

# The Irish Catholic

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## Secular Ireland will 'pay a price' for forgetting God Priest calls on Christians to unite

Chai Brady

A well-known Irish priest has warned of "stormy seas" ahead and that Christians must face the "common enemy" of secularism and godlessness together.

Vincentian priest Fr Pat Collins CM, who is an expert in deliverance ministry and is due to speak at the Divine Mercy National Conference in the RDS this weekend, told *The Irish Catholic* he feels "a very strong sense of urgency about this conference".

Regarding his message to the faithful, he said it will "be a call to arms really for Catholics and Christians in general – because I'm going to be talking about ecumenism – and saying we have a common enemy and we need to unite and pray very strongly and read the prophetic signs of the times and respond appropriately.

"Secularism and godlessness are the common enemy. Fighting among ourselves, disagreeing among ourselves, seems to me to be ridiculous in the face of what we're all facing as Christians, which is the forgetfulness of God and living as if he doesn't exist," Fr Collins said.

The theme of the February 21-23 conference is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, 'Repent... so that a time of refreshing may come'.

"I think we're heading into very stormy seas in the coming years and a lot of this has been predicted in terms of prophetic words we have gotten from popes, from saintly men and women, from Marian apparitions.

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### Sealed with the Holy Spirit



Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty celebrated Confirmation of 47 young people recently in Abbeyleix and later in Ballyroan. Pictured are the children attending in St Patrick's Church, Ballyroan.

### Primate of All Ireland prays for sick Pope

Staff reporter

The Primate of All Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin has offered prayers for Pope Francis as he struggled with a respiratory tract infection.

The 88-year-old Pope was hospitalised on February 14 in Rome's Gemelli hospital.

Archbishop Martin said on social media: "Our Lady of Lourdes; St Bernadette; intercede for Pope Francis – that he may find healing and regain his strength."

The Vatican said on Monday that the Pope was suffering from "a polymicrobial infection of the respiratory tract", which meant his treatment was being changed. All his commitments over the weekend were cancelled due to his continued ill health.

This has been his fourth hospitalisation in Gemelli since his election in 2013.

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# Regrettable hospices must fundraise to survive - bishop

## Renata Steffens

Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan took part in the annual fundraising run in Limerick over the weekend. Runners from around the country joined in the 10k run/walk fundraising for the Milford Care Centre on February 16.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bishop Monahan said "the annual 10k is an important fundraiser for Milford Hospice which does amazing work for so many in the mid-West region. The medical and pastoral care they offer to so many is immense. I often think it is regrettable that the hospice movement have to

do so much fundraising in order to survive and thrive, especially seeing the major contribution they offer to society."

About the 2025 run, the bishop said that "several thousand took part in the run including many from our Clare Crusaders club... The weather wasn't too good, but it didn't dampen

the spirits." Bishop Monahan has been running with the Crusaders Running Club since he moved to Ennis in 2016.

"Our group, the Clare Crusaders raise fund for special needs charity in Barefield, Ennis and we run several events during the year. 10ks, half marathons and full marathons...

In Kinvara on March 1, Connemara in April, Limerick in May, Kilkee in July, Tullamore in August, Dingle in September and Dublin in October and then Athenry and Resolution Run in Galway around Christmas and New Year."

The bishop of Killaloe is "not the only bishop who runs," he said. "Donal

Mckeown has run a marathon as a bishop, John Kirby before he was ordained, Alan McGuckian runs park runs every Saturday and Brendan Leahy does the 10k at the Limerick Marathon Festival in May. Running away from it all may be one of the most important skills in our job," the bishop said.

## Secular Ireland will 'pay a price' for forgetting God

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We are going to pay a price for the forgetfulness of God and living, as Pope John Paul II said, as if God does not exist," warned Fr Collins.

"I think it is our job at the conference to warn people and to give them indications of how to react to the growing dangers that there are in the world today. I think we are at the beginnings of World War III," he added, "But it is not inevitable, if people respond appropriately we can mitigate or even stop what is about to happen, but I don't see much sign of that - that people are going to respond very much."

Fr Collins, who is also a prolific author and psychotherapist, said that people face "very dark times", which the Church

is already experiencing, but also in the secular world.

"I have always thought that the secular agenda would turn out to be a disappointment and that without a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose things will go wrong in secular society and there is abundant evidence that instead of getting more cohesive and happier, there's every indication that the opposite is the case," he said.

"In Christian terms that is not surprising because we see there is a spiritual war going on all the time between good and evil, and the dark side is prevailing more and more."

Fr Collins added that there is a moral breakdown and a "tide of sin sweeping the world because... people have re-written the 10 Commandments just to suit themselves".

## Perpetually helping the faithful...



The 41st 'Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help' started on February 17 and will take place until February 25. Bro. Richard Hendrick was the first speaker, and each day a different guest will give a talk. Confessions and candlelit holy hour are available each day except Saturday and Sunday.

## Tributes paid following beloved priest's death in Donegal

### Staff reporter

A retired priest of the Raphoe Diocese died aged 87 on February 15 and left many mourning throughout the diocese. Dean Austin Laverty PE, retired parish priest of Ardara dedicated over 60 years of

work across a variety of roles in the diocese.

The Parish of Iniskeel said in a statement that "even in his retirement he enthusiastically continued to assist with parish duties, attending deanery and diocesan gatherings and helping to lighten the workload for Fr Aodhán in the parish."

St Connell's Museum said he "will be remembered for his quick wit, his sharp as a tack mind, his capacity to be truthful and honourable in all things he did and said, but more importantly his faithfulness, humility and lasting energy for the Church and the people he served."

The Diocese of Raphoe said "Dean Austin's life was one of faithful service, dedication, and love for the Church. His many decades of priestly ministry touched countless lives, and even in retirement, his generosity and commitment to his vocation never wavered. His presence, wis-

dom, and kindness will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him."

The Requiem Mass took place on Tuesday, February 18 in the Church of the Holy Family, Ardara, followed by interment in the adjoining cemetery.

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# Housing should not delay tying the knot, say married couples

Chai Brady

Married couples have responded to new statistics from Accord showing almost half of couples delay marriage due to the housing crisis, giving a plethora of advice including “you can live in a tent and still be married”.

Hundreds of people who were married in Newman University Church in Dublin gathered in the church over the weekend for the third year in a row to celebrate marriage.

New research conducted by Accord, the marriage preparation and couples counselling service, found that 48% of couples planning to get married would have married before now if it wasn't for Ireland's housing crisis.

Asked about the statistics Thomas Flynn who attended the Newman University Church event with his wife of 14 years Claire and their three children, said: “The whole point of getting married is that you are being a witness in front of God whether you have a house or not. You could live anywhere and be married, you could live in a tent, you're still together.

“People feel they want to have everything ready before they actually make that decision, for us personally, that's a peculiar way of doing it. Why should you? You want to make a life together, it's an easy decision whether you have things or not, it's not about material wealth,” he said.

Kevin and Una Sammon from Kimmage in Dublin



Newly married couple Rob Shaw and Megan O'Neill pictured in Newman University Church in Dublin. Photo: Patrick Grant.

were married in December. Una said that nowadays “it's really difficult for young couples who want to get married”.

“I think if the basic aspects of a marriage – being able to live together in a house – are not there, it would be difficult. But ultimately you have to live somewhere, so I just wouldn't put off the decision because you can't buy a house. You could rent somewhere together? But there's always a solution, my advice is: don't put it off. I know we're only beginning our journey but it's so exciting,” she said.

Rob Shaw and Megan O'Neill who were recently married in the church are still looking for a house, but did not let that stop them. Megan said: “I would say don't put it off, we're looking for a house, we didn't have a house. We will make that happen, but that security with each other, making that commitment in

front of your friends and family is the most amazing thing.”

For John and Adrienne Waring from Castleknock, who have been married for 50 years, Christ is key in any marriage. Mr Waring said: “There's three people in a marriage, not two, that's the secret to a long and happy marriage.”

The priest of University Church, Fr Gary Chamberland CSC told *The Irish Catholic* the church accommodates about 50 weddings each year. “I do believe, as I say to couples all the time, that the principle vocational choice made by most Catholics is marriage, yet we say so little about it. It is a great joy, a source of grace, maturation, and a deepening of love and it's hard, it's wonderful, and we just want to take one day a year to say ‘yes’ to their yes,” Fr Chamberland said.

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# Bishop Kevin Doran appointed Bishop of Achonry

Renata Milán Morales

Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Kevin Doran to serve as the Bishop of Achonry, uniting it with the Diocese of Elphin in *persona episcopi* - governed by one bishop. The announcement was made on Sunday, February 16, with Mass celebrated at 10am, followed by the formal announcement of Bishop Doran's appointment as the new Bishop of Achonry.

Bishop Doran, who has already been serving as the Apostolic Administrator of Achonry since April 2024, expressed that the new appointment would not change much about his current responsibilities. “I gladly accept my responsibility as Bishop of both dioceses, and I look forward to working with you all to grow together into the unity to which we are called.”

Bishop Doran has recently created an “Implementation Group” to find the next steps for bringing the dioceses together. This group

will explore ways to combine the strengths of each diocese, “to bring our two Dioceses together in a way which respects the unique culture of each but will also sow the seeds of renewal so that we can go into the future as one Diocese strong in faith and in mission,” explained Bishop Doran.

In a statement of support, Archbishop Francis Duffy, Archbishop of Tuam and Apostolic Administrator of Killala, “warmly” welcomed the announcement. He noted that the gradual reorganisation of dioceses in the west of Ireland was intended to meet evolving pastoral needs.

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and President of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, also offered his congratulations to Bishop Doran. Archbishop Martin prayed that Bishop Doran's continued work would enhance pastoral care and renewal, particularly during the Jubilee Year of Hope.



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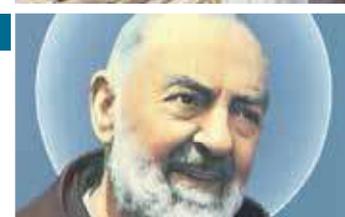


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# Only a quarter of recruits joining PSNI are Catholic

Renata Steffens

The number of recruits from a Catholic background joining the PSNI has dropped significantly in the past few years. In the latest recruitment campaign, only 27% of all new recruits are Catholic, confirmed chief constable Jon Boutcher.

Speaking to *BBC*, Mr Boutcher said “the figures are not what I want. There is no doubt about that. But Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

The proportion of Catholics-Protestants joining the PSNI was more even when a 50-50 recruitment policy was in place between 2001 and 2011.

“A number of impediments are there to make Catholics turn away from a job in policing. We still have the threat that’s posed by murderous dissident gangs and that’s a big issue for people in areas where these thugs operate,” Liam Kelly, chair of the Police Federa-

tion for Northern Ireland told *The Irish News*. “Societal changes are required. Potential applicants must get to the point where they can seek a career in policing without suffering intimidation or threats.”

Superintendent Gerry Murray, chair of the Catholic Police Guild of Northern Ireland has called for an inde-



Superintendent Gerry Murray

pendent review of the PSNI. He told *The Irish News*: “We need an independent review, like Baroness Casey, to look into, first of all, the culture – is the culture right within the organisation? To invite young Catholics into the organisation.”

He said it is “all our responsibility to try to influence the Catholic community to look at the police as an opportunity”.

It is believed that in the past, members of the RUC had links to loyalists, and the PSNI has been criticised for withholding information about sectarian murders carried out during the Troubles.

Mark H. Durkan, SDLP Policing Board member said that “Jon Boucher as Chief Constable has led with purpose, but when it comes to the perception of the police service the harm had been done and confidence reduced. The reasons for this go further and deeper, particularly when it comes

to legacy issues which have been deeply damaging.”

Mr Murray said he supports Mr Boutcher, as “he gets it, he gets it about Cath-

olics not coming forward”. He believes Mr Boutcher will do everything in his power to encourage Catholics entering the PSNI.

## Popular Catholic app faces EU ban

Pedro Esteva

Hallow, the world’s most popular Christian prayer app, may soon be unavailable to users across the European Union according to the CEO. The app, relied on by many Catholics for daily prayer and meditation, is facing potential restrictions under EU regulations – sparking backlash from religious freedom advocates.

Alex Jones, CEO and co-founder of Hallow, announced on X (formerly Twitter) that the EU would no longer allow citizens to access the app. Though details remain unclear, Mr Jones blamed “over-regulation” targeting religious apps. Some speculate that the EU’s strict data privacy laws may be a factor, particularly the Digital Services Act (2022), which limits platforms from handling sensitive data—such as religious beliefs—without explicit consent.

Mr Jones noted that Hallow had been working on expanding its Polish, French, Italian, and German efforts which would be halted if the app were banned. “Pray for a vibe shift in the EU,” he told followers.

Though Mr Jones has not made it clear whether he intends to pursue any legal means, that has not stopped the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International, a legal group working to advance fundamental human rights such as religious freedom or freedom of speech, from offering their support.

The news follows China’s recent decision to remove the app from its App Store outright raising concerns about global restrictions on faith-based digital platforms.

## Climbing friars on Croagh Patrick

Staff reporter

The Friars in Wexford climbed Croagh Patrick on February 19 to raise funds for roof repairs in the friary. The Father Guardian was joined by other friars and the community for the climb and said Mass on top of the mountain.

Speaking ahead of the event, Fr Robert Cojoc OFM, Father Guardian said the friary needs to raise €170,000 to fix the roof, which is allowing water down and is already damaging the ceiling. He said they have a good chance to get a 50% grant, but even then, the sum they need to raise is still high.

This is not the first event planned to raise the money.

“There are a few things going on. People try to help us in different ways,” the priest said. The community suggests ideas and the priest tries to implement them, “like a coffee morning, maybe a table quiz.”

However, the priest decided the community should not be the only ones doing something to raise the money. “The friars have to do something as well.”

Ignoring the people advising the priest that they should wait for the winter to be over to do it, three of them climbed, “just three and the diocesan priest, who’s visiting,” Fr Cojoc said. “People said it’s wet, but it’s wet in the Summer as well.”

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Kerry commissions 25 pastoral leaders

The Diocese of Kerry, after two years of pastoral placements and studies, has appointed 25 pastoral leaders. The ceremony took place during Mass celebrated by Bishop Ray Browne on Sunday February 9 in St Mary’s Cathedral, Killarney.

The pastoral leaders will take up responsibilities in their parishes, ministering alongside the clergy and other parish ministers. The training included personal and spiritual development, pastoral ministry, modules in Pastoral Theology and Leadership.

The formation was delivered through a blend of online modules and face-to-face gatherings which took place at a location in the Diocese of Kerry.

#### Elphin prepares faithful to catechise children with new programme

The Diocese of Elphin recently hosted an ‘Information and Training’ gathering aimed at committed Catholic adults who recognise the need for additional support in passing on the Catholic faith to younger generations.

During these sessions, a group of lay people received training in catechising children using the well-established ‘Come, Follow Me’ catechetical programme, used across Ireland, France and the UK. This initiative started within the Achonry and Elphin dioceses, where a small group of women and men, laity and clergy, encouraged by Bishop Kevin Doran, emerged around the question of how best to proceed.

#### Churches to host faith-building programmes

Catholics across the country are preparing to embark on a journey of hope, inspired by Pope Francis’ vision for the Jubilee year. Dioceses nationwide are offering a variety of courses to enrich the spiritual life, led by Charis Ireland’s Spirit Life 25 initiative which seeks to help people deepen their relationship with God. Starting in February, churches across the country will host faith-building programs such as Alpha Courses and Life in the Spirit Seminars. People of all ages are invited to take part, whether in person or online as virtual courses begin on February 19.

For more details visit the Charis Ireland website.

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# Better to charge the living than the dead

**D**uring my apprenticeship as a rookie journalist, many decades ago, I was taught some rudimentary rules about the law.

The first was an emphasis on the difference between 'the accused' and 'the convicted'. There was a sacrosanct rule in every liberal democracy that everyone has the right to be judged innocent until and unless they were found guilty in a court of law. However bad the situation looked, 'the accused', was still 'the accused', unless and until convicted.

## Uncomfortable

Thus, I am a little uncomfortable with the recent Jesuit report naming some 15 dead Jesuits as having been apparently guilty of child abuse. Though they never stood trial, the accusations against these men were described as "credible".

Certain priests, including the "weird fish", Fr Brendan Kearney, and Fr Joseph Marmion, were named as "probable" paedophiles. Fr John 'Jack' Leonard was a "suspected" abuser, as was Fr Rupert Coyle, a former headmaster at Belvedere College, and Fr Finbarr

**“I am still uneasy about the procedure of naming names of dead persons on grounds of having been ‘probable’ paedophiles”**

## A needed conversation

**T**here is little doubt that the world order changed last weekend, when JD Vance, the American Vice-President, addressed European leaders in Munich. He made a number of critiques of European societies, but the takeaway message was: "Europe – defend yourselves. No more depending on Uncle Sam." Defence commentators seem to be agreed that Europe – the EU, plus Britain and

Norway – will have to greatly increase their spending on the military.

This will have big implications for Ireland. The Irish electorate is consistently supportive of neutrality and consistently opposed to alignment with NATO, or the idea of a European army. But if Ireland doesn't join in the conversation, Ireland will be increasingly sidelined within the EU family. Michéal Martin seems to be aware of this.

It's a strange anomaly about Irish life

**I**n his homily on Sunday, I heard a priest advise the congregation to start each day with a morning prayer. "It need only be six words," he said.

"Such as 'Thank you Lord for another day'. More is better, but six words can be enough."

The "morning offering" used to be a standard part

ward to describe their experiences of abuse – either by bullying, beating or inappropriate sexual conduct – they are doing the right thing. They deserve a respectful hearing, and, indeed, compassion. They

may be also entitled to some compensation.

## Odious

Any crime against a child is odious and should always be open to prosecution. Presumably, the Jesuit authorities are striving to be open about this situation so that claims of "cover-up" may no longer be made. Fr Shane Daly, the order's Provincial, extended his sympathies to anyone who had suffered abuse and encouraged

everyone with such a complaint to make contact.

**“It would serve justice much better to encourage complainants to come forward while the accused is still alive, so that the law may be fully processed”**

Yet I am still uneasy about the procedure of naming names of dead persons on grounds of having been "probable" paedophiles. The families of these 15 dead priests must be devastated

to be so publicly shamed by association. The case of Fr Diarmuid Ó Péicín is particularly disappointing to his Donegal parishioners – he did a lot for the community as a priest, but all that is set at naught by the stain of having abused both boys and girls, according to the charge.

It is most regrettable that these cases were not pursued during the lifetimes of the accused. It would serve justice much better to encourage complainants to come forward while the accused is still alive, so that the law may be fully processed, with plaintiff, defence and evidence in court. And, if guilt is established, the full penalties of the law.



Mary Kenny





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of Catholic practice and I'm not sure how widely practiced it still is. But this brief utterance seems to me to be altogether thoughtful and reflective.

Indeed, even "Mindfulness" gurus say that the most important sentiment to express is "gratitude". And each day is a cause for gratitude.

# How the social media giants engaged in censorship



David Quinn

There is a fellow by the name of Marc Andreessen you have almost certainly never heard of. I hadn't until recently. He is one of those tech wizards who are present basically at the founding of the internet when he was only in his twenties. He helped to set up one of the first big internet browsers, namely Netscape. He also provided some of the seed capital for Facebook.

Today, he is worth about \$2 billion, and he is still only 53. Andreessen knows Silicon Valley from the inside out, that is, the California-

based epicentre of most of the world's most important technological developments, and he also knows American politics inside and out. This is a man who knows about the ideological battles for the heart and soul of Silicon Valley and how this battle helps to shape how the rest of us think, including you and me, even when we are not aware of it.

## Censoring

Anyway, I mention Andreessen because he recently gave a very important interview to Ross Douthat, a columnist with the New York Times. Douthat is another name it is worth your while remembering. The New York Times is one of the most important and influential papers in the world, and Douthat is the newspaper's 'token' Catholic writer. He happens to be an excellent commentator, a brilliant analyst of social, political and religious trends,

and a conservative, but a moderate one, in his basic outlook. He is also the author of several books, his latest being *Believe: Why Everyone Should Be Religious*.

“A so-called ‘content moderator’ decided this was ‘violent and graphic content’”

Douthat interviewed Andreessen last month, just before Trump began his second term as American president because Andreessen had switched from being a Democrat supporter to a Republican one and he explained his reasons why. The big one was the non-stop bullying of the tech companies by the Biden Administration.

But what I found interesting is that the interview confirmed what a lot of us have



long suspected, which is that the big social media companies like Facebook, and Twitter (before Elon Musk bought it) were basically censoring opinions liberal Americans did not like, and while he did not go into what was happening outside of America, the same thing has been happening on this side of the Atlantic as well.

I can confirm this from personal experience. As Daulta Roughneen explains at greater length elsewhere in this newspaper this week, both Facebook and Twitter banned The Iona Institute (which I run) from advertising on their platforms for no good reason.

Facebook did it because we were trying to run an ad on the first anniversary of the abortion referendum showing an 11-week-old baby in the womb with the caption ‘Still One of Us’. Incredibly, a so-called ‘content moderator’ decided this was ‘violent and graphic content’ and banned us totally from advertising without any right of appeal.

Fortunately, I managed to get a little media coverage about the Facebook decision and the ban was overturned. It is not like The Iona Institute will ever have a big social media advertising budget, but it would be nice to do some advertising.

## Biases

Around the same time Twitter banned us because we tried to advertise a video about the good Catholic organisations do all over the world. We were banned by another totally anonymous ‘content moderator’ (a censor, in fact), even though organisations like Atheist Ireland were still allowed to advertise on the platform. The bias of the content moderators should be

immediately apparent.

Only in the last couple of weeks have we managed to get this ban lifted, because Musk-era Twitter (‘X’) is less censorious than it was. And even if you think that ‘X’ has become too much of a free-for-all, the decision to ban The Iona Institute from advertising was never remotely justifiable.

“They wanted the world to be much more socialist”

In his interview with Douthat, Andreessen confirms that the tech companies have long had a very strong liberal bias, but this got much worse from around 2012 as a new wave of ultra-radicalised graduates from America's leading universities came to work in Silicon Valley determined to use the tech companies as a vehicle to change the world in their image. Something similar was happening on this side of the world.

These graduates entered university around 2008 when the financial crash happened, and left from 2012 on. The crash made them extremely anti-capitalist. They wanted the world to be much more socialist. This was the start of what has been called ‘The Great Awakening’, and it is the time when censorship of ‘unacceptable’ opinions went into overdrive.

As Andreessen says in the interview: “By 2013, the [average] newly arrived Harvard kid was like: “[expletive] it. We’re burning the system down. You are all evil. White people are evil. All men are evil. Capitalism is evil. Tech is evil.”

He recounts a senior exec-

utive in Silicon Valley saying to him: “I think some of these kids are joining the company not with the intent of doing things for us but destroying us.”

Basically, the Democrat-supporting people running Silicon Valley had suddenly employed a whole lot of young people who were much more radical, much more hard-line and far more militant than they were.

Things became worse when Covid broke out. Joe Biden came into office in 2021, less than a year after Covid upended our lives and the big tech companies found themselves being bullied from the inside by their own employees, and by the American Government. One major example of censorship was taking down posts speculating that the virus might have originated in a lab in Wuhan that was expressly experimenting on coronaviruses. That theory is actually extremely plausible.

The bullying became so bad, that after one meeting with White House officials, Andreessen and one of his business partners “stood in the parking lot of the West Wing [of the White House] and took one look at each other, and we’re like, ‘Yep, we’re for Trump.’”

For the Biden Administration to push people who are natural Democrat supporters into the arms of Donald Trump is absolutely extraordinary.

## Regime

This only happened because both the internal and external regime of censorship forcing itself on the social media giants had been so bad, so suffocating, so extreme. When it enveloped a tiny organisation like The Iona Institute for running perfectly reasoned ads, you can see how bad it got.

And it's not over. Who knows who is still doing ‘content moderation’ in the Facebook head-office in Dublin? What posts are still being made less visible than others?

But things have improved. The question is whether or not there will be an eventual return to the intense censorship of very recently. A lot depends on the answer to this. Will there be an even playing pitch for everyone who wants to take part in public debate rather than a continual bias in favour of the ‘liberal’ side, starting with the mainstream media and extending into social media?

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# Laudato Si' celebrates ten years



Renata Steffens

The Catholic Church will have a busy year, full of celebrations with the Jubilee of Hope mobilising Catholics worldwide. However, that is not the only important event the Church will be seeing in 2025.

The Laudato Si' encyclical and the Laudato Si' Movement celebrate ten years in 2025. *The Irish Catholic* talked to Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes, Laudato Si' Coordinator for the Irish Bishops, and Jane Mellett, Trócaire Church Manager about this important milestone.

