

# The Irish Catholic

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## Sacred liturgy being eroded by 'golf balls and fishing rods'

### Priests increasingly demoralised by uncommitted Catholics' lack of appreciation for sacred - Bishop

Garry O'Sullivan

The sacredness of the liturgy is being eroded by people who don't understand it and want to personalise it, and this is demoralising priests, according to Bishop Donal Roche, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* as a contributor to the 'Relentless Ministry' series in this paper, he said that people were looking for "pop songs at funerals and wanting to bring up footballs and fishing rods in the offertory procession."

"I can understand that sense that priests have, I have it myself, the sacredness of the liturgy is being eroded by people who don't really understand it and want it personalised. And even among the faithful - 'well it's daddy's funeral' - they want a celebration of daddy's life instead of what it should be, it's a prayer, we're praying for the person who died and for God to have mercy on his or her soul. We've lost that; now it's golf balls and fishing rods and so on. That gets priests down a lot, the liturgy being compromised and people wanting to bring in their own stuff and music etc."

He added: "It's very hard to say 'No' and we've allowed it to happen, and we didn't want to be unpopular and we didn't want to say 'No' and now more and more it's being taken over. Fr Chris Hayden writing in *The Irish Catholic* made that point very well about the way a lot of priests feel about the lack of sense of appreciation of the liturgy and what we offer. That's at the heart of it. He captured so much in his piece on how priests feel. He said one of the causes of this relentless

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### Black tea and a little bit of Purgatory



Children of the Parish of Greencastle, Co. Tyrone recently had their Confirmation retreat in Lough Derg. They are preparing for their Confirmation ceremony with Bishop Donal McKeown on Saturday.

## GAA giant warns youth 'a lot more insecure' now

Éanna Mackey

The "fear of failure" for young GAA players is "massive" because their shortcomings can be broadcast across social media, Seán Óg Ó hAilpín has warned.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Mr hAilpín said that when he was a young hurler "unless someone was at the game, they wouldn't know how well or how poorly I played".

"Everything is instant nowadays because of social media. It is really challenging; I'd struggle myself if I were a teenager now, no doubt," he said.

Despite his concerns, he acknowledges that young people need to come to their own realisations.

Mr hAilpín said: "I think switching off from technology would definitely help a lot of young people. The art of communicating with one another is dying and they would be much better if they weren't so reliant and focused on their phones. But you're trying to talk to a 15-year-old saying that—they'd think you're from a different planet."

"I think that it's something that they'll only find out with experience, and when they get to my age, they might think, 'Maybe that fella Seán Óg had a point.' But they'll have to go through the experiences of life to be able to reflect and look back. They'll just have to experience life with and without their phone to make a judgement themselves of what's worthwhile and what's not."

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The Irish Catholic



## Sacred liturgy being eroded by 'golf balls and fishing rods'

» **Continued from Page 1** ministry are the Catholics who make demands but are not committed enough to make sense of the Church's mission. I think that captured for me a lot of what is going on in parishes."

One solution he suggested is a service without a mass. "I try to explain, not to give in, maybe compromise a bit but one solution is a funeral without a Mass, a religious service that is not

mass allows for more flexibility and takes the tension out of it. Because you haven't got the sacredness of the eucharist and people talking and laughing during Holy Communion. It is an alternative way and leave the sacrament for those who appreciate it. That's not trying to sound elitist but it is something we could explore more to help priests with that tension, that there are options."

### A wee dote



Digital creator from Donegal, Eric Roberts and his wife Niamh Emmett celebrated the Christening of their son Rían Oisín Roberts last weekend in St John the Baptist Church, Carrigart. The family is pictured with PP Charles Byrne in a photo published on social media.

# Government gives €2.3M to international abortion provider

### Renata Milán Morales

The Department of Foreign Affairs has provided €2.3 million to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) between 2019 and 2024, Minister for Foreign Affairs Neale Richmond has confirmed.

Carol Nolan TD recently questioned Minister Richmond regarding the impact of Ireland's abortion legislation since its legalisation in 2018. Ireland now aligns with the "European Union's position on sexual and reproductive health and rights," replied Minister Richmond.

In a statement by the Pro-Life Campaign, Eilís Mulroy said: "If the goal was to fund maternal healthcare and

safety for women during pregnancy in developing countries, the Government could have very easily donated to groups that provide such excellent care to women and babies in pregnancy. They decided to donate to a major international abortion provider with an appalling record in human rights and in respecting the right to life. There needs to be an urgent debate in the Dáil on this matter and the way in which taxpayers' money is being spent." Minister Richmond said that Ireland's development cooperation programme does not "prioritise the promotion or provision of abortion, and no specific funding is allocated for that purpose. Instead, the initiative aims to reduce unmet contraceptive needs, particu-

larly among adolescents and young women, including those in humanitarian crises."

"Since 2022, the Department of Foreign Affairs has provided €2,300,000 to the global health care provider, the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF). The IPPF is one of the leading providers of contraception in low-income countries," explained the minister.

Commenting on the minister's reply, Deputy Carol Nolan said, "content with directing millions in taxpayers funding to abortion and ending innocent lives here in Ireland, the Government is now actively blurring the lines for abortion access abroad and promoting an ideology that is inextricably linked to its practice. How much death is enough?"

## Cubism pioneer drawing returns to Kingscourt Parish

### Staff reporter

An original drawing of the Fatima Window by Evie Hone, Irish artist considered an early pioneer of cubism, has recently been discovered by the Mercy sisters in Co. Cavan.

The local parish community was delighted to welcome this original piece of work and accept it back to the parish. It is expected to be on display soon in the church.

Evie Hone was born on April 1894 in Dublin. At age 11 she contracted Polio which left her with a severe disability for the rest of her life. She was as knowledgeable in Medieval Stained Glass as she was in European Stained Glass.

She converted to Catholicism in 1937. This fact with her search for a true expression of her faith, led her to continue her work in stained glass. She had a dislike of any of her works leaving Ireland and thus her



Pictured are Sr Brenda Dolphin, Leader of the Mercy Sisters, and Sr Mary Coyle, Archivist of the Mercy Sisters, presenting the original drawing by Evie Hone of the Fatima window at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, which was recently discovered in their archives to Annette O'Rourke, Chairperson of the Kingscourt Parish Pastoral Assembly and Ciaran Boylan, Chairperson of the Parish Finance Committee. Photo: Paul Callaghan.

stained-glass windows are to be seen in churches throughout the country.

Her most famous commissions were a series of five windows she made for the Catholic Church in Tullabeg, Co. Offaly (1946). Four windows for the

Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt (1947 – 1948), the Hatch Street, Dublin series in 1947 and the huge nine light Eton College Chapel East window (1949 – 1952).

The only church in Co. Cavan with Evie Hone-stained glass

window is the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt. In Co. Meath, there is an Evie Hone window in the Church of Ireland at Tara.

Her windows in Kingscourt are truly unique and are treasured by the Parish.

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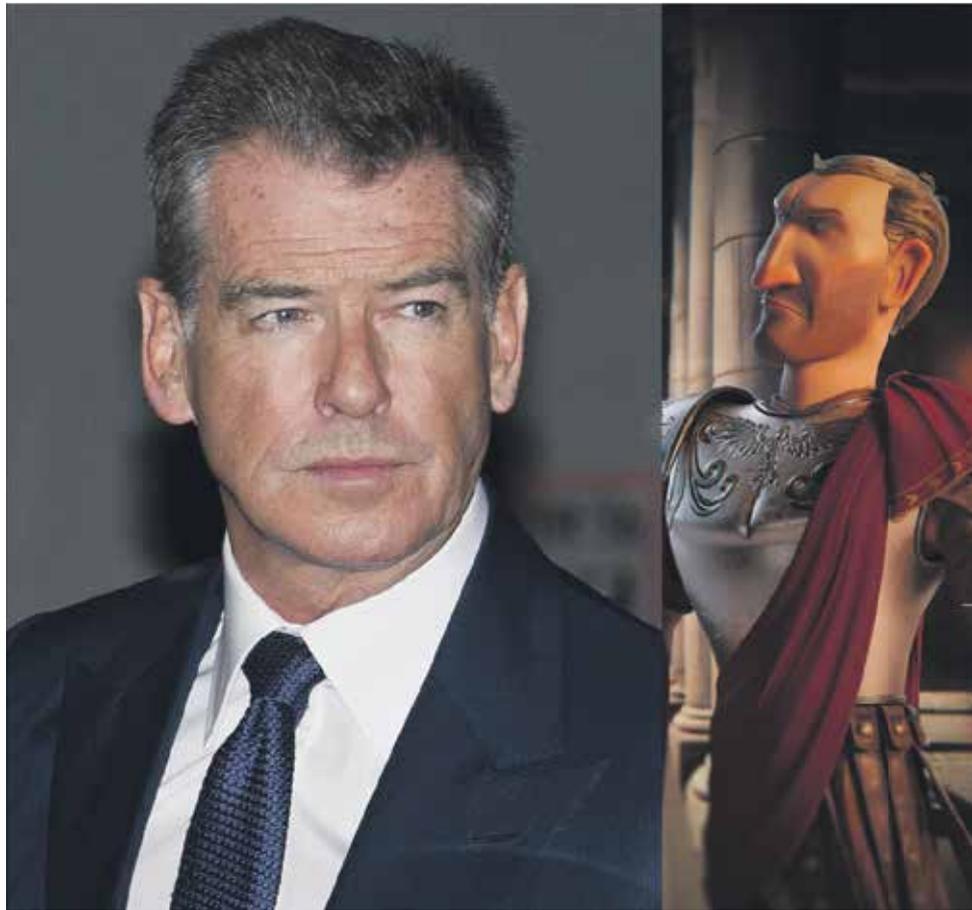
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# Pierce's Pilate has licence to kill in The King of Kings



Pierce Brosnan, Irish actor who voices Pontius Pilate in *The King of Kings*

## Renata Milán Morales

A new animated film, *The King of Kings*, will be in cinemas on April 11. The project tells the story of the life of Jesus through the eyes of a child as his father narrates it.

The film is based on an untold story by Charles Dickens, written in 1849. His retelling of Christ's life, originally intended to teach

his children about Jesus.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the film director, Seong-ho Jang said, "Audiences will laugh, they will cry, and they will leave the cinema with a renewed sense of hope... It's not just about Jesus' miracles and teachings. It's about understanding what it means to love unconditionally."

Pierce Brosnan said, "I'm sure this film will touch many hearts. It's a powerful

story that has stood the test of time, and now a new generation will get to experience it in a whole new way."

Pierce Brosnan, who voices Pontius Pilate, found the script moving. "Pilate is a man conflicted," he explained. "He doesn't want to make the decision to crucify Jesus, but the pressure of politics and power weighs heavily on him. It was an incredible role to explore."

# New community centre to open in former parish church building

## Renata Steffens

St Margaret's Parish Hall in Finglas, which was purchased by Fingal County Council in 2023 and renovated, will reopen at the end of April as a community centre.

The parish hall had been in the centre of the community life for decades and when plans of selling the hall were announced in 2022, the community was afraid local groups would be left 'homeless'.

Speaking for the community centre, Ann English told *The Irish Catholic* the "Community Centre will fulfil the role" of being a centre piece for the community.

Despite the official opening of St Margaret's Community Centre being planned for the end of April beginning of May, a 'viewing' already took place on March 16. Coinciding with the viewing, a community day took place with

a raffle being hosted in the newly renovated building.

During the renovation, the sign at the door naming the place was switched to a 'St Margaret's Community Centre' one, however, the religious history of the building was not erased. A plaque inside states the building was the parish church of St Margaret from 1786 to 1900 and that three former parish priests are buried underneath.

St Canice's Church, who with St Margaret's and other churches compose the Greater Finglas Parish, said in a post on Facebook the new Centre will become "a vibrant resource for all, bringing a new energy to a super community."

Even though the place is not yet officially open, "expressions of interest are at present being taken," Ms English said. Those who are interested in using the Centre for an hourly charge of €25 can email [stmargarethall25@gmail.com](mailto:stmargarethall25@gmail.com) and request the booking form.



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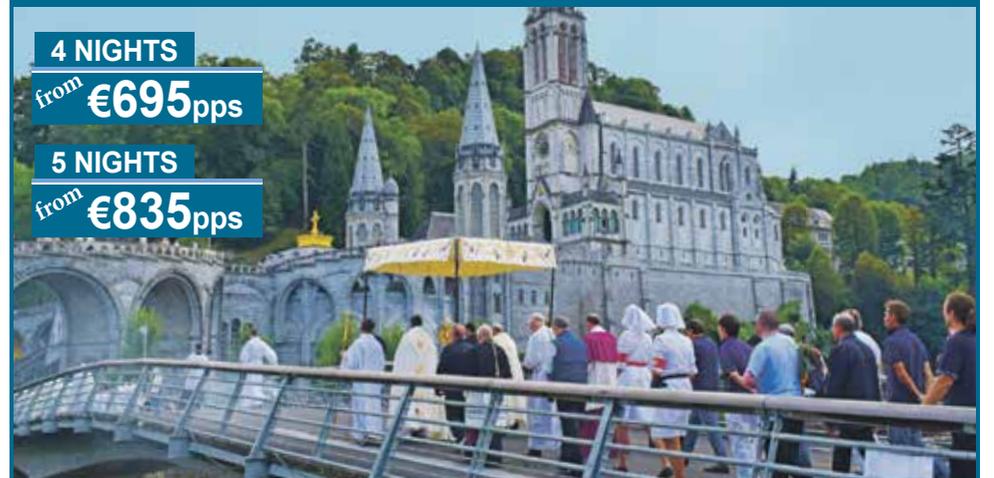
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# TDs bash bill seeking removal of 'God' from judicial oath

Chai Brady

A bill introduced last week which aims to change the Constitution and remove the oath to God judges must take has been criticised by TDs.

It was introduced by Fine Gael's Barry Ward TD of Dún Laoghaire and to fully pass would require a referendum.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Carol Nolan TD of Laois-Offaly described the move as "political vanity" and that the Government is "tone deaf" to the people.

"Not one person in ten thousand outside the Law Library or the hard left political enclaves wants the Government to spend valuable time and money

on this proposed referendum," she said "If anything, my sense is people actually want an oath that transcends the whims of personal belief. An oath rooted in and mindful of the ultimate source of our laws, as the constitution outlines."

Mattie McGrath TD of Tipperary South said he believes there are "far more important issues" than seeking a referendum for changing the judicial oath.

"It is my belief that it should not be changed, the same way as the Dáil prayer. The census will tell us that it is a Christian, Catholic, country. Let the people decide if they want to, but this constant chipping away and undermining is totally unnecessary and appealing to his

constituents in south Dublin, in the leafy suburbs," Mr McGrath said.

The Thirty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judicial Oath of Office) Bill 2025 aims to "modernise" the oath by removing references to 'God' from the English and Irish versions of the oath, and change the word 'man' to 'person' in the English version.

The sections in question are "I láthair Dia na nUilechumhacht" in the Irish oath and "In the presence of Almighty God" in the English, which also includes "May God direct and sustain me" at the end.

Mr Ward, who is a barrister, said in the Dáil that he is Christian but that it is "contradictory in a modern state that

we would require people of a different faith or no faith at all to stand up in the Supreme Court and make a declaration in the presence of Almighty God, a personage in whom they might not believe to any extent at all, to take the oath in the presence of that personage and then require that that same personage would direct and sustain them".

"This is inconsistent with modern Ireland. I am not anti-religion. It is hugely important. Many judges believe in God, but it must also be the case that many do not believe in God. As a result, it seems unfair to expect them to take an oath that essentially expresses a belief in God or else is a nonsense."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Rest in Peace: Fr Dermot Laycock (1944–2025)

Born in Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry, Fr Dermot Laycock was ordained in 1970 after studying at Clonliffe College Dublin and St Patrick's, Maynooth. He served as a priest and teacher in Dun Laoghaire before becoming chaplain at Mountjoy Prison (1975–1983). He later ministered in Marino and Killester, eventually serving as parish priest at Church of the Guardian Angel, Newtownpark Avenue, until his retirement in 2020.

A dedicated priest for 55 years, Fr Laycock was known for his deep faith, kindness, and ability to bring people together. He established parish groups, built two parish centres, and was committed to lay involvement. Even during his long illness, he maintained friendships and supported those in need. An avid golfer with a dry wit, he was beloved in the diocese.

Fr Laycock passed away peacefully on March 23, 2025. He is survived by his sisters, extended family, and classmates. May he rest in peace.

### 122 congregations gather in hope for liturgy of renewal

The Archdiocese of Dublin hosted a Liturgy of Hope for nearly 122 religious congregations, celebrating the Consecrated, Religious, and Contemplatives. Archbishop Dermot Farrell presided over the Mass, which was part of the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious in Ireland (AMRI) ongoing efforts to chart a hopeful future for religious and missionary life in Ireland.

This follows the release of AMRI's recent plan, A Future with Hope, born from consultations with religious leaders. The plan addresses the challenges of shrinking congregations and the aging population of religious members, many over 70.

## Young people not negative towards Church - Bishop Roche

Garry O'Sullivan

"Most young people today don't have a lot of negativity towards the Church, they might actually be more curious about what the Church is offering," Bishop Donal Roche told *The Irish Catholic*. Bishop Roche is an auxiliary bishop in the Dublin Archdiocese and is charged with visiting the

priests and laity of the parishes of the Archdiocese regularly.

He said it was sad that young people and older people go to other faiths looking for spiritual practices which already exist inside the church, such as Christian meditation. "We have something here that people just don't appreciate" he said. "Christian meditation, being still, surrendering to God,

saying 'I can't cope with this, I need help' and just sitting in His presence in Adoration. Adoration – silent prayer is very popular and in some city churches they report a regular stream of people just coming in during the day and sitting quietly. But it's not widely known, we need to advertise it more, what we have. We have something very good, and posi-

tive to offer."

Bishop Roche also lamented that many people don't have an adult understanding of one of the Church's greatest sacraments, the sacrament of forgiveness. "People also have a stereotypical view of Confession since they were children – 'I told lies and kicked my sister' – 'say three Hail Marys' and they're stuck in this childish view and have not being able to see it in a more adult way, that this is a way to unburden yourself of any anxiety and guilt you have and to be reassured in a human voice with a

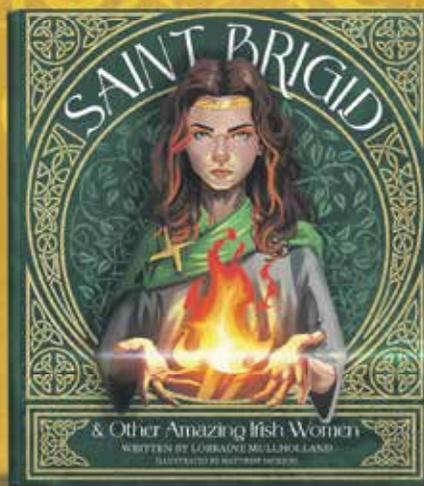
person in front of you. There are places that offer regular confession and they get lots of people going, but by and large people have this idea that your first confession is your only confession or its just for kids. It is definitively misunderstood."

He concluded: "Yes awful things have happened but there is a lot to give, its not about me or us, it's about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what he's offering and the values he is offering the world. We have something to give, let's not be too downhearted over own failings and shortcomings."

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Fr John Kenny Adm Westport launched the Jubilee 2025 Pilgrim Passport at Croagh Patrick. The Pilgrim Passport is a joint initiative of Croagh Patrick, Knock Shrine and Lough Derg. Pilgrims are invited to visit all three sanctuaries as part of the Jubilee Year Pilgrims of Hope. When pilgrims have completed all three of them, they can receive a special commemorative Jubilee Year Pilgrims Medal. The official online launch event takes place this Friday. For more details visit [www.pilgrimpassport.ie](http://www.pilgrimpassport.ie). Photo: Frank Dolan.

## Radio Maria appoints new Priest Director

Renata Steffens

Radio Maria Ireland appointed a new Priest Director this week. Fr Des Farren MSC is joining the Catholic radio station as it reaches its tenth anniversary.

Fr Farren's new role is to ensure the charism and identity of the radio station are upheld, evangelise and serve as the spiritual and institutional leader for both staff and volunteers and manages the life in the station

and oratory within the studio.

Fr Farren will take over the work from current Spiritual Director Deacon Don Devaney, who will continue to be involved in the station. "I was humbled to be considered as Priest Director and look forward to building upon the great work of my predecessors," Fr Farren said.

Fr Farren carries into the new role his experience as formator and National Chap-

lain for the World Apostolate of Fatima, where he also spent a term on their international board. The priest also worked as a healthcare chaplain, a lecturer in South Africa and a pilgrimage leader.

"We are excited to welcome Fr Des to our leadership team, having become part of our community celebrating Mass in the station in the last few months" said John Carlin, President of Radio Maria Ireland.

# Mother's Day versus the Annunciation

I was married on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, many moons ago, back in the 1970s.

Friends said "You're mad! Getting hitched at the end of the tax year – such bad timing!" I have always borne in mind, ever since, that money and fiscal policies often have quite an influence on matrimonial arrangements.

## Special

Nevertheless, and putting material matters aside, March 25 has remained a special date, and I've always regarded the Annunciation as my special feast. It truly is a celebration of life, and of motherhood.

Mary's visitation by the Angel Gabriel has inspired painters since the pre-Renaissance period: Fra Angelico's tempera work, painted between 1432 and 1434 was among the



Mary Kenny

first of many depictions of this momentous event. 'The Annunciation' became probably the most frequently-portrayed themes of European painting over centuries, and central to the development of European art.

**“The Annunciation underlines a more nuanced message: that motherhood begins in the womb”**

Some regard the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan as the starting-point

of Christianity. Yet, from a female perspective, the Annunciation must represent, literally, the conception of the Christian faith. Mary saying “yes” to becoming the mother of the Saviour, is how Christianity began.

The significance of this event is reflected in the rosary, in the Angelus, and in the veneration of the Mother of God in both Eastern and Western Christian devotion. The Anglicans called it “Lady Day”, and it became a key date in the legal calendar under British law.

Yet the Annunciation has lost significance – or public recognition – in more recent history. I would suggest that

**“The Annunciation has lost significance – or public recognition – in more recent history. I would suggest that it has been succeeded, or replaced, by the more secular feast of Mother's Day, occurring this weekend”**

## The power of ‘offering it up’

The cool young women sitting next to me at the coffee-shop had two main topics of conversation. One was their gym membership and how often they exercised. The second was a self-help book that is topping the best-seller lists and has “gone viral”. “It has really empowered me,” I heard. “It’s changed my outlook on managing my life.”

It’s interesting to hear what captures people’s attention, so I went and obtained the book in question. It’s called *The Let Them Theory* by Mel Robbins, a successful American self-help guru whose profits go into the many millions.

The theory, as spelt out in the book, is perfectly sensible and helpful. In a nutshell, it says “stop trying to control what you have no power over”. If the traffic is maddening, there’s no point in fuming – you can’t do anything about it. If people have negative opinions about you – or stupid opinions you know to be wrong – it’s unlikely you’ll change their mind by argument: let them. Friendships sometimes fade: accept it. Don’t compare yourself upwards to others – those richer, more successful, happier – it’s pointless. Life isn’t fair – be sure of that.

Evidently, these age-old maxims have found a new audience. A lot

of this advice to “rise above life’s aggravations” is drawn from old wisdoms. As we age, we most of us realise, anyway, that we’re wasting time and energy trying to control what’s beyond our reach. Patience, endurance and “offering it up” is an essential part of religious traditions.

In one way, I’m glad to see the coffee-house clientèle searching for meaning: the question of “How to live” also preoccupied the Greek philosophers. Hopefully, modern readers might eventually pursue a deeper source which leads them to the missing link in life’s meaning – spirituality.



The Annunciation, fresco by Fra Angelico, 1438–45; in the Museum of San Marco, Florence. Photo Encyclopædia Britannica

it has been succeeded, or replaced, by the more secular feast of Mother's Day, occurring this weekend.

The widespread celebration of Mother's Day, even if it is egregiously commercialised, is perfectly fine. It's nice to honour your mother.

But the Annunciation underlines a more nuanced message: that motherhood begins in the womb. That sacred sense of wonder and awe of the miracle of life's launchpad is what inspired all those painters through the ages.

When invited to participate in 'Synodality' in my local parish, I have, when possible, joined in. It seems, generally, a good idea to get communities and congregations together, though I'm not sure yet how deep the impact goes. *The Synodal Times*, in this newspaper, also keeps

me informed.

But Damian Thompson, a well-informed, if sometimes waspish, English Catholic writer (and an old friend of mine) has a different take. He calls synodality “an Anglican-style talking-shop for woke activists that is trying the patience of bishops the world over.” One future

candidate for the Papacy, Cardinal Pietro Parolin – currently Vatican Secretary of State (in secular terms, Prime Minister) – would be rid of it, Damian claims, writing in *The Spectator*.

Damian is a critic of Pope Francis, and claims that he has hosted “pro-abortion zealots and trans-rights fanatics” just to “goad the

traditionalists”.

Meanwhile leading Irish historian Diarmaid Ferriter complains that Francis has been too traditional – he speaks with tolerance, but doesn't modernise Catholic doctrines enough.

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# Outreach push planned for PSNI Catholic recruits

**Chai Brady**

The Catholic Police Guild of Northern Ireland are planning a new outreach push in schools before the end of the academic year to tackle the low numbers of Catholics joining the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

The Catholic Guild has received funds under the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund for an outreach programme to tackle the recruitment issue.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Superintendent Gerry Murray – chair of the Catholic Police Guild – said that they aim to “make

specifically Catholic schools in the hard-to-reach areas aware of the variety of career paths within the Pathways to Employment”.

“We are looking at outreach, where young Catholic police officers and Catholic staff would speak to lower sixth or upper sixth to talk about pathways to employment within the PSNI,” Supt Murray explained.

“There are so many other jobs within the PSNI, physiotherapists, nurses, doctors, journalists, IT consultants, call handlers, there’s a range of support services that support frontline policing. We’re hoping before the academic year closes to have an outreach programme.”

While Supt Murray would be of the same mind as justice minister Naomi Long that there should not be a return to 50:50 policing – a quota introduced to balance the lack of Catholic officers – he said there should be an independent review as the PSNI comes up to its 25-year anniversary.

