compassion. The far centre is a more difficult place to inhabit; its occupants are vulnerable to attack from both right and left. But sincere discipleship – and a little bit of digital savvy – bring the far centre within reach. May the Lord help us to take up residence there!

“The centre is the Gospel, with its all-embracing worldview, which is lovely, coherent, wise, and as hard as diamond”

Finally, that other increasingly common adjective, 'hard,' shouldn't be surrendered to those who want to describe their opponents as 'hard right' or 'hard left.' Very often, the extreme positions are intellectually rather soft (which, incidentally, explains a lot of their stridency: when your position is weak, then shout louder!).

Here, too, we can speak of the 'hard centre.' For us, as Christians, the centre is the Gospel, with its all-embracing worldview, which is lovely, coherent, wise, and as hard as diamond. Not 'hard' as in 'harsh,' but hard as in durable, brilliant, hardwearing. So let's strive to live at the far and hard centre, mindful that in a world of increasing polarisation and confusion, the word of the Lord is close to hand and endures for ever.

The light of hope and faith shining through the darkness of fear

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Ps 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Col 3:1-4 OR 1 Cor 5:6b-8
Jn 20:1-9

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Dominik Domagala



My good friend recently shared a story about a man he met in a Brazilian prison nearly 30 years ago. Sentenced for a crime he indeed committed, he had little hope of an early release and regaining his freedom. However, something remarkable happened that Easter Sunday; he attended the Mass that my priest friend celebrated in the prison chapel. During the homily, my friend asked the prisoners what resurrection meant to them. There were no responses at first. Finally, the young man, who attended the Mass for the first time, raised his hand. He replied: "I don't know much about faith and resurrection, but for me, my mother is that sign."

If you are intrigued by what he meant, that is understandable. I also wondered about the inmate's words and asked my friend to explain them to me. Fr Michael then told me, "You see, at that time, visiting a sentenced man in jail was not easy at all. In Brazil, the person visiting someone had to go through numerous procedures and checks before seeing their relative. The mother of this young man had to be completely stripped of all her clothes and endure various humiliating procedures just to see her boy." He continued, "Do you know what she told him after all the check-ups were done? And when they finally could see each other?" "What?" I asked. "She didn't complain or lash out," Fr Michael said. "The only thing she asked was whether he was doing well and had put his life back on track, and that she was happy to finally see her son."

Fr Michael finished telling me his story with this remark: resurrection doesn't have to be a theo-

retical theological wonder. Of course, we relate it to Jesus, who came back to life and triumphed over sin and death. However, the same Jesus brings about many resurrections in our lives, even if we don't always recognise them. This beautiful mother overcame numerous difficulties to restore life to her poor son. She accepted the cross and humiliation to give life to her prodigal son. She offered love to the one who did not merit it. She made a choice of faith: she opted for a life-giving gesture rather than allowing her boy to remain dead.

Peter's witness

The power with which Apostle Peter speaks in today's First Reading is undeniable: "I, and those with me, can witness to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judaea and in Jerusalem itself; and also to the fact that they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet three days afterwards God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand" (Acts 10:39-41).

What made Peter proclaim this amazing statement of faith in front of the pagan centurion Cornelius and his entire household? Was it because of a dream in which he heard the voice from above, "What God has made clean you must not call profane?" (Acts 10:15). Certainly, God opened the eyes of Peter to understand that it is of God's grace from which people receive the graces. Indeed, they receive God's life. But he also had to remember his many mistakes before truly accepting what the Lord was teaching him. To mention only some of Peter's mistakes, he oftentimes was full of self-



The disciples Peter and John running to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection, Eugène Burnand

ambition and pride, wanting to decide who could be the closest to Jesus. He repeatedly watered down the message of Jesus by his misbelief and doubts (walking on water, the Transfiguration). Peter was even trying to impose on Jesus his worldly agenda, being rebuked by the Lord! How many promises and oaths he made, proving to be always faithful to the Lord. However, his mistakes were not altogether in vain! These and many other fallouts helped Peter understand and believe he was not the one who saved others. He was the one to be saved!

Paul's encouragement

In St Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the Apostle encourages the Christians to have their ultimate hope and faith in the Grace obtained for them by Jesus: "Since you have

“There are still people who didn't experience that shine, enlightening the empty tomb of Jesus. Their journey is long, their night is dark, and arriving at that empty cave might take a while”

been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in Heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the Earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3).

St Paul truly believes and teaches others that Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection free every human being from the chains of sin's slavery! In Him, any human fault, fallout, or sin is redeemed! This redemption done for us by the Lord has to be sometimes discovered; at times, taken down by mistakes and failures, people living around us might not be able to see, appreciate, and live again from that Grace. That's where your and mine's job is yet to be done!

Mary's faith

St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) says that surrendering to God and staying in union with Him is indeed the highest level

of prayer. Then, she says, "People can do nothing but radiate to other hearts the divine love that fills them and so participate in the perfection of all into unity in God, which was and is Jesus' great desire" (*The Hidden Life*, pp.17-18).

“The light enters the deep cave in which the empty stone lies. The light comes in, and to those with faith, all is clear”

The Resurrection of the Lord, which we are celebrating this Sunday, is one of the greatest mysteries of our faith. Last night, we were singing in the Church, "Let there be light!" As we approach the church this morning, the stone is indeed rolled away. The light enters the deep cave in which the empty stone lies. The light comes in, and to those with faith, all

is clear. The promise from the prophet Ezekiel is clear and sound: "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, my People" (Ezekiel 37:12). Although Mary was confused, maybe even frightened, the light of hope and faith had to shine through the darkness of fear.

Yet, there are still people who didn't experience that shine, enlightening the empty tomb of Jesus. Their journey is long, their night is dark, and arriving at that empty cave might take a while. Until that happens, they have you and me. Now, it is for us to make a choice of faith: we ought our Sweet Saviour to opt for a life-giving gesture rather than allowing anyone to remain dead. Happy Easter.

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“She accepted the cross and humiliation to give life to her prodigal son. She offered love to the one who did not merit it. She made a choice of faith: she opted for a life-giving gesture rather than allowing her boy to remain dead”

A visible witness of grace and trust

The sacred power of the religious habit



In a world where everyone's obsessed with being unique, the habit makes the most countercultural statement of all: 'My truest self (identity) is found only in Christ,' writes **Bro. Oman Ashraf OSA**

The religious habit is like a flame in the fog of modern life, where so much noise, distraction, and emptiness can make God seem distant. But when people see a priest, nun, or brother in their habit, it cuts through the confusion. That simple, sacred clothing shouts without a word, God is real, and He calls. He is worth giving everything for. It's an armour, too, not against physical danger, but against the slow destruction of faith. Every time they put it on, it reminds them as much as others, 'You are Christ's'. So, walk like Him, following and preaching the living word of God for those who just see it. To the struggling, it's a hope that someone still believes enough to live this testimony. To the angry, it's a challenge - What if holiness is real? To the faithful, it's comforting that God still raises saints. This isn't playacting or nostalgia. The habit is a battle flag in a world at war with the invisible. It says surrender isn't defeat, it's the only victory that lasts.

Mark of Consecration

The religious habit is like a public promise, a way of saying, 'I belong completely to God.' Just like a wedding ring shows the world that someone is married and faithful to their spouse, the habit shows that a priest or nun has given their whole life to God, as St Teresa of Avila says, "The habit is a wedding garment; it signifies our espousal to Christ".

It's their way of saying 'yes' to Him forever. It echoes the words of St Paul "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). In a world where many people are confused about what's true or important, the habit is a clear sign. It tells everyone, 'God is real'. His love changes lives. And giving yourself to Him is the greatest meaning you can find. For the person wearing it, it's also a daily reminder that my life isn't about me anymore, it's about Christ living through me. So, it's not just clothing, it's a mission, a witness, and a call to something greater. In an age of ambiguity, the habit gives clarity. It reminds the wearer and the world that some truths are unchanging; God and the Gospel are transformative, and a life given to Him is a life of profound purpose.

The sacred story

Out in the world – whether on noisy city sidewalks, crowded shopping malls, or quiet church corridors, the religious habit tells its own powerful story before its wearer ever speaks a word. To children, it sparks hope of change and faith, to grandparents, it brings back warm memories of faith, and to those searching for deeper meaning, it plants quiet but persistent questions in their hearts. For those who've drifted from the Church, seeing that familiar habit can feel like coming home, like unexpectedly meeting a mother's open arms. St Alphonsus Liguori says, "The religious habit is a continual sermon preached in silence, reminding the wearer and the world of eternal truths". For people who don't believe, it stands as a walking question mark that challenges everything. What kind of love would make someone live like this? And for young souls just beginning to listen for God's voice, it becomes a living invitation. Could this extraordinary calling be meant for you too? As Pope Benedict XVI once reflected, that habit makes three radical statements "I choose to obey, I embrace simplicity, and I won't chase what everyone else wants." In our modern world where everyone's obsessed with being unique and expressing themselves, the habit makes the most countercultural statement of all: 'My truest self (identity) is found only in Christ.' St Padre Pio says, "The habit is a sign of our

belonging to Christ; it is a banner of our faith before the world."