Bishop Hayes is a member of the Laudato Si' Working Groups (LSWG), which consists of a number of academics, Trócaire personnel and volunteers. They are affiliated within two councils, the Council for Justice and Peace and the Council for Catechetics. Being a member of the group, the bishop's role is to

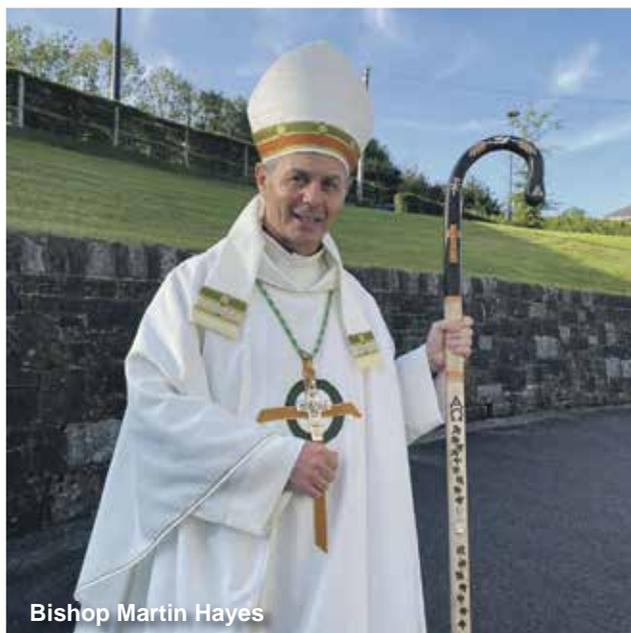
"link that group and the [Irish Bishops'] Conference."

Trócaire has been working in conjunction with the Irish Bishops Conference's LSWG for the past five years, Ms Mellett explained. "In Trócaire, we have the Laudato Si' officer who resources that group, and we're sort of driving the initiatives... We're running courses and workshops in parishes around the country," she said. She explained they engage with any parish that wants some support in how to become an eco-parish.

## Projects

The LSWG is involved in many different projects. "One of the key ones is organising Laudato Si' conferences throughout the country, the bishop explained. Another project involves "returning 30% of Church grounds to nature and we're working in conjunction with the Irish Heritage Council and its biodiversity officers."

The Irish Heritage Council is a state body with officers throughout the South of Ireland with the exception of two counties, Bishop Hayes said. At the moment, there is a pilot project "happening in



Bishop Martin Hayes

Killaloe Diocese and that has involved from ten up to fourteen parishes."

The conversation around eco-protection and eco-preservation seems to be increasing in the past few years. The bishop believes there is "a constant communication effort to get the message of Laudato Si' out there" and the Laudato Si' document itself "consists of the social teaching of the Church and

it takes an amount of study and involvement of experts in theology and ecology to disseminate fully what the meaning of it is."

The LSWG and the Laudato Si' Movement (LSM) have been working to make the language accessible to the community. Both the language used in the encyclical, in other documents issued by Rome and the scientific language in ecology discussions.

## Solutions

Ms Mellett believes people are aware of the problems now, and they want to hear about solutions. "In parishes where we have done a course or a retreat... there's a huge interest in small groups coming together to further on that."

The growth in awareness and interest has grown more in the past five years, the Church Manager explained. However, "you would love to see this expand across every parish around the country. That hasn't happened... It is in pockets."

According to the bishop, there are different parish groups studying different paragraphs of the encyclical. "In the latter chapters of Laudato Si', there's a focus upon integral ecology, the spirituality of Creation, the spirituality of caring for Creation. And I think there are a real need for people to embrace that we can be overwhelmed at times by the amount of science," the bishop said. "In my presentations I would highlight the amount of extinctions of the various species, the insects, birds, that is happening due to climate change. Sometimes people get a little overwhelmed with all those facts."

The bishop explained that it is important to place humanity in the centre of Creation. Sometimes, he said, "when we use a totally scientific viewpoint, an objective viewpoint, we're looking at Creation from a distance."



Jane Mellett

He believes people should see themselves as part of the planet, of Creation.

"We would like to get to a stage whereby people in parishes realise that faith commitment and commitment to parish involves not just care of souls and care of individual persons but involves care of Creation." This means, embracing a spirituality that includes a determination to undergo an ecological conversation.

**“We had six sessions of Laudato Si' courses running for the last five years, and around 900 people have participated in those around the country”**

One of the noticeable results of these ten years of ecological conversations in the Church, Ms Mellett explained, is the response to the 'Season of Creation'. "We had six sessions of Laudato Si' courses running for the last five years, and around 900 people have participated in those around the country," Ms Mellett said.

"That doesn't mean they're all active, but there's certainly a few 100 people who are very active on the ground at the grassroots. I think it definitely has started to become more prominent in some parishes."

To mark the 10 years of Laudato Si', there will be a number of events on an international level, Bishop Hayes explained. "What we would hope to do is to link with them. For example, there's an event in July at an international level and we would hope to connect with that."

Bishop Hayes explained that "everything that has been organised as part of the 10th anniversary has been

linked into the Jubilee Year of Hope, and that's coming from LSM as well, the Laudato Si' Movement... What we want to do, in particular during the year, is reach out to other parts of the Church. To make the implementation of Laudato Si' part and parcel of parish life."

## Advances

Even though some advances have been made, "globally we haven't made as much progress as we would like," the bishop said. "There are political realities that we have to consider and that we need always to be advocating. I don't say it's easy. But there's economic forces and there's ecological and very often much of life is based on economic realities. We would prefer that people would make their plans economically on the basis of the ecology, rather than using ecology to feed economics. There has to be a balance between the two."

However, parishioners do not need to wait for the parish priest, bishop or politicians to take actions. The community can work locally, in their own homes and neighbourhoods. The bishop said people can start by checking out "the Irish Bishops website on our 'Return to Nature' initiative," he said, "there are two resources, one explaining what the whole project is about and how to get going on this project." There are also resources for the 'Season of Creation', which happens annually, usually from September 1 to October 4.

Ms Mellett explained that "big changes need to come from our government... But we can all do something ourselves locally, and this is to do with our personal relationship with Creation. Start with the simple things, like sorting out the recycling bins, checking our energy use... It can be as simple as switching to energy saving bulbs... We say to people, 'do what you can, and the little bit that you can do is important.'"

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# Relentless Ministry

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## A Layman's response to Relentless Ministry

**Solution to relentless ministry is all around priests in their parishes- it's laypeople, writes Martin Harran**

**G**ary O'Sullivan and 'Fr John' have both written recently about the relentless pressure on priests and nobody can dispute that as a genuine issue which can only continue to get worse. What we can question is whether priests are doing enough to help themselves. It seems to me that there is a direct correlation between how much pressure a priest is under and how much that priest is prepared to let his parishioners take on responsibility for various areas. In his article, Gary included a typical list of activities requiring the priest's attention - "the daily dose of funerals, weddings, baptisms, sick calls, safeguarding training, GDPR forms, music rights checklists, heating bills, insurance requirements, cemeteries, schools, diocesan committees, special collections." It is difficult to see, however, why several of those activities require Holy Orders to carry them out; it is indeed quite likely that in some areas such as GDPR, insurance or music rights, that there is somebody in the parish much better qualified to carry them out than the priest. Unfortunately, activities like these often have to be carried out to a specific timetable and cannot be deferred; as the priest gets busier and busier with them, the most important part of the priest's duty, his pastoral care of his parishioners, is the part that becomes easiest to defer which in turn can increase the sense of detachment from the Church that is becoming ever more common.

### **Demands**

Going beyond these day-to-day activities, every parish needs to be looking at its long-term pastoral demands in these increasingly difficult circumstances and trying to develop a plan of action to fulfil them. Everyone who has looked at this has

concluded that the answer lies with Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC). Although PPCs are one of the main recommendations in the final report of the Synodal Pathway, there is nothing new about them; PPCs have their roots in Vatican II and were explicitly recommended in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Pope John Paul II referred to them in his *2000 Apostolic Letter for the New Millennium* and their importance for the future of the Church has been further echoed by Pope Benedict and Pope Francis.

**“I know of at least one diocese where the figure is less than 50% and there is no reason to think that is untypical”**

In 2007, in response to the very patchy implementation of PPCs over the previous 20 odd years, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference issued their 'Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development' in which they noted:

"While the Code of Canon Law stops short of mandat-

**“Very little seems to have changed in practice with lots of people talking about PPCs but a lot less people implementing them”**



Pope Francis meets with Parish Priests from around the world to talk about synodality

ing parish pastoral councils in every parish it certainly encourages their establishment, seeing this as an inescapable consequence of the vision of Church heralded by the Second Vatican Council."

Seventeen years on from that document, very little seems to have changed in practice with lots of people talking about PPCs but a lot less people implementing them. There are no figures immediately available for what proportion of parishes actually have established a PPC (perhaps the absence of figures tells its own story) but I know of at least one diocese where the figure is less than 50% and there is no reason to think that is untypical across the country.

### **Change**

The lack of implementation is due to one thing and one thing only - individual priests declining if not outright refusing to implement a PPC in their parish, insisting that they retain responsibility for all areas of parish activity. Reasons for this are not always clearly stated but one wonders how an individual priest can come to the conclusion that he is a better judge of what needs to be done to deal with the problems facing the

Church than three consecutive popes and the Irish Catholic Bishops speaking collectively.

**“Perhaps the bishop's first response should be to ask that priest what help he has sought”**

Regarding the recent Synodal Pathway, my own impression was that parishes that had an existing effective Pastoral Council were the ones who became most engaged with the process and that parishes with no such Council were the ones least likely to participate with any degree of enthusiasm and, in far too many cases, did not engage at all. In effect, the Synodal Pathway likely did more to help and encourage those who

are already doing well and did little for those who most need help.

Even among its most enthusiastic supporters, there seems to be a widespread feeling of disappointment that the Synodal Pathway failed to achieve any real change. Whilst the media, however, like to focus on what they see as the 'big ticket' issues like female ordination and treatment of divorced people and the LGBT community, the people I talk to are frustrated not about those major items but more with how little change there has been that can help them at a local level with the specific issues facing their parish. The big danger in all of this is that whilst listening is a vital part of bringing about real change, if nothing changes as a result of the listening then it may seem as little more than lip-service and lead to people becoming

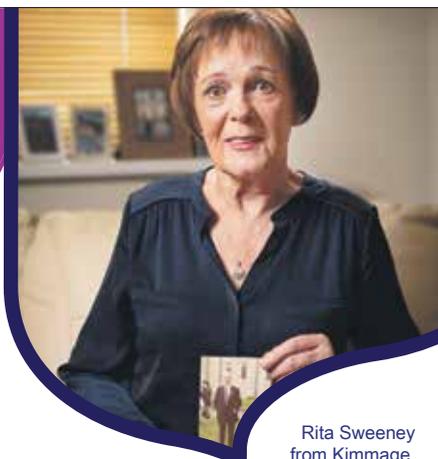
even more dispirited.

Pope Francis has signed off on the final Synod document, making it a teaching of the Magisterium. The Synod's conclusions on the value of PPCs suggest that these might become mandatory in Canon Law rather than optional as they are at present. It remains to be seen whether that happens in practice and what the effect might be. In the meantime, when a priest comes to his bishop looking for additional help or even just to moan about his ever-increasing workload, perhaps the bishop's first response should be to ask that priest what help he has sought from his parishioners.

**i** Martin Harran has been involved in a range of parish activities over many years including past membership of a PPC.

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# Modern day censorship: an unnecessary evil or an uncomfortable truth



Dualta Roughneen

It took them long enough! Finally, the Iona Institute, whose CEO is David Quinn, a columnist with *The Irish Catholic*, has had their ban on X (formerly Twitter) for those of you as social media disinclined as I am) lifted. Crazy, the ban on advertising on Twitter was imposed in 2019, so the charity (yes, it is a Charity) has been a victim of cancel culture for almost six years.

What as their crime? According to the organisation, the ban was imposed when they tried to advertise a video about 'The Good the Church Does'. They were totally banned from all advertising.

Charities, all kinds of charities, need to advertise to generate revenue to make their contribution to society. They also use advertising to promote positions in the public sphere and contribute to a robust civic discourse that is vital for a healthy democratic society. Social media is a growing, and important, medium for both fundraising and advocacy. Almost all charities see this route as of increasing importance. With a substantial increase in the cost of letters using An Post announced in the past weeks, the price has increased by 40% increase since 2020. The price of a standard stamp has tripled in the past two decades.

## Liberty

This makes online communication even more important for communicating with supporters and donors. Which is why online censorship can be so insidious. Arguments made are that misinformation and disinformation needs to be controlled. Before we get to that argument, the question

**“Those that lament the demise of Twitter and the rise of X would be quick to point out the apparent authoritarian streak in the Church while not seeing the plank in their own”**



remains as to why a video talking about 'the good the Church does' would be considered verboten. I have seen the video and it is nothing more than factual.

**“That changed since X was bought by Elon Musk and all such restrictions have been removed”**

But maybe they are uncomfortable facts at a time when the Church is deemed fair game, and for the culture that felt – in 2019 – that it was in the ascendency. It felt confident and brazen enough that basic civil liberties such as free speech could be ridden roughshod over. That changed since X was bought by Elon Musk and all such restrictions have been removed. It has changed since Donald Trump was elected and the likes of Mark Zuckerberg and Meta realised which way the wind was blowing. Moderators who had the power to were

**“Moderators who had the power to were almost impossible to question and unchallengeable Orwellian responses issued to anyone who queried the reasons for being censored ‘It goes against policy’ was essentially the byline”**

almost impossible to question and unchallengeable Orwellian responses issued to anyone who queried the reasons for being censored 'It goes against policy' was essentially the byline.

Commenting on the lifting of the ban, the Iona Institute noted "The lifting of the ban by 'X' gives us a more even playing pitch to play on now, but the original ban (which pre-dates Elon Musk's takeover of the platform) shows how ideologically biased some of those making day-to-day decisions for these companies were (and in some cases probably still are)."

## Regime

Yet, the lifting of such censorship has not been welcomed by many. There has been a quick – but probably unsustainable departure of a not unreasonable number, from X to rivals such BlueSky, often announced, ironically on X (for greatest impact), with many returning shortly after in order to benefit from the platform that X provides.

Not being an active user of Twitter or other platforms, I have struggled to understand what the angst is about since Elon Musk

took over. There seems to be anger that the playing field has been levelled, and that certain voices with certain perspectives are no longer given favoured status. I have not seen anyone provide evidence that reverse censorship is now taking place – or that what might be considered 'right' views are being favoured over the 'left'. If this is the case, then it is equally as bad as what occurred under the previous regime.

**“Free speech, liberty, is only real if it allows for the perspectives of those you disagree with to be heard”**

The problem with this though, even if it is happening, those that are complaining most, were not displeased with the previous approach. I am not sure that I heard many liberal voices arguing for the Iona Institute to have its ban rescinded or defending free speech for perspectives they

disagreed with.

This is the challenge. Free speech, liberty, is only real if it allows for the perspectives of those you disagree with to be heard. Free speech is not supposed to be contingent on the views espoused, yet the argument for controlling dis/misinformation is that this is dangerous and that an omnipotent authority is required to make determination on what is truth. The corollary to that is that (perceived) untruths must be suppressed rather than exposed to the light of day.

## Authority

The first position assumes that determining what is truth and what is misinformation is possible and that 'Fact-checkers' and 'Moderators' are the people to do this. This is more authoritarian than the Index of Forbidden Books or Cardinal Ratzinger's 'censorship' of dissident priests or theologians. Those that lament the demise of Twitter and the rise of X would be quick to point out the apparent authoritarian streak in the Church while not seeing the plank in their own.

For the Church, at least the Index was signed off by the Pope and he took

responsibility for its contents. Cardinal Ratzinger, as prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, did not stop theologians speaking, only from claiming to speak as Church representatives, taking positions contrary to the Church.

**“The law is moving in the direction of requiring social media companies to impose such censorship”**

With modern day censorship, it is faceless mandarins, or more likely, bots and algorithms, that make the determinations. There is little recourse, and ironically, the law is moving in the direction of requiring social media companies to impose such censorship rather than restricting censorship as it should do in a free society.

Do you remember the Primetime exposé on the silencing of religious voices on social media? Do you remember the uproar when the Iona Institute was a victim of cancel culture? Do you remember the Irish Council for Civil Liberties or the Irish Human Rights and Equalities Commission arguing about the censorship of religious charities on Twitter?

You don't because it didn't happen.

# Scripture warns us not to place our trust in princes



Maria Steen

Every so often in world politics, someone comes along who is a game changer and it is very exciting to be alive to witness it – particularly when that someone (within the space of a week) manages to quote St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and Pope St John Paul II. I write of course about the Vice-President of the United States of America, JD Vance.

Readers of this paper may be interested to find out that Mr Vance, whose wife is Hindu, converted to Catholicism in 2019, taking Augustine as his confirmation name after St Augustine of Hippo. He grew up in a poor, disadvantaged and, frankly, dysfunctional household. His mother had a serious drug addiction. She had a series of relationships with men who would come and go out of the young JD's life. His most profound influence in his early years was "Mamaw", his grandmother, with whom he lived following a particularly harrowing incident with his mother. The young boy was obviously intelligent and with Mamaw's help and encouragement, completed his education, joined the Marine Corps, served in Iraq, returned home and went to college, and eventually made it to Yale Law School where he met his now wife, Usha. His biography, *Hillbilly Elegy*, was published in 2016, topping the *New York Times* best seller list and later was made into a film starring Amy Adams and Glenn Close.

## Principles

Which makes it all the more interesting that Mr Vance, coming from those lowly beginnings, last week chided the leaders of Europe for their abandonment of the principles that were once the hallmark of western civilisation – notably a commitment to freedom of speech. On St Valentine's Day, he gave a speech at the Munich Security Conference that has, as they say, 'gone viral'. The response to that speech has been little short of apoplectic. The great and the good of the old world have responded with sputtering outrage to being told off by this Appalachian upstart.

Mr Vance seems to possess considerable personal courage,



French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron pose with US Vice President JD Vance and his wife Usha Vance as they arrive for a meeting at the Elysee Palace as part of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Action Summit in Paris, February 11, 2025. Mr Vance was on his first foreign trip as vice president. Photo: OSV News/Abdul Saboor, Reuters

To stand before a completely hostile audience and tell them what you know they do not want to hear is no easy task. Conference attendees – who included heads of state, ministers, and high-ranking military personnel as well as business and industry leaders and media gurus – sat stony-faced as they listened to the Vice-President remind them that, in Washington, there was "a new sheriff in town". An early ripple of polite applause was replaced, as his speech progressed, by silent disapproval and even murmurs of discontent. Despite the fact that the Munich Conference's motto is "Peace through Dialogue", it became quite clear that most of those present would have preferred that Mr Vance not be given a platform to speak at all. I don't doubt that it would be uncomfortable to be subjected to a 20-minute indictment of one's role in the decline of our continent.

**“Vance's essential critique centred on something that Catholics and pro-life supporters will be all too familiar with in this country: a restriction on freedom of speech”**

What must have made it worse for those present is that Mr Vance's arguments are so well-made and persuasive.

The 40-year-old Vice-President didn't pull his punches. He spoke of the conflict over values that is present throughout Europe – principally between the elites and the people – and warned that the greatest threat to democracy is not from outside, but rather from within. He addressed mass migration in some detail, just a day after a terror incident in Munich in which an Afghan immigrant ploughed a car into a crowd,

down social media in times of civil unrest for "hateful content", and Scottish Government warnings to citizens whose homes lay within a "safe access zone" for abortion that even private domestic prayer might amount to breaking the law.

## Outraged

One can understand why those in the room in Munich were so shocked and outraged. These are not the sort of things that respectable politicians – still less senior office holders – are supposed to bring up. When was the last time any senior representative of a major political party in Ireland said anything critical of so-called abortion rights, or of infractions on the right to pray publicly? Where were our political leaders when social media giants engaged in election interference in 2018, by banning pro life organisations from taking out advertisements on their platforms? Where were our elected representatives when Buffer Zone Laws were passed here? The answer is that they were at the table drafting and passing the laws and at least tacitly encouraging the social media companies to silence their opponents. And of course that is before we talk about the government's drafting of and attempts to introduce 'hate speech' legislation that would disproportionately target religious people, whose views do not align with the those of the Irish governing class.

Across Europe, the crack-

downs and the restrictions on speech and religious liberty have been justified by appeals to kindness and tolerance, and the need to protect a vulnerable populace from being led into error. Mr Vance was having none of it. He charged those who once helped to win the Cold War with becoming what they once said they hated: "old, entrenched interests hiding behind ugly Soviet era words like misinformation and disinformation, who simply don't like the idea that somebody with an alternative viewpoint might express a different opinion or, God forbid, vote a different way, or even worse, win an election."

A glance at the reactions to his speech from the traditional media reveals accusations of "populism" and fears of the growth of a "populist right". For his part, Mr Vance talks about democracy and listening to – and taking seriously – the will of the

people. So what is the difference between a populist and a democrat? It seems to me that the difference is in the perception of others. If you say the sort of things they approve of in Munich, you are democrat. If they disapprove of you, you are a populist demagogue. And when someone like that wins an election, democracy is under threat.

## Trust

Scripture warns us not to place our trust in princes. Mr Vance and his boss have been in office only a few weeks. We can wish them well while reserving judgment on their administration. But what we have to admire is a young man who is willing to risk the ire of his audience in order to speak the unvarnished truth to powerful interests. That he can do so informed by some of the greatest thinkers the Faith has ever produced justifies us in having high hopes for him and his future.



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# Irish congregations discuss eco investments

Staff reporter

**F**ifteen Irish congregations came together to discuss Laudato Si' in action and to start a conversation on how climate justice impact can be reduced through Irish congregation's investments, on Saturday, February 15, at the Mercy International Centre in Dublin.

The speakers – who represented both congregations and professional finance services perspectives – included Sr Juliet Walsh from Sisters of Mercy Western Province, Sarah Smith from Mercy Investment Services (USA), John O'Shaughnessy from the Franciscan Sisters of Mary in St Louis, US, Ambassador John Simon from Total Impact Capital (USA), Fr Séamus O'Neill from St Patrick's Missionary Society, Prof. Gerry Boyle, former Head of Teagasc, Ian Halstead of I&P (Cantor Fitzgerald), John Weakliam of Vita Impact and Fr Brendan Carr of The Spiritans.

The attendees were welcomed by Sr Patricia O'Donovan from Mercy International and Sr Margaret Tiernan, Sisters of Mercy Western Province who



John O' Shaughnessy, treasurer and chief investment officer for the Franciscan Sisters of Mary who spoke at the conference, Maggie Bukowa of Vita Impact, Hsuan Lo, of Total Impact Capital, and Sr Patricia O' Donovan (Mercy International) chatting during a tea break on Saturday. Photos: John McElroy.

lit the Eco Congregation climate justice candle.

Some questions emerged over the course of the morning including, 'how does impact investing work?' and 'where are the opportunities for Irish congregations to engage?'

Fr Séamus O'Neill took the attendees through the St Patrick's experience, from discussing and identifying impact investing as a means

for them to action Laudato Si' to identifying appropriate investment vehicles that aligned with the St Patrick's mission, while Ambassador John Simon spoke of how Total Impact Capital had a wide portfolio of different investment opportunities – including access to clean water, stoves and solar in the global south.

He described this kind of capital – impact investment

– as the fuel of the development machine. Fr Brendan Carr stated that, in this jubilee year, Laudato Si' must work in harmony with Fratelli Tutti.

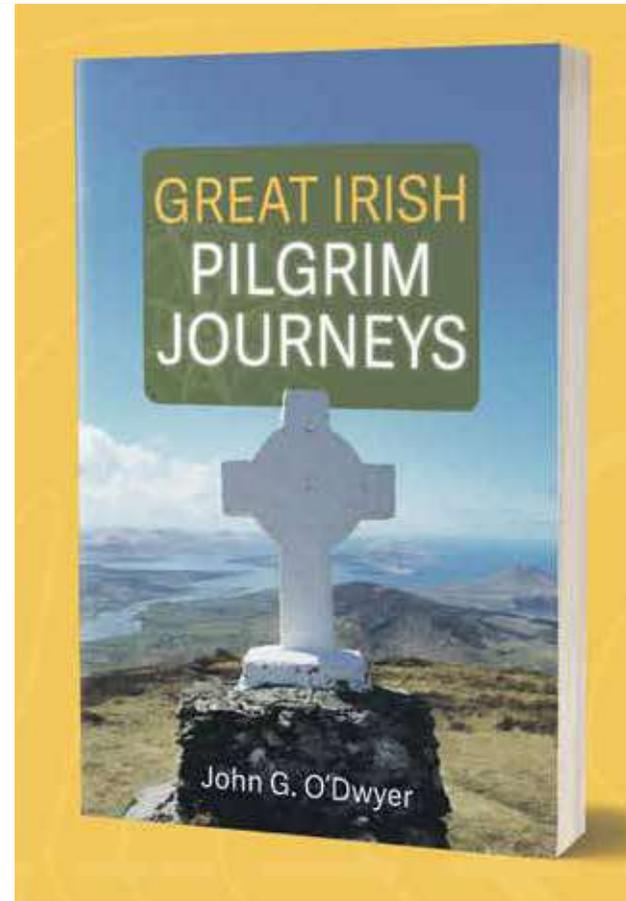
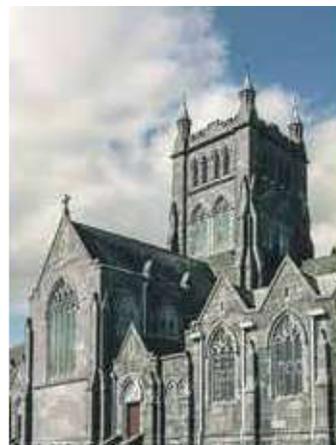
Describing how US congregations came together to form CIIC (Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative) to find an appropriate approach to impact investing, Mr O'Shaughnessy said that it was crucial to ensure that the responsibility of due diligence was shared amongst members so that those without the in-house professional expertise could 'lean on' those who had the professional capacity to make these decisions. Sarah Smith spoke about how her organisation, Mercy Investment Services, had the expertise needed to analyse prospects and share the results with smaller congregations.