“At this particular time, in my honest opinion as chair of the Catholic Guild, I think 50:50 may have run its course,” he said.

“And I think we need to look at a new dimension with regard to the organisation. And maybe an independent review of the Police Service of Northern Ireland coming up to 25 years to look at the culture of the

organisation and to look at the barriers to recruitment – it might be a softer way of going forward as opposed to 50:50.”

Earlier this year it was revealed that of thousands of applicants just about a quarter were from a Catholic background.

Supt Murray said: “The figures are low and the senior executive team within the Police Service of Northern Ireland are aware of this. One of the reasons the Catholic Guild was founded was to support and work with the senior management team to help the recruitment process. It is very, very disappointing. And I do think to some extent, one aspect may be legacy.”

# Ireland's oldest woman had strong faith says family

**Garry O'Sullivan**

Born on New Year's Eve in 1915, at Sandy Row, Castlefin Ruby Druce was 109 years and 80 days old and was Ireland's oldest person before her death.

Martin Harran, the husband of Ruby's niece Carmel, with whom Ruby spent the final eight months of her life, told the *The Irish Catholic* that Ruby's faith was very important to her. “Ruby was a lifelong Catholic and daily Mass attendee

until her 90s. Up to the middle of last year, at 108 she was still saying her Rosary every day – sometimes several times – and listening to Mass on YouTube. The symbols of Ruby's life brought to the altar at the start of her funeral Mass included a copy of the *Messenger* magazine which she distributed locally for many years; her Rosary beads; her original christening gown which was placed on her coffin, providing a symbolic link between her Baptism and her death. Her christening gown was

brought to the altar by her great-grand-niece (our granddaughter) also called Ruby, who was baptised in the same gown 100 years later.”

He added: “Fr Harkin had selected Luke 2:22-38, the story of the Presentation, for the Gospel Reading and in his homily, related Ruby to Simeon, talking about how Ruby had waited patiently for the call from God and that “It was very much a prayerful waiting ... that Ruby was in a state of continual prayer.”



The first photo is Ruby on her last birthday with her extended family holding the nine centenarian medals she has received from the President. The photo on the right is of Ruby at 100 holding Ruby Jr. wearing the Christening robe they were both baptised in.

The Irish Catholic

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## Come and See: fostering vocations amid a priest shortage

**Pedro Esteva**

According to the Vatican's Central Office of Church Statistics, the global Catholic population has grown from 1.39 billion to 1.4 billion. However, priest shortages persist in Europe, the Americas, and Oceania, despite vocational growth in Africa and Asia.

Against this backdrop, Fr Willie Purcell, head of the National Vocations Office in Ireland, has observed increased interest in the priesthood. “Last weekend, we had a Come and See weekend with 22 young men attending, which was great,” he shared.

In an interview with *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Purcell emphasised the role of the community in fostering vocations. “The most important thing laypeople can do is pray for vocations and encourage men to consider priesthood. A simple question from a parent, teacher, or priest—‘Have you ever thought about becoming a priest?’—can spark an inquiry.”

He advises discerners to pray, seek guidance from a vocations director or priest, and draw inspiration from saints like Bl. Carlo Acutis and Sr Clare Crockett. As priest numbers decline, prayer and personal encouragement remain vital for the Church's future.

## 600 students gather in Malahide to venerate Blessed Carlo Acutis

**Pedro Esteva**

Over 600 schoolchildren and teenagers gathered at St Sylvester's Parish, Malahide, for a grace-filled day honouring Bl. Carlo Acutis, the first millennial saint set to be canonised on April 27.

Mary-Aoife and Séamus Ong from Carlo Acutis Ireland shared moving testimonies about Carlo's deep love for the Eucharist, inspiring

young hearts to follow his example of faith and devotion. The students received a blessing with the relic, lit candles, and joined together in prayer.

The event was part of a wider weekend centred around the visit of a first-class relic of Bl. Carlo. It included talks on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and Eucharistic miracles, as well as special

blessings for infants, toddlers, and young children and blessings for the public after each Mass.

Made possible by dedicated parish volunteers and Fr Des Doyle PP, the gathering fostered a strong sense of community and spiritual renewal. Blessed Carlo's witness continues to inspire young people worldwide, proving that holiness is possible at any age.

# The battle for a vision of society



Maria Steen

Last weekend, a conference was held in the Clayton Hotel in Ballsbridge, Dublin, hosted by the Life Institute, Family and Solidarity, and Doctors for Life on the issue of assisted suicide. All around the world, there are moves to introduce assisted suicide, and Ireland is no different. Last year, a majority of TDs voted in favour of a report advocating for assisted suicide and euthanasia, and a “Voluntary Assisted Dying” private member’s bill was introduced. Is this simply “a sign of the times” that we and society should shrug off as “compassion” and “progress”? The words of the Gospel according to St Luke, Chapter 12 come to mind: “How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time? Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right?”

For Catholics and Christians, and all who believe in God, the times are rather a prompt for us to answer the question: “why is suicide wrong?” and to communicate that to the society in which we live.

In opposing assisted suicide, the challenge in western society today centres on the divide between believers and non-believers. It is not a question, as so many atheists rather ham-fistedly attempt to frame it, of religious people “imposing their views” on others – that is what those who support assisted suicide are attempting to do after all. The “don’t impose your views on me” objection is therefore one of the most stupid comments that can be made: anyone who lobbies for a particular law is seeking to impose that law on everyone in society. The real question rather centres on the difficulty of articulating why suicide – in all its guises, assisted or otherwise – is wrong if you don’t believe in God.

## Convincing

There is a real difficulty for atheists to make a convincing argument against suicide that doesn’t descend into circular reasoning or contradictory or frankly hypocritical arguments. Ultimately, in a world without God, everything is simply a matter of preference.

**“Do we get rid of the weak and vulnerable or do we look after them? Do we encourage each other through thick and thin, or are we indifferent to others, not caring if they give up and lose hope?”**

Do we get rid of the weak and vulnerable or do we look after them?



Some atheists will say “suicide is morally wrong in the same way that selling oneself into slavery is wrong” – but why is that wrong? If a person consents to it, why shouldn’t he or she decide to do so? Another might say “suicide hurts others, particularly friends and family”. But in a world without God and with no afterlife (and therefore no consequences or accountability), why do we have a duty to others? What do their feelings matter to us after we are gone, or even before we are gone? Secular humanists might argue that life has intrinsic value in itself – but again, if there is no God and we are just a random collection of atoms that has magically morphed into a living being, why does that life have more value or dignity than other life forms, or why does it have any value at all?

**“Suicide is wrong, because our lives are not our own, our bodies are not our own, our freedom and life were bought at a great price by One who loved us more that we can ever comprehend”**

For the believer, all rights, all duties, all authority to write laws and to govern ultimately come from God. This is not as some atheists say, irrational, rather it is the opposite, completely rational, logical and authentic. Why? Well, for the believer, there is a God, and that being the case, we owe

a duty and loyalty to Him. It is because of our recognition that human life comes from God, the Creator, and is impressed with His image and likeness, that each life has an inherent worth. The fact that each of us is a creature of God is testament to our shared heritage and underscores the fact that though there seem to be great inequalities between us, we are required to treat each other with equal dignity, respect – and for the Christian – love.

Suicide is wrong, because our lives are not our own, our bodies are not our own, our freedom and life were bought at a great price by One who loved us more that we can ever comprehend. This world in which we live is not our true home, but rather a staging post while we wait for our real life to start. And to gain admittance to our new home, we will be called to give an account of ourselves and our actions and omissions throughout our lives.

As the Book of Genesis teaches us, without God, all things lead to death. With God, however, there is life – everlasting life – and that has consequences for our thinking and our decision-making.

## Dignity

This is why, ultimately, all Human Rights stem from the Church’s teaching on the inherent dignity of man. Although the Human Rights industry has been taken over by secular humanists and atheists, its foundation is Christian. If that foundation is undermined, it is simply a matter of time before the whole edifice comes crumbling down. Amidst

himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world.” Chesterton saw it as an act of treason against the world and the ultimate insult to God – which it is.

**“A person who commits suicide is a man who cares so little for anything outside him, that he wants to see the last of everything”**

That is not to say that there may be very difficult circumstances at play in which a person feels “driven” to suicide, but very many wrongdoings have some difficult circumstances behind them. The suicide, says Chesterton, is the opposite of the martyr. A martyr is a man who cares so much for something outside him, that he forgets his own personal life. A person who commits suicide is a man who cares so little for anything outside him, that he wants to see the last of everything.

Those words may seem harsh to modern ears – there is much greater understanding these days of mental

illness and suffering, I hear you say. But is there really? Why does there seem to be so much more mental illness around? Which is kinder to say: “Suicide is a sin. You need to know that before you decide on it, because as great as your suffering is now, eternal suffering is much worse. I will hold your hand, I will help you cope, I will ease your pain as best I can.” Or to say: “Suicide is a completely reasonable response, you’ve suffered for far too long, you don’t need to anymore. I’ll help you end it all – then you’ll have no more suffering and pain.” Which response makes for a better social order, for a more compassionate and loving society?

Whatever law is put in place, at its root will be one vision of society and the nature of humanity, or another. That vision, for good or ill, will be imposed on all of us. The choice is ours: Do we get rid of the weak and vulnerable or do we look after them? Do we encourage each other through thick and thin, or are we indifferent to others, not caring if they give up and lose hope? Do we give what is due to our Creator or do we insult Him?

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# Prayers, exorcism and a remarkable reverence in Athlone pilgrimage



Louise Rosingrave

Athlone came to a standstill on St Patrick's eve, for a public reaffirming of faith in the form of a Eucharistic Procession. More than 1,000 Catholics travelled from all four corners of the country to accompany Our Lord Jesus Christ through the streets. The Procession, which follows similar events in Dublin last September and Derry in February, was multi-purpose, with a specific focus on the deliverance of special blessings to all four provinces from a heart of the country, on a bridge over the River Shannon.

For this reporter, the reverence with which the spectacle was received on the streets was significant and somewhat unexpected. The people of Athlone stood respectfully, if somewhat confused, bemused or mystified. There were no harsh words for participants, no mockery or abuse that I saw. When I mentioned this to organisers, Brian and Karen Brady, they provided the following explanation:

"Where Our Lord walks through the streets, demons flee."

## Exorcism

During preparatory prayers in St Mary's Church beforehand, Fr Basil McCabe of Silverstream Priory in Co Meath explained that while he did not have the required permission from the Bishop to conduct a general exorcism of Athlone ahead of the event, he could (and did) offer exorcism prayers in Latin for the Procession itself and for those that encountered it. I believe it was these prayers, plus thirty three hours of adoration at the 6th Century site of St Ciaran's Monastery, Clonmacnoise, that paved the way for the beautiful atmospheric peace that accompanied this public pilgrimage.

The Bradys explained that a Walk The Cross pilgrimage from Clonmacnoise to Dublin had taken place in the lead up to the Eucharistic Procession through the streets of Dublin which they organised on September 14th last.

"The idea came to us through prayer. We had Walked the Cross to Dublin, praying along the canals ahead of the Eucharistic Procession in Dublin city and the success of that gave us the confidence to keep going. We were just so pleasantly surprised by how it



**“The clincher for me, the moment I knew this was going to happen, was when I heard of the four statues that were blessed by the Pope in Rome, that were coming back to Ireland, one for each province”**

went and it gave us the heart to keep going, to organise another Procession and to encourage others to organise their own in towns around the country," Brian Brady said.

**“We were able to honour the heart of Ireland and to bless it. That was huge. It was a great witness to our faith”**

Karen Brady spoke to me about how the word Croí, (meaning heart in English) came to her in prayer and after that, a series of unusually organic events allowed the entire organisation of the Athlone event to simply 'flow'.

"We were able to honour the heart of Ireland and to bless it. That was huge. It was a great witness to our faith. The Catholic faith is alive and well and it is the only place you can get the peace, love, joy and hope that the world cannot give you," Karen said.

The central purpose of this

series of Eucharistic Processions is for the revival of the Catholic Faith in Ireland. The believers, prayed in earnest for the rekindling of their precious Catholic faith, for their families, friends, neighbours, for the government, for those that have gone before us, those who literally suffered and died for their faith.

Banners of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saints Joseph and Patrick and the beloved Sister Clare Crockett of Derry billowed in the breeze as the procession moved east to west across the Shannon. Gardai stopped traffic to facilitate the prayerful crossing over the Town Bridge, a limestone construction opened in 1844 at a cost of £23,000. The Procession skirted the walls of the 12th Century Athlone Castle and continued along by the infamous Sean's Bar, which claims to be the oldest pub in Ireland. On the town's greenway bridge (2023, €15m) crossing west to east, the assembly drew to a halt and knelt for the offering of the Rosary, lead via microphone by the voices of the youngest participants - members of the Children's Rosary

movement, groups of which are popping up in communities around the country.

## Pinnacle

From the centre of this bridge, Fr McCabe issued the pinnacle prayers of the Eucharistic Procession, offered on the eve of Saint Patrick, blessing all four cardinal points in the four provinces of Ireland, calling down an outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the rekindling of the Catholic faith countrywide.

"It was actually a very moving moment. It brought a tear to the eye for those that knew what was going on," Karen said.

Meanwhile, apartment dwellers emerged and stood on riverside balconies to view the spectacle, take photos or stand respectfully for the passing of Our Lord Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance. It was a most unusual experience, to witness this almost ethereal reverence in action, so far removed from the ordinary bustle of a busy market town on a Sunday afternoon.

"The clincher for me, the



"I went because I felt called to go. To give witness to the faith and to pray for a renewal of the faith, for the young people to get to know God. It was very moving. It was very emotional. It's very encouraging, that others felt called too. The moment of Fr Basil's blessing on the footbridge, that was key. It was to bring the faith back to life. To convert us all and bring us all closer to the Lord.

**Mary Bourke,**  
Ballintubber, Co Mayo

"For me, the Eucharistic Procession was a profound and moving experience. It was powerful, from the singing of the Divine Mercy (leaving the Church) to the arrival back at the Church, capturing everyone on the streets - in cars, busses, walking and beyond. As the procession moved along the streets it was as if Jesus himself was walking among us, touching hearts and renewing souls."

**Lourda Dunne,**  
Doolin, Co Clare

"It was a really beautiful experience. It gives great hope for our country. Watching the little children lead the Rosary as part of the Children's Rosary Movement was profound. They are the future of our church in Ireland. They prayed with such reverence and the little five year old girl leading a decade of the Rosary 'as Gaeilge' was really heart warming!"

**Karen Clancy**  
Ennis, Co Clare

"I was tired that day and I wasn't going to go. It's a two hour journey for me. But effort is always rewarded and it was definitely worth going. I thought it was very powerful. It was a good crowd, I didn't expect so many people and there was respect as we walked through Athlone. People were standing out in their faith and they were respected for it. I think when you step out for God, when you put yourself out for him, he will stand up for you."

**Turlough Keenan,**  
Castleblayney, Co Monaghan from Manna Heritage Mill.

moment I knew this was going to happen, was when I heard of the four statues that were blessed by the Pope in Rome, that were coming back to Ireland, one for each province," Brian explained.

**“Was Our Blessed Mother watching over her children as they walked and prayed to reclaim the heart of Ireland for Christ?”**

In the aftermath of the event, the Bradys sent me some pictures they had captured on phone cameras. In one photo, as the Proces-

sion passed Quirke and Sons Motor Factors, located on Abbey Lane, an anomaly presented itself over a statue of Our Blessed Lady, the statue destined for Connacht. The picture depicts four men carrying the statue at shoulder height on a wooden plinth. The picture angle captures the view from below, so that behind Our Lady is blue sky and white clouds. In the photo, behind the actual plaster statue, is a second definite outline of Our Lady in the sky, separated from the top of the Quirke building by a layer of clouds. Take a look. Was Our Blessed Mother watching over her children as they walked and prayed to reclaim the heart of Ireland for Christ? Perhaps this is what they call a 'glitch in the Matrix.'



# Adolescence: Boys need positive male role models



David Quinn

**T**ánaiste Simon Harris has come to attention of Andrew Tate of all people. You might not be familiar with who Andrew Tate is, so let me explain. He is a 'social media influencer' with millions of followers, overwhelmingly teenage boys and young men. He promotes an extremely aggressive form of masculinity that basically tells his followers to take what they can from life, to be ultra-competitive and to regard women as something to be used. It is the definition of 'toxic masculinity', a survival of the fittest mentality which says that the strong should prosper, because they can, and the weakest should get out of the way. You protect only what you want to protect, but you have no broader obligation to protect the vulnerable.

All and all, it is a completely anti-Christian philosophy. Tate himself is British-American and a former professional kick-boxer. He and his brother, Tristan, are currently being investigated in Romania (which they moved to sometime back) on suspicion of rape and human trafficking, charges they deny.

## Adolescence

Tate's influence on young boys features heavily in a new, widely discussed Netflix series called *Adolescence*. The central character is 13-year-old Jamie Miller who is arrested in the opening scene of episode one after he is seen on CCTV the previous evening stabbing to death a girl who went to the same school as him.

Jamie lives in a small council-type house with his mother and father and sister. His crime comes as a total shock to his parents. Jamie has no history of delinquency. He is by and large getting on well at school, although teachers have spotted changes for the worse in his

behaviour, but nothing to be unduly alarmed by. Jamie does not look tough. On the contrary, he looks like a choir-boy.

Without wanting to give away too much of the story, it turns out that he has been strongly influenced by the likes of Andrew Tate. Up in his bedroom, where his parents think he is staying out of trouble, he is watching videos on his phone telling him how to be a 'real man', and if that involves violence, then so be it. He is becoming a toxic male.

In the Dail last week, Simon Harris mentioned the show. He condemned Andrew Tate, and said the series should be compulsory viewing in schools.

Tate spotted Harris's attack on him and replied in kind. He said on Twitter ('X'): "Jealous weak men will do anything it takes to stop powerful men regaining control of the systems. Their objective is to destroy all masculinity and continue to lead us to destruction. They hate that Conor [McGregor] and I are the people's champions and respected. This is revenge of the nerds. Weak men are traitors by nature and can NEVER be trusted."

He condemned the show for not highlighting crimes committed by immigrants. His message was read hundreds of thousands of times.

Tate has almost 11 million followers on Twitter alone.

**“I was roundly attacked in the same way Harris was attacked by Tate, that is, as a weak person and a traitor to Ireland”**

I was on the receiving end of abuse on social media very recently by Conor McGregor supporters. I had written a piece for a British online magazine about McGregor's appearance in the White House and his announcement that he intends running for the presidency later this year.

I criticised McGregor and said he should stay out of the immigration debate because his interventions will only

further 'toxify' it and make it harder to have a sensible and much needed discussion about what is the right level of immigration.

I was roundly attacked in the same way Harris was attacked by Tate, that is, as a weak person and a traitor to Ireland. I got the impression that most of those attacking me had never heard of me and were completely unaware of all the debates I have taken part in down the years or all the attacks which have come my way because of my views on issues like the family, religion or the right-to-life.

But in a way, this is beside the point. The point is that if you criticise people like McGregor or Tate you are no longer a 'real man' because 'real men' are hyper-aggressive. Your average teenage boy wants to be a 'real man' and will be susceptible to messaging which says you can't be a real man unless you are willing to physically fight for what you think you are owed. No teenage boy likes to be told by their friends that they are weak and not a 'real man'.

By the way, I don't believe the Jamie Miller character was realistic. It is extremely unlikely that a boy from a home with two loving parents is so deeply influenced by what he is watching on his phone that he becomes a murderer. A boy who turns to violence is much more likely to be from a deeply dysfunctional home, lacking in positive male role models and falls in with the wrong peer group.

## Simplistic

Blaming everything on social media and influencers like Andrew Tate is too simplistic, and I doubt if making *Adolescence* compulsory viewing in secondary schools, as Simon Harris suggests, is the answer. If the message to boys is that traditional male traits per se, such as risk-taking, physical prowess, assertiveness and competitiveness are themselves suspicious, then you create a market for someone like Tate and his toxic brand of masculinity.

The question for schools is whether they are even willing to say that traditional male

Owen Cooper plays Jamie Miller in Netflix series *Adolescence*. Photo Netflix

traits are good in themselves, or if instead they believe that no set of behaviours can be labelled 'male' or 'female' because that is stereotyping and sexist?

If so, then it is no wonder that a lot of boys are confused, especially if they are also told 'gender' is fluid and that there are more than two 'genders', namely male and female.

If an energetic, risk-taking, competitive young boy is told

that all of these traits are somehow suspicious, then don't be entirely surprised if he turns to negative male role models instead, especially if there is no positive male role model at home, which is increasingly common these days.

## Answer

The answer to toxic masculinity is positive masculinity. No, not all boys are sporty and traditionally male (I write this

as someone who is more the bookworm type) but boys who are typically male in their behaviour should be pointed in the direction of the best sporting heroes, for example.

They should be taught that honour, faithfulness, steadfastness, using your strength to protect the weak, not exploit them, are the marks of a man. They should hear that it is ok to be competitive, so long as it is within the rules (like on the playing field).

None of this should be regarded as somehow suspicious or retrograde by the school system. If it is, then we are asking for trouble. I don't think the Jamie Miller character would have killed anyone because he doesn't fit the profile for that. But boys are definitely being influenced by people like Andrew Tate. We counter that by offering them good male models and by not denying that masculinity can have a good side as well as a bad side.



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**“The question for schools is whether they are even willing to say that traditional male traits are good in themselves, or if instead they believe that no set of behaviours can be labelled 'male' or 'female' because that is stereotyping and sexist?”**

# Ireland's stars collaborate in upcoming Biblical film



Renata Milán Morales

**T**his Lent season, a new animated film will retell the life of Jesus Christ. *The King of Kings*, featuring an all-star cast including Pierce Brosnan (Pontius Pilate), a Drogheda man, Kenneth Branagh (Charles Dickens), from Belfast, Oscar Isaac, Uma Thurman, Mark Hamill, Ben Kingsley, and Forest Whitaker, the film offers a new perspective on the biggest story in history. *The King of Kings* is not just a biblical narrative but a story within a story seen through the eyes of a child, as his father, Charles Dickens, tells the life of Christ. This storytelling makes the film “accessible to both Christian and non-Christian audiences,” said Seong-ho Jang, a renowned South Korean animator and the film director.

*The King of Kings* is a project that has been in development for over a decade. Mr Jang's goal was to present the story of Jesus in “a way that resonates with modern audiences.”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Jang explained the challenges of reducing the teachings and events of the Bible into a 100-minute film. His solution was to frame the story through the relationship between Charles Dickens and his son Walter with the goal to put the emphasis on love, forgiveness, and redemption.

“At its core, this is a film about relationships,” Mr Jang said. “It's about fathers and sons, about healing broken bonds, and ultimately about the love of God. Whether you are religious or not, everyone can relate to the idea of love and forgiveness.”

The film counts with a professional voice cast, with Oscar Isaac portraying Jesus Christ. Known for his roles in *Star Wars* and *Dune*, Isaac brings a human portrayal to the character. Speaking about his role, he shared, “There was a lot of room to try to bring myself into the role, to make Jesus more relatable and connected to his humanity. The kingdom

of Heaven is already here, within us, and I wanted to express that sense of love and connection.”

Kenneth Branagh, who voices Charles Dickens, described the film as “compassionately and imaginatively told.” He praised the storytelling, which not only presents the story of Jesus but also explores the personal struggles of Dickens himself.

Pierce Brosnan (Pontius Pilate) found the script deeply moving. “Pilate is a man conflicted,” he explained. “He doesn't want to make the decision to crucify Jesus, but the pressure of politics and power weighs heavily on him. It was an incredible role to explore.”

Uma Thurman, who plays Mrs Dickens, saw a connection between her role and her real-life experience as a mother. “Motherhood has been my greatest role, and Catherine Dickens' journey of encouraging her husband to tell this story to their child resonated with me deeply.”

**“Mr Jang saw this as the perfect way to introduce Jesus' story to modern audiences”**

Other cast members include Mark Hamill as King Herod, Ben Kingsley as High Priest Caiaphas, and Forest Whitaker as the Apostle Peter. Young actor Roman Griffin Davis, best known for *Jojo Rabbit*, voices Walter Dickens, through whose eyes the audience experiences the story.

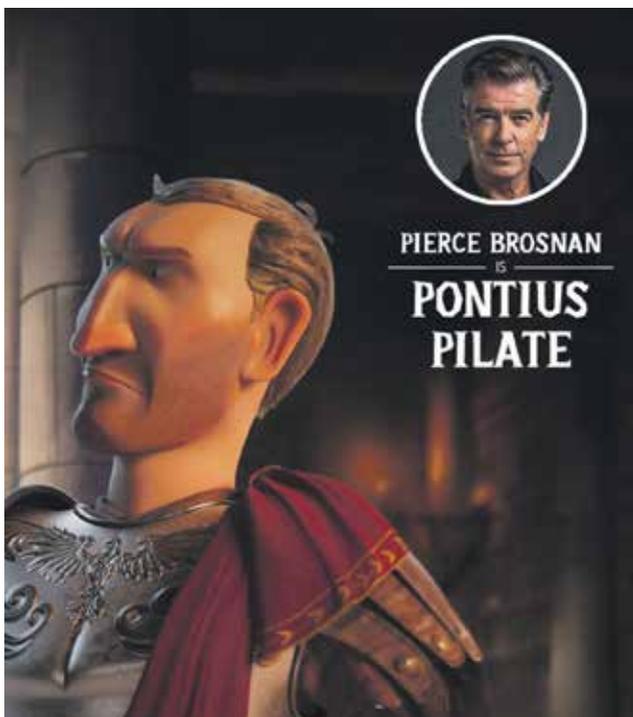
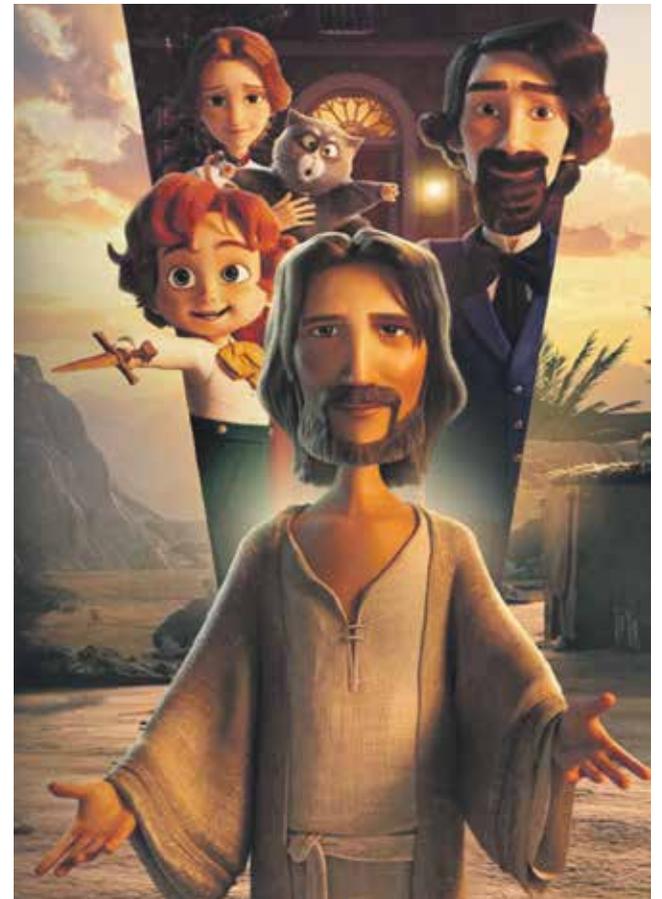
The film is based on an untold story by Charles Dickens, written in 1849. His retelling of Christ's life, originally intended to teach his children about Jesus.