When fabric becomes a vow

The religious habit is more than just a uniform; it's a shield of faith, protecting the one who wears it as much as it speaks to the world. Every time a sister or brother ties their cincture or straightens their veil, it's like whispering their vows all over again, a promise to live for God alone, in poverty, purity, and obedience. The habit becomes a second skin, a gentle but firm reminder to walk the path of holiness and turn away from anything that would pull them from their calling. Its purity is a teacher, too, quietly stripping away pride and clothing the heart in Christ's own humility. Mother Teresa captured this beautifully when she explained why her sisters wore such simple saris, "We wear the poverty of the poor—and the purity of angels." In those words, she showed how the habit is both an embrace of the lowliest and a reflection of heaven's light—a daily yes to God written in fabric and thread. Fr Anthony Finn, OSA, Augustinian prior in the Galway community, shared his thoughts on the religious habit, particularly in the Augustinian order "The Augustinian habit consists of black or white habit - Capuche with a black leather cincture or belt. It is a sign of dedication and Commitment to community life, to ow consecration to God through Religious vows of poverty, chastity and Obedience. in our Augustinian tradition, we are a community of brothers who follow the rule St Augustine, which has its basis in the Acts the Apostles: We give ourselves to prayer, sharing our life in community realising the vision and Charism of the Augustinian life".

Defying Modernity

In an era where moral uncertainty, the simple choice to wear a religious habit stands as a quiet but powerful witness against the emptiness of modern life. It challenges materialism by showing that true riches lie not in possessions but in faith. It defies individualism by embodying the beauty of belonging to a community, to the Church, and ultimately to Christ.



Fr Colm O'Mahony, OSA



Fr John Grace OSA

“This visible sign of faith also plays a vital role in inspiring vocations. In recent decades, as religious habits became rare, so too did priestly and religious vocations”



The Augustinian's Chapel Galway

And in a time of widespread despair, it offers hope, proving that holiness and love still triumph. Young people, tired of shallow promises of happiness, are searching for something real. The habit invites them to consider a radical idea: What if true freedom comes not from chasing desires but from surrendering to a higher calling? This visible sign of faith also plays a vital role in inspiring vocations. In recent decades, as religious habits became rare, so too did priestly and religious vocations. But where habits return as seen in thriving communities like the Nashville Dominicans or the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, young people respond with enthusiasm. A young man may never picture himself as a priest if he never sees one in a cassock. A young woman may never feel the call to religious life if she never encounters a nun in a veil. The habit is often the first spark that ignites a lifelong vocation. In a world that has forgotten the power of sacrifice, it remains a beacon of truth, beauty, and purpose. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). Let the world see Him in us.

“The religious habit is a protest against the world's vanity and a sign of the soul's inward transformation”

Religious habits are fading from public view, hidden behind church walls or set aside. We must know and understand even keep reminding ourselves, that our religious habits are not relics of the past, so we must boldly reclaim this sacred tradition. Pope Pius XII says, "Let the religious habit always be worn as a sign of consecration and a testimony to the world". Now, more than ever, we must wear it with joy and courage. Let it be a silent sermon in the streets, a



Fr Anthony Finn, OSA, prior in the Augustinian community Galway.

reminder of God's presence in a secular age. Let it challenge the world's distractions and declare that holiness is not outdated—it is eternal. Fr Colm O'Mahony, OSA, is a radiant witness to Christ in today's world. His humble presence in Drogheda, faithfully wearing his Augustinian habit, speaks louder than words—a quiet but powerful invitation for new vocations to the priesthood. In his devotion, he shows the beauty of a life given to God, inspiring others to follow the call.

St John Henry Newman, "The religious habit is a protest against the world's vanity and a sign of the soul's inward transformation". For the young, it inspires vocation. For the faithful, it strengthens hope. And for the world, it is a defiant whisper: God is still here. So let us not hide this treasure. Let us wear our habits with pride, not fear—with joy, not hesitation—knowing that even in fading visibility, their witness still shines bright. Fr Donald Calloway, MIC, is an American author and Catholic priest who

says, "The habit is not a relic; it is a revolution. Wear it boldly". Today, as faith fades from public view, the habit matters more than ever. It restores the sacred, answers loneliness with joy, and defies the myth that faith is private. Where habits vanish, vocations wither—so we must act.

Thus, the religious habit is a powerful sign of faith. It shows the world that God is real and that giving your life to Him brings true joy. For those who wear it, the habit is a daily reminder to live like Christ—with love, humility, and courage. For those who see it, the habit is a spark of hope, a challenge to seek holiness, and an invitation to follow God's call. In a world that often forgets God, the habit stands as a quiet but bold witness. Let us wear it with pride, not fear, knowing that even the smallest act of faith can change hearts. As St Teresa of Avila said, "Christ has no body now but yours." So let us be His light in the world—visible, joyful, and unafraid.

Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

Why do we need confession if Jesus' death cleansed us from our sins?

Q: How could Jesus' death 'cleanse us from our sins' and 'assure our entrance into Heaven?' If that is the case, why do we need confession?

A: First, since it pertains to some of the deepest mysteries of our faith, I think the exact 'mechanics' of how Jesus' passion and death redeemed the fallen human race are ultimately going to be beyond our full understanding. But by that same token, this means it is something we can ponder for the rest of our lives without ever exhausting the theme.

St Leo the Great tries to explain this in one of his letters, a passage of which the Church includes in the Liturgy of the Hours for the Solemnity of the Annunciation on March 25 in the Office of Readings:

"To pay the debt of our sinful state, a nature that was incapable of suffering was joined to one that could suffer. Thus, in keeping with the healing that we needed, one and the same mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, was able to die in one nature, and unable to die in the other."

As we recall, Adam and Eve, the first humans created, introduced sin into the human experience by their primordial act of disobedience toward God. From that time on, humanity has been labouring under the negative effects of this original sin. These effects include the inevitability of suffering and bodily death, as well as a certain inborn weakness of the will and a tendency toward sin (in technical language called 'concupiscence'). All humans everywhere are subject to these negative effects, even if they have not personally committed any serious sins themselves.

As the rift caused by original sin was so radical and severe, human beings on their own are unable to repair this breach. However, we believe that in the Incarnation, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Word of God, "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14).

We believe that Jesus, son of God and son of Mary, was

one person with two natures, meaning that he was both fully human and fully divine. Jesus in his human nature endured a human death, but because he was God, he had the power to resurrect himself and did not remain dead. Since he took on our nature, we as humans can follow the path Jesus took in inheriting eternal life.

Similarly, Jesus' perfect obedience to God's will as the 'new Adam' has the power to free humanity from the guilt incurred by the sin of the first Adam.

However, even with these great gifts which Jesus has made available to us, God still respects our free will, and it always remains our choice to accept or reject God's offer of His friendship and eternal life. Our baptism is what initially conforms us to Jesus in this way, and baptism is always a choice, either our own choice or - for those who were too young to speak for ourselves - a choice on the part of our parents.

Baptism frees us from the guilt - sometimes poetically referred to as the 'stain' - of original sin. Yet any time we personally commit a sin, we are deliberately rejecting God and thus the gift of redemption which Jesus gained for us. A serious 'mortal' or deadly sin totally cuts us off from God; and this essentially brings us back to square one, as it is effectively forfeiting our share in the life and forgiveness gained by Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

Even less serious venial sins can still damage our relationship with God and can make it easier to fall into more serious sin.

Still, we know that God is totally loving and merciful and is always ready to forgive. And this is why Jesus left the Church with the sacrament of penance, to provide a means for reconciliation after post-baptismal sins.

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

Why a new generation of women

The unlikely appeal of the convent



In an age that tells us to always want more, these women choose less - and find more in that choice. Fewer distractions from the outside world. But more silence, more clarity, more peace, writes **Renata Milán Morales**

A significant number of young women have recently chosen to step away from their careers, personal relationships and digital commitments to embrace a life dedicated to God through a consecrated life or by entering a cloister.

"In the last fifteen years, a culture of discernment has developed," said Sr Jacinta, speaking to *The Plough*. Sr Jacinta, who grew up in Princeton, New Jersey, dropped out of New York University in 2010 to join the Nashville Dominicans. "If you're a young faithful Catholic today, the question of vocation and discernment comes up naturally."

Trend

For many, the image of a cloistered nun conjures up images of the Middle Ages - ancient abbeys, Gregorian chants and a life removed from the world in deep contemplation. It's hard to imagine such a path appealing to young women today. Some might even see it as a form of self-imposed isolation. But contrary to these perceptions, a quiet but steady movement is growing.

What is driving this unexpected trend? Why would people raised during social media and career aspirations choose a life of seclusion, silence and prayer? The reasons are many, connecting a deep



Photo: Gabriella Clare Marino via Unsplash.

spiritual longing, a sense of disillusionment with contemporary life, and the interest of renunciation in our culture.