Sarah Smith, a founder of CIIC, spoke about how Mercy International Services has embraced and elevated impact investing in the US.

In closing, Mr O'Shaughnessy advised any congregations contemplating moving into this type of high-impact investment to find just one good opportunity, decide whether it is mission-aligned, and start there.



Sr Margaret Tiernan and Sr Patricia O'Donovan lighting a climate justice candle before the event on Saturday.



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# No justice without a fight in a fallen world



Martina Purdy

In the book of Genesis, we hear God tell Cain: "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground." And these words echo, in my own heart, each time the media revisits the assassination of John F Kennedy, whose Irish roots run deep into the soil of County Wexford.

He was the first Catholic to be elected President of the United States and Kennedy has been back in the news, following renewed efforts in Washington to uncover classified documents about his murder.

Officially, Kennedy was killed by a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, who was himself shot by an assassin Jack Ruby. Despite exhaustive investigation into the events of November 22, 1963, the conspiracy theories go on and on.

Most of the classified documents surrounding President Kennedy's death have been released, albeit with some redactions. The 'powers-that-be' had intended that the remaining ones should remain classified until 2039. But President Donald Trump, himself no stranger to conspiracy theories and indeed attempted assassination, has demanded their release.

## Declassify

A few weeks ago, he signed an Executive Order giving the FBI and CIA fifteen days to come up with a plan to declassify all documents relating to Kennedy's assassination. He also included in this order, the 1968 murders of Senator Robert Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

It has been reported that a plan has since been delivered to The White House by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Experts suggest that 'no smoking gun' will emerge. But these fresh moves piqued my interest in the events of February, 1969, when a New Orleans businessman with links to the CIA, Clay Shaw, was put on trial, accused of involvement in a conspiracy to murder President Kennedy. Clay is the only person ever to stand trial in relation to the 1963 assassination.



Former US President John F. Kennedy

It took the jury just 54 minutes to acquit him.

Some say Shaw was a victim of an overzealous prosecutor, Jim Garrison; others view the latter as a hero in pursuit of truth. The jury is still out on that one, though many were influenced by the sympathetic portrayal of Garrison by Kevin Costner in Oliver Stone's 1991 film, *JFK*.

**Justice presents a threat to power, and in order to make justice come into being, you often have to fight power"**

The film re-enacts the trial, which opened on February 6, with Garrison delivering his closing argument on February 28, 1969. His summation to the jury is worth revisiting, as it tackles very contemporary issues: the abuse of power, institutionalised deceit and the notion that justice is not automatic in this fallen world. Justice, Garrison declared, must be fought for. "Men have to make it occur," said Garrison. "Individual human beings have to make it occur, otherwise it doesn't come into existence, and this is not always easy. As a matter of fact, it is always hard, because justice presents a threat to power, and in order to make justice come into being, you often have to fight power."

Garrison's summation was focused on the abuse of power which of course can occur, not just in government, but in other

institutions, even in the Church or in courtrooms.

Garrison railed against powerful forces which can take an authoritarian approach to justice: "They will tell you what justice is."

And, in a world of sometimes 'fake news' and indeed 'fake impartiality', Garrison also highlighted those dark forces which can "manipulate the media by the release of false information".

## Secrecy

Garrison was concerned with another very modern problem, that of state secrecy. "We have had enough of power without truth," he said.

Garrison vowed to fight for the truth and pointed to the worst of all crimes: "...when our government murders truth".

"If it can murder truth," said Garrison, "it can murder freedom."

Amen to that! Truth is not a trivial matter. Just look at the widely reported case of Sandie Peggie, the Scottish NHS nurse who was suspended from duty, after she objected to sharing a changing room with a male doctor, who claims to be female.

Truth, freedom and justice are biblical principles, and Martin Luther King Junior gave his life for those foundations. His speeches were in fact littered with references to scripture, and he was clearly inspired by the prophet Amos, who was tasked with telling a corrupt kingdom to repent. In Amos, King found the words: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream..."

# A landmark day for Christian freedoms

The Free Speech Union is celebrating victory in the case of a Christian mother, who was sacked after posting her concerns about 'LGBT+ relationship teaching' in her son's primary school (It was a Church of England school). Kristie Higgs lost her job in 2019 as a school administrator because she complained to 100 friends on social media about "brainwashing our children" with the notion of "gender fluidity". Using her maiden name (perhaps as a kind of protection), she also referred to the suppression of Christianity, and objected to the equating of same-sex marriage with marriage between a man and a woman.

Farmor's School, Gloucestershire, sacked her for gross misconduct in 2019, and claimed she had brought the school into disrepute. Although she won on appeal in 2023, it didn't end there. The

Appeal Court sent her case back to another tribunal for a fresh ruling on whether her sacking was "lawful". And last week, three judges ruled in her favour. Speaking afterwards, Higgs declared: "I pray that today will prove to be a landmark day for Christian freedoms and free speech. Christians have the right to express their beliefs on social media and at other non-work-related settings without fear of being punished by their employer."

Those who opposed Higgs claimed she was guilty of homophobia and transphobia, when in fact she was simply exercising freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The French philosopher Voltaire is credited with the principle, best summed up by the English author Evelyn Beatrice Hall: "I detest what you write but I would give my life to make it possible for you to continue to write."

'Polycarp' is not a name you hear much these days, though I'm reminded of him every time I walk to my local shops and pass the Belfast Church that bears his name. This place of worship is actually Church of Ireland. Polycarp is an

early Christian saint who predates the schism, having suffered martyrdom in 151AD. He was a disciple of the apostles and the Bishop of Smyrna (which is now in modern Turkey). I have an affinity to Polycarp because my parents were married on his feast day, February 23, 1963. A letter concern-

ing his martyrdom reveals a man of great courage. Some witnessing his execution by fire reported seeing a vision after his body was set alight. Part of this vision was that Polycarp's body appeared like 'bread being baked'. His last words were in praise of the God of truth 'in whom there is no deceit'.

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# Louth shrine of St Oliver Plunkett marked as a jubilee pilgrim site

Chai Brady

“Devoted” St Oliver Plunkett played a vital role in Drogheda, dedicating himself to education and “the sanctification of his clergy and faithful”, the Primate of All Ireland has said, designating St Peter’s church a place of pilgrimage for the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope.

Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh launched #Oliver400 last week marking the 400th anniversary of St Oliver’s birth and the 50th anniversary of his canonisation in St Peter’s Church in Drogheda, which

houses his shrine and the relic of his head.

The event was attended by Mayor of Drogheda Pio Smith and local TD Fergus O’Dowd, along with students from St Oliver’s Community College and St Oliver’s National School.

A commemorative book has been published and there will be school resources, a history seminar in May, concerts, cultural events, and special Masses throughout the year in Armagh, Louth, and Meath.

Archbishop Martin praised Drogheda for preserving St Oliver’s memory, saying: “Nowhere has kept the memory of St Oliver alive like this



Children from St Oliver’s National School at St Peter’s Church Drogheda.

historic town of Drogheda.”

He acknowledged the Dominican Sisters of the Siena Convent, who safeguarded the relic of St Oliver’s head for centuries, doing so “often in secret, sometimes in peril of their own safety – but always surrounding

this sacred relic with reverence and contemplation”.

Archbishop Martin recalled the saint’s final words at Tyburn in 1681: “I do heartily forgive them (my accusers), and also the judges, ...and I also forgive all those who had a hand in

bringing me from Ireland to be tried here, where it is morally impossible for me to have a fair trial. I do finally forgive all who did concur directly or indirectly to take away my life; and I ask forgiveness of all those whom I ever offended by thought, word or deed.”

Archbishop Martin designated St Peter’s Church a ‘jubilee church’ for the Holy Year 2025, alongside St Patrick’s Cathedral in Armagh.

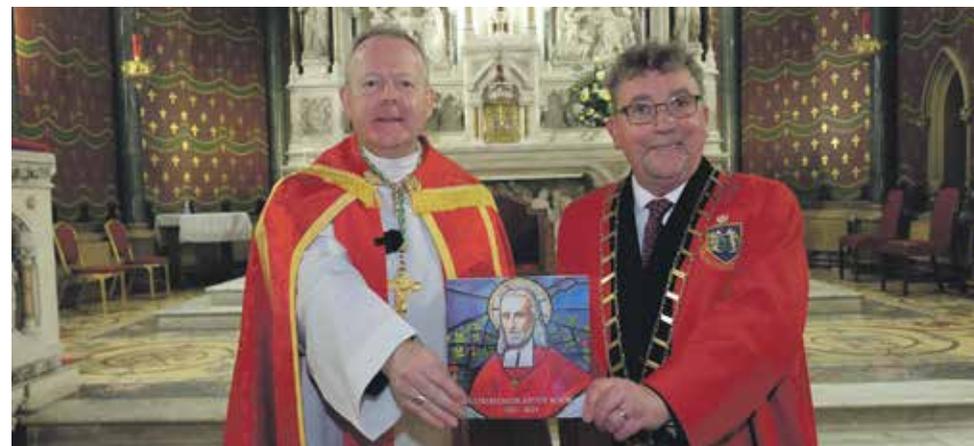
Fr Eugene Sweeney PP of St Peter’s Church said: “Oliver Plunkett lived at a remarkably difficult and chaotic time. His resilience, courage and constant efforts for peace and

justice are truly inspiring, and therefore it is appropriate to honour his memory not just in Ireland but further afield.

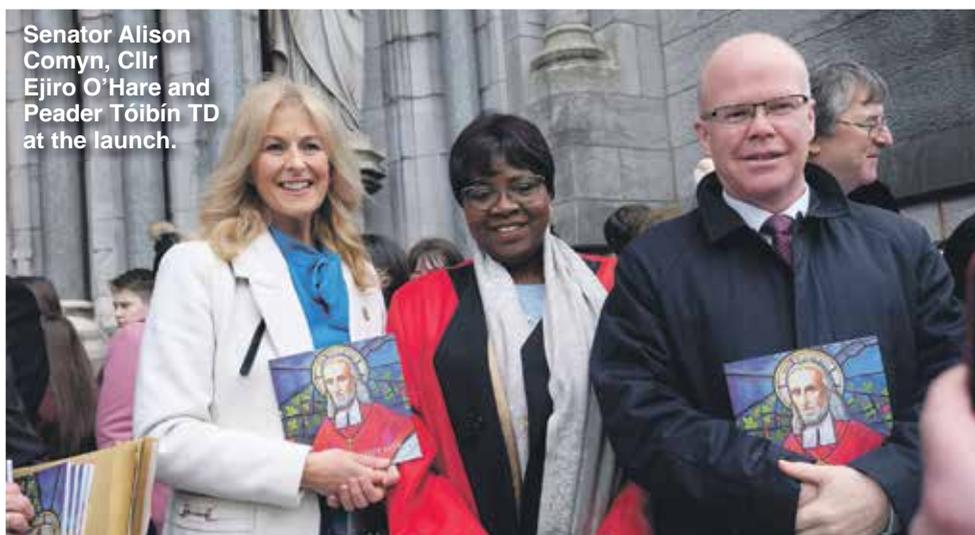
“We warmly welcome all to the National Shrine of St Oliver at St Peter’s Church, Drogheda, in this special year to honour the martyred archbishop. We urge pilgrims to pray for peace throughout the world through his intercession, to share with the Lord in the saint’s presence all their hopes and joys, and leave to him their stresses and sufferings, trials and tribulations... St Oliver Plunkett did not succumb to despair, and neither should we 400 years later.”



St Oliver’s Community School students, pictured in St Peter’s Church in Drogheda, Co. Louth, attend the celebration of the ‘Saint Oliver Plunkett 400’ commemorative booklet.



Archbishop Eamon Martin, Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, and Mayor of Drogheda Paddy McQuillan mark the ‘Saint Oliver Plunkett 400’ commemorative booklet launch which celebrates martyred St Oliver Plunkett.



Senator Alison Comyn, Cllr Ejiro O’Hare and Peader Tóibín TD at the launch.



Archbishop Eamon Martin with students from St Oliver’s Community School.



Fr Eugene Sweeney at the launch of the ‘Saint Oliver Plunkett 400’ commemorative booklet in Drogheda. Photos: Liam McArdle

# St Valentine's blessings in Belfast

## Renata Steffens

Marking St Valentine's Day on February 14, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Armagh Michael Routers blessed engaged and married couples during a 'photocall of engaged couples' arranged by the Catholic marriage care service, Accord NI at St Mary's Grotto, Belfast.

Speaking ahead of the gathering, Deirdre O'Rawe, Regional Director of Accord NI said: "It is encouraging to note that over the last two years Accord NI has helped prepare just under 3,500 couples who have chosen sacramental marriage.

"In addition, this year Accord NI has twenty counsellors and marriage educa-

tion facilitators in training. Clearly sacramental marriage continues to be deeply valued, and this is good news for couples, families and for society in general."

Amongst the attendees was Accord Facilitator Ed Doherty, and his wife Catherine, who recently received an Apostolic Blessing from Pope Francis on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary.

Mr Doherty said, "It has been an amazing privilege to work with the Accord Marriage Preparation team and with couples preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage. It has benefited our own married life as we reflect with gratitude, on so many precious years together".



Bishop Michael Router with engaged couple Aideen Hagan and Jake Magill.



Bishop Michael Router with Catherine and Ed Doherty.



Bishop Michael Router blessed engaged and married couples. (L/R) Jake Magill and Aideen Hagan, Bishop Michael Router, Mario Burns and Clara Hamilton Orr with Jake, and Ed and Catherine Doherty. Photos: LiamMcArdle.com



Bishop Michael Router with engaged couple Mario Burns and Clara Hamilton Orr and Jake.



Engaged and Married Couples Blessing took place on February 14 in St Mary's Church, Belfast.

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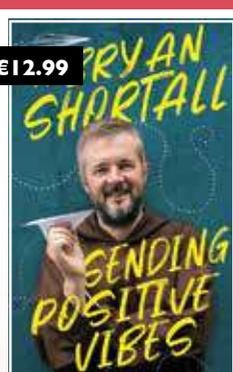


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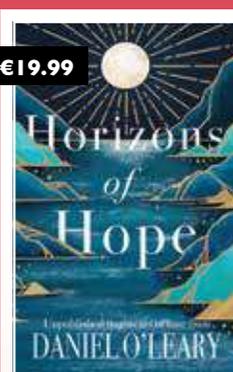


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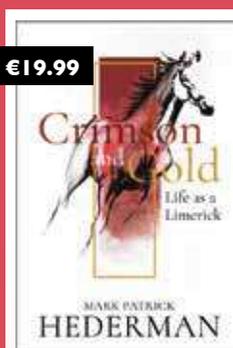


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Mark Patrick Hederman

A Benedictine Monk of Glenstal Abbey, Fr Hederman continues to explore how we as Irish Roman Catholics can hone in on the most precious aspects of our faith and cancel the surrounding noise.

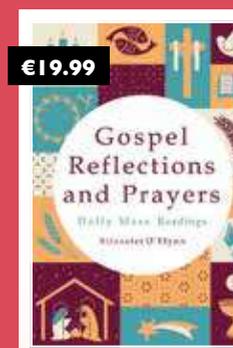


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# Marriage celebrated in acclaimed Dublin parish



Chai Brady

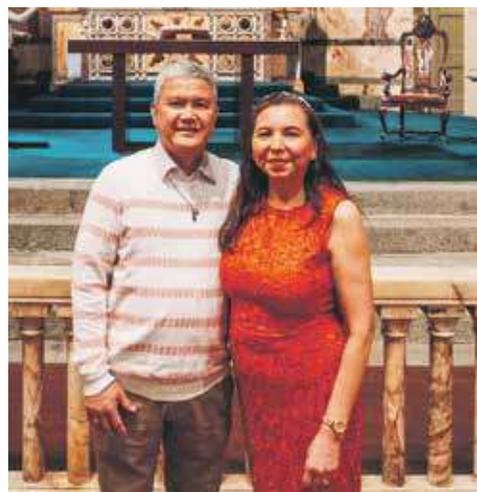
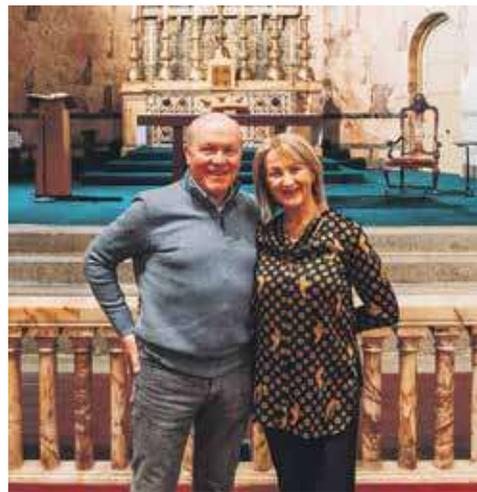
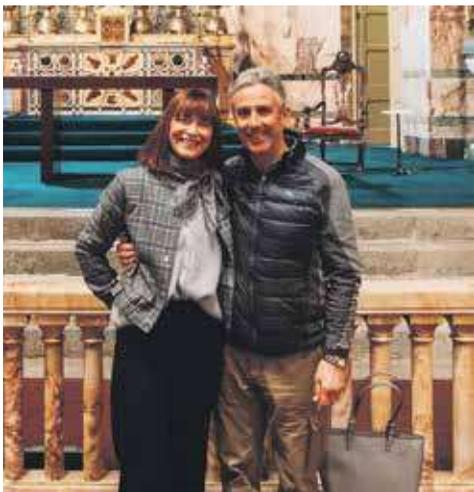
For the third year in a row, famed Newman University Church in Dublin celebrated couples that have been married there on February 16.

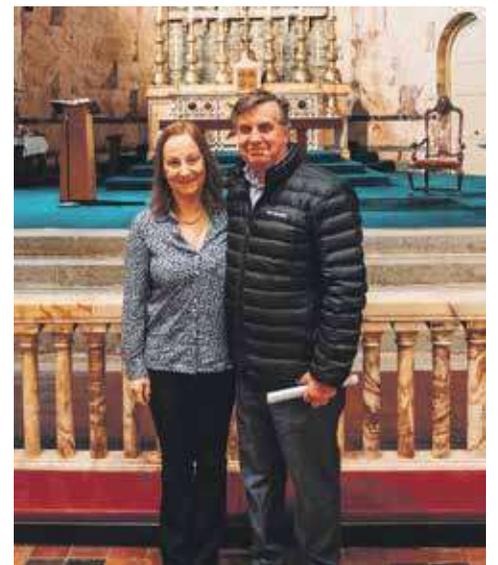
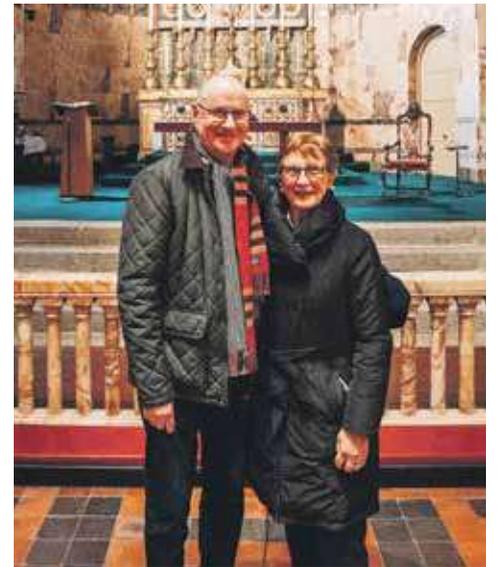
They hosted a Mass for the couples followed by a reception with champagne and chocolates. Throughout the month of February they displayed photographs of couples on their wedding day that were submitted by people interested in the event.

More than 350 photographs were submitted.



Photos: Patrick Grant.



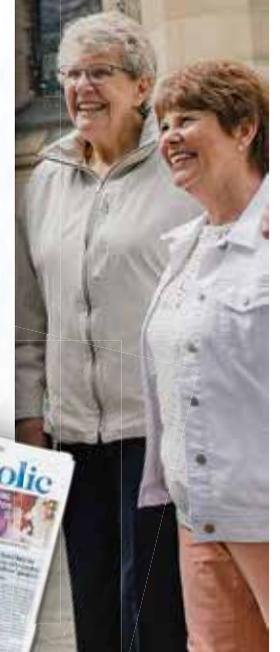



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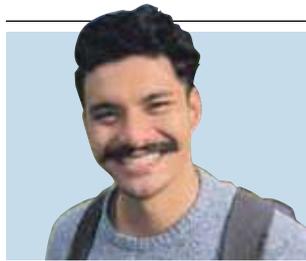
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# Want to save the West? First, follow Christ



Pedro Esteva

Christian civilisation is not the end goal but the byproduct of genuine faith in God. This was one of the many ideas at the Christ and Culture conference in Galway this past weekend at St Mary's Church in the Claddagh. Overlooking Galway Bay, the setting was the perfect place for an event looking to begin a dialogue around the questions: What does it mean to have a Christian culture? How does culture situate us in our local contexts while uniting us with the universal Church? I was there to report but also to take part in the festivities and fellowship.

The conference began with the hymn 'Be Thou My Vision,'

an ancient Irish melody which set a reflective tone for the gathering. Around 150 participants entered into an afternoon of discussions on Irish Christian culture, both past and present.

The first session, moderated by Fr Conor McDonough OP, featured an ecumenical panel made up of Paul Vanderklay, a Protestant pastor and YouTube commentator from Sacramento, and Paul Kingsnorth, a writer and former environmentalist who converted to Orthodox Christianity.

## Journey

The speakers opened with their personal faith journeys before discussing the state of Christian culture. Ptr Vanderklay emphasised that "humans can't help but do culture," citing a scene from *Forrest Gump*, where Gump unknowingly creates a movement simply by running across the country which dissipates just as quickly as he stops running.

Mr Kingsnorth, whose spir-

itual path took him through Buddhism and Wicca before his conversion, built on this by saying, "Culture is made in following," adding that we must ask ourselves, 'What god are we serving?' He challenged the idea some have of 'saving the West' arguing that Christian civilisation is secondary to Christian mysticism. Culture, he suggested, should emerge from faith, not the other way around.

**“Stories matter because they are what we hang our hearts on”**

He also noted that modern culture is far from Christian, pointing out that the seven deadly sins have been monetised in today's world. In response, he urged Christians to stand for truth in love, reminding the audience that Jesus' command to love our enemies presupposes that we

will have enemies.

After a tea break and fellowship, the second session focused on Story and History in Ireland. Hosted by Marcos Ó Conghaile Muirthemne (Connolly), the organiser of the event and host of the *More Christ* podcast, the panel featured historian Fr Conor McDonough OP and storyteller Martin Shaw.

Mr Shaw captured the essence of the discussion with, "Stories matter because they are what we hang our hearts on." And elsewhere challenged attendees to ask: "Am I sitting at tables that Christ would have kicked over?"

## Stories

Fr McDonough highlighted how early Irish Christians didn't reject pagan mythology but baptised it, drawing out what was true and good. He recounted a story of St Patrick and the King of Leinster, who refused baptism unless the warrior Cú Chulainn appeared before him. Miraculously, Cú Chulainn did appear, performing tricks in his flaming chariot, but only on the condition that the king then be baptised. This, Fr McDonough noted, reflects a Christian approach to culture—not erasing but transforming it.

Speaking with Marcos Connolly about his vision for the event, he said one goal was to bring Fr Conor into conversation with more widely known speakers in what Ptr Vanderklay calls "this little corner of the Internet." Beyond this, Mr Connolly has larger ambitions—he hopes to establish a centre for ecumenical gatherings and conferences, creating a space for dialogue, faith, and cultural renewal.

On the whole the conference drew a wide variety of participants of all ages and not just from Ireland but also from Scotland, England, and a few Americans. Many of those in attendance had come for the various speakers, from YouTube interviews or by listening to their podcasts, while others had simply seen the flyer at the local church.

