

# The Irish Catholic

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Thursday, December 12, 2024 €3.00 (Stg £2.70) The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper @IrishCathNews www.irishcatholic.com

## Don't burn out this Christmas bishops urge very busy priests

Chai Brady

Priests should reach out for support if they are feeling stressed as Christmas approaches, the Auxiliary Bishops of Dublin and Armagh have urged.

Having served for a long time as parish priest in Wicklow, Bishop Donal Roche expressed concern for priests who are busy all year round and particularly the increased pressure they face in the run up to Christmas. The bishop suggested providing services conducted by lay people rather than Mass, which could take "pressure off" stretched priests.

The bishop advised that priests reflect on their experience of Christmas this year and use it to plan ahead for next year.

He said: "Make a note for next year... Perhaps to combine forces, get people to help, don't be taking it all on yourself. In a lot of places there are willing volunteers who can help with the planning and the preparations.

"I know that priests are overworked, and they feel overloaded and have to provide a service to people, all you can suggest is that they talk about it, reach out to somebody - to the bishop, their neighbour, or somebody else, and not to carry the burden on their own. If it is too much, tell somebody. There are lots of people, there's a vicar for clergy, there's the local bishop, whoever, who can hopefully be a support for them. So do not just struggle and burn yourself into the ground, talk to someone about it if it is getting you down."

Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh Michael Router warned that it is an "accumulation that causes burnout" but Christmas can naturally be "very busy".

Looking at how Christmas falls this year, he said that "you have the weekend beforehand, Christmas in the middle of the week, the weekend afterwards, the beginning

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### The Three Patrons' new helpers



Mass goes in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh of The Three Patrons Parish in Derry saw the debut of six new altar servers on December 8. (L/R) Cody Ryan Ward, Tommy Morrow, Sophia Rose Mitchell, John Doherty, Levi Curran and Sean Millar.

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## Don't burn out this Christmas bishops urge very busy priests

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of the Jubilee of Hope which has to be marked in most dioceses, so it is a very packed schedule over Christmas. Burnout comes from an accumulation of extra pressure throughout the whole year and when you come to this stage in the year you can be a bit tired”.

Bishop Rouser said: “It’s very difficult to give advice because pressure keeps coming on priests all the time. I would just hope that people in parishes would be understanding and aware of that... and try if they can not to put too much pressure on them and to help out, to offer their assistance in organising liturgies, and helping in whatever way they can over the course of the next few weeks.”

While acknowledging the timetables in parishes for Christmas have already been finalised, Bishop Roche said a Christmas service rather than a Mass for children “made a big difference” when he was a parish priest. This was reiterated by Bishop Rouser.

Bishop Roche: “It has worked very well, to have a simpler celebration of the Word, Christmas carols with the story of Christmas for children, and keeping it very simple with no Holy Communion. It was that in particular that caused a lot of the stress – a huge crowd and they get so restless. So a shorter, simpler Christmas service, lots of music and just the story of Jesus and Mary and all that, I recommend it. And they can have Mass later in the evening for those who want Mass.

“That was the great thing about it: that can be led by lay people and I have done it that way. When I was under a lot of pressure, I had lay people leading that early service and I had Mass in the other outlying churches when that was going on, so it took some of the pressure off.”

Bishop Roche stressed that while it’s not fulfilling an obligation, “it’s for people who might have a lot of young children, it’s a kind of Mass that might suit families with young children –

but it’s not Mass – and people need to be made aware of that, it’s just a celebration of Christmas”.

Fr David Vard, Administrator of Stradbally parish, Co. Laois told *The Irish Catholic* “I think last year we did have too many Masses, so we reduced Masses this year”.

He asked parishioners to “temper their expectations”, as while they may be used to going to Mass in their local church at a certain time over Christmas and have a “great affiliation”, this may not be possible.

“They might now have to go to the 9pm in another church in the parish and I hope people can understand that,” Fr Vard said. In his parish they have reduced the number of Christmas eve Masses by two.

He added: “I think it makes more sense. I think with the level of people volunteering, choirs, and also the number of priests – we’re being stretched as it is... so you are bringing together your resources, you are having a nicer celebration – I hope – and the priest is less stressed.”

Fr Joe Deegan PP of Clara parish, Co. Offaly said that Mass attendance has been “slipping” and that the Covid pandemic and people watching Mass online has played a part.

Fr Deegan told this paper: “Crowds are not as big as they used to be even back pre-Covid, even families and people who used to come to Mass, even once or twice a year, I think we’ve lost quite a few of that group as well.

“We’re not at the point here where we would be reducing Masses but the Mass schedule that we have is manageable,” he said, adding: “I think we should realise that depending on numbers of priests and age of priests we don’t have the same resources there, of man-power, and I know in some big towns and even in some of the more rural areas in the West – where lads are looking after a number of parishes – they’re obviously going to have to do something to make it more manageable.”

## Priest-farmer doesn't want to eat beef if grown to lesser standard

**Brandon Scott**

The European Union’s plan to import 99,000 tonnes of cheaper beef into the European market every year from a range of South American countries has provoked questions from a priest-farmer, who said that he wouldn’t be happy if the imported beef was produced at a lesser standard than it currently is in Ireland and added that he doesn’t want to eat it if it is.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Joseph McEvoy from Moynalty Parish in Co. Meath said that the fear he has about the EU’s proposed Mercosur Trade Agreement largely

revolves around maintaining the high standards Ireland has adopted when it comes to beef production.

“The fear I have is about standards,” he said. “We have to produce everything to a very high standard, which is all right and proper. I would want everything to be at the standard we have because I think our standards are good – they’re good for the animals and they’re good for the people that consume them.

“My fear about the trade agreement is will we be eating animals grown to a lower standard than we produce? If we are then it’s not good for the animals or for the people who consume them. I don’t

care where I eat the beef from but my only concern is standards.”

Drawing on his recent experience on a relative’s farm in the US, Fr McEvoy said that certain systems on large beef farms aren’t “right” and that he would sooner eat beef that was grown to a better standard but was slightly more expensive, regardless of what anyone says.

“I’m just back from Arizona where I have cousins who raise a small number of beef cattle,” he said. “It’s a desert so they’re fed from the feedlot. I saw the way they fed their animals – there were 250,000 male cows in the feedlot and it just wasn’t

right. It was horrible to see them confined to this pen all day and all night, sometimes in scorching hot conditions. I don’t want to eat that beef – I don’t care what anyone says. I would sooner eat beef that costs more but is grown to a better standard.

“If we were importing beef from a Mercosur country that was grown in those conditions, I wouldn’t be happy at all about it. Will the consumer know or taste the difference and will they be willing to pay the small amount extra for Irish grass fed beef or will they pay less and buy beef grown to a much lesser standard in these feedlots?”

## Letterkenny celebrates thanksgiving Mass for Veritas

**Renata Milán Morales**

The Veritas shop in Letterkenny is set to close its doors this week, bringing an emotional end to an institution that has served the faith community in Donegal for

decades. A special Mass of thanksgiving was held to commemorate the shop’s contribution to the Diocese of Raphoe, with former Bishop Philip Boyce paying tribute to its manager, Sheila, and her 23 years of service.

During his homily, Bishop Boyce highlighted the shop’s role as an important piece of faith in the region. Veritas provided a range of religious literature, devotional items, and resources for key Catholic feasts such as Christmas,

Lent, and Easter. “It also served as a place of prayer and reflection, thanks to a prayer room that offered solace to many,” as Bishop Boyce highlighted.

The closure is part of the general wind down of the company. Bishop Boyce noted that “the Letterkenny branch was not operating at a loss, making the decision to close all the more difficult for the community.”

“Sheila [the store manager] was the dragging force. The genius behind it for the last 23 years... This shop even has a little prayer room over here where people came for a quiet prayer. It is more than a shop. It was also a place of prayer. The closure has been met with sorrow and disbelief, with many expressing gratitude for the shop’s enduring service,” said Bishop Boyce.

The Bishop concluded, “Let us not forget to thank the Lord for everything that he has given to us down the years through the Veritas shop here in Letterkenny. As well as sadness there is also a sentiment of gratitude in our hearts today.”

## United nations in Faith



Pictured is the Catholic Vietnamese Community during the ‘Multicultural Christmas Carol Service’, celebrated at The Church of the Holy Family, Stoneybatter, Co. Dublin, the evening of December 8. “It is lovely to see the life, the vibrancy and the beautiful mix of cultures... Things don’t happen you have to make them happen. It gives us great hope to see all of us gathered from different nations. A hope that the world needs at this moment in time,” said Bishop Paul Dempsey closing the concert. Photo: Gerard Bissett

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Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €199. Airmail €320. Six months €105.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Dublin.

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# Laity praised as major review says Church ‘has good story to tell about safeguarding of children’

Garry O’Sullivan

An independent major external review has said that “the Church has a good story to tell about what it has implemented and achieved in relation to the safeguarding of children over the last 20 years... and “it is now regarded by some commentators as an exemplar in the Catholic Church globally.”

The review went on to say “a cul-

ture of safeguarding is embedded deeply with the Catholic Church in Ireland today.” The review which has just been published was commissioned in 2021 by the Bishops’ Conference and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI). This review was carried out by the professional services consultancy RSM Ireland.

“There was a general consensus during the stakeholder engage-

ment that the Church in Ireland has travelled a considerable distance when it comes to safeguarding compared to 20 years ago... the Church’s safeguarding has improved significantly since the establishment of the National Board in 2006” the report states. However it does say there are shortcomings in the current model and a “lack of clarity about where ultimate accountability sits.”

The report praised the work of Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs)

who it says are an “important lynchpin of the safeguarding apparatus” and that their role “is vital” and it also praised the work of lay volunteers at local level who it said are “crucial to making things work”.

The review evaluated all aspects of safeguarding and outreach to survivors, including the impact and effectiveness of the important work done by the NBSCCCI, as well as the two support organisations for survivors,

Towards Healing and Towards Peace, and it has been welcomed by the three organisations. RSM who conducted the review also consulted widely with key stakeholders including, *inter alia*, designated liaison persons, safeguarding officers, and representatives from other organisations in Ireland dealing with safeguarding issues. RSM also sought the views of victims and survivors of abuse within the Catholic Church.

# Archbishop Martin attends Notre Dame reopening

Renata Steffens

The reopening ceremony of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris happened last Saturday evening, December 7, five years after a fire destroyed part of the building. The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin attended the reopening Mass.

Archbishop Martin was

invited by Archbishop Laurent Ulrich, Archbishop of Paris, to represent the bishops and people of Ireland at the event.

“*Locus iste a Deo factus est*, this place was made by God! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!” the Archbishop said reflecting in the restoration of the Cathedral. “Here in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, I thank God for those who helped save this 850-year-old

Cathedral from total destruction, and to all those whose talents and resources have helped to restore it.”

The Cathedral spire, *la flèche*, was one of the most recognisable landmarks in Paris before being burned during the fire. The roof of the Cathedral was also completely destroyed by flames. Now, everything was restored or rebuilt and the building is back open to the public.

“Praise God for the gifts of artists, craftspeople and musicians whose skills truly enhance our worship and lift our eyes up to the transcendent,” Archbishop Martin said. “Today I am honoured to represent the bishops and people of Ireland, and I am joined by bishops from Europe and by civic leaders from around the world.”

“On this day of renewal, I pray for the Universal Church.

I pray for the faith to grow stronger in Ireland, in France and everywhere – beginning in our own hearts. Notre Dame Our Lady, Mother of the Church, Pray for us.”



Archbishop Eamon Martin with French Mgr Denis Moutel (right) in Notre Dame Cathedral for the inaugural Mass and consecration of the altar. Picture: Archbishop Eamon Martin

# Pop star’s public embrace of Faith leaves fans ‘shocked’



Gwen Stefani joined forces with prayer and meditation app Hallow to encourage people to pray during Christmas. Photo: John Lamparski/Getty Images

Brandon Scott

Fans of the pop star Gwen Stefani were left “shocked” after she recently announced that she has teamed up with the Catholic prayer app Hallow for its Advent prayer challenge.

Ms Stefani (55) was raised Catholic and reportedly remained practicing throughout her music career. However, the partnership between the singer and Hallow “shocked” her fans, according to *The Blast*.

Hallow announced the partnership with Ms Stefani via social media in late

November. For every Saturday of Advent, various singers will contribute a song reflecting the liturgical season.

“Though she has reportedly always embraced the Catholic faith, as *Church-Pop* noted, this is the first [time] many of her fans have witnessed the singer engage with it in such a public way,” Yahoo reported.

Ms Stefani announced the partnership herself on her Instagram account December 3, saying that she is excited to work with “this amazing prayer, meditation and music app”.

“Join me and millions of other Chris-

tians around the world as we celebrate the truth that God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son,” she said, encouraging her followers to download Hallow and participate in the 25-day prayer challenge.

Comments on her post ranged from criticism, debates, and accusations of becoming a “trad wife” to messages of support and excitement at seeing a celebrity embrace her faith.

Ms Stefani contributed an original song titled “Christmas Eve”, which was released December 7, the sixth day of the prayer challenge.

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# Priests welcome push for 10-minute homilies

**Renata Milán Morales**

Pope Francis has recently urged priests to keep their homilies short, suggesting a maximum of ten minutes to ensure their message is clear. Speaking during a General Audience, the pontiff said, "After 8 minutes, preaching gets dispersive and no one understands. Never go over 10 minutes, ever! This is very important."

In response, three Irish priests shared their thoughts with *The Irish Catholic*, all expressing support for the Pope's advice while offering differing insights on the topic.

Fr Benedict McGlinchey OP, based in Co. Louth, agreed, explaining that he follows a similar approach. "I try to follow Newman's advice to keep it to 7 minutes. Somebody told me Newman said that, but that's what I do," he remarked. Fr McGlinchey noted that attention spans are limited and that homilies should be focused on drawing out essential theological ideas with practical applications. "You can't teach, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity in a homily," he said, "but you can draw out some essential theological point and try to give it some practical application."

Fr Eoghan Ó Cadhla, based in Co. Kerry, highlighted the influence of modern technology on people's expectations. "With the advent of social media, people expect things to be put very quickly," he noted. Fr Ó Cadhla emphasised that shorter homilies engage better with congregations familiar to brief and focused communication. "I think the congregation would be very much in agreement with Pope Francis," he said, acknowledging that longer sermons risk losing their audience's attention.

Fr Paddy Byrne, from Co. Laois, praised the Pope's "pragmatic teaching" and criticised unprepared sermons. "Homilies are a rich opportunity that's often deeply spoilt by prolonged, unprepared sermons," he said. Fr Byrne argued that preparation is key to delivering meaningful, concise messages that connect with parishioners. "To get up and ramble for over 10 minutes can be quite painful to listen to," he added, noting that most people in the Church would warmly welcome the Pope's guidance.

While each priest has different reasons for supporting shorter homilies, they all agreed on the importance of the message preached. Whether influenced by attention spans, preparation, or changing societal expectations, they all agreed that short preaching is not only practical but essential for effective evangelisation.

## An extraordinary adventure...



Sr Isabelle Smyth of the Medical Missionaries of Mary launched her new book *Called to an Extraordinary Adventure in Faith*. The book tells the true stories about implementing healthcare and development over several decades in the face of unjust social structures and periods of war. The book was launched by Dr Fainche Ryan Professor at the school of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies at Trinity College Dublin. Pictured are Sr Isabelle Smyth (centre) with friends at the book launch last Friday in Dublin. Photo: John McElroy.

## Bishop Denis welcomes discerning deacons



Candidates in formation for the Permanent Diaconate from the Diocese of Ferns and the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin took a step closer in their deacon pathway as they were instituted lectors in a ceremony led by Bishop Denis Nulty that happened in St Brigid's Church, Kildare on December 7.

# 'Picking up speed' towards an Irish Synod

**Garry O'Sullivan**

The Catholic bishops at their winter general meeting have called for the Synodal Pathway which began in 2021 and which they called a "providential development", to "now continue" and "pick up speed during 2025". The Synodal Pathway was essentially on hold until the Synod in Rome ended in October, however Synodal maestro Cardinal Grech has repeatedly said that there is nothing stopping local churches from implementing findings from their consultations with the faithful in 2022. The Irish Bishops did say that "the themes that emerged in Ireland over this time (2022 consultation) will form part of a structured discernment process in the lead up to the first National Synodal Assembly in 2026."

In their statement the Bishops also said they "shared how the Synodal pathway is what the Spirit is calling the faithful to pursue at this time in the Church's

journey along the pathways of history. Bishops acknowledged that a certain fatigue can set in, but as Pope Francis reminded delegates during the Mass marking the conclusion of the Synod in Rome, we need to ask the Lord to lift up our hearts and let ourselves be woken up by the power of the Gospel: "We always need to return to the Lord and the Gospel so we can get back on our feet." It is also instructive, they said, that Pope Francis wrote to priests in May asking them to become 'missionaries of synodality.'

The statement added: "The bishops concluded, No doubt there is more to be gained from engagement with the *Final Document*, and we undertake to continue to explore it further."

The challenge now for the bishops and those working on the Synodal Pathway is to communicate that an Irish Synodal Assembly is happening in less than two years and to help laity and clergy prepare for it.

# A parish of centenarians

**Renata Steffens**

Ennis Parish celebrated the centenary of two parishioners last weekend. Mary Cahir was born on December 8, 1924, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and Mary Galvin was born on December 6 in the same year. They are both still active Mass goers.

Fr Tom Ryan PP said the parish has "quite [a] number of parishioners [who] are in their 90s. But it is always a special occasion when someone reaches 100 years. One century of life, of service and good health."

Both women "have been actively involved in the parish over the years, and Mary Galvin lives at the moment with her daughter Cath-

erine in Dublin." However, Ms Galvin still attends Mass at Ennis Parish by watching the online transmission.

Ms Cahir "attends Mass in her own parish and here in the Franciscan Friary, she's a regular." She does not need assistance when going to Mass, "she's still active and enjoys a good quality of life, and celebrated on Sunday with family, friends and neighbours," Fr Ryan said.

On Friday, December 6, Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral in Ennis to celebrate the 100th birthday of Mary Galvin, who watched it from Dublin. "She wasn't physically present, but we would say she was there because she was joining," the priest said.



# A serious point to a temperance drink

**Y**ou will be aware of the phrase “First World Problem”, usually employed sarcastically. It’s an apt description of those spoilt folk in the rich world whinging about trivialities while so much of the globe experiences real suffering.

So, this may seem something of a “First World Problem”, but I’ll mention it just the same as it does have a meaningful dimension. My big whinge at this time of the year is that when I get invited to Advent or Christmas parties, there’s often nothing decent to drink – for those of us who don’t partake of alcohol.

## Options

I find it puzzlingly self-ish, to be honest, that hosts who swish down wine and even cocktails



**Mary Kenny**

by the bucketful seldom give any real thought to providing a pleasant drink for non-topers.

Water or orange juice are usually the only alternatives, and they are frankly inadequate on these occasions. Water is boring in a party setting, and orange juice is a breakfast drink, totally lacking fizz. You want something with a bit of sparkle – ginger ale, elderflower spritzer, even a serving of Seven-Up would be welcome. Indeed, Seven-Up was invented to provide an interesting drink for American teetotallers. Honestly, next seasonal party I’m invited to, I’ll bring my own bottle!

And here’s the more serious side of this “first world problem”: the organisation Alcohol Action Ireland constantly pleads for more measures against alcohol abuse. Alcohol accounts for 11 per cent of Irish health care, and five per cent of Irish deaths. Alcoholism, they claim, costs Ireland €12 billion annually.

One part of the personal battle against booze is finding an alternative libation. That is the more serious reason to providing interesting, flavoursome non-intoxicating party drinks. You are not only pleasing your guest, you are also supporting temperance.

**“Alcohol accounts for 11 per cent of Irish health care, and five per cent of Irish deaths. Alcoholism, they claim, costs Ireland €12 billion annually”**



**I**t’s evident that commentators don’t quite know how to analyse the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, and its replacement by a rebel group led by a former jihadist, 42-year-old Abu Mohammed al-Jolani. Will Christians be respected, or even tolerated? The small Christian community is in such a vulnerable position.

Yet Syria has definite links with Christian history. In Matthew’s gospel (4: 24) it is related that the fame of

Jesus “went throughout Syria” as he taught and healed. Even though modern Syria is not exactly the same geographical shape, the allusion is meaningful.

The most renowned of all Christian conversions, that of St Paul, occurred on the road to Damascus (Acts, 9:3-10). When Paul reached Damascus, there was a disciple, Ananias, there to greet him. Yes, Christianity’s roots are surely in this troubled land.

**O**n a related topic, I am told that young people these days have rediscovered the delight of the cocktail. This was associated with the 1920s, rather than the 2020s, but everything gets reinvented in time.

And there are the non-alcoholic version called a “mocktail”. The most popular are the “Negroni mocktail”, which is composed of grape juice,

coriander and cardamon pods; the “non-alcoholic G & T”, being camomile, cardamon, mint, cloves and rosemary – plus the tonic, evidently. There is also the “Sidecar mocktail”, which is made of cold lapsang souchong tea, lemon juice and honey. To any “mocktail” I would add a spritz of something fizzy, either tonic, soda, sparkling water, even lemonade.

I savoured a real “Sidecar” or two back in

a misspent youth. I recall this drink as sinfully delicious, and you don’t realise how intoxicating it is until the room spins as you try to stand up. It consisted of a generous helping of Cointreau, a dash of vodka, a drop of angostura bitters, some lemon juice, and a glaze of sugar around the glass. If trying it, stop at one! There’s always the “mocktail” as a clear-headed alternative.

**I** met a nun last week who had worked at the Vatican for over a decade, and she declared the movie “Conclave” to be “very accurate”. She also approved of the performance of Isabella Rossellini as the only prominent nun in the movie. (Although, for movie pedants, be it noted that the conclave scenes were not filmed in the Vatican itself, but at a well-known church,

Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza, in Rome’s Corso del Rinascimento.)

She also noted – which I hadn’t picked up – that the “reactionary” cardinal was called “Tedesco” – meaning German. This is taken to be a nudge against Pope Benedict.

The movie has been widely acclaimed as one of the films of 2024, but perhaps it takes a Protestant to dissent. The

journalist Peter Hitchens, who identifies himself as “one of the last English Protestants”, waxed critical. “The main conservative character is, of course, stupid and crude. And we are invited to think that traditional prayers and big families are bad things...my sword leaps from its scabbard to defend [the Catholic church] against this liberal bilge.”

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# Bishop hails NI Catholic schools after strong showing on best schools list

**Brandon Scott**

The performance of Catholic schools in the North, following the appearance of 7 Catholic schools on a recently published list of the 10 best schools in Northern Ireland, has been hailed by the Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown who said that in spite of the negative commentary directed at Catholic schools and Faith-based education "those who call for an end to faith schools would do well

to note who educates best".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bishop McKeown said that although Catholic schools are often the subject of complaints and criticism in the North, they consistently defy critics by contributing to the academic and developmental excellence of thousands of young people and that this reputation is leading to a sustained demand for what these schools are offering.