“It is not we who choose God, but God who has chosen us”

Sr Mary Mother of Merciful Love, SSVM, based in Ireland, sheds light on this vocation: "It is a response to God's call. John Paul II says that this is what it means to be called to a life of conse-

crated life. It is a total decision. It comes directly from God. He also mentions a verse from the Bible, John 15:16, which says that it is not we who choose God, but God who has chosen us and appointed us to go and bear fruit. This is essential to understanding vocation, because a person's vocation depends on when they respond to God's call. God first loved us and called us to be his own. Vocation is therefore a response to God's life."

In an age of limitless choice, young women are

“The monastery and convent offer an alternative - a space where the constant noise stops, where endless scrolling and striving is replaced by silence, reflection and purpose”

“Ironically, in a society that values personal freedom, the choice to become a cloistered nun is a radical act of rebelliousness”

often told they can be anything they want to be. But as psychologist Barry Schwartz argues in *The Paradox of Choice*, an abundance of options can lead to anxiety rather than liberation. Many Millennials and Gen Z women express feelings of being overwhelmed, unfulfilled and exhausted.

For some, this exhaus-

tion turns into a rejection of modernity itself. The monastery and convent offer an alternative - a space where the constant noise stops, where endless scrolling and striving is replaced by silence, reflection and purpose.

Choice

At first glance, the convent might seem at odds with modern feminism. What could be less empowering than a life of obedience, celibacy and self-denial? Yet for some young women, these very commitments offer a profound sense of

freedom.

Sr Marta Hewelt, a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, shares her experience: "I am a Franciscan Missionary of Mary. It is a missionary congregation, so the first thing that attracted me was the desire to help people and to give to them. When I joined the FMMs, I fell in love with the prayer of the Word of God. It is an amazing form of prayer and encounter with Jesus. Every day before I go out on a mission, I pray with the Word of God and Jesus guides me through life. It is also a challenge to trust God completely, but just praying the Word of God helps me to do that. I am very happy, and my vocation is a great gift for me."

“Felt torn and had no peace until I decided and said ‘yes’ to God who was calling me to the celibate life”

This apparent contradiction isn't new. In medieval Europe, convents often served as unexpected centres of female freedom, allowing women to engage in scholarship, leadership and creativity in ways that were inaccessible in secular society. Today's young women, disillusioned with the hyper-individualism of modern feminism, are rediscovering a different form of agency.

Ironically, in a society that values personal freedom, the choice to become a cloistered nun is a radical act of rebelliousness. In a time when professional achievement and social media presence often define identity, the decision to renounce these markers is profoundly countercultural.

For many, the journey isn't about rejecting the world out of fear or dissatisfaction, but about seeking something greater, something that transcends the temporary. Sr Marta reflects on her own journey: "I had a boyfriend who was very good to me, and we went to church together, but I felt that someone else was calling me. I felt torn and had no peace until I decided and said 'yes' to God who was calling me to the celibate life. Then the decision was made, and I felt at peace."

The interest in monastic life doesn't mean that a

Men are pursuing religious life to young women in our day and age

mass revival of monasteries is imminent. The numbers are still modest and the lifestyle demanding. But the trend points to a wider hunger - a desire for depth in a superficial world, for silence in the midst of constant noise, for meaning in an age of distraction.

Fulfilment

Sr Mary Mother of Merciful Love SSVM explains: "People often wonder how they can be so happy all the time. The secret is to be a spouse of Christ. I'm sure people are familiar with the image of Jesus as the Bride. We can live a spiritual marriage. The consecrated person testifies that what many have thought impossible becomes possible and truly liberating with the grace of the Lord. Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart. To place him above every other level. This witness is more necessary than ever, precisely because it is so little understood in our world. Love is the goal of the consecrated life".

Even for those who don't choose the cloister, its growing interest suggests a cultural shift worth noting. Perhaps young women aren't so much rejecting modernity as redefining what it means to be fulfilled. In a society that

equates success with visibility, the convent offers an alternative vision - one in which purpose is found not in being seen, but in being silent.

“They are drawn not only by the beauty of silence and prayer, but by the sense of belonging to something the world cannot offer”

For a generation tired of chasing a disappearing horizon of achievement, this vision is more attractive than ever. "I feel free, I feel happy and I feel I can be more myself. And that gives me real life," says Sr Marta.

This sense of being truly yourself - not defined by what you own, how you look or how many followers you have - is at the heart of consecrated life. It's about discovering your identity in a deeper relationship with God. Not as an escape from reality, but as a journey into what is most real.

St Teresa of Avila once wrote: "He who has God lacks nothing: God alone is enough". These words, written centuries ago, are still true today for many young

women who are entering a very old tradition with fresh hearts. They are drawn not only by the beauty of silence and prayer, but by the sense of belonging to something the world cannot offer - a love that asks for everything and gives everything in return.

In an age that tells us to always want more, these women choose less - and find more in that choice. Fewer distractions, fewer possessions, fewer expectations from the outside world. But in their place: more silence, more clarity, more peace.

Truth

The consecrated life is not easy. It involves sacrifice. The decision to give up romantic love, the dream of a family and many worldly ambitions is not taken lightly. And yet, for those who are called, these sacrifices are not seen as losses. They are gifts - given freely for love.

As St Clare of Assisi wrote, "What you hold, may you always hold. What you do, may you always do and never give up. But with a swift pace, with a light step, and with unshakable feet, so that even your steps do not stir up dust, go forward safely, joyfully and swiftly on the path of prudent hap-



Sr Marta Hewelt is pictured with her parents after taking her final vows.

“A woman is not valuable for what she can produce or do. She is valuable because of who she is - loved by God, created for communion with him and free to live that love in radical ways”



Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan is pictured with the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal and their two lay missionaries, Kate and Anna, in St Mary's Church, Drogheda. Photo: Sean Blackwell

piness".

Many of the young women entering religious life today didn't grow up thinking this was their future. They dreamed of being teachers, doctors, artists, engineers. Some were in long-term relationships. Some were successful in their studies or careers. But something deeper was calling in their hearts - something they couldn't ignore.

Often the call to religious life begins as a restlessness, a feeling that something is missing, even when everything seems 'right' on the outside. It can come during a time of prayer, while reading Scripture, or simply in the quiet moments of daily life. That gentle invitation: come and follow me.

And it is always personal.

God speaks to each soul in a unique way.

“The world doesn't need what women have, it needs what women are. In the consecrated life this truth is fully lived”

St Edith Stein (St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) once said: "The world doesn't need what women have, it needs what women are". In the consecrated life this truth is fully lived. A woman is not valuable for what she can produce or do. She is valuable because of who she

is - loved by God, created for communion with him and free to live that love in radical ways.

Calling

For some, this means a hidden life in the cloister, interceding for the world through silence and prayer. For others, it means serving the poor, teaching children, or caring for the sick - all with the same heart of consecration.

Whether in a monastery or a mission field, these women are saying 'yes' to something greater than themselves. Not because they think the world is bad or evil, but because they believe in something better. They want to be signs of hope. Reminders that love is real. That joy is possible. That God is nearby. And in a world that is often cynical, that witness matters.

While the number of new vocations may still be small, their impact is not. Every young woman who chooses this path becomes a light - sometimes hidden, sometimes visible - pointing to the truth that we are made for more than what this world offers.

“It's about discovering your identity in a deeper relationship with God. Not as an escape from reality, but as a journey into what is most real”

Stillborn - A spirit fully alive!

How love connects siblings' souls on Earth and in Heaven



I'm not even sure if I saw her and yet her spirit is so alive and present with me today, writes **Fr Joe Jonas**

Fr Joe Jones

November 22, 2024, it's mam's birthday and if she were alive, she would be 95 today. I made the usual visit to her grave bringing the customary bunch of flowers to mark the special occasion. Happy heavenly birthday mam. 12 years gone and yet your spirit lives on in so many ways.

November 23, I woke up from a dream thinking of a child that was born almost

3 years after me. She was stillborn and even though she died at birth in some strange way she is still part of my life. The name my mother gave this child was Catherine. Today, for some reason, Catherine is telling me she is very much present with me. Her spirit feels fully alive and dreaming about her after all these years prompts me to think 'there is a reason for her presence today.'

“Catherine, who had made a very brief appearance into our world had a profound impact on my mother and I'm sure on my father too”

The thoughts of her are clear in my mind. Could it be that I did see Catherine when she came into this

world? Does my memory as a 3-year-old child still carry the image of her? I'm not even sure if I saw her and yet her spirit is so alive and present with me today.

Depression

Back in the late 90's my mam went through a brief period of depression. She wasn't the kind of women who showed her feelings but at that time she eventually told us that the issue of babies' organs being kept in hospitals without parents' consent had upset her very much. Although Catherine was born at home the controversial debate on radio and television made mam think about Catherine and exactly where was her body buried? I remember mam saying that our dad took Catherine to Glasnevin Cemetery where she was buried in the Angels Plot. At that time, she didn't

accompany him. I believe one of his bothers may have gone with him to bury Catherine.