Mr Jang saw this as the perfect way to introduce Jesus' story to modern audiences. “Faith has been passed through storytelling for centuries,” he said. “And what better way to share the message of love and sacrifice than through the words of one of the greatest storytellers of all time?”

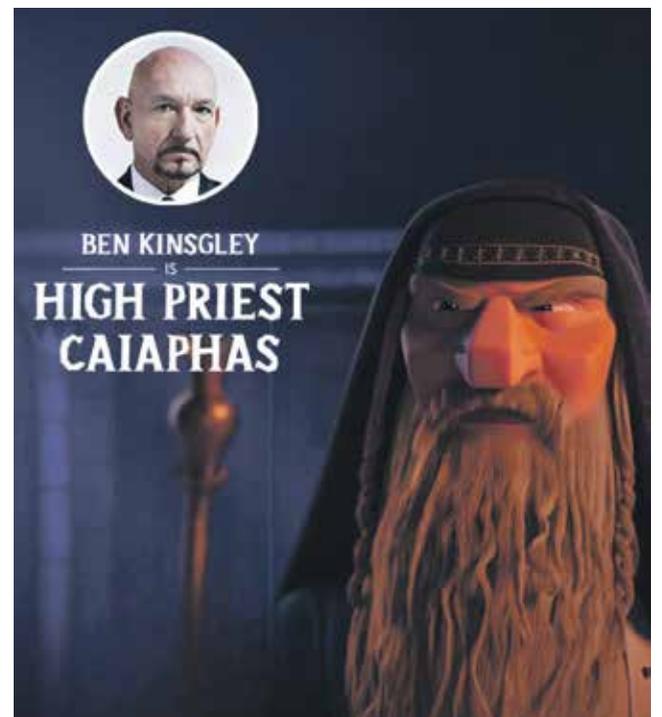
While *The King of Kings* is rooted in Christian teach-



The King of Kings



PIERCE BROSNAN  
IS  
PONTIUS  
PILATE



BEN KINGSLEY  
IS  
HIGH PRIEST  
CAIAPHAS

ings, Mr Jang and the team behind the film have worked to ensure it speaks to audiences of all backgrounds. “The core message of Jesus is love, and love is universal. The film encourages viewers to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us,” said Mr Jang.

## Depth

We can see this approached pictured in the film's depth. “Audiences will laugh, they will cry, and they will leave the cinema with a renewed

sense of hope,” Mr Jang promised. “It's not just about Jesus' miracles and teachings. It's about understanding what it means to love unconditionally.”

**“I'm sure this film will touch many hearts”**

The director also hopes the film will spark conver-

sations within families. “We live in a time where relationships are often strained - whether between family members, friends, or even nations. *The King of Kings* reminds us that reconciliation and love are possible.”

With animation by South Korea's Mofac Animation, *The King of Kings* is visually outstanding. From the humble manger in Bethlehem to the dramatic crucifixion and resurrection, the director aimed to bring biblical events to life in a way that

is historically respectful and cinematically breathtaking through the film.

Pierce Brosnan said, “I'm sure this film will touch many hearts. It's a powerful story that has stood the test of time, and now a new generation will get to experience it in a whole new way.”

**i** *The King of Kings* will be released in cinemas across the UK and Ireland on 11 April, with special previews starting from 7 April.

# Let us pray for Patrick's children who are shedding blood



Martina Purdy

It was the summer of 2014 when I first heard the harmony. It was so flawless, I thought it must have been a recording. In fact it was the sweet sound of seminarians from St Bonaventure's, a Franciscan college, in Lusaka, Zambia, located next to the orphanage, where I was volunteering.

At the time, St Bonaventure's was headed by an Irish priest, and conscious that quite a few Irish seminarians drop out, I asked him how many of these men, who numbered a thousand, would actually become priests. He seemed surprised by the question. "Almost all of them," he answered.

I was introduced to one seminarian by a Salesian nun. He was from another country, some distance away. His family were quite poor and had sacrificed much to support his call. He came to mind when I heard the awful news that a young seminarian in Nigeria, Andrew Peter, had been kidnapped and killed. It was announced he would be laid to rest on March 26. How terribly sad.

Andrew Peter and a priest were taken on March 3, from the rectory of St Peter's Catholic Church in Edo state. The gunmen attacked both the rectory and church, destroying doors and windows before taking these poor men into a surrounding forest. The priest endured terrible torture before being rescued.

There was little detail around Andrew Peter's murder, which was described simply as "gruesome".

"Life has been hell for our people," said the local bishop. "People are not safe on the roads, in their farms, and even in their homes."

In fact there was a time when the same could be said of Catholics in Ireland, dating from the Penal times.

St Patrick, thanks to a legacy of Irish missionaries, is patron saint of Nigeria, recently named the most dangerous country in the world for Christians.

These children of Patrick in Nigeria are suffering terribly.

There was a lack of information about Andrew Peter's killers. One press release said he had unfortunately "died" and others referred to gunmen or kidnapers. There were references to the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria.

**“In the past few months there has been a dramatic rise in the number of kidnappings for ransom”**

Was this murder simply down to a criminal gang in a country where Islamist extremists have also killed Catholics, and specifically targeted Catholic priests?

After a deliberate search I was told that the murder of this Catholic seminarian was motivated by criminality.

It is often however down to creed. Christians in Nigeria are being targeted for their faith by Boko Haram and ISWAP, as well as Muslim herders from the Fulani ethnic who attack mostly Christian farmers.

Boko Haram aims to overthrow the Nigerian government and replace it with Islamist rule. It is sometimes referred to as "Nigerian Taliban". ISWAP is a splinter group of Boko Haram and its initials stand for Islamic State - West African Province.



Women are pictured in a file photo praying during Mass at Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Abuja, Nigeria. Seminarian Andrew Peter, 21, has become the latest victim of killings in the West African country, where the attack and kidnapping of Catholic clergy is on the rise. On March 3, 2025, he was kidnapped alongside Fr Philip Ekweli, a priest from the Diocese of Auchi in southern Nigeria. The priest was released March 13, but the abductors killed the seminarian, the diocese said. Photo: OSV News/Afolabi Sotunde, Reuters.

In the past few months there has been a dramatic rise in the number of kidnappings for ransom of Catholic priests, seminarians and women religious. And on March 5, Fr Sylvester Okechukwu of the Diocese of Kafanchan was murdered a day after his abduction

According to statistics compiled by the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 145 priests and seminarians have been kidnapped in the country over the past 10 years, with 11 killed - and these out-of-date numbers are rising.

At Masses up and down this country, we frequently pray intentionally for peace in Gaza, and Ukraine - and rightly so! But do we, who stand at a distance, pay sufficient attention to the blood of our fellow Catholics who do not always make the daily headlines?

## Martyrs

The mainstream media may choose to ignore these cases but we must not forget the modern martyrs, especially as we come to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of St Oliver Plunkett. This Archbishop of Ireland

was hung, drawn and quartered at Tyburn on July 1, 1681. A gruesome execution.

Down the centuries the martyrs come, and lest we forget, the Irish ones are recorded in a book by the Rev Denish Murphy, SJ, whose 1896 manu-

script was rediscovered in a skip by a recovering heroin addict. In 2010, Damien Richardson found around 300 pages bearing the names of the martyrs, and turned his discovery into great treasure. Indeed the proceeds for Our Martyrs goes to the Pontifical charity Aid to a Church in Need (ACN) in Ireland to help persecuted Christians in our day.

The book is a beautiful reminder of the rich legacy of our faith and the old Irish saying: "The scholar's ink lasts longer than the martyr's blood."

**“For this cause I would be willing to die not once but a thousand deaths”**

Between 1537 and 1714, in Ireland and England, there was an attempted extermination of the Catholic faith. These 'martyrs' - clergy, religious and lay people - refused to deny the truth of the Eucharist or renounce the authority of Rome. Some were stoned, oth-

ers hanged or beheaded. The Archbishop of Cashel Dermot O'Hurley had his legs boiled over a roaring fire and still he refused to denounce his faith.

"For this cause I would be willing to die not once but a thousand deaths" Blessed Dominic Collins, declared before his own execution.

In Down and Connor, the deaths of John O'Locran, Edmund Fitzsimon, and Donagh O'Roarke is retold. They were tortured and hanged at a place near Downpatrick, known as St John's well, where "the angels appeared to St Patrick".

We have been spared the details of Andrew Peter's death and whatever the motive surrounding this seminarian's murder, many Catholics are enduring their own penal times, martyred in countries such as Nigeria, the Congo, and Syria, some celebrated, some not. At the very least let us remember them by name at the altar of God, and, without fear, the evil that takes them, knowing our only weapon is love and truth.

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David Quinn, CEO, The Iona Institute

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Did you know that the Feast of the Annunciation, which we just celebrated, once marked New Year's Day in most European towns during the Middle Ages? The holiday stretched until April 1, and those who persisted in celebrating this date were called "April Fools". In fact there is much debate about the origins of this

celebrated day. Indeed, it has been suggested it goes back to Noah in Genesis when he foolishly sent the dove out, before the waters had even abated, on the first of the month. The Hebrews, in memory of this, would then send others out on foolish errands on the first day of April. Whatever the truth, it is a day for folly - and our chance to celebrate it as fools for Christ!

I met a few friends the other day who were deep in conversation about the 'trans' issue. I immediately assumed they were talking about the gender wars - especially as the First Minister of Northern Ireland had just dodged a question about men in women's sport - men

who claim to be female and beat up women in the boxing ring. "I'm not playing your game," declared Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill when asked about the issue in the Stormont assembly. I was about to say the First Minister had some cheek on her!

But as I listened, it turned

out that one of my friends was actually making a very important point on faith - and how 'trans' is very Catholic: transformation, transfiguration, transubstantiation. How very clever - wouldn't it be wonderful to live in a totally 'trans world' where we are all transfigured by Christ!

# GAA giant admits he would struggle as a teenager now



Éanna Mackey

Seán Óg Ó hAilpín's life has been anything but ordinary. Born in Rotuma, some 600km off the coast of Fiji, with a native mother and his father hailing from Fermanagh, he moved to Ireland as a child and carved out a legendary hurling career.

Neither Fiji or Fermanagh a hurling stronghold as the old saying goes, hAilpín's story is nothing short of remarkable. From Rotuma to Sydney and then to the north side of the Lee in rainy Cork City, the challenges and the lessons learnt along the way carved Seán Óg into one of the greatest athletes

ever to don the Cork jersey in a career that spanned three decades.

But Ó hAilpín's story is so much more than one about sport—it's about resilience, discipline, and a perspective that comes from living through immense upheaval and change.

**“The fear of failure is massive because everyone knows about everything nowadays”**

Now, coaching in his former North Mon College, one of the city's famous but fallen hurling nurseries, he reflects on modern life and how young people navigate a world he barely recognises from that of his own youth.

“Maybe to an extent, the fear of failure is massive because everyone knows about everything nowadays because it's all

over social media. Back in my day, unless someone was at the game, they wouldn't know how well or how poorly I played. Everything is instant nowadays because of social media. It is really challenging; I'd struggle myself if I were a teenager now, no doubt.”

The contrast between his youth and today's digital world is something he finds striking.

“Back when I was playing hurling, it was the only thing going on in your life outside of education. The teenager today has a lot more going on than I would have. Everyone has a phone now. You hop on a bus to go to a game, and everyone is on their phone. Thirty years ago, you would have sat on a bus and chatted to the guy next to you.”

## Pressure

That shift, he believes, has changed how young people interact and perceive themselves. The constant pressures presented by technology and



Sean Og O'hAilpin, Cork, in action against Mike O'Brien, Limerick at the Allianz National Hurling League, Quarter-Final, Limerick vs Cork, The Gaelic Grounds, Limerick on April 6, 2008. Photo: David Maher/Sportsfile

social media have created an environment that breeds insecurity amongst young people nowadays.

“I probably wouldn't have been as paranoid as a young lad as they are nowadays, but because everyone is trying to impress everyone else these days, I think young people are a lot more insecure, and they're always looking over their shoulder to see what Joe Bloggs is thinking of them.”

Despite his concerns, he acknowledges that young people need to come to their own realisations. For him, the ability to switch off and embrace solitude and spirituality is essential, and the constant need for validation online is a distraction from personal growth.

**“I think switching off from technology would definitely help a lot of young people”**

“I'd be quiet by nature, mad into sport, and I actually really value time on my own. I just like to turn off the phone, no TV, no radio, and I'm at my happiest when I'm in that state.”

“I think switching off from technology would definitely help a lot of young people. The art of communicating with one another is dying and they would be much better if they weren't so reliant and focused on their phones. But you're try-

ing to talk to a 15-year-old saying that—they'd think you're from a different planet.”

“I think that it's something that they'll only find out with experience, and when they get to my age, they might think, ‘Maybe that fella Seán Óg had a point.’ But they'll have to go through the experiences of life to be able to reflect and look back. They'll just have to experience life with and without their phone to make a judgement themselves of what's worthwhile and what's not.”

“In saying that, I'm not totally blinded to the benefits of having a phone. Phone use in case of emergency is great, but using it purely for the sake of trying to impress other people—I just don't get it.”

## Believer

Beyond technology, his life philosophy has been shaped by his upbringing in a Catholic household and the resilience that his journey has taught him along the way. A serious knee injury suffered in a car accident could have spelt the death knells for Ó hAilpín's stellar sporting career, but his faith helped him to come back stronger.

“I'm a believer in faith because it gives you something to look forward to, and it gives you that hope that you are chasing. For instance, when I was banjaxed with my knee, deep down inside, faith would have been one of the drivers in seeing me through the rehab

process and getting to my goal of getting back playing again.”

“Even in the face of adversity and against common knowledge at the time that I wouldn't get back to where I was, I still believed that I could, and my faith was a big part of that.”

That belief extends to his understanding of life and loss.

**“It's not an easy thing to do, but there's great power in embracing disappointment”**

“I'd like to believe that when we move from this life, our spirit is carried on in another. In what form? I don't know. Say, loved ones that have passed away, every now and then something might occur, and you'd say to yourself, ‘Jeez, they really are still with me.’”

Key to Ó hAilpín's success both as an athlete and a role model is his ability to triumph over adversity. For him, loss can be the greatest teacher in life.

“It's not an easy thing to do, but there's great power in embracing disappointment. Sport is 99% disappointment, and if sport is a microcosm of life, then you will have a lot more disappointment than success. Just embrace it and see it as a learning tool.”

“A lot of people let their disappointments define them when they are just a bump on your journey. Just try to be happy and content with yourself. Be the best that you can be; don't be worrying and benchmarking yourself against any-one other than yourself.”




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**“They'll just have to experience life with and without their phone to make a judgement themselves of what's worthwhile and what's not”**

# Pilgrimage: A quest for meaning



John G O'Dwyer

**T**he Spanish Camino has undoubtedly been the European tourism phenomenon of the 21st century. Seeking meaning beyond materialism and recourse, for a time at least, to a freer and less controlled way of living, the numbers completing this mystical Spanish trail have risen from fewer than 100 in 1967 to almost 500,000 in 2024. This has involved large numbers of modern wayfarers looking back towards medieval times and heeding the ageless call of a long walk to some mystical place of sanctity.

Until recently, few of the multitudes attracted by the allure of a pilgrim walk along the Camino of St James would have considered Ireland an alternative, mainly because this country was believed to lack penitential trails. On the contrary, Ireland has a network of mystical paths and a vibrant pilgrim tradition, with all major routes long predating the Camino, some by up to a thousand years.

## Devotional

Historically, pilgrimage was an important devotional expression for Irish people with penitents journeying to Glendalough, Gougane Barra, Croagh Patrick, Mount Brandon and Lough Derg. Later, during the 19th and 20th centuries, when an emphasis was placed on more formal in-church worship, interest in the Irish pilgrim paths evaporated and they became overgrown and largely forgotten.

It is sometimes said that the past, never completely dies but eventually, like Banquo's Ghost, comes to revisit us. And so it is that Irish history has come a full circle; people are again taking to these ancient tracks

on about 500km of fully waymarked trails that follow the steps of penitents past. The pilgrim journey is, however, vastly different these days, with little overt emphasis on the penance and prayer of former years. Instead, those who follow our ancient spiritual trails are generally a casual and relaxed bunch - more interested in the walk itself than the penitential destination.

**“As the modern expressions of spirituality becomes more informal and individual, pilgrimage is now as much a voyage of personal renewal as a physical journey”**

Many will have their backpack moved ahead each day, while none will take on the arduous task of footing it back to the pilgrim starting point, which medieval pilgrims were obliged to accept. And unlike hikers, who generally prefer to explore pristine environments with the minimum of human influence, pilgrim walkers are happy to acquaint themselves with the well-trodden trails followed by past generations with more emphasis on history, mindfulness and engaging with the surroundings than on the prayerful origins of the route.

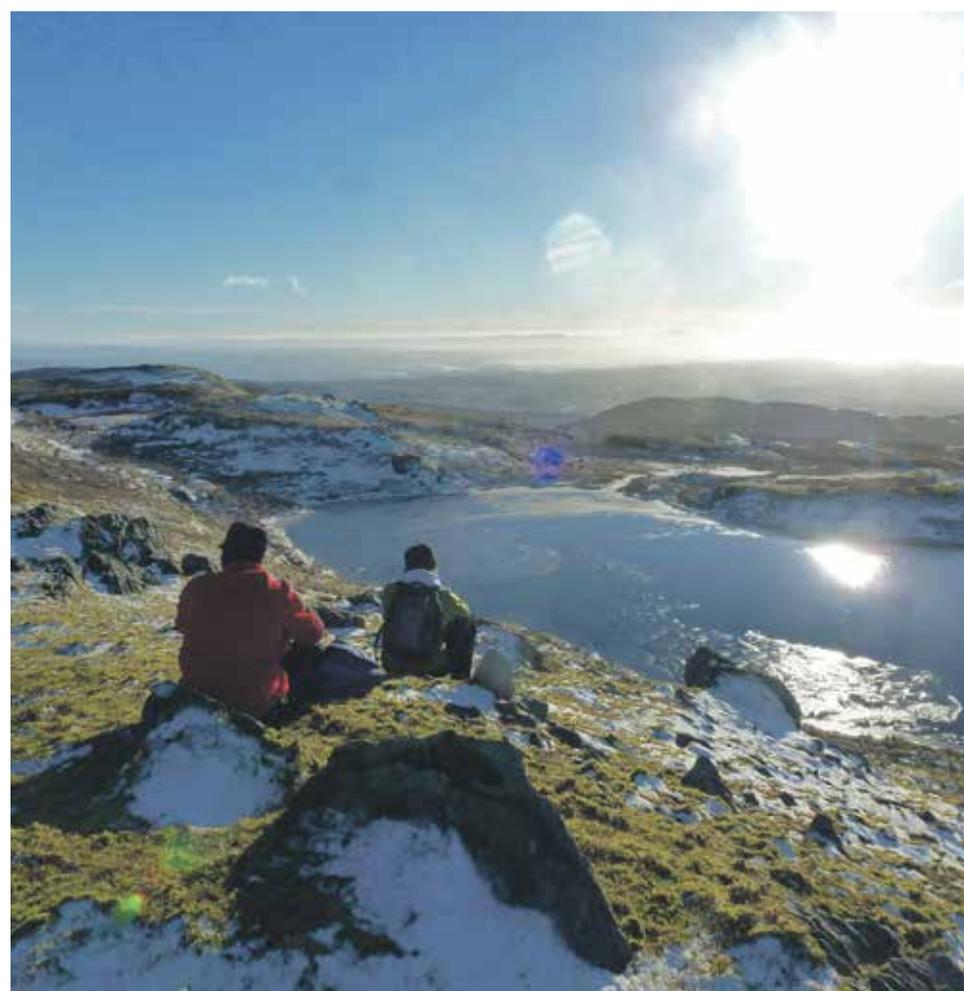
To some, pilgrim walking may seem just another form of hiking, but for most participants, it hides a quest for deeper meaning, which is rarely found among recreational walkers. As the modern expressions of spirituality becomes more informal and individual, pilgrimage is now as much a voyage of personal renewal as a physical journey. Materialism has long been seen as a core value that gives a sense of purpose to our lives, but what do we replace it with when our physical needs have been satisfied? The

growing numbers who are, once again, following the ancient tradition of a pilgrim walk are proof of a renewed desire for higher meaning that the rampant materialism of our age leaves largely unsatisfied. For the individuals who undertake pilgrim journeys, the emphasis is, in the main, on simplicity and reflective experience. Walking a pilgrim path allows us time to step away from the pressures of the 21st century and into a space where the task facing us is easy to understand, physical and absorbing. It provides an opportunity to slow down while reflecting on the purpose of life, with each participant taking a personal meaning from the route.

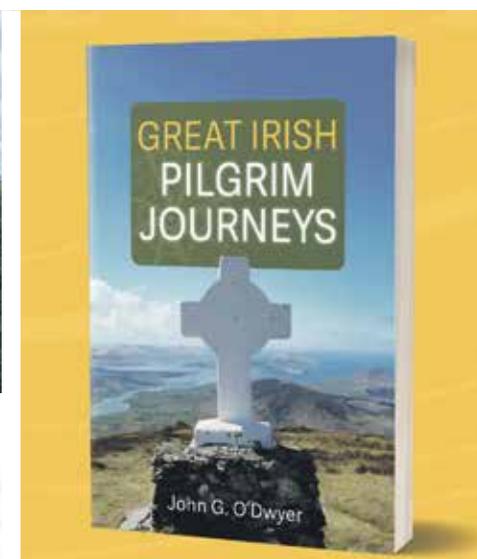
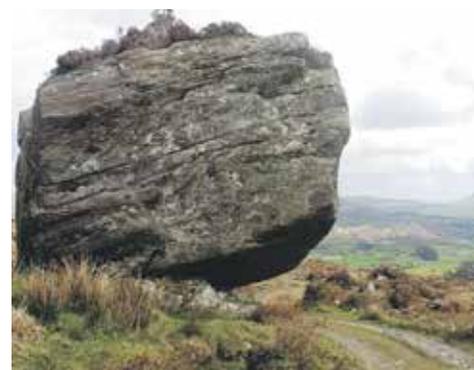
## Ageless

Footing these ageless trails not only offers the opportunity for self-discovery, it also provides a link to the past while bringing the welcome bonus of additional visitor spending to Irish rural communities. In my new book titled *Great Irish Pilgrim Journeys*, I describe and tell stories from the paths walked by medieval Irish pilgrims both in Ireland and abroad, such as The Celtic Camino, The Pilgrim Passport Journey, St Declan's Way and many other well-walked trails. Accompanied by detailed maps and photographs of the landscape along the paths, the walks described take anywhere from 4 hours to 8 days to complete. In this way, I believe the book offers a pilgrim walk for everyone and will act as a complete resource for Irish people and overseas visitors wishing to discover the rich history of the ancient pilgrim trails trodden by our forefathers.

**i** Great Irish Pilgrim Journeys is now available from bookshops nationwide and from the publishers at [currachbooks.com](http://currachbooks.com). It will be launched by Grainne Moynihan, Chairperson of St Declan's Way, on Friday, March 28 in the Cabragh Wetlands, Thurles, at 7.30pm. All are welcome to attend.



Lavagh Beg, Bluestack Mountains, Co. Donegal. Credit: Colin C Murphy, Unsplash.



**“To some, pilgrim walking may seem just another form of hiking, but for most participants, it hides a quest for deeper meaning, which is rarely found among recreational walkers”**

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# Relentless

## I never found priestly minis

**Bishop Donal Roche**, in an interview with **Garry O'Sullivan**, describes a love for the priesthood, and reflects on a way of life that is mixed in hope and a sense of fear for what comes next.

**So I asked you to reflect on Relentless Ministry, what are your thoughts?**

I don't find ministry relentless, personally. I've always enjoyed being in parishes and the ministry side. Sunday Masses and being in the community, even funerals, it was and is an engaging and fulfilling ministry. What I found relentless was the administration, the constant emails, trying to deal with all the stuff coming from the diocese, etc.

So I can understand the frustration the guys have and I do have that a bit of that myself. You're trying to keep on top of things and then more stuff comes in. But obviously the ministry part, as I said, if you could be left to do it, it'd

be great. But you get caught up in the administration, running the pumps. A lot of places are talking about getting people in to do these things and some places have started. Not to have the priest running everything and fixing the lights or the broken toilets or whatever.

**Why is the priest running everything? You can have a pastoral council and lay help, is it as simple as that?**

It's not as simple as that because you do need paid people. There are so many things to be done in a parish or a group of parishes. You can't rely on volunteers for everything. You need a manager of some sort. We are moving in that direction for the office stuff, when I started as a parish priest, I was doing the books and I'm not a bookkeeper and paying the bills, now all of that is done by parish secretaries by and large. That's a huge burden lifted.