"Catholic schools are often criticised for being divisive

and damaging to a successful society in Northern Ireland," he said. "However, Catholic schools have consistently been overrepresented among the highest performing academic institutions in the North. This simply replicates a pattern that is found in so many other jurisdictions where faith-based schools – and specifically Catholic ones – are in huge demand.

"But it is important that achievement is not restricted to academic success. Good grades are only one meas-

ure of achievement. Schools that are results factories can often damage young people and not prepare them for the worlds of work, independence and resilience."

Outlining the core determinants for "a good education", Bishop McKeown stressed that the best approach is a holistic one and one that factors in the practical and the transcendental and this is something at the centre of Catholic schools.

"A good education takes all pupils from where they

are and helps them do and be their best," he said. "Community, respect for the fragile, high expectations for all, extra-curricular activities and an openness to the transcendent – these are all key elements in preparing young people to live life to the full. And Catholic schools tend to do that all very well – often without even being aware of it.

"Those who call for an end to faith schools would do well to note who educates best," he said.

# Community unites to save 574-year-old Abbeyside tower

**Renata Milán Morales**

The community of Abbey-side, Co. Waterford, has come together to save the ancient Bell Tower of St Augustine's Church, which has stood on the edge of Dungarvan

Harbour since 1450. Water seeping into the 574-year-old tower threatened its structural integrity, leaving parishioners and parish priest Fr Ned Hassett facing a €70,000 repair bill.

Fr Hassett described the response to the fundraising

effort as "hugely uplifting." Locals took the initiative with activities ranging from a Scouts' litter pick to a ladies' football toy sale, a fun quiz, and a traditional music concert. "People freely dug deep and gave generously," Fr Hassett told *The Irish Catholic*.

"It's a vital part of our parish heritage and in everyday use as the stunning entrance porch to our place of worship."

The bell tower, now the entrance to the church built in 1832, is a historical and cultural landmark. It dates to an earlier medieval priory, established in 1290 by Augustinian friars who came from Clare Priory in Suffolk, England.

The tower is a valued symbol of the village. It features on the badges of local groups including the scout troop, ladies' football team,

and soccer club. As one local noted, "If it is not stabilised, it will collapse completely and be gone. In 100 years, there would be nothing left to look at."

The community has organised several successful fundraising events. A traditional music concert raised nearly €5,000 alone. Locals consider this "more than a history project, it's a community project." While the campaign began as an effort to preserve a historical monument, it has become a unifying force in Abbeyside.

## Bishop prays for Syria peace and friend kidnapped by al-Assad regime

**Illiana Ochoa Bravo**

The Bishop of Elphin and Apostolic Administrator of Achonry has said he is praying for the safety of the Syrian people and for a peaceful transition of power.

Bishop Kevin Doran said on social media that he's thinking of Johanna Ibrahim, his fellow student at the Irish College in Rome and the former Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, who went missing in 2013. He said Archbishop Ibrahim was

involved in Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue and spoke of "opportunities for reconciliation".

"He was an outspoken opponent of Bashar al-Assad. He was kidnapped while on a mission of mercy in 2013. I have no idea whether he is dead or alive," Bishop Doran said.

In recent years, the Diocese of Achonry has been "privileged" to welcome refugees from Syria, said Bishop Doran. "They have sat beside us in school and worked

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Shrine vandalised and donations stolen from Louth church

The close-knit community of Omeath in north Louth is in shock after the shrines to St Anthony in St Laurence's Church were vandalised and donations stolen last weekend.

It's believed that an attempt was made to break open the collection box at the Shrine of St Mary on Friday and that the culprits returned with tools on Saturday afternoon. They forced open the brass panel of the Shrine of St Anthony and made off with donations which people had left.

The incident at the church on Saturday afternoon happened when much of the village was without electricity following Storm Darragh.

Garda confirmed that they are investigating a theft which occurred at Omeath, on Saturday, December 7.

### Bishop Coll to mark death of well-known historian

On Sunday December 15, the village of Durrow in Laois will host an event to mark the life and legacy of Canon William Carrigan on the centenary of his death.

Bishop Niall Coll will preside at a special liturgy in Durrow's Church of the Holy Trinity during the 11.15 Mass, to be followed by a visit to the canon's grave in the adjoining cemetery.

This month marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Canon William Carrigan, an Ossory priest who produced a four-volume account of the history and antiquities of Ossory in 1905.

Canon Carrigan died on December 12, 1924, and will have his passing marked by events in both Durrow and Kilkenny.

alongside us in the community," he said.

"Today, we appreciate the mixture of hope and anxiety experienced by our Syrian neighbours as they witness the dramatic developments all across their homeland. We join them in praying for the safety of their families and friends at home, and for a peaceful transition of power to a government which will respect and protect the human rights of all Syrians."

## Nota Bene



Participants on the School's Singing Programme in the Archdiocese of Armagh and the Diocese of Dromore from the schools of St Patrick's PS, Mt St Catherine's, Our Lady's Tullysaran, St Malachy's and Our Lady and St Machuas Derrynoose gathered in St Patrick's Cathedral for an Advent celebration on December 5. Led by Musical directors Orla Nugent and Sara Jane Kelly (organist and pianist) they were joined by parish congregation and family members.



# SafeBirth4All

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# When conversion becomes a crime



Martina Purdy

It's almost 40 years since Jeffrey Dudgeon successfully changed the law in Northern Ireland.

And it took courage as he was living in real fear, under an unjust law: his house had been raided, and he had been arrested and interrogated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. His crime? Dudgeon was a gay man and homosexual activity was not only illegal but loudly condemned by Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterians who had led a *Save Ulster From Sodomy* Campaign.

Dudgeon brought a case against the UK law to the European Court on Human Rights and won.

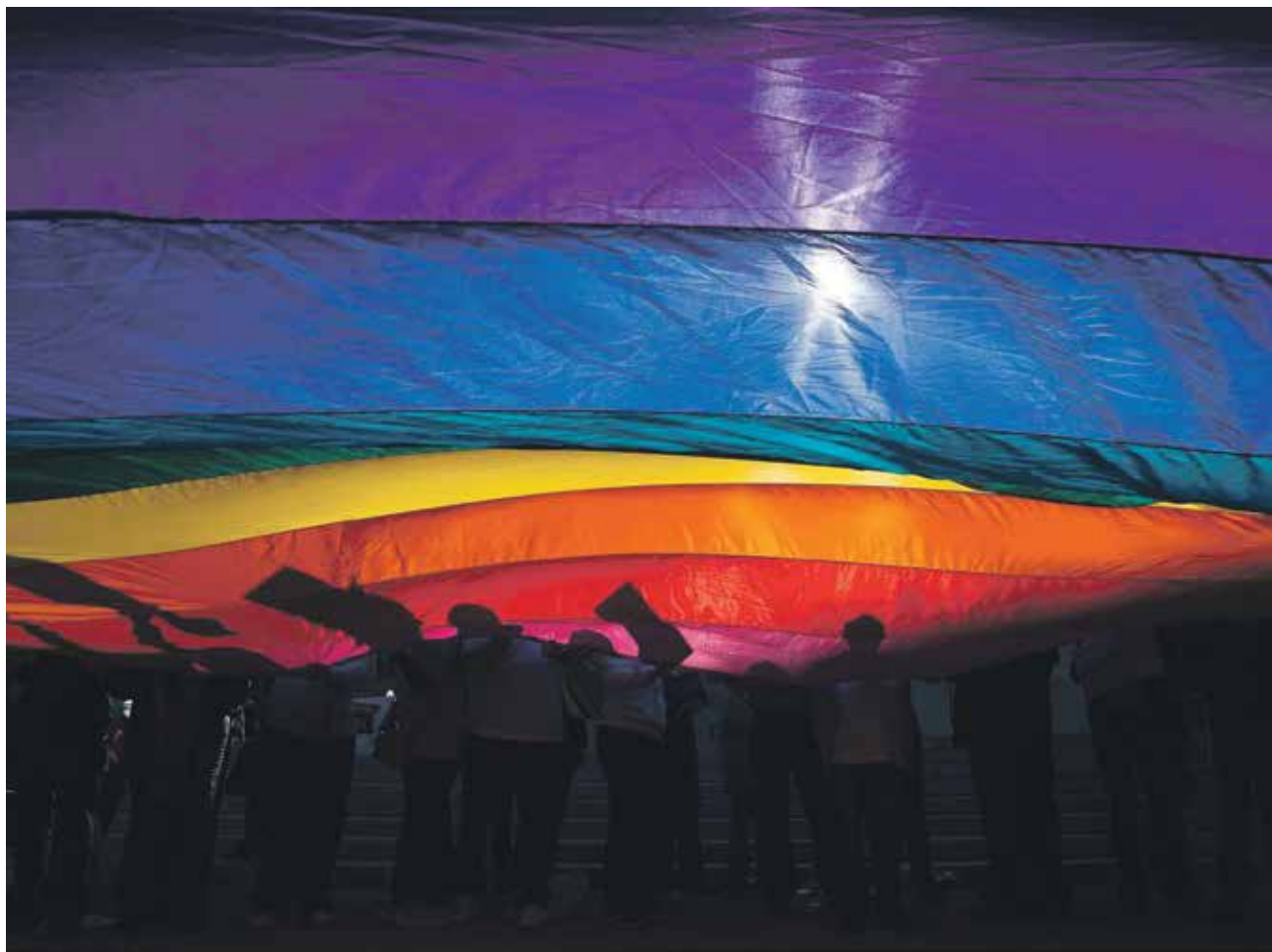
Fast forward 40 years and it is Dudgeon who is now cautioning against a change in the law - this time around so-called "conversion therapy" - that is, techniques which intend to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. Under a proposed new private member's bill at Stormont, anyone using such techniques - even with the person's consent - would be criminalised, if it was proved they used coercion or caused an individual harm.

## Impact

Dudgeon appeared on BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback programme on December 5, expressing his concerns over the bill, which has also raised alarm bells among Christians. The penalty for breaking this law could be up to seven years in jail, a fine or both, depending on the seriousness of the offence.

The bill is being proposed by Eoin Tennyson, a Stormont assembly member and newly elected deputy leader of the Alliance Party.

**"Tennyson maintains that 'conversion therapy' has real mental health consequences such as feelings of guilt, shame, depression, anxiety and even thoughts of suicide. 'I don't believe we should be standing for that as a society,' he said"**



LGBTQ supporters wave a flag outside the US Supreme Court in Washington. Photo: OSV News/Tyler Orsburn, CNS archive.

Tennyson (26) - who became the youngest member of Stormont three years ago - describes himself as gay, "progressive" and "inclusive".

**"My big fear is that we're using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, because there isn't a great deal of evidence of significant criminal activity, as Eoin would define it"**

He claims that so-called conversion practices are "torture, not treatment" and wants to make it a criminal offence for pastors and counsellors to engage in "conversion therapy".

The only formal defence

is that the accused's behaviour was "reasonable".

But even the Alliance Party admits on its own website that this defence would be difficult to envisage in a case which met its four tests: a relevant act, intent, harm and an identifiable victim.

Dudgeon is not impressed. "My big fear is that we're using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, because there isn't a great deal of evidence of significant criminal activity, as Eoin would define it."

## Criticism

Tennyson maintains that 'conversion therapy' has real mental health consequences such as feelings of

**A**s Storm Darragh raged, I was thinking that naming storms is a new phenomenon. But in fact it dates back hundreds of years - though it is more common now. It

**"Even talk of prosecutions creates a chill factor for priests and pastors, and parents, who might feel intimidated when talking to a confused teen?"**

guilt, shame, depression, anxiety and even thoughts of suicide. "I don't believe we should be standing for that as a society," he said.

While claiming he wanted to strike the appropriate balance with free speech and freedom of religion, Tennyson dodged a pointed question put by the host of Talkback, William Crawley, who gave an example of someone, aged 35 or

turns out saint's names were once a popular choice. When a hurricane hit Puerto Rico in October, 1526, it was the feast of St Francis of Assisi so the storm was named after him.

**T**he countdown to Christmas has become a countdown to appeal for a County Antrim woman who was fined £750 by Coleraine Magistrates Court for praying inside an exclusion zone at an abortion hospital. Claire Brennan, a mother of five, has until Decem-

ber 23 to lodge an appeal. But if that fails she will be bound to pay the fine - or face a week in prison. She says she is prepared to go to jail. In court she quoted the book of proverbs: "It is my duty to rescue those being led to death..." Indeed, it is the duty of every Christian.

to Westminster to legislate instead.

James Kennedy, NI policy officer for the Christian Institute, said the broad definition in Tennyson's bill around "harm" would mean that a parent could be prosecuted if they discouraged their child from gender transition or sexual experimentation. "Even saying 'you might regret it' could be seen as causing fear and thus be illegal," he claimed.

Of course no one wants to see anyone damaged or shamed through poor and inadequate counselling - or indeed cruel or coercive treatment.

## Regulation

There is certainly an issue around the regulation of counselling that politicians should address. For example, anyone in Northern Ireland can simply claim to be a counsellor, charging exorbitant fees.

But Tennyson isn't concerning himself with this issue - which seems more practical than his own proposed legislation.

Frankly, I doubt this bill will pass into law - but either way there is a consequence in what is surely a minefield in our society. Even talk of prosecutions creates a chill factor for priests and pastors, and parents, who might feel intimidated when talking to a confused teen?

There is an odd rationale behind this bill: sexual orientation cannot be changed but gender identity, that is whether we are male or female, can?

The Alliance Party's views have been rather concerning.

Last August, when the NI Executive temporarily banned puberty blockers, which suppress a child's sexual development, Alliance was critical of the decision. The ban followed the Cass Review which found remarkably weak evidence to support their use. The Cass Review, led by a retired paediatrician for the NHS, also found that "gender medicine" was operating on "shaky foundations". The Alliance Party said these were decisions for clinicians not politicians, adding it was committed to improving access to "gender-based care". This week it was reported that the Alliance Party's ministers backed an Executive extension of the ban, albeit with reservations.

Frankly Dudgeon's common sense approach should be heeded when it comes to this bill. Given his own appalling experience, Dudgeon said he has no wish to see other people's homes raided for what he would call a "relatively minor offence."

**"Of course no one wants to see anyone damaged or shamed through poor and inadequate counselling - or indeed cruel or coercive treatment"**

Critics say Tennyson's bill - which is at the consultation stage - is merely a rehash of proposals already shelved by Holyrood in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament - amid a backlash around concerns over human rights violations - said it would leave it



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# Funerals can remind us of our true mission



Maria Steen

**A**dvent is a time of preparation, when we slow down a little, anticipate what is ahead and prepare for what is to come. As I read about the funeral of Mary Regan in Co. Carlow a few days ago, I was reminded of the similarities between Advent and the funeral mass as celebrated in the Catholic Church: that “in-between” time following death and before burial is a time of sombre mood with preparations being made. Despite the sadness and grief, a funeral, like Advent, looks ahead in hope to something better to come: a new life.

One might be tempted, listening to the news in other places, to think that there is little hope or goodness left in the world, but a beautiful witness to hope and kindness emerged in Askea, Carlow last week. The kindness of one man – the undertaker – led him to put the call out asking people to attend the funeral of Mary Regan.

## Generosity

Because he was aware that she had no next of kin, he knew there would be few, if any, to attend her funeral. The people of the locality responded with pity and generosity. Rory Healy, the funeral director, was taken aback to see the response, when about 300 people turned up at the funeral mass in the Church of the Holy Family, Askea in Carlow town.

All the major news outlets covered the story; there was the proper acknowledgment of the role the funeral director had played in assembling



the people and of course of the people's response, but what of the Church?

**“They looked and saw a great story – one person reaching out in kindness to another, others responding, but for what?”**

The same outlets that so often are brutally critical of the Catholic Church, some even going so far as to call for its disbanding, had nothing to say about the fact that it was the Church that provided the

opportunity, through its rites, for people to assemble to support the lady who had died. Nor was there any mention of the kindness that the Church extends to her children by actually having a funeral Mass offered for the soul of the person who has died.

## Superficial

Our secular world recognised the goodness, but could only read it on a completely superficial level. They looked and saw a great story – one person reaching out in kindness to another, others responding, but for what? On a secular world view – which does not believe in God or the next life or that the soul lives on after death –

what does it matter to the lady who died if anyone turns up to her funeral?

To understand the significance of it, we need to understand the purpose of the funeral Mass. A funeral is not made better by a eulogy that brings people to tears, or the rank of the priest who officiates, or even the size of the crowd. None of these things matters. What matters is that we pray for the soul of the person who had died.

**“It was instituted by Christ, not for us to be entertained, but so that we might do what we ought by making our offering to God through the priest”**

The Mass, as we know, is a sacrifice. Christ gave His life for us on Calvary and the Mass recalls this in a mystical way, making Christ present in our midst through the actions of the priest. Just as Christ gave His life for us, the Mass

too was made for us. It was instituted by Christ, not for us to be entertained, but so that we might do what we ought by making our offering to God through the priest, and making our own personal offering of our lives by praying in a fourfold way: we adore God, we give Him thanks, we ask forgiveness for our sins, and petition Him or ask for help in whatever way we need.

For a funeral Mass, we do the same thing, but we pray on behalf of the person who can no longer pray for himself or herself. We adore God, we thank him for the person's life, we ask forgiveness for his or her sins, and we petition God for him or her to be united with Him in Heaven.

## Beautiful

What was beautiful about the funeral of Mary Regan was that she had people there to pray for her – even though they didn't know her. And that really encapsulates the idea of communion within the Catholic Church: the spiritual solidarity of all the members of the one mystical body, praying with each other and for each other.

Mary Regan's funeral highlighted what is really important about the Catholic funeral, which is easily overlooked at funerals that are packed with well-wishers and friends of the dead person.

It is not about a celebration of the person's life (remember, the people in Askea did not know Mary Regan personally), but a commendation of the person's soul to God. A celebration of a person's life ends at the grave; the funeral mass and commendation looks forward to something else, something much greater. Those haunting words that are so familiar to those of us used to attending Catholic funerals remind us of this: “Receive her soul and present her to God the Most High.”

In the end, the funeral of a lady with no next of kin highlighted the importance and beauty of the faithful working together with the whole Church body in an act of love. That love was to be found in the kindness of one good Samaritan, the response of the people, and the embrace of the person who had died in the bosom of the Church in an act of commendation to God.

**“A celebration of a person's life ends at the grave; the funeral mass and commendation looks forward to something else, something much greater. Those haunting words that are so familiar to those of us used to attending Catholic funerals remind us of this: ‘Receive her soul and present her to God the Most High’”**



# Many people with disabilities are 'terrified' of assisted suicide bill



Nuala O'Loan

**F**undamental to our faith is our belief in the sanctity of human life, from conception to natural end, because all life comes from God. This eternal truth informs all we do.

In the secular world there is no belief in God, and, for many, little belief in the sanctity of human life. Those who have faith are told their beliefs and values should be a private matter. Those who do not have faith appear to consider their values of greater relevance than those of people of faith. It is difficult to understand this assertion.

There has been massive coverage of the vote on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill in parliament on November 29: the first time the UK Parliament has ever voted positively on an assisted suicide or euthanasia bill.

The state has accepted that people should have the autonomy to make a decision to die by suicide. However that is a very different situation from the state intervening to enable death. The arguments for assisted suicide and euthanasia focus on individual autonomy and the right to choose how, where and when one dies. However, the logic of this is that assisted suicide should be available for everyone without any restriction. The bill provides only for assisted suicide for those who are terminally ill with less than six months to live. Yet in all countries allowing such laws, they have been extended. People of all ages die this way: because of inability to access medical/ mental health services, loneliness, isolation, learning disabilities, autism and the fear of being a burden to others.

## Options

Kim Leadbeater is reported to have said last month on radio that the current situation for terminally ill people is that "you can suffer and have a very difficult and painful death, you can go to Switzerland with dignity and the other option is you can take your own life". This is not true. With good palliative care, pain can in so many cases be managed, if doctors



are properly trained, yet palliative care training and provision is very limited.

The bill is full of uncertainties.

It provides that a terminally ill person who has capacity, is over 18, resident in England or Wales for at least 12 months, registered with a GP there, who has a "clear, settled, and informed wish to end their own life, who has made that decision voluntarily without any coercion or pressure, may be provided with assistance to end their own life".

**“Most hospital doctors and most GPs won't really know the patient. Many may not have in-depth knowledge of the patient's illness or their circumstances”**

How is all this to be established? Prognoses about how long someone has to live are very often wrong. How is coercion or pressure to be detected? What is a clear, settled and informed wish? How long does it have to be settled for?

The bill provides that a person can tell a registered medical practitioner (doctor) that they want medical assistance to end their own life. Most hospital doctors and most GPs won't really know

the patient. Many may not have in-depth knowledge of the patient's illness or their circumstances.

The doctor, if willing to do so, can "explain it" and talk to the patient about "their diagnosis and prognosis, any treatment and the likely effect of it and any available palliative, hospice or other care, including symptom management and psychological support". Such support is often not available because we do not invest in it.

Doctors can raise the issue with a patient unasked, if they think it is "appropriate to do so".

## Conditions

What will this do to trust in the medical profession? Patients may feel they should die to free up beds; so that they are not a burden or a nuisance to others. They may think that since the doctor has suggested it, it may be the right thing to do. How will families and chaplains cope?

The bill requires three declarations – one from the patient, one from the doctor who will help the death, and one from an independent doctor. Then the patient can apply to the High Court for a declaration approving the request. If the judge is satisfied that all conditions are met, they must agree, if not the judge must refuse. There is a right of appeal to the Court of Appeal.

If the court agrees, the patient must make a second declaration after a cooling off period of 14 days (or 48 hours where death is imminent), that they still want to die. The declaration can be withdrawn at any stage.

The first doctor may then give the substance to the patient which the patient may self-administer. An independent person does not have to be present. "The doctor can assist the patient to ingest or otherwise self-administer the substance."

**“It has been calculated that we would have up to almost 27,000 'assisted' deaths each year in England and Wales”**

The doctor does not have to stay in the room until the patient has taken the drug, but must remain on the premises until the patient is dead, or the procedure has failed. What if the patient does not die? What does the doctor do?

In Oregon complication rates have been up to 14.8%. Patients can have difficulty swallowing the medication, may suffer drug regurgitation or seizures, may regain consciousness or suffer prolonged vomiting. The longest time taken to die last year was 137 hours – over five days. Are doctors going to remain that long?

581,363 people died in England and Wales in 2023. It has been calculated that we would have up to almost 27,000 'assisted' deaths each year in England and Wales.