Catherine, who had made a very brief appearance into our world had a profound impact on my mother and I'm sure on my father too. I can't even begin to imagine what that loss must feel like for any mother and father to lose a child at any stage in a pregnancy. The grief is enormous and we should never under-estimate the sorrow and pain that follows.

“I had her name carved on one of the large stones erected in the memory of all those babies who were buried in the Angels Plot”

To help my mother at that time, I went to Glasnevin

Cemetery and in the Office, I told the story of my sister Catherine in an effort to find out exactly where she was buried? They were able to tell me the location of her burial and so I had her name carved on one of the large stones erected in the memory of all those babies who were buried in the Angels Plot. When her name was placed on the stone, we, as a family accompanied my mother and went to Catherine's graveside. I remember we brought flowers, and I said the prayers for the Final Commendation and Burial of a Child. I know it was a healing moment for our mam and a memory for each of us as siblings. Following my dream, I wondered what would Catherine have been like if she were alive today? I was not even sure what date she entered and left our world and yet somehow I needed to find out.

I decided I would go again to Glasnevin Cemetery and find that location of her

name placed on that stone and simply remember her there. I arrived at Glasnevin and bought a little plant of roses to bring to the Angels Plot in memory of Catherine. Although it is now many years since that day we, as a family, went to visit her grave, I had not been back there since then. Now, I had to return and find that place once more and, in some way, reconnect our spirits.

“For the first time in my life I felt close to this sister whose little life was a gift to the world, a gift I could never forget”

I walked up and down the area of the Angels Plot to find her name, but I couldn't see it. I thought 'I can't leave this area until I find her.' So I put the plant on the ground and told



Angels Plot headstone in Glasnevin Cemetery

myself to take my time and go through each stone until I find the name 'Catherine Jones'.

As I placed the plant on the ground, her name jumped out to me. Finally, it was there, clear for all to see, yet the date had eroded with time and it was difficult to decipher the exact date of her arrival and departure into this life. I remember staying there for some time unaware of people around me, just being happy to be in the presence of this little infant who had come into our lives for such a brief moment in time. For the first time in my life I felt close to this sister whose little life was a gift to the world, a gift I could never forget.

Reconnect

I was happy to reconnect in some small way. On leaving the Angels Plot I sauntered along reflecting on this little infant who had entered my life once more. The Glasnevin Visitor Centre was open and I could see people inside. I thought, I'll go in and have

a look around. There were people about and some were talking to the assistant at the desk. They were looking for information and whereabouts of graves they wanted to visit. I could hardly believe this opportunity was presenting itself to me. This fully alive little spirit continues to knock on the doors of my spirit, pleading with me to let her in.

I asked one of the staff on the desk if she could find the date of my sister's burial in the Angels Plot? She asked for her name and my parents' names. "Her name was Catherine Jones and my father was Joseph and my mother was Nellie (Ellen) Jones." She needed a final piece of information to complete the search, the address of my parents. I remember saying; "we lived in Eccles St but I believe Catherine may have been born in Annamoe, in Cabra." She immediately found the information on her database and was able to tell me Catherine was born on December 6, 1960.



She had indeed been born in Annamoe. Finally, I had a date. An additional piece of information was provided which surprised me. The assistant asked, "Would you like to know the exact location of your sister's burial?" I could hardly believe she was offering this information. She took out a map on an A4 piece of paper and began to mark the location where I would find Catherine's burial spot. "The exact location and co-ordinates in the Angels Plot is; LA - 112." I could not believe I was hearing these words. I thanked the young lady for her welcome assistance. For some reason, I don't remember getting this information all those years ago when we had her name printed on the stone.

I went back to the Angels Plot with my map in hand and I was able to walk with the co-ordinates and find the exact spot where Catherine's little body lay. I remember standing over the area and feeling so connected with this little spirit that had once again come into my life.

“Her spirit lives on. We are connected. I will be forever grateful that she has come to me and is with me”

I would have been 2 years and 10 months old. Could I possibly have a memory of that sacred time in all of our lives? The fourth child in my family whose little life was taken from us on that day. My sister Breda often spoke of her memory as she would have been almost 8 years old. She remembered being excited about the possibility of having a sister and then that excitement turning to a dreadful grief and loss.

I find myself asking: why is Catherine coming to me this day? This stillborn child who entered our world for the briefest of moments yet her spirit filled the lives of my parents, and her siblings in a way that we may never fully comprehend in this life. Her spirit lives on. We are connected. I will be forever

grateful that she has come to me and is with me. While our time together was short I feel that I know her so well. I know I love her now as much as I love each member of my family.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in one of his great statements reminds us: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

Celebrate

I often use these words as I celebrate the Funeral Rites for those who have completed the human part of their spiritual journey. Now, I am reminded once more that Catherine's human journey was lived for a short time within the confines of my mother's womb. Did her life have meaning? Was she sent into this world with a purpose? Yes, her very short existence brought much love for a brief moment. The grief that my parents experienced was the price they paid for the love they found in that

brief part of this little soul's human journey. Catherine had come to bless them in the human part of their journey too. Her brief human journey, although confined, was sent to tell us that God loves us and will never leave us. She has once again entered my human journey too and I will be forever grateful that she has brought her memory to me once again.

“I am grateful that God has given some very special souls to accompany me on this human part of my spiritual journey”

My parents, Nellie and Joe, my sister Breda and my brother Johnny have completed their human journey too and now they enjoy the company of Catherine. They each will have had their own memories of

Catherine as she entered and left this world for the briefest of moments. Now they live together in the new world that our faith teaches us we will all enjoy one day.

Rest in peace dear souls and until we meet again, know that I am filled with love for each of you. I am grateful that God has given some very special souls to accompany me on this human part of my spiritual journey. Our souls, our spirits are eternally connected and one day we will understand the real reason for the grief we experience in the loss of the human spirits we meet along this part of our spiritual journey.

i Fr Joe Jones is a retired priest of Dublin Archdiocese, he is a former Chaplain to the Deaf Community, Chaplain in DCU and former parish priest in Bonnybrook parish. He is currently doing a course in Milltown on Spiritual Direction.

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“I am grateful that God has given some very special souls to accompany me on this human part of my spiritual journey. Our souls, our spirits are eternally connected and one day we will understand the real reason for the grief we experience in the loss of the human spirits we meet along this part of our spiritual journey”

Easter in the Glens: hurling, faith, and identity



The values of Lent and the celebrations of Easter – sacrifice, reflection, service – were instilled early in McManus' life, writes Éanna Mackey

Easter Sunday will see parishes across the country alive with the joy of the Lord's resurrection. But in the Glens of Antrim, a different kind of devotion – just as serious to those who follow it – will also take place.

Saffron-clad supporters will make the long trip south to Wexford for the opening round of the Leinster Hurling Championship or the short trip down to the great Sambo McNaughton's pub. Up here, hurling isn't just a sport—it's a way of life, tied as tightly to identity as faith itself.

Rhythm

At least that is how it has always been for Neil McManus, a modern-day great of Ulster hurling. After sixteen years of service between the white lines for Antrim, McManus remains part of the intercounty setup as a performance coach with the Saffron seniors, having retired in 2023. For him, Easter always carried a dual meaning: a celebration of the risen Christ and a time of year when hurling and community were at their most alive.

"My Sunday morning ritual had both faith and hurling wrapped up into one," McManus recalls. "I'd go down to Mass and then straight up to the pitch with the added bonus of Jackie Carson and Conor McCambridge out hitting frees. We'd go to Mass every Sunday, and then on the way home I'd be eagerly awaiting the drive past the pitch to see if either Conor or Jackie



Neil McManus of Antrim after the Joe McDonagh Cup Final match between Antrim and Kerry at Croke Park in Dublin on June 4, 2022. Photo: Ray McManus/Sportsfile.

was out hitting frees."

That rhythm of life – Mass, community, sport – remains the beating heart of Cushendall, a village where God and the sliotar are not separate but intertwined. For McManus, the enduring power of both faith and hurling lies in how they anchor people in something deeper than themselves.

“Faith has kept us all very tight-knit, but whenever it comes to times of need, the community will rally around them”

"It's a major component of society in Cushendall. It's just a huge part of Irish life. It's maybe the rural nature of the Glens of Antrim and the isolation of it; it's kept those traditions intact here," he said.

"We have a very strong community and a very strong identity of where we

come from. Faith has kept us all very tight-knit, but whenever it comes to times of need, the community will rally around them. It would be a big part of the Glens as a whole."

Traditional

In a rapidly changing Ireland, the Glens have held firm. Where other places have seen tradition fade, Cushendall continues to cultivate it. McManus sees this as a strength, not a limitation. He speaks proudly of the way the Glens have resisted the erosion of identity in an increasingly globalised world.