**“The evening session was filled with song and storytelling”**

In small-group discussions, or "estuary groups" (Ptr Vanderklay's concept), participants explored themes from the sessions. One woman shared a story of a Catholic

priest who lived among the Maasai people, not immediately preaching Christ but first seeking the seeds of truth already present in their culture. This mirrored St Paul's approach in Athens, where he pointed to the altar of the "Unknown God" as a bridge to the Gospel.

After Vespers with the Poor Clares, the evening session was filled with song and storytelling. The Ní Churraoin Sisters, Étaín & Máire, performed Sean-nós singing with harmonies that soared through the church, accompanied by a shruti box, an Indian drone instrument that provided an enchanting undertone. Along with stories from Martin Shaw, Mr Connolly, and his wife Grace.

If I had one critique, it's that the event was too short—a sentiment echoed by several attendees. But as one put it, "It's better to leave wanting more than for it to drag on too long." Though honestly, I was sad to miss the evening festivities, I met many incredible and interesting individuals and had rich conversations. In the end, Mr Connolly told me to watch out because there would be more events like this and that the conversations begun here in Galway would continue, both online and in future gatherings.

**“If I had one critique, it's that the event was too short—a sentiment echoed by several attendees”**



The organisers of the event Fr Conor McDonough OP and Marcos Connolly



Marcas Connolly opens the afternoon



The speakers of the opening session. (L/R) Paul Vanderklay, Paul Kingsnorth, Fr Conor McDonough OP



Conversations over tea and pastries



Musicians playing Irish traditional music



Fr Conor and Martin Shaw (left) discussing the importance of storytelling



Some of the conference's attendees

# Out&About

## The sound of the Church in Cavan



**CAVAN:** On February 8 a group of members of the Irish Church Music Association (ICMA) gathered for a workshop in Cavan and “sang their hearts out”. The event was hosted by Trevor Clarke and Thomas Hanley and Cavan Pastoral Centre.



**DERRY:** Caitlin Quinn Murphy with Bishop Donal and the parish priest of Buncrana, Fr Francis Bradley. She was awarded a JP2 on January 29 for her volunteering work in St Mary's Cockhill and St Mary's Oratory, Buncrana.



**DUBLIN:** Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty led the annual blessing of engaged couples at the Shrine of St Valentine in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on February 12. Louise O'Reilly and David Lovett plan to marry in 2026 and Margaret Gleeson and Jimmy Moynihan are both widowed and are planning to marry on May 22. Photo: John McElroy.

### IN SHORT

#### Pilot Confirmation retreat programme takes place in Cork and Ross

Schools from the Diocese of Cork and Ross participated in a 'pilot retreat programme' for preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The retreats happened from February 3 to 7 and were offered by NET Ministries Ireland, a team of youth missionaries.

“The retreats were very well

received by each of the participating schools and feedback indicated that pupils had a wonderful experience,” the diocese said in a statement. The NET missionaries connected with the children with ease, engaging in accordance with the age level of the pupils, who responded well. The retreat offered talks, testimonies, prayer ministry, games and small groups activities.

Focusing on faith formation, the retreat used multiple strategies throughout the retreat duration, including active learning, listening and relating to the children's own

lives, concentrating on the true meaning of Confirmation.

#### Accord releases survey results during the annual blessing of engaged couples

Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty, who is the President of Accord CLG led the annual blessing of two engaged couples

on February 12 at the Shrine of St Valentine in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Whitefriar Street in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

The two couples are Louise O'Reilly and David Lovett, and Margaret Gleeson and Jimmy Moynihan. On the same day, Accord published the results of a survey that showed 84% of adults in Ireland say that the housing crisis is causing couples to delay getting married and/or have children.

Tony Shanahan, Director of Accord CLG said, “on behalf of Accord, I wish to warmly congratu-

late Louise and David, and Margaret and Jimmy, and all couples, on their forthcoming marriages.

“Today Accord publishes an Amárach survey that reveals the extent to which the lack of housing supply is impacting on the decision-making of couples who wish to get married and have children... Different demographics have different needs, and public policy should incentivise development initiatives geared towards the provision of accommodation solutions appropriate to each demographic,” said Mr Shanahan.

Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



If you have any stories, photos, or events you wish to be considered for publication, email a week in advance of publication



**KILKENNY:** Bishop Niall Coll celebrated Mass in St Fiacre's Church, Loughboy on January 29 to mark the World Day of Consecrated Life. He was joined by religious of the diocese from many congregations and parishes.



**DERRY:** Pictured with her teacher, Rosaleen O'Donnell, Caitlin Quinn Murphy, a pupil of Crana College Buncrana, who has been volunteering for the past three years in St Mary's Cockhill and St Mary's Oratory, Buncrana, was one of the 720 recipients of the JP2 Award in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry on January 29.



**ANTRIM:** Fr Damian McCaughan, Down and Connor Diocesan Licensed Facilitators during the launch evening of Small Discernment Groups 'Called and Gifted' on February 10. The discernment process is developed and licensed by the St Catherine of Siena Institute.



**MONAGHAN:** Recently, close to 250 people gathered to mark the 50th anniversary of the charismatic movement in Monaghan. The Monaghan Charismatic Prayer Group (MCPG) Conference happened in the Four Seasons Hotel and opened with Mass by Bishop Larry Duffy.



**MONAGHAN:** Eddie Stones and his daughter Catherine Stones at the Monaghan Charismatic Prayer Group (MCPG) Conference, marking the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the charismatic movement in Monaghan.



**FRANCE:** On the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Fr Stephen Gorman, Raphoe Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage Director lit a candle at the Grotto in Lourdes, praying for all parishioners of the Raphoe Diocese, especially remembering those who are sick.

**ANTRIM**

Ballymena Parish youth retreat day facilitated by Clonard Youth and Young Adult Ministry takes place in the All Saints Parish Centre on March 8 from 10am to 3pm (arrival at 9.45am). All year 8 students welcome. Book your place before March 5 through ballymena@downandconnor.org.

**CORK**

St Sharbel's Relic will be available for veneration in St Senan's Church, Cloghroe on March 15-17. Each day there will be Mass with the relic. Come to learn more about this saint, who is the monk one with the most amount of miracles. For more information call 083 815 9492.

Irish Dominicans 'Vocation Weekend' happens from February 28 to March 2. If you are considering following the footsteps of St Dominican and serve the Church through preaching and studying contact Fr Benedict McGlinchey for more info on 0871852759.

**DERRY**

Our Lady of Montligeon Prayer Group, praying for the holy souls in purgatory will meet on February 26 from 12.30pm to 1.30pm in Termonbacca. Everyone is welcome.

**DUBLIN**

European pilgrimage of the image of Santo Niño de Cebu will bring the image to Dublin on March 14-17 in collaboration with Santo Niño Ireland Community. For more information contact santonino.ireland@yahoo.com.

**KILDARE**

The Annual Trócaire Lecture with theme 'A Politics of Hope and Catholic Social Teaching as a Guiding Light' takes place on March 11 at 7pm in Renehan Hall, St Patrick's College Maynooth. Speaker is Dr Anna Rowlands. Registration is required. More information on frances.haran@trocaire.org.

**LIMERICK**

The next Holy Hour for Vocations in St John's Cathedral takes place on March 19, from 7.30pm to 8.30pm. Join and pray for vocation in the diocese. For more information contact vocations@limerickdiocese.org.

**MAYO**

The next Latin Mass takes place on Sunday March 9 at 6pm, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock Shrine.

**MONAGHAN**

To mark the closure of the Sisters of St Louis Motherhouse Convent, Mass of Thanksgiving will be celebrated on March 2 in St Macartan's Cathedral at 3pm followed by light refreshments in the Hillgrove Hotel.

**SLIGO**

'Baby Bonding Classes' are sessions with gentle and playful activities to help you build a strong bond with your baby. Learn how babies develop and how you play a role in it. Dates to be decided. Suitable for newborns to 8-months-old. Cost is €10 and places are limited. Bookings on 071 918 6926.

**TIPPERARY**

Thurles Parish Young Adults' meeting in Bohernanave Church takes place on February 28 at 8pm. All 18 to 35-year-olds looking for a Catholic Community are welcome. Come for friendship, faith, adoration and more. For more information contact Thomas on 0870646637

**TYRONE**

Termonmaguirc Parish 'Triduum of Prayer' takes place from February 26 to 28. The Triduum will be led by Dominican Friar from Dublin Fr Damian Polly. Triduum starts with 10am Mass on February 26 in St Colmille's Church and ends with 7.30 evening liturgy on February 28 in St Mary's Church.

**WATERFORD**

'Encounter' monthly young adult event takes place in St John's Church, Parnell Street on March 18 at 7.30pm. Faith and fellowship for 18-35s. Come for inspiring talk, music, prayer and more. There will also be pizza and chat afterwards! Donations only. More information on 0858623704.

**DONEGAL**

'Crochet Club' in Desertegney Parish Hall meets every Tuesdays from 9.30am to 11.30am. Tea and coffee served. All welcome, from levels beginners to advanced. €5 per person.

# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

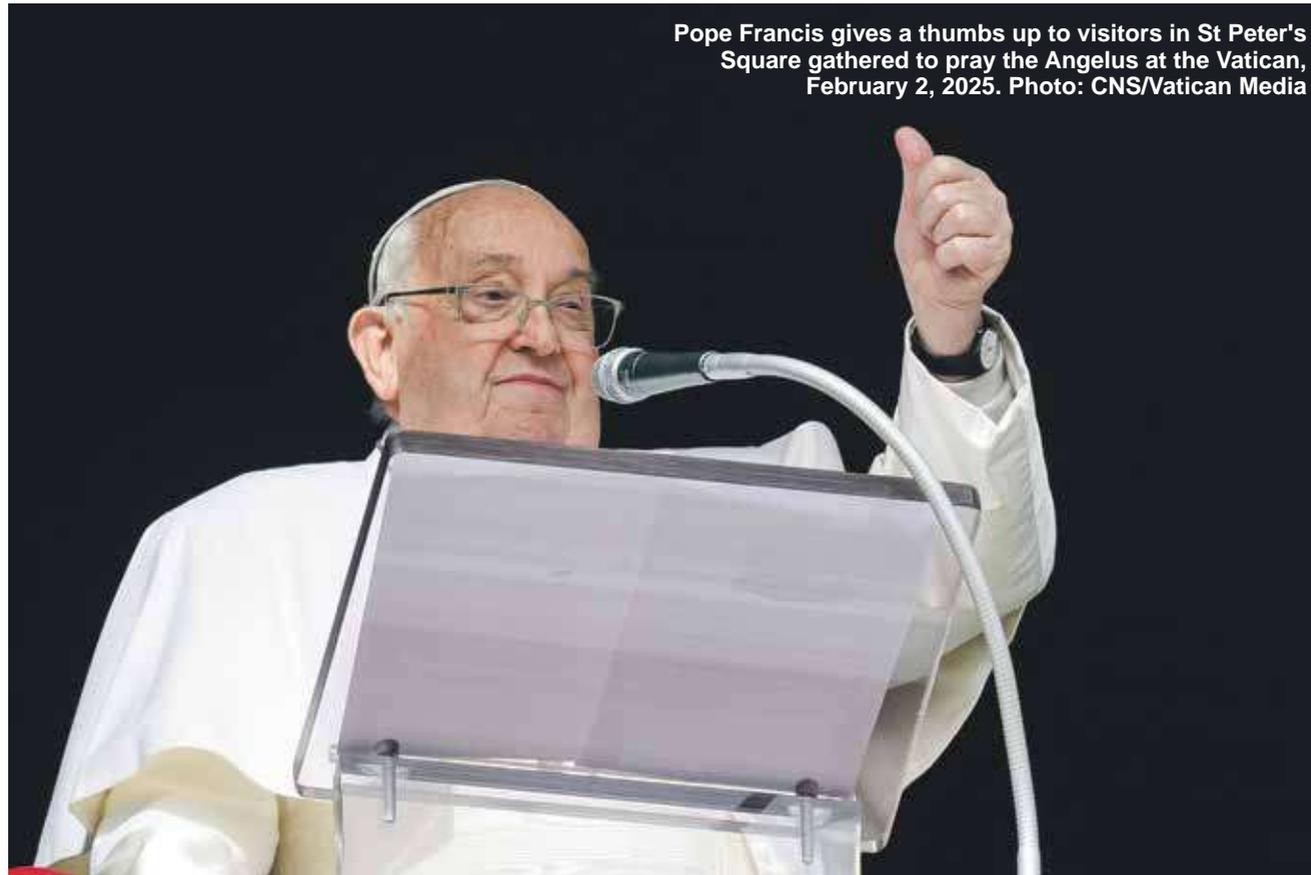
## The power of Synodal practices Learning from the Benedictines

Kristin M. Colberg  
and Jos Moons, SJ

In this chapter we zoom in on Benedictine wisdom. The Benedictine life is named after St Benedict of Nursia (480–550/60) and includes two major reformed branches, the Cistercians and Trappists. It takes the *Rule of St Benedict* as a guide for organising a common life of prayer and work—*ora et labora*—under the leadership of an abbot or abbess. The *ora* is a major part of Benedictine life. Brothers or sisters gather various times a day to pray in common (what is called “the *opus Dei*,” the work of God) but also have their personal prayer times, which typically include a particular form of Scripture meditation known as *lectio divina*. The *labora* means that brothers and sisters work to earn their living. For example, throughout history Benedictines have been major land developers, and these days Benedictines are known for their beers, cheese, meat, pottery, soap, schools, and so on.

Members of the Benedictine family point out that the synodal process has made them aware that their Rule and their way of life have much to offer in the development of a more synodal Church. For example, Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, abbot general of the Cistercian Order, commented in a letter to the order, “Ever since Pope Francis launched the synodal path, recalling that synodality is part of the nature of the Church, I have been realising ever more clearly how much our Benedictine-Cistercian charism is marked by ecclesial synodality.” In what follows, we will highlight three key features of the Benedictine practice that are thoroughly synodal and which therefore might inspire a synodal church: first, life as a process of ongoing for-

“The Rule develops into promoting a general attitude of charitable and humble interaction that serves the other and, therefore, the community”



Pope Francis gives a thumbs up to visitors in St Peter's Square gathered to pray the Angelus at the Vatican, February 2, 2025. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

mation; second, multifaceted hierarchical, convincing, and pastoral leadership; and third, the role of regular and broad consultation. Before concluding, we will broaden the perspective and suggest a few other possible sources of inspiration.

### Monastic life

In the first place, formation is essential to Benedictine life. Monastic life is a never-ending learning process, aimed at leaving behind wayward attitudes and growing in faith, hope, and charity. Benedict speaks in the Prologue of his Rule about wanting to establish “a school for the Lord's service.” The goal of that school is to embrace a certain lifestyle (or *conversatio morum*), which is so important that it is one of the three vows that monks take.

For Benedict, all monks must seek lifelong learning. That becomes very clear in the opening chapter of the Rule,

in which Benedict lists two good types of monks, namely, those who live under a rule and an abbot, and those who, having done so, have grown strong enough to continue the spiritual life (or “the battle,” as Benedict has it) by themselves. These two types of monks he opposes with two other types of monks who either do what they like—“whatever strikes their fancy”—or who never settle down and wander from place to place (RB 1). The problem with these latter types of monks is that they avoid any formation process.

Crucial for that learning process is the spiritual leadership of the abbot, whose role is so important that it is the subject of two chapters in the Rule (and in fact more). Equally crucial is the monk's openness to formation; a monk must want to receive instruction, feedback, and correction. The very opening words of the Rule highlight the importance of a receptive attitude: “Listen, my son [or daughter], to the master's instruction, and bend the ear of your heart.” It translates into two key virtues for the monk: obedience (RB 5) and humility (RB 7). The latter is a technical

term and means a profound asceticism of decentering from self to God, the superior, and the community, with growth in love and service as its ultimate aim.

“The chapter also speaks about honouring one's brothers as much as one can”

In fact, that formation process is largely realised not through humble obedience to the abbot but through the common life. Modern commentators such as Abbot General Lepori underscore the formative value of a communal lifestyle. In his 2022 Pentecost reflection on synodality, he described living together as “a paschal transformation” of dying to self and rising to new life, as a community. According to Lepori, this transformation is a key element of the Rule: “The whole Rule again and again proposes steps for growing in the life of communion, for passing therefore through death of our false, isolated ‘I’ to the paschal life of the ‘I’ in the eccle-

sial ‘we.’” A crucial element of that process is that “they shall bear one another's weaknesses of body and behaviour with the utmost patience,” as the chapter on the monk's “good zeal” notes (RB 72), although it is not limited to that. The chapter also speaks about honouring one's brothers as much as one can and even obeying one's brothers as much as one can. Here we see that, towards the end, the Rule develops into promoting a general attitude of charitable and humble interaction that serves the other and, therefore, the community.

### The Church's common life

Thus, a first particularity of the Benedictine practice is that Benedictine life is very much about formation, which may be a painful process and which can only happen if one is willing to listen, learn, and grow in communion. How may this inspire and form a more synodal way of proceeding?

In the first place, Benedictine life helps to get the priorities right: we should not focus on decisions and outcomes. Synodality understood as shared decision-making is part

of a much larger and much more significant project of journeying together. While monks share their views only occasionally—namely, when there is a chapter (or at the election of an abbot, or when they have been given an impossible task)—they rub shoulders every day. In the Benedictine project, the common life with its humdrum, joys, and tensions matters greatly; it is where our paschal transformation from I to we takes place. The means for that transformation are, in addition to the shared prayer, the concrete work, and tasks one may fulfil, simply living together in general and bearing with one another.

“For our diversity to become formative, it should not be suppressed but embraced”

Highlighting the journey rather than the outcome—instead of imagining synodality with a narrow focus on shared decision-making—does not belittle the synodal endeavour but rather enlarges it. The ecclesial project in which shared decision-making has a place is one of fraternal living together and growing in mercy by bearing with one another. Abbot General Lepori goes as far as saying that a communion of this kind is the very core of the Church's mission: “Fraternal communion in Christ is the substance of the mission, of the Church's whole mission, including the mission of monasteries. Communion is the motive, the method, and the end; the origin, the meaning, and the purpose of the Church's mission.” Here emerges the second particularity of a Benedictine approach, namely, that a good part of our formation process into a community does not need to be organised; it is simply there in the form of our living together

as a faith community with very diverse characters and gifts. For our diversity to become formative, it should not be suppressed but embraced.

This sheds a particular light on the need for formation addressed in the official documents for the synod. In light of the Benedictine tradition, it is important to underline that this formation is not the usual catechetical formation; it is personal formation. It is not just the transmission of information but a capacity to appreciate each person's gifts and, if that is not possible, charitably bear with one another. As it is a paschal formation, it will involve making space for others and, in a certain sense, dying to self.

To help us develop the practice of journeying together, the Synod 2021–24 process suggests things that we can do and that may benefit us. Our sense of journeying together is greatly enhanced by meeting one another and spending time together, in the formal setting of round table conversations as much as in the informal setting of coffee breaks or drinks. Even the fact that the synod participants were going on a short retreat together forms part of it. Some Synod 2023 participants suggested sharing more meals together, which would be another possibility. Could similar community-building activities be developed in parishes and dioceses? Have we sometimes become too focused on sacraments and too efficient in meetings? Should we spend more time together?

### Multifaceted leadership

Second, Benedictine practice is characterised by a strong yet multifaceted leadership. Several chapters of the Rule elaborate what that leadership should look like, especially RB 2 and 64 on the abbot, RB 21

## “Benedictine wisdom suggests that the leader needs to find the right balance between challenging people to make headway and moderating his comments to avoid discouragement or exhaustion”

on the deans, RB 31 on the cellarer, and RB 65 on the prior. In line with the tradition of the desert fathers and mothers, this leadership has a strong vertical dimension and is located particularly in the abbot. For example, we read in RB 2 that the abbot “is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery,” and that the relationship between the abbot and the monks is that of a teacher and students (or *discipuli*). In the chapter on obedience, the Rule specifies that monks are supposed to carry out with prompt obedience whatever the superior orders (RB 5), which echoes the tradition of the desert fathers and desert mothers according to which the assignments of one's master are to be followed without questioning, even if absurd. When other leadership roles are discussed, Benedict always recalls that those, too, have the abbot as their point of reference.

## “The point of this type of leadership is pastoral and spiritual: to help people go forward”

Interestingly, however, that is not the full story, as the abbot's leadership has various other dimensions also, so that it is best described as multifaceted. For a start, the abbot's leadership is clearly situated

under God, who will call the abbot to account for his leadership of the community, as the Rule repeats at various instances. RB 2 and RB 64 both point out that the abbot cannot invent his own rules and should stick to the Gospel. The Rule—or even “holy Rule” (RB 65)—constitutes another limitation of the abbot's power, or rather, the framework for his leadership.

In the second place, the abbot is supposed to lead an exemplary spiritual and moral life. The opening line of RB 2 recalls that “the abbot who is worthy of governing a monastery must always remember what his title signifies and verify the name of superior [maior] by his actions.” One should live up to one's role. According to the Rule, an abbot teaches both by words and by actions, with the latter being stressed: “He must point out to them all that is good and holy more by actions than by words” (RB 2.11–15). These same points structure the chapter on the election of the abbot (RB 64). After stating that he “shall be chosen for the merit of his life and the wisdom of his teaching,” with no consideration of his rank in the community, the chapter details a long list of actions to be avoided and virtues to be embraced. Here we are far removed from a purely vertical culture; Benedictine leadership needs to be convincing. As the abbot can only expect something from his subjects when he himself lives virtuously, he needs conversion

just like his brothers do.

Thirdly, in his leadership the abbot should pay attention to the character, capacities, and situation of each person and adapt his treatment accordingly. The words of the Rule sound surprisingly modern: “The abbot must vary with circumstances, threatening and coaxing by turns, stern as a master, tender as a father,” and “he must so accommodate and adapt himself to each one's character and intelligence that he will not only keep the flock entrusted to his care from dwindling, but will rejoice in the increase of a good flock” (RB 2). A later chapter explicitly states that material goods should not be given equally to everybody. Quoting the Scripture verse “distribution was made to every one according to his needs” (Acts 4:35), Benedict states that people's “weaknesses” should be considered (RB 34). This means that in some cases the abbot should push someone to take the next step or clearly correct someone, and in other cases he should be lenient and mild (RB 2). Note that this involves details like the bedding that a monk is given (RB 22), as well as the food and drink each one receives (RB 39–40)! Much of this accommodating leadership is summed up in the brief note that the abbot should be loved more than feared (RB 64).

The point of this type of leadership is pastoral and spiritual: to help people go forward. Benedictine wisdom suggests that the leader needs to find the right balance between challenging people to make headway and moderating his comments to avoid discouragement or exhaustion (RB 64). Even corrections are understood within this perspective: in punishing monks, the abbot is compared to “a wise physician” who seeks remedies to heal (RB 27–28). Benedictine



Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, the General Abbot of the Cistercian order.

## “Instead of making all-or-nothing dogmatic or ethical orthodoxy their primary concern, leaders should opt primarily for a pastoral style of nearness and accompaniment”

leadership may, therefore, be described as contextual or pastoral leadership and is, once again, far removed from a purely vertical leadership.

Finally, the abbot is not alone to rule the monastery. The Rule specifies various other leadership roles, such as the deans of the monastery, the cellarer, and the prior. Deans are those with whom the abbot of a big monastery may “share his burden” as they overlook smaller groups of monks (RB 21–23). The cellarer takes care of material things (RB 31), and the prior is the assistant superior (RB 65). While the Rule recalls that they should heed the orders of the abbot—something which is elaborated especially for the prior—it is also clear that they have their own responsibilities. Especially in the extensive description of the cellarer's role, one hears echoes of the contextual, pastoral, spiritual leadership of the abbot. For example, “If a brother should present him with an unreasonable request, [the cellarer] shall not give him cause for sadness by rejecting him with contempt, but he shall humbly answer the improper request with a reasonable refusal” (RB 31).

### Pastoral leadership

Thus, a second particularity of the Benedictine way of proceeding is its multifaceted leadership. Benedictine life underlines the crucial importance of leadership while also shifting the focus away from power. While there is no doubt about the abbot's authority, it is not absolute; rather, it is situated under God. Meant to serve each monk's personal growth, it should be flexible. Moreover, it should be convincing and therefore the abbot should live by what he teaches others. Finally, the abbot can share the burden of his leadership with others if need be. How may

each of these facets inspire and form a more synodal practice in the Church?