But there's all the other stuff that comes your way. There's something wrong with the house, the parish centre, so there is a need for paid people to take on the management of parishes.

**Yet that's hard for parishes financially but with parishes coming together maybe it can happen?**

That would make it more possible that maybe five or six parishes together could hire

The disciples were out fishing all night and had caught nothing.



somebody to manage. But we're not there yet. We don't have the structure built up yet for that.

**But aren't priests nervous about handing over the operation to lay people because it could all fall apart, committees and in-fighting etc, some priests have found out the hard way that this doesn't always work or you don't always get the right people to step up?**

That's true and you can end up with nobody in charge. A pastoral council should have an overall vision and this Synodal approach that we're asking people to reflect, don't just rush into things, you're asked to talk, to share, to reflect or maybe pray and take time to make the right decisions.

I've been at council meetings [Bishop Donal worked in local government before he

became a priest] where somebody says, 'let's do this', and the response is 'great idea, we'll do it', without thinking 'is it the right thing to do', 'is there a better thing to do'; just because somebody forceful in the group says it's a good thing to do and there is that danger when you put someone else in charge that you are losing that control.

It is a good summation of the problem that we have to get sorted. There's so few of us left, we're getting older, health issues and priests feel this burden of responsibility. I know priests who retired, at 75 they can walk away but they have this sense of 'I can't abandon them, they still need me' they feel they can't let go and are afraid what might happen, that the whole thing will unravel.

So I just think this thing of relentless ministry, it's a fear. It's not a tiredness that comes from the work itself, I don't

**“This thing of relentless ministry, it's a fear. It's not a tiredness that comes from the work itself”**

think that is the main problem. I think it's more the fear that we are dwindling now. Who's coming after us.

**The fear of who will preach the gospel in 20 years?**

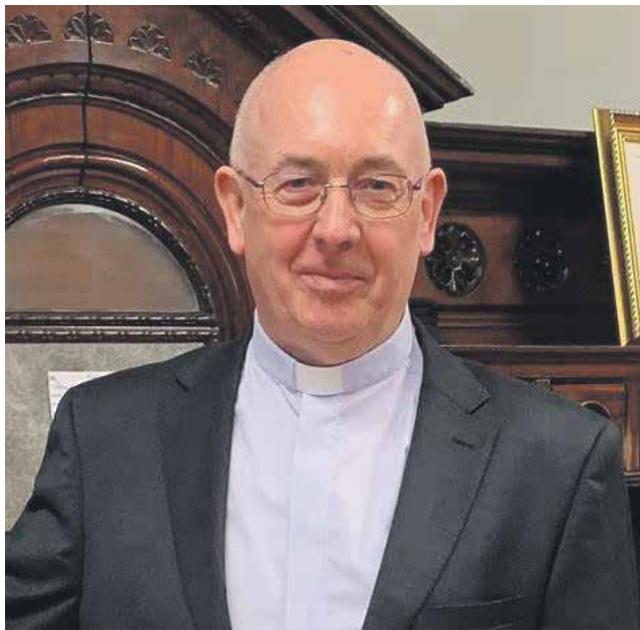
I think that's at the heart of it, behind it all, the fear. I was in Maynooth last week and we had a Mass with seminary students and there are 30 of them. When I was in seminary there were hundreds of them. It was very nostalgic and lovely singing and the liturgy was beautiful, but nostalgic. It did give me hope that there are 30 and that there are people interested in

joining, but there's a huge gap between them and us in our 60's and 70's.

So there's this huge gap. And not that long ago a parish priest had three or four curates. Now it's one parish priest for two parishes. And it's quite incredible just to take that in, big, busy Dublin parishes that I would have seen as a young man, the parish priest with a team of curates, and now a recently ordained guy running it and two others.

**And the two others are probably in their 70s.**

Yes. I just feel a great sense of sympathy for the older guys. And the health issues. Thank God I don't have any health issues at the moment. But so many guys at my age, or slightly older or even the younger guys getting stents put in and so many of our age group with health issues.



**“I know priests who retired, at 75 they can walk away but they have this sense of ‘I can't abandon them, they still need me’ they feel they can't let go and are afraid what might happen”**

# Ministry

Exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today

## Ministry relentless

**As you go around, do you see and feel any solutions, like a taskforce?**

Not so much a taskforce, it is more local. I'm meeting the priests of an area later in the afternoon and we'll be looking at their Mass schedules and how we can help each other, we can have two Masses there and one here and whatever. We're looking at those kind of things to try to help that cooperation between parishes. The partnerships are in progress for a long time and some need more work and cooperation than others. We don't all need a 10 O'clock Mass for instance.

**If you look at the number of Masses that are live streamed on Sundays, it does make you wonder if we need all the Masses?**

What's funny is Sunday Mass is probably the least of the problems. Okay, there could be an emergency, somebody gets sick. But generally I think we have streamlined the Sunday Masses or that there maybe still some big churches that don't need two or three Masses a day, one might be enough.

With the weekday Masses, it's a good innovation with the parishes groupings that Masses can be cancelled and you can go five minutes up the road and have Mass in another parish. So that's manageable.

It is more of that sense of despondency. It you read the gospel on St Patrick's Day it speaks of the fishermen having worked hard all night long and caught nothing. What do we have to show for all the hard work, we've given our whole life for this, and we're dwindling.

We're talking about building hope, and we're talking about synodal pathways but on the ground we're seeing things contracting and dwindling. But while I say that I genuinely believe that there are great signs of hope, it's not just talk of building hope. It's one of the things I've seen going around parishes.

There are quite a number of young people, not as many

as you'd like, obviously, and a lot of them are foreign nationals that brought great life into parishes.

Even with vocations there are encouraging signs. That there are quite a number of guys who are making inquiries

**I want to talk about priests and synodality – it usually elicits eyerolls from priests – but priests really haven't had their voices heard in this process in Ireland? Ultimately, I think the synodal church idea has to come back to priests, because if priests are not on board, it's not going to be a runner is it?**

Are you saying that priests are not on board in general?

**I wonder what your experience is. I don't think they understand it, it is pushing them out of their comfort zone, it's pushing them to share power, trust lay people, it's asking a lot of men who were trained for a different model of Church.**

I found to be honest and agree with you that we do need to be more engaged, there is a sense of that the most enthusiastic people, I would see, would be members of parish pastoral councils, lay people committed to the Church. I see this as a wonderful way to reinvigorate the Church and make it more inclusive.

The majority of people just go to Mass on Sunday. The most enthusiastic would certainly be the lay faithful and maybe priests tend not to be as enthusiastic as they could be.

**Maybe they feel they've been here before with the push for the New Evangelisation, now it's Synodality.**

Well we've had these things all along. Remember the PDR parish development renewal, that was a big thing in Dublin diocese back in the 90s. That was a big thing at the time but there were a lot more priests, a lot younger priests then. And it was seen as a real revival, renewal, but with the older priests age profile now and all the workload maybe they

find it hard to get as energised about it.

**Do you think we're asking the wrong questions in the lead up to an Irish synod, shouldn't we be talking about the future of the Church in Ireland, what kind of Church we want, etc?**

I think we need to do more vocations promotion. We have put so much effort and energy and resources into synodality and lay-ministry and lay involvement that the danger is we'll say we don't need priests, that's all going to be done by laypeople. We do have to focus. And I think that is happening, we are more aware of it but we need to do more promotion of vocations, it's valid way of life. A lot of people are afraid to talk about vocations. A lot of priests are afraid to encourage somebody, what are we inviting them into and I understand that. There is a great uncertainty, much more difficult now than it was in my time, when it was a much more valid thing to do.

Now it just seems so strange that somebody would want it and there is a reluctance on the part of priests to encourage vocations. And I think that's a big loss. You know, I look at myself. I'm happy almost 39 years of priesthood, despite all the stuff that went on, the sex abuse scandals and all that. That really dragged me down but I've never, ever felt like leaving. I love the ministry. I love the priesthood. I love what I do. I'm still enthused by the gospel that brought me into it in the first place. The young people I see now who are coming, in smaller numbers, they're hearing the same gospel, the hearing the same message and they're finding it attractive.

Why can't we not do more to encourage them to come in and to just take that step, have the courage to say, yes, give this a try. I just think a lot of priests are reluctant to do that. I'd love to see more of it. Just let them share their joy in their faith. There's this perception of being a priest at times that's it a lonely, miserable life, I cannot speak for everybody. For me and for my friends, the people I know, it isn't. It is a very fulfilling life. But how do you get that across to people?

We have something very positive to offer, we have something to give, let's not be too downhearted about our own failings.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell with the two new Auxiliary Bishops of Dublin Paul Dempsey and Donal Roche photographed after the Mass on Sunday. Photo John McElroy

## POPE FRANCIS

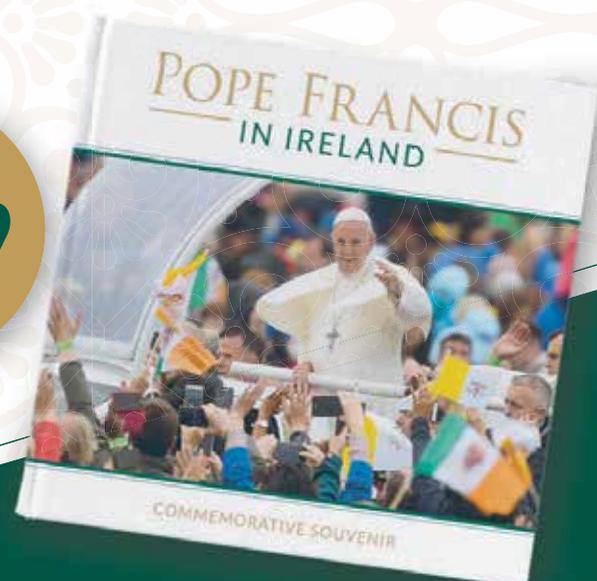
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# By avoiding boredom, never learn discipline



Breda O'Brien

A recent report in *The Irish Catholic* described a study by the Universities of Vienna and Sussex on spiritual boredom.

When lead author, Thomas Gotz, and his team decided to investigate spiritual boredom, they discovered that there was a surprising lack of previous research. They chose five spiritual practices - yoga, meditation, pilgrimage, silent retreats and sermons at Catholic Masses - to investigate.

Unsurprisingly, sermons were rated as boring whereas pilgrimages were not. Surprisingly, perhaps, yoga was also rated as boring, though less so than sermons. Boredom is often associated with a lack of control. Gotz wondered why people would experience boredom in activities they have opted to engage in. He surmises that people take back control by no longer attending church.

## Captivation

Let me state immediately that I feel sorry for homilists. Preaching week after week (and many also give brief homilies at weekday Masses, too) is far from easy.

Furthermore, I have spoken in many churches at novenas and other occasions and the sense of deadness in some congregations is intense and sometimes difficult to overcome.

Normally, I am starting with an advantage because

**“Of course, the Mass is the greatest gift we have but it must be accompanied by regular prayer, confession and a community commitment, including service to others”**

a layperson speaking after Communion is somewhat of a novelty. But even with this headstart, sometimes my heart fails me when I look out on a sea of faces who look bored even before I start. I can imagine how difficult it must be for a priest.

Boredom is nothing new. In the Acts of the Apostles, a young man called Eutychus went to sleep as Paul was preaching, fell several stories to the ground and was killed. Paul restored him to life. Some homilists wish they could restore their congregations to life, I am sure.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers had a word for a particular kind of boredom, which they called *acedia*, or the noonday devil. It is a kind of listlessness where you are bored or cannot be bothered with your self-chosen spiritual exercises. It is a kind of deadening of the spirit.

**“It is an ever-present crutch, so we never have to endure and push through boredom”**

William Hogarth's earliest dated painting, from 1728, features a preacher so boring that halfway through the entire congregation is asleep. Hogarth is a social satirist and his paintings often have elements of the grotesque.

In 1863 and 1864, John Everett Millais painted two paintings called 'My First Sermon' and 'My Second Sermon', which are much more charming. They feature the artist's adorable

little daughter, Effie, who is aged about five. She is paying full attention in the first portrait. In the second, her little legs hang bonelessly, as she is fast asleep.

While boredom has been present since the earliest times in the Church, we now have agents of distraction constantly at hand, called mobile phones. It is an ever-present crutch, so we never have to endure and push through boredom. As a result, our attention spans and tolerance for boredom have atrophied. If we are not being entertained, we don't want to be there.

## Discipline

But by avoiding boredom, we never learn the discipline necessary to go beyond it to interior quiet. And therefore, we have fewer opportunities to hear the gentle voice of the Lord.

We must be careful about trying to make the Gospel more relevant. The Gospel is already the most relevant document known to humanity; it simply needs to be presented in an engaging way.

Some Protestant and Evangelical churches in the US leaned heavily on making church relevant, with up-to-date music and homilies that were more like pep rallies. It worked for a while but those megachurches are slowly emptying now, too.

If people stop going to church because of the homily, something deeper is going on.

My mother-in-law used to respond, "Your love is too short", when people complained that the Mass was too long.

We have come to rely too heavily on Mass as the only marker of being a Catholic. Of course, the Mass is the greatest gift we have but it must be accompanied by regular prayer, confession and a community commitment, including service to others.

In Penal times in Ireland, Catholics risked their lives to attend Mass. In many places today, Catholics take similar risks. I doubt they complain of boredom.

Priests have an obligation to preach to the best of their ability. The



'My Second Sermon' by Sir John Everett Millais (1829-96).

**“The Desert Fathers and Mothers had a word for a particular kind of boredom, which they called *acedia*, or the noonday devil. It is a kind of listlessness where you are bored or cannot be bothered with your self-chosen spiritual exercises. It is a kind of deadening of the spirit”**

most humble and effective preachers I know actively seek feedback. A chaplain (now deceased) at the school where I used to teach once asked students how he could improve his homilies.

One student let rip. She attended his church every week, which was rare for a young person even then. She was frustrated because he never addressed young people. A gentle and kind man, he was taken aback

but asked her how he might do so.

A year later, she informed me that he addressed young people directly at some stage in every single homily. Now, that is truly inspiring.

# Bonhoeffer - faith and action over despair

**Peter Keenan** watched the film *Bonhoeffer* and was inspired by the story of courage and faith

On April 9 1945, one of the truly remarkable human beings of modern times, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was executed at Flossenbürg, a concentration camp situated in Upper Bavaria. In the Gregorian calendar, April 9 is the anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus (probably 30 CE). Bonhoeffer would have known this, walking to the scaffold. His last known words were, "This is the end, but for me the beginning of life."

*Bonhoeffer*, the recent film, with Jonas Dessler playing Dietrich, is a worthy contribution to keeping alive the memory of this great man, despite its seeming ignorance of the above 'last words'. It also features Bishop Martin Niemöller (d. 1984), played by August Diehl. Niemöller was a former U-boat commander whose resistance to the regime infuriated Hitler.

## Commemorated

Eleven years earlier, also in Bavaria, the villagers of Oberammergau commemorated the 400th anniversary of the world-famous passion play. Alois Lang, a committed Nazi, played Jesus that year, and he was most accommodating when visitors, especially American tourists, asked Lang to bless their children, mimicking the pericope in Mark 10 where Jesus 'took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them' (v. 16).

Hitler commended Lang's performance; and that same year, Michael King Sr, on a visit to Germany as part of the Fifth Baptist Congress, also saw the play. He was so impressed by aspects of life in Germany that, upon returning to Atlanta, 'he changed both his and his son's name to Martin Luther King, in honour of the 'founder' of the Reformation, Martin Luther (d.1546).<sup>1</sup>

Martin jnr, assassinated in 1968, is also 'one of the truly remarkable human beings of modern times'. He famously said that "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter". The movie portrays, in sometimes jarring but always heartening ways, Bonhoeffer's commitment to 'things that matter'. A number of scenes are set in Harlem, with the black friend he made there, Frank Fisher. One scene in particular, over a lively meal, depicts a light bulb moment in Bonhoeffer's



Mary holds the crucified body of Christ in a scene from the 1990 production of the Oberammergau Passion Play. The play is presented every 10 years in Oberammergau, Germany. Photo: CNS/Thomas Klinger, June 26, 1998

religious journey, and one that also presents the Evangelical Christian narrative in its best light, where the social gospel, not the prosperity gospel, is centre stage, intimating what some thirty years later came to be known more widely as the Civil Rights Movement, with one of its major centres in Atlanta Georgia, the city where Martin Jnr was murdered.

**“The focus of the Church should be not its own concerns, but service to the world, in imitation of Jesus, ‘the man for others’”**

A key theme in Bonhoeffer's thought is 'religionless Christianity'. We see its birth, so to speak, during the Harlem meal, when he recognises, with the shock of a Damascene experience, that Christians too often live in a ghetto of their own making, their focus on salvation in another world but distanced from the concerns of real life. Years later, in a Berlin prison cell, he famously articulated this insight: "Before God, and with God, we live without God."

His language may seem opaque, but in context what Bonhoeffer means is that God must be at the centre of the world, not at its periphery, in such manner that Christians embrace the powerlessness of God, through the suffering and weakness of Christ. In this way, the focus of the Church should be not its own concerns, but service to the world, in imitation of Jesus, 'the man for others'.

From 1933, Bonhoeffer had been involved on the margins of serious resistance to Hitler,



Adolf Hitler shakes hands with Bishop Ludwig Müller, appointed leader of the Reich Church in 1933. A new film explores the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran theologian and part of Germany's 'confessing church,' which systematically opposed the Nazi-sponsored church.

as were his father (a professor of psychiatry, who, in the '30s, had planned to have Hitler confined to a mental institution) and brother Klaus (a lawyer, also killed in 1945 by the Nazis). The failed 1944 July Plot, led by Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (he famously called Hitler the 'Master of Vermin of the Third Reich'<sup>2</sup>), eventually led to Bonhoeffer's execution nine months later, following two years of imprisonment, from April 5 1943, shortly after announcing his engagement. At that time, the authorities were not aware of the extent of his involvement with the Resistance, which remained unknown until September 1944. Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison* is a modern classic of spirituality-theology. It gives added poignancy to his incarceration. Niemöller, miraculously, survived his many years in the camp system.

## Objected

With Niemöller, Bonhoeffer objected vehemently to the Nazis establishment of a Protestant Reich church, championing instead the cause of the Evangelical Confessing church, opposed to the anti-Semitic and other policies enacted by the Third Reich. The film focuses in dramatic form on the resistance to what has been described as the Reich church's surrender to the powers of this world. Their heroism, and Bonhoeffer's eventual martyrdom, doubtless influenced the young Martin Luther King to speak truth to power, to resist by peaceful means 'the powers of this world'. In November 1938, in the wake of the notorious *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), Bonhoeffer wrote:

"The synagogues burn today; the churches will be on fire tomorrow."

It did not work out quite that way, but there is no doubt that

German Protestants of the time, like Catholics, failed to protest effectively against the Nazis: Alois Lang (d. 1971) was representative of most Germans of that era, but underlying that consideration is the far more important one that Christianity has made possible the active and latent anti-Semitism which continues to poison our social, political and religious discourse.

The odious phenomenon of Holocaust denial, for example, is symptomatic of this depressing reality.

## Anxieties

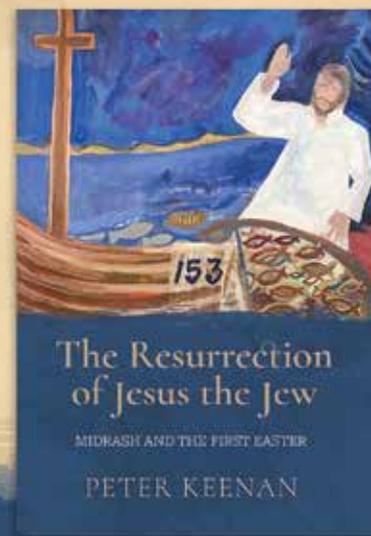
Such anxieties are behind concerns voiced by some members of Bonhoeffer's family. They fear that the film will be hijacked in the service of neo-Fascist Christian

Nationalism, especially in the United States. Breda O'Brien (*The Irish Times*, March 8), addressing these concerns, is right to observe that the movie makes clear Bonhoeffer's implacable opposition to such ideologies.

Her insightful article captures the essence of this remarkable man, a pacifist by inclination: Bonhoeffer was 'no conquering hero but a sensitive, tormented human being who chose faith and action over despair'. As the film draws to its end, Bonhoeffer presides at a moving celebration of the Eucharist, an enactment of commensality that invites us also to choose hope over despair, as did Martin Luther King jnr. He and Bonhoeffer knew there are times when things really do matter, when silence is never an appropriate response to evil. May their memory be a blessing.

**i** Peter Keenan is the author of *The Death of Jesus the Jew: Midrash in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (2023) and, more recently, *The Resurrection of Jesus the Jew: Midrash and the First Easter* (2025, Columba Books; [www.columbabooks.com](http://www.columbabooks.com)).

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# Out&About

## An Irish prayer in Rome



**ROME:** A group of 60 Members and Friends of the Hugh O'Flaherty Memorial Society went on the Society's 5th tour of Rome. The group is pictured in the Chapel of Propaganda Fide College.



**MEATH:** Recently, Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan presented Benemerenti Medals to four parishioners in Trim. (L/R) Fr Paul Crosbie PP, Bernie Doyle (Trim), Dorothy Cribbin (Boardsmill), Bishop Tom Deenihan, Miriam Mooney (Trim), Christo Mulligan (Trim) and Fr John Kennedy CC.



**ROME:** Pontifical Irish College Choir made up of both Lay and Clerical students sang the Irish Language Mass setting by Seán Ó Riada for the St Patrick's Day Mass at St Isidore's Irish Franciscan college.

### INSHORT

#### Irish pilgrims celebrate St Patrick's Day in Rome

Hundreds of Irish pilgrims celebrated St Patrick's Day in Rome. Gathering for Mass at St Isidore's Irish Franciscan College who celebrate their 400th anniversary this year.

The Pontifical Irish College and St Isidore's share the same founder, Franciscan Luke Wadding. To honour the relationship between the two institutions, Mass was celebrated by Fr Paul Finnerty, Rector of the Irish College who was joined by Guardian of St Isidore's Fr Míchéal McGrath and priests from Irish Communities resident in Rome.

Attending Mass were representatives of the Irish embassy to Italy, the Irish Ambassador to the Holy See, Frances Collins

and Irish Government Minister for Justice Jim O'Callaghan TD who represented the Irish Government in Italy for St Patrick's festival.

Following the Mass, a reception was hosted at the Irish College attended by both Ambassadors, Minister O'Callaghan and Irish Bishops working in the Holy See, John Kennedy Paul Tighe.

#### Over €50,000 raised for ill 11-year-old girl

Over €50,000 raised for 11-year-old Co. Mayo girl who spent eleven days in ICU due to brain bleed. The GoFundMe was set last week with the original target of €20,000, and the donations more than doubled the amount in only four days.

In the GoFundMe page, it says that Shannon Lynch from Cashel, Achill Island was home on February 15 when became suddenly ill and was rushed to Mayo University Hospital in Castlebar. At the hospital, a bleed was discovered on the right side of her brain which resulted in her transfer to Temple Street Children's Hospital in Dublin.

After the bleeding was stopped at the Children's Hospital, the girl was kept in ICU for eleven days to recover. Now, she is in St Gabriel's Ward, Temple Street where she will stay until April 4, when she will undergo another operation in Beaumont Hospital.

Mary Cattigan, the organiser of the fundraising said they "wish to thank everyone for all their well wishes, prayers said and candles lit to date, they have without any doubt assisted Shannon and her Family to keep fighting their bravest battle."

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



**TIPPERARY:** Were present at the St Patrick's Mass in St Mary's Church, Clonmel the Mayor Cllr Pat English, representatives of Rotary Club, Credit Union and ONE, 4 quests from their Twin Town, Costa Masnaga, Italy, their Mayor Sabina Panzeri, Deputy Mayor Cristian Pozzi and Councillors Andrea Molteni and Corinna Cereda.



**CAVAN:** Muriel Harney, Ena McGinley and Audrey Frazer at St Ernan's Church of Ireland, Kingscourt at the recent Women's World Day of Prayer, prepared by the women of the Cooke Islands.



**CLARE:** Preparing to receive Baptism at the Easter Vigil, Bassant and Sid took part in the calling of the Elect in the Cathedral of SS Peter & Paul Ennis on the first Sunday of Lent, they participated in the calling of the Elect in the Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul Ennis. Here they are pictured with Joy Hensey from the RCIA Team in the Parish and Fr Tom Ryan.



**MAYO:** Recently, Permanent Deacon James McLoughlin officiated the wedding of Donna Reilly and Medhi Abroud who travelled from London with families and friends to be married in Lecanvey, Westport.



**TIPPERARY:** The JP2 Ty Students from Coláiste Dun Iascaigh Secondary School, Cahir took part in the St Mary's Ash Wednesday Celebrations. They altar served, read, sang, played music, administered ashes and gave the parishioners a cup of tea and a chat for Trócaire.



**DUBLIN:** (L/R) Sr Berneice Loch from Australia (former CEO of MIA) with Mary O'Donovan the new CEO of MIC and Sr Patricia O'Donovan (outgoing CEO) at the announcement of the new CEO of Mercy International Association in the International Room of Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street.

**ANTRIM**

Rathmore Grammar School is organising an evening of fun and games for the Grand Sale for Trócaire on April 9 from 6.30pm to 9pm. Join for prizes, easter eggs, children's books, toys, buns and more.

**CORK**

'Daffodil Day, Coffee Morning / Cake Sale' takes place in Killeagh Hall on March 28 from 10am to 12pm. Join to raise funds for cancer patients and their families.

**DONEGAL**

The Adult Faith Group are organising a visit to the IOSAS Centre on March 29 from 10am to 12.30pm. The visit includes a tour of the Celtic Garden, talk, and quiet time in the oratory. Light lunch included. To participate, fill form at the back of the Parish of Iskaheen and Upper Moville's chapel.

**DOWN**

Magheralin Parish invites the youth of Dromore Diocese (13 to 20+ yrs) to celebrate the life of Carlo Acutis on April 13 from 2pm to 5pm at Dromantine Conference Centre. Join for workshop, testimony, pilgrimage, blessing with his Relic, and more. For more information contact Caitriona on 07979 725564.