There are 18 judges in the Family Division of the High Court who deal with all cases. There are massive backlogs.

**“The shift from preserving life to taking life is enormous and should not be minimised”**

How could those judges cope with the anticipated 27,000 cases a year?

In a recent open letter, 2,038 doctors, 905 nurses, and 462 other healthcare workers (including medical directors at hospices and NHS trusts, and 53 eminent medical professors) warned that the "NHS is broken, with health and social care in disarray. Palliative care is woefully underfunded and many lack access to specialist provision".

The thought of assisted suicide being introduced and managed safely at such a time is remarkably out of touch with the gravity of the current mental health crisis and pressures on staff.

The shift from preserving life to taking life is enormous

and should not be minimised. The prohibition of killing is present in all societies due to the immeasurable worth and inherent dignity of every human life. The prohibition of killing is the safeguard. The current law is the protection for the vulnerable

This bill is dangerous. Many of those with disabilities are terrified of it. They know what has happened elsewhere and they fear that ultimately there will be an understanding that those with disabilities and vulnerabilities are superfluous and costly.

Belief in the sanctity of human life means that we must fight the bill. The state must protect and support our sick, our vulnerable, our lonely: not kill them.

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# Calming the storms through contemplative tradition

## A conversation with Bro. Richard Hendrick OFM



Bro. Richard Hendrick



Renata Milán Morales

**“Most of us live, right now, in a world of storms. Never in history has the human being been under so much pressure from so many directions all at once. The world seems to be on fire as political systems are rocked, and new conflicts and wars are breaking out... The individual person is put under a constant pressure to succeed, to be perfect, to have it all...”** With these words Bro. Richard Hendrick starts his latest book, *Calming the Storms: Meditation as a Path*

to *Inner Peace and Happiness*.

In a conversation with *The Irish Catholic*, the author said, “What people want is what they’ve always wanted, peace. The deep peace that this world cannot give. The peace that comes from living in right relationship with God, with one another and with all of creation. That’s what’s at the heart of the hungers of everybody, even if those hungers are misplaced or are fulfilled in difficult or problematic ways. There is a hunger for union with God and for peace with one another.”

### Purpose

Talking about the purpose behind his new book, Bro. Richard Hendrick told this paper, “The previous work, *Still Points*, comes out of the same idea, which was to begin to introduce people to the Christian contemplative tradition, particularly people who may have had interest in the kind of

modern mindfulness but wouldn’t have known that the Christian contemplative tradition exists in such steps. So, the idea would be to allow people to recognise that that’s there as a possible way to explore our faith and prayer practice as well.”

The contemplative tradition, often associated with monastic life, is just as accessible to those immersed in busy family or work lives, explains Bro. Richard. The Irish friar shared insights on how living deeply in the present moment is the core of every spiritual practice,

“Whether it’s a parent tending to children or a professional at work, being fully present in each moment opens the space for encountering God.” This echoes the words of St Elizabeth of the Trinity, a 20th-century Carmelite, who wrote: “It seems to me that I have found my Heaven on Earth, because my Heaven is you, my God, and you are in my soul.”

### Tradition

Bro. Richard emphasised that this call to presence is an integral part of the contemplative life, which the Church’s mystical tra-

dition has long nurtured. He lamented that contemporary Christian practice often places the focus far from this aspect, concentrating more on liturgy and Apostolic life. He believes it is crucial for the contemplative life to be reintroduced at all levels of religious formation, from parish communities to individual spirituality: “It needs to be taught more widely... Traditionally, the monasteries were the places of deep spiritual practice, but they were also meant to be petrol stations for the ordinary faithful as well.

Where people could go to receive deeper instruction and refuel their spiritual journey.”

**“By reintroducing the contemplative tradition, the Church can offer people a way to connect more deeply with their faith”**

In losing touch with this contemplative tradition, Bro. Richard argues that Christians have also lost a vital aspect of their spiritual journey. “In separating ourselves from contemplative space, one of the things we’ve done is lose the ability to know that this is meant to be part of the journey of every baptised Christian.” He suggests that by rein-

**“In separating ourselves from contemplative space, one of the things we’ve done is losing the ability to know that this is meant to be part of the journey of every baptised Christian”**



## “This is the knowing that we are called to through stillness and silence. The knowing of God’s presence in our very being as love, and it leads us to an awareness of God’s presence in everybody else too”

troducing the contemplative tradition, the Church can offer people a way to connect more deeply with their faith, particularly in a world filled with distractions and anxieties.

### Resonate

Bro. Richard's reflections resonate strongly with certain biblical teachings. In Matthew 6:22-24, Jesus speaks of the importance of having a clear eye, which fills the whole body with light. This metaphor of clarity and light can be understood as a call to mindfulness and presence - qualities that are at the heart of the contemplative life. Similarly, in Matthew 6:25-27 and 34, Jesus tells his followers not to worry about their lives, reminding them that life is more than food and clothing. He urges them to trust in God's providence, noting that even the birds in the sky are cared for by the heavenly Father. This message of trusting in God and living in the present moment is central to Br Richard's teachings on meditation and contemplation.

In *Calming the Storms*, Bro. Richard writes: “The practice of deeper meditation teaches us what we may become in God through a deepened awareness of His presence in each

succeeding moment and at deeper and deeper levels.” This practice, he argues, leads to a transformation in how we relate to ourselves, to others, and to all of creation. It allows us to “become an empty bowl to be filled with grace” and to experience God's presence as love. This awareness of God's presence in us, he suggests, naturally extends to an awareness of God's presence in others.

“I think the Church is always in need of renewal and always has been, since the beginning”

For Bro. Richard, meditation is not simply a practice of inward reflection but a means of fostering compassion and wisdom in our relationships with others. “Eventually, our Christian mindfulness, through the cultivation of intentionality and the practice of inner attention, leads us into understanding how we must relate to ourselves and to all other creatures from wisdom and with compassion.” This is a call not only to personal peace but to peace with others and with the natural world.

Bro. Richard's focus on

the contemplative life as a path to peace and renewal is also linked to his understanding of the Church's ongoing need for reform. He acknowledges that the Church is always in a process of renewal, driven by the work of the Holy Spirit. “I think the Church is always in need of renewal and always has been, since the beginning,” he says. He believes that this renewal involves a return to the authenticity of the Gospel and the teachings of the Apostles. This was a central theme in the life of St Francis, who received the call from Christ to “rebuild my Church.”

### Perfect time

Bro. Richard reminds us that there has never been a “perfect time” within the Church. It has always experienced both light and darkness. He references St Augustine, who noted that while the Church is holy in its head, Christ, it can be sinful in its members - humanity. The journey of renewal, Bro. Richard suggests, involves a constant attempt to reform ourselves, to renew ourselves in God's grace, and to listen to the promptings of the Spirit.

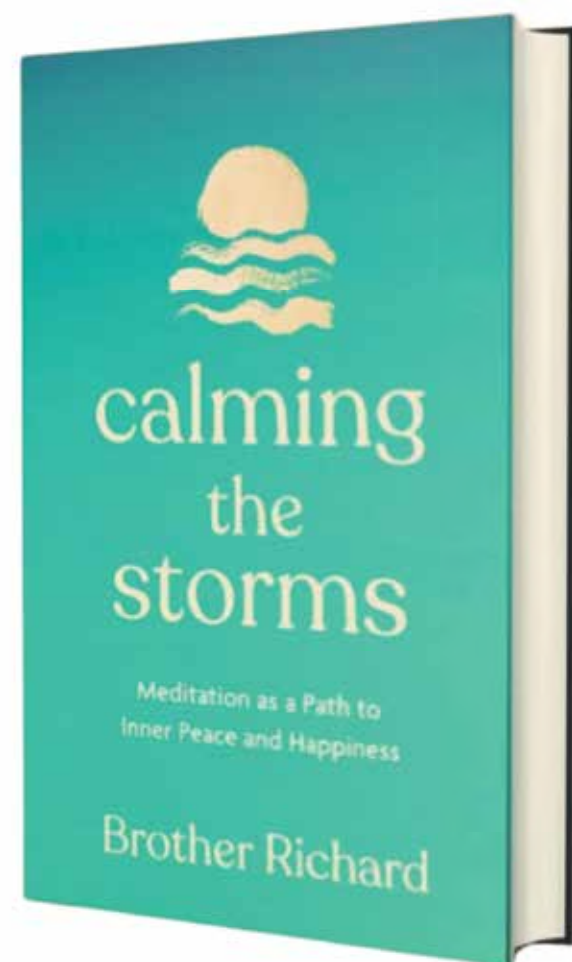
This process of renewal, he argues, must begin with deep listening and discern-

ment. It is in the silence of contemplation that we can hear the voice of God and begin the work of reform. For Bro. Richard, the contemplative life is not just for monks and nuns but for all Christians who seek to live in deeper relationship with God, with one another, and with all of creation.

“Calming the Storms is a call to return to the deep spiritual practices that have sustained Christians for centuries”

The Christian contemplative tradition offers a way to ‘calm’ the storms of modern life - a way that is grounded in stillness, presence, and the awareness of God's love. As Bro. Richard writes, “This is the knowing that we are called to through stillness and silence. The knowing of God's presence in our very being as love, and it leads us to an awareness of God's presence in everybody else too.” In a world filled with anxiety and conflict, this message of peace and presence is one that many are longing to hear.

*Calming the Storms* is a call to return to the deep spiritual practices that have sustained Christians for centuries. It is an invitation to rediscover the contemplative life, not as a distant monastic ideal but as a practical and accessible path for all who seek peace during life's storms. Through meditation, mindfulness, and a deepened awareness of God's presence, Bro. Richard offers a way to find the peace that “this world cannot give”.



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# Waterford walks with Our Lady Aparecida



**Renata Steffens**

**T**he Brazilian community in Waterford (Católicos de Waterford) gathered for a Triduum and a procession for Our Lady from December 5-8. The event, a version of the Our Lady Aparecida procession which happens in Dublin annually, brought prayer and hymns to the streets of Waterford.

The request for the event, said Scarleth Tavares, one of the event organisers, came from the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus (Phonsie) Cullinan. He heard about the Dublin procession and thought the growing Brazilian community in Waterford should have a similar celebration.

Bishop Cullinan speaks Spanish, but with help from Brazilian religious sisters living in the area, he said Mass in Portuguese during the event. "He practiced with them. It was wonderful, he read Mass in Portuguese. The homily was given in English, but he added a few sentences in Portuguese throughout it," Ms Tavares said.

For the procession, close to

150 people joined, "all Brazilians and the Irish bishop." Ms Tavares said that "during the procession, we pray and sing in English, so people stopped to pray with us, or joined in the walk. Everyone knows Bishop Phonsie in here."

For the Triduum Masses, the number of attendees was slightly lower, in between 80 and 90 people, which is the same number of a regular Sunday Mass attendance, said Ms Tavares.

The Triduum Masses were led by two Brazilian priests who live in Ireland, Fr Ademir Marques and Fr Severino Pinheiro da Silva Neto, the Chaplain to the Brazilian Community in Dublin and one Irish priest, Fr Michael Byrne, who lived in Brazil for a few years and speaks Portuguese.

Having an active community who speaks your native language "is a way of welcoming families who have been living here for years and get far from the Church because of language barrier."

Fr Neto, one of the priests who says Mass in Portuguese three times a month in Waterford, said this was "an experience of joined evangelisation. The community had the opportunity to witness their Catholic faith publicly, as the procession went through the central roads of Waterford. It's gratifying to feel welcome by the diocese, as the bishop himself was present, leading Mass and walking the procession."



**Choir for the Brazilian community in Waterford. Photos: Católicos em Waterford**



**Bishop Cullinan leading the procession.**



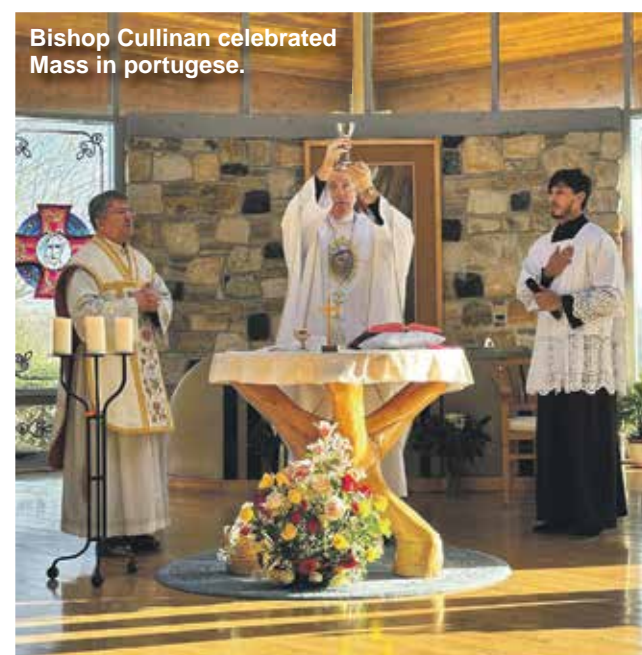
**Our Lady Aparecida.**



**Pilgrims entering the church with Our Lady Aparecida image.**



**Mass celebrated on the day of the procession.**



**Bishop Cullinan celebrated Mass in Portuguese.**



**Brazilian parishioners processing with Our Lady.**



**Children who helped crowning Our Lady.**



**Children throwing rose petals at Our Lady after the crowning ritual.**



# Youth 2000 National Christmas retreat

Renata Milán Morales

Youth 2000 recently celebrated their National Christmas Retreat at the Dominican College, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, with 520 young people aged 18 to 35 attending. The weekend featured workshops by Holy Family Mission, NET Ministries, and Pure in Heart, along with talks on topics like The Creed by Fr Stephen Kennedy.

"The women's vocation workshop was beautiful. I got to meet religious sisters and learn so much," said Alexandra (25), one of the attendees.

Katie Fillion shared her highlights, "the Eucharistic Healing Service on Saturday night had such a peaceful atmosphere, and it touched many deeply. I love seeing long queues for confession too!" She added, "It's amazing to be surrounded by so many young people encouraging each other in our Catholic faith. It really lifts my own faith."

Other workshops included How to Get God to Answer Your Prayers by Patrick McCrystal and a Q&A with priests and religious.



Attendees prayed morning prayer and celebrated Mass with the support of the Magnificat.



Attendees during Mass



Attendees worshipping

December 19, 2024



The Irish Catholic

# Winter Legacy

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# Out&About

## Bicentenary celebration in Offaly



**OFFALY:** Launch of book to celebrate the bicentenary of St Brendan's Church, Birr, on November 29 in a ceremony led by Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan. Entitled *A Place in All Our Hearts*, the book tells the story of the Church throughout the years



**DERRY:** Fr Paul Farren, Administrator of St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry recently pictured after Mass with members of The Order of Knights of St Columbanus as they journey on pilgrimage with the relic of Venerable Matt Talbot.



**DUBLIN:** Bishop Paul Dempsey joined the Irish Jesuits in the Gardiner Street Community on December 3 for the feast of St Francis Xavier celebration. On the occasion, the bishop also said a prayer at the Bl. John Sullivan's crypt.

### IN SHORT

#### A Christmas forest inside a church

The Parish of Clones/Aughdrumsee in the Diocese of Clogher, located on the border of counties Fermanagh and Monaghan hosted the first Christmas tree festival in a Catholic church in the area on November 29.

The festival took place in St Macartan's Aghadrumssee over the weekend and ended on the night of December 1, the first Sunday of Advent. It was a result of the idea, inspiration and hard work of Irene Crudden and her committee.

Local schools, businesses and parishes were invited to display their trees which could be imaginatively prepared with any material or messages.

In total, 57 trees went on display presenting the most different types of materials and decorations. However, "the most prominent tree was a memory tree, whereby parishioners were invited to display the names of their deceased loved ones. This tree contains almost 400 names and will remain as the Christmas tree for the Church in Aghadrumssee," said Fr Gabriel Dolan SPS.

Hundreds lined up to visit the festival over the weekend and were entertained by choirs and local musicians over a cup of tea. Proceeds were shared between the Parish and SOSAD Cavan, a local mental health support group.

#### Brazilian community celebrate Confirmations in Cork

On the first Sunday of Advent, the Brazilian community in Cork joined to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation of 14 adult members. The ceremony led by Bishop Fintan Gavin took place at the Cathedral of St Mary and St Anne.

Marking an important step in the faith journey of these Brazilian young adults, the Sacrament ceremony was the result of several months of preparation.

During his homily, Bishop Gavin invited the attendees to reflect on the significance of Advent as a time of waiting and preparing for the arrival of Christ. The bishop also invited the community to reflect on their own faith journey as adults. He invited those present to take time in busy days to pray and

reflect on the questions 'Where am I with my faith as an adult?'

The Cathedral Choir, led by John Casey, was responsible for the music singing in both Portuguese and English.

#### Book celebrates bicentenary of Birr church

To celebrate the bicentenary of St Brendan's Church, Birr in Co. Offaly a book was launched on November 29. The book entitled *A Place in All Our Hearts*, written by the Pastoral Council chairperson Brian Kennedy tells the story of the Church.

Mr Kennedy worked with collaborators to gather and create the book's content. It contains information of clergy, bishops, religious congregations, choirs, schools, and many other people who worked together in these 200 years of history.

The church, which has been the centre of the Catholic community of Birr Parish for over two decades reached 200 years last August. The book was launched in St Brendan's Church by Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan during an ecumenical service to mark the Feast of St Brendan of Birr.



Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**ANTRIM:** Recent QUS graduates and members of the Catholic Chaplaincy gathered to discern how best to provide for alumni and friends. After a Holy Hour in the Chapel with a meditation delivered by Chaplain, Fr Dominic McGrattan, they enjoyed a conversation facilitated by the Director of campus ministry, Shannon Campbell.



**LONDON:** From November 27 to December 2, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa ofm, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem visited the United Kingdom to mark the 70th anniversary of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre's Lieutenantcy in England and Wales. Pictured are Chevaliers Vincent Keaveny (Dublin) and Joe Fanning (Thurles).



**LONDON:** Chevaliers Thomas Kilduff (Cavan), H.E. Juan Luis Cabral (Cape Town) Joe Mc Nally (Kildare) during the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre's Lieutenantcy in England and Wales.



**LONDON:** Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa ofm, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem presided over the solemn investiture ceremony of eleven new Knights of the Equestrian Order at St George's Cathedral, Southwark on November 3. Pictured are Dr Stephen Dorgan (Dublin) with Peter and Nora Durnin (Drogheda) at the post-Investiture lunch at Lincoln's Inn, Westminster.



**DERRY:** The Parish of the Three Patrons had on December 3 the final night of the Advent Wreath making in the Emmaus Room at St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn. The crafting night was led by florist John Paul.



**DERRY:** The Parish of the Three Patrons had their final Advent Wreath making night led by florist John Paul on December 3 in the Emmaus Room at St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn.

## ANTRIM

Cullybackey Community Partnership is organising a 'Christmas Coffee Morning' on December 13 from 10.30am to 12.30pm in Maine Business Centre (top floor). Come for festive fun and games. For more info contact 02825882281 or 07548893047.

All ages are welcome. There will be snacks, puzzles, colouring, and more. For more info contact Gerald at 085 142 1817.

## KILDARE

Clane Union of Parishes' Cake Sale takes place on December 15 from 10am to 12.30pm in Clane Parish Centre, Main St. Come for cakes, biscuits, tarts, jams, bread and gluten free goods.

## KILKENNY

Duiske Abbey Choir invites you to the Christmas Carol Service in Duiske Abbey, Graiguenamanagh on December 23 at 7pm. Donations to the Irish Cancer Society – nursing services are appreciated. All welcome.

## LIMERICK

Lessons and Carols are being held at St Saviour's Dominican Church on December 13 at 7.30pm. Tickets are €10 and available at the parish office (Mon-Fri 10am-2pm) or on 085 726 2262. Primary school children go FREE. It is a fundraiser for St Saviour's new heating system.

## LONGFORD

AFCM Ireland is organising the Our Lady of Queen of the Travellers' men's one-day healing retreat led by John Pridmore, ex-gangster, takes place pm December 14 from 10am to 4pm in St Mel's family centre, St Mel's Cathedral.

## LOUTH

'Advent Holy Hour' takes place on December 13 at 7.30pm in the Monastery of St Catherine of Siena, Drogheda, A92 KR84. The event is organised by the Knights of St Columbanus Drogheda. All welcome.

## WATERFORD

On December 13, the feast day of St Lucy - Patron saint for the blind, visually impaired and eye illness, A 1st class relic of St Lucy will be available at the 1pm Mass for blessings in the Friary Church, Lady Lane. All are welcome to attend for prayers to St Lucy for improved vision of body and soul and the grace to use it.

## WESTMEATH

Killucan Parish's Christmas Carol Service takes place on December 15 at 7pm in St Brigid's Church, Raharney. All welcome.

## CORK

Annual Christmas Fair in aid of Aquinas Classical Academy takes place in St Martin's Chapel, St Marys, Pope's Quay on December 15 from 10am to 2pm. Free parking. Come for hand-made cakes, bric-and-brac sale, kids activities and free tea/coffee.

## DERRY

St Eugene's Cathedral's Carol Service takes place on December 22 at 4.00pm, St Eugene's Cathedral Choir will lead the singing. This will be a moment of song, prayer and readings.

## DONEGAL

Carols by Candlelight takes place on December 15 in St Patrick's Church, Crossroads, Killygordon, followed by live crib and hot chocolate. The event is run by Derry Home and the Mothers Sisters.

## DOWN

'Candlelight Christmas Concert' with International soprano Margaret Keys and Classical Brit award winner Fr Eugene O'Hagan happens on December 22 at 7.30pm in St Malachy's Church Castlewellan. Tickets are £20 and can be booked online at event-brite.ie, at Parish Office at 02843778259, or the Post Office in Castlewellan.

## DUBLIN

Advent Talk by Bishop Donal Roche takes place on December 16 after 10am Mass in Johnstown Parish Centre. Tea and refreshments afterwards. All welcome.

Priorswood Parish's 'Carols by Candlelight' takes place on December 16 at 7pm at St Francis of Assisi Church. All Welcome.

## ROSCOMMON

The Legion of Mary is organising a 'Family Game Night – Christmas Edition' on December 13 at 6pm in St Mary's Presbytery, behind St Mary's Catholic Church.



# Notre Dame is renewed, now for the Church itself



David Quinn

Some readers might remember the widely-acclaimed BBC documentary series from 1969 called 'Civilisation' presented by the ultra-urbane, quintessential Englishman, the art critic, Kenneth Clark.

In the 13-part series (which can be found on YouTube), Clark gives a personal view of Western civilisation and how it developed from the 'Dark Ages' down to his own day, when the slogan 'Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western civ has got to go' rang out on university campuses. Clark was a defender of the achievements of Western civilisation, which was a deeply unfashionable to do in certain quarters, even then.