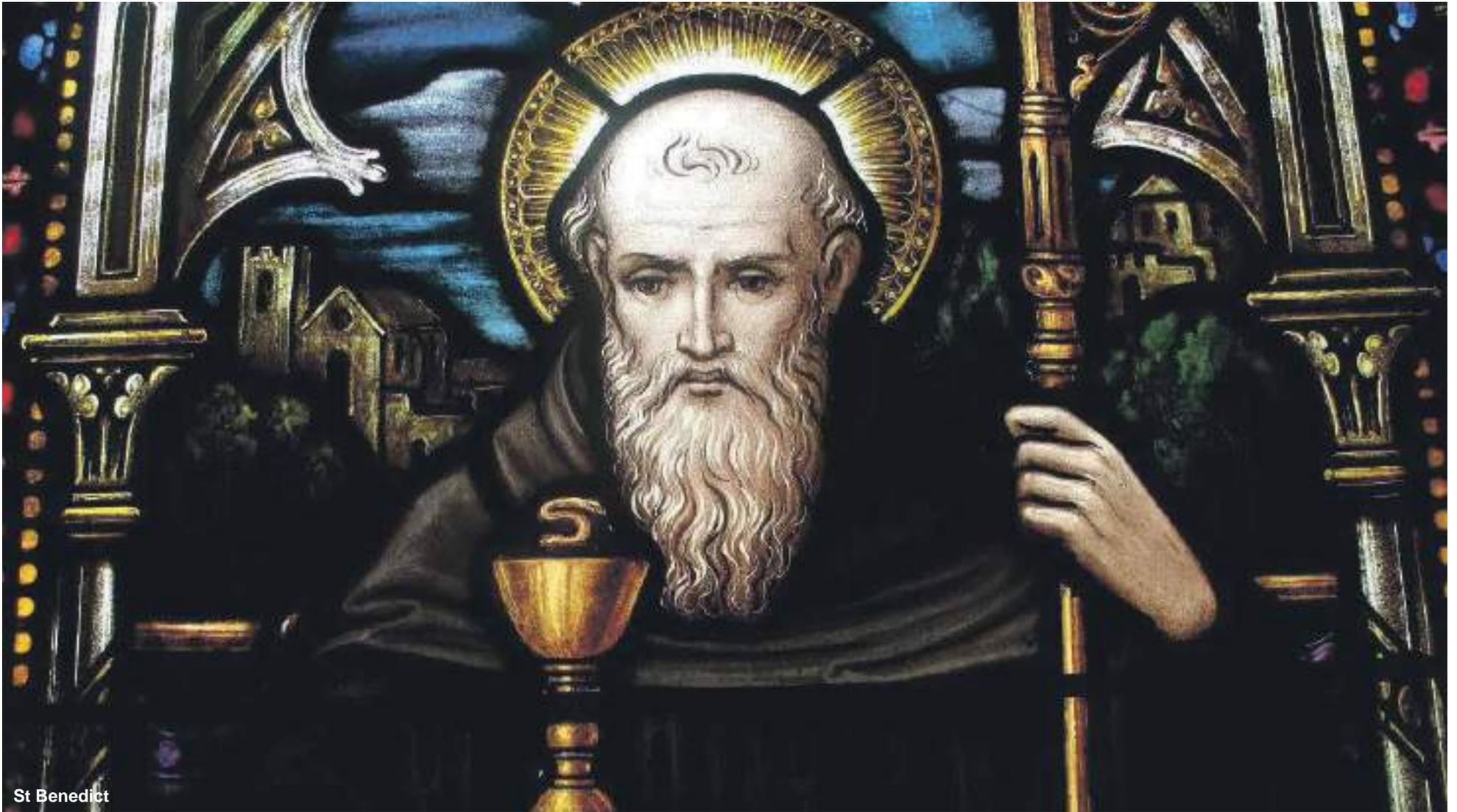
## “Something as unspectacular as actual contact with the People of God seems to be the most important”

The key concern of Benedictine leadership seems to be the spiritual growth of each of the members of the community and that of the community as a whole. Or, in negative terms, the key concern is not dogmatic, as in defending orthodoxy, or managerial, as in “running” parishes or the diocese. This suggests that ecclesial leadership should prioritise the spiritual life of the faithful, which requires a contextual and flexible approach that stands out for its moderation, mercy, and wisdom. Instead of making all-or-nothing dogmatic or ethical orthodoxy their primary concern, leaders should opt primarily for a pastoral style of nearness and accompaniment. While conservative circles may fear that such a pastoral flexibility will destroy the Church, for Benedict the point is the exact opposite: it helps people to progress as they can. The Rule's outlook is both very pragmatic and deeply spiritual: “The abbot must so arrange everything that the strong may have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from” (RB 64). As such, it is a way of building up a Church that journeys together with each and every person at their own pace.

That requires a convincing leadership. Moral integrity and spiritual wisdom should be key criteria for leaders. The “shepherds” should be living witnesses of the paschal formation process that their “sheep”



Pope Francis looks upward while celebrating the closing Mass of the Synod of Bishops on synodality in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, October 27, 2024. Photo CNS, Lola Gomez.



St Benedict

**“Yet spiritual conversation is certainly not the only way to practice speaking and listening well, and it should be complemented by a respectful style of going about arguments, something that spiritual conversation in its current form does not allow for”**

are called to. The spiritual and ethical authenticity of practicing what they preach will both dispel the fear that they are watering down things and make them convincing leaders. To avoid haughty leadership, leaders should withstand clerical impulses and remind themselves that God is the deepest ground of ecclesial realities. To become humble leaders, it can be helpful to observe that, although the Rule compares the abbot to Christ, he is not himself the ultimate leader; he is directed (or “ruled”) by the Rule and is reminded that God will call him to account.

To help us develop a practice of a humble, convincing, and pastoral leadership practice, much work needs to be done. Something as unspectacular as actual contact with the People of God seems to be the most important “exercise,” as it invites leaders to come down from clerical pedestals and to leave theoretical bubbles. When one encounters people as they are, one is both impressed by their virtues—which calls leaders to imitate them—and touched by their troubles—which calls leaders to pastoral attitudes of mercy and adaptation. Here the Synthesis Report speaks helpful words. It calls priests and deacons to create bonds of closeness and

synodal attitudes “from the earliest stages of formation by ensuring close contact with the People of God and through concrete service-learning experiences among those most in need.” This would also apply to bishops. Speaking of the latter, the Synthesis Report specifies that “his ministry is realised in a synodal manner when governance is accompanied by co-responsibility, preaching by listening to the faithful People of God, and sanctification and celebration of the liturgy by humility and conversion.” Co-responsibility ties in well with the fact that, in Benedictine governance, the abbot does not fulfil all the leadership roles by himself but clearly shares responsibility; that is a key element for a synodal Church also.

To conclude this section, let us signal the practical nature of what we are proposing here. With its model of ministry rooted in community and service, the Benedictine tradition can help us synodalise ecclesial practices, offering a helpful alternative to exclusively hierarchical ways of proceeding. Theologians can support this by continuing the effort to reimagine the theology of ministry in such a way that a sacralised, cultic priesthood, which stresses difference, is replaced by one that is rooted in the

community and in service of the variety of charismatic gifts in the community.

**The views of the monks matter**

A third characteristic of Benedictine practice is that the views of the monks play an important role in the life of the community. The Rule identifies various moments in which they share their views, all of which further situate the abbot’s leadership.

Firstly, the monks play a major role in choosing their own leader. Different from earlier monastic traditions, according to which abbots appointed their successors, here the community elects its own leader. Although Benedict is not very clear about the details of that election, he is clear about what the community should look for in a leader. “The one to be ordained [i.e., elected abbot] shall be chosen for the merit of his life and the wisdom of his teaching, even if he ranks last in the community” (RB 64). The criterion is not one’s place in the monastery’s hierarchy, which is based on the time spent in the monastery, but spiritual leadership qualities.

The Rule also gives great weight to the views of the monks when important deci-

sions are being made. The chapter on the abbot (RB 2) is immediately followed by the chapter on “summoning the brothers for counsel” (RB 3), the point of which is summarised well by Gregory Polan, abbot primate of the Benedictine order: “It is clear that for Benedict, important major decisions affecting the entire community’s well-being were to be made by the community as a whole.”

**“Young monks with little experience may refresh the wisdom of the experienced monks”**

For this to function well, the Rule specifies the following. The abbot should clearly explain what is at stake (to which modern commentators add that he needs to create a safe atmosphere that invites all community members to speak). He should listen to the view of the brothers. In doing so, he should have a special interest in the views of the young ones, as “the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger.” The brothers for their part should speak without insisting on their point of view and without putting pressure by speaking in the name of others or a group. What the monks present should simply be their own point of view. It is supposed that these points of view are the fruit of prayer-

ful reflection rather than one’s own design. Finally, the abbot should ponder what was said and make a final decision, which monks should accept.

In the Rule, the participation of the monks remains limited to sharing their views; once the consultation is done, the abbot ponders and decides. Yet modern commentators stretch the role of the community and make consultation a dialogical undertaking, to the point of sometimes speaking of “communal listening and discernment.” Thus, the counsel at the very beginning of the Rule to “bend the ear of your heart” characterises not only the monk’s readiness to learn from the abbot but also the readiness of all to learn from one another, and even that of the abbot to learn from the monks. As Willekes puts it, “The type of meeting Benedict intends is not so much about what I may want to say, but rather what I may hear. Or even, what the Lord wants me to hear and, thereby, to reveal to me.” Prior to the abbot taking a decision and the monks following that decision, the monks may learn from one another and as a community journey to a decision.

A third example of the monk being invited to (or at least allowed to) share his voice

can be found in the chapter on the question of what to do “if impossible tasks are assigned to a brother” (RB 68). Echoing RB 3, on the consultation of the brothers, the chapter recommends humbly bringing the matter to the attention of one’s superior, who then decides. Benedict opts for a realistic obedience rather than ascetically idealising and absolutising obedience. Maybe this suggests a more general possibility to speak one’s mind with the superior, too. Elsewhere, the Rule recommends great transparency towards the abbot concerning one’s sins and inner life. Does this include sharing one’s views of how things are going in the monastery?

Thus, the Rule gives ample space for the monks to share their view of God’s will, as they best see it, without downplaying the role of the abbot. The monks elect the abbot, contribute their views when important matters are considered, and can speak up when things are too difficult for them. The abbot’s leadership remains yet is complemented—informed, enriched, questioned, corrected—by these other elements. The basic presupposition in all of this is that God’s will may be communicated through others than the abbot.

**“The monks elect the abbot, contribute their views when important matters are considered, and can speak up when things are too difficult for them”**

## “The fact that participative leadership has become standard language says enough: most modern managers work with ample consultation, as this leads to better decisions and greater staff involvement in the process”

Willekes speaks of “two forms of wisdom”: young monks with little experience may refresh the wisdom of the experienced monks, who say more traditional things. She points out that, according to Benedict, even outsiders may say useful things (RB 61)! Beyond an act of humility on the part of the abbot—humility being the great virtue of monasticism—listening to the views of the monks is primarily meant to better hear God’s voice.

### Faithful who speak, leaders who listen

In allowing monks to vote and to speak their mind, Benedictine practice operates with the humble awareness that a brother or sister may offer wisdom in God’s name. What could this mean for a synodal church? In the first place, the general principle is worth considering: the faithful may actually say useful things that help the Church forward; insight and wisdom are not the privilege of leaders. A more synodal Church is called to adopt a more positive view of the contributions of the laity, deacons, priests, and religious.

In addition, the Benedictine example calls ecclesial leaders and the faithful to engage in a new style of conversation. As we have seen, the Rule is quite particular about how the monks should speak and the abbot should listen. Can faithful men and women grow in the art of speaking their mind and explaining their point succinctly, without anger, frustration, or pressure, and without trying to win over the other person? Can leaders grow in the art of listening and pondering before actually deciding? It seems an understatement to say that both groups can grow in the attitudes indicated here.

Finally, these two more general points—on a culture of trust and a cultivated style of conversing—should be “incarnated” in concrete procedures and specific topics for which the voice of the faithful (including deacons and priests) is taken seriously. The obvious examples are the nomination of bishops and major pastoral decisions in dioceses and parishes. Could it also include reflection on hot-button moral or dogmatic issues?

To help us develop these practices of speaking well and listening well, the Synod 2021–24 promoted spiritual conversation, or conversation in the Spirit, which was presented in chapter three of this book. The Benedictine practice of holding chapters and its modern interpretation as common discernment confirms the value of careful speaking and listening

and thus journeying together. In both cases, the method is not its own goal but an instrument for creating communion: “This spiritual practice enables us to move from the ‘I’ to the ‘we’; it does not lose sight of or erase the personal dimension of the ‘I,’ but recognises it and inserts it into the community dimension.” Testimonies suggest that it worked well in the synod gatherings and that it created a new culture of listening and being together. For example, the Synthesis Report says, “The practice [of conversation in the Spirit] has elicited joy, awe and gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church.”

### “Without these meetings being transformed into spiritual sharing, they could adopt elements of it”

Yet spiritual conversation is certainly not the only way to practice speaking and listening well, and it should be complemented by a respectful style of going about arguments, something that spiritual conversation in its current form does not allow for. Moreover, it seems useful to integrate elements from this spiritual conversation approach into other types of meetings that are not in themselves spiritual, such as board meetings, planning commissions, strategic boards, and so on. Without these meetings being transformed into spiritual sharing, they could adopt elements of it, such as spending some time on making up one’s mind before speaking or inviting another participant with a

different viewpoint to say more instead of offering a quick “yes, but” response. Possibilities for training the People of God in this method are vast and even include our normal day to day-to-day conversations.

### From whom else may we learn?

When the synod recommended that the Church learn from “the practices of synodal life and discernment that have been tried and tested in communities of consecrated life, maturing over the centuries,” it spoke in the plural. The plural is well chosen, for the consecrated life offers a rich variety of practices. With the above therefore being no more than one case study, who else may we learn from, apart from the Benedictines?

Very different from the Benedictine tradition, the Dominican way of doing things is marked by a culture of conversation, searching for the truth, and doing so by relying on arguments rather than authorities. Because of human differences, pursuing truth and remaining in unity is a challenge. Speaking on Dominican spirituality and synodality, Timothy Radcliffe aptly noted, “The typically Protestant temptation is to champion truth at the expense of unity. The Catholic weakness is to insist on unity to the detriment of fearlessly seeking the truth. Both are premature resolutions of a tension that will always and necessarily abide.” He explains that we need bearing with one another, friendship, time, and patience. Can the Dominican tradition enlighten the Church in this regard?

To take one more example, the Jesuit way of proceeding is marked by power concentrated in the figure of the superior

that recalls the vertical dimension that we also found in the Benedictine tradition. It has resulted in popular representations of the Jesuits as a military order with blind obedience. At the same time, the superior’s power is strongly relativised, as Jesuit practice is marked by a culture of discernment. Before taking decisions, the superior should discern those decisions. Rather than following his own instincts or preferences, he should ask two questions: Does a possible decision come with an aftertaste of spiritual joy, peace, clarity, and so on?

And if so, does it serve the greater good (or, if you prefer, the kingdom of God)? Moreover, as part of that discernment he should consult people, both in the form of a board of advisors (the so-called consult) and through a yearly confidential conversation with every Jesuit within his province. Thus, Jesuit practice is multifaceted also.

### “Secular expertise from the world of organisational management may help”

It is easy to multiply examples. On July 1, 2021, synod participants experienced a day of reflection on synodal spiritualities, with presentations on Augustinian, Benedictine, Dominican, Sant’Egidio, Franciscan, Ignatian, Salesian, and Focolare perspectives. (One may ask if young groups such as Sant’Egidio and Focolare have matured sufficiently to be included among such traditions.) Distinctively feminine traditions, such as that of the Ursuline sisters, would have further enriched the variety of perspectives. Thus, in creating a synodal practice, we do not need to start from scratch; our tradition offers many existing models. They are best understood as *produktive Vorbilde*: examples that encourage and inspire to find one’s own feet.

For doing that, the religious

traditions are not the only resource. As we noted earlier, the Latin American and Caribbean bishops have ample experience with collaborating effectively at the continental level. Interestingly, pastors and theologians have usually played a role in those deliberations.

More recently they have experimented with a new form, an “ecclesial assembly,” with ample lay participation, rather than an episcopal conference (CELAM) assembly, which involves the participation of bishops almost exclusively. What can their experience of collaboration and consultation teach the Church? More recent examples, such as the Australian plenary council and the German *Synodaler Weg*, have perhaps not yet fully matured but may be worth consideration also.

To those we could further add cultural resources, such as the African palaver tradition, which is related to the notion of Ubuntu and which highlights the importance of the community in resolving issues. India has a similar tradition, called Palliyogam. Secular expertise from the world of organisational management may help also. The fact that participative leadership has become standard language says enough: most modern managers work with ample consultation, as this leads to better decisions and greater staff involvement in the process.

### Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the power of practices and, in so doing, has broadened the range of elements that are necessary for synodallying the Church. In addition to the subjective dimension of personal conversion and commitment to specific types of behaviour (chapter six) and the objective dimension of the reform of structures (chapter seven), we need to address the communitarian dimension. Synodallying the Church requires habits and ways of proceeding that effectively realise synodality. Not

unlike how a novice is formed for the religious life by immersion, the People of God familiarises itself with synodality by copying what others are doing and by “simply” following their example. The Benedictine tradition offers an instructive example of such a practice.

### “This book has highlighted the rich resources that are available in terms of theology, history, and encouraging examples”

Realistically speaking, however, a synodal way of proceeding is not yet the Church’s standard practice. Ironically, therefore, before we can rely on synodal habits, we first need to consciously and deliberately adopt them—not unlike training. In that training, specific methods such as spiritual conversation function like exercises. Importantly, we should not underestimate the role each and every person can play, for anybody who listens well, speaks well, waits and ponders, and journeys together contributes to building up a synodal practice. Structures play an important role also.

To sum up this book, we have first looked at the theology and history of synodality, particularly as it has been unfolding over the past several years (part one), and then presented several elements that are crucial for continuing to “synodally” the Church as it moves into the future (part two). Clearly the journey is far from over. Instead of being discouraged by what has not yet been achieved, this book has highlighted the rich resources that are available in terms of theology, history, and encouraging examples.

To that we would like to add our personal experience. In our own involvement in the synodal journey, we have encountered the grace and power of synodality. This includes meeting many generous people who are committed to adopting more synodal ways of proceeding at a personal level and to promoting a more synodal structure when possible. Thus, the Church has many resources at its disposal to learn from and to draw on as it seeks to journey together into the future. That consolation seems a fitting way to end this book.

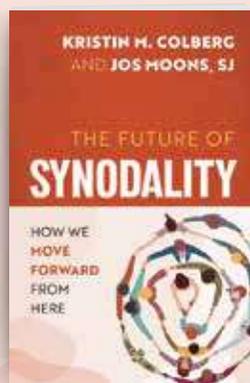
**i** Kristin Colberg was a member of the Theological Commission advising the Synod on Synodality 2021–24.

**i** Jos Moons was the main researcher for a research project entitled Mapping Synodality, which reviewed academic publications on the synod and on synodality.

**i** Reprinted here with kind permission of Liturgical Press.

“This book is for those who seek to turn this promising springtime [of synodality] into a fruitful harvest.”

SR. NATHALIE BECQUART, XMCJ  
Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod



How can the church continue to grow in a more synodal—more participative, open-minded, inclusive, and spiritual—ecclesial style? Now that the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024) has ended, Kristin Colberg and Jos Moons begin to answer this key question in essential ways.

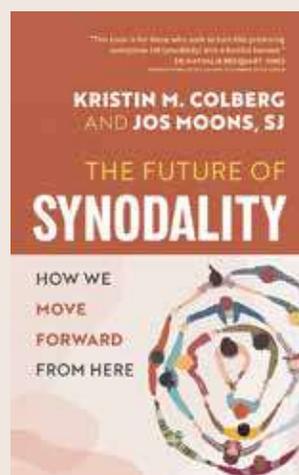
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# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Bishop in Argentina resigns for 'personal' reasons after 2 years in office

● Pope Francis accepted the resignation of a 59-year-old bishop in the Pope's native Argentina on Thursday, after just under two years in the leadership of an already troubled diocese.

Bishop Carlos María Domínguez of San Rafael in Argentina said his resignation was "for reasons of a personal nature," but did not offer any further description.

"I want to ask for forgiveness for what I did wrong, for what I didn't do and for what I didn't know how to do," Bishop Domínguez said in a *communiqué*, though he offered no specifics.

In an interview with *ACI Prensa*, the spokesman for San Rafael, Fr José Álvarez, explained the request for forgiveness as something "anyone who leaves his place" would offer as a matter of course.

Bishop Domínguez, however, acknowledged he "can sense the perplexity that this news may cause," among the faithful of the diocese. "[B]elieve me," he wrote, "this decision causes me deep pain."

Fr Álvarez also told *ACI Prensa* Bishop Domínguez is no longer in the diocese.

### Cameroon priest says elections help build a community of love

● A leading Cameroonian priest and intellectual, Fr Humphrey Tatab Mbuy, says electing the right candidates during elections help in achieving one of the Church's overarching goals: Building a community of love.

Speaking during his weekly sermons distributed on social media, Fr Mbuy's message comes at a critical time as

Cameroonians prepare for the upcoming presidential election scheduled for October this year.

With the October election expected to be an inflection point in Cameroon's political journey, Fr Mbuy said he believes the Church may be called to play a leading role in guiding the electorate towards making an informed choice.

### Catholic bishops in Nigeria say hope is hard for hungry people

● Catholic bishops in Nigeria say it is increasingly harder for the Church to convey a message of hope to Nigerians hurt by hunger.

Africa's most populous nation is also one of the nations with the largest number of hungry people. The World Food Program estimates that 33 million Nigerians will be food insecure this year – up from 25 million last year.

"Things are hard. Really very hard. I see it on the faces of our people. We are in one of the most difficult phases of our national life," said the Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto in a message sent to *Crux*.

The bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province (IEP) blasted the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for failing to meet the basic needs of Nigerians. Tinubu came to power two years ago promising to "renew hope" for Nigeria. Two years down the line, "millions of Nigerians still yearn for the most basic necessities of life," the bishops said.

### White South African Church leaders respond to Trump

● More than 150 white South African Christian leaders have signed a statement rejecting claims by US President Donald Trump that white people are being victimised in South Africa.

The statement responds to Trump's February 7 executive order withdrawing all US government aid to South Africa, citing victimisation, violence and hateful rhetoric against white people in South Africa along with legislation providing for the expropriation of land without compensation, and South Africa's criticism of Israel's military action in Gaza.

"As white South Africans in active leadership within the Christian community, representing diverse political and theological perspectives, we unanimously reject these claims," the statement said.

## Religious sister says Angola can support refugees from the Congo

As conflict continues to escalate in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Catholic Church in Angola has signalled its readiness to welcome refugees fleeing the Central African country.

Sr Carla Luísa Frei Bamberg, Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants (CEPAMI) in Angola, said the Church, through its Pastoral Care for Migrants, is on alert in border dioceses, particularly Uíge and Mbanza Congo, to welcome refugees.

Fighting between Congolese security forces and militant groups, notably the M23 rebels backed by Rwanda, are driven by the search for territorial control and competition for critical minerals so abundant in eastern Congo. And it is rooted in historical ethnic tensions.

Reports indicate that columns of M23 fighters entered the centre of Bukavu on February 16. According to RFI, they were received by the population as "liberators." Most of the Congolese armed forces abandoned Bukavu on Friday, leaving behind weapons that were recovered by civilians and bandits.

The rebels entered Bukavu three weeks after conquering Goma – the capital of North Kivu.

The fighting in Goma – in North Kivu – displaced over 400,000 people in three weeks, adding to the over four million already displaced, according to the UN.

## Sr Raffaella Petrini appointed president of Vatican governorate

Pope Francis has appointed Sr Raffaella Petrini, FSE, as president of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State and president of the Governorate of Vatican City State, the Vatican announced Saturday.

According to the February 15 bulletin from the Holy See Press Office, Sr Petrini will assume her new roles on March 1. She succeeds Cardinal Fernando Vérgez in both positions.

Sr Petrini, who has served as secre-



A displaced Congolese man sits outside his tent at a temporary camp in North Kivu February 3, 2025, days after the M23 rebel group seized the city Goma, forcing thousands to flee and triggering a wave of looting and deaths. Photo: OSV News/Arlette Bashizi, Reuters.

An estimated 135,000 people have been displaced from the town of Sake alone, contributing to the region's high number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), estimated to be around 800,000.

M23 released a statement urging the population not to succumb to fear. However, Johan Viljoen, Director of the Denis Hurley Peace Institute of the South Africa Bishops Conference, told *Crux* that the population has little trust in both the insurgents and the government forces.

"The local population faces threats from both insurgents

and the State Armed Forces and does not necessarily view either as liberators. The people of Goma are battle-weary – they have witnessed numerous armed formations come and go. To them, this is just more of the same," he said.

Angola and the DRC share a long border—approximately 1,500 miles. Controlling the influx of refugees and migrants is increasingly challenging.

"We do not have rigid border control, making it easy and vulnerable for crossings, which could also lead to human rights violations. This is important, concerning

and challenging for us in the Pastoral Care of Migrants," Sr Bamberg said.

The religious sister mentioned that the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have drained much of the international humanitarian assistance, making funding for Congo war victims difficult.

Despite these challenges, the Church is prepared to take on the responsibility. Sr Bamberg, a Brazilian-born nun, said that pastoral agents in various dioceses are being trained to welcome refugees and refer them to the competent authorities.