**DUBLIN**

The feast of Divine Mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 27 in St Vincent de Paul Church in Marino with Holy Hour at 3pm during which time confessions will be heard, followed by holy mass at 4pm.

**GALWAY**

The 'Youth 2000 Connaught one-day retreat' takes place on March 29 at St Mary's Church, Dominican Priory beginning at 9.30am. Workshops, music, talks and more. Donation only. Register at youth2000.ie.

**LEITRIM**

Youth Club continues every Friday evening from 8pm to 10pm in Ballinaglera Hall for all teenagers in the area. Entry is €2 per evening and the gathering is supervised. For more information and to register contact the Ballinaglera Healthy Club facebook page.

**LIMERICK**

Join the Dominican Sisters of

St Cecilia for a 'Come and See Retreat' from March 28 to 30. This is a retreat for those exploring the religious life. For more information or to register, email limerick@op-tn.org.

**LOUTH**

Oasis of Peace Retreat Centre: Catholic Young Adult Group (18-35 yrs) happens on the first Sunday of each month at 1pm at Mellifont Abbey, Collon. For more information contact John on 0035389 6152568.

**MAYO**

The next Latin Mass in Knock Shrine takes place on Sunday, April 13 at 6pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

**SLIGO**

'Afternoon with Priests & Religious' hosted by the Sisters of Life takes place on May 9 from 2pm to 4pm at the Clayton Hotel Sligo, Clarion Road. There will be two talks, Q&A and an opportunity to connect over tea/coffee. To resgister access sistersoflife.org/event/visit-ireland/

**TIPPERARY**

'A walk in the park for Parkinson's' takes place on Templemore Park, Tipperary on April 5 at 12pm. Visit parkinsons.ie to register or register on the day.

**TYRONE**

'The Synodal Pathway – Dungannon Parish' gathering happens on March 29 from 11am to 1pm in The Scout Hall, Charlemont Street. Come along and have your say.

**WATERFORD**

The monthly Healing Service and Benediction will continue at the Holy Family Church Luke Wadding Street on March 29 at 11am. All welcome to be Anointed and pray for personal, family, relationship and community past and present healing.

At the Holy Family Church the weekly Eucharistic Adoration service takes place each Monday following the 11am Mass until 4pm.

**WEXFORD**

Social Coffee Morning on April 2 at 10.45am at the Loch Garman Arms Hotel, Gorey. No entry charge. All welcome. Bring a friend!

# From construction to man of the cloth



Joanne Savage

The Reverend Bill Shaw is director of the 174 Trust, an organisation birthed 23 years ago that is dedicated to peace-building, reconciliation, dialogue and Christian community development. It is situated in the nationalist New Lodge estate, near loyalist Tiger's Bay – working class areas that were both seriously affected by the Troubles. The organisation is a part of the Duncairn Arts Centre, a hub of activity in a former Presbyterian church which underwent a £3.5m renovation in 2014 and is now a cultural oasis where live music is played, art is created, theatre performed and all kinds of classes and workshops meet – a place of colour and activity where people connect. Bill sees it as a meeting point for a community still reeling from the darkest years of the conflict.

## Peace-building

Reverend Shaw has distinguished himself in peace-building efforts – in February 2005, he was a recipient of the Harry McKillop Irish Spirit Award – established by Ross Perot “to support and recognise individual efforts in community-based projects which seek to promote inter community relationships and peace in Ireland” – during a ceremony at Queen's University Belfast.

And in recognition of his efforts promoting tolerance and mutual understanding he has served three terms as part of the Lord Mayor's Interfaith Chaplaincy Team.

Raised in Sandy Row, the Reverend Shaw spent many years working in construction before turning his back

on building sites in order to follow the call to serve God in a more overt way.

It's an extraordinary pivot, to go from bricks and mortar to preaching the truth of the Bible as a Presbyterian minister, and it seems that he came to faith gradually rather than experiencing any kind of flashbulb or Damascene moment of conversion; rather he began attending church with his wife so that he could have his first-born son baptised, and gradually felt a pull towards faith that would lead him first to undertake study of theology at Queen's University Belfast. After ordination as minister in the Presbyterian Church he served the community in a loyalist area of what was then a deeply divided city beleaguered by sectarian violence and darkened by bigotry.

**“I worried that my friends would all turn away from me and assume I was a weirdo”**

“I was in construction for ten years, loved football, having a drink with my mates, all the usual stuff, and then I started attending church with my wife. That led to conversations with my local minister and I began to think about Christian faith more. When I first mentioned that I was considering serving God in a different way my wife thought I was crazy because church or anything to do with that had never been a factor in my life at all. It had never really registered with me before. In evangelical terms I was saved.

“I worried that my friends would all turn away from me and assume I was a weirdo.”

So he found himself sitting before the pulpit and becoming more involved

with church outreach, began speaking at evangelical meetings, prayed about a possible vocation, and after his theological studies was ordained after a three-year assistantship on the Shankill Road beginning in 1989.

“I always thought that church was for respectable people, pious people, but then I realised that there was a place for me too, that the Gospels made a lot of sense to me and that by becoming a minister I could serve both God and my own community in a more substantial way. I realised that I could help people in a pastoral way.”

After his time in Sandy Row, Shaw moved to Craigavon Presbyterian and then Vinecash, a joint congregation, preaching the word of God at both churches. His manse was in a Catholic area and Shaw says that this is the first time that he came to know and befriend Catholics. At that time he had, he recalls, the arrogance of a Protestant fundamentalist and viewed the Catholic faith negatively.

“But now I think Catholic or Protestant – we are worshipping the same God and following the same teachings of Jesus Christ. I once very much had the sense that we, Protestants, were right, and Catholics were simply wrong. I thought of my theology as right and that God was in this Presbyterian box. I felt certain that evangelical Protestants had a grasp on the truth and that other denominations were wrong. Then Drumcree happened. That got me thinking about how this kind of ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality was dangerous and that it needed to be stamped out.”

## Scripture

Bill went back to Scripture, considering that the idea of reconciliation and forgiveness, not to mention love of one's enemies, was writ large,

**“Christianity is about love. And if you take away all the denominational differences in doctrine we should be united. If you don't love your neighbour, if you don't love your enemy, you are simply a noisy cymbal and not a true follower of Jesus”**



The Reverend Bill Shaw

and that inter-faith dialogue and respect for the dominant Christian traditions in Northern Ireland and beyond was a matter of profound importance.

“I knew that some of the men in my congregation were in the Orange Order and were fighting with Catholics, for example, on the Garvaghy Road. Then I felt an onus on me as a minister to preach in a way that called out sectarianism for the evil that it is. True Christianity is love of one's neighbour. Had we followed this ethic from the beginning none of the bloodshed of the Troubles would ever have occurred.”

**“Christian faith, if properly practiced, is all about reconciliation”**

For Shaw it is clear that it is the failure to read the Scriptures, to understand the message – love of God and love of neighbour – that resulted in

Ulster's conflict. He recalls his horror at the spectacle of the Holy Cross outrage in 2001 when Catholic children and their parents were verbally abused and spat upon as they made their way to school in the mixed Ardoyne estate by Protestants who claimed that Catholics had been attacking and damaging their homes. Shaw was asked to help mediate in the resolution of a dispute that laid bare naked sectarian bigotry in scenes that went around the world, a spectacle of hatred that showed Northern Ireland at its very worst.

## Reconciliation

“Christian faith, if properly practiced, is all about reconciliation. When I came here in 1998 the Poor Clares had a convent near here and there was a Sister Carmel who used to come and pray with me. I wanted the community here to know that I was here first and foremost simply as a Christian. It was important to me to meet the priests at nearby St Patrick's and Holy Family [Catholic churches].

“Christianity is about love. And if you take away all the denominational differences in doctrine we should be united. If you don't love your neighbour, if you don't love your enemy, you are simply a noisy cymbal and not a true follower of Jesus.”

**“The love that God has for us as a world, as a universe, is all embracing”**

He adds: “Christianity is all about community and community should overcome all forms of sectarianism. The love that God has for us as a world, as a universe, is all embracing. Faith helps all of us to be the best versions of ourselves that we can be.”

Asked about his favourite lines of scripture, Reverend Shaw quotes Micah 6:8, where Christian faith is defined as being all about three imperatives: “To love mercy, to act justly, and to walk humbly with your God.”

# Trump's 50 days of American carnage



**Michael Sanfey** reflects on a fast-paced first 50 days of Donald Trump

**P**resident Trump's strongest opponents could hardly deny that he has started out of the blocks of his second term at a blistering pace. A sign of this is how analysts and media commentators chose to assess his first 50 days rather than his first 100 as had previously been the norm. However, any survey of his words and actions so far would give grounds for describing these early days of Trump 2.0 as 'American carnage' to borrow a phrase from Trump's first inaugural address.

**“Bremmer sees Trump as operating in two main modes. He's transactional with strong people/powerful countries, whereas he's predatory when dealing with people/countries who are weak”**

One of the world's savviest geopolitical analysts is Ian Bremmer, head of the Eurasia Group, a leading risk advisory firm. He was recently in conversation with Ravi Agrawal of media platform [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com) on the subject of Trump's first 50 days. Bremmer sees Trump as being in a much stronger position now than he was in his first term. The attitude of most foreign countries is 'Get out of the guy's way and let's not have a fight with him'. [Comment: Ireland included, judging from Taoiseach Micheál Martin's



A woman walks past a Santa Fe New Mexican vending box in downtown Santa Fe, where the headline reads "Trump is Back." Photo: AnnHuizenga/istock

**“Trump is going after Europe's core values, saying they're not really democracies, and not genuinely supportive of the rule of law, or freedom of speech”**

approach during the Oval office meeting on March 12].

Bremmer sees Trump as operating in two main modes. He's transactional with strong people/powerful countries, whereas he's predatory when dealing with people/countries who are seen as being in a weaker position - e.g., Mexico, Canada, Panama, the Danes (over Greenland), the Ukrainians.

Bremmer said that Trump recognises that he doesn't have a lot of time to get things done - after all he was shot in the head, almost killed, and his attitude is 'Gotta' get this stuff done now'; there's a level of urgency and a willingness to tolerate broken china (no pun intended) - Trump is less cautious this time round.

## Elon Musk

The thing that has most surprised Bremmer is the huge role being played by Elon Musk, who is the principal driver and activator of Trump's policy. Musk is driving disruption in the adminis-

tration and in Bremmer's view he has had a pretty significant impact already. Trump has virtually no filter and has aspirations to talk about policy in any space at any moment and Musk is willing and capable to implement on those things. No one is as "inner circle" as Elon, said Bremmer.

## Bremmer on winners and losers so far

The winners have been countries such as the Gulf States - particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE; Israel; India (Modi being seen as one of Trump's guys); Orbán in Hungary; Bukele in El Salvador; Milei in Argentina.

The biggest winner is China, because it can take advantage of US withdrawal from multilateral and global architecture, even if China is taking a couple hits too. For now, Russia is also a big winner - Trump is not asking for much so far and is giving Russia some opportunities. Ukraine is much more of a supplicant / vassal from Trump's perspective - he is

putting the gun much closer to its head, and its unwillingness to play ball will have massive consequences for the country. For Putin, the situation is not yet as clear.

Europe is in the worst position, thinks Bremmer. It is being hit with tariffs and Trump went over the heads of the Europeans on Ukraine and by establishing a rapprochement with their principal enemy, Russia.

**“Although the tariffs will have a real market cost for the US itself, Trump is ready for this on the basis of needing to break eggs to make an omelette”**

Trump is going after Europe's core values, saying they're not really democracies, and not genuinely supportive of the rule of law, or freedom of speech. Trump wants anti-EU parties in Europe to win - e.g., AfD in Germany, Reform in the UK - and he believes that Europe

is just one electoral cycle behind the US as regards voting for MAGA-type parties. This is a bet Trump is making, is Bremmer's take, and the damage to transatlantic relations will be permanent.

On tariffs, Bremmer sees the environment as being very escalatory. Although the tariffs will have a real market cost for the US itself, Trump is ready for this on the basis of needing to break eggs to make an omelette. The pugnacity is also evident in the way Musk recently criticised Poland's foreign minister over Starlink. Ordinarily one might have expected Trump to worry about the negative political knock-on effects of that on the Polish-American vote, but Trump doesn't care, thinks Bremmer. With such a mindset the Trump administration can implement a much greater array of what one could even term revolutionary policies that will change nature of governance in the US - he has much more capacity on this, in Bremmer's opinion.

## US Elites have been cowed into silence

Bremmer was really interesting in regard to what he said about American elites - media, universities, business - having gone quiet because of worries about retribution being exacted if they voiced any oppositional views to what Trump was doing. This was despite some in business being worried about anti-immigration and anti-Green Card moves, and the DOGE chainsaw approach to the bureaucracy.

## Canada

In the space of just 30 minutes Bremmer covered a huge amount of ground. Inevitably not every topic could be discussed in detail and one that interests me is Canada. I reached out to Bremmer to seek his opinion on that, given that the new Prime Minister, Mark Carney - perhaps uniquely among western leaders - has adopted a very tough response towards Trump, who has made aggressive statements about wanting Canada as the 51st state. With an election now called

for 28 April, Bremmer simply ventured that the fight will get resolved after that. Incidentally, Carney's wife Diana is a senior adviser to Bremmer's Eurasia Group, as is former Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird who advises opposition leader Pierre Poilievre.

## Let's not forget Vice President JD Vance

The Vice President didn't feature in the foreignpolicy.com discussion but we can point to at least two significant happenings involving him during the first 50 days. First there was his speech at the Munich Security Conference on February 14. You know the expression about a comedian leaving his audience 'rolling in the aisles'? With Vance's Munich speech it was more a case of leaving them 'crying in their beers'. His remarks were a very cold shower indeed in conveying US disregard for Europe.

**“It seemed to be Vance's reference to 'diplomacy' that triggered Zelenskyy into pushing back on the whole Trumpian narrative about how to end the war”**

The second incident was the role Vance played during the row that broke out between Trump and Ukraine's President Valenskyy during their meeting at the Oval Office on February 28. It seemed to be Vance's reference to 'diplomacy' that triggered Zelenskyy into pushing back on the whole Trumpian narrative about how to end the war.

## The Gaza Plan

For me personally, the single most upsetting aspect of Trump's first 50 days was his reference to having a plan to 'clean out' Gaza. It couldn't be better described than by the American philosopher Edward Feser: "To look at the suffering and destruction in Gaza and see in it a good real estate opportunity, and to think that people might abandon their ancestral home given sufficient cash - it's the crassest economic reductionism, it's insulting. It's obscene, really."

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

## The Spirit is as active in our time as the times of the Apostles and pentecost



Interview with Dr Anna Rowlands in Maynooth who was in Ireland to give the annual Trocaire Lenten talk

**GARRY**

How did you get involved with the Vatican and the preparations for the Synod on Synodality?

**DR ROWLANDS**

So, my involvement started just before the Frascati meeting and I think because the Pope wanted this genuine listening process at the beginning, the Vatican realised that they needed a different kind of team in order to process the information they were receiving, the reflections of people from all over the world, and that they also needed to learn how to write documents in a different way.

I was asked to be involved as someone who could help process those grassroots reports. I've a background in empirical research, as well as being a theologian, so I'm used to dealing with data from the

field. Helping to process that, but also to work on that as a theologian.

The other thing that they wanted to do was to work bilingually in the way that they would write documents for the Synod process. Not many people know this, but this is the first time that a Vatican process has equally worked in English and Italian simultaneously. The Frascati document is the first Vatican text we think to have been written completely simultaneously in two languages, written collaboratively in two languages, and it really does change the kind of document that you get at the end of that when you're having to think between two languages all the way through, it makes it more accessible, I think.

**“Some people were producing their documents in the middle of war zones, we receive contributions from Ukraine, from Russia, from the Holy Land, from parts of Africa where there are conflict”**

And also, I think it makes you think more sharply about what you say sometimes as well because you're having to think about the translatability of the phrase that that you're using. So, I was involved really from the point at which we were having to think, 'how will we give back to the Church?', 'how will we restore to the



Anna Rowlands, a professor of Catholic social thought and practice at Durham University in England, gives a theological reflection as the assembly of the Synod of Bishops begins work on its section section, communion, in this screen grab from Oct. 9, 2023, in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall. Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media, via YouTube

Church in a document where they will recognise themselves this material that they have so generously contributed through the pandemic, through extreme difficulty?'

Some people were producing their documents in the middle of war zones, we receive contributions from Ukraine, from Russia, from the Holy Land, from parts of Africa where there are conflict.

So, people had had really given themselves. Including with some real vulnerability to produce that material and our task in Frascati was to return that to people in a way that they could recognise themselves and see themselves honoured in what we had written.

**GARRY**

You said somewhere else that shifting through that

material from the grassroots, was generating an energy and the spirit that if the Church could capture it, could be used and worked with over decades. Was that spirit captured? And if so, how is it being used and worked?

**DR ROWLANDS**

Well, in a sense, I'm the worst person to ask whether it was captured because I was part of the group that that produced the Frascati document. So that's probably for others to judge rather than for me.

**“There are things said in our local groups that were so rich and in the national synthesis they disappeared”**

Although the feedback that I have had from people who haven't known that I was involved in the document process was to say they really did see themselves echoed in that text.

I was in America a couple of weeks ago, in the middle of Georgia, and I was sitting next to a woman who had helped to gather together all of the grassroots listening for the Archdiocese of Atlanta and she said to me, 'oh, there are things said in our local groups that were so rich and in the national synthesis they disappeared. But something remarkable happened when the Frascati document came out they were back there somehow. We don't know how that happened.'

**GARRY**

Because they weren't the only ones saying it.

**DR ROWLANDS**

Exactly. What was astonishing to them were things that felt very local to a group of parishes in Atlanta, Georgia that were also being said by parishes in Ethiopia, or a parish in Canada, or a parish in France, or grouping of churches.

I think, that sense that people did see themselves recognised and were struck by just how much they had thought was very local is

probably much more universal.

**GARRY**

But do you think, looking on from Frascati three and a half years ago, that there was a spirit, a kind of energy, and what that woman's talking about, but do you think that was carried on and carried forward or did the process become a little... forgive me now, but the academics and the bureaucrats kind of took over and that spirit was lost a bit?

**DR ROWLANDS**

I think there are two different bits to that question. One is: was there material lost? And I think the honest answer is that some things raised at the grassroots level were lost or became less emphasised than they were. And actually, one of the ones that gives me the greatest trouble in that regard, conscience wise, is questions around the inclusion of people with disabilities.

One of the things that was a genuine universal, alongside 'please help priests to preach better'

**“What was astonishing to them were things that felt very local to a group of parishes in Atlanta, Georgia that were also being said by parishes in Ethiopia, or a parish in Canada, or a parish in France, or grouping of churches”**



Anna Rowlands, left, a theologian from England, attends a working session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall Oct. 18, 2023. Photo: CNS photo/Lola Gomez

and 'please involve women', 'young people', was people living with disabilities', their lack of inclusion, so the way in which most parishes are simply not set up to enable people with disabilities to participate in the same way.

And also, to kind of learn from people with disabilities to see them as people with a certain kind of spiritual knowledge as well. So, I think we lost attention to that question as we went through and that worries me, and I think that's because we lost the voice of people with disabilities present in the room.

**“And being slightly facetious, for the first year, the academics were locked in a sort of bunker room in the bottom of the Synod because they were not integrated around the round tables”**

There was one Synod member, in fact there were two who had very obvious visible disabilities. To start with, one of them ended up too unwell to attend the

full second session, but they tried to bring the question of disability back to the fore. But I think that wasn't held in the way that it was there with energy in the grassroots report.

So, there are some issues, realities like that that I think we lost attention to. So yes, that would just be one concrete example and there are others. But I don't think it's because the process was taken over by academics and bureaucrats.

And being slightly facetious, for the first year, the academics were locked in a sort of bunker room in the bottom of the Synod because they were not integrated around the round tables.

The theological experts who were present, and we should say that some theologians were also voting members and facilitators. There were theologians throughout the whole process, not just the so-called experts. But actually they struggled. We struggled to integrate the theologians into the process in the right way. And I think that actually is really significant and tells us something about the relationship between theology, theologians and the Church.

Particularly Episcopal leadership, at the moment, there is a real challenge

globally. How can theology be truly of service to the Church? How can bishops welcome that dialogue and engagement with theologians? How can theologians be asking the questions which are most urgently in the hearts of people and accompanying them in a relationship of accompaniment with their bishop..

And there are relationship breakdown reasons on both sides sometimes.

**GARRY**  
A lot of bishops probably would feel a little bit under qualified just sitting down with a theologian, they might not have sufficient training?

**DR ROWLANDS**  
There are some bishops who are outstandingly well trained theologically. There are others I think who perhaps didn't have a brilliant experience at seminary of learning theology.

**“In some contexts, theologians have felt actively persecuted by Rome or the Bishops' Conferences over the years as well”**

And frankly, their memory of the extent to which

**“This is not just a bishop issue for bishops to sort out, or a priests issue for priests to sort out. It's a whole people of God issue. It's sections of the people of God**

there was some help to them, is that it wasn't very much. In one sense, or at least in the way they were taught to it. I think sometimes that's the problem.

I also think that sometimes the academy has moved in a direction where the question that academic theologians are asking are not necessarily the most urgent ones that bishops face in the exercise of episcopacy ministry.

So the gap can be for reasons on both sides. In some contexts, theologians have felt actively persecuted by Rome or the Bishops' Conferences over the years as well, so there's a degree of mutual suspicion sometimes. I think it's complicated, multilayered reasons, multifactorial reasons for the fact that there's not always been a relationship between the two.

I think actually the Synod process raised this sort of existential reality in the

position of bishops, in a way that wasn't present in the grassroots report. As some issues got lost from the grassroots reports like disability, there were other questions that raised themselves through the process that were not in the grassroots report that became more important.

**“There were reasons why priests didn't feel able to speak or didn't wish to speak, in that early grassroots listening and that meant that their voices were lost”**

And two of those are the need for a renewal in Episcopal Ministry in support of bishops. Not like a kind of bad report on 'bishops must improve'. But a renewal in

the kind of vitality of episcopacy which means in fact providing much greater opportunities for formation, for bishops, much greater support for bishops understanding where there are real tensions in the role of bishops who often find themselves having to be both sort of a father to their priests and judge, and combining those paternal and judicial roles can feel really awkward.

Many bishops report feeling quite isolated and overwhelmed by the tasks on their desks. At the same time, the most silent group in the grassroots reports, who didn't speak for themselves were priests.

And there have to be reasons and I think there are multiple. I think they're not impossible to understand and digest. There were reasons why priests didn't feel able to speak or didn't wish to speak, in that early grassroots listening and

that meant that their voices were lost.

**GARRY**  
Was that a global trend?

**DR ROWLANDS**  
That was global. I mean there were some contexts in which priests spoke more, but I would say that was a global dynamic and I think sometimes that was because priests didn't want to colonise the space, so they retreated to enable their laity to speak. But religious still found organised ways to speak interestingly.

Sometimes it was because of scepticism and burnout. Sometimes it was because of outright hostility and fear about the process or opposition.

There are a whole number of different reasons why I think priests didn't feel that that was a space that they could speak into honestly. And I think that affects then the picture that we have that emerges. But priests were able to talk more as the process went on. There was a special

meeting for parish priests in Rome, which actually produced a really beautiful report that's worth reading.

**“Priests and bishops belong to the people of God, they are in our midst, they are among us and we are with them and I think reclaiming that language of ‘amongst’ and ‘with’ is really important”**

But it's clear that it is a difficult vocation to be a priest, and it's an even more difficult vocation to be a bishop. So that sense that those questions emerged in a way that with some subtlety and sensitivity, we need to get hold of, and that means we the laity as well. This is not just a bishop issue for bishops to

sort out, or a priests issue for priests to sort out. It's a whole people of God issue. It's sections of the people of God. Priests and bishops belong to the people of God, they are in our midst, they are among us and we are with them and I think reclaiming that language of 'amongst' and 'with' is really important.

**GARRY**  
The bottleneck for any change essentially is the parish priest, because the Pope, can decide what he wants, cardinals, bishops too but if it comes to the local parish and that priest decides, 'maybe I'll have a pastoral council, or maybe I won't' then there's nothing that can be done

**DR ROWLANDS**  
Well, technically that's not possible if you read the final document. The final document stipulates that every parish will have to have a council and there's a kind of discernment process for the making of decisions, and also there is informa-

tion about how people should be appointed onto such groups.

So, in fact, should the document be taken as a whole and fully implemented it would bring serious change to the composition of Parish Councils, Plenary Councils, many other kinds of councils.

**“This is about the dignity of baptism, the baptism of all and the responsibility of every baptised person for mission”**

So there is real change embedded in that document, if it's taken seriously and I don't think it will just be a question of the parish priest, I think a huge amount will depend on the ability and willingness of individual bishops and whole Bishops' Conferences to get hold of this, with some energy. But it also requires grass-roots energy, and I think for priests to take this on without a ground swell of support from their laity, I think that would be tricky for them.

The question is about, this is about the responsibility of every baptised person. Hence why bap-

tism becomes such a central category emerging in the Synodal Process that this is about the dignity of baptism, the baptism of all and the responsibility of every baptised person for mission.

**GARRY**  
The difficulty in Ireland from where I see it is in a sense everyone's sitting back waiting for someone else to do something. The Bishops' Conference is meeting here this week but the rate of change is very slow.

But look, it's easy to blame bishops as well. The laity can be lazy in Ireland. We're so used to just having it handed to us.

**DR ROWLANDS**  
The maturing process of each, each of us growing into our own vocations, characters and ministries, but the point of the report is that we only grow into those personal vocations, charisms and ministries together, so we make each other, we mature together. As Pope Francis always says, 'none of us is saved alone'.

And the same is true in terms of how we grow, grow into those vocations, charisms and ministries. That's a social, communal task, not just a kind of highly individualised one. And no one can do it, it's a whole community task, no

one can do it on their own. That's also true for priests and bishops.

**GARRY**  
There was a list of things that could be done early on that came out of Frascati. Better homilies, formation for priests and all that. Have you picked up any sense that any of that renewal is happening? Because here there was a lot of 'uh, let's wait and see what Rome's going to do'.