"We are very traditional people in the Glens. Traditional music is a big part of the culture, along with hurling and faith. They're kind of all intertwined, and I think in the last two to three decades, Ireland has changed an awful lot, but I think that the best parts of Ireland have actually stayed really strong in the Glens of Antrim."

"The world has become

a smaller place as globalisation has continued, and it's easier to be influenced from outside, but I think the tight-knit nature and sense of community of the Glens of Antrim have been a real bonus for us."

“As well as going off the sweets and the chocolate, you were encouraged to do something in the community”

The values of Lent and the celebrations of Easter – sacrifice, reflection, service – were instilled early in McManus' life.

"My mother and father would have been people of faith. They would have always persuaded us to go off something as well as going on something for Lent. As well as going off the sweets and the chocolate, you were encouraged to do something in the com-

munity."

He remembers raising money for Trócaire as a child, an Easter tradition that reinforced the importance of giving back, of seeing oneself as part of something wider.

"Giving up something gives you a very small insight into what it's like to live in a society where things are not as plentiful."

Resonance

But beyond the spiritual, Easter also resonates deeply with McManus for its historical significance.

"Obviously there's the historical significance as well as the spiritual with the Easter 1916 Rising. Easter historically was the seminal moment in the Gaelic revival," he explained.

"Irish culture was so heavily suppressed during the famine times. The Irish revival at the beginning of the late 19th century meant that people were starting to understand again what it was to be Irish—our religion, our culture, our language and our heritage. People had to work so hard to keep it all alive, and to see it thriving now is incredible."

In Cushendall, where the hills meet the sea and the past feels vividly present, these things are not relics—

they are lived realities. The Glens of Antrim are a predominantly Catholic area, and McManus believes they offer a reflection of something deeply and uniquely Irish.

"We see ourselves as a very good representation of what Irish people are. We're rural, fairly rugged, fairly resilient, and people of great humour. We think we represent Ireland very well in our sporting endeavours. It really is all tied in together, and Irishness is something that's passed down from generation to generation."

Tying all of this together in McManus' view is the GAA. More than a sporting organisation, it is the framework through which identity is celebrated, supported, and passed on.

“When the GAA was formed, it was a part of that Celtic revival to give us our sense of identity”

"In such a changing world it's very important to have places like Cushendall, and I think the GAA plays a massive role in that," he says. "What the GAA provides in terms of a social network and fabric for parishes and villages across the country simply could not be replicated."

"When the GAA was formed, it was a part of that Celtic revival to give us our sense of identity and what was so important to us, and that lives and breathes in places like the Glens of Antrim. That is where we get our sense of ourselves."

As Easter arrives and the Saffron faithful make their pilgrimage south, McManus hopes the next generation understands what they are inheriting. An area steeped in hurling folklore, but also its devotion to its faith, community and identity.

"It's massively important that that continues, and we are the custodians of that to ensure that our children grow up in the same way with the same support because that's what we do. We support each other. There's a huge onus on us to make sure that we give our children the opportunity to grow up with the support that we had and to teach them about who we are and where we came from."

“McManus hopes the next generation understands what they are inheriting. An area steeped in hurling folklore, but also its devotion to its faith, community and identity”

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



The need for our consciences to be examine

In our largely Christian country, you might think that an act of forgiveness wouldn't be that noteworthy, but maybe our residual faith has left the concept lagging behind.

And so it was that on **Drive-time** (RTÉ Radio 1, Thursday) I first heard the story of the court case in which stabbing victim and army chaplain Fr Paul Murphy very publicly forgave the perpetrator... A young man who was 16 at the time of the offence. He had been radicalised by ISIS propaganda and seemed to think that the Irish army had some involvement in the West's military actions in the Middle-East. The young man said he didn't know what came over him, and seemed sorry, genuinely moved by the way the priest reached out to him, emotionally and physically – there was a hug. No doubt many were reminded of another high-profile event of a similar nature when Pope John Paul II visited his would-be assassin in prison.

The event had a significant impact. Later, on that same show, Matt Carthy, Sinn Féin TD, who was on to talk about something else called Fr Murphy's gesture the "epitome of inspiration" and "Christianity in action in all its best ways". The item was the first to be mentioned on **It Says in the Papers** the next morning. I hope it reverberates widely and isn't forgotten too soon as the media chases after the



Delphine Chui, Spokesperson for ADF International.

next shiny distraction. Most of the rest of the news shows how much forgiveness is needed. Too often, revenge or desire for power seems more likely to be what motivates people.

In another recent court

case, this time in the UK, a woman was tried for offering conversation – this might seem draconian, and indeed it was. Livia Tossici-Bolt was found guilty of doing this in a buffer or exclusion zone near an abortion clinic. There was

no protest, no harassment, no shouting slogans, just the most dignified stance you could imagine, and yet this was allowed to soak up valuable police and court time. The issue was discussed on **Mornings with Wendy** (Spirit Radio, Thursday) when the presenter spoke to Delphine Chui (Spokesperson for ADF International, a group that often defends those accused of such 'offences'). She found the judgement "so shocking", a "gross departure from our legal tradition" and setting an "alarming precedent". She said Ms Tossici-Bolt was criminalised for a point of view that wasn't even expressed! The judge had said she was a known Christian and was known to have pro-life views. Ms Chui regarded this as being judged for who you are, the contents of your mind and the beliefs you hold, rather than anything you've actually done.

A similar concern arose, also on the same show/podcast, only this time in Ireland. Jana Lunden, founder of the cleverly named Natural Women's Council, told of how a conference organised by her group, on 'Safeguarding Children's Education', had been cancelled at the last minute by a hotel after that business had been pressured by left wing activists. There had been, she said, 200 vociferous emails, threat of protest and ultimately death threats against herself. Fortu-

PICK OF THE WEEK

THE PRIESTS - DON'T GIVE UP THE DAY JOB

RTÉ One Easter Sunday 6:30pm

Excellent programme - Frs Martin and Eugene O'Hagan and Fr David Delargy, and the record executives who signed them reveal the story of how 'The Priests' were discovered and catapulted to fame.

PILGRIMAGE: ROAD THROUGH THE ALPS

BBC Two Easter Sunday-Tuesday, 9pm

Seven celebrities of differing faiths and beliefs take on a pilgrimage through the Austrian and Swiss Alps to Einsiedeln Abbey, a pilgrim destination for over a thousand years.

OUR DIVINE SPARKS

RTÉ Radio 1 Easter Monday, April 21, 3pm

In a special hour-long Easter programme, Dearbhail McDonald explores the history and legacy of the Nicene Creed.

nately for her, another hotel held firm and facilitated the conference. Some people do not want there to be a discussion of controversial gender theory and how this is applied in schools. As Ms Lunden said: "attempts to shut down debate only affirm how important that debate is".

A better type of cancelling is when we cancel our sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the latest episode of **The Lenten Journey** (Radio Maria, Wednesday) Fr Eamonn McCarthy urged listeners to avail of the sacrament in good time for Easter, and indeed to frequent it regularly. He said it helps to break down blockages to God's grace and encourages a "spirit of repentance". He

noted long queues for Communion, but short ones for Confession. For people who say they have no sins, he'd ask "Are you perfect?". Maybe it's partly got to do with what he described as consciences being dulled, or could it be people reserving it for the big sins only? The story of the Prodigal Son is often used in relation to Reconciliation, but Fr McCarthy used it in an interesting way – saying the father in the story hears the son's confession – "Father I have sinned against Heaven and against you!"

Towards the end of the programme, he emphasised forgiveness, which brings us right back to where we started.



Aubrey Malone

Film

From rags to 'Richie' in the Welsh valleys

Richard Burton was the twelfth of thirteen children born in the Welsh village of Pontrhydyfen 100 years ago. His mother died two years later.

Richard Jenkins – his birth name – would probably have spent his working life 'down the mines' like his father and most of the other male inhabitants of the village were it not for his good looks, fine build and, perhaps most importantly, that incredibly sonorous voice.

Mr Burton (12A) traces his trans-mogrification from Jenkins to Burton with his English teacher, Philip Burton (Toby Jones). Burton took him under his wing and, to the relief of his sister Cis and her husband Elfed, who took him in after his mother died, became his guard-

ian when he reached adulthood.

Richard was nicknamed 'Rich', or 'Richie', in youth. This film deals with those years. Harry Lawtey plays him as a teenager on the cusp of fame as World War II rages outdoors.

He's put through his theatrical paces by Burton. Lesley Manville is the kindly landlady who tries to get him to abandon his earthy habits.

The performances and production values are excellent in the film, but director Marc Evans plays fast and loose with the facts. We get an elongated late section, for instance, where Lawtey turns on Jones in furious shows of temper.

This never happened. The only time they fell out was over his affair with Elizabeth Taylor. Burton was friends with Rich's first wife, Sybil

Williams, and disapproved of his divorce from her.