## Catholic priest murdered in the Kachin area of Myanmar

A Catholic priest was killed in Myanmar on Friday, an incident that "deeply shocked and saddened" Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar.

Fr Donald Martin Ye Naing Win from the Archdiocese of Mandalay in

Upper Burma, was killed by a group of armed men on the evening of February 14 in Kangyi Taw village of the Shwebo Township.

The 44-year-old was a priest at Our Lady of Lourdes's Parish and had been a priest for seven years. His body was found in a for-

est near the old town of Pyu in Kangyi Taw.

Christians make up about 6% of Myanmar's overwhelmingly Buddhist population, but about 34% of Kachin's estimated 1.7 million population.

"The Catholic Church throughout Myanmar mourns this loss together with Arch-

bishop Marco Tin Win, the priests, the religious, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Mandalay and parents and relatives of Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win. May God the Father, the Lord of all life, comfort your mourning hearts and ours," the cardinal said in a statement.

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Eternally grateful to my teachers

**Dear Editor,** I wish to associate myself with Liam Lally's Comment [*The Irish Catholic* – January 30, 2025]. Educated, free, for 12 years by the Sisters of Mercy in Cobh, Co. Cork, I am eternally grateful to my teachers. Wise women

who gave their all during those informative years. I know I often put them to the pin of their collars (or habits!) by my mischievous behaviour at times but always found them to have a sense of humour and forgiving. Most sympathetic

in speech and deed on the untimely young death of my mother. Because of their tireless patience and comprehensive teaching, I went on to UCC and later taught in Malawi, where, hopefully, I kindly and intelligently passed on their methodol-

ogy, and thoroughly enjoyed my time there. It is now popular to vilify these sisters, but perhaps it's time to thank them, and change our attitude.

*Yours etc.,  
Mary O'Mahony  
Crosshaven, Co. Cork*

### Confused by the 'mixed messages'

**Dear Editor,** I was somewhat confused by the mixed messages conveyed by Auxiliary Bishop Michael Router of Armagh. While he correctly criticises the Irish health-care system for undermining human dignity through the introduction of a liberal abortion regime and the potential introduction of assisted suicide, as reported on page two of *The Irish Catholic* (February 6), he then praises the "sincere statement of Christian beliefs" expressed by American Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde on page four.

Had Bishop Router and *The Irish Catholic* journalists conducted more thorough research, they would have discovered that Bishop Budde's Christian beliefs do not extend to abortion or assisted suicide. In fact, she has publicly stated that "Christ would support abortion".

*Yours etc.,  
Pat Savage  
Drogheda, Co. Louth*



### Applauding woke bishops?

**Dear Editor,** As reported recently the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) have written a letter of congratulations to Bishop Mariann Budde of the Episcopal Church after her sermon during an inaugural prayer service in front of President Trump urging him to show mercy towards LGBTQ+ and migrant communities.

The LGBT community in

the USA are not being discriminated against nowadays and some of their members have been persecuting Christians such as bakers with legal cases demanding that they support the LGBT agenda.

As regards migrant communities, the unauthorised immigrant population in the United States grew to 11 million in 2022, according to new Pew Research Center research, so surely the USA

has the right to control its borders and decide who can and how many can legally be allowed into their country.

Are AMRI also aware that Bishop Budde also believes that Jesus would support abortion? Perhaps AMRI might be more careful in future before applauding woke bishops.

*Yours etc.,  
Liam de Paor  
Carrickane, Co. Cavan*

### Are we being treated like Schmucks?

**Dear Editor,** Bord Gáis Energy tells us "The standing charge is an annual charge included in your price plan. This covers the fixed costs of providing your gas and electricity supply".

You pay to provide electricity to your home and then pay for the electricity used in the process. Is that not a 'Three card trick' deal for the provider. You are an Investor of your energy supplier without any dividend.

Yet the taxpayer through the EU Green Energy Funding and Government give tax breaks to these providers.

We are told that the taxpayer has to pay up for the repairs etc. due to the recent hurricane!

Did not the people of this country already pay for the roll out of electricity infrastructure through the ESB (semi-state), so where is the pay back

for the public?

Eircom and the roll out of the broadband another situation where the taxpayer pays for the infrastructure and private companies benefit and Joe public pays at both ends. Are we the public being treated like Schmucks?

*Yours etc.,  
Nuala Nolan  
Bowling Green, Galway City*

#### 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.

### If it were not for the Dominican sisters...

**Dear Editor,** Recently you ran an article on religious sisters and nuns in Ireland, past and present. I invite you, dear reader, to enter into a glimpse of my experience with a group of them.

The year was 1959. I had just finished my primary 'education'.

Emotional, psychological and physical damage was done to me during those years. Before free education my mother, far seeing as she was, took in a lodger, to save money, for her three daughters and one son's secondary school education. It was a life changing move.

In turn, the three girls, cycled daily into Dominican College, Eccles St for what turned out to be a 'true' education.

With great love and respect the sisters tapped into our educational, spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. We began to expand and grow into mature young Irish women, ready to face the world, though still tainted by our previous primary school experience.

I was called to enter the Dominican novitiate in Kerdifftown, Kill, Co. Kildare. Alas, after three years in formation, it became obvious that I was not called to religious life and sadly, I left.

I believe that I'm still a Dominican at heart. Thank you, sisters, for a great education, leaving me with good and wholesome memories. Your motto, *Veritas*, is etched deeply into my heart and psyche.

Yes, I was graced over the years to forgive those lay teachers, in my primary school 'education', who did me harm in so many ways. They no longer control me.

If it were not for the Dominican sisters, I would have had a sad and a damaged life, with a different story to relate.

The world will be saved by beauty, truth, and love. Let's live this truth, so that we may share it with all.

*Your etc.,  
Lorraine Doran  
Marino, Dublin 3*

### An unparalleled record of integrity

**Dear Editor,** I wish to commend Baroness Nuala O'Loan for calling on the Irish Government to establish a separate inquiry into the Omagh bombing [*The Irish Catholic* – February 13, 2025]. As the former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Baroness O'Loan has an unparalleled record of integrity, courage, and dedication to justice. Her landmark investigations have exposed serious failings in policing and intelligence-sharing. When someone of her experience and credibility speaks out, we must listen.

The Omagh bombing was the worst atrocity of the Troubles.

This was a cross-border terrorist operation, and the full truth can only emerge if both governments conduct parallel investigations, working together to uncover what could and should have been done to prevent this tragedy.

Baroness O'Loan has dedicated her career to ensuring that victims and their families receive the truth they deserve. The Irish Government must now show the same commitment to justice. Justice delayed is justice denied. An Irish inquiry must be established without further hesitation.

*Yours etc.,  
Jamie Murray  
Shankhill, Dublin 18*

### Nothing like humour to engage people

**Dear Editor,** Thank you to Fr Bernard Cotter for highlighting appointments of bishops. With Pope Francis, it is hoped that all should have the smell of sheep. I think the last few appointed from our diocese (Meath) have the "common touch", but not all have. On a lighter note, Fr Bernard is so right introducing a bit of humour in his homily... there's nothing like it to engage people!

*Yours etc.,  
Therese Mullen  
Mullingar, Co. Westmeath*

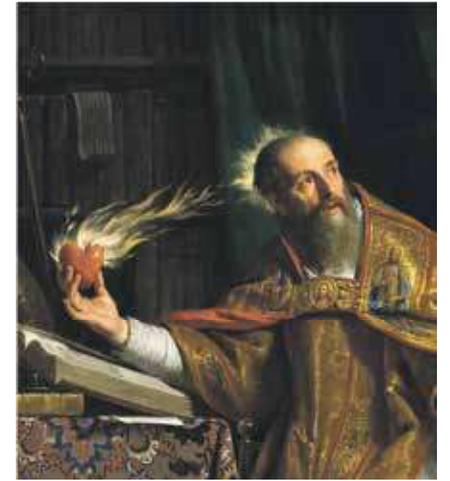
# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, February 20, 2025

Our  
restless  
selves

Fr Rolheiser

Page 32



## A prodigal son who became a Carmelite brother

Sharing something about yourself is always challenging, because we do need to figure out what would be relevant to the people who are going to read it but also because we tend to share just the beautiful pieces of this big puzzle that is our life. Anyway, I would like to start by saying that I am a prodigal son, and I think by the end of my words you will have understood why.

I'm Bro. Jander Maria de Jesus, a Carmelite brother from Brazil. I was born in João Pessoa, a very historical city in the North-East of Brazil. I am the second of three children of my parents. I have an older brother and a younger sister. Both of them are already married and have children.

I grew up in a family in which Faith was something important, but the testimonies of my mother and my grandmother were something remarkable. I remember that when I was a little child my mom always brought me to Mass, or to novenas to Our Lady during May which are great devotions in Brazil. At home, we would pray the rosary together, and I have a vivid memory of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus because my grandmother was a member of the Sacred Heart Apostolate.



**All my certainties were gone. That love I experienced brought meaning to my life, says Bro. Jander María de Jesus**

However, while I was growing up I was also becoming a very questioning child and I think it did annoy one of my catechists. I had three years of preparation for first Communion, and at the end of that, when I was 9 years old, I was not allowed to go forward with my group because according to my mom I was not on my best behaviour.

**“While the priest was giving the homily I imagined myself preaching and using some terms from biology”**

So, I did not want to do that anymore. Little by little I became less interested in religious things. When I was 15 I joined another catechism group and had my Confirmation and first Communion on the same day, but it did not affect me so much. I spent years without being really engaged with the Church.

I finished secondary school, and got a place in the University when I was 16. I decided to do Biology, and

throughout the course I was building up my plans to do a master and a doctorate, because I really wanted to become a lecturer. During that time though I had a very busy academic life. I was also doing scientific research in the university. I still had a good social life. I used to go to many concerts and hang out with my friends.

Little by little I began to attend Mass again, and I remember one day while the priest was giving the homily I imagined myself preaching and using some terms from biology. I found it a silly thing and I did not even consider seriously the possibility of a vocation to religious life or priesthood.

### Meaning

Then, during my final semester at university, one of my friends invited me to a retreat for young people. I was a bit reluctant, but I finally accepted

**“That silly thought I had might become true, and I might use some biological terms from time to time in my homilies”**

to go and, though it is funny it is also true; after going with her to do the registration, I went with some friends for some pints.

After a few weeks, I went for that weekend retreat, and it was definitely a turning point in my life. I had a deep and powerful experience of God's love there and it shook everything in my life. It was time for the prodigal son come back home. All my certainties were gone. Because that love I experienced was greater than anything I was looking for, it brought a real meaning to my life. By now I was 20 years old, in my final year of university.

**“Sometimes our vocation is not a straight line in the path of our life”**

So, after my graduation, I already had a supervisor for my master's degree, but I just gave up my plans, and decided to start a journey in order to figure out what would be God's will to my life. So I asked my parish priest to start a vocational discernment.

At that time, I was a member of a charismatic community in my city,

but I started going for retreats with the Jesuits, and later with the Diocesan priests. Those experiences helped me in my discernment for the religious life, but it was actually with the Carmelites that I found my place in the Church. What really impressed me when I met the Carmelite brothers was the great devotion to Mary, what is actually a life lived in imitation of Mary, which is a particular aspect of our charism. Added to that is the great dimension of prayer and the strong call to contemplation, the joy of living as brothers in fraternity and service. I also have to mention the beauty of the Carmelite habit which is a powerful sign of our consecration and spirituality.

So, after a time of discernment, I joined the Carmelites in 2015, made my first profession in 2018 and my solemn profession in 2023. I must say that I am very happy as a Carmelite brother. I hope my story does not discourage you, but I really wanted to show that sometimes our vocation is not a straight line in the path of our life. However, God is insistent. He is always attracting us to his love but through many different ways. Now I am in my final year of theology, and hopefully I will be ordained soon. Then, that silly thought I had might become true, and I might use some biological terms from time to time in my homilies.

# What is 'authentic love'?



Renata Milán Morales

The Church dedicates the month of February to the Holy Family, an inspiring model of love. This time offers an opportunity for reflection on what love truly means. With St Valentine's Day accompanied by chocolates, flowers, and idealistic films, it is easy to overlook the deeper meaning of love. But we are left with an important question: What did we really celebrate?

On a recent conference held by Pure in Heart Ireland, Michelle Kelly, General Manager of PIH Ireland, shared that "People in the US Google the word 'love' about 1.2 million times a month... Many of those searches ask, 'What is love?' Yet, what often comes up first is a song by Haddaway rather than a true understanding of love. Clearly, we have work to do." This statistic reveals that despite the representations of love in culture, the question of what love is has not been answered.

## Love

The concept of love is often misunderstood, especially in today's world. As Fr Alan O'Sullivan OP noted during the same conference, "Modern culture confuses infatuation with love, but they

are not the same thing." In a society where emotions and feelings have been prioritised, the depth of love is overlooked. Our culture has drifted away from an understanding of love rooted in truth, goodness, and beauty - fundamental characteristics of love and charity. Instead, love has become an agreement between parties based on emotions and sentimentalism. This shift explains why people search for the meaning of love so frequently. "Feelings can be deceiving because they make us believe we love someone, even when we don't," Fr Alan continued. "One of the greatest dangers in relationships is mistaking strong emotions for real love."

**“This reminds us that love, in its truest form, cannot be separated from truth”**

Many of the wounds we experience in life come from a lack of understanding and experience of true love. As Michelle Kelly put it, "Many of the wounds we experience happen from a lack of love... The only one remedy will heal us: to live, receive, give, and know authentic, true love, which always leads us to the source of love, God himself."

St Edith Stein, a German Jewish philosopher who converted to Catholicism and later became a Discalced Carmelite nun, captured this truth. She wrote, "Do not accept anything as the truth if it

lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth." This reminds us that love, in its purest form, cannot be separated from truth. Genuine love is built upon a foundation of honesty, integrity, and authenticity, and it cannot be reduced to mere sentiment or passion.

## Authenticity

Sean Flack, Regional Director of Focus Europe, also shared his experiences working with young men. He observed that many young men are eager to love, often desiring to find a spouse to express this love. However, Mr Flack cautioned, "You should not wait to find your spouse to start loving others." He explained that the recognition of our own selfishness often comes only after we have built a family, but he insisted that this should not be the case. We should begin practising love, generosity, and responsibility long before that moment. As Fr Alan O'Sullivan said, "Responsibility is not a romantic word, but it is the essence of love... The greater the sense of responsibility for the other, the more real the love is."

But the question still lingers: What is love, and how can we truly understand it? St John Paul II offers an answer: "Authentic love is not a vague sentiment or a blind passion. It is an inner attitude that involves the whole human being... Love, in a word, is the gift of self." As Sr Mary Mother of Merciful Love SSVM said during the conference, "Right now, the world is focused on self and pleasure, but we are called to self-giving love, to sacrifice, to embracing the cross."

"We do not 'fall' in love," Fr Alan O'Sullivan concluded. "We grow in love through commitment and virtue... And love is not just an emotion, it is an act of the will." This distinction is crucial. Love involves developing virtues such as patience, kindness, and self-control. Love is not a passing feeling but a conscious decision to act for the good of another.



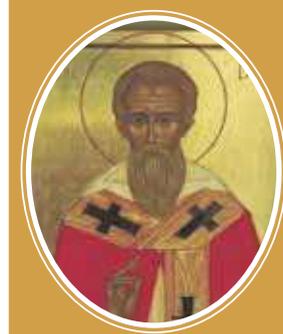
Bartolomé Esteban Murillo - The Heavenly and Earthly Trinities

**“Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth”**

**“Responsibility is not a romantic word, but it is the essence of love... The greater the sense of responsibility for the other, the more real the love is”**

## Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milán Morales



St Peter Damian

## St Peter Damian: Sanctity despite troubles

St Peter was born the youngest child into a poor but noble family in Ravenna, Italy. His early years were not easy, as both of his parents died when he was still young. He was raised by an older brother who mistreated him, forcing him to work. However, his life took a positive turn when his other brother, Fr Damian, a priest from Ravenna, took him in. This brother provided Peter with an excellent education, and Peter was so grateful that he added his brother's name to his own, becoming Peter Damian.

Peter excelled in his studies and taught in a university setting. However, he soon found that the academic life did not suit him, forcing him to withdraw to the monastery of Fonte-Avellana for a forty-day retreat. It was during this time that he discerned a calling to the monastic life

and received the habit, marking the beginning of his spiritual journey as a monk. As a monk, Peter Damian lived a secluded life, dedicating himself to prayer and extreme penance. His penances were so severe that they sometimes affected his health. Despite this, his intellectual gifts were not neglected, and he was soon called upon to teach his fellow monks. His time at the monastery also saw the creation of one of his first works, a biography of St Romuald, a recently deceased monk from his monastery who was renowned for his exceptional holiness.

In 1043, at the age of thirty-five, Peter was appointed the prior of his monastery, and he led his brothers with unwavering commitment to their rule. This was a time of significant instability within the Church, particularly due to the actions of Pope

Benedict IX, whose papacy is remembered by its scandals. In 1045, Benedict IX resigned to marry his cousin, leaving the papacy vacant. Fr Damian's godfather, Fr John Gratian, was made Pope Gregory VI. Peter Damian was excited at this change and urged the new pope to tackle the corruption. Peter was repeatedly called upon to help reform the clergy, combat simony (the selling of Church offices), address sexual abuses, challenge bishops, and reform monasteries.

In 1057, Peter Damian was made Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia, despite his resistance to the position. As a cardinal, he quickly became known for his commitment to eradicating corruption, even when it put him at odds with other Church leaders.

Peter Damian's efforts to reform the Church were not limited to Italy. His work extended to the broader Church,

especially in combating simony and clerical marriage. His writings, such as *Liber gratissimus* and *Liber Gomorrhianus*, were influential in shaping the Church's perspective on these issues. He also played a key role in preparing the decree on papal elections in 1059, which declared that only the College of Cardinals had the right to elect the pope.

Peter Damian died in 1072 at the age of sixty-five, after battling ill health and fighting corruption within the Church for many years. His legacy lives on in his writings, his reform work, and his role in shaping the medieval papacy. In 1828, he was declared a Doctor of the Church. His life remains a powerful testament to the strength of prayer, penance, and reform, and he is remembered as a saint who helped to restore the Church's holiness during a time of great crisis.

# Catholic history in God's own country, Kerala



Rohith Kinattukara

Each time I meet someone new there are two things that shock them. One being that there are Catholics in India and the second being Christianity reached the shores of India before it reached Europe. History shows that St Thomas, one of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ reached Muziris (Modern day Kodungallur in Kerala) in AD 52, and started the evangelical journey of spreading the word of Christ. This was the start of the St Thomas Christians which has now turned into the Syro-Malabar Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern Church, which was a Persian rite, got in contact with the St Thomas Christians and hence the Syro-Malabar Church was formed.

Now there is the other side, the Latin Catholics. The famous Italian explorer was believed to bring the Latin rite to Kerala during the 13th century. He reached Quillon (modern day Kollam a district in Kerala) and started stories of Christianity which led to the first Latin Catholic Diocese in India. The Portuguese traveller Vasco Da Gama, further brought in the idea of Latin Catholicism, which led to an issue between the Syrian Catholics of the time and the Latin Catholics. Imagine the look on their faces when they realised Christianity had already spread in this part of the world.

## Beauty

The beauty in all this is that I am half Latin Catholic and Half Syro-Malabar Catholic. My mother being from the Latin Catholic side. I have seen both traditions, both Masses and other related rituals that might sound



A giant statue of St Thomas at the Palayur Shrine, where St Thomas performed the miracle where he threw water up in the air, which remained still in the air. Seeing this, many Brahmins and Jews at the Palayur area converted. It is a famous place even today for the sacrament of Baptism. Photo: Shahnmusthafa, Wikimedia Commons.

similar but have their own symbolic twists.

**“When it comes to the Syro-Malabar side, it's a mixture of local culture and traditions. A new one to many would be having to attend a marriage preparation course”**

When it comes to Mass, The Syrian Catholics like to keep things very traditional. Usually, the Sunday Mass tends to last around 1h30m to 2h, with loads of songs and prayers. Certain words still use the Aramaic dialect which is quite interest-

ing. For example, Syrian Catholics refer to Jesus as *Yeshu*, which is like the Aramaic name of Christ. As Easter is around the corner, it reminds me of the different ways Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter is being celebrated.

*Pesaha*, also a word derived from Aramaic is Maundy Thursday. The tradition is after Mass, a fermented bread called Appam is baked with the Cross placed in the centre and is dipped in coconut milk while the head of the family reads the Bible. On Good Friday, there is a procession of the Crucifix and after the procession, a sort of sauce is given a bitter gourd (a vegetable found in South Asia) mixed with Vinegar to commemorate the time when Jesus as for water but was offered Vinegar. Easter is

similar but with a joyful Mass with many hymns and songs being played.

One thing Indians are known for our grand weddings, and there is a difference within the Latin Church and the Syro-Malabar Churches have slight variations. My mother's side, it is the same as the weddings we see in the west, same type of display in both Mass and reception. However, when it comes to the Syro-Malabar side, it's a mixture of local culture and traditions. A new one to many would be having to attend a marriage preparation course. This has been the norm for many generations, where talks about healthy family traditions are important, whilst growing as a family in faith.

## Madhuram vekkai

On the wedding eve, *Madhuram vekkai* (sweet giving is the literal translation) takes place in both the bride and groom to be house. This is a Kerala tradition which has been incorporated into the marriage ceremony. Done on the eve of the wedding, this is mainly done in front of close relatives and in both

houses. During the wedding ceremony, a *manthrakodi*, a type of Indian clothing which symbolises Christ's clothing of the church with glory, is kept around the brides' head after tying the *thali* (gold chain) and both the bride and groom swear by the Holy Bible. The *thali* must be worn by the bride for the rest of her life, along with the ring.

**“Yes the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church has its issues currently, but as the years go by, the dedication and strength of these religious folks are increasing”**

Most of the other traditions might sound foreign to many. For instance, having to remove your shoes before entering the church as a sign of respect, Separate seating for men and women, compulsory Cate-

chism classes up until 17 years of age (now a days up to 15 minimum) on Sundays, with a proper school system with exams, and women wearing a veil around their head are some of the different day to day things one must follow as a Syro-Malabar Catholic.

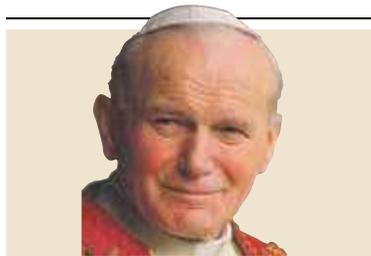
## Growing

The Syro-Malabar Catholic community is growing in Ireland. The community in Ireland is bringing back great numbers to church, with mainly youngsters providing community services and spreading the word of Christ. Yes the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church has its issues currently, but as the years go by, the dedication and strength of these religious folks are increasing, proving centuries worth of history and tradition of our saviour Jesus Christ is above all. God Bless!

**📍 Rohith Kinattukara is a Catholic student from Griffith College Dublin studying MSc in Procurement and Supply Chain Management who loves to write and breathes tech.**

**“The Syro-Malabar Catholic community is growing in Ireland. The community in Ireland is bringing back great numbers to church, with mainly youngsters providing community services and spreading the word of Christ”**

# We have come to worship Him



St John Paul II

**T**here is a strong urge to believe in the shallow myths of success and power. It is dangerous to accept the fleeting ideas of the sacred which present God in the form of cosmic energy, or in any other manner that is inconsistent with Catholic teaching.

My dear young people do not yield to false illusions and passing fashions which so frequently leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum! Reject the seduction of wealth, consumerism and the subtle violence sometimes used by the mass media.

Worshipping the true God is an authentic act of resistance to all forms of idolatry. [...]

As the apostle Paul writes, “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”. The apostle then adds that we must not be conformed to the mentality of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds, to “prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (cf Rm 12: 1-2).

**“They had no hesitation in placing their intellectual abilities at the service of the Faith, thereby demonstrating that Faith and reason are linked and seek each other”**



Pope John Paul II greets the World Youth Day crowd in Czestochowa, Poland, in 1992. Photo: CNS file photo.

Listening to Christ and worshipping Him leads us to make courageous choices, to take what are sometimes heroic decisions. Jesus is demanding, because He wishes our genuine happiness. He calls some to give up everything to follow Him in the priestly or consecrated life. Those who hear this invitation must not be afraid to say ‘yes’ and to generously set about following Him as His disciples. But in addition to vocations to special forms of consecration there is also the specific vocation of all baptised Christians: that is also a vocation to that ‘high standard’ of ordinary Christian living which is expressed in holiness... When we meet Christ and accept His Gospel, life changes and we are driven to communicate our experience to others.

**“The Church needs saints. All are called to holiness, and holy people alone can renew humanity”**

There are so many of our contemporaries who do not yet know the love of God or who are seeking to fill their hearts with trifling substitutes. It is therefore urgently necessary for us to be witnesses to love contemplated in Christ. The

invitation to take part in ‘World Youth Day’ is also extended to you, dear friends, who are not baptised or who do not identify with the Church. Are you not perhaps yearning for the Absolute and in search of ‘something’ to give a meaning to your lives? Turn to Christ and you will not be let down.