**DR ROWLANDS**  
From the beginning of what you're saying, most of the things, the things that came up in that original process dealing with better formation for priests in homiletics, better quality of liturgy, the inclusion of women in more roles, greater focus on young people, a preferential option for the young was the quote from one of the documents at the beginning of the process, there is not a single thing that Rome needs to do to make any of those things happen.

**GARRY**  
And Cardinal Grech came here and stated that clearly.

**DR ROWLANDS**  
And he's absolutely right. What is stopping a national renewal in homiletics formation? What would Rome have to do? What would the Bishops' Conference even have to do to make that happen? So, any of those issues you've listed are within the grasp of the people of God in this place, right now, today, tomorrow. And it's a capacity, it's like an awakening.

**“The reality is that the vast majority of dioceses, National Bishops' Conferences and so forth are massively under in what they could be doing already without a single change to canon law”**

You know, there's a reason why each of the headings of the sections of the final document begins with conversion, this is about a reconversion with energy from the spirit to our basic core tasks. And most of the things that are not right are in the basic structures of how we're living Christian community.

And all of those things are readily available for us to reflect on, discern, and act together on, and most of them don't cost huge amounts of money either. So then they don't require enormous amounts of resourcing, that every parish and diocese and at national level, to look at what is it possible for women to do,

**“Should the document be taken as a whole and fully implemented it would bring serious change to the composition of Parish Councils, Plenary Councils, many other kinds of councils”**



Italian Jesuit Father Giacomo Costa, second from left, adviser to the secretary-general of the synod, speaks at a news conference at the Vatican Oct. 27 to present the document for the continental phase of the Synod of Bishops on synodality. Also pictured are Msgr. Piero Coda, secretary-general of the International Theological Commission; Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops; Anna Rowlands, professor of Catholic social thought and practice at Durham University in the United Kingdom; and Matteo Bruni, director of the Holy See Press Office. Photo: OSV News/Junno Arocho Esteves, CNS

currently within the structures of Canon law and how far are we even in ensuring that we have sufficient numbers of women serving within these roles?

Because the reality is that the vast majority of dioceses, National Bishops' Conferences and so forth are massively under in what they could be doing already without a single change to canon law to enable more women to be involved at every level, in mission and ministry in the Church's life.

What it requires is the imagination and the will to think that it's really important that there are women who are equal in their baptismal dignity, equal in their call to mission. We're all given a diversity of charisms and gifts. What would it look like to make sure that we are listening to what the spirit is doing and that that there's an obedience, as it were, to the work of the spirit? It requires us to be actively, attentively discerning.

**GARRY**

Absolutely, couldn't agree with you more. We're in Maynooth, and it's a man's world here and a clerical man's world at that. How does a world like that open itself in the most rudimentary way to women?

**DR ROWLANDS**

It's true there are settings in which it feels more comfortable for women to be with other women, for men to be with other men. And it is a challenge to realise that actually, there is a necessary enrichment even if also a change and a challenge to learning how to do relationships between men and women differently.

Again the document says this really clearly. There is a kind of relational poverty in our relations between men and women. And we have to look at, it's in the fine detail of how we live.

That's the granularity of what the document is saying. When it's saying, 'we have to examine in our consciences and see where there is a kind of relation in poverty in the way that men and women all relate again'.

**GARRY**

But one good bishop could show leadership and say we need to be more inclusive of women here, and that the trappings of a boys club will have to go.

**DR ROWLANDS**

Well, that's my point, that you will enrich the conversation. And if there's a genuine belief in a sort of reciprocity, complementarity of relations, then you have to believe that your conversion, your dinner, your decision making, your leadership will be improved. By the presence of someone who brings something distinctive, even if only by their life experience to the table.



Pope Francis meets with parish priests from around the world who were chosen by their bishops to share their reflections with the Synod of Bishops on synodality May 2, 2024, in the Synod Hall at the Vatican. To the left of the pope is Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod, and to the right is Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, synod relator general. Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media

And the non-inclusion of that, there is an impoverishment in that reality. Equally, is also true that if you have one woman, that's really difficult because it puts huge pressure on that single woman to bear a responsibility for all women, which is unrealistic.

**“They're slowly learning ways of working with women. That in these kinds of roles and at the highest levels, and so you are bringing perspectives that perhaps haven't been thought about before”**

But also, it's much easier for there to be non-inclusive behaviour. That woman may not feel comfortable to speak out. You should never really, it should always be in a context where you ensure that it's not just one.

**GARRY**

Your own experience as a woman working in the Church. How has that been?

**DR ROWLANDS**

First of all, I am aware that I have been serving in roles where no woman has served before and that can be nothing but both a joy and a privilege genuinely, to be doing work in a way that I

know have not had a woman in quite that role.

That gives me great joy. My grandparents left Ireland in their teens having not even completed their formal education. It's not exactly like I expected to find myself sitting in the Vatican and doing work, and I imagine that they never expected their granddaughter would be sitting in the Vatican and doing that work. I have a sense of that and the kind of honour of doing that.

Nonetheless, it's a context where they're slowly learning ways of working with women. That in these kinds of roles and at the highest levels, and so you are bringing perspectives that perhaps haven't been thought about before in quite that way into the room. They're also having to learn how to adapt structures, cultures, sometimes even physical buildings, toilets. There're all sorts of things that arise as a challenge.

On the whole, I have to say my experience is of having been welcomed. I think actually, particularly within the Synod itself, that not all, but that the vast majority of bishops and cardinals were delighted to have women in the room and lay men. And I think it's really important to talk about the presence of lay men as well, who often are a very overlooked

**“I have to say my experience is of having been welcomed. I think actually, particularly within the Synod itself, that not all, but that the vast majority of bishops and cardinals were delighted to have women in the room and lay men”**

group for other reasons. But that for me, to see the way in which that conviviality, men and women together and the way everybody was given an equal amount of time to speak, didn't matter whether you were the patriarch or you were a lay woman from Syria, you got your three minutes.

So, there were ways in which that really was a productive, open and very beautiful space and I think it's given many a taste of something. That means that they wouldn't necessarily, they would feel a lack were they to go back to a model that didn't involve any element of that for a future Synod.

**GARRY**

But the Vatican is the Vatican.. And the women been promoted, a lot of them are, really most of them are religious women, so there's a

way to go in truly involving laity.

**DR ROWLANDS**

There are more lay women around. Women like Emilce Cuda in the Latin America section, she's married, she has two children. So, there are women around, in increasing number who are and function in a variety of roles. I'm formerly a member of the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, which means I was appointed by Pope Francis to be on the governing body of the dicastery. Normally that's the bishop, he would play that role, but this is the kind of creativity Francis has had in thinking, it's really not so difficult to include women in governance structures that really haven't to be a Bishop in order to do this.

There are now many women who are involved in

the governance of dicasteries, while they're not on the payroll, they are involved in governance and oversight.

**“The Vatican remains in many ways a patronage system and that's a challenge if you're somebody coming from outside”**

That includes Vatican finances, it includes safeguarding, it includes standard dicastery work, so although the visible appointments of full time people to posts tend to be women religious, those who are appointed to these other less visible governance roles are more often expert women, who are lay women working in secular



Pope Francis smiles during an exclusive interview with Reuters at the Vatican July 2, 2022. Photo: CNS photo/Remo Casilli, Reuters

occupations. It does give me some confidence that they're there at that level. Nonetheless, the Vatican remains in many ways a patronage system and that's a challenge if you're somebody coming from outside. The basically clerical structures of a patronage system.

**“Maybe I'm the only person to have this experience, of being mocked for my football affiliation, which was not what I was expecting from the first meeting with Pope Francis”**

How you think about including women in such a way that they don't have to become part of that patronage system, can have their own authority and way of working within that structure. That's something that I think remains to be really thought about.

**GARRY**

Tell me a little about your meetings with Pope Francis. I'm sure you've met him several times, what's your experience of him?

**“The messiness and the chaos thing I think is not as an end in itself, but it's an understanding of the messiness and complexity of living Christian lives in a world in which things are not well, in which things must be challenged and disturbed for the seed of the gospel to be able to really take root”**

**DR ROWLANDS**

My experience of him, in the first instance, and maybe I'm the only person to have this experience, was of being mocked for my football affiliation, which was not what I was expecting from the first meeting with Pope Francis.

He asked me what football team I supported, and I grew up in Manchester, so quite naturally, the only team in Manchester we're supporting, obviously [is] Manchester United. I had to say that I was a Manchester United fan. And he just looked at me and roared with laughter and I have a photograph of this very moment that somebody else took. He roared, threw his head back and roared with laughter, turned to his colleague next to him and said 'well, at least she's got

a sense of humour.' That was my first experience.

He has a very natural, easy rapport with people. He uses humour to connect with people, even mockery clearly. And yet there's another seriousness to the way in which he sees the task, has seen the task of his papacy.

My experience of him is somebody who's in the detail of things, who knows what he wants, listens, and he's happy to listen and take guidance. But he's a people person at the end of the day and yes, with a slightly wicked and dry sense of humour.

**GARRY**

He likes to kind of throw a little chaos into the mix, or what we call hopping the ball?

**DR ROWLANDS**

I think sometimes, there's

some parts of him that is unafraid of the conflict and chaos. Sometimes people will say, as if he's got a sort of rather dark enjoyment of chaos. I don't think that's true, but I think he's unafraid of making a mess, of chaos and I think it's much misunderstood when he goes and says to young people make a mess in the world.

For people who've got a slightly more conservative bent, they feel distressed at this and think this is a sign of someone who doesn't understand what young people need right now, which is 'guidance' and 'discipline' and so forth. 'This is like the most unhelpful thing the Pope could say', but I think he's also saying, you have to be willing to challenge, to open yourself up, to not needing to control every outcome, and to

risk, and to venture and that these are words of Christian living.

These are not kind of opposed to the world of Christian living. Christians, deliberately, we were there to be the kind of impure people who were not too worried about purity taboos and here we're willing to change things. Jesus heals on the Sabbath and Jesus breaks many of the rules that are of the cultural norms of his time not to bring chaos, but to accept that some of the rules we set ourselves within our cultures for purity and order might not be of service to the good in the way that we think they are. I just think that he has an understanding of that.

**“This whole thing is about discernment in freedom, and it's almost creating the conditions for that freedom, in which the discernment takes place”**

I also think from an Ignatian point of view, his understanding of discernment is that you very often

create a number of different possible pathways that you could take, and then at a later point you determine which is the pathway to be taken. That you almost have to create the open possibility of those different pathways so that you could do a good discernment.

This whole thing is about discernment in freedom, and it's almost creating the conditions for that freedom, in which the discernment takes place. I suspect that's what he may be doing at the moment about whether he needs to resign or not resign, he will look deeply at the pathways where there are different possibilities there.

I mean a colleague of mine, Austin Ivereigh, he has a kind of understanding of this I think, is exactly the way the Pope thinks.

The messiness and the chaos thing I think is not as an end in itself, but it's an understanding of the messiness and complexity of living Christian lives in a world in which things are not well, in which things must be challenged and disturbed for the seed of the gospel to be able to really take root. It's a paradox with him and he's very drawn to Romano Guardini.

I see a lot of Simone Weil in his thinking as well, and they are both thinkers of tension and paradox they're not afraid of conflict.

And where they see what seems like a contradiction both thinkers, both he and Guardini go down into the tension, the point is to go as deeply as possible into the contradictions and paradoxes of the world in order to set us up, each other, for salvation, and I think that he follows in a vein which is quite Romano Guardini and quite Simon Weil in that regard. He's unafraid to go deeper into the sights of paradox and tension and contradiction, to see what's fruitful in them and the seeds of the good, and to see what is the opposite of that which is privation of the good which you reject.

#### GARRY

You spoke of a tragic disconnect between the Church, eager to reach out and people of faith who feel they have gifts which are not being used. You said you hoped the two years would find ways to drive the giftedness and find ways to help this Catholic renewal that can happen in communities. You still feel the same? You still feel that renewal in communities can happen?

#### DR ROWLANDS

I think the communities that are able to be listening communities that go back to their base, that realise that, I mean, I'm going to speak for a UK context now you can tell me whether there's any resonance for an Irish context or not.

**“The natural privacy that people have there's a sense in which we have to learn again how to build small scale face to face communities and that's kind of what parishes are”**

There are large numbers of people who attend my parish on a Sunday morning and come to Mass and they leave, and they speak to no one. Not because I think they don't want to speak to

anyone, but the culture of our Catholicism is still very much people keep their own space, and so we've no idea about the life story of maybe two thirds of the people who still attend Mass.

We have no idea what's going on in their lives. We also have no idea of what skills, gifts, charisms, capabilities those individuals have and how that could be unleashed as part of the community, so unfortunately we are still almost radical individualists, despite being communitarian people at one level.

And without wanting to break the privacy, the natural privacy that people have there's a sense in which we have to learn again how to build small scale face to face communities and that's kind of what parishes are. But I think we need to learn how to build those in a different way, and in a different part of my existence I'm a trained community organiser. And one of the things they teach you when you're linking to the organiser training is the people who say they're leaders are often not the people who really are leaders in a community, and your task is to go and find the people who have active leadership capabilities in communities and draw that out from them. And community organising teaches you to do that and you do that by having lots and lots of one to one conversations with people.

People sometimes don't have the confidence, they need that to be called out from them, but that community organising teaches that you get that by relationship building and that requires one to one conversations, that requires an interest in people's life stories. Finding which is not a nosiness or voyeurism but it's finding that connection and building community.

I had a conversation with a woman in our parish the other week who has been coming to Mass for 40 years in that parish since she was a child. And she said, 'I'm thinking I might just stop coming.' And I said 'why?' and she said, 'I just think nobody would notice if I didn't come.'

It's that sense of she's not



Dr Anna Rowlands (Second from right) pictured at the Trocaire Annual Lenten Lecture 2025

greeted by anyone. I mean, it's Pope Francis's thing, you greet people by name. The power of being in a context where your name is called. Where you are known and welcome and there's nothing unwelcoming about our parish. It's a really welcoming parish. But she sits there every Sunday, she helps hand out books, she brings up the offertory sometimes, but she feels that probably nobody would notice if she just stopped coming.

**“There is simply not enough priests to make that a viable option for the survival of vibrant Christian community to the local level”**

We're living in parishes with that level of depersonalisation, it's really difficult to have a sense of those baptismal charisms and gifts that are sitting there, that could be absolutely the source of renewal, but we

have to become interested in each other again, and we have to be determined to form real communities and recognise that we're totally interdependent. One small group of the parish cannot do this alone, and it's unhealthy if they are.

#### GARRY

Otherwise we're just going back to that kind of service ministry type of approach where everyone else, the 90% are sitting back, you know being served basically.

#### DR ROWLANDS

Yeah, and the danger is that there's a certain kind of clericalism that feeds that, lay and ordained. And the danger is, if we're going back to a point of a kind of fixation on the priest as that mystical provider of all things, and certainly in my context, there is simply not enough priests to make that a viable option for the survival of vibrant Christian community to the local level. We have a priest at the moment, but our diocese has already got a real challenge.

#### GARRY

How do you see that playing out then? Just in your diocese, as mirrored in so many other dioceses here and everywhere else.

#### DR ROWLANDS

So, either there's a sudden uptick in vocations to the priesthood and either or there is a recognition that we need to build our parish and local small-scale communities with the work of our hands collectively, served in different ways, in a diversity of ways according to the gifts and charisms that are present in the community.

And my own view is

that there's never an age of austerity. The spirit isn't austere in some ages and generous in others. The spirit pours, I mean, this would just be my Newmanology, the spirit is surely as active in our own times as the times of Pentecost, etc. The question is whether we in ourselves, are open to what the spirit is doing and whether the community is discerning what the spirit is doing in such a way that those gifts can be called out and offered for the service of the Church and the world.

**“If you believe fundamentally that your baptism is your entry into that community, that your responsibility is to be open to what happens to you in your life”**

But that's a task of opening ourselves, of receptivity. And also not of self-dependence, of accepting if it looks like we've got no way forward here, what is it we're not seeing? What are we not perceiving about the action of the Spirit? Which is generous and abundant in every age.

That's our poverty. That's not the poverty of the vocations not being poured out, that's our poverty of discernment and a lack of willingness, I think, to confront aspects of that reality.

But if you believe fundamentally that your baptism is your entry into that community, that your responsi-

bility is to be open to what happens to you in your life and what is given to you from that moment of baptism onwards, and that it's the responsibility of a community to be discerning the leadership of the Bishop, to be discerning those gifts and charisms, you have to believe that they are abundant, or else you end up with a really strange Newmanology.

#### GARRY

That's what I always say to people is, I don't think we're that special that the Church is going to die on our watch.. Something else will come.

#### DR ROWLANDS

No, I mean, there's also Timothy Radcliffe's joke from the Synod talks. He told some joke about it, it must have been like in the age of Napoleon or something and somebody comes to the Vatican and says: 'But Napoleons attempting to destroy the Church,' to which the response was, 'ah, my dear, not even we have managed to achieve that.' Because we imagine ourselves so special that we get to be the choice.

It's a refocusing on the question that we're so used to being self-dependent and self-sufficient, this is about returning our attention to the question of our own receptivity and attention to what we believe that the action of the spirit is in our own times. What is God's activity, promised presence amongst us through history always walking with God's people. Among us, amidst us, dwelling with us. What is our capacity to be open to what that activity is and then our own response to that, is receptivity.

**“That's our poverty. That's not the poverty of the vocations not being poured out, that's our poverty of discernment and a lack of willingness, I think, to confront aspects of that reality”**

# Cutting overseas aid: an affront to solidarity and the common good

Dualta Roughneen argues that no matter which way we look at international aid or charitable giving to those living in less prosperous or more volatile countries, walking away shouldn't be countenanced



Dualta Roughneen

Are we suffering from an excess of empathy that creating compassion fatigue? In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, the internet – and our fixation with social media and doomscrolling – means we are bombarded with never-ending stories of gloom.

Domestically, we have a housing crisis and a homeless emergency, we have a health crisis, we have a mental health crisis; internationally there is a refugee crisis or crises, we have Ukraine, we have Gaza, we have climate change, we have the wars we barely hear about but never seem to end.

Despite living in an era of greatest prosperity, we feel like we exist in a world of ceaseless crisis. We are living in one of the wealthiest countries at probably the most prosperous period in world history, yet doom lives around every corner. Are we becoming inoculated to the real crises that exist in the world?

## Reactions

Donald Trump's decision to pause and then cut a very large portion of the US government's overseas aid was met with little in the way of popular outrage. Keir Starmer's announcement shortly after to reduce UK aid from 5% of GDP to 3% encountered very little resistance. If it was a Tory government it may not have been surprising but no one expected a Labour government to cut assistance to those in need around the world. They did, and the world moved on very quickly.

Inside the aid-sector, the reaction was much different. It has turned international assistance on its head. The sector has entered crisis mode yet we have struggled to articulate a strong and compelling argument about what this will mean for the most vulnerable across the world. It is hard to understand why. The examples



People hold placards outside the US Agency for International Development building in Washington February 3, 2025, protesting the Trump administration's moves to shut down the US foreign aid agency. Photo: OSV News/Kent Nishimura, Reuters.

brought forward by Elon Musk discrediting international assistance gained far more traction than the counter-arguments even if they were cherry-picked for maximum impact.

**“Immediately after the quake hit, they were ready to go again to pick up anyone injured”**

Two of my proudest moments in over twenty years working in international aid demonstrated to me the power of overseas assistance in general but in particular the power – and benefits – of United States assistance. The Nepal earthquake of 2015 devastated a huge part of the country. People were killed immediately but millions lost their homes, their livelihoods, their education and much more. The United States marines played a pivotal role in facilitating the NGO sector in getting food, water and shelter to places that were cut off from civilisation. The US deployed huge volumes of cash to buy necessary goods but also sent helicopters, planes and marines to help get the aid to where no one else could go.

When the second earthquake hit two weeks later on May 12, I was very close to the epicentre, benefitting from US Marines helicopters who were flying me – and food and tents – to people high in the mountains. Immediately after the quake hit, they were ready to go again to pick up anyone injured and fly them to Kathmandu for treatment. They invited me to go with them to assess the damage but I declined, rather leaving space for anyone injured to be picked up. They took off and, on their way back, they met cloud cover and heavy mist, crashing into an outcrop of the Himalayas. 5 civilians, 6 United States Marines and 2 Nepalese Soldiers, lost their lives.

## Aid

In 2014, when the ebola crisis in West Africa was its peak, there was a real fear that the epidemic would go completely out of control and devastate vast swathes of the region. As it was over 11,000 people died but it could have been much, much worse. If it weren't for the funds, the logistics, the organisation and the heavy lifting of the US government in Liberia and to a similar extent, the UK government in Sierra Leone,

the outbreak could have been a lot worse. I was there and I can testify to the impact that the US and the UK had in curbing the epidemic and bringing it under control.

**“Angus Deaton articulates one of the strongest arguments that ‘most external aid is doing more harm than good’”**

In both these examples, NGOs and the international aid sector played critical roles in harnessing the strength and funding of the different governments.

These are two examples that I can testify to first hand. It can be easy to dismiss them as outliers and point to profligacy,

unintended consequences, and ongoing crisis to create a narrative that demonstrates the ineffectiveness of aid. In *'The Great Escape'* Angus Deaton articulates one of the strongest arguments that 'most external aid is doing more harm than good'. William Easterly in *'White Man's Burden'* gives an equally compelling narrative.

## Perspective

Many who decry Donald Trump's cuts are at the same time critical of aid from the perspective of it being a colonial endeavour. I have some sympathy for the former criticisms and little for the latter. It is easy to find narratives that suit your perspective in such a complex area where emergency aid, development assistance, and the responsibilities governments interact – often with war an aggravating factor.

External aid is being ques-

**“It can be easy to dismiss them as outliers and point to profligacy, unintended consequences, and ongoing crisis to create a narrative that demonstrates the ineffectiveness of aid”**

tioned both by an increasingly cynical, sceptical and impatient public at large, but also from what could be considered 'the left' and 'the right'. Many of the same people who make the argument that aid is inherently colonial and patriarchal, are most aggrieved by the current US administrations attack on 'Diversity, Equality & Inclusion' (DEI). Incoherently, they have been undermining external aid for years attacking its history, origins and way of working – while wishing to arrogate the trappings of aid for their own ends.

**“The language and reasoning of aid agencies is becoming lost in a type of moralising that is alienating to the average Joe/Josephine”**

I agree that there is a correction needed and that the ordinary meaning of good intentions in relation diversity, equality and inclusion have been hi-jacked and re-interpreted to be divisive rather than inclusive concepts, pushing identity politics to the extent that it undermines overseas assistance, both development and humanitarian, creating the stories that allow Donald Trump and other aid sceptics to make a mockery of hugely important work. The rigid orthodoxy that accompanies this viewpoint has made not-for-profit work and international development a difficult place for those who do not align.

There are four main principles of Catholic Social Teaching: the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, the common good, and solidarity. These underpin what should be the core reasons for supporting developed countries' overseas assistance programmes. These are accompanied by the pursuit of peace and care (the preferential option) for the poor. This is not very different to how many aid policy makers understand the moral argument for aid in itself but the language and reasoning of aid agencies is becoming lost in a type of moralising that is alienating to the average Joe/Josephine.

We shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Aid – like everything human – is imperfect, it is flawed, but if we turn our backs on it, we turn our backs on our responsibility for what Catholics call corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to give shelter to travellers, to visit the sick, to visit the imprisoned, and to bury the dead. These words may stick in the throat of many who want the language to reflect their own worldview, who seek justice rather than charity in external aid. They view the language of charity as an anachronism yet do not see that justice properly understood is not exclusive nor separate from charity. Many seek charitable donations but are embarrassed to identify as charities.

Pope Benedict expressed the interplay of charity and justice nicely: “To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or ‘city’.” The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *pólis*.”

Elsewhere, he emphatically declares that “[n]ot only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is ‘inseparable from charity’, and intrinsic to it”, but he never forgets that charity moves beyond justice, that delivering charity does not obviate that justice must also be served.

### Blurred

Works of mercy are grounded in the virtues of faith, hope and charity, but of course we are called to justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude, which require us to question – as Angus Deaton and William Easterly do – the practical outcomes of how we approach our work. We shouldn't be blind to the fact that our endeavours can be mistaken and we need to correct our works of charity and justice.

In Donald Trump's decision to obliterate the United States overseas assistance the virtues of prudence and temperance feel egregiously absent. He has used a cudgel where a scalpel would be most useful. The aid sector is in a constant state of self-correction, that from the inside, can feel like naval-gazing. Speculative concepts sometimes supplant practical solutions and there has been a growing tendency to drift



Residents of Makeni, a town in northern Sierra Leone, receive food aid from religious sisters September 20, 2023. After the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2016 ended, religious sisters in Sierra Leone have been fighting the stigma that is associated with Ebola and also educating the community to accept Ebola survivors back into the community. Photo: OSV News/Doreen Ajiambo, Global Sisters Report.

**“They invited me to go with them to assess the damage but I declined, rather leaving space for anyone injured to be picked up. They took off and, on their way back, they met cloud cover and heavy mist, crashing into an outcrop of the Himalayas. 5 civilians, 6 United States Marines and 2 Nepalese Soldiers, lost their lives”**

inappropriately into areas of social and attitudinal change that seek impose modern, ‘western’ values within development assistance. DEI is often packaged in a way to enable this, undermining the original and normal meaning of these words.

**“Lost in the midst of these ideological and somewhat philosophical battles, are the stories of real people”**

There is a fuzzy line between cultural imposition and defending human rights. This line is increasingly blurred and subject to activists' agenda in the name of development. And this is where things become unclear: where charity is left behind and a very subjective interpretation of what constitutes justice (social, racial, economic, climate) creates a landscape of innumerable perspectives and a competition of values. This mess provided Donald Trump with the ammunition to effectively stop the US governments overseas assistance.

Lost in the midst of these ideological and somewhat philosophical battles, are the stories of real people. Amidst the constant narrative of crisis,

and culture wars, are individuals with their own stories. What is lost will be vital life-saving assistance for people affected by war and natural disasters, or support for people in places where their governments either don't have the will or the means to put systems in place that give them equal access to rights – and certainly not the standards of living we are used to here in Ireland.