The film also uses poetic licence regarding his drinking, having us believe alcohol first took its hold on Rich the night his father (a much too tall Steffan Rhodri) demanded £50 for allowing Burton to adopt him. Rich was drinking heavily long before this.

The chaste attitude he shows to an early girlfriend is also incorrect. He was a womaniser from very early on in his life. And Lawtey is too tall and lanky for Rich. Burton was much stockier than him even as a young man.

The film also misinforms us about the circumstances of his name change. It didn't come about as a result of a perceived impropriety in the relationship between Rich

and Philip Burton by an RAF officer considering him for Oxford. And it wasn't Rich who suggested he live with Burton. This was Burton's own idea.

My main problem with the film, however, was the way it jumped ahead eight years at one point. Lawtey doesn't look a day older after the eight years. On the credit side, his voice now has the depth it should have had from the first scene. It's only at this point that Lawtey really starts to look – and sound – like Burton (Richard, that is).

But this is still a wonderful film. For informing me about it, and about other events associated with Burton in this, his centenary year, I would like to sincerely thank Gareth Bowden, Hannah Evans and Mike from The Warrior Agency.



A scene from the film, *Mr Burton*.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



The Year of the Lord 325: The Council of Nicaea Celebrated

The Councils of the Church: A Short History,

by Norman P. Tanner SJ
(Herder & Herder, £14.99 / €20.00)

T. P. O'Mahony

The debate within the Catholic Church about conciliarism has waxed and waned since the 15th to the 19th centuries. The central question - where does ultimate authority in the Church reside, with the Pope or a General Council? - has sharply divided theologians and biblical scholars over the years.

Then in 1870, with its formal declarations on papal primacy and papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council, it seemed that the matter had finally been put to rest. Pope Pius IX, who had convened the Council (which opened on December 8 1869) certainly thought so.

But was Vatican I really a 'free' Council, given that well in advance it was known its outcome was what Pius IX and his supporters (one of the most ardent of whom was Cardinal Paul Cullen, the Archbishop of Dublin) wanted.

“Although conciliarism was now formally dead, it never really went away: it lived on below the radar in liberal Catholic circles”

There was also the fact that the Council - the 20th in the series of General or Ecumenical (meaning worldwide) Councils since the first in Nicaea in 325 - was brought to a premature closure by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian on July 19 1870.

This led to the withdrawal of the French troops protecting Rome; the city was quickly seized by the

“The apparent simplicity of the creed of Nicaea belies the work that went into producing it”



An iconic image of the Nicene Council presided over by the Emperor Constantine

newly emergent Kingdom of Italy, and the authority of the Pope as a secular ruler ended, a situation that was only finally resolved between Italy and the Vatican with the Lateran Treaty between Italy and the Vatican in 1929, creating the situation with which we are all familiar with today.

Although conciliarism was now formally dead, it never really went away: it lived on below the radar in liberal Catholic circles until it was brought back (at least partially) into the open at Vatican II (1962-65) during the debates on collegiality.

The enforced silence of Vatican I on the role of bishops represented 'unfinished business'; Vatican II sought to engage with this 'unfinished business' by considering the nature of episcopal collegiality.

Infallibility

“Although Vatican II almost obsessively asserted its continuity with Vatican I, the council's promulgation of the doctrine of episcopal collegiality raised questions about the previous council's doctrines of primacy and infallibility,” says John O'Malley SJ of Georgetown

University in his history of Vatican I.

“Under the patronage of the Roman Emperor Constantine, it affirmed the Christian faith in a triune God and produced the first version of the Nicene Creed”

The role, status and authority of General Councils are going to come back into the spotlight this year as plans get underway in the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 325.

That gathering marked

the transition from Christians being a persecuted minority to becoming a Church recognised and protected by the Roman State. Under the patronage of the Roman Emperor Constantine, it affirmed the Christian faith in a triune God and produced the first version of the Nicene Creed.

Peace

“The event that made an ecumenical council possible was the peace brought to the church by the conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine,” Norman P Tanner SJ tells us in his book *The Councils of the Church*. “The establishment of Christianity as the favoured religion of the Roman Empire meant that bishops could come from a distance and meet without disturbance. Indeed it was

Constantine himself who summoned the Council.”

“This creed was accepted by the members of the council as the best formulation of their beliefs, and it condemned the weakened notion of divinity attributed to the Son of God by Arius”

Nicaea is especially remembered for the creed it produced and for its rejection of Arianism, an early heresy which denied the full divinity of Christ. “The creed of Nicaea emerged from the controversy that centered around the teachings of Arius, who was a popular preacher in the city of Alexandria, regarding the divinity of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity,” explains Tanner.

“This creed was accepted by the members of the council as the best formulation of their beliefs, and it condemned the weakened notion of divinity attributed to the Son of God by Arius, though he is not mentioned by name.”

By the time of the First Council of Constantinople in 381, it was felt that something more needed to be added to the text. This formulation, which contains a more rounded version of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity, is what has come down to us today and is used in the liturgy of the Mass.

“The apparent simplicity of the creed of Nicaea belies the work that went into producing it,” says Tanner.

Although Tanner does not give specific dates for the Council of Nicaea, we are told by Philip Hughes in his 1961 book *The Church in Crisis: A History of the Twenty Great Councils*, it opened on May 20, 325, and held its final session barely four weeks after it opened, June 19, 325. This means that events to mark this momentous passage in the Church history will be taking place through Christendom.

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.

International Theological Commission in Rome marks 1700th anniversary of Council of Nicaea



Pope Francis with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

On Thursday, April 3 2025, the International Theological Commission published a statement on this anniversary entitled *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour: 1700th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325-2025)*. The statement emphasises that the faith of Nicaea is the faith common to all Christians.

"The year 2025 is therefore an invaluable opportunity to underline that what we have in common is much stronger, quantitatively and qualitatively, of what divides us: All together, we believe in the Trinitarian God, in Christ, true man and true God, salvation in Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures read in the Church and under the willing of the Holy Spirit," the statement asserts.

"Together, we believe in the Church, baptism, the resurrection of the dead and the eternal life," it continues.

"The Council of Nicaea is especially venerated by the Churches of the East, not simply as a council between others or as the first of a series, but it is the Council par excellence."

Opportunity

The document from the International Theological Commission said 2025 is the opportunity for all Christians to celebrate the faith that the Council made

possible to express.

"Ecumenism theological theory, legitimately, focuses its attention and its efforts on the unresolved knots of our differences, but without doubt it is no less fruitful, if not more fruitful, to celebrate together this anniversary, to advance towards the re-establishment of full communion among all Christians, so that the world believes."

“The divergence of Christians about the most of their calendar creates pastoral discomfort within communities, to the point of dividing families, and scandal among non-Christians”

The statement also spoke about the fact that Easter will be celebrated on the same day in both the Western and Eastern Churches, and pointed out the Council of Nicaea also tried to establish a common date of Easter in the Church.

"The divergence of Christians about the most of their calendar creates pastoral discomfort within communities, to the point of dividing families, and scandal among non-Christians, thus damaging the witness to the Gospel," the

statement says.

"For this reason, Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other heads of Churches many times expressed the desire for a date to be established for the celebration of Easter.

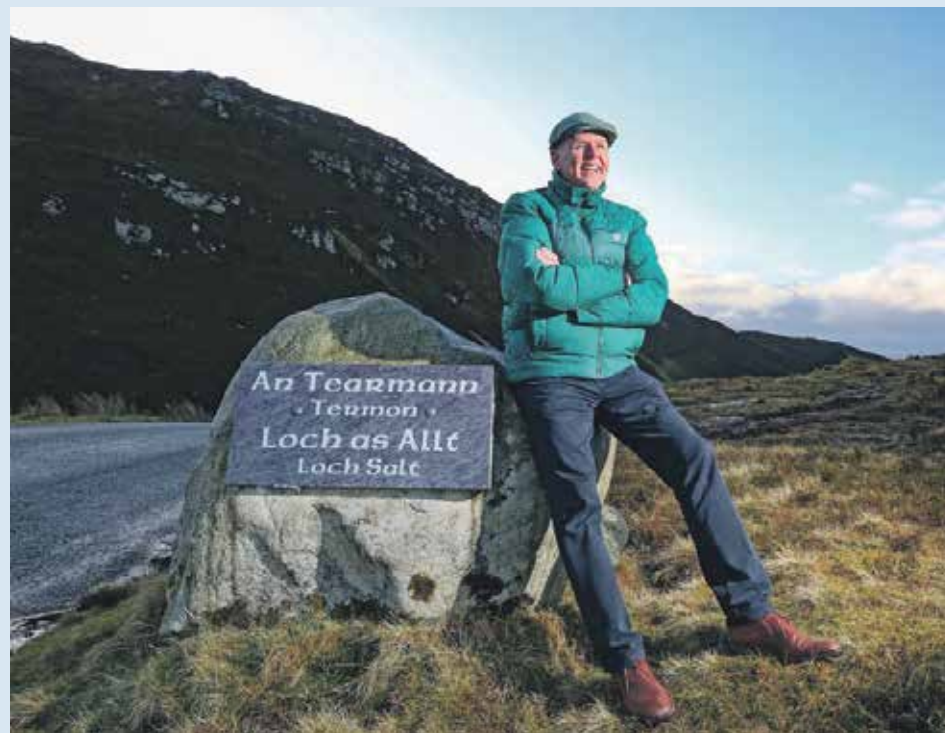
Solution

"On this question the Catholic Church remains open to dialogue and to an ecumenical solution. Already in the appendix of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Vatican Council II had no objection to the introduction of a new timetable, and stressed that this should have been achieved 'with the consent of those who are interested, especially the brothers separated by communion with the Apostolic See'.