In the first episode of the series, Clark is in Paris, on the banks of the Seine. He asks, 'What is civilisation?' and responds, 'I don't know. I can't define it in abstract terms yet, but I think I can recognise it when I see it, and I'm looking at it now'. Behind him, stands Notre Dame cathedral in all its glory, one of the greatest symbols of Western culture, art, civilisation and, of course, Christianity.

## Ingrained

It is because Notre Dame cathedral is all these things and is so ingrained in the Western and world imagination, that the fire which engulfed and almost destroyed it in 2019 was so shocking and had such a visceral effect on so many of us. If it had been lost, it would almost have been like losing part of ourselves. If he was filming 'Civilisation' today, what would Kenneth Clark have stood in front of as the symbol of Western civilisation? There would have been other choices, other great cathedrals, but few have the same combination of age, beauty, grandeur and fame as Notre Dame de Paris, not even St Peter's basilica in Rome, which is several centuries younger.

The fact that it was almost lost, and was saved only by the sheer heroism and skill of hundreds of

fire-fighters, is what made its reopening last weekend such a great and memorable occasion.

Even as smoke was still rising from the semi-ruins of the cathedral, donations began to pour in from all over the world. In total, 340,000 people made a donation from very small to extremely large. One French billionaire made a personal donation of €100 million.

In some ways it is hard to believe we are looking at the same building as the one that was engulfed by fire five years ago. The exterior is fully restored, intact and recognisable, but the tens of millions of people, tourists and worshippers alike, who have been in the cathedral down the centuries will have been amazed at how different the interior is. Gone from the walls, the statues and the other works of art is the effect of centuries of smoke from the church candles. The church now looks as though it was built yesterday and the effect is much brighter, far less gloomy. It looks now more like how it would have appeared to the earlier Mass-goers who have worshipped there.

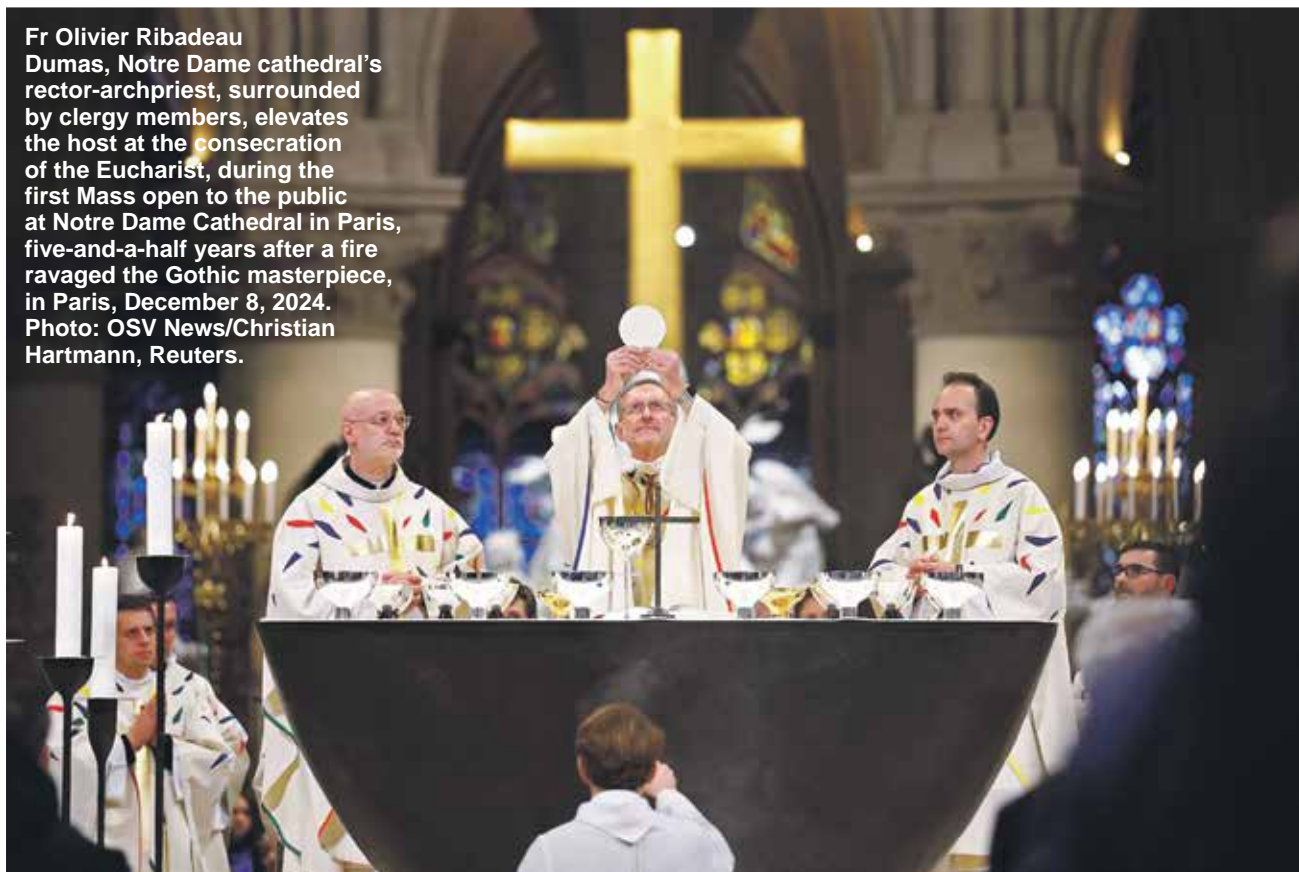
As a writer in the *Guardian* put it: "the effect is as close to time-travel as it comes, as if the medieval guilds had just left the building."

**“The Middle Ages were also a time of astonishing achievement, when the foundations of the modern age were very much being laid down”**

And what we can marvel at anew is the immense skills of the craftsmen who began building Notre Dame cathedral almost 1,000 years ago without any of the advantages of modern technology.

The Middle Ages are seen today in an almost completely negative light, as a time of ignorance, barbarism and superstition in which the Church was dominant and holding back society. Indeed, they are seen in much the same way Irish people have been trained to see our own history until, at this point, 1990 or so now that our 'dark age' has been

Fr Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, Notre Dame cathedral's rector-archpriest, surrounded by clergy members, elevates the host at the consecration of the Eucharist, during the first Mass open to the public at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, five-and-a-half years after a fire ravaged the Gothic masterpiece, in Paris, December 8, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Christian Hartmann, Reuters.



**“Will we have any common identity at all if we are not Christian? It is no good suggesting ‘multi-culturalism’ as the long-term answer because multi-culturalism is having decidedly mixed effects, some good, some bad”**

extended into the 1980s.

But the Middle Ages were also a time of astonishing achievement, when the foundations of the modern age were very much being laid down. During the Middle Ages, the first true universities were founded, a growing number of hospitals began to be built, the monasteries were putting ever more land to productive use, banking was being founded in countries like Italy and France, modern versions of trade were being developed, especially by the Italians. Improved agricultural techniques were coming into use, and as we can see from Notre Dame cathedral, new forms of engineering, architecture, construction and art were being invented.

## Foundations

In addition, the Church was developing its canon law apace which helped to lay the foundations of modern law and indeed, modern bureaucratic techniques. Guilds were coming into being, which helped to develop representative

forms of Government. The idea of 'Europe' was increasingly taking hold, and the clan systems were continuing to break down in growing parts of Europe which also allowed new, representative forms of Government to develop over time.

**“In another 50 years, how much more Muslim will France become? This is one of the big questions absorbing the country”**

But Notre Dame cathedral has been restored in a France and on a continent which are far more secular and where levels of church attendance have collapsed compared with even the recent past. Is the restoration of the cathedral, in fact, a last gasp of Christianity in Europe and of the religion that helped to build Europe and that church in the first place?

The re-opening of Notre

Dame has taken place in a country that is roiled by political turmoil and a huge struggle over its identity. France has become far more multi-cultural since the Second World War, and especially more Muslim. The country has an estimated 5 million Muslims living within it. Many Muslims are well integrated, but many are not, and some have been recruited to radical Islamist organisations like ISIS. In another 50 years, how much more Muslim will France become? This is one of the big questions absorbing the country. And if it has not happened already, there might be more practising Muslims than practising Catholics in France in due course.

## Challenge

The changing nature of France is not only a challenge to the Catholic Church, it is also a challenge to the French idea of secularism, or 'laïcité'.

And as Europe becomes less Christian, but also possibly less secular in some

respects, how will Europe define itself? Not so long ago you could say that Europe was Christian, even if it often practiced that religion very badly.

**“The restoration of Notre Dame de Paris is a reminder of what we were, in the best sense, and it is also a reminder of possibilities”**

But what is it now? Will we have any common identity at all if we are not Christian? It is no good suggesting 'multi-culturalism' as the long-term answer because multi-culturalism is having decidedly mixed effects, some good, some bad.

The restoration of Notre Dame de Paris is a reminder of what we were, in the best sense, and it is also a reminder of possibilities. Above all, it is reminder of the great need for the Church to renew itself, to become as gleaming and beautiful as Paris's great cathedral. A renewed, rejuvenated Church will attract worshippers again. Let the restoration of Notre Dame be a symbol of that possibility.





# Christmas

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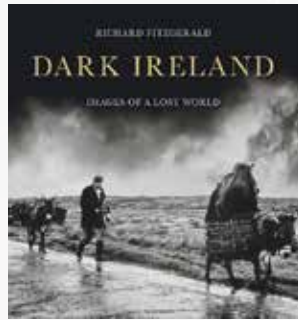
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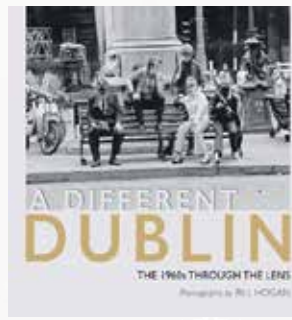
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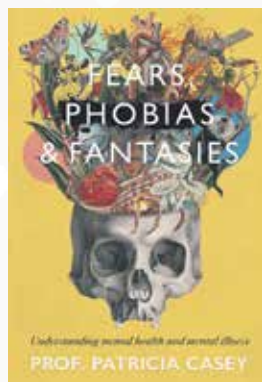
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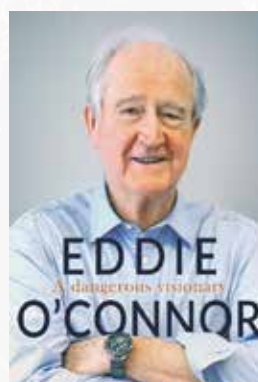
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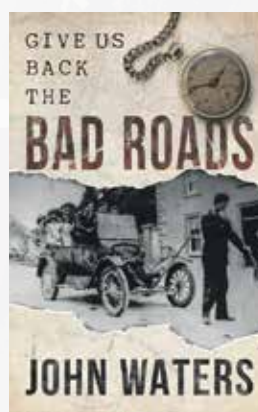
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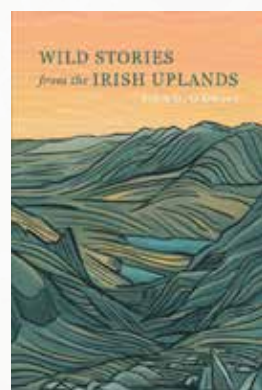
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“Synodality is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium” – Pope Francis

## Archbishop Scicluna says synod discussions need to be clear

KNA

**A**rchbishop Scicluna of Malta has warned against using the methods of the World Synod's spiritual dialogue – an alternation of speaking and meditation without direct discussion – everywhere in the Church: “If, for example, I have to deal with financial experts for the audit of the Archdiocese of Malta, I don't need to have a spiritual dialogue with them.” Rather, it is about the clear word.

The 65-year-old archbishop and legal expert Charles Scicluna is Chairman of the Bishops' Conference in Malta and Assistant Secretary in the Vatican Office for the Doctrine of the Faith. There he is responsible for dealing with cases of abuse.

What are the consequences of the World Synod for the Church? If the Pope's confidant Archbishop Scicluna has his way, there will soon be checklists for the work of bishops and a new style of leadership in the Vatican.

The Archbishop of Malta and papal confidant

Charles Scicluna has called for a new style of leadership in the Roman Curia. “We must create a culture of transparency and accountability at all levels,” Archbishop Scicluna told the Jesuit newspaper “America”.

After the World Synod, the Curia could no longer say: “The law is laid down here and it has to be followed out there,” said Archbishop Scicluna. He hopes for a new, more inclusive attitude. Laws should not only be laid down in the Vatican but also followed and modified in dialogue with the universal church. For example, the publication of a Vatican document must in future be preceded by a transparent process of consultation. Any other approach would be contrary to the ethos of synodality, said the Archbishop.

Scicluna also praised the final document of the World Synod. He particularly liked the call for binding accountability and control mechanisms in the church. “I liked the concept of checklists.” Ideals and guidelines are pointless if there is no system in place that allows them

to be scrutinised. According to Scicluna, the work and leadership style of bishops should also be evaluated in a binding manner – as part of the regular *ad limina* visits – using checklists.

One of the challenges, of course, will be the conversion of the Roman Curia to this style of leadership because we bishops also need to be able to engage with the Roman Curia – especially the dicasteries – in this spirit. We need to instil a culture of transparency and accountability across all levels.

In some areas, this has improved, but there is still work to do. The Roman Curia can no longer say, “The law is set here, and it is to be obeyed out there.” Some interpret the posture of the hands of the statues of St. Peter and St. Paul in front of the Vatican Basilica as saying just that. My hope is for a new more inclusive interpretation: “The law is set and obeyed here, and it also obeyed out there, having been set after hearing what the local churches out there have to say.”

Publishing a document that has not been through a transparent process of consultation and accountability goes against the very ethos of synodality, and one hopes that will no longer happen.

The document also gives due importance to spiritual conversation. This is a good thing, but we have to admit that spiritual conversation is not a panacea. For example, when I'm dealing with financial experts on the audit for the Archdiocese of Malta, I don't need to have a spiritual conversation with them.

I need to know exactly



where we stand. This also applies to safeguarding issues. Spiritual conversation is important when it comes to discerning policy, but it's not the only way to engage in a synodal manner.

One of my favourite lines in the document is that “Synodality is not an end in itself”. I was surprised to see that in the final text but also very glad. If I may quote from No 32, it states: “Synodality is not an end

in itself. Rather, it serves the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church, in the spirit. To evangelise is the essential mission of the Church. It is the grace and vocation proper to Church, her deepest identity”.

**“We must create a culture of transparency and accountability at all levels”**





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Catholic bishop in Sudan seriously injured by Rapid Forces

● The bishop of the Diocese of El-Obeid in Sudan has shared his harrowing experience at the hands of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who tortured him and left him seriously injured.

Bishop Yunan Tombe Trille Kuku Andali, who was accompanied by a deacon, fell into the hands of the paramilitary force while he was travelling to the embattled country.

He shared his horrific experience with Bishop Edward Hiiboro Kussala of South Sudan's Diocese of Tombura-Yambio, who shared the report with ACI Africa, CNA's news partner in Africa, on December 1. Neither bishop was available to provide more details of where the bishop and the deacon were travelling from when they met their assailants.

### Battle over gender policies for minors rages in Chile

● Since mid-2024, Chile's legislative branch has been reviewing various regulations on the use of medications and procedures designed to enable the "gender transition" of minors.

Last month, both the country's Chamber of Deputies and Senate approved a rule in the national budget to prevent the financing of transgender-focused hormone and surgical treatments for minors in the government's public health network. The measure, slated

to take effect in January 2025, is being challenged in court by President Gabriel Boric and his allies.

"The Ministry of Health may not finance expenses related to the acquisition, prescription, or administration of medications for the purpose of using hormonal therapy, be it puberty blocking or cross-hormones, which are part of or are in themselves a form of treatment for gender dysphoria, whether clinically diagnosed or not, in minors," the approved text states.

### Catholic bishops to join online mental health retreat

● Several US Catholic bishops and priests will join Catholic therapists, authors, and other experts later this month for a free online conference on mental health and prayer.

The Divine Fulfillment Conference, to be held December 27–29, "is a first and perhaps only of its kind event," conference spokesman Daniel Coleman told CNA. A lay apostolate based in Denver called Souls of the Christian Apostolate (SOCA) is organising the conference.

The conference's goal, Mr Coleman explained, is "to move the needle on this epidemic of mental illness, first in the life of participants and then, God-willing, to the people closest to them amongst family, friends, and greater community."

### Brazilian priests condemn 'institutionalised violence against the poor' by police

● Amid a wave of growing police violence in São Paulo state, Catholic clergy are voicing criticism of public security policies. Over the past few weeks, cases of police brutality gained media attention and spurred outrage among many in São Paulo, Brazil's richest and most populous state.

The most recent occurred December 2 before dawn, and involved a group of police agents who were caught on video as they threw a man off the top of a bridge into a polluted river in the city of São Paulo.

"The right-wing doesn't have, and doesn't want to have, a responsible understanding of poverty and the poor. For many uninformed people, poverty seems to be a personal decision. For them, all poor people and all Black people are robbers," Franciscan Fr David Santos told *Crux*.

### Religious minorities facing attacks in Belarus, charity says

● Religious freedom will 'rapidly deteriorate' in Belarus as a law passed a year ago gives the government broad discretion to use formal legal grounds to persecute "disloyal religious figures," according to a new report.

The law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations" was passed in December 2023, granting the government the power to close churches and other religious communities from among religious minorities, and increase centralised control over any religious activity in the country.

UN experts have expressed "grave concern" about the law, which they said appear "to contravene Belarus's obligations under international human rights law."

# There may be hope for Syrian Christians

Amid the jubilation unleashed inside Syria and around the world by the fall of the Assad regime last Saturday night, one community in the country that probably isn't in such a festive mood right now would be Syria's Christian minority.

Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Christians represented roughly 10% of the population, which translated to around 1.5 million people. Today that number stands at around 300,000, many of whom left due to constant fighting and economic stagnation, ie, the same reasons millions of other Syrians have fled. Others, however, have abandoned Syria because of persecution and violence at the hands of radical jihadist groups that make up a significant part of the rebel coalition.

Over the years, the widely held perception has been that Christians were relatively pro-Assad, not because they had any special affection for the regime and its obvious brutality, but rather because it at least kept the Islamic radicals at bay.

Here's how Jean-Clement Jeanbart, who resigned as the Greek Melkite Archbishop of Aleppo in Syria in 2021, put things in a 2015 interview with *Crux*.

"Personally, I would say that Bashar al-Assad is a good man," he said. "I don't want to pass



People celebrate next to a sculpture of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, a Druze warrior who led a revolt against French rule in 1925, after Syrian rebels announced that they had ousted President Bashar Assad, in Majdal Shams, a Druze village in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, December 9, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Shir Torem, Reuters

judgment beyond that, but I've met him a couple of times and all my colleagues, my fellow bishops and the priests and nuns, appreciate him."

"That doesn't mean he's an angel," he said.

Mr Jeanbart told the story of once getting reports about members of his flock who were being encircled by ISIS fighters. He called Assad's office in Damascus, and a convoy of armoured personnel carriers were dispatched to rescue his people. In that context, he said, he found it difficult to call Assad a "monster".

"It seems sometimes that

all the countries of the world are against Assad, but we feel we don't have any other alternative," Jeanbart said. "Honest to God, this is the situation. I think [Assad] wants to reform. Let him prove his good intentions, and let's give him the chance to see what he will do."

In effect, many Syrian Christians have long felt that the realistic alternative to Assad wasn't a thriving, pluralistic democracy, but an Islamic theocracy.

To be clear, rebel forces have been saying all the right things during the present offensive, which has reached a crescendo

with the capture of Damascus. The leader of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist group once linked with al-Qaeda and ISIS but which now insists it's independent, recently hailed Syria's history as a "a meeting point for civilisations and cultures," promising to respect its "cultural and religious diversity."

During a recent Mass in Aleppo just days after Hayat Tahrir al-Sham fighters captured the city, Armenian Catholic Archbishop Boutros Marayati told his followers that he's received "assurances" that "everything will remain as before, only better".

## New Canadian cardinal stresses evangelisation

A new cardinal elevated by Pope Francis on Saturday has said he wants his service to focus on facilitating a return to Christ through prayer and evangelisation.

Speaking to journalists after the December 7 consistory Mass in St Peter's Basilica in which he got his red hat from Pope Francis, Cardinal Francis Leo of Toronto said his appointment was a "great surprise and shock", and that he was not expecting the news at all.

"I went to kneel in front of the Blessed Sacrament," he said. "If this was being asked, I gave my fiat like the Blessed Mother," he said, expressing his willingness "to serve Jesus and the Church and his kingdom."

Asked what he believes the Church's biggest needs are, Leo said, "We need to get back to the basics in proclaiming Jesus and his Gospel in a clear way, a loving way, to help people come to know the person of Jesus, to belong to him and to live with him and in him".

"Everything else will flow from the relationship with Jesus, which is a walk of faith," he said, saying the Virgin Mary is "the one who helps us most" to proclaim Jesus.

"No one knows him and loves him and follows him more faithfully than her, so taking her lead and following her footsteps, speaking to people, proposing Jesus as the way, the truth and the life, there's nothing more. Everything else will flow from that connection, that relationship with Jesus," he said.

## Notre Dame Cathedral back in the light after glorious reopening

The doors of the newly restored Notre-Dame of Paris Cathedral were officially reopened to the public during a ceremony last Saturday evening just over five years after a blaze ravaged the iconic structure's roof, frame, and spire.

Authorities mobilised a massive security force of some 6,000 police and gendarmes for the event, citing a "very high level of terrorist threat." Space was provided for up to 40,000 people outside the cathedral.

French President Emma-

nuel Macron, who was initially scheduled to speak on the cathedral's forecourt to respect the law of separation between the Church and the state, wound up speaking inside the building due to inclement weather, as previously announced in a press release

from the Archdiocese of Paris.

Expressing "the gratitude of the French nation" to the cathedral's rebuilders during his address, Macron asserted that Notre Dame "tells us how much meaning and transcendence help us to live in this world."





Edited by Brandon Scott  
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

## Time for an upgrade



Pope Francis listens as Ola Källenius, CEO of Mercedes-Benz, presents a new all-electric popemobile during a meeting at the Vatican, December 4, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez.

# Nicaraguan dictatorship kidnaps and expels another priest

The Nicaraguan dictatorship of Daniel Ortega and his “co-president” and wife, Rosario Murillo, last week kidnapped and expelled from the country Fr Floriano Ceferino Vargas, a priest of the Diocese of Bluefields.

Medardo Mairena, a former peasant leader now in exile, stated on X that “Fr Floriano Ceferino Vargas, parish priest of the Church of San Martín de Porres in Nueva Guinea, has been exiled by the Sandinista regime”, further specifying that the priest is now in Panama.