### Dignity

The Catholic principle of subsidiarity recognises the human dignity of each individual and the right to be involved in his/her own development. Cuts to development assistance will impact civil society in the poorest areas from having the resources to exert some control over their own lives. Taking CBM's own work, supporting organisations of people with disabilities, with resources to engage with their communities, governments, and other actors, to lobby for policy and legislative changes where they might otherwise be ignored, in countries where civil society is not supported, where democracy is weak and often where people with disabilities are disregarded in the competition for scarce resources, is hugely important. This is what the aid sector calls localisation in many respects. At CBM, we support OPDs, locally, to set their own agenda rather than imposing our own values. International development assistance is piv-

otal for people with disabilities, but also other often marginalized groups, to gain a foothold at the table.

Aid for us, isn't just about saving sight – we know that this is necessary, urgent and immediate – but also supporting people to engage in the process of their own country's development and in the spaces where decisions are taken and made. Cutting overseas development assistance risks taking away the one support that makes the invisible visible. We only need to think back to our own past where invisible people became forgotten people. People may honestly differ on whether this is the best use of taxpayers' money, and it is not as easy to sell as emergency assistance, but it can be just as important to the real person or persons who otherwise would be just a number.

**“In a globalised world, we are no longer complete strangers to people who are a continent away”**

Putting ideology aside, we have to reflect on the lives of those who are going to suffer when aid is cut. People will die and others will suffer needlessly. Turning our backs and walking away is not the solution. If aid has morphed into something we do not like, that

is on our heads and not the fault of disaster-affected people or people who are born into countries that have not yet seen the fruits of economic development that we benefit from here in Europe and US. In Ireland, we wouldn't contemplate stopping the ambulance service because the HSE needed to get its house in order.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and Levite determined that they owed nothing to the injured man lying on the road. They crossed the road to avoid engaging. The Good Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

The Samaritan may not have borne any responsibility for the situation that he encountered but he knew he could not, in good conscience, walk away. In a globalised world, we are no longer complete strangers to people who are a continent away. We can – and do – argue until the cows come home about where justice is owed in our globalised world, as history is contested and blame apportioned and restitution owed – by whom and to whom and to what extent.

### Justice

The Good Samaritan may not have had any obligations to justice but was animated by charity. Pope John Paul II, was convinced that justice alone is insufficient to establish a truly humane society. “In every sphere of interpersonal relationships,” he maintained, “justice must, so to speak, be

corrected’ to a considerable extent by that love which, as Saint Paul proclaims, ‘is patient and kind’ or, in other words, possesses the characteristics of that merciful love which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity”. Reflecting on this, Pope Benedict explained “Charity, in a word, not only enables justice to become more inventive and to meet new challenges; it also inspires and purifies humanity's efforts to achieve authentic justice and thus the building of a society worthy of man.”

Whether we consider overseas aid as charity or the subject of justice distracts from our Christian obligations and is to dance on the head of a pin. We can talk ourselves to death arguing about what is owed to justice and what are our obligations but turning our backs should not be an option.

**“Charity goes beyond justice, that delivering charity does not obviate that justice must also be served”**

Pope Benedict brought justice and charity together with great articulation: “While it is true that human solidarity inspired by love goes beyond justice – because to love is to give, to offer what is ‘mine’ to the other – it is never without justice, which leads us to give the other what is ‘his’, what belongs to him by virtue of his being and acting. Indeed, I cannot ‘give’ the other what is ‘mine’, without first giving him what belongs to him in justice.”

Separately he emphasised that “[n]ot only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is ‘inseparable from charity’, and intrinsic to it.”

When viewed in this way, we cannot forget that charity goes beyond justice, that delivering charity does not obviate that justice must also be served – and no matter which way we look at international aid or charitable giving to those living in less prosperous or more volatile countries, walking away shouldn't be countenanced. If you believe that aid, as currently practiced, does more harm than good, fix it.

As the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, Donald Trump seems to have forgotten Luke 12:48: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

**i** Dailta Roughneen is the CEO of CBM Ireland, an international disability rights organisation, committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and those at risk of disability, in low-income regions of the world. [www.cbm.ie/donate](http://www.cbm.ie/donate)



# Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

## Letter of the week

# Ultimate 'cancer' in life is separation from God

**Dear Editor,** I agreed 110% with Fr Chris Hayden 'Be quick to listen' [*The Irish Catholic* – March 13, 2025].

Irish Catholics really need to move on from the stereotypical desire for 'quickie' Masses and homilies. It's quite immature, minimalistic and lacking in generosity to the God to whom we owe our very existence. It

doesn't consider the importance of being spiritually fed from the table of the Lord's word in addition to the table of the Lord's body and blood.

Once a devout woman visited Ireland thinking it was still an idyllic 'Island of Saints and Scholars'. She was scandalised by a 20-minute Sunday Mass that skipped the Glo-

ria, homily and Creed. With some embarrassment I explained that some Irish were in the mind-set of the Penal Times when British soldiers might be a few 100 yards away and brevity was of the essence.

Fr Hayden spoke about the blessing of living with the benefit of God's truth. Why is this

truth so important?

I have been kept alive for the past 12 years of my cancer journey by the truth of high-tech medicine, most recently here in New York. The ultimate 'cancer' in life however is sin which can separate us from God and eternal life with him. Especially in today's secular world we need all

the more this saving truth which sets us free (John 8:32) to live for God.

Can I finish with an advert? A brilliant catechetical programme by Archbishop Fulton J Sheen can be heard at [www.tiny.cc/AFJSTALKS](http://www.tiny.cc/AFJSTALKS).

*Yours etc.,*

**Fr Morty O'Shea SOLT**  
Queens, New York, USA

# Reduce and eliminating the causes of violence

**Dear Editor,** As an army veteran, allow me a brief comment on Maire Mhic Fhearghusa's letter on Jesus and non-violence. The practice of non-violence is a very high ideal, but unfortunately not always possible in our world.

In a time of crisis Jesus gave this advice to his followers: "But now...if you have no sword, sell your cloak and buy one..." Lk.22:36).

Jesus was also a realist. This is reflected in a Vatican Document titled – 'The International Arms Trade, an ethical reflection', published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and signed by Cardinal Roger Etchegary, President, and Diarmuid Martin, Secretary.

I quote: Paragraph 5: "In a world marked by evil and sin, the right of legitimate defence by armed means exists. This right can become a serious duty for those who are responsible for the lives of others, for the common good of the family or the civil community. It is this right alone that can justify the possession or the transfer of arms. It is not, however, an absolute right; it is coupled with the duty to do all possible to reduce to a minimum, and indeed eliminate, the causes of violence."

*Yours etc.,*

**Domhnall Mac Cionnaith**  
Letterkenny, Co. Donegal



# Faithfulness in the face of decline: Cardinal Pell's call to the Catholic Tradition

## Editorial

In his *Prison Journal*, Cardinal George Pell offers a sobering yet steadfast reflection on the state of the Catholic Church, particularly in Australia and the West. His observations, written in the solitude of his prison cell, are not those of a man bitterly lamenting the Church's struggles but of one who sees hope in fidelity to tradition. Pell argues that true renewal comes not from innovation for innovation's sake but from a firm commitment to faith, prayer, and orthodoxy. His reflections resonate far beyond his personal situation, offering a clarion call to a Church at a crossroads.

Pell acknowledges the difficult reality: "We have been in the lean years, and prayer, orthodoxy, and loy-

alty cannot guarantee genuine growth" – an admission that faithfulness does not automatically translate to flourishing numbers. Yet, he insists that abandoning these foundations is no solution. "We have to be united to the vine, and we will certainly not nourish genuine vitality without faith, prayer, and sacrifice." This assertion strikes at the heart of contemporary debates within Catholicism, where some argue that doctrinal flexibility and modernisation are the keys to reversing decline. Pell sees this as misguided, pointing to historical examples of what happens when the Church loses its identity.

The decline of Catholicism in places like Quebec, Holland, and Belgium serves as a cautionary tale. He warns that the upcoming Australian

Plenary Council 2020, if handled poorly, could accelerate the Church's collapse. "Too many, even some bishops, are too reconciled to decline, and some do not even know where the battlefield is." This indictment of clerical complacency is a striking critique. Pell does not shy away from the reality that some in leadership positions fail to grasp the existential challenges facing the Church.

Yet, amid these challenges, he sees hope – not in bureaucratic restructuring or doctrinal experimentation, but in the young priests, religious, and laity who remain committed to the faith as it has been handed down. "The young priests, the young women religious (to the extent we have them) are faithful, prayerful, and know where the main game

is to be played." Similarly, he notes that "the smaller number of regularly worshipping young adults are faithful and prayerful." This observation aligns with global trends: where Catholicism is thriving, it is often due to adherence to tradition rather than compromise with secular culture.

Pell's reflections on the aftermath of Vatican II further illuminate his perspective. He describes how, in the post-conciliar period, many assumed that being "progressive" meant supporting reforms beyond the texts of the Council itself. He recalls how theologians like Joseph Ratzinger, Henri de Lubac, and Hans Urs von Balthasar helped clarify the choice between "continuity or rupture." For Pell, the lesson is clear: genuine reform must

be anchored in the authentic teachings of the Church rather than serve as a pretext for radical departures.

His reflections are not purely theoretical. They are deeply personal. He expresses gratitude for the many letters he receives from Catholics thanking him for his efforts to strengthen faith in the community. "God gives the increase, but the moves were well-intentioned and, I deeply believe, coherent and consistent with the only strategies that might produce growth." His faith in the power of God's grace underlines his belief that renewal does not come from human strategies alone but through fidelity to Christ and His Church.

Pell's reflections also touch on the importance of personal holiness and perseverance. He finds solace in the words of St Thérèse of Lisieux, who compared prayer – even when hindered by fatigue – to a child resting in a parent's arms. This humble acknowledgment of human weakness reinforces his broader message: the

Church's renewal will not come from activism alone but from deep spiritual commitment.

In his closing reflections, Pell prays for discernment among Church leaders, quoting James McAuley's poetic plea: "Set pools of (prayerful) silence in this thirsty land." He does not call for revolution but for a return to the wellspring of Catholic faith – prayer, tradition, and sacrifice. His message is both a challenge and an encouragement to Catholics today: do not seek shortcuts, do not fear being countercultural, and do not abandon the rich inheritance of the faith.

As debates continue over the future of the Church, Pell's reflections stand as a reminder that renewal does not mean reinvention. His *Prison Journal* is not merely the musings of a man enduring hardship but a profound meditation on what it means to be faithful in times of crisis. The Church, he insists, must remain "united to the vine." If it does, true growth – spiritual and even numerical – will follow.

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, March 27, 2025

What is a jubilee year?

Fr James Goodwin

Page 34



**W**hile reflecting on my journey to Catholicism, I think it right to explain how and why I came to believe the Catholic Faith was the truth, rather than merely something in which I found meaning or comfort and belonging.

All too often the latter gets emphasised – as if we're part of a particularly welcoming yoga group or are studying stoicism. (We're not.)

I come from an essentially agnostic but nominally Anglican confessional background. For the first twenty years of my life the record number of times I must have entered a church in a single year may have been five (compelled to by my school).

I was 20-years old when it struck. I was studying in Oslo on a year-abroad and after a breakup, I experienced something of an existential crisis.

"How else but through a broken heart may Lord Christ enter in?" asks Oscar Wilde. Touché.

I don't know if the reader has ever been to Oslo. A strange city. The place experiences the most arresting, spectacular sunsets and sunrises. In the outer suburbs, there are forests and lakes and brightly painted Scandinavian wooden farmhouses. It also suffers from the worst bleakness and most vapid aspects of urban post-industrial modernity: soulless metal-glass buildings animated by restlessly shallow yuppie lifestyles.

## Europe

I'd properly travelled around Europe for the first time only the Summer prior to my time there. This juxtaposition seemed to describe my impression of the entire continent around me in the modern age: bleakness, with glimmers of real beauty from nature and the civilisational things older and more dignified. I felt something was missing; something had been lost.

This Scandinavian setting, and the disorder and meaningless in my own life – my high disturbance at the wrongness of contemporary culture, the values espoused by Hollywood and the music industry – lay the foundation for me to search for something more solid.

I found it. Or it found me.

Gently encouraged bone Norwegian evening by a believing friend, I was advised to read the Bible after an argument. I later did, and it opened floodgates. Of course, I was confused by much of what I heard in the Gospel of Matthew. I understood but little, but what I heard was enough.

I found myself (like many before me) mesmerised and confronted by a voice so ancient and mysterious. The Christ of the Gospels always spoke with a matter-of-fact forthrightness – "as one with authority" – indeed, as if



**Encouraged by a believing friend, I was advised to read the Bible after an argument. I did, and it opened floodgates, says Thomas Colsy**

He were a God.

This man behaved as if He were the light – exposing the sicknesses and causes of wrongdoing even in the hidden innermost inward parts. Hating a man was murder; a careless eye was adultery. This *Yeshua Maschiach* was not looking for popularity, offering an alluring creed or doctrine. He simply said what is.

I didn't find it hard to believe there could be a God. Now I wanted to know who He was. I began looking for a Church.

Looking into Church History from my home not only confirmed that the Catholic Church had the greatest claims to be in continuity with the Church founded by Christ with the Apostles – it made me surer of this whole Christian thing.

I found the martyrs of the early Church converted and evangelised for the first three centuries of the Faith's existence with almost no worldly incentive to do so – only the threat of torture and Colosseum death. They embraced this fearlessly. Powerless, dying slaves conquered the Roman Empire in their bravery and meekness. Like their master.

**“Nothing else from the ancient world even comes close to the verifiability or authenticity of these texts”**

Another big step towards believing in the objectivity of the truth of this new Faith I was discovering came when a friend introduced me to an American Evangelical film called *The Case for Christ*. It follows the true story of an atheistic journalist who tried to write a scathing hit-piece on the Christian Faith after his wife's unwelcome conversion. It's well-worth watching, if you can tolerate how American it is.

It powerfully conveys how robustly the New Testament has stood up to textual criticism. We have manuscripts from within ten years of original composition in the first century AD. Nothing else from the ancient world even comes close to the verifiability or authenticity of these texts. Even hostile, atheist scholars now must concede the Gospels and books of the New Testa-

ment were each of them written within a lifetime of Christ's life.

This has profound implications when you read of Jesus' bold and now fulfilled prophecies about the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, or about His obscure, dwindling movement spreading to every corner of the planet.

The film also emphasises love. A corrupted and overused and abused word in our age, too often associated with the merely sentimental. But most realise it's the purpose of human life – the one most prized resource we struggle to go without. To believe God's presence and character is found herein was hardly any arduous task.

When I began reading and receiving Catechesis, I found the depth and wisdom of the Church's philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine. This made sense of all areas of existence from science to the anthropology of who and what a human is.

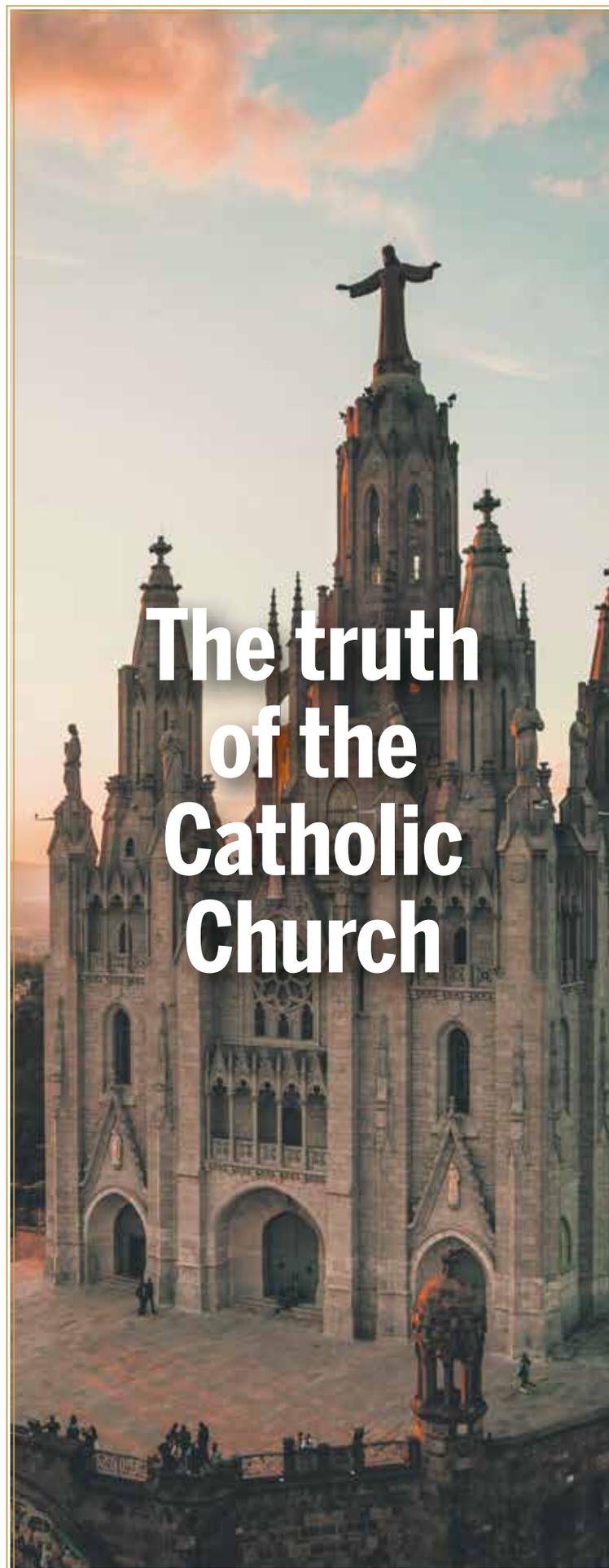
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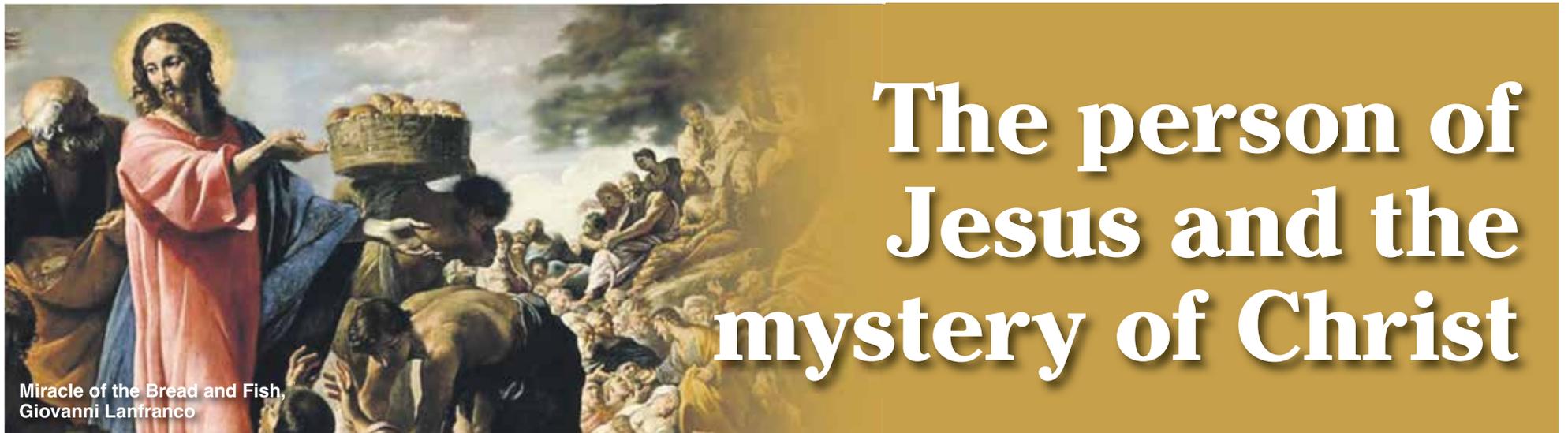
As I neared my confirmation in 2021, I had my first experience with something that would continue: the metaphysical sacramental power of confession. It's something I refuse to and cannot believe is merely psychological. My peers agree when I often describe how it sincerely seems as if the colours drain from the sky when one is in a state of mortal sin.

There's more that could be said – discovering all the indicators of the impossibility and authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, of ecstatic consolations after reception of Holy Communion at a Tridentine Mass, a Latin Novus Ordo, and a new rite Mass separately. The influence of GK Chesterton's apologia. The hand of grace guided me to each of these.

I may have begun my journey by becoming conscious of the light and dark, but I now know they were not equals. The light was more powerful and varied. The light was the first and final say. And I had experienced this light; I now knew His name.

"Faith is certain" says the Catechism. If you want to heed this, you can't do so naturally or without grace and prayer, but the evidence is all there. Seek, and ye shall find.





Miracle of the Bread and Fish,  
Giovanni Lanfranco

# The person of Jesus and the mystery of Christ



Fr Rolheiser

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

I was raised a Roman Catholic and essentially inhaled the religious ethos of Roman Catholicism. I went to the seminary, earned theological degrees, and taught theology at a graduate level for several years before I ever started making a distinction between 'Jesus' and 'Christ'. For me, they were always one and the same thing, Jesus Christ.

To my mind, Jesus Christ was the second person of the Trinity who took on flesh in the incarnation and is still now our God, our advocate, and our friend in Heaven. I didn't distinguish between Jesus and Christ in terms of whom I was praying to, speaking about, or relating to. Indeed, for many years in my writings, I simply used the words Jesus and Christ interchangeably.

### Distinguish

Slowly through the years this changed, and I have begun to distinguish more between

Jesus and Christ. It began with a deepened understanding of what the Gospels and St Paul mean by the reality of Christ as a mystery which, while always having Jesus as its centre, is larger than the historical Jesus. This distinction and its importance became clearer to me when I began to have more contact with Evangelicals, both as students and as colleagues.

**“How we understand the primary invitation given us in the Gospels are coloured by how we perceive ourselves in relationship to Jesus and to Christ”**

In faith fellowship with various groups of Evangelicals, I began to see that one of the ecclesial differences between us, Evangelicals and

Roman Catholics, is that we, Roman Catholics, while not ignoring Jesus, are very much about Christ, and Evangelicals, while not ignoring Christ, are very much about Jesus.

How we understand the Church, how we understand the Eucharist, and how we understand the primary invitation given us in the Gospels are coloured by how we perceive ourselves in relationship to Jesus and to Christ.

What's at stake here? There's a difference, an important one. Christ is not Jesus' second name – as in Jack Smith, Susan Parker, or Jesus Christ. While it is correct to use the two names together, as we do commonly in our prayer (We pray through Jesus Christ, Our Lord), there is an important distinction to be made.

### Incarnate

Jesus is a person, the second person in the Trinity, the divine person who became incarnate, and the person who calls us to one-to-one

intimacy with him. Christ is a mystery of which we are a part. The mystery of Christ includes the person of Jesus but also includes us. We are not part of the body of Jesus, but we are part of the body of Christ.

**“In Christ, the goal of Christian discipleship is community of life with Jesus, with each other, and with physical creation”**

As Christians we believe that Jesus is the body of Christ, that the Eucharist is the body of Christ, and that we, baptised Christians, are also the body of Christ. St Paul states clearly that we, the Christian community, are the body of Christ on Earth, just as Jesus and the Eucharist are

the body of Christ. And Paul means this literally. We (the Christian community) are not like a body, or some mystical or metaphorical body; nor do we represent or replace Christ's body. Rather, we are the body of Christ on earth, still giving physical flesh to God on earth.

### Discipleship

This has implications for Christian discipleship: Jesus is a person, the person who invites us to one-to-one intimacy with him (which Evangelicals see as the goal of Christian discipleship). Christ is part of a larger mystery which includes Jesus but also includes each of us. In this mystery we are called to intimacy not just with Jesus, but also with each other and with physical creation. In Christ, the goal of Christian discipleship is community of life with Jesus, with each other, and with physical creation (since the mystery of Christ is also cosmic).

At the risk of huge over-

simplification, allow me a suggestion: Roman Catholics and Evangelicals can learn from each other on this.

From our Evangelical brothers and sisters, Roman Catholics can learn to focus as much on Jesus as we do on Christ, so that like Evangelicals we might realise more explicitly (as is clear in the Gospel of John) that at the very heart of Christian discipleship lies the invitation to a one-to-one intimacy with a person, Jesus, (and not just with a mystery).

Conversely, Evangelicals can learn from Roman Catholics to focus as much on Christ as on Jesus, with all this implies in terms of defining discipleship more widely than personal intimacy with Jesus and church more widely than simple fellowship. Relating to Christ points to the centrality of the Eucharist as a communal event. As well, it implies seeing Christian discipleship not just as an invitation to intimacy with Jesus, but as an incorporation into an ecclesial body which includes not just Jesus but the community of all believers as well as nature itself.

We can learn from each other to take both Jesus and Christ more seriously.

**“Christ is part of a larger mystery which includes Jesus but also includes each of us. In this mystery we are called to intimacy not just with Jesus, but also with each other and with physical creation”**

## Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milán Morales

# The Paschal Mystery

The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the centre of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world.

The Church remains faithful to the interpretation of “all the Scriptures” that Jesus gave both before and after his Passover. Jesus' sufferings took their historical, concrete form from the fact that he was “rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes”, who handed “him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified”.

### Jesus and Israel

From the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, certain Pharisees and partisans of Herod together with priests and scribes agreed together to destroy him. He is accused of blasphemy and false prophecy, religious

crimes which the Law punished with death by stoning.

Many of Jesus' deeds and words constituted a “sign of contradiction”, but more so for the religious authorities in Jerusalem, whom the Gospel according to John often calls simply “the Jews”, than for the ordinary People of God.

In the eyes of many in Israel, Jesus seems to be acting against essential institutions of the Chosen People: - submission to the whole of the Law and, for the Pharisees, in the interpretation of oral tradition; - the centrality of the Temple at Jerusalem as the holy place where God's presence dwells in a special way; - faith in the one God whose glory no man can share.

### Jesus and the law

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus issued a solemn

warning in which he presented God's law, given on Sinai during the first covenant, in light of the grace of the New Covenant:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets: I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law, until all is accomplished.” Jesus, Israel's Messiah and therefore the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, was to fulfil the Law by keeping it in its all-embracing detail.