Dear young people, the Church needs genuine witnesses for the new evangelisation: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others. The Church needs saints. All are called to holiness, and holy people alone can renew humanity. Many have gone before us along this path of Gospel heroism, and I urge you to turn often to them to pray for their intercession. [...] I would like to specifically mention St Albert the Great and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross who, with the same interior attitude as the Magi, were passionate seekers after the truth. They had no hesitation in placing their intellectual abilities at the service of the Faith, thereby demonstrating that Faith and reason are linked and seek each other.

The Pope will accompany you with his prayers. May Mary, Eucharistic woman and Mother of Wisdom, support you along the way, enlighten your decisions, and teach you to love what is true, good and beautiful. May she lead you all to her Son, who alone can satisfy the innermost yearnings of the human mind and heart.

Go with my blessing!

**i** From the message of the late Pope St John Paul II to the youth of the world in Castel Gandolfo, 6 August 2004 on the occasion of the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne, August 2025.

## Questions of Faith ?

Jenna Marie Cooper

**Is a person divorced due to an abusive marriage unable to receive Communion?**

**Q: If someone were in an abusive marriage, if they divorced would they still lose their right to Communion?**

**A:** The short answer is no, the simple fact of being divorced does not in any way hinder or cut off a Catholic’s access to the sacraments.

For some background, we as Catholics do believe that on a theological level, divorce as such is not truly possible. While the Church does recognise and respect the purely secular legal effects of a civil divorce (e.g., things like property divisions and child custody arrangements), at the end of the day the Church understands divorce as somewhat of a ‘legal fiction’. That is, a consummated marriage between two baptised adults who entered the union with the proper intention and with full knowledge and freedom cannot be ended by anything other than the death of one of the spouses. We can find a scriptural basis for this teaching in Matthew 19:1-12.

It is possible that there could have been a problem at the time of the wedding - such as a mental health issue that prevented one of the parties from being able to consent, or a party having the wrong intentions - which prevented a true marriage from occurring in the first place. This is what the Church’s marriage nullity process exists to discern. Yet we should keep in mind that declaring an apparent marriage invalid is very different from holding that an actual marriage bond can be broken.

However, for serious reasons the Church does allow spouses to separate. In canonical terms, this is called “separation while the bond remains.” And in cases of abuse, the Church’s law could be interpreted as practically encouraging the endangered spouse to leave the marital home.

As we read in Canon 1153 of the Code of Canon Law: “A spouse who occasions grave danger of soul or body to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes the common life unduly difficult, provides the other spouse with a reason to leave, either by a decree of the local Ordinary [that is, the diocesan bishop or his Vicar General] or, if there is danger in delay,

even on his or her own authority.”

Although Canon 1153 envisions the bishop’s involvement in the separation of Catholic spouses, it is noteworthy how this same canon empowers ordinary lay Catholics to use their own best judgment in determining whether there is ‘danger in delay’ in escaping an abusive or otherwise harmful domestic situation.

In a similar vein, while the Church teaches against divorce in general, the Church also acknowledges that a merely civil divorce might be necessary and acceptable in certain situations. Paragraph 2383 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us: “if civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense.”

Divorce only becomes an obstacle for receiving the sacraments when a divorced Catholic attempts to remarry civilly without having had their first marriage declared null by a Catholic marriage tribunal. Since even a legitimately separated Catholic is still married to their original spouse in the eyes of God and the Church, any attempt at a new marriage would not ‘work’. And living with another person in the manner of a married couple, when one is still actually married to another, is technically adultery.

Granted, most divorced and civilly remarried Catholics probably would not experience their new romantic situation as an adulterous union on a purely subjective and emotional level. Still, this does not change the fact that ‘on paper’ at least they are living in a situation of objective and manifest (that is, publicly knowable) grave sin, which is why the divorced and remarried cannot receive Communion.

But these considerations do not apply to a Catholic who is divorced and striving to live a chaste life according to the Church’s teachings.

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



## Our restless selves



Fr Rolheiser

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

**D**uring the last years of his life, Thomas Merton lived in a hermitage outside a monastery, hoping to find more solitude in his life. But solitude is an illusive thing and he found it was forever escaping him.

Then one morning he sensed that for a moment he had found it. However, what he experienced was a surprise to him. Solitude, it turns out, is not some altered state of consciousness or some heightened sense of God and the transcendent in our lives. Solitude, as he experienced it, was simply being peacefully inside your own skin, gratefully aware of and peacefully breathing in the immense richness inside

your own life. Solitude consists in sleeping in intimacy with your own experience, at peace there, aware of its riches and wonder.

**“God has put a sense of past and future into our hearts”**

But that’s not easy. It’s rare. Rarely do we find ourselves at peace with the present moment inside us. Why? Because that’s the way we are built. We are overcharged for this world. When God put us into this world, as the author of the *Book of Ecclesiastes* tells us, God put “timelessness”

**“This intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence”**

into our hearts and because of that we don’t make easy peace with our lives.

We read this, for example, in the famous passage about the rhythm of the seasons in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. There is a time and a season for everything, we are told: “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to gather in what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal ...” and so the text goes on. Then, after listing this natural rhythm of time and the seasons, the author ends with these words: “God has made everything suitable for its own time but has put timelessness into the human heart so that human beings are out of sync with the rhythms of the seasons from beginning to end.”

The Hebrew word used here to express ‘timelessness’ is *Olam*, a word suggesting ‘eternity’ and ‘transcendence’. Some English translations put it this way: “God has put a sense of past and future into our hearts.” Perhaps that captures it best in terms of how we generally experience this in our lives. We know from experience how difficult it is to be at peace inside the present moment because the

past and the future won’t leave us alone. They are forever coloring the present.

### Present

The past haunts us with half-forgotten lullabies and melodies that trigger memories about love found and lost, about wounds that have never healed, and with inchoate feelings of nostalgia, regret, and wanting to cling to something that once was. The past is forever sowing restlessness into the present moment.

And the future? It impales itself into the present as well, looming as promise and threat, forever demanding our attention, forever sowing anxiety into our lives, and forever stripping us of the capacity to simply rest inside the present.

The present is forever colored by obsessions, heartaches, headaches, and anxieties that have little to do with people we are actually sitting with at table.

Philosophers and poets have given various names to

this. Plato called it “a madness that comes from the gods”; Hindu poets have called it “a nostalgia for the infinite”; Shakespeare speaks of “immortal longings”, and Augustine, in perhaps the most famous naming of them all, called it an incurable restlessness that God has put into the human heart to keep it from finding a home in something less than the infinite and eternal – “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

**“In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations”**

And so, it’s rare to be peacefully present to our own lives, restful inside of our own skins. But this ‘torment’, as TS Eliot, once named it, has a God-given

intentionality, a divine purpose.

Henri Nouwen, in a remarkable passage both names the struggle and its purpose: “Our life is a short time in expectation, a time in which sadness and joy kiss each other at every moment. There is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our life. It seems that there is no such thing as a clear-cut pure joy, but that even in the most happy moments of our existence we sense a tinge of sadness. In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations. In every success, there is the fear of jealousy. Behind every smile, there is a tear. In every embrace, there is loneliness. In every friendship, distance. And in all forms of light, there is the knowledge of surrounding darkness. But this intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence. It can do so by making us look forward in expectation to that day when our hearts will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us.”

Our restless hearts keep us from falling asleep to the divine fire inside us.

**“It’s rare to be peacefully present to our own lives, restful inside of our own skins”**

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milán Morales

# God has sent his Son

**G**od has visited his people. He has fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants. He acted far beyond all expectation - he has sent his own ‘beloved Son’. We believe and confess that Jesus is the eternal Son of God made man. For ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’, full of grace and truth.

The transmission of the Christian faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ to lead others to faith in him. From the beginning, the first disciples burned with the desire to proclaim Christ. It and they invite people of every era to enter the joy of their communion with Christ. To catechise is to reveal in the Person of Christ. Only he can lead us to the love of the Father in

the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

### The name

Jesus means in Hebrew: ‘God saves’. At the annunciation, the angel Gabriel gave him the name Jesus as his proper name, which expresses both his identity and his mission. In Jesus, God recapitulates all of his history of salvation on behalf of men. It is the divine name that alone brings salvation.

Jesus’ Resurrection glorifies the name of the Saviour God, for from that time on it is the name of Jesus that fully manifests the supreme power of the “name which is above every name” – it is at heart of Christian prayer. The evil spirits fear his name; in his name his disciples per-

form miracles, for the Father grants all they ask in this name.

The word ‘Christ’ comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah, which means ‘anointed’. It became the name proper to Jesus only because he accomplished perfectly the divine mission that ‘Christ’ signifies. The name ‘Christ’ implies ‘he who anointed’, ‘he who was anointed’ and ‘the very anointing with which he was anointed’.

### Son of God

In the Old Testament, ‘son of God’ is a title given to the angels, the Chosen People, the children of Israel, and their kings. It signifies an adoptive sonship that establishes a relationship of particular intimacy between God and his creature.

When Jesus is called ‘son of God’, it does not necessarily imply that he was more than human.

Jesus referred to himself as ‘the Son’ who knows the Father, as distinct from the ‘servants’ God had earlier sent to his people. Jesus calls himself the ‘only Son of God’, and by this title affirms his eternal pre-existence.

After his Resurrection, Jesus’ divine sonship becomes manifest in the power of his glorified humanity. He was “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead”. The apostles can confess: “We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

# A little fact about a little fruit

1 Sm 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23  
Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13  
1 Cor 15:45-49  
Lk 6:27-38

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Dominik Domagala



James Tissot, Jesus Teaches the People by the Sea



One of my friends, Fr Michael Brady, devoted much of his life to missionary work in Brazil, offering his service for around 50 years. Recently, he shared with me that when he began his missionary journey, others mentioned a small fact about a tiny fruit. He remarked, "Most people wouldn't really eat the fruit because, at first, they found it too bitter and not pleasant to eat at all." "However," he continued, "once you got past the initial taste, you would find that it was extremely healthy and nutritious."

You see, dear reader, today's Gospel is like this little fruit. We can water it down a bit to make it more accessible and sound nicer, but we wouldn't gain much from it. We can also eat it as it is, and although initially a bit bitter, we will eventually find it nutritious and spiritually liberating.

### Common misconception

The Gospel reading for this Sunday seems to present one of the most radical commandments of Jesus: "I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly" (Luke 6:27-28). And from the very beginning, we should realise that this call from the Lord is not just about the simple favours of kindness and care we should offer each other. However, that is what we usually get to when approaching this text.

But Jesus is very straightforward and frank about what he says in the commandment: "If

you love those who love you, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much" (Luke 6:32-33).

**“People frequently undertake favours and acts of courtesy, particularly when there is an eventual benefit. However, Jesus does not instruct us to do this”**

It is quite evident that many individuals, not just Christians, engage in both simple and profound acts of kindness! The commandments of God are not necessary for practising charitable deeds. Many people perform these acts for various reasons, and evidence of this can be found all around us. Sometimes, this stems from genuine kindness; at other times, it is motivated by a desire for something in return. As the increasingly turbulent global political landscape has recently demonstrated, individuals often seek to assist one another when it is advantageous for them. Indeed, people frequently undertake favours and acts of courtesy, particularly when there is an eventual benefit. However, Jesus does not instruct us to do this.

True Christian love towards the neighbour is proven when we are asked to offer it towards someone who is not friendly towards us. About that Jesus speaks

when he uses the phrase: "To the one who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too" (Luke 6:29).

The first step towards the Christian love of the neighbour is a conscious reaction to the actions of others, a reaction within our own thoughts and feelings.

What is, for example, our first and very natural reaction to someone who is aggressive? Undoubtedly, it would be to respond with a similar amount of aggression. Or, at the very least, we might find ourselves punishing that person in our thoughts and harbouring negative feelings towards them. Indeed, if we truly confront this within ourselves, we quickly discover that we have a vibrant selection of names, perhaps even some unsavoury words, ready to spring to mind when someone really gets under our skin! Have you ever imagined that, even while remaining silent and unyielding, you are screaming back everything you genuinely

think about the person or the situation? Yes, I have done that at times as well.

### The law of retaliation

However, that is not what the Lord desires us to do. The different reaction to which He refers may initially seem like capitulation, but in truth, it represents a significant victory. This alternative form of triumph prevents any aggressor from tainting our souls with malice. In Jesus' teachings today, we can find numerous examples of refraining from responding to evil with evil. This is particularly evident in the teaching of turning the other cheek. When the Gospel of St Matthew (Matthew 5:39) advises us to turn the other cheek, it implies that the aggressor is to strike the left side of the face. For a Jew, hitting the left cheek of his opponent meant doing so with the external side of his right hand, which would be perceived as the utmost humiliation!

Jesus teaches us, therefore, not to use the law of retaliation as a response. When someone attempts to diminish the dignity of others and to deny this most essential of human rights, the proper response is not to repeat the same mistake—but rather to

respond differently! Turning the other cheek does not mean naively becoming a punching bag for others; rather, it signifies responding with love against hatred, allowing the wrongdoer to recognise his mistake and cutting the ground from under his feet. Only then, only in this way, shall we be able to improve the situation, the relationship, and eventually the world as a whole.

**“If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?”**

Ultimately, the adage about turning the other cheek should not be understood literally. It is merely a metaphor, illustrating how we ought to respond to evil and injustice. Even the Lord himself demonstrated how to properly enact his teachings. When he was prosecuted before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was presented to Annas and encountered similar injustices. His reaction to the false accusations and beatings was indeed turning the other cheek, but not in a literal sense. Jesus replied, "If I have

spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" (John 18:23).

### Justice and faithfulness

As we approach the conclusion of this Sunday Sermon, let us consider today's First Reading (1 Samuel 26). If David were to think only in human terms, judging by outward appearances, he could easily retaliate for all the evil attempts by King Saul against this faithful servant's life. However, he would not follow the advice of others; instead, he would await God's protection and assistance "for his justice and faithfulness" in adhering to God's commands.

Indeed, this attitude requires trusting God. It also asks us to stand bravely for truth and justice rather than against personal conflicts. If we can overcome it, we will discover in Christ's Command a beautiful, nutritious fruit that can make us truly free.

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**“When someone attempts to diminish the dignity of others and to deny this most essential of human rights, the proper response is not to repeat the same mistake—but rather to respond differently!”**

# Fr Vincent McNabb OP, an Irish light from the past



Matteo Mazzariol

**“T**radition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.”

These words of GK Chesterton are probably the best to introduce the figure of a very dear friend of him, the Dominican priest Vincent McNabb, who definitely went through the “accident of death” many years ago, in 1947. Since then he had been suffering the worse of the disqualification, that of not having been considered anymore.

**“Distributism was not an ideology, but a genuine and transparent effort to apply the reason, enlightened by Faith and Revelation, to the main problems of our civil life”**

It is worth mentioning that Fr McNabb went through another ‘accident’, that of being an Irish man living most of his adult life, at the beginning of the 20th Century, in London, the centre of the English Empire. As a Dominican inspired by the everlasting thought of St Thomas Aquinas, he worked hard, together with significant Catholic lay people such as GK Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, to get an understanding of not only what was wrong with the world but also of what could have been done to fix it, on the ground the Social Doctrine of the Church and of right reason.

He therefore was one of the intellectual leaders, together with the above mentioned personalities, of



Fr Vincent McNabb OP

Distributism, which synthetically can be defined as a interpretation of economics, money and politics as if God matters.

Distributism was not an ideology, but a genuine and transparent effort to apply the reason, enlightened by Faith and Revelation, to the main problems of our civil life.

## Proposal

*The Church and the Land*, written in 1926 was probably the book in which Fr Vincent expressed more clearly his proposal: In order to establish a minimal level of common good and social order, there are four points the humanity needs always to consider, according to the distributist vision. The first is the necessity of putting the natural family

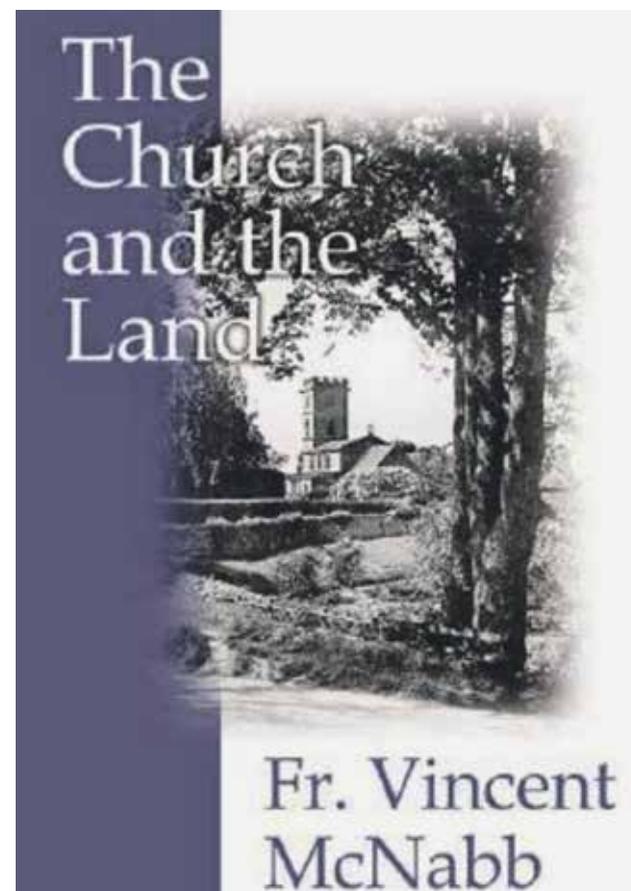
at the centre of economy. The second is the necessity of uniting capital and work in the same people, trying to spread as much as possible the ownership of the tools of production. The third is the necessity to give back again to the social body political participation and freedom, reestablishing the natural communities of work. Lastly, the necessity to rethink the way in which money is created and managed, stopping the monopoly of the banks

in producing money and above stopping the interest of money, or usury, which is at the base of the current uneven distribution of resources and richness and of the tendency to concentrate the possession of property in the hand of an always more limited minority.

## Aggravated

If we turn from the past to the present, we cannot but agree that the socio-economical and political prob-

**“If we turn from the past to the present, we cannot but agree that the socio-economical and political problems which Fr McNabb was facing have only aggravated with time”**



Cover of Fr McNabb's book, *The Church and the Land*, written in 1926.

lems which Fr McNabb was facing have only aggravated with time.

**“He notices that this extreme limited number of people are the same who hold leading positions in the main non governative institutions which are responsible for global governance”**

Peter Philips, eminent american sociologist, in 2024 published a scientific book titled *The Tytan of Economy*. In it he studies who owns most of the capital and richness of the world and comes to the conclusion, based on evidence and data and not on mere assumptions, that the 17th bigger banks and financial institutes in the world hold more than half of the total amount of wealth on Earth.

He clarified that the owners and administrators of these mega businesses are only a few, who, most the times, possess shares in more than one of these institutions. Even more, he notices that this extreme limited number of people are the same who hold leading positions in the main non governative institutions which are responsible for global governance (for example, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Economic Forum of Davos, Bilderberg Group, Group of the Thirty, Trilateral Commission and many more).

In order to fix these imbalance of economical powers, which understandably can produce as well political imbalance, our contemporary thinkers find difficult to think of a reasonable solution.

Would not therefore make sense at this stage to bring back from the very recent past the proposals of Catholic and Irish people such as the most distinguished Fr McNabb, overcoming the unfair prejudice linked to the fact that they are not anymore with us?

**i** Matteo Mazzariol is a Consultant Psychiatrist and founder of the Italian Distributist Movement.

# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Discussions on the practical aspects of marriage

Last Friday being St Valentine's Day it wasn't surprising that love, romance, sex and marriage figured in media discussions.

**Our Divine Sparks** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday) featured some historical background about the saint. Apparently, 3rd-century Roman Emperor Claudius II banned marriage because married men don't make for good soldiers! So, Valentine performed secret marriages and was hauled off to jail and execution. One story was that he fell in love with the jailer's daughter and sent her a letter signed 'from your Valentine', which certainly started a tradition. But then Valentine was a common name in Rome at the time so historians have some trouble distinguishing between them.

Fr James Eivers of Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin told of the great interest in the saint. His relics are stored there – gifted by Pope Gregory XVI in the 1830's. On the saint's day there was Mass and renewal of marriage vows. His shrine has an intentions book – apart from the romantic stuff, sometimes parents pray that their children will be blessed with love. For those who aren't so fortunate, there's a shrine nearby to St Jude – patron saint of hopeless cases!

More practical aspects of marriage were discussed when presenter Dearbhail Mc Donald interviewed David Quinn



The shrine venerating St Valentine at Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin's inner city. Photo Chai Brady

about an Iona Institute report ('Religion, Marriage and Fertility: Shall the Religious Inherit Ireland?'), on the demographic problems caused by the current decline in marriage and fertility. Simply put, in the not-too-distant future there will be an increasing number of older people being supported by a decreasing number of younger

people, with all the pressures that will cause. The report shows that religious people, regardless of which religion they belong to, tend to have more children, hence the second half of the report's title.

David Quinn suggested that one of the reasons behind this "incredible aging of the population" was a "prioritising of

personal freedom above the huge commitment of starting a family". He outlined the 'pro-social' benefits of religious practice and reckoned that a change wasn't going to come from Church leadership, but from within young people themselves (hopefully with the nudging of the Holy Spirit).

The final item asked if 'sex' was a dirty word in the eyes of God, but, despite some insights about 'dignity and flourishing', there were too many clichés, stereotypes, misunderstandings and rationalising about Christian teaching on sexuality.

**Saturday Morning Live** (BBC One, Sunday) dealt with unsavoury aspects of relationships, and, in the light of controversies about abuse in the Church of England, asked the question – 'Can the Church be trusted to police itself?' Their governing body had rejected a fully independent safeguarding structure to deal with abuse cases, opting instead for a hybrid model of 'independent oversight'. Two speakers, including a survivors' representative, were critical of the rejection, believing that the approach ought to be truly independent, while two thought it was a good idea. The latter believed a totally independent model would amount to passing the buck, passing off their responsibilities to others rather than tackling the issues themselves. There was an Anglican clergyman on both sides of the argument. What

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday February 23, 1.15pm**

Art in Churches: Claire McCollum discovers spectacular wall paintings in a Yorkshire village church and explores how traditional and modern art can bring stories of faith alive.

#### CHRIST CONTEMPLATED

**EWTN Wednesday February 26, 11am**

Join Fr Marcus Holden and Dr. Teresa Lane at the National Gallery in London to reflect on twelve different depictions of Jesus Christ in masterpieces from distinct great artists.

#### KINDERTRANSPORT - BYE BYE

**RTÉ 2 Friday February 28, 8.30pm**

When the train pulled out of Wien Westbahnhof in December 1938, every kilometre it covered took the Jewish children sitting in the carriages that little bit closer to safety.

wasn't made clear enough, and this is often the case in controversial debates, was that all four were obviously convinced and of the vital need for safeguarding. Of course, people of good will can agree on principle but disagree on strategy.

I'm not sure that good will motivates the hounding of people whose orthodox Christian views on sexuality and gender offend those who disagree. On **Rod Liddle** (Times Radio, Saturday) the host spoke to lawyer Michael Phillips of the Christian Legal Centre who said that 'to offend is not an offence'. He had represented UK school worker Kristie Higgs who won her appeal case against dismissal over sharing, on a private

Facebook group, her concerns about the teaching of LGBT and gender ideology in a Church of England primary school that her son attended. As Sen. Rónán Mullen said recently, the process is the punishment, and the vindication comes over five years after the initial complaint. The presenter was taken aback by the 'astonishing number' of cases being fought by the Christian Legal Centre – it was around a thousand per year, including one where a student was being required to attend a Pride march.

Learning is one thing, he said, but a requirement to participate and celebrate was something may parents would have a problem with.

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Art and commerce in the film world

How important is art in films? Are we living in a world where money rules OK and everything else gets squashed into the background?

One of the first films I saw when I came to Dublin was Vittorio De Sica's earthy *Bicycle Thieves*, a 'cinema verité' story of a man and his son living on the streets of Italy. It was a culture shock to me, a total antithesis of the Hollywood films I'd been weaned on since childhood.

I was living in Phibsboro at the time and saw it in my 'local', The State cinema, which featured many *avant garde* European films from the likes of De Sica, Fellini and Antonioni. It was later turned into an ice rink, which

seemed to say it all for me about people's priorities.

Mahdi Fleifel's *To a Land Unknown* (15A), currently on release, has been compared to *Bicycle Thieves*, and also to *Midnight Cowboy*, another counter-cultural work. It was the first X-rated film to win an Oscar.

The first fictional feature from Fleifel, *To a Land Unknown* is the story of two Palestinian refugees whose efforts to pony up the cost of (fake) passports to get them out of Athens are derailed when one of them succumbs to drug addiction. They then resort to crime to raise the proceeds.