In an interview with *EWTN Noticias*, lawyer and researcher Martha Patricia Molina said it is not known

exactly why Vargas was kidnapped and expelled from the country.

However, Ms Molina said, “just because you are religious in Nicaragua, the dictatorship can kidnap you”.

Ms Molina, who has documented hundreds of attacks by the Nicaraguan government against the Catholic Church in recent years, also indicated that it is possible that the priest had made “some comment that they [the dictatorship] consider hostile to the supposed revolution, which at every moment they say must be defended”.

The researcher also commented that, in the midst

of everything, it is good to know that the priest “is not going to be in the prisons of Nicaragua, where more than 40 mechanisms of torture, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment are practiced”.

The priest was arrested after celebrating Mass in his parish.

The kidnapping and expulsion of Vargas happened the same week Pope Francis sent a letter to the country’s Catholics in which he encouraged them and reminded them that faith and hope “work miracles”.

Growing concern for the well-being of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua was also expressed this week by the

bishops of Central America, who convoked for December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, a day of prayer for the persecuted Church in the neighbouring country.

Since October 2023, more than 200 religious persons have been banished, expelled from or denied entry into the country. In total, since 2018, 46 priests and bishops have been released from prison and expelled to the Vatican State or the United States. Currently, other lay people linked to the Catholic Church remain in prison, including collaborators of Caritas Esteli.

# Naples’ new cardinal sees red hat as call to ‘embrace the cross of the weakest’

Pope Francis created 21 new cardinals at a consistory last Saturday, including Archbishop Domenico Battaglia of Naples, Italy, who said he sees the appointment not as a personal honour but as “a call to dream together of a Church that gets its hands dirty, that is not afraid of the

peripheries and that allows itself to be guided by the transforming power of the Gospel”.

In an interview with *ACI Stampa*, CNA’s Italian-language news partner, Cardinal Battaglia described his initial reaction to the news as “a deep inner

silence, inhabited by awe but also by fear”.

“At that moment I felt all the weight and grace of a call that I had neither sought nor imagined,” said the 62-year-old archbishop, who is known in his diocese simply as “Don Mimmo”.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope Francis proposes joint Catholic-Orthodox celebration

● Pope Francis has proposed celebrating the 1,700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea together with Orthodox leaders in a personal letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

The letter, published by the Vatican last Saturday, was delivered by Cardinal Kurt Koch - who heads the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity - during a visit to Istanbul for the patronal feast of the Orthodox Church.

“The now imminent 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea will be another opportunity to bear witness to the growing communion that already exists among all who are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the Pope wrote in his message dated November 30.

### Existence of Vatican dossier on missing Emanuela Orlandi confirmed

● The Vatican’s chief prosecutor confirmed at a public event last Wednesday that despite prior denials, the Vatican does possess a confidential file on the disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi — the so-called “Vatican girl” who went missing over 40 years ago.

The Vatican “found” the file, it does “exist”, the Vati-

can’s promoter of justice, Alessandro Diddi, said at a book presentation in Rome on November 27, according to Italian media.

Orlandi’s brother, Pietro Orlandi, has maintained for years that the Vatican had information on his missing sister that it was withholding from the Italian authorities.

### Pope meets Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán

● Pope Francis received the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, at the Vatican last Wednesday.

The meeting, which Prime Minister Orbán described as “an opportunity for peace”, lasted 35 minutes and took place in a room near the Paul VI classroom in the Vatican and not in the Apostolic Palace, as is customary, because it preceded the Pope’s general audience.

Just prior to his meeting with the Holy Father, Prime Minister Orbán, a Calvinist, attended a Mass in St Peter’s Basilica.

### Mercedes-Benz presents Pope with modified ‘Popemobile’

● Pope Francis was handed the key to a new Mercedes-Benz “Popemobile” last Wednesday by the CEO of the German luxury car brand.

Ola Källenius, the CEO of Mercedes-Benz, presented the Pope with a white and chrome key fob inside a white box after showing off the new open-air vehicle in a parking lot inside Vatican City on December 4.

The fully electric, white SUV is emblazoned with Pope Francis’ coat of arms, has black detailing, and has chrome rims. Two small Holy See flags wave from the front hood.

### Rite to demolish wall protecting Holy Door held at St Peter’s

● On the evening December 2, the rite of “*recognitio*” (Latin for “verification”) took place in St Peter’s Basilica. This is a traditional ceremony to verify and ascertain that the Holy Door, closed during the last holy year, is intact, sealed, and ready to be reopened at the beginning of the new Jubilee 2025.

The pilgrimage to the Holy Doors is a central act of the jubilee. Passing through them during the holy year symbolises entry into a new life in Christ and the beginning of a journey of conversion.



# Pilgrimage to the Holy Land is safe again, says Patriarch

KNA

**“P**ilgrimage is now absolutely safe and also important for society,” the head of Catholics in the Holy Land said recently on a trip to Germany. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, is counting on a rapid normalisation of pilgrimage tourism following the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon.

He hopes that the relative calming of the war situation in Israel will lead to more pilgrims arriving again in a few weeks' time. Pilgrimages and religious tourism are an important economic factor for many Christians in the region. With regard to Germany,

Cardinal Pizzaballa said that there was no reason for airlines to interrupt their flights to Israel.

## Christians in the Middle East under pressure

During a lecture at the Cologne School of Catholic Theology, the Jerusalem Patriarch also pointed out the threat to Christianity in the Middle East. In Jerusalem, for example, hostility towards Christians from radical Jews had increased significantly. Religious in particular are now avoiding certain neighbourhoods for fear of spitting attacks and other assaults. There are also Jewish organisations that specifically document such cases in the fight against hatred. “But the general indifference is a problem,”

Cardinal Pizzaballa told the Catholic News Agency (KNA).

## “The Christian minority is under particular pressure, which is also reflected in the high emigration figures”

The cardinal expressed his concern with regard to radical Islam, as is currently evident once again in attacks by Islamist militias in the newly flared Syrian civil war. The Middle East is going through enormous social and political conflicts that affect everyone in the region, he said. However, the Christian minority is under particular pressure, which is also reflected in the high emigration figures. “Everything depends on whether there is a political perspective,” says Cardinal Pizzaballa. However, the model of Western democracy does not fit with the religious and confessional mentality of the people in the region.



Bethlehem, West Bank, Palestine - July 24, 2013: A Sikh visitor at the Church of the Nativity touches the star that marks the spot where Jesus was born. Photo: Joel Carillet

**“In Jerusalem, for example, hostility towards Christians from radical Jews had increased significantly”**

# Pope's ambassador: Lift sanctions against Syria

KNA

**T**he signals are positive: the Pope's ambassador to Syria reports that the rebels are respecting religious diversity in the country.

The Pope's ambassador to Syria is relieved about the largely peaceful change of power in the country so far. In an interview with *Vatican News*, Cardinal Mario Zenari made an urgent appeal to the international community to lift the sanctions against the country in order to facilitate reconstruction.

## Solution

It seems that “a problem that has caused so much suffering has been solved. The decisive factor is that it happened without bloodshed,” said the Apostolic Nuncio, who has been working in Syria since 2008. Reconciliation and hope for peaceful coexistence are now a top priority.

“In the first few hours,

the rebels sought dialogue with the bishops in Aleppo and promised respect for religious diversity,” reported Cardinal Zenari. “We hope that these promises will be honoured and that the international community will support the peaceful transition.”

## “He called on the international community not only to provide humanitarian aid, but also to help stabilise the country”

At the same time, Cardinal Zenari expressed his concern for the younger generation: “For many young people in Syria, there were no prospects other than fleeing. Now there is hope that they can find a future in their home country.” He called

on the international community not only to provide humanitarian aid, but also to help stabilise the country by lifting the sanctions.

## Reconciliation

For Cardinal Zenari, the focus is now on building a pluralistic society: “The only path to a stable Syria is reconciliation. Only through dialogue and cooperation between all ethnic and religious groups can we heal the wounds of the civil war.” He appealed to the new rulers to honour their promises.

According to estimates by religious experts, the proportion of Christians in Syria has recently fallen to less than 2% Before the start of the civil war in 2011, it was still 6%. Many Christians have left the country as a result of the ongoing violence.

**“For many young people in Syria, there were no prospects other than fleeing. Now there is hope that they can find a future in their home country”**

**“The only path to a stable Syria is reconciliation. Only through dialogue and cooperation between all ethnic and religious groups can we heal the wounds of the civil war”**



Smoke rises, after Syrian rebels announced that they have ousted Syria's Bashar al-Assad, in Damascus, Syria, December 8, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Mohamed Azakir, Reuters.



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Surely we are not so miserly

**Dear Editor,** As I sit here tonight my wife is in the next room being treated by the palliative care team. She was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour and her life expectancy was estimated to be 3 or 4 months. I struggled for a few weeks trying to help her as she needed to be fed, clothed, brought to the commode or helped in and out of bed. As her condition deteriorated I knew I needed help.

I know only too well how carers tire and feel

burdened. Caring is burdensome. Patients sense this and can feel pressure to end the carer's ordeal. The pressure they exert on themselves for our sake can be more powerful than the pressure we place on them.

While my wife is sedated now, she is far from being unaware of her surroundings. Yesterday as I spoke and sang some of the songs she likes she raised her hand and gently squeezed mine. The words "until death do us part" mean more to me now than ever.

Caring for someone is a genuine expression of compassion more so than offering the avoidance of suffering through assisted suicide. Unfortunately, there are occasions when palliative care does not adequately relieve the suffering for some. But every lawmaker knows hard cases do not make good law, and those who do not know this should not be lawmakers.

But palliative care is expensive involving nurses' time and medi-

cations. I believe church leaders, laity and the followers of every faith need to make their voices heard through social media or directly to their elected TDs demanding the government finance palliative care rather than favour the cheaper option of assisted suicide. Surely we are not so miserly that we refuse to pay for the compassionate care of people in the last stages of life.

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

## Well done Brendan

**Dear Editor,** I am a regular reader of *The Irish Catholic* and enjoy being updated on matters of concern to me.

However, I must give credit where credit is due. The weekly feature which I most look forward to is Brendan O'Regan's TV&Radio column. It is regularly insightful and interesting, and worth a good read.

Well done, Brendan.

*Yours etc.,  
P.J. Mathews,  
Drogheda, Co. Louth*



## Very grateful for men's superior strength

**Dear Editor,** I would like to commend David Quinn on his article 'Time to say something in support of boys and men' [*The Irish Catholic* – November 28, 2024].

I am shocked to hear of this ridiculous survey mon-

itoring children's activity.

I feel that in today's society, men are being forced to watch what they say and how they act. This "dumbing down" of men's behaviour, to please the feminists, is unhealthy. Boys build up their physical strength

through rough play.

I was recently very grateful for men's superior strength and skill when they installed extremely heavy triple glazing windows and doors in my house. This strength was, no doubt, encouraged,

honed and built up in their boyhood years and so essential to their development.

I for one was very appreciative!

*Yours etc.,  
Nora O'Malley  
Dundrum, Dublin 14.*

### Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

## Saint Nicholas Bishop of Myra: A story of generosity and gift giving

**Dear Editor,** St Nicholas or 'Sinterklaas' in Dutch was a 4th-century Bishop of Myra who appeared on the night of December 5 laden with gifts for Dutch children. The man is dressed in red and white, with a mitre and crozier, as befits a bishop, and many miracles are attributed to him. St Nicholas came to be known as the patron saint of children, sailors, pawnbrokers, coopers, and the falsely accused. His acts of charity inspired Dutch and Germanic tradition of Santa Claus. The saintly figure was known for wandering the streets at night, leaving gifts for people in their homes. His bedtime attire during these late-night escapades even makes their way to the nightcap stylings of Santa. *Sinterklaas*, which evolved into Santa Claus' role as a giver of gifts to children, involved placing shoes by the fireplace, singing songs and writing humorous poems which echo the St Nicholas tradition. After his death in 343 AD, multiple churches and countries observe December 6 as his feast day with great celebrations, processions, services and gift giving. Turkish archaeologists have uncovered the likely burial place of St Nicholas, who gave rise to the legend of Santa Claus as everyone knows is alive and well, residing in Lapland. Surveyors discovered an intact temple and burial grounds beneath St Nicholas church in Antalya. By the time this vignette is published, the feast of Saint Nicholas will have already occurred in Western Christian countries on December 6. St Nicholas of Myra once said: "The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic His giving, by grace, through faith, and this is not of ourselves."

*Yours etc.,  
Gerry Coughlan  
Kilnamanagh, Dublin 24*

## We need a newer Church culture

**Dear Editor,** It took me a while to process the view of Bishop Brendan Leahy (Limerick) about the focus of the latest Synod deliberations – "Synod calls for a new 'Church culture'" [*The Irish Catholic* – October 31, 2024]. This new culture would be "directed towards being better able to promote justice and peace in the world as we ourselves grow in processes of listening and dialogue, sharing and reconciliation".

It appears to me that this new culture is not really centred on the fundamental Biblical imperative of the glory of God and salvation of souls. Specifically, Jesus' departing mandate on Ascension Thursday was: "therefore go and make

disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matt 28:19-20)

This new culture is not really centred either in the general substance of papal and council declarations throughout the centuries as represented in this statement of the Catechism, "The Church's structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members" (#773).

I believe we need a yet newer Church culture that refocuses on the primary objectives of evangelisation, making disciples and holiness.

*Yours etc.,  
A.P. Breen  
Bronx, NY*



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, December 12, 2024

## Balancing technology as Catholics

Rohith Kinattukar

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It's that time of the year again. The time when we often tend to forget our humanity, to some extent, and pursue all that is not important. In Matthew (chapter 6), Jesus reminds us not to worry, "but strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness." We are called to strive for what is commonly described as true, good and beautiful. And that we can only find in a kingdom that "is not of this world". Let us take a closer look at what this means for us.

At the outset, I would like to wish to all of you a very blessed new liturgical year! Starting with the first Sunday of Advent, the Church begins a new year, a new cycle a 'new beginning'. Yes, this is your chance to come up with all the resolutions for losing weight, finding more time for your family, reading more books, being more active, and so on. Just kidding! Advent is the time of the year during which the only resolution you should be considering is to find more time and space for yourself. Indeed, be selfish, but let me explain below how.

Advent means 'to come' or 'coming' from the Latin 'ad venire' or 'adventus' (parousia in Greek). We cannot claim with certainty the origins of this special time set aside before Jesus is born in Bethlehem. By the time of the 5th and 6th Century, the practice was alive and it became more defined during the papacy of Pope Gregory I.



**Gift yourself with precious time for your own spiritual recharge, says Peter Kasko**

(590-604). The main focus is that of Christ's two comings: His birth and His second coming at the end of time.

**“The phrase “I want” and “I want it now” is the unspoken motto of the era we live in”**

St John the Baptist, the last true prophet, was calling on his listeners (in the words of a popular song today) "to prepare the way, to prepare the way for the Lord". That calling is as true today as it was 2000 years ago. And so are the challenges accompanying it. You could probably argue that in our day, the challenge is even bigger with the number of distractions coming at us from all sides.

Greatest of all, however, is the challenge to our patience. The 'insta' world, as we know it today, has successfully killed what little

patience we had in us as children, fostered - with all levels of difficulty - by our parents and environment. The phrase "I want" and "I want it now" is the unspoken motto of the era we live in. Having to wait in a queue for coffee or traffic for more than a minute is causing a heart-rate closer to an underground techno party of the '90s.

### Patience

I believe that with this lost sense of patience we also lost our sense of childlike wonder. We lack expectations because we are catered and fed instantly, like a baby, directly 'into our mouth'. When you don't need to exert any effort to achieve something, the muscles become 'lazy', our attitude complacent and the longer this goes on the harder it will be to come back from such slumber.

St Bernard, a Cistercian monk and abbot in Clairvaux, speaks of three comings: Christ's birth, His second coming and the third is

between them. The first two are visible, the third is not. This middle coming of our Lord, as St Bernard puts it, "is hidden, ... only the chosen see Him, and they see Him within themselves" (*Sermo 5 in Adventu Domini*). This is the way the St John the Baptist speaks of the way that you and I need to prepare for the Lord. This is the road that connects Christ's two comings: St Bernard calls this middle way "our rest and our consolation."

**“Our message is a message of hope and not of despair. We proclaim every Sunday that God is where we can find what is true, good and beautiful”**

Another early saint, St Ephraem the Deacon, echoes my sentiment on patience in his commentary on the Diatessaron. When Jesus is asked about his time of coming, he replies with the famous words "no one knows, neither the angels nor the Son." St Ephraem focuses on this 'hiddenness' so that we are patient but focused, and that we keep watch with Christ who is our consolation and keeping that honest and true yearning. The yearning that the modern-day

world is trying so hard to cancel and destroy.

### Hope

Our message is a message of hope and not of despair. We proclaim every Sunday that God is where we can find what is true, good and beautiful. To achieve that, I challenge you to gift yourself with precious time for your own spiritual recharge. I don't mean to turn away from the world, but to turn it off for a moment or two and investigate your own heart. Search for the 'middle hidden way' and prepare it so our Lord can walk freely into your humble abode when you invite him in. Once you are fully recharged you can go out to the world and be a gift to those around you - your family, your colleagues and your neighbours.

Finally, I wish and hope that we all can come together as One Family and proclaim with joyful voices using the words of a medieval Christmas hymn: *Gaudete, gaudete Christus est natus, ex Maria Virgine, Gaudete!* which translates as 'Rejoice, rejoice! Christ is born of the Virgin Mary, rejoice!'

Have a very blessed Advent and Christmas.

**i** Peter Kasko is a core team member of Living Water prayer group, which meets every Wednesday at 7:15pm in St Teresa's Church, Clarendon Street, Dublin, and has a passion for Theology and Patristics.



# The slave girl who became a saint



Fr Adrian Crowley

**S**t Josephine Bakhita was born in 1869, in Sudan. Her village was surrounded by palms, banana trees, fields, shrubs. Her tribe lived peacefully, working the fields. Her father was an important man in the village. As a child she was full of life and joyful, loved her brothers and helped her mother. She loved flowers, flowing water, the singing of birds. One day while her mother was baking bread, she left her playmates and went to the fields. Passing the barley fields and flowering hedges she began picking flowers. Suddenly two men sprang up out of the long grass. One of them spoke sweetly to her, "Go to the end of the field and you will find things I left there. Bring them here. We are so tired." She was terrified but did not cry for help. At the end of the field the two men jumped out from a hedge, beat her, gagged her, and threatened her with a knife, "if you shout, you are dead! Come on, walk." Bending low they dragged her through tall grass and marshland. They crossed muddy rivers, hot sands, finally reaching a forest.

## Locked

Later, in a faraway village she was locked in a hut. She collapsed on the ground, senseless. When she woke, she found a piece of bread thrown to her, but she could not eat it. She tried to escape by breaking the clay roof, but it was too hard, and her hands bled. With her arms covered in blood, she began to roll around, crying, almost insane.

One morning, a man dragged her outside and sold her to a slave-trader waiting under a tree. "Look at her. She's perfect!" Outside the village, others were waiting with chains around their necks. Two guards carried daggers and whips. Another little girl held her hand. The journey, through marshes, woodland and desert was an



An image of St Josephine Bakhita hangs from the facade of St Peter's Basilica. Photo: OSV News /Paolo Cocco, Reuters.

unspeakable torture.

**“Bakhita saw ‘a shining figure’ in the sky above them which gave her boundless joy and wonder”**

One day the two little girls ran away and escaped. They reached the forest, so happy at the thought of finding their villages again. They ate fruit and drank water. The following day they crossed a desert, the sand burning their bleeding feet. At night a wild animal, a lion, came to attack them. Bakhita saw ‘a shining figure’ in the sky above them which gave her boundless joy and wonder. The wild animal turned and went away. They

came to green countryside with grain and watermelons. They ate heartily, drank, and fell asleep. Later, a shepherd promised to help them but instead he chained them with his sheep and goats. He sold them to a slave-trader. Again, they were slaves!

## Sold

Reaching a city, they were sold to a slave-dealer. They lived in a large stone house and served his two daughters. These were delighted and treated the girls kindly. Bakhita was cleaned, combed and given bracelets and shiny pearls.

A soldier came one day, a General in the Egyptian army. He bought her and now she became slave to two very arrogant, heartless women. One day, after a furious argument he ordered that she

be beaten with sticks by his soldiers. She was beaten so badly that a wound on her leg lasted all her life. For more than a month she was unable to walk or work. After this, she was put in chains and branded as a slave.

**“Follow this lady, you no longer belong to me. Go!”**

In 1883 during a war, the General had to leave hurriedly. Crossing the desert, with his family and slaves, they travelled by night, on camels. Bakhita was beaten for every small mistake, yet she loved seeing the desert. They arrived in Khartoum. One morning a white lady came to the house and the General said ‘Follow this

lady, you no longer belong to me. Go!’ The lady smiled and spoke gently and kindly.

Bakhita was overjoyed. She cried and laughed, wanting to kiss the feet of the Consul. She smiled happily and kissed the hands of the governess. That night she slept in a bed for the first time in her life.

## Free

The Italian Consul set them free. He was like a father to Bakhita and searched for her family and village but failed. Her soul was thirsting for God, but she knew no religion. She grew into a beautiful, gracious young woman. Her gentleness, prudence and goodness amazed all in the house and she was much-loved. During a revolution in 1884 the Consul had to leave for Italy. Bakhita overcoming her shyness,

begged him to take her with him. He looked in amazement, asking her to repeat the question. Three times she asked him and finally he agreed. They crossed the desert on camels and set sail for Italy, reaching Genoa in 1885. There the Consul entrusted her to the wife of a friend. She promised to treat the girl well and took her to Venice.

**“‘I did not know what the crucifix was. I used to look at it secretly and I felt something within me that I cannot explain”**

In her new home, Bakhita was well-cared for. She



learned Italian and looked after a little girl, Mimi who loved her a lot. She served in the hotel but with all her heart yearned for a return to Venice. The hotel prospered and the family returned to Italy with Bakhita to sell their property and return.

In Venice, a Catholic friend gave her a crucifix, explaining the life of Christ. She listened, smiled, and kissed the crucifix. She later commented - 'I did not know what the crucifix was. I used to look at it secretly and I felt something within me that I cannot explain.' She learned the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be. 'Without knowing God, without knowing what the words meant, I had a good feeling in my soul, and I repeated them morning and evening with Mimi in her room.' In 1888, she was enrolled in a school for religious instruction in Venice, run by the Canossian Sisters. The sisters treated her with exceptional kindness. Faith like a light catching fire, enlightened her mind. She began to know and love the Lord. Often when alone, she would kneel in adoration, 'I felt a burning desire to obey Him, never to displease Him and to serve Him to perfection.' But she found it difficult to believe that God loved her. The mystery of His love filled her mind, but she felt so unworthy.