The International Theological Commission noted that it is in the context of the Council of Nicaea that the Church chooses decisively to separate from the date of Passover, to distance Christianity from Judaism.

"Beyond the question of the calendar, it would be desirable to emphasise the relationship between Easter and Pesach [Jewish Passover] more and more, both in theology and in homilies as well as in catechesis, to achieve a broader and deeper understanding of the meaning of Easter," the document concluded.

Back to the roots of Irish culture in Donegal



Joe McHugh at home in Donegal with the Irish language

Beidh Tú Alright: An Irish Language Journey,
by Joe McHugh
(Red Stripe Press / Orpen Press, €19.99 / £17.99)

J. Anthony Gaughan

This book is an illuminating and eventful account of a Donegal man's journey through often conflicting aspects of Irish life, culture and language. Everyone, but especially those who are doubtful on the use of the Irish language, will find it most interesting.

The background of the author is an important aspect of the book. Joe McHugh was born at Carrigart, Co. Donegal, on July 16 1971. He attended Umlagh National School, Loreto Community School, Milford, and St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

After graduating from Maynooth he secured an appointment at the Loreto Secondary School in Letterkenny, where he taught from 1993 to 1995. Then after a year teaching in Dubai he returned to Ireland and was active in youth ministry in the Letterkenny area.

He was elected to Donegal County Council in 1999 and so began his life-long career in politics. He was subsequently elected to Seanad Éireann in the interests of Fine Gael. Joe topped the poll in the Donegal North-East constituency in the general election in 2007.

Apart from other appointments he was given responsibility for North-South Co-Operation. He was re-elected to the Dáil in 2011 and was later appointed Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Joe retained his seat in the 2016 general election and was appointed Minister for Education and Skills in 2018. He retired from politics in 2024.

Controversy

Joe attracted controversy. In January 2011 he proposed that a monument, funded by the Irish government, be erected in Donegal to commemorate the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

This he did, notwithstanding that Eddie Fullerton, a member of Donegal County Council and a member of the provisional IRA, had been assassinated by loyalists in 1991 and he and the other Fine Gael Coun-

cillors did not partake in events to remember Fullerton and objected to a monument being erected to him in his native Buncrana.

In 2016 Joe was again the centre of controversy. He resided at the edge of the Donegal Gaeltacht and his distribution of the grants to the various Gaeltachts was, seemingly, unduly favourable to his native Donegal. It resulted in his having to appear before the Public Accounts Committee.

In 2022 Joe vindicated his claim to be a person of principle when he resigned from his Party, refused to support the government and continued to serve in the Dáil as an Independent. The issue on which he resigned concerned the assistance to be provided to those in his constituency who had to substantially repair their homes because of the extensive use of a defective block in their erection.

The controversy with which Joe is mostly associated occurred when in 2014 he was appointed to the Ministry which among other responsibilities involved promoting the Irish language. At that time, he was one of those people who mark in the Census form that they 'have Irish'.

They learn Irish in the primary and secondary schools, sometimes in schools where the teaching is through the medium of Irish, as in my case. At the conclusion of their education they are competent in Irish. However, owing to their non-use of it, their knowledge of it withers away.

At his first interview with the media as the minister responsible for the Gaeltacht and the Irish language, Joe had to admit that he was not able to converse in Irish. This prompted an outcry from the Irish-speaking community. There were protesters at Government Buildings chanting *Aire gan teanga, Aire gan clue* (a minister without a language is a minister without a clue).

Joe there and then set out to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of Irish, the culture which underpins it and a fluency in speaking it. This book is a very revealing and honest account of that odyssey into the mysteries of Irish culture which continues to the present day.

The book is meticulously researched, well-written and beautifully laid-out. For anyone who wishes to brush up on their Irish one could not recommend a more useful *vade mecum*.

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1 Dude 2 Competent 3 Tenor 4 Libra 5 Teak 7 Eject 8 Dispensary 9 Denmark 13 Mace 14 Tribute 16. Franciscan 20 Speed trap 21 Severed 22 Comb 27 Awake 29 Banns 30 Tiger 31 Leap 32 Pele

Crossword

Easter bumper crossword

Gordius 711

- Across
- 1 'Budgie', in full (10)

6 These young men work with horses (6,4)

11 Cider (7)

14 Imprecise (5)

15 Anticipated (8)

17 This follower of Jesus was one of the women who found the tomb to be empty (4,9)

20 & 74d She gave Jesus her veil to wipe His forehead; the 72 down is claimed to be that veil (5,8)

21 Dais, platform (7)

24 Allow, permit (3)

25 Surname used as a pen-name by David Cornell, under which he wrote many spy novels featuring the character George Smiley (2,5)

26 & 106a Design style from about the 1920's (3,4)

27 Grow older (3)

29 Earth, clay (4)

31 Daredevil acts (6)

34 Ages, eons (4)

37 Assault (6)

38 Belief, religion (5)

39 & 40 He bore the cross for Jesus (5,2,6)

41 Person who peruses aloud pieces of scripture at mass (6)

44 With which to sew (6)

46 Substance used in making candles (3)

47 Distrustful caution (8)

49 Frivolity, glee (5)

50 Sadness, grief (6)

51 Recess found in a church (4)

52 Upward movement, such as that of Jesus forty days after Easter (6)

55 Singers (9)

57 Death (6)

58 According to Greek myth, this naiad was transformed into a laurel tree; the Christian name of writer du Maurier (6)

59 Prophet, visionary mystic (4)

60 Excavated (5)

62 No score (3)

63 Incorrect (5)

66 Maker of honey (3)

67 Immature newt (3)

68 Perfect - exactly as imagined (5)

69 & 118a The route along which Jesus carried His cross (3,8)

71 Distinctive design element (5)

75 Group of three (4)

76 Stinging plant (6)

78 Banished to a foreign land (6)

79 Etching (9)

80 Chinese fruit (6)

81 Sweet that will freshen your breath (4)

84 In the Bible, Moses' father-in-law and father of Zipporah (6)

85 Spinney (5)

87 Walked vainly (8)

89 Embrace (3)

90 Irritating injury (6)

94 Location of an oracle in Greek mythology (6)

96 Saviour (8)

98 Motto (5)

99 Star of stage or screen (5)

101 Male who is not in the clergy (6)

102 Above or finished (4)

104 One of the wounds inflicted on Jesus, which wounds have appeared on certain saints since, such as St Francis of Assisi (6)