Fleifel uses De Sica's minimalist directorial style to tell his tale. Sadly, it hasn't been



Marianne Jean-Baptiste as Pansy in *Hard Truths*

deemed a contender for the Best Foreign Film at the Oscar ceremonies this year. I was also surprised to see Edward

Berger not being nominated for *Conclave*, though Ralph Fiennes is in with a shout as Best Actor for this.

Marianne Jean-Baptiste, who was so electrifying in *Hard Truths*, has also been left out of the running for Best Actress, as has Saoirse Ronan, who was widely tipped to be nominated for *The Outrun*. Ronan also missed out on a nomination in the Best Supporting Actress category for Steve McQueen's World War II feature, *Blitz*. Angelina Jolie is another shock omission for her controversial turn as Maria Callas in *Maria*.

Nobody knows why the Academy makes its decisions. It has also bypassed *Kneecap* so Irish hopes at the event – which was due to be held this month but has been postponed due to the L.A. fires – rest on two nominations for *The Apprentice* (which was

produced by our company Tailored Films) – Sebastian Stan and Jeremy Strong.

One cinematic event which has never compromised its artistic ambitions is the Dublin International Film Festival. It takes place this year from February 20 to March 2, opening with another Ralph Fiennes film, Umberto Pasolini's *The Return*, based on the final sections of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The most talked-about film of the festival is Jonathan Kent's alchemised adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's Pulitzer-Prize winning scorching family drama *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, starring Jessica Lange and Ed Harris, both of whom are expected to be in attendance. Hollywood royalty.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



# Christians and the burden of their flesh



Adam and Eve are tempted to eat of the forbidden fruit and are driven from the Garden, from the Sistine Chapel

**Lower than the Angels: A History of Sex and Christianity**, by Diarmaid MacCulloch (Allen Lane, £41.96 / €42.99)

Robert Marshall

**D**iarmaid MacCulloch is emeritus Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University. He has written extensively on the history of the Church and its Reformations. *Lower than the Angels*, running to some 600 pages, is his latest exploration of the complexities of Christian history.

It engages with the Christian experience of human sexuality which, as a professor of genetics commented to me many years ago, is the most complicated part of our personalities. This book is therefore likely to be controversial for many.

MacCulloch's approach is to tell the story quietly and with erudition. He writes in a relaxed style which comes from complete command of an extraordinary breadth of

material. To chart how we have got to where we are today, he resurrects the past values of different Christian societies. He confronts many sacred cows, misconceptions and much misperception.

Words of warning are sounded in the opening chapter. Not only is most writing concerning the Bible written by men, but most of those men are clerics. There are difficulties of translation, some of which may be prepared not to reflect the concerns of the original, but instead some contemporary preoccupation of our own, or of a particular generation.

## Altered

MacCulloch emphasises that the biblical text cannot be altered to suit modern sensibilities. This means that the controversial aspects of St John's Gospel which styles Jesus' opponents as the Jews has to stand, and cannot be adjusted to meet twenty-first sensitivities to the horrific twentieth century crimes against them.

Like MacCulloch's *His-*

*tory of Christianity* (Allen Lane, 2009), this book examines the first 3,000 years of Christianity. Three millennia are examined because of the need to set Christianity in the Hellenistic and Jewish contexts in which it originated. Distinct from the Greeks gods, the god of the Hebrews had no name: 'I am that I am'.

**“MacCulloch brings the tools of scholasticism to his exploration of gender and Christianity”**

A further distinction from the surrounding peoples of Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean was that Hebrews made no graven image of Him. Between the two cultures, masculinity and marriage differed. The consequences of these origins are charted in five parts as their inherent differences ebbed and flowed across the two millennia of Christianity proper.

A feature of this book is MacCulloch's politeness to and consideration for of those who hold to different viewpoints – an instance is his refusal to refer to “Nestorians” so that the index directs readers to the entries ‘Church of the East’, ‘Dyophysite Christianity’ and ‘Syriac Christianity’.

MacCulloch brings the tools of scholasticism to his exploration of gender and Christianity. He notes in chapter twelve – when considering Gregory VII and the First Sexual Revolution – that the Scholastic method was disputatious, sceptical, analytical, and that this remained the characteristic of Western intellectual exploration long after most Western intellectuals parted company with Scholasticism itself. With these tools he examines different cultures, regimes and religious circumstances in five parts.

## Hellenism

Part One entitled ‘Foundations’ examines the differences between Greek and Jewish thought, the consequences of Hellenism meeting Judaism, and then their

reflection in the ‘infant’ narratives, the Holy Family and the teaching of Jesus Christ, son of the Virgin and ‘Son of Man’.

Part Two entitled ‘Families and Monasteries’ looks at St Paul, the emergence of Christianity and its mutation from Jewish sect to Christian Church culminating in a chapter entitled ‘Virgins, Celibates, and Ascetics’ reviewing the emergence of monasticism and arguments for and against marriage.

**“Here he notes how medical theory on gender boundaries became more rigid while concepts of sex and gender drew more closely together”**

All changed in the reign of Constantine so that

Part Three is entitled ‘the Coming of Christendom’. Amongst the themes here are ‘Ascetic Christianity in Imperial Society’, the spiritual and temporal value of marriage; celibacy for the different orders of clergy and the survival and variety of marriage; the advent of Islam, western landscapes of monasteries including Ireland, and Anglo Saxon Christianity.

Part Four is divided into three chapters. They examine ‘Pope Gregory VII and the First Sexual Revolution 1000 - 1200’, particularly the Gregorian choice between lay marriage and clerical celibacy, followed by ‘Western Christendom Established (1100 to 1500)’ and finally ‘The Second Revolution: the Reformation Chasm (1500 - 1700)’.

## Enlightenment

Part Five is the longest as under the title ‘New Stories’ MacCulloch considers ‘Enlightenment and Choice’. Here he notes how

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.

**“Western marriage is currently a matter of a loving relationship but it was not always so, for marriage was arranged between two men - the groom and the bride’s father”**

medical theory on gender boundaries became more rigid while concepts of sex and gender drew more closely together (p. 380). ‘Revolution and Catholicism Rebuilt’ considers the consequence of an ultramontane Church emerging from the attempt by the French Revolution to ‘crush Christendom’.

‘Global Western Christianity’ is the title of a chapter dealing with the age of Imperialism, addressing Christian concerns to abolish slavery, Victorian values, and polygamies.

**“Despite the apparent malaise in comfortable Western Europe, Christianity is a work in progress, ‘taking root in new situations and reinventing itself for new times’”**

Part Five has three further chapters which bring us to the Culture Wars of the twenty-first century. The twentieth century gives rise to Pentecostalism, contraception, new voices for Christian women, the continuing debate over sexual liberalism, and public intrusion into relationships. Here MacCulloch notes the prescience of the Anglo-Catholic Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford, 1911-19, who critically pointed out that the separation “of sexual pleasure from procreation” justifies the philosophy of homosexuality.

That very much calls a spade a spade and irrespective of sexual orientation, the separation mentioned has created much expectation and driven much contentious change.

The ongoing nature of Christianity means that this book has no conclusion. Despite the apparent malaise in comfortable Western Europe, Christianity is a work in progress, ‘taking root in new situations and reinventing itself for new times’.

Throughout two millennia Christianity has adapted

to changing times, often slowly and against considerable internal resistance, compounded by denominational difference. Currently, the Bible is often found to be ‘a blunt instrument’ when ‘faced with matters of sex and gender that receive no meaningful coverage in scriptural pronouncements’. Nothing is inherently wrong in change, unless there is a pretence that things have always been thus.

Complexities and variety preclude summarising here how over the millennia Christians have spoken about ‘sex, men, women, children, and marriage’. To read this book is to be confronted with the evidence that it has been ‘a complicated and varied conversation’. Western marriage is currently a matter of a loving relationship but it was not always so, for marriage was arranged between two men - the groom and the bride’s father. Others saw value only in a chaste and spiritual life. Baptism replaced male circumcision, and became the universal badge of Christian identity. That universality suggests the authenticity of female leadership in clerical roles around which an ecumenical consensus has yet to emerge.

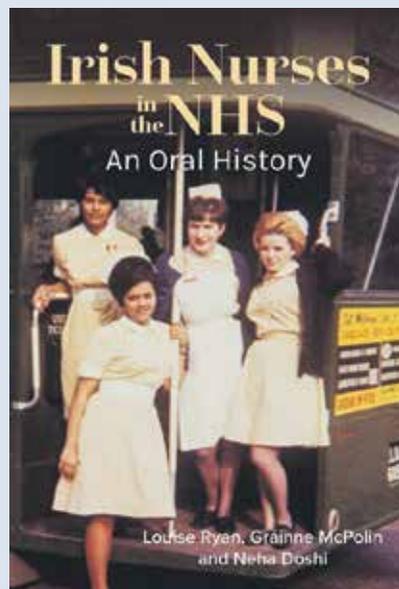
### Society

Gender both supports and divides society. The attributes of what it is to be male or female are imposed by societies on that physiological division. The attributes change over time. The pace of change has accelerated, creating winners and losers, both emotional and financial. Coming to grips with those changes is challenging for the reader, for modern society, and the place of Christianity within it.

This worthwhile book is essential for understanding the layers behind Christian perspectives of gender and sex over the centuries. It is quietly thought provoking: while reading it, expect some challenges.

**Rev. Robert Marshall, a priest in the Church of Ireland tradition, is Diocesan and Provincial Registrar for the Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough. He writes here in a personal capacity.**

# ‘The Irish Nurse’ as an international image of attentive care in times of need



**Irish Nurses in the NHS: An Oral History**, by Louise Ryan, Gráinne McPolin and Neha Doshi (Four Courts Press, €17.95pb)

**J. Anthony Gaughan**

In the second half of the twentieth century, thousands of Irish girls migrated to the UK to train as nurses. They were subsequently employed in hospitals throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Some also served as District Nurses in communities across the UK.

The National Health Service had been established in 1948, an outcome of the social reforms which emerged from the wartime conditions of Britain between 1939 and 1945. By the 1960s some 30,000 Irish born nurses were working across the NHS, consisting of 12% of all the nursing staff. This important study records their collective experience.

All in all this is a remarkable story of an aspect of the Irish diaspora which deserves to be better known, even though many of the older generation with British contacts will be aware of the popularity that ‘the Irish nurse’ enjoyed. For many of them it was a matter of a deep unspoken sense of Christian *caritas* in action.

### Teaching

The training programmes they undertook were hospital based and very practical with short periods of classroom teaching. As one interviewee recalled: ‘It was hands on, on the



ward and then block training, every so often you would get two or three weeks academic and that went on for three years. Halfway through you had an intermediate test and then after three years you had the main test – the finals. The exams were both practical and written”. There was an emphasis on discipline with regard to punctuality and particularly on the need to show respect to patients. There were very few English nurses in the hospital wards but there was ethnic diversity, with nurses from Jamaica, Trinidad, Malaysia and India. The extent of the ethnic diversity depended on the location of the hospital.

**“The interviewees recalled the very long hours in the wards, the struggle to stay awake during night duty and the occasional encounter with the matron”**

The nurses greatly appreciated their uniforms, seeing it as both a sign and source of their authority. Some described how putting on the uniform gave them confidence. The uniform not only denoted identity as a nurse but like a military uniform also indicated one’s rank and seniority. As one nurse recalled: “The patients knew from the uniform who everybody was. A white belt was a first year, a purple belt was a second year, a gold belt a third year, a blue uniform was a qualified nurse, a navy uniform was a sister”.

**“The Irish nurses in London spent most of their free time dancing. They stole out of the nurses’s homes to dance their nights away in the Irish dance-halls then run by the ebullient Kerryman, Bill Fuller”**

Relations between colleagues followed a rigid hierarchy and clear status. This hierarchy and regimented formality on the wards was reflected on how staff addressed each other. The authority and control of the ward sister was daunting and not to be challenged. The interviewees recalled the very long hours in the wards, the struggle to stay awake during night duty and the occasional encounter with the matron.

Seemingly the Irish nurses in London spent most of their free time dancing. They stole out of the nurses’s homes to dance their nights away in the Irish dance-halls then run by the ebullient Kerryman, Bill Fuller.

Strangely none of the nurses refer to the Irish Centre in London which was established to cater for the social activities of the Irish emigrants.

Nor is there an acknowledgement of the splendid programme devised and implemented by the Irish Catholic bishops to provide for the spiritual and general well-being of the most vulnerable of the Irish emigrants. This was staffed by priests, nuns and a large number of lay volunteers who ensured that the emigrants did not lose contact with their families back in Ireland.

### Local people

The Irish nurses recalled how they were received by the local people. This varied according to different time-periods or, above all, events. The Irish girls who travelled to the UK in the 1950s would see landlady’s signs, such as ‘No Blacks, No Irish, No dogs!’ But this soon became just a bad memory. Later the anti-Irish feeling the Irish nurses faced was caused by various IRA campaigns of violence.

Most of the Irish nurses who trained and worked in the UK returned home, where they continued to exercise their profession and enhanced various branches of Ireland’s medical services.

Apart from its merits as an oral history, this publication is a fitting tribute to our Irish nurses who trained in the UK. But given the difficulties that public medicine now faces in both Ireland and Great Britain, with increasing difficulties in finance and management, this book recalls a lost era when it seemed possible to achieve a health service serving all impartially and with ease.

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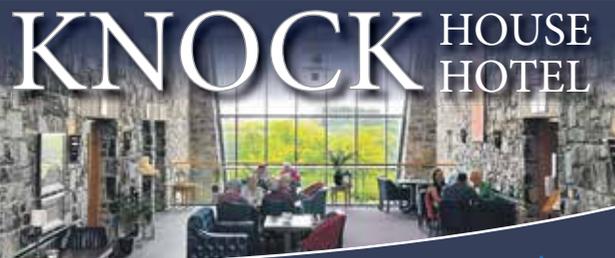
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For more information, please contact James at jsullivan@materfoundation.ie or phone 01 830 3482.

## Crossword

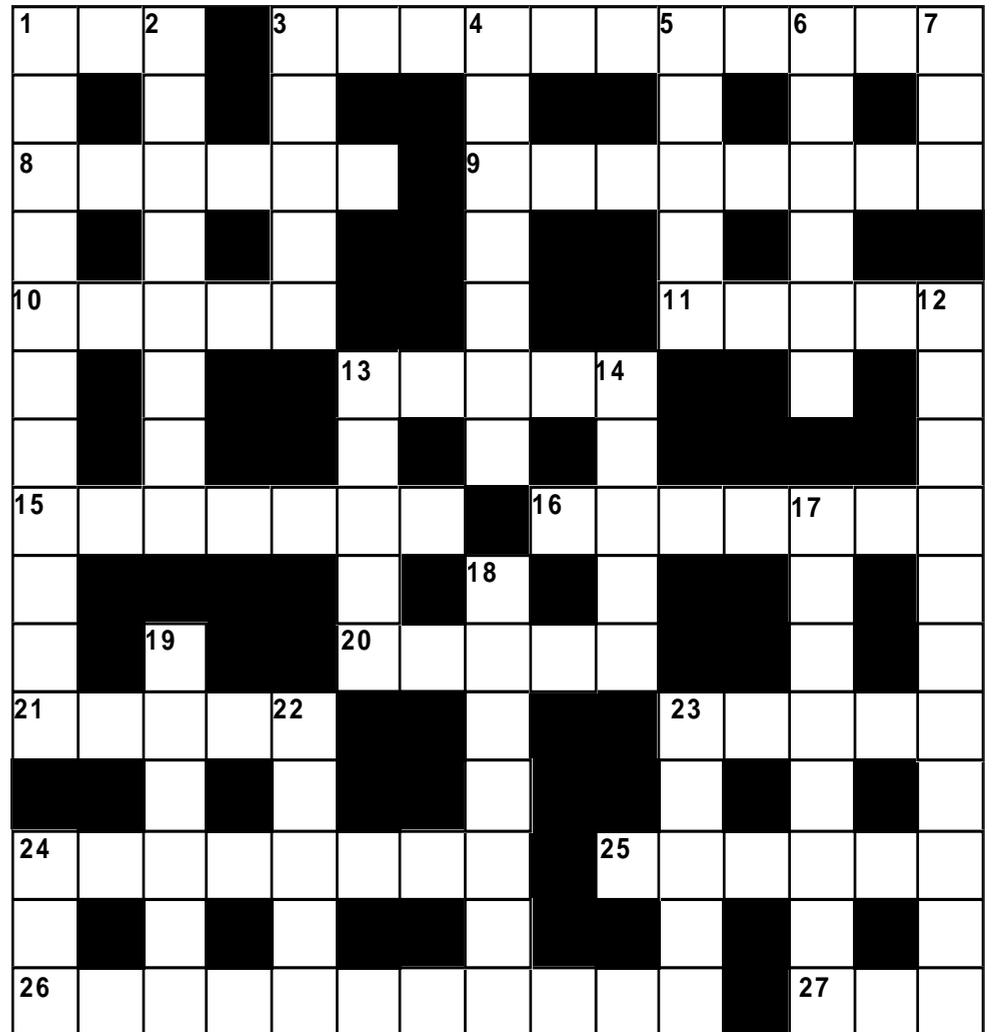
Gordius 703

### Across

- 1 Assistance (3)
- 3 Sphere used by fortune tellers (7,4)
- 8 Out of the country (6)
- 9 It's convenient to eat (4,4)
- 10 Liturgical vestment (5)
- 11 Wetland. (5)
- 13 It is used for animal bedding (5)
- 15 Hairy facial feature (7)
- 16 French city on the Riviera (7)
- 20 Excavation, dike (5)
- 21 Item of furniture (5)
- 23 Wood projection inserted into a mortise (5)
- 24 Absolute clarity (8)
- 25 Disc-shaped element of a drum kit (6)
- 26 Health-enhancing substance (11)
- 27 State, utter (3)

### Down

- 1 Drug administered to make you unconscious (11)
- 2 This creature is often given as an example of a hibernant (8)
- 3 Long for uncontrollably; need (5)
- 4 Endures pain or hardship (7)
- 5 Water-lily or yoga position (5)



- 6 Unprincipled (6)
- 7 Chap (3)
- 12 What made Oberammergau famous (7,4)
- 13 Got to one's feet (5)
- 14 Winding apparatus (5)
- 17 Cypriot who evangelised along with St Paul (8)
- 18 Wandered off the planned route (7)
- 19 Talisman (6)
- 22 Cowboy competition (5)
- 23 Lovers' rendezvous (5)
- 24 Meadow (3)

## SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 13

### GORDIUS No. 702

#### Across

- 1 Ton 3 Greenhouses 8 Caviar 9 Beverage 10 Lunge 11 About 13 Based 15 Puffins 16 Puccini 20 Sloth 21 Keats 23 Viola 24. Rehoused 25 Pagoda 26. Forward pass 27 Yet

#### Down

- 1 Tickled pink 2 Novena of grace 4 Embassy 5 Omega 6 Season 7 Sue 12 Taking apart 13 Bends 14 Dough 17 Ideology 18 Roundup 19 Washer 22 Sauna 23 Vials 24 Ref

## Sudoku Corner 571

### Easy

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

### Hard

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

### Last week's Easy 570

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

### Last week's Hard 570

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

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



# Diocesan appointment heralds a time of change

**This week it was announced** that Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Kevin Doran to be Bishop of Achonry. Kevin is Bishop of Elphin and now is bishop of both dioceses. Since last April he has been Apostolic Administrator in our diocese so, in many ways, this was an expected announcement and a welcome one.

There was, as can be understood, a lot of surprise in our diocese – indeed in all the Western dioceses – when it was announced last year that the amalgamation of dioceses is the road ahead. This means that the six dioceses that formed the Province of Tuam, will become three. Furthermore, that the six bishops who oversaw the dioceses of the province will become three. In effect, this has already happened, with Bishop Michael Duignan being Bishop of Galway and Bishop of Clonfert, Archbishop Francis Duffy being Archbishop of Tuam and Apostolic Administrator of Killala and now, Bishop Kevin Doran being Bishop of Elphin and Bishop of Achonry. It is truly a time of change and change brings its own challenges and, in fairness, opportunities.

**Challenge**

The challenge is around being open to change. We are all crea-



Parishioners congratulate Bishop Kevin Doran following his appointment as Bishop of Achonry during Sunday Mass on February 16. He will minister simultaneously as Bishop of Achonry and as Bishop of Elphin following Pope Francis' appointment.

tures of habit and can find it difficult to adjust to new expectations and demands. When I went to the seminary, I went with the hope of being a priest in the diocese of Achonry. It is my home diocese, and I felt I knew it well and believed that my future lay in the hope of being a priest of that diocese for the rest of my life. I knew

it to be a small diocese, and this would have been brought home to me when I met other students in Maynooth and they might say: "Where is Achonry?" A reminder, even if I didn't recognise it as such, that what is "home" to us might be just a name to someone else.

**“The challenge then, is to look to a new landscape that will involve closer collaboration with the people and priests of our neighbouring diocese, united now under one bishop”**

I was and am happy to be a priest of Achonry Diocese. Apart from the five years when I worked in the Marriage Tribunal in Galway, the past thirty-eight years have been spent in a number of parishes of the diocese and, thankfully, they have been happy years with good and decent people. The priests of the diocese have been good to me as well and it is a pleasure and an honour to be numbered amongst them. The challenge then, is to

look to a new landscape that will involve closer collaboration with the people and priests of our neighbouring diocese, united now under one bishop.

**Opportunity**

Therein lies the opportunity too! We as people and priests belong now to a larger grouping and a broader canvas. In time, as this process continues, our dioceses will become one. What name will that diocese have? Probably depending on where we are right now, and as they say on TV "In no particular order", it might be the Diocese of Achonry and Elphin or the Diocese of Elphin and Achonry! Whatever the name at the heart of the diocese will be people, striving to live life and life in faith. There will be good days and difficult days, days of great hope and days of doubt but days when we will try to be Church together. In all those days, the constant will be God. We may well have to re-write some of our current script and be more flexible in our response, but we can and will do this.

Something that has struck me very forcibly over the past few months is that for people the "parish" is central. For priests, and those who work in

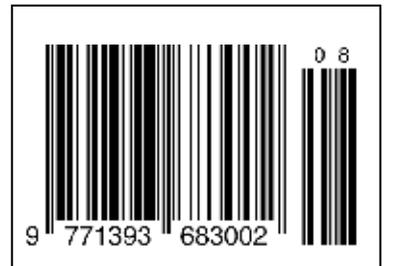
**Remembering Achonry**

I am thinking of a priest of the diocese, now dead, who spoke one time of celebrating Mass in Westminster Cathedral. He spoke of the sacristy being huge with numerous attendants on hand. One of the men, possibly the man in charge, asked in a rather toffee-nosed manner "Where is Father from?", to which he replied "Achonry". There was a silence, and the man in a puzzled if not overly excited tone, responded: "A-connn-ryyyy, haven't heard of it!"

Our man celebrated Mass! God bless Achonry and Elphin (in no particular order!)

the diocese, there is a sense of family but maybe family is at its best when it reaches out and welcomes in.

That seems to be where we are. Maybe we are at our best!



**EMERGENCY IN SUDAN:**

**Please help The Little Way Association to ensure that medical help and care reaches thousands of those in need**

Some time ago, our Association was pleased to be able to assist Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in their vital medical work in many places in Sudan. As Pope Francis has often reminded us, a forgotten tragedy has been unfolding away from the eyes of the public. Civil war has devastated the health care system and left millions of children and adults in desperate need of medical care. Over 4 million children have fled from their homes.

In South Darfur, MSF is seeing one of the worst maternal and child health emergencies in the world. "Thousands of children are on the brink of death and starvation," writes MSF. "Newborn babies, pregnant women, and new mothers are dying in shocking numbers. And so many of these deaths are due to preventable conditions, but almost everything has broken down. The scarcity of functioning health facilities and unaffordable transportation costs mean many women and children arrive at hospital in critical condition. With the conflict now well into its second year, the needs remain enormous."

**PLEASE HELP US TO CONTINUE PROVIDING VITAL CARE TOGETHER. WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE.**

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION to enable MSF to continue to provide life-saving medical care to thousands of malnourished children, pregnant women, new mothers and their babies in South Darfur.

**PLEASE BE AS GENEROUS AS YOU CAN, AND PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN. THE NEEDS ARE IMMENSE.**



*"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight." - St Therese*

**MISSION CHAPELS**

St. Therese, our patroness, wished to spread the Gospel throughout the world "until the end of time". We receive many requests for help from bishops and priests to build, renovate or complete their mission chapels. We are often asked for funds to provide a permanent roof for a chapel. In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of straw or other flimsy material which, as you may imagine, is easily damaged or destroyed in bad weather.

*Your donation will help a priest in a mission country to provide a decent chapel for his congregation, a fitting place for the celebration of Holy Mass.*

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- €..... **EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR SUDAN**
- €..... **MISSION CHAPELS**
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We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass
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