**“The gentle Voice of Christ had resounded in her heart ‘Stay in My house. I will make you, My bride’”**

Bakhita was baptised and confirmed in 1890. She did not sleep the night before, for sheer joy at the thought of becoming a daughter of God. She also received her First Holy Communion, inexpressible joy on her face. During a special lunch afterwards, a friend wrote, 'she looked heavenly. Gone was the usual look of sadness on her face. She seemed transfigured.'

During her first Holy Communion she had prayed 'Let me die Lord, but don't let me leave this house.' The gentle Voice of Christ had resounded in her heart 'Stay in My house. I will make you, My bride.' During a confession, she told a priest all about it. He assured her it was Jesus Himself calling her, and she should respond to the special love the Lord had shown her. Afterwards the priest went to the sisters and spoke in her favour. In December she was called one day to the parlour and told she had been accepted to become a novice. She fell on her knees and wept with joy.



St Josephine Bakhita is represented in this statue by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz. Photo: CNS/courtesy Holy See Press Office.

**“Her advice to all was, “Be good, love the Lord, pray for non-believers. Know what a great grace it is to know God!”**

As a novice she was exemplary. One companion said, 'I admired her for her spirit of devotion and sacrifice, she was always the first to help.' 'She was an example to everyone with her exactness and virtue.' In 1895 she received the habit - 'Her eyes sparkled with unforgettable light... and supernatural joy. In 1896, she vowed to the Lord to live chastity, poverty, and obedience as a Canossian sister. That night, before the altar, in extra prayer, she offered herself for the salvation of her African people.

#### Transferred

In 1902 she was transferred to the town of Schio. She worked as cook, impressive for her patience, thoughtfulness, joy, and charity. She spoke with God as with a familiar friend, very simply, about Africa and her family. One sister nick-named her "Glorious Praise." One morning in the sacristy she saw the same vision as she had seen in the desert. He smiled at her and disappeared. 'It was your angel,' a sister commented.

'I think so too. She had great faith in the Eucharist.' At night with permission, she would spend long times in extra prayer, before the tabernacle, in profound adoration.

**“When I asked her ‘how do you manage to stay so good?’ she replied with a look of wonder - ‘How could anyone offend such a good God when they have served such evil owners?’”**

The children grew very fond of her, she was everyone's friend, she told stories, knew how to soothe, and turn their tears to smiles. The soldiers too, during World War 1, surprised to find a sister, were fascinated by her life-story, asked her questions. She always spoke of the need to love and serve God, to keep their souls pure from sin because death

could come at any time and destroy them for eternity. If she heard any soldier blaspheming, she drew them aside and told them how wrong it was to mis-use God's name. "Confess it. You are always in danger and if you were to die without being forgiven by God, what would become of your soul?"

She was very sparing with food. "I have nothing except three books, and I do not use them because I can hardly see any more. I have given away all the rest, all I have is my rosary and crucifix." In 1930 a booklet about her life was written. While telling her story her voice was sometimes choked with grief, especially as she spoke of her family; sometimes she trembled as she talked about the horrors of slavery. When I asked her 'how do you manage to stay so good?' she replied with a look of wonder - 'How could anyone offend such a good God when they have served such evil owners?'

#### Wildfire

The book spread like wildfire around Italy. Many

came to see her. In 1933 she was asked to go on a tour of Italy, on behalf of the missions. She was 64 years. Everywhere the tour was successful. Teachers brought their pupils, mothers brought their children, the sick came asking for prayers. Men who had not been to church for years went to see her and went away crying. Theatres were filled to overflowing. Cardinals and bishops brought their priests. Large crowds, even blocking the traffic, came to see her. She smiled at everyone, had a good word for all, was always humble, courteous and in good humour. At train-stations as soon as she was noticed, crowds gathered. Her advice to all was, "Be good, love the Lord, pray for non-believers. Know what a great grace it is to know God!"

**“He must get better. I have given my life to save his! And he must become a priest and save many souls”**

All her life was governed by the words "Whatever the Lord wants!" For this reason, she was always obedient. She prayed all the time. Once when a boy was suffering from TB, she assured his mother he would be cured. "He must

get better. I have given my life to save his! And he must become a priest and save many souls." The boy was cured, and later as a priest he assisted at her bedside as she was dying.

If someone thanked her for a grace received, she would say "Not me, not me. God did it all! She prayed much - 'I talk to the Lord just normally like I speak to you.' She said several rosaries a day and recommended it. 'I call on my guardian angel and am refreshed.' - 'If I can get to Communion, all is well and good. If not, I have still got God inside me and I will adore him.' She stayed long times in the chapel, alone with Jesus.

She died in 1947, saying 'Oh how happy I am... Our Lady... Our Lady!' She lifted her eyes to Heaven, with just a hint of a smile and passed away. She felt no fear, on her face there was something heavenly. A vast number of people came to pray. They touched her body with medals, rosaries, crucifixes, lifted her hands to bless children. A rich lady offered her family tomb as a final resting place. Her funeral seemed like a celebration. On her grave is written 'Let's look up to Heaven; all things are passing; all things are passing!'

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



# A view from the Quays



Fr Alan Hilliard

**T**he book of Job is an amazingly insightful work which tries to understand the human condition and the possibility of God. He presents insights into friendship, family, property, money and death. In Scripture, we see him being stripped of all he owns and all he knows and is left with nothing.

God and the devil had a game where the cunning devil said if God inflicted enough struggles on Job, he would reject God and believe no more. Eventually the devil thought he had won, and Job's reply was "if we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrow too?"

Job is an unusual book in the bible. No covenant, no law, no clear ten commandments. It's a story laden with truth. Job is not even an Israelite but, rather, a God-fearing pagan who seeks the truth and will not compromise on it. Truth, we see in this epic, is the best ally of God.

## Truth

I remember encountering truth in a prison cell while visiting a young man. He had, what was called then, "the virus". He lost his confidence, felt a failure and now that he was off drugs, he knew how much pain and torment he caused his parents. I asked him one day when he was weakening and he knew he may not have had long left, did he believe in life after death? He said, without hesitating, "I do." I asked, "why is your answer so positive?" and he simply replied, "there has to be something better than this." His



Job and his friends, Iliá Repin (1844–1930)

answer, his story and his life were like Job's.

I felt sad that he had come to know God because of all his addiction, pain and hurt. It made me think of the way I had come to know God, which was through so much opportunity and goodness, kindness, example and love. I probably wouldn't have answered as assuredly as he had. But God is bountiful, and he often pours more on those who are in need.

There is no doubt that the ways of God are a mystery as Job outlines. How some come to know him and others find it difficult to even acknowledge the possibility of God.

One of the Churches greatest, St John of the Cross, lived in the 16th century and had a very tough childhood. He has given me great insight into the nature of faith and belief. When he became a Carmelite, he became part of the renewal of the order and this caused a lot of change and disruption which put him on the wrong side of a lot of people. Like Job, he was tormented. His fellow Carmelites tried to sway him by demanding obedience, the offer of allurements and the threat of punishment. They eventually imprisoned him in a cell

that was only fifty to sixty square feet with a little shaft of light entering it. The tiny room was formerly a toilet. Somehow in that place he grew in intimacy with God and felt God's presence very closely. His writings during this time are extraordinary. On one occasion he says, "Now that the face of evil more and more bares itself, so does the Lord bare his treasures all the more." He escaped by tying sheets together and made his way out of an upper window. After this, he arrived to a convent where he found refuge. He shared his poetry composed while in prison with the cloistered nuns. The religious knew that they were listening to something sublime.

## Silence

One of his greatest lines - which he used continuously with his novices - was, "What we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God with our appetites and with our tongue, for the language he best hears is silent love."

As a people of faith, we must start dreaming again. And, as Job did, trust in God's providence and presence. Let's think about it, let's pray about it and let's do something about it.

# The strange humility of God

Elizabeth Scalia

**"A**fter the man, Adam, had eaten of the tree, the Lord God called to the man and asked him, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.' Then he asked, 'Who told you that you were naked?' (Gn 3:8-11) In these early days of Advent, when we are immersing ourselves in biblical narratives, we can easily forget that nothing we read in Scripture is there by accident - that even a seemingly inconsequential detail (like the fact that the Prodigal Son was still "a long way off" when the Father ran out to meet him) is an invitation to ponder God's greatness, as well as his strange humility.

## Grace

What kind of God runs out to meet the trudging, imperfectly penitent prodigal? What sort of Maker, choosing to Incarnate, first seeks out the consent of the creature whose grace and flesh he requires? A humble one.

What sort of Creator (who, being omnipresent, never needs to ask us a thing) nevertheless inquires of the man, Adam, "Who told you that you were naked?"

"Who told you that you were naked," is not a trick or a test. As with all of God's questions, it is a summons for his creatures to behold, consider and better understand

ourselves and why we do the stupid things we do.

Animals do not perceive nakedness; they don't feel afraid and hide because of it. But, whether through evolution or fruit, suddenly Adam and Eve were feeling vulnerable, and scared. They were hiding, but why?

Perhaps what really frightened them was their first, very shallow experience of self-awareness, the understanding that they possessed not only instinct but reason and free will. Now they were answerable, and to someone beyond themselves, for their action.

## Trust

I wonder if Adam and Eve lost Eden not because they disobeyed but because afterward they hid themselves. Unable to believe that they could trust God in their new understanding of vulnerability, they went into the shadows and wilfully separated themselves from God's company.

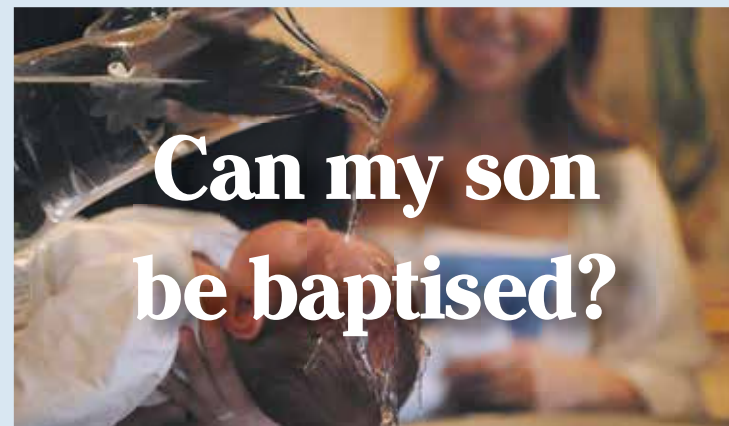
Perhaps the inability to seek out and trust in God's merciful goodness when we feel vulnerable is the true taint and effect of Original Sin: God has been trying to get us to trust Him, to reveal ourselves to Him ever since.

In Advent, as we plead for Emmanuel to come to us, I like to remember the plea God makes to us - to return to him, like the Prodigal. To consent to him, like Mary. To be aware and thus vulnerable: "Ephphatha! Be opened."

**i** Elizabeth Scalia is editor at large for OSV.

# Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



## Can my son be baptised?

**Q: I'm a new mother in the middle of a divorce. I admit that I have never been a very good Catholic, but I still want my baby baptised in the hope that he will have a better relationship with God than I've had. My ex-husband and I share custody, and in many ways, he is a good parent, but he was raised in a very secular household and is basically an atheist. Can my son still be baptised? Or will the priest take one look at my situation and decide we don't qualify?**

**A:** First, I'm sorry that you are going through such difficult life circumstances. But the good news is that there is nothing in the Church's law which would prevent your child from being baptised.

The Code of Canon Law clearly states the requirements for infant baptism - and know that in the Church's law, an "infant" is any child under seven years of age, so all this could apply even to a child who is older than what we would colloquially consider a baby.

As we read in Canon 868, 1 of the Code: For an infant to be baptised lawfully it is required: "1. that the parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place [such as the permanent legal guardian of an orphan] give their consent; 2. there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion."

Regarding the first requirement, while in a perfect world both parents of an infant would enthusiastically request the baptism of their child, at the end of the day all that is needed is for one parent to merely consent to their child's baptism.

If you as your child's mother are actively requesting baptism, you have already fulfilled this prerequisite; you do not need the permission or involvement of your child's father. But it is still theoretically possible that an infant could be licitly baptised Catholic even if neither parent particularly cared about this one way or the other. For exam-

ple, a baby could be baptised at their grandparent's request as long as at least one parent gave their permission for this.

By the same token, although it is to be hoped that the child's parents will be fervently practicing the Catholic faith, this goes way beyond the stated minimum requirement of one parent providing simple consent.

Looking at the second requirement, having a "founded hope" that the child will be raised Catholic is also a fairly low bar to clear. That is, the baptising priest or deacon does not need proof, moral certainty, or even rock-solid assurances that the child will have a Catholic upbringing. There only must be a reasonable hope that this will happen. And such a hope would seem to be present in cases where a parent is making the effort to seek out baptism for their child. Even in instances where this hope is judged to be, as the canon puts it, "altogether lacking," the law speaks of delaying rather than denying baptism.

It's also good to keep in mind that if a child is in danger of death, "all bets are off" so to speak. That is, canon law stipulates that an infant child in immediate danger of dying should be baptised immediately, with or without the permission of the parents (see Canon 868, 2). And in danger of death, "any person who has the requisite intention" can validly and licitly baptise, regardless of whether they are ordained priest clergy or even Catholic (Canon 861, 2).

Sometimes Catholics are surprised that the requirements for infant baptism are so minimal and seemingly 'easy'. But in a beautiful way, the Church's law in this area echoes the words of Jesus himself: "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these" (Mt 19:14).

**i** Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist.





Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

**A**s a member of a religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, I chose to make four religious vows: poverty, chastity, obedience, and perseverance. I did this freely, with no other compulsion than a strong inner sense that this was being asked of me. That freedom to make vows with no outside pressures, is a luxury millions of men and women don't have. On their part, they take these same vows (albeit in a different modality) because they are compelled by circumstance to do so. In effect, these are vows that someone else makes for them.

#### Wordsworth

William Wordsworth once gave this poetic expression:

My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows

Were then made for me; bond unknown to me

Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly.

#### “What does it mean to be consecrated? What is consecration?”

Most of us, I suspect, have known people for which this is true, that is, persons who without ever formally professing religious vows, lived out their own version of obedience, celibacy, poverty, and perseverance. For most of their lives, circumstances conscripted them and in effect took away their freedom so that they were never able to make their own choices about where to go in life, about educational opportunities, about where to live, about what job to have, and (not least) about whether to marry or not. Rather they spend their adult years existentially unfree, bound by circumstance and duty, sacrificing

their own dreams and plans to serve others. But, and this is the point, even though those vows are not made explicitly or publicly, they are consecrated vows, sacred in the biblical sense.

What does it mean to be consecrated? What is consecration?

Sadly, today we have turned this word into a 'Church word', and we speak of consecrated buildings (churches), consecrated cups (chalices), and consecrated persons (ministers in our churches and vowed religious). Why do we speak of them as consecrated? The answer lies in the original meaning of what it means to be consecrated.

#### Purposes

To be consecrated simply means to be 'set aside' - though not first for Church purposes. Rather, imagine this scenario: You have just left work and are driving home when you come

upon the scene of an accident. At that moment you lose your freedom. You are no longer free to simply drive off. People are injured and you are there! You are conscripted and must respond simply because you are there. At that moment you become a consecrated person, consecrated by circumstance, by need. At that moment, in Wordsworth's words, certain vows are made for you.

There's an interesting parallel to the situation Moses finds himself in when God asks him to be the person to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Moses does not want the job, nor does he volunteer for it. He gives God various excuses as to why he isn't the right person, and ends up by asking God, "why me? Why not my brother?" In essence, God's answer is this: "Because you saw the oppression of the people. Because you've seen it, you're no longer free.

You're like the first person at the scene of an accident."

#### “Your choice is not whether to get on with life or to stay and help? Your only question is: what's my responsibility here?”

That's what it means to be consecrated, to be called, to have a vocation. While you remain radically free (you can drive away from the accident) you are no longer existentially or morally free - else, as Wordsworth says, "you should sin gravely." Your choice is not whether to get on with life or to stay and help? Your only question is: what's my responsibility here? Circumstance has made a vow for you.

It can be helpful to understand vocation, vows, and consecration through this lens. I once chose freely to give myself over to a vocation which asked me to publicly make a set of vows, that is, to live in a certain simplicity, to forego marriage and having my own family, to make myself available for the service of others, and to persevere in that for the rest of my life. Several of my own siblings (and millions of women and men) have done the same thing, without the recognition and communal support that comes with public vows. They too lived consecrated lives, though without public recognition.

#### Marriage

In affirming this, I do not exclude married persons, except to say that, in marriage, like me, they made public vows and thus receive a certain recognition and communal support that comes with that; albeit their vows, save for celibacy, are the same.

All of us are perennially at the scene of an accident, unfree to drive away, conscripted, bound by vows that are made for us. It's called having a vocation.

## “All of us are perennially at the scene of an accident, unfree to drive away, conscripted, bound by vows that are made for us. It's called having a vocation”

### Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milan Morales

# Man's response: Faith

**B**y his Revelation, God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends, and moves among them. The adequate response to this invitation is faith. By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God.

To obey in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture and the Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. Throughout her life and until her last ordeal when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary's faith never wavered, and so the Church venerates in Mary the purest faith.

The Church never ceases to proclaim her faith in one only God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For a

Christian, believing in God cannot be separated from believing in the One he sent, his "beloved Son", in whom the Father is "well pleased."

#### Characteristics of Faith

Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. The submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason. God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit. The miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability are 'motives of credibility'. Faith seeks understanding. It is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith. Yet, methodical research

provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith. Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation. Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man.

Even though enlightened by him in whom it believes, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. It is then we must turn to the witnesses of faith. Faith is a personal act. But faith is not an isolated act. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others.

#### The Faith of the Church

It is the Church that believes first, and so bears, nourishes and sustains my faith. It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in

Christ by Baptism.

Salvation comes from God alone. We receive the life of faith through the Church.

The Church, guards "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints". She guards the memory of Christ's words. It is she who from generation-to-generation hands on the apostles' confession of faith.

Through the centuries, the Church has constantly confessed this one faith, received from the one Lord, transmitted by one Baptism, and grounded in the conviction that all people have only one God and Father. For though languages differ throughout the world, the content of the Tradition is one and the same.

**i** Next week we will be exploring paragraphs 185 – 231, 'The Creeds'



# The path that leads to joy

Zep 3:14-18a  
Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6  
Phil 4:4-7  
Lk 3:10-18

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Joshua J. Whitfield



**T**he point is summed up in what Josef Pieper wrote once, that “we are not the forgers of our own felicity.”

Of course, he wasn't at all the only one to say something like this, such has always been true. Real joy is not anything we make on our own but can only receive. Those who understand this find real happiness while those who don't find it - after what they thought would make them happy fades away - find only real emptiness. Again, as I said, this has always been true. It's like an eternal law.

And it's the truth of Gaudete Sunday, the truth of Advent and Christmas, this truth of the universe. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord, always. I shall say it again: rejoice!” Why? Because: “The Lord is near” (Phil 4:4-5).

None of this is esoteric, none of it the reward of any method or mindset. It is simply what happens to the person who has found Christ.

### Truth

Which is why the Church reminds us of this eternal truth each year during Advent. Because this is the season we celebrate mystically what is every day, at least since the incarnation, now true: that the Lord is near, made flesh and dwelling among us. This - the motherly Church never tires of whispering to us - is the only source of our joy, the only way of happiness: that the Way himself made his way to us and that all we need do is open our eyes to find all the many Bethlehems where he's born.

St Bernard of Clairvaux preached this time of year on

the three ‘advents’ of Christ - at Bethlehem, in the Church in the sacraments and at the end of time. Because it's an image so rich, many a preacher and writer (me included) for many years have drawn on the three advents of Christ to help people understand how what we anticipate and celebrate is more than the mere celebration of some past event but an unveiling of reality - an apocalypse, so to speak, of Christ's real presence in the world now. Which, as I've already said, is the cause of real joy, that the Lord is near. This is why the angels woke up the shepherds with song (Lk 2:13-14).

**“We find him not just in the sacraments of the Church, those mystical pieces of the same Christ, but also in the world - especially among the poor, the vulnerable, the difficult”**

We find this Christ in the Church, of course, in the sacrament of the altar and among the sisters and brothers of the body of Christ. We hear this song in the liturgy, even in the humblest singing of *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*. We find this Christ in those mystical moments when like John we look up from worship and suffering to see what is taking place (Rv 1:9-11). What I'm saying here is that to discover Christ is

first a mystical experience, a thing at first liturgical and sacramental, a matter of prayer.

But that isn't all. While on this Earth, as strange as it sounds, we must also find Christ in pieces. We find him not just in the sacraments of the Church, those mystical pieces of the same Christ, but also in the world - especially among the poor, the vulnerable, the difficult. That is, we must also find Christ among those whom we know we should serve, the lowly more than the good and the great.

And here we come to the question posed to John the Baptist. Now we see why this passage from Luke is appropriate for Gaudete Sunday. “What should we do?” the crowd asks him (Lk 3:10-14). Share, don't lie, don't cheat, be satisfied with what you have.

Another way to put it: Make yourself the sort of person that is good for others, a servant who is kind, honest and humble. That is what a person transformed by the coming of Jesus Christ looks like. He or she looks like a servant; another word for it is Christian.

### Contrast

Which, as I said, is the contrast, the choice to be made between true happiness born of giving and false happiness born of taking. One path leads to joy that is pure and eternal. The other path leads to emptiness and torment, crushing many of God's poor ones along the way. Which is why the torment will be just, why the wrath of it will be holy. This too is a theme of Advent, this clear warning only foolishly ignored.

But it is the trusted servant who will hear the invitation to enter the master's joy (Mt 25:23). Such will be the one who was faithful in small



St John the Baptist pointing to Jesus, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682)

things, not just large ones. Such will be the one who receives the Father's inheritance: the servant who served the least of the Lord's sisters and brothers (Mt 25:40). This is the path of real joy.

Which finally makes clear the deeper truths of Gaudete Sunday: that joy comes from finding Christ mystically in the Church and in those we must serve, and that is a joy that while found on Earth,

endures in Heaven.

**i** Fr Joshua J. Whitfield is pastor of St Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of *The Crisis of Bad Preaching* and other books.

## Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milan Morales



St John of the Cross

## St John of the Cross: The purification of the soul

**T**he religious life and spirituality of the Carmel were clear and defining calls in the life of St John of the Cross. At eighteen, after finishing his studies in rhetoric and classical languages with the Jesuits in Medina del Campo, Ávila, Spain, he started his journey into the Carmelite order in 1563. Shortly afterwards, he met Teresa of Ávila, an encounter that changed both their lives.