106 See 26 across

107 Popular beverage (3)

109 Strange or uneven (3)

111 Popular ice-cream flavour (7)

112 Male adult (3)

113 One who doesn't believe in God (7)

114 Furze or whin (5)

117 Jesus' final repast with His apostles (3,4,6)

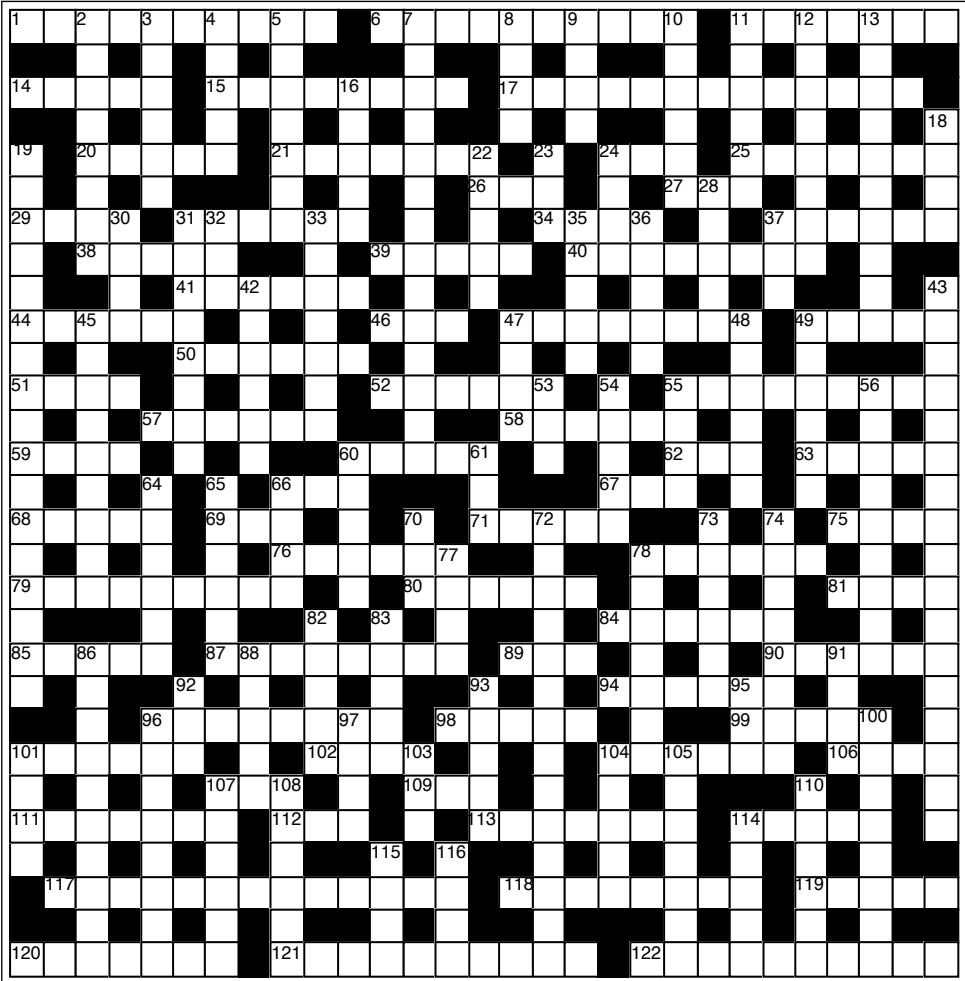
118 See 69 across

119 Actions, feats (5)

120 Creates patterns (7)

121 Pays no attention to; ignores (10)

122 Incrementally, one stage at a time (4,2,4)



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- meal (8)
- 3 Move one when you wink (6)
- 4 Inactive (5)
- 5 Pain-relieving tablet (7)
- 7 He features in a well-loved parable (3,8,3)
- 8 Lantern (4)
- 9 Skulk, loiter menacingly (4)
- 10 Ancient Greek city-state (6)
- 11 Seat placed on a horse (6)
- 12 Place or site oneself or one's business somewhere new (8)
- 13 One who claims to be able to divine what you are thinking (4,6)
- 16 Barrels (5)
- 18 Feeble (4)
- 19 Acts of self-denial practised on Ash Wednesday, for example (4,3,10)
- 22 Commissioned rank in the army (5)
- 23 Dined (3)
- 24 Baker's product (4)
- 28 Bacteria (5)
- 30 Alight (4)
- 31 Emphasised (8)
- 32, 91d & 54d Robber who repented and was forgiven at Calvary (3,4,5)
- 33 1953 film, starring Richard Burton, about the soldier who won a garment Jesus had worn (3,4)
- 35 Shouts, bellows (5)
- 36 Odour or perfume (5)
- 37 Insect which lives in a colony (3)
- 42 Deft (6)
- 43 Prayerful action recalling Christ's crucifixion (3,4,2,3,5)
- 45 Paschal chocolate treat (6,3)
- 47 Gale or breeze perhaps (4)
- 48 Reaping implement that featured on the flag of the USSR (6)
- 49 African country, formerly Nyasaland (6)
- 53 Faucet (3)
- 54 See 32 down
- 55 Air duct (4)
- 56 Whipping to which Jesus was subjected (9)
- 60 The Royal County (5)
- 61 Hydroelectric structure (3)
- 64 Polite word (6)
- 65 Such figures are egg-shaped (6)
- 66 Explosive sound (4)
- 70 Unwell (3)
- 72 Cloth purporting to bear a likeness of Christ (3,5,6)
- 73 The spiritual leader of a diocese (6)
- 74 See 20 across
- 77 Looked at (4)
- 78 The world's highest mountain (7)
- 82 Famous cathedral in Florence (5)
- 83 Look fixedly (5)
- 86 Hybrid primrose (10)
- 88 In that place (5)
- 91 See 32 down
- 92 Farmyard fowl (3)
- 93 One who ensures we keep the peace (5)
- 95 Cured pig-meat (3)
- 96 It's needed to screw into plaster, etc (8)
- 97 Smooth, level (4)
- 100 Solemnly respectful (8)
- 101 The greatest virtue (4)
- 103 Use oars (3)
- 104 The Yeats County (5)
- 105 Antiphon sung as the priest approaches the altar (7)
- 107 City in Turkey where St Paul was born (6)
- 108 Entertained (6)
- 110 The day of the week on which the Jesus was crucified (6)
- 114 Understand or take hold of (5)
- 115 Goading attachment to a cowboy's boot (4)
- 116 Pharmaceutical product (4)

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



Merging dioceses – is it really progress?

My colleague was not impressed with my attacks on Church authorities, as he saw it. "Isn't it bad enough that you're having a go at our poor bishops," said he, "without taking potshots at the Holy Father as well." He had read my musings on Rome's appointment of non-local priests to dioceses and was not amused. (I hope he is on his Easter holidays this Sunday, as I double down on my 'attack'.)

Discussion

The policy of lumping dioceses together stirs much discussion in the Irish Church. This policy, so far confined to the western province, is supposed to be coming to the rest of Ireland too – whether we want it or not. It seems strange that in this era of synodality, when 'Conversations in the Spirit' are supposed to precede every ecclesiastical change, consultation prior to 'lumping-together' announcements seem slim on the ground. Perhaps the bishops concerned are consulted (or maybe simply notified?), perhaps some priests hear of it 'on the grapevine', but consultation among the people of God seems unheard of. Or is it?

This amalgamation of dioceses was inevitable however, given other developments in the Church. In Ireland we were familiar with Charles Haughey's legislative "Irish solution to an Irish problem". It seems to be that merging of dioceses is a 'Roman solution to a Roman problem'. May I explain?



I am a humble PP in a parish, so I suffer at a small scale what bishops must suffer at large scale in dioceses. In four particular areas, I find myself as the person responsible for the parish's legal situation: charity regulation, revenue/finance, child safeguarding and data protection. While none of these areas belong to the essential nature of priesthood (nor did they feature in the ordination rite nor the promises I made then), they have gradually crept in and the pastor assigned the responsibility to see that each is attended to in his parish.

CEO

As it is in the parish, so it must be for a bishop – but much, much more so. The work that a competent CEO, employed by a diocese, might accomplish with ease is instead landed on the bishop's

lap – and then Rome wonders why so few priests want to take on episcopal office in Ireland. The key tasks of a bishop: teaching the Faith, presiding at the sacraments and being a father to the priests and people can so easily be lost under a flood of administration, which could easily be managed by professional administrator.

So to cure this tragic dilemma they have created, another solution is imposed: unite dioceses together, so that fewer bishops are needed – even though they will have twice as much administration until the dioceses are united completely, however long that takes. And along the way, a history going back to AD 1111 and AD 1152 is swept away, and the tradition of a bishop knowing his flock and being known by them is replaced with mega-dioceses where this familiarity is impossible. Is that really progress?

Should we treasure RTÉ a little more?

You probably heard of the impact of the docu-drama *Adolescence* on Netflix. Many politicians reacted to it, with British PM Keir Starmer saying it should be compulsory viewing in British schools.

Netflix is now 'the' TV station. No terrestrial television station can compete. This could mean the demise of the national stations we have been used to, like RTÉ. Would that be good? Would it be wise for all cutting-edge television to be in the hands of a multi-million-dollar private company, over which we would have no control. Maybe we should treasure RTÉ a little more, while we can.

“The key tasks of a bishop: teaching the Faith, presiding at the sacraments and being a father to the priests and people can so easily be lost under a flood of administration”

A heartbreaking true story

Have you read *Poor*, Katriona O'Sullivan's account of growing up in poverty and chaos, with parents who were heroin addicts? It's the most heartbreaking book I have read, all the more affecting because it is a true story.

I particular enjoyed hearing about the heroes of the story, the teachers and others who took a personal interest in Katriona and saved her from her parents' fate. It is to her credit that she had the strength of character to eventually enter Trinity College and gain a PhD there – a tribute to everyone whose simple acts helped her on the road.



This Easter, please help the people of Myanmar

The two earthquakes, whose epicentres were located near the cities of Mandalay and Sagaing, have caused great devastation. At present, the death toll is believed to be around 5,350, with 7,860 injured and hundreds more reported missing. Fr Henry is in charge of the Archdiocese of Mandalay's emergency response team. He writes to the Little Way, "The situation is terrible. At present, the most important needs are humanitarian assistance such as food, medicine, temporary shelter, and hygiene kits. Many people will need help for a long time, before they can start to rebuild their homes and lives."

The Little Way Association will forward, without deduction, every euro you send to Priests and Sisters known to us in Myanmar to provide basic humanitarian aid and to help families rebuild their lives. Please give what you can, and pray for Myanmar, going through a harsh period of war and natural disaster. The needs are immense. To donate online go to littlewayassociation.com



We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and blessed Easter.

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