At the time, John had already been ordained, and he was deeply inspired by Teresa's vision for reforming the Carmelite order, including its male branch. They

worked together to put into practise their shared ideas, and, in 1568, they established the first house of the Discalced Carmelites in Duruelo, Ávila. This marked the foundation of the first reformed men's community within the order. It was during this period that John adopted the name 'of the Cross', by which he would be known ever after.

By the end of 1572, at Teresa's request, John became her confessor and vicar at the Monastery of the Incarnation in Ávila, where she served as prioress. However, their reform efforts faced significant opposition. John endured persecution and was

even imprisoned due to unjust accusations. Despite his suffering, he escaped with the help of Teresa. After regaining his strength, he resumed his mission, even as he faced several trials.

John's life was marked by a strong suffering, including a long illness towards the end. He passed away in December 1591 at a convent near Jaén, Andalusia, during the early morning prayer of Lauds. His final words were, “Today I am going to sing the Office in Heaven.” His body was later moved to Segovia.

John was beatified by Pope Clement X in 1675 and canonised

by Pope Benedict XIII in 1726. Known as the “Saint of the purification of the soul,” he accepted his trials with humility and faith. It was during his most difficult moments, including his imprisonment, that he composed some of his deepest spiritual works.

Pope Benedict XVI described him as “one of the most important lyrical poets of Spanish literature,” emphasising his doctrine as a guide to sanctity. The Spanish saint imagine the path to holiness as climbing a mountain which the man must face with courage and patience.



# Balancing technology as Catholics



Rohith Kinattukara

**T**echnology and the Church has been a hot topic since the first iteration of the Internet boom. While many debate the problems that it is causing for people of the Catholic faith to fall back to the different evils that are readily available on the internet, others believe it is now the perfect platform to spread the Word of the Lord and to engage with the young Catholics all around the world. Pope Francis has been sceptical on the rapid growth of technology, by famously saying “technology cannot replace human contact”. What the Pope has said is true, and there is a way us Catholics can combat technology and learn to balance the usage and make most of out of it.

## Free rules

This is a growing trend when it comes to balancing digital detox and increasing productivity. What does this mean though? These are personally set rules, where one can decide when to omit technology from certain tasks they do during the day. The two of the most famous ones are: watching something while eating and the second one being scrolling or using social media before sleeping.

These are famous habits

that has now been an everyday norm, where people can't go about their day or night without doing this. Setting rules to just watching a video with a certain time limit or even switching to informational content that has a set time limit is a great starting point. Another way could be watching a video for some time and then reading a book (few pages would be a great start) or even the Bible before sleeping. Artificial light can block the melatonin creation, which is a hormone that helps a person sleep better at night.

**“Social media is a great tool that has allowed millions of people to connect with people from far ends of the world in an instant”**

The biggest excuse everyone has is that each time they scroll, better content appears, and that is exactly what these social media platforms are designed for. However, smartphone companies have a feature that allows you to control screen time on all apps that you use. This is a great feature that allows people to mindfully use their tech, knowing that there is a specific limit to this. That free time could be used to go for walks, meet friends and family, visit the local parish or even take the time to reflect and pray.

Face to face contact is essential for human life. It promotes trust and security, and this allows for a more meaningful conversation. We should always remember, never let screens control you, instead, control the screens!

Social media is a great tool that has allowed millions of people to connect with people from far ends of the world in an instant. Social media has been misused by people to spread harmful content and content that isn't reality. This is the major flaw when it comes to social media, and all these problems lead to depression, and other mental health problems over the years. This can be eradicated with the help of following content that is catered to positive sources. Following different Catholic pages, different priests who share interesting content on faith. Unfollowing different content will make a big difference when it comes to mental health, and since social media is the main reason why someone pulls out their smartphone.

## Options

Taking breaks is very important when it comes to doing anything in general. Using technology doesn't allow you to take breaks, mainly because of work and on-screen meetings. Certain ways someone

**“The Church should also however, teach the importance of human creativity and that humans are a creation of God, and no technology big or small can replace what was created by Him”**



A priest uses his phone to take a video of Pope Francis in Rome's Basilica of St John Lateran. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

can take more regular breaks would be getting reminders from certain apps that allow you to take breaks. Putting your phone on DND (Do not Disturb) mode or even work mode makes a difference when it comes to concentra-

tion and productivity. Many people often use two devices when they are at work, this is also a bad habit. An easy solution would be to avoid putting your phone next to you, and even summarise important notifications at a certain time.

The Catholic Church can make most use of technology to teach and share different information such as bible verses or even more recently, having more content tailored to the younger generation. This not only makes the younger generation more engaged, but it also reaches to a vast audience in a mat-

ter of seconds. The Church should also, however, teach the importance of human creativity and that humans are a creation of God, and no technology, big or small, can replace what was created by Him. Learning how to balance life and technology will help anyone survive in the modern world.

*Rohith Kinattukara is a Catholic student from Grif-fith College Dublin studying MScin Procurement and Supply Chain Management who loves to write and breathes tech.*

## ‘Wealth, power mean nothing when the heart is cold,’ says the Pope



Carol Glatz

**C**hristians are called to be more like Mary: generous and loving servants of the Lord, Pope Francis said.

“Sadly, if we look around us, we realise that the presumption that we can be ‘like God,’ which led to the first sin, continues to wound our human family,” he said, celebrating Mass in St Peter's Basilica on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

“Neither love nor happi-

ness can arise from this presumption of self-sufficiency. Those who see the rejection of any stable and lasting bond in life as progress do not grant freedom,” he said in his homily.

**“There is the risk, however, of thinking that Mary's beauty is somehow remote, out of reach, unattainable”**

Celebrating the Mass with the College of Cardinals, including the 21 new cardinals he elevated to the college the day before, the Pope highlighted Mary's beauty and pure heart, “a heart that is free from sin, docile to the

working of the Holy Spirit and ready to offer to God, out of love, the full submission of intellect and will.”

“There is the risk, however, of thinking that Mary's beauty is somehow remote, out of reach, unattainable,” he said. But everyone has received this beauty as a gift in baptism, “when we were freed from sin and became sons and daughters of God.”

“Like the Virgin Mary, we are called to cultivate this beauty with a filial, spousal and maternal love” and to be “grateful for what we have received and generous in what we give back,” he said.

## Embrace

Unfortunately, he said, today there are those who “deprive fathers and mothers of respect, those who do not want children, those who

reduce others to mere objects or treat them as nuisances, those who consider sharing with others a waste, and solidarity an impoverishment.”

Such attitudes “cannot spread joy or build a future,” the Pope said.

**“Let us look to Mary Immaculate and ask her to conquer us through her loving heart”**

“What is the use of having a full bank account, a comfortable home, unreal virtual relationships, if our hearts remain cold, empty and closed?” he asked. “What is the use of traveling around the world if every encounter is reduced to a passing

impression or a photograph that no one will remember in a few days or months?”

Instead, the Pope said, “May we be men and women who are ready to say, ‘Thank you’ and ‘Yes,’ ... not just with our words, but above all by our actions, ever ready to make room for the Lord in our plans and aspirations, eager to embrace with maternal tenderness the brothers and sisters we encounter on our way.”

“Let us look to Mary Immaculate and ask her to conquer us through her loving heart. May she convert us and make us a community in which filial, spousal and maternal love may be a rule and criterion of life,” he said.

“Only then will families be united, will spouses truly share everything, will parents be physically present

and close to their children,” he said.

“As we imitate her, may all of us, by God's grace, help to change our world for the better,” Pope Francis said.

## Heart

Before praying the Angelus at noon with visitors gathered in St Peter's Square, the Pope asked the faithful that “as the opening of the Holy Door of the Jubilee approaches, let us open the doors of the heart and the mind to the Lord Jesus, born of Mary Immaculate, and let us implore the intercession of Mary.”

He encouraged Catholics to go to confession on December 8 or during the coming week “to open your heart. The Lord forgives everything, everything, everything, and that way we will be happier in the hands of Mary.”



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## In search of an anchor of permanence

As I was saying at the end of last week's article, the turnout in the General Election was disappointing – 59.7%. Do we value our democracy enough?

On **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1, Tuesday) we heard from Art O'Leary, CEO of the Electoral Commission, pointing out that one of the problems outlined was inaccuracy in the electoral register. As these were managed by local authorities, there were, in effect, 31 separate registers. He envisaged that they would be moving to a centralised database. On the plus side he pointed out that there were over 400,000 new registrations. Mind you, he wasn't sure but had heard that the existing register might be inaccurate by 500,000 voters!

The previous evening on **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio 1) journalism lecturer Kevin Cunningham suggested that turnout tended to be higher among Mass goers because of 'regularity in their regime'. Maybe so, but I'd say it has as much, if not more, to do with their sense of civic duty and commitment.

I also touched on migration last week and it came across my radar again. On **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio 1, Tuesday) we heard of Ukrainian families being moved out of their accommodation just before Christmas – how heartless! Maybe hotel spaces are needed for tourism, but hardly at this time of year.



The Archbishop of Paris, Laurent Ulrich, leads Emmanuel Macron, Brigitte Macron, and the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo on their way to the Notre Dame Cathedral on December 7. Photo: OSV News/Ludovic Marin via Reuters.

Most of the contract terminations were from the Government side, with health and safety being quoted in some cases but this felt like an excuse. Locals seemed largely supportive as they have been elsewhere – they don't like to see people that have integrated well into the community being disrupted like this. Some have taken them into their own homes. There were stories of students having settled into schools, adults having jobs, an elderly person recovering from a stroke. I'm not convinced that whatever new Government is formed will do any better.

After being bumped aside for the election **Our Diving**

**Sparks** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday) returned with a timely item on what presenter Dearbhail McDonald called 'the resurrection' of Notre Dame – which reopened last weekend after the great fire of 2019. Fr Aidan Troy, who was ministering at a nearby church at the time, remembered the night of the fire and the palpable shock and 'immense sadness' of the people of Paris, whether religious or not. They referred to 'our Notre Dame'. He watched the 'raging inferno' from a nearby bridge, and was so glad to return to watch the re-opening from the same vantage point. People, he said, looked for 'an anchor of permanence' and

the cathedral would surely fit the bill. He was glad the Church insisted there would be no charge for entry.

There was also a charming item on a nativity play in Ennis Co. Clare, with children having lovely things to say about Mary – she was a 'nice caring person', 'very kind', with 'a good heart'. One child was very wise – what with dirty nappies, snotty noses and lack of sleep, the role of Mary was easier to act than to carry out in real life! Theologian Gina Menzies was on hand for less inspiring analysis. In the past, she said, Mary was defined by a 'patriarchal Church' which emphasised meekness, submissiveness and obedience.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

**RECLAIMING THE CAROL**  
EWTN Monday December 16, 8pm, also Tuesday December 17, 2pm

The late Charles Dickens returns to find that A Christmas Carol, and the holiday it celebrates, has become overshadowed by glitz and commercialism in this touching story about the true meaning of Christmas.

**SO THIS IS CHRISTMAS**  
RTE One Wednesday December 18, 9:35pm

So This Is Christmas follows a handful of people around Ireland as they navigate a complicated lead-up to Christmas.

**COUNTRY MUSIC CHRISTMAS**  
BBC 4 Friday December 20, 9:05pm

Country music's biggest stars get together for a night full of festive classics, celebrating the joy of the holidays in true Nashville style.

Paul VI changed the emphasis, describing Mary as a strong woman and some modern theologians focused on her being initially disturbed by the news from the angel Gabriel, having questions about it, but the ultimate assent was only briefly acknowledged. She also spoke of how we don't know how Mary died – the Assumption surely deserved a mention!

On assisted dying Ms Menzies was impressed by the quality of the recent debate in the House of Commons. She realised that the Law Society and palliative care medics were against the current Irish bill and thought it should be scrapped, which I agreed with, but I wasn't happy with her call to 'start again'. She

favoured the best of palliative care, always important, but also a Citizens' Assembly (we already have one, Dáil Éireann!) While she understood the 'slippery slope' argument, she thought the Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) system in Canada worked well, with its safeguards – I don't think so! She thought all should have access to palliative care 'and other choices as well to exercise autonomy'. That was worrying.

Finally, writer Michael Harding had a reflection on the end of life, describing death as 'the terror of leaping into the light... into the mystery of deeper being'.

# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## An exceptional showcase of Irish talent

I am grateful to Finghin Collins for keeping me up to date about the next Dublin International Piano Competition taking place from May 9 to 16 2025.

The Irish preliminary rounds are scheduled for Friday December 20 at the RIAM's Whyte Recital Hall beginning at 09.15am and concluding at approximately 5.30pm with the results expected around 6pm. Twelve competitors – Adam Collins, Dida Condria, Johanna Dietz, Rowel Friers, Justine Gormley, Defne Guitoprak, Adam Heron, Brendan Kennedy, Luke Lally Maguire, Laoise McMull-



ConTempo Quartet

lin, Stanislaus O'Neirne and Mickey Tomas – will play before a panel of judges

chaired by Finghin Collins.

The jury will comprise Fíachra Garvey, artistic director

of the West Wicklow Festival, Michael McHale, Royal Academy of Music London, Isabelle O'Connell, Conservatory of Music, News Yotk and Cathy Stokes, Concerts and Planning Coordinator, NSO.

Finghin Collins also tells me that he is excited to chair the jury for what promises to be a mouth-watering showcase of Irish talent on December 20. The event promises to raise the curtain on DIPC 2025, a true celebration of international talent that will bring musicians together from all around the globe. I wish the best of luck to all twelve young pianists. Please

come and support them on Friday December 20 at the beautiful Whyte Recital Hall. Admission is free and advance booking is not a requirement. The competition's quarter and semi-final rounds will take place at the RIAM with the finale at the NCH.

In 2025 the competition will include a chamber music element during the semi-final round where each competitor will play a piano quintet with the ConTempo Quartet and, of course, the three finalists will perform a piano concerto with the NSO in the final battle for the first prize at the NCH on May 16, 2025.



Finghin Collins



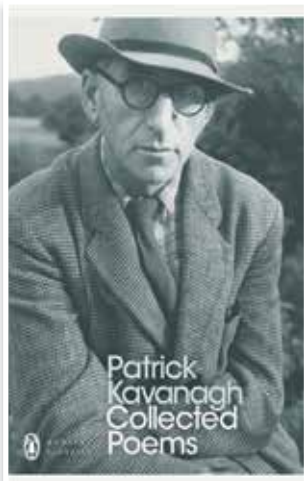
# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## 2024 Books of the Year

### The selected choices of our reviewers



Joe Carroll

My choice is tripartite: *Patrick Kavanagh: Collected Poems*, Tarry Flynn and the biography of the poet by Antoinette Quinn, none of them new, but still to be found in the shops.

On a visit to the Patrick Kavanagh Centre in Inniskeen I picked up a new issue of *Tarry Flynn* and re-read it after, it must be 50 years.

That led me back to the *Collected Poems* and Antoinette Quinn's superb biography. Her research was extraordinary as she hunted down every written and available living source. These included former British prime minister, Harold Macmillan and his son Maurice whose firm published an early collection of his poetry in the 1930s, a great boost for the peasant-poet at the time.

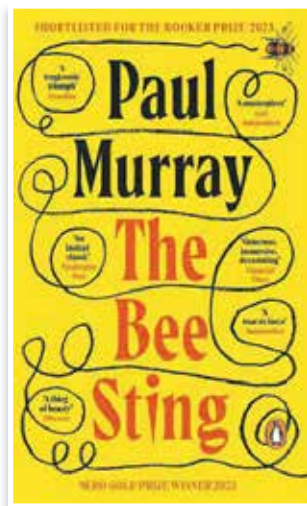
Quinn traces the evolution of Kavanagh's Catholicism from First Communion, through the mysticism of early poems, and the criticism of Church dominance over rural Ireland evidenced in *The Great Hunger* and *Lough Derg*. He did not allow *Lough Derg* to be published during his lifetime with its reference to a case where a monk seduced a schoolgirl.

Quinn surmises that he could not risk antagonising the clerical support he solicited at that time to survive in wartime Dublin. He used to pester Archbishop John Charles McQuaid for financial aid and to

secure him employment. The Archbishop frequently obliged and secured him a job with the Catholic newspaper, the *Standard* where he was film critic for a time, although he savaged most of the films he viewed.

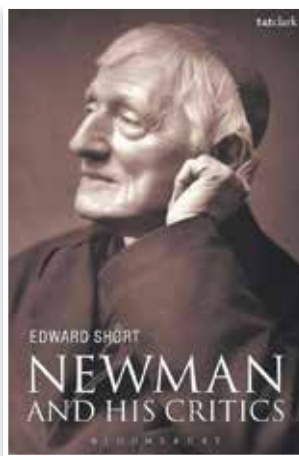
The late Fr Tom Stack wrote a short book about "God and Patrick Kavanagh" which includes an anthology. Of Kavanagh's 253 published poems, Fr Stack pointed out, no fewer than 138 "include explicitly religious themes, images or allusions."

But he observes cautiously: "the exact status of Patrick Kavanagh's mystical moments, whether we place them in inverted comments or not, is hardly for any of us to judge."



Mary Kenny

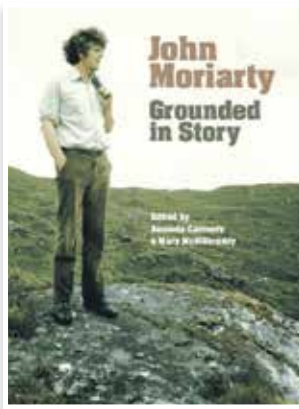
*The Bee Sting*, by Paul Murray, which came out in a Macmillan paperback this year, was such a compelling read that I'm planning to read it again, despite its 656 pages. It's been described as an entertainment and a family saga, and it is all that, but it is also a "state of the nation" Irish novel for me. It depicts the shifting and crossover values of Ireland in 2008 and before; Catholic practice mixes with Celtic Tiger business opportunities (and failures), and concern over the environment is a key focus for a most sympathetic character, 12-year-old PJ. A superb, meaningful, funny and sad book.



Peter Costello

One of the most impressive books to my way this year was the recently published *Newman and His Critics* by the American Newman scholar Edward Short.

This comprises both an overview of the development of Newman belief and opinion, both religious and secular, though at all times they are hard to separate, as reflected in his dialogues with a series of friends and one or two opponents. Newman in Ireland seems to have become a matter of specialised interest these days to many of Newman's admirers. This is a pity. Everything he wrote, his diaries, letters and larger works, is filled with interest not only for the nature of religion, the state of faith in his times, and the natures of Victorian life and society. It is a pity that his Irish experiences were no dealt with by Edward Short, but perhaps one cannot have everything at once, even from Newman.



Gabriel Fitzmaurice

John Moriarty, poet, philosopher, mystic, mythologist, was enormous in his heart,

in his soul and in his mind. So enormous sometimes that it is difficult to read him.

Amanda Carmody, his niece, and Mary McGillicuddy, author of *John Moriarty, Not the Whole Story* (Lilliput Press, 2018), an introduction to his life and vision, have lovingly given us *John Moriarty: Grounded in Story* (Lilliput Press, €25), a selection of his writings, taken from his many books, about the influence on him of his native place, Moyvane in north Kerry.

An enlightened teacher who shows us how to walk beautifully on the earth, he draws us here into his vision of a Moyvane of big characters, big talk, big stories, big dreamings.

In a world where, he has said, we are rapidly becoming an AIDS virus to the earth, *Grounded in Story* is an invitation to the world and wisdom of an extraordinary man who reminds us of the Godliness, sacredness and inter-dependence of all creation. Sensitively illustrated by Amanda Carmody, it is a fascinating, important and very readable book.

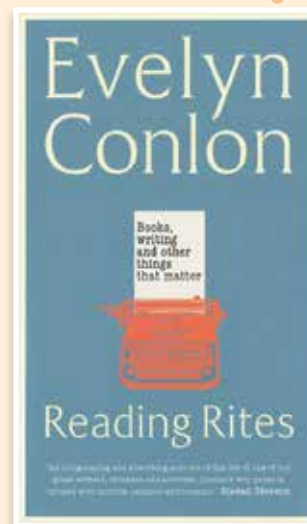
Desmond Egan's latest book of poems, *Laptop* (Goldsmith Press €20), like Rothko's paintings to which he frequently refers, is miraculous.

In an age of "lazy atheism" as Egan describes it, it is good to find a poet who sees God in a battered teapot. Egan's world is one where "in spite of wars and horror and ruin/there are always wonders" for "wonder is the beginning of belief" and life "is full of God's excitement" "cutting through the waste".

We are free but not abandoned, "God is always thereabouts always/nearer than the church door". Egan's poetry is timeless, it belongs "somewhere others have not been". A true poet, he goes on "trying to try [his] best/not able not

to", his otherness "complete as a sonnet".

These poems, like Rothko's paintings, try to "address/life and love and it all/with music playing" because he reminds us "life without music is unlife". I read and re-read *Laptop* with profit and pleasure. It is a *lón anama*, food for the soul, whose true music is "more nourishing than milk".

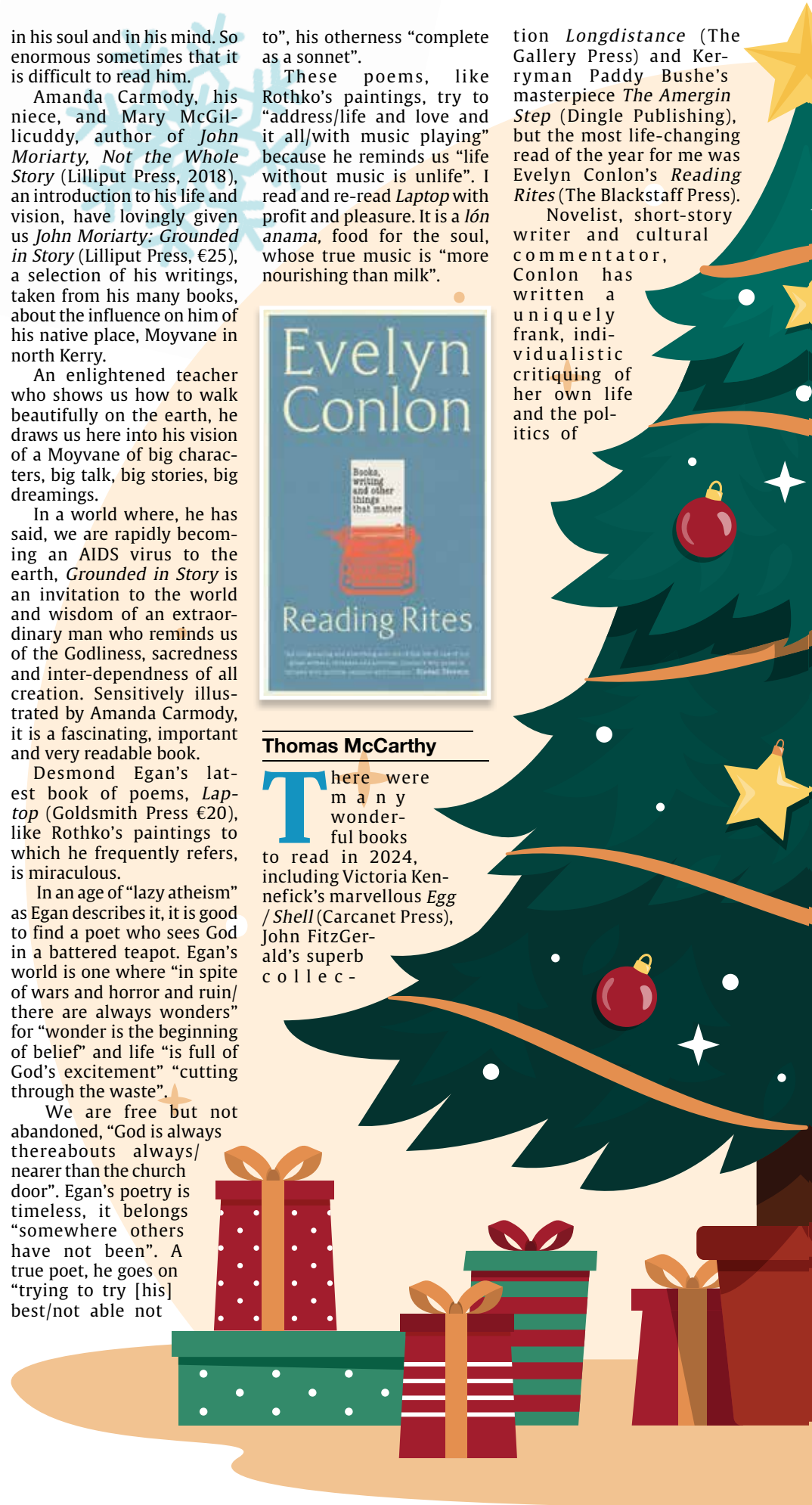


Thomas McCarthy

There were many wonderful books to read in 2024, including Victoria Kennefick's marvellous *Egg / Shell* (Carcenet Press), John Fitzgerald's superb *collec-*

tion *Longdistance* (The Gallery Press) and Kerryman Paddy Bushe's masterpiece *The Amergin Step* (Dingle Publishing), but the most life-changing read of the year for me was Evelyn Conlon's *Reading Rites* (The Blackstaff Press).

Novelist, short-story writer and cultural commentator, Conlon has written a uniquely frank, individualistic critiquing of her own life and the politics of





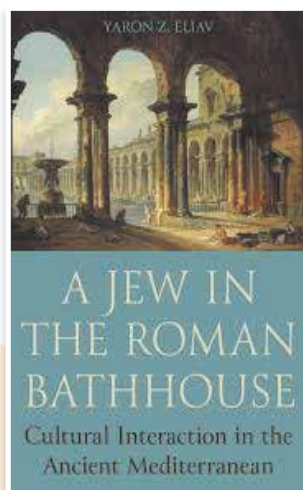
Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

the women's movement in Ireland. "I loved every day of my St Louis adventure, a fondness nailed down when I learned how to skip classes that didn't interest me," she writes of her lovely St Louis Secondary School in Monaghan.

She was soon skipping away from UCD with its smell of drying concrete to travel the wild Seventies world. Then "In October 1976, I arrived in Maynooth with a five-month-old baby to study for a BA."

The adventure of her adulthood began that day. It was an adventure of fiction writing and advocacy, of home-making and critiquing the world that male editors had created. This is a treasure of a memoir, written by a Monaghan

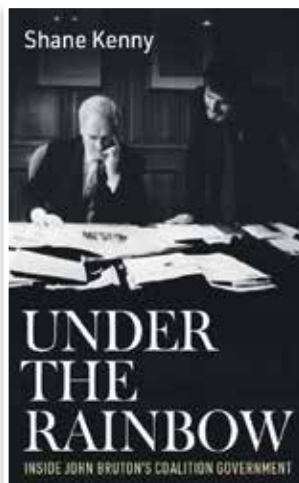
intellectual of lively, no-nonsense genius.



Thomas O'Loughlin

**T**he most fascinating book I read this year was *A Jew in the Roman Bathhouse*. The public bathhouse was the social institution of the cities of the Roman world. They were the mark of civilization and were a linchpin of society and gossip - but also of nakedness and the cults of the cities' deities. Not the place to expect a Jew (or a Christian)! And, that was the opinion of most historians. Then this book - a mix of archaeology, legal history, and a detective story - showed how Jews adapted to their surroundings and took full advantage of the bathhouse. This is a study of one historical period, but also a tale of how living religions adapt and thrive. It may not be the easiest of reads, but it is an enlightening one. *A Jew in the Roman Bathhouse: Cultural Inter-*

*action in the Ancient Mediterranean*, by Yaron Z. Eliav is published by Princeton University Press.



Felix M Larkin

John Bruton, who died on February 6 last, was one of the most significant figures in Irish public life for more than fifty years. He was Taoiseach from December 1994 to June 1997, and notably successful in that role in holding together a coalition government comprising three very different parties - the so-called Rainbow Coalition.

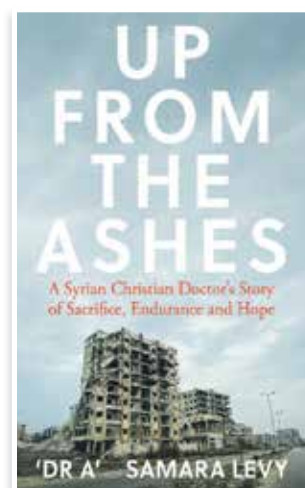
**“Kenny's book is a classic “first rough draft of history” and a great read for all political junkies”**

In his recently-published book, *Under the Rainbow*, Shane Kenny has given us an insider's account of that government. He was Bruton's press secretary for the duration of the government. He chronicles its vicissitudes of fortune, but rightly emphasises its many achievements - especially in relation to the Northern Ireland peace process.

Its achievements are overshadowed in public memory by the fact that the government was not returned to power in the general election of June 1997. What is forgotten,

however, is that the government lost the election because of a collapse in support for the Labour Party. Fine Gael increased its representation in the Dáil from 45 to 54 seats, a strong vote of confidence in Bruton as Taoiseach - but cold comfort to him.

Kenny's book is a classic “first rough draft of history” and a great read for all political junkies.



Anthony Redmond

**I**am sending you a mention of *Up From the Ashes*, an amazing story which I read a couple of years ago and reread again recently, which I found then and now deeply moving and uplifting

This is an inspiring story of a Syrian Christian doctor who decided to stay in his country and help as many people as he could after the horrific war broke out there in 2011. That was the year that monstrous changes took place in Syria with huge numbers of Jihadists flooding into the country with the intention to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad and impose an Islamic regime.

Anyone who opposed these violent Jihadists in Syria became a target. ISIS became shorthand for horror and sadism. The West supported many of these Jihadist rebels. Archbishop Jacques Bejjani, the Syrian Catholic Archbishop, said that if Assad were forced to go, Syria would become another Libya.

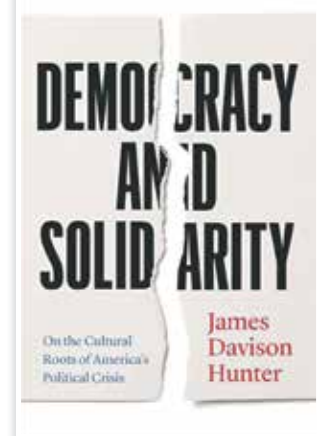
We now have the cruel situation where the US has imposed the most terrible sanctions on Syria resulting in dire poverty and hardship for the Syrian people. They have virtually no electricity and heating and find it very difficult to feed their children.

Now we have the fluid situation where the varied rebel groups have not only seized Homs and Damascus, but have forced the repugnant President al-Bashar Assad to

flee abroad. North and south the people are celebrating, but in such a rapidly developing situation the future is very uncertain. Will there be social regeneration or a renewal of inter-faction fighting?

Dr A (he has to remain anonymous for the sake of his family) has decided to stay and help his people in their hour of need. His deeply moving story is one of heroism and love for his country and his people.

*Up From the Ashes: A Syrian Doctor's Story of Sacrifice and Hope*, by 'Dr A' with Samara Levy is published by Hodder & Stoughton.



Frank Litton

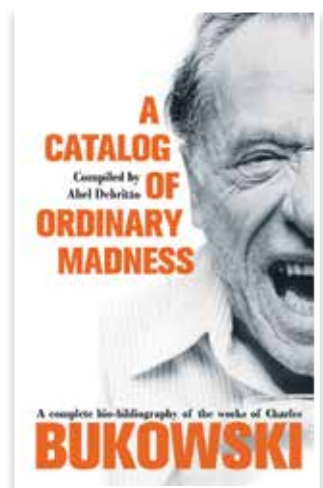
**C**ontemplating the degradation of United States' politics, I scanned my shelves looking for consolation. I had read good analyses of democracy's travails published this year. James Davison Hunter's *Democracy and solidarity: on the cultural roots of America's political crisis* (Yale University Press) stands out with its account of how the cultural resources to sustain solidarity rapidly diminish. Hunter does not tell us how they might be replenished.

**“Politics of Nature is a key text in body of work that educates us in a new way of seeing ourselves and our place in the world”**

Then, I recovered Bruno Latour's *Politics of Nature* (Harvard University Press). Unfortunately we live in interesting times. Political institutions fail as the problems they confront deepen. The devastations of climate change top the list.

In the 17th century Hobbes and Locke transformed our understanding of our interdependencies and the institutions that managed them. They laid the foundations of the modern political order. These foundations weaken and crack.

We need a new reframing of our politics of a similar scope and scale. Latour, philosopher, anthropologist, sociologist, catholic, who died in 2022, is the 'Hobbes' of our time. *Politics of Nature* is a key text in body of work that educates us in a new way of seeing ourselves and our place in the world. There is a better way.



Aubrey Malone

**I**don't normally pay \$70 for a book, but made an exception for Abel Debritto's *A Catalogue of Ordinary Madness* (Chatwin), an incredible 854 page bio-bibliography of Charles Bukowski, a man who brought poetry to the masses.

Neil Jordan is as great a writer as a film director. His memoir *Amnesiac* (Apollo, £17.96) was my book of the year - prose poetry at its finest.

Philip Gafter's *Cocktails With George and Martha* (Ithaca, £19.03) is a fascinating study of the main characters of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. They bled into their actual lives. Gafter tells us how.

Elvis Presley's daughter Lisa-Marie died last year. His grand-daughter Riley Keough has compiled what she says were notes toward an intended memoir by her mother, *From Here to the Great Unknown* (Macmillan, £12.50), adding her own life story as a subtext. A tragic catalogue of an ill-fated dynasty.



Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4028 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)

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CARDS & NOTELETS

BOOKMARKS

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– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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The Irish Catholic

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[www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)

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A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at [anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie](mailto:anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie) or call 01 679 3188



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The Irish Catholic

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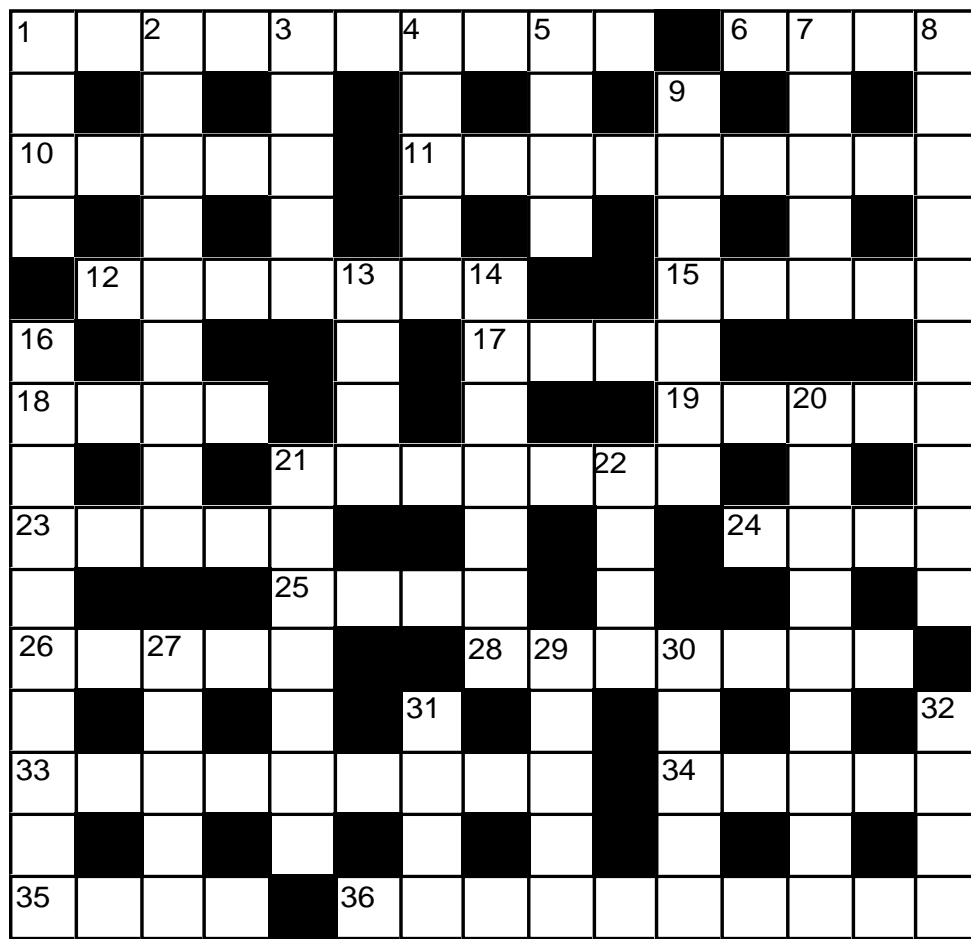
**Just ring 01 5240139 if you'd like more information,  
or to let us know about your legacy. Thank you for  
the good you leave behind.**

## Crossword

Gordius 693

### Across

- 1 As well-behaved as precious metal (4,2,4)  
6 Walk lamely (4)  
10 The sound of a pager (5)  
11 The time 13.55 (4,2,3)  
12 Flavour or style of sweet (7)  
15 One of a flock (5)  
17 Egyptian cross (4)  
18 Way out (4)  
19 Young eel (5)  
21 & 36a Styles of self-denial (4,3,10)  
23 One who shuns company (5)  
24 Rabbit's tail (4)  
25 Asian country, capital Teheran (4)  
26 Make cloth (5)  
28 Private detective (7)  
33 Stories (9)  
34 Upper leg (5)  
35 The correct amount of medicine to take or apply (4)  
36 See 21 across



## Down

- 1 Asian desert (4)  
2 Surgical procedure (9)  
3 The first letter of the  
Greek alphabet (5)  
4 Social blunder (5)  
5 The greatest of the  
abiding virtues (4)  
7 Plant fibre used to

- make carpets, etc (5)  
8 Financial success;  
wealth (10)  
9 Stowed away (7)  
13 Great civilization of  
Mexico (4)  
14 Durable (7)  
16 It may be brandished

- by a referee (6,4)  
20 Of the historic era  
roughly coinciding with  
the nineteenth century  
(9)  
21 Pals (7)  
22 The typical or stan-  
dard (4)

- 27 Testifies (5)  
29 Disturb or overturn (5)  
30 Shiny, smooth material (5)  
31 Wound with a knife (4)  
32 Clarified butter (4)

## SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 5

**GORDIUS No. 692**

### Across

- 1 Lieutenant 6 Talc 10 Ricer 11 Badminton 12 Clothes 15 Offer 17 Tear 18 Arts 19 Coast 21 Produce 23 Agree  
24 Bono 25 Noun 26 Ailed 28 Targets 33 Calendula 34 Azure 35 Risk 36 Permanence

## Down

- 1 Lark 2 Escalator 3 Tarot 4 Noble 5 Nods 7 Act of Contrition 9 Divorce 13 Heir 14 Student 16. Madagascar 20  
About turn 21 Pendant 22 Czar 27 Lulls 29 Alarm 30 Grain 31 Duke 32 Gene

## Sudoku Corner 563

563

## Easy

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

## Hard

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

## Last week's Easy 562

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

## Last week's Hard 562

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

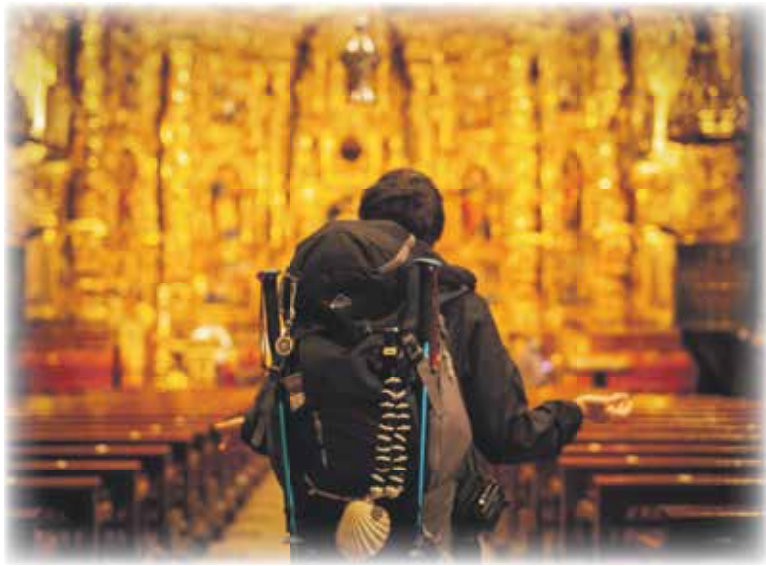


# The difference between a tourist and a pilgrim...

On December 29, the Church begins a Jubilee Year, with the theme 'Pilgrims of Hope'. Maybe this is not a bad place for us to spend a bit of time, this week, as we head towards the celebration of Christmas.

There is a priest in Mayo that I have admired for many years – his name is Frank Fahey. I first came to know Frank when I spent a few summers at Knock Shrine during my seminary days. He was one of those people who influenced without being an 'influencer'! Good humoured and prayerful, dedicated and encouraging, available and a witness to ministry. As a young seminarian, Frank deepened within me the desire to be a priest. I listened to him, watched him and felt my time was well spent doing both.

I mention Frank in these lines because one of the themes I have heard him return to many times through the years is the theme of 'pilgrimage'. Since I first met him, his priesthood has been spent in two locations of pilgrimage: initially at Knock Shrine and following on from that his next appointment to Ballintubber Abbey. In both places, he knew what it was to see pilgrims arrive for a day or few days' prayer and reflection. Some



came on buses, others by cars and many walked. In arriving at Knock Shrine or Ballintubber Abbey a destination was reached but, in many ways, the journey had just begun.

The distinction Frank liked to make was one between 'tourist' and 'pilgrim'. In some cases, the person arriving to either place, might well be a tourist – one visiting Ireland or Mayo and feeling that Knock or Ballintubber Abbey should be visited. A noble choice, for sure, but the distinction remains. In his telling, the tourist might visit to take a photo, pick up a souvenir, light a candle and maybe say a prayer. Later, the photo might be put in an album, labelled, "Visit to Ireland", in which many photos find their place. The Guinness Factory, Mountains of Mourne, Book of Kells, Cliffs of Moher, Blarney Stone, Ring of Kerry, Wild Atlantic Way and more, would occupy space and might even be captioned. "I did the Ring of Kerry"

... "I kissed the Blarney Stone". Past tense, boxes ticked, and memories made. The tourist!

In Frank's telling, the tourist comes to see something, to create a memory, enjoy and remember. The 'Pilgrim' on the other hand, journeys in the hope of change – maybe even, in the need of change. He or she leaves something open in the self that allows for change. This may well take the pilgrim to a deeper place called reflection and to a recognition that because of the pilgrimage, things will never be quite the same again. Far from the journey becoming a memory, it becomes the journey, travelling the roadways of life, accompanying on dark days and brightening the brightness that is God's presence in our lives.

Isn't Pilgrims of Hope a wonderful title for the year and opportunity ahead? In your parish and diocese, there will be many opportunities to engage with this year. Some may well take you on pilgrimage to local or far away destinations. Others will invite you to spend a bit of time in your own parish church. Some will see you walk and pray with fellow pilgrims, and others, will take you to a quiet place and the necessary words: "Bless me Father, for I have

**Destination reached!**

There's an old story told of a taxi driver who was asked to take a tourist to "Christ's Church Cathedral". Caught in heavy traffic, the taxi driver decided on an easier location and drove to a nearby parish church. As he looks at the church, the passenger calls out: "This is not Christ's Church Cathedral – that's where I asked you to take me."

The taxi driver replied: "If Christ isn't in there, he's out of town!"

sinned..." All of this – yes, all of this – done as pilgrims, open to being changed and in the name of hope.

So, as the Holy Year begins, which box will we tick 'tourist' or 'pilgrim'?





The Little Way Association



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**Advent Appeal from Comboni Sisters in Jordan: medicines and medical aid are very urgently needed for thousands of people**

Sr Alessandra has contacted The Little Way Association from the Comboni Missionary Sisters' hospital at Karak in the south of Jordan. She is counting upon you, and other donors, to assist with the cost of providing the hospital with urgent medical supplies. In this part of Jordan are hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Palestinians, Bedouins and many others. Sister writes: "Our hospital is the only Christian institution doing medical work in southern Jordan and it has a capacity of 50 beds. The people receive no government or UN help at all and turn to us for medical treatment."

**Mothers, babies, infants are in the greatest need of help**

"We aim to care for as many refugees, and poor Jordanians as possible, especially mothers, children and adults in emergency situations. We provide milk and nappies for newborns, many of whose mothers came across the border to give birth. Some need emergency treatment. We wish to witness to the Gospel and also to be a bridge of trust and understanding with the local 97% Muslim population. We need, to name but a few, antibiotics, anti-haemorrhagic pills, painkillers, anti-allergic medicines, surgical materials and milk for newborns."

**We implore you to give what you can this Advent. Every euro you send to the little way association for this project will be forwarded to the Sisters without deduction. The Sisters and hundreds of ordinary people will be very thankful to God and to you. May God bless you all.**



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

**AWAITING CHRISTMAS**

With St Therese at our side, let us patiently await the birth of Christ in all its simplicity. She tells us, "Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love at which we do them." May we then perform small acts of kindness throughout this Advent season.

**SANITATION AND WATER**

Water is a precious commodity that we sometimes take for granted, but in areas of the world where water is scarce or contaminated, a borehole or well can transform the lives of the people for generations to come.

The Little Way Association receives many requests for grants for sanitation and water projects and we always welcome donations for this purpose.

IC/12/12