The perfect fulfilment of the Law could be the work of none but the divine legislator, born subject to the Law in the person of the Son. In Jesus, the Law no longer appears engraved on tables of stone but “upon the heart” of the Servant who becomes “a covenant to the

people”, because he will “faithfully bring forth justice”.

### Jesus and the temple

Jesus went up to the Temple as the privileged place of encounter with God. For him, the Temple was the dwelling of his Father, a house of prayer, and he was angered that its outer court had become a place of commerce. He drove merchants out of it because of jealous love for his Father.

Jesus identified himself with the Temple by presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling-place among men. Therefore his being put to bodily death presaged the destruction of the Temple, which would manifest the dawning of a new age in the history of salvation.

Jesus asked the religious authorities of Jerusalem to believe in him because of the Father's works which he accomplished. But such an act of faith must go through a mysterious death to self, for a new “birth from above” under the influence of divine grace.

**i** From paragraphs 571-591.

# Sometimes you need to run

Jos 5:9a, 10-12  
Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7  
2 Cor 5:17-21  
Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



**W**e usually forget about the running.

When we consider this Sunday's scripture and the heart-stopping story of the prodigal son, we tend to overlook or just brush aside this extraordinary detail. We shouldn't.

As Luke describes it in the Gospel: "While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him."

This is the moment the son has been waiting for - and the father, too. And it gives tremendous power and poignancy to one of the most familiar parables in scripture, with a statement of love and mercy so many of us desperately need.

### Waiting

What we realise here is that the father isn't passive. He's been looking, waiting, watching, worrying about the son who turned away from him. And when he discovers that his son is coming home - in fact, he's close enough to see - the father doesn't waste a second. He doesn't say, "Well, what do you know? It's about time. Let him come to me. He owes me that." No. He runs to him. And before his son can utter a word, he embraces him and welcomes him back. He doesn't even give the son a chance to explain. He orders celebrations. "This son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

Years ago, I heard of an artist named Charlie Mackesy, who did a series of paint-

ings and sculptures about this parable. He didn't call it 'The Prodigal Son'; he dubbed it the parable of 'The Running Father.'

The father, of course, is our Father.

Ultimately this is a story of love - a lesson in how far our heavenly Father is willing to go for us. He runs to us, even when we are far away, when he sees we want to come home.

**“Lent should stir in us a sense of humility and a deeper desire to heal wounds, mend fences, bridge differences”**

It's a beautiful, comforting thought during these weeks of Lent, when we spend much time and energy seeking atonement and renewal. This season is a chance to jumpstart our relationship with the Father and prepare ourselves for the great feast of Easter. Understanding how much God the Father loves us can only help.

But there are other ways we need to work on ourselves - and that can include our relationships to one another, especially those who have hurt us. If we consider this parable from the father's point of view, we may find ourselves confronting this

question: how many of us could do what he did? How many of us could be that merciful?

Lent should stir in us a sense of humility and a deeper desire to heal wounds, mend fences, bridge differences.

That means: Forgive those who have hurt us or insulted us or done us wrong. Honor and respect those who are contrite.

It means: Run to meet those who are wounded, and ashamed, and hurt and who want to come home. Open your arms to someone who wants to start over.

It means: Know the value of the second chance. Believe in redemption and conversion and hope.

When we hear the story of the prodigal son, it can be a useful exercise to ask ourselves: Where do I fit into the story? Which character am I?

### Reconciliation

Am I the son who left, who is detached from the father and is seeking reconciliation and healing? Am I the father, who hungers for a reunion with someone I love? Or am I the other son, the one who stayed, and who harbours jealousy or resentment over long-festered wounds? At one time or another, maybe we have felt like all of them.

Consider this an opportunity to reflect more deeply on those we love and how much God the Father loves us. As we continue our journey through Lent, with a goal of spiritual healing and growth in mind, maybe this is a good time to break our stride. Sometimes, to get where you really want to be, you need to run.

**i** Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog *The Deacon's Bench*.



Return of the Prodigal Son, Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn.

## Lenten listening: What do you hear?

Carolyn Woo

**T**here is an ongoing debate in our home on how well my husband can hear. He doesn't always catch the conversation, and particularly so in noisy venues. Sometimes I will loudly convey a message from the bottom of the stairs to his office upstairs.

Almost always, David will work hard to get the message: In a crowd, he will cup one ear and lean toward the speaker; at home he will come into the room where I am; and frequently he asks for repetitions.

One day watching Dave, it hit me that Lent is a time to practice our hearing. For many of us, our spir-

itual listening skills are probably not much better than my husband's physical hearing. There is so much noise around us: news and messages demanding our attention, music through earbuds to facilitate our escape to some other world that we would rather be in, and background TV that is on everywhere.

Lent is a gift from the Church for us to tune into what God is trying to tell us.

When I was young, I associated Lent with a much deserved 'scold' with all the readings and homilies pointing out our faults and follies. It filled me with dread and unshakable weariness of my own imperfections and vanities.

In time, my thinking evolved

and now I approach Lent as a time of warning - much like road signs that spell out 'Danger', 'Do Not Trespass', 'Dead End', 'Slow', 'Mind the Gap' or 'Exit'. All these messages are meant to alert us, calling for needed behaviour before we get into deep trouble.

The prodigal son found great mercy and a much better life when he returned to his father. But he had to take note, acknowledge his mistakes and reverse direction. Lent invites us to do the same.

The ultimate goal of Lenten exercises is not to avoid punishment, but to end up in that kingdom in which the prodigal son made his home. Yes, Lent reminds us of our faults, but it does not end there.

Such examination helps us get out of the ruts that prevent us from living our full potential as children of God: gifted, loved and made in his image.

Lent probes our ways that can be small, suffocating and foolish in light of the real prize. It speaks with a certain urgency to not waste time, to not waste our lives. Most precious for me, Lent offers hope in that my repentance does not all depend on me, but on God's grace that is there for our asking. Lent invites us to ask.

Learning from my husband, perhaps the first step in listening to God is to say, 'I can't hear'. The second step is to assert and affirm our desire to hear, and to actively place

ourselves in the presence of God.

For these days of Lent, we can hang a 'reserve' sign on certain moments of the day so we can listen to God through Scripture, the needs of another person and our hearts.

One of my Lenten practices is to keep a journal of my reflections from the daily readings and meditations: They seldom exceed five sentences. During the Easter triduum, I review these and somehow the act feels like a conversation.

Look, we are all a bit lost. But Jesus reassured us in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Lent is that time to turn our ears, minds and hearts to the shepherd's beckoning.

# What is a jubilee year?



Fr James Goodwin

**2**025 has been declared by Pope Francis as a jubilee year. But what does that mean? What is a jubilee? How do we celebrate it?

The roots of a jubilee year are found in Scripture. As described in Leviticus 25, every 50th year was to be celebrated as a jubilee year in which all debt was forgiven, slaves were freed, and their ancestral lands could be reclaimed.

This followed a cycle: seven years times seven years, for 49 years. Jubilees, as celebrated by the Israelites, were a sort of reset button. Some people had to sell their property due to debt and work the land for the new owner, essentially left in a form of slavery. However, every jubilee offered the opportunity for debt to be cancelled and property to be returned.

In Isaiah 61, the prophet prophesies a Messianic jubilee. This was fulfilled by Jesus, which he proclaims in the fourth chapter of St Luke's Gospel. Christ is our Jubilee, who frees us from bondage to death, sin and the devil. Through him we are returned to our homeland, which is heaven, as part of God's family.

In the year 1300, Pope Boniface VIII declared a jubilee in Rome. A plenary indulgence was granted to those who visited the Roman Basilicas of St Peter and St Paul, who were contrite and who confessed their sins.

## Flocked

Boniface VIII's jubilee year turned out to be a wildly popular idea and pilgrims flocked to Rome. At first there were variations to the schedule by which they were observed. The original idea was every 100 years, but sometimes it was 33 years or some other number. Eventually it was settled to celebrate jubilees every quarter century, as proclaimed by Pope Paul II in 1470.

In 1500, all four major basilicas - St Peter, St Paul Outside the Walls, St Mary Major and St John Lateran - in Rome opened up Holy Doors for the Jubilee year. Entering through the Holy Doors, otherwise sealed outside the jubilees,

**“The results of the ensuing German synod evidently petrified the nation's bishops enough to force them to abruptly move to derail the listening process and extend it to 2023”**



A Jubilee volunteer returns crosses to the beginning of the pilgrimage path after groups of the faithful process to the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican February 19, 2025. Photo: CNS/Pablo Esparza.

was the traditional way to make the pilgrimage. Occasionally, popes have declared extraordinary jubilee years for special reasons.

To inaugurate the 2025 jubilee, Pope Francis has issued the papal bull *Spes Non Confundit*, which means 'hope does not disappoint'. The Jubilee Year began December 24, 2024, and continues through January 6, 2026. Holy Doors are open for the 2025 Jubilee only at the four Roman basilicas, with an additional Holy Door at a prison in Rome.

**“The jubilee is an opportunity to respond to God's call 'to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind'”**

As the Church celebrates the 2025th anniversary of Christ's birth, the Pope has drawn our attention to the theological virtue of hope. As a unique opportunity to encounter Christ, the Pope expressed his desire to see this jubilee year as an opportunity to also proclaim Christ anew, and bring others to know the hope we find in Christ alone.

Noting how “hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross,” (*Spes Non Confundit*, No. 3), the Pope reiterates that the jubilee is an opportunity to respond to God's call “to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind” (No. 10).

A key feature of this Jubilee Year,

as with others in the past, is the various opportunities offered to the faithful to obtain jubilee plenary indulgences. This is in keeping with the scriptural understanding that a jubilee meant freedom from slavery and restoration to one's family.

An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment of sin when the eternal punishment has already been forgiven in the sacrament of penance. It is not an automatic 'get out of hell free' card. The faithful must be truly repentant and free from any affection for sin, moved by the spirit of charity, purified through the sacrament of penance, refreshed by holy Communion, and pray for the intentions of the pope. Indulgences can be applied as suffrages for the souls in purgatory.

## Indulgence

There are three ways to gain this indulgence. First, undertake a pilgrimage to a major basilica in Rome. While there, participate in some form of worship or prayer, such as Mass, Stations of the Cross or the rosary. Second, if that is not possible, there are other designated basilicas and shrines one can visit. Each diocese can choose its cathedral and other churches as pilgrimage sites. There are a variety of specific opportunities to obtain indulgences in this jubilee year through pilgrimage, prayer, or specific penances or works of charity and mercy.

Additionally, for this jubilee, a Catholic can gain a second plenary indulgence each day for the poor souls in purgatory by carrying out an act of charity. The usual conditions apply, including receiving holy Communion in the context of Mass a second time that day. This is a very unusual concession on the part of the Holy Father.

Therefore, everyone can participate in and benefit from the jubilee this Holy Year 2025. Check out what your local diocese is doing and where the pilgrimage sites are in your area. Make this year a truly holy year of abundant grace in your life.

**i** Fr James Goodwin is judicial vicar for the Diocese of Fargo, North Dakota.

## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

### How does a vegan senior citizen handle Lenten fasting?

**Q: I am a longstanding vegan, so when Lent comes each year there's nothing for me to skip; no meat is already my regular routine. But at age 70, and even if I wasn't vegan, is it true that seniors are no longer bound by Lenten fasting and abstinence requirements?**

**A:** The short answer is that, even at age 70, you are still bound to abstinence from meat on Ash Wednesday and Lenten Fridays - even if, in your case as a vegan, you wouldn't be doing anything special or 'extra' in this regard.

Canon 1252 of the Code of Canon Law tells us that “the law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year.” This means that children under the age of 14 are not strictly required to abstain from meat on Fridays. Though of course younger children may still abstain even without being bound to do so, and I imagine that in practice many if not most children raised in Catholic families will wind up observing Friday abstinence along with the rest of their household.

Notably, the canon does not name an upper age limit for abstinence, so we can conclude that after the age of 14 this obligation is binding for the rest of a Catholic's life.

In contrast, Canon 1252 does give us both an upper and lower age for observing the Church's law on fasting, stating: “The law of fasting binds those who have attained their majority, until the beginning of their sixtieth year.” Or in other words, Catholics are required to fast on the Church's two obligatory fast days, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, from the time they turn 18 - that is, reaching the age of majority or legal adulthood-- until age 59 i.e., when they are beginning their 60th year of life, a year which is completed on their 60th birthday.

The Church's law does not give an explicit explanation for these different age ranges, but my own thought is that this is likely due to the varying level of difficulty between these two penitential practices. Occasionally going without meat, especially for non-vegans who can easily make up

the 'missing' protein with eggs, dairy or seafood, is not a health risk and would be physically taxing for only a very small number of people.

On the other hand, fasting - which in the Latin (aka 'Roman') Catholic discipline means eating only one full meal in a day with two smaller meals or snacks permitted if necessary - can be more challenging. So, it makes sense that the Church would not seek to strictly impose this on young people who may still be growing, nor on senior citizens whose strength may be naturally diminishing due to age.

But it's good to keep in mind that canon law only gives us the basic minimum of what we should do, largely so that all the faithful “may be joined together in a certain common practice of penance” (Canon 1249) for the sake of community and a corporate witness to the faith.

These bare-bones common requirements are therefore not necessarily a comprehensive blueprint for everyone to grow in holiness most effectively, and so it would be worthwhile for many Catholics to prayerfully discern whether they might benefit from freely taking on some additional penitential practices appropriate to their particular life and vocation.

For example, while a vegan or vegetarian already fulfils the law of abstinence by just sticking to their usual meat-free eating habits, it might make sense for them to consider adopting an additional penance for Lent. However, this would be an optional choice made for a deepening of their own personal spirituality.

Likewise, Canon 1252 concludes its discussion of age limits by noting that: “pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance.”

**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.

# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## The normalisation of the human crisis

There is so much aggravational division in the world. Some of it due to identity politics, but a related problem is labelling – instead of seeing people as complex individuals, made in the image of God, we prefer to label people. This is particularly problematic when it comes to children – sometimes doing it for their own good to access services, sometimes with the effect of locking them into certain behaviours, expectations and groupings when we should just let them be themselves and develop at their own pace.

These thoughts were prompted by an item on **Brendan O'Connor** (RTÉ Radio 1, Saturday). In this case the issue was medical labelling and over-diagnosis, as O'Connor interviewed Dr Suzanne O'Sullivan, about her new book **The Age of Diagnosis: Sicknes, Health and Why Medicine Has Gone Too Far**. He said the interview would be challenging and stressed the high qualifications and bona fides of the author ("hugely respected expert"). She had issues with over-diagnosis, over-medicalisation of problems that didn't benefit from it. She was concerned about the long-term effects of such labelling. The problems related to issues like depression (in some cases it was just a mild sadness being given a



Presenter Dearbhail McDonald

medical label), ADHD and autism, where again people with mild traits were being placed on the spectrum. Likewise, she saw the dangers of over-screening including in relation to Downs Syndrome. The item did cause a bit of a stir – with texters strongly agreeing and disagreeing. It was discussion worth having and considerable food for thought – listen back!

So, we go from under-medicalising certain problems, effectively neglecting them in the past as Dr O'Sullivan pointed out, to over-medicalising – we tend to be wedded to the pendulum effect. Why is moderation not more popular? So, it seems to be with the swingeing cuts to US foreign development under the new Trump administration. Defenders of the cuts

point to wasteful spending on dubious ideologically driven projects that had flown under the radar, mostly involving Diversity Equality and Inclusion (DEI) projects. Critics of the cuts point to worthwhile medical and anti-poverty programmes in the developing world. Surely a more nuanced and measured review of wasteful and unwise spending would have been in order, instead of the slash and burn approach of DOGE (Dept of Government Efficiency) under the loose cannon approach of Elon Musk.

This was one of the topics on **Our Divine Sparks** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday). Hospice volunteer Miriam Donoghue spoke of the news of cuts coming like a "thunderbolt", causing confusion and panic. Patients were in danger of being left without lifesaving medication e.g. the retroviral drugs that relate to treatment of HIV. "This is a death sentence" said one of the patients. She referenced Catholic Relief Services, a partner of US Aid, who said "the timing couldn't be worse", with vulnerable communities facing neglect. The Jesuit Relief Service that helps refugees fleeing from conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has also had to curtail operations. There was a sense of a lifeline cut and progress set back. Presenter Dearbhail McDonald summed up – "an uncertain future for the fragile continent of Africa". Last

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### FAITH AND LIFE

**EWTN Sunday March 30, 9am**

Host Campbell Miller speaks with Fr Richard Gibbons, the Rector of the Knock Shrine in Ireland which was built in commemoration of the approved apparitions of Our Lady in 1879.

#### THE LAST PRIESTS IN IRELAND

**RTÉ 2 Tuesday (night) March 1, 12.40am**

Actor and comedian Ardal O'Hanlon examines the role of Catholic priests in Irish life, from earliest times to the present day, to see how they shaped Irish lives. Repeat.

#### SON OF A CRITCH

**RTÉ 1 Friday March 4, 8pm**

The Pope comes for a rare visit but, sadly, Mark is too sick to attend the outdoor Mass. Nostalgic Canadian comedy series

Monday on **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1) a related item on the 'It Says in the Papers' slot referred to South Sudan and how cuts in US Aid threatens to affect cholera treatment there, with the likely loss of many lives.

**Unreported World** (Channel 4, Wednesday) focused on a huge humanitarian crisis in the southern part of Sudan, where refugees are fleeing to avoid the latest war between Government troops and rebels, with both sides being accused of war crimes. Starvation is the worst problem here, in the Nuba mountains, and frustratingly this is no natural disaster but a man-made crisis. It was described as an 'unreported' crisis – so much media attention goes

to Ukraine and Gaza. We heard from a brave doctor, Tom Catena, struggling to cope with limited resources in the Mother of Mercy Hospital run by the Diocese of El-Obied. A nurse, Nafisa Abdulrahim, herself a refugee with her own children, tried to give the best care she could. At 'Our Father's Cleft', a Church-run boarding school and children's home, staff under director Ezekiel Ayub, gave a better life to the most vulnerable children, and they certainly seemed happy – singing, dancing and learning.

Presenter Krishnan Guru-Murthy finished with a grim summary: "people here are suffering and the world is looking the other way."

# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## Touching the souls of those who listen



Scottish composer James MacMillan

For a number of years now the National Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have performed one or other of Bach's *Passions* on Good Friday afternoon at the National Concert Hall. This year brings something a little different in the form of Scottish composer James MacMillan's setting of the passion section of the Gospel of St John.

MacMillan's is a lengthy piece lasting roughly about an hour and a half and will be receiving its first Irish performance on Good Friday afternoon at the National Concert Hall with the NSO and Chorus. The conductor will be David Hall with soloist – the composer calls for just one – bari-

tone Christopher Purves, who sings the role of the Christ. Besides the National Symphony Chorus, which is principally acting as 'the crowd', Chamber Choir Ireland takes the part of the others, notably Peter and Pilate, in St John's narrative.

James MacMillan (born in 1959) is a prolific composer whose works cover a range of musical genres. A devout Catholic, he studied at Edinburgh and Durham Universities. He lectured for a while at Manchester University before returning to Scotland and settling in Glasgow. He has been featured composer at the Edinburgh Festival (1993 and

2019), composer/conductor with the BBC Philharmonic between 2000 and 2009 and principal guest conductor of the Netherlands Chamber Philharmonic.

MacMillan's international career had been launched at the BBC Proms in 1990.

His percussion concerto, *Veni, Veni, Immanuel*, was written for the Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie in 1992 and it has received over 500 performances worldwide. The London Symphony Orchestra commissioned a triptych of works from him in the 2000s but there were also other commissions – a cello concerto for the great Russian artist Mstislav Ros-

tropovich, a symphonic work *Vigil and Quickening* for vocal ensemble.

His three-act opera *The Sacrifice*, written immediately before the St John Passion for the Welsh National Opera, was a co-commission from the LSO, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, the Boston Symphony and the Berlin Radio Choir. The piece had its first performance under the baton of Colin Davis, a musician greatly admired by MacMillan, in September 2007. The St John Passion dates from the following year. It is dedicated to Colin Davis

Writing in *The Guardian* some time ago musicologist

Kate Molleson maintained "the music's uncompromising impact sits in the contrast of harmonies that move in and out of clarity; Gregorian chants underscored by menacing dissonance; Latin motets laced with squealing woodwinds then dissolving into bombastic affirmation from brass and timpani."

MacMillan likens the Latin passages to the chorales that Bach inserted into his passion settings, a chance for the listener to sit back and reflect for a moment. But MacMillan leaves little space for reflection. Every note of this score is invested with deep-felt didactic meaning.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Laurence O'Toole, Dublin's Own Special Saint

**The Latin Lives of St Laurence of Dublin** edited with critical introduction by Maurice F. Roche (Four Courts Press, € 45)

Catherine Swift

St Laurence O'Toole is the patron saint of Dublin Archdiocese and, quite apart from the churches which are dedicated to him, such as North Wall, Kilmacud and Baldoyle, many others have stained glass windows, paintings or statues of the saint.

For all of that, the history of St Laurence O'Toole has not been widely studied and Fr Dermot Forristal's popular biography *The Man in the Middle: St Laurence O'Toole* (first published in 1988) is the main account currently available.

We owe a particular debt of gratitude, therefore, to the enthusiasts who came together to publish this book. Maurice Roche's Ph.D thesis on the lives of St Laurence O'Toole was completed in 1981 with the help of his sister, Nellie who typed the manuscript but the university copy was subsequently mislaid.

### Connections

His widow, Ms Eileen Phelan, gave the family copy to Fr Ivan Tonge who passed photographs on to Mary Kelly

(OPW) and Charles Doherty (UCD). They, in turn, had the photographs turned into digital text. Missing pages were provided by Dr Jesse Harrington of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

**“St Laurence lived in interesting times in an era where bishops often spent much of their careers as royal administrators”**

In a very real sense, therefore, this book represents a labour of love – love not just of the individual scholar for his subject, but of those who went the extra mile to ensure that Dr Roche's research could be made available to all interested in the early Irish Church.

St Laurence lived in interesting times in an era where bishops often spent much of their careers as royal administrators. Born Lorcán

**“The biographical overview provided by Dr Roche is very much of its time in debating the potential role of Irish patriotism in motivating Laurence's actions”**

Ua Tuathail, he was brought up in Glendalough where he became abbot at 25. He later was elected Archbishop of Dublin and consecrated by the Archbishop of Armagh in 1162 when the Leinster king, Diarmait mac Murchada (Dermot mac Murrough) controlled the city.

Diarmait was married to Lorcán's half-sister Mór so that the new archbishop subsequently became uncle-in-law to Earl Richard de Clare (Strongbow) who ruled Dublin from the Norman conquest until his death in 1176. At the same time, Lorcán is identified as the 'chancellor of the king of Connacht', Ruaidri Ua Conchobair (Rory O'Connor), in the Treaty of Windsor of 1175 and he died at Eu, in Normandy, in 1180 while bringing Ua Conchobair's nephew as a hostage to the Angevin court at Le Mans.

The biographical overview provided by Dr Roche is very much of its time in debating the potential role of Irish patriotism in motivating Laurence's actions;

however, his conclusion was that Laurence was a pragmatist who endorsed Realpolitik and co-operation with all secular overlords.

### Lives

Despite these political connections, our main sources for Laurence are hagiographic – a collection of Latin lives which Dr Roche argues were drawn up in the thirteenth century and designed to bolster the case for papal canonisation.

A major part of the work is the edition and discussion of four lives termed the Arsenal Life, the Abbeville Life, the Vita Prima and the Vita Secunda. The Arsenal Life is a concise, factual document which Dr Roche believes was commissioned by the Eu canons to provide information on Laurence's Irish career and may have been compiled by Henry of London, as Archbishop of Dublin, in the early 1220s.

The Abbeville Life can be divided into two parts of which the first is strongly homiletic and exegetical in tone. The second, in contrast, is largely a historical narrative. Dr Roche concluded that the text represents work by John of Abbeville who studied in Paris and later became dean of Amiens, being written between 1215 and 1225. The later additions appear intended to transform John's



St Laurence O'Toole, a stained glass window in Christ Church Cathedral

work into something closer to a proper biography and mostly deals with the canonisation in Eu.

**“English historians sometimes produce two-dimensional descriptions of Hubert Walter”**

The third life, the longest and most detailed of the four, is termed by Roche the Vita Prima and he believes it was written by a canon of Eu in or shortly after 1226 with the intention of promoting the pilgrimage cult of the newly canonised saint. The Vita Secunda represents the final version and is essentially a revised form of the Vita Prima. English translations are provided for the Arsenal Life and the Vita Prima.

In describing Laurence's

contemporaries, Henry Mahr-Harting noted that English historians sometimes produce two-dimensional descriptions of Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, simply as a royal administrator, enthusiastically raising taxation to pay for Richard the Lionheart's ransom while contrasting him with the Carthusian monk, Hugh of Lincoln, who is depicted as a spiritual and reform-minded 'Holy Man' with no interest in secular politics.

In Laurence O'Toole, these two aspects of the twelfth-century episcopate are inextricably intertwined and Maurice Roche provides us with the evidence necessary to visualise Dublin's patron saint in all his human complexity.

**i** Dr Catherine Swift *Lectures in medieval Irish history at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.*

St Laurence O'Toole has a place in the popular traditions of Dublin as the city's own special saint. Living as he did during a very conflicted passage in history soon after the arrival of the Normans in the country and the claims of the King of England to also be the Lord of Ireland this is not surprising.

Today the ancient simply made iron reliquary holding the remains of the saint's heart is to be found enshrined in a little side chapel off the nave in Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, where it has been since medieval days, through many vicissitudes (including the recent theft of the reliquary in 2012 and its mysterious return by being left down in the Phoenix Park for the police to find in April 2018.)

However, a recent visit left the impression that the shrine today is mostly visited by tourists rather than Dubliners, who in fact are missing out on a relic that provides a long sense of continuity with the city's past to all those sensitive to the movements of Irish history.



Enshrined reliquary of the heart of St Laurence O'Toole in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin (photo Peter Costello)

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.

## A great poet's view of Irish life over eight decades

**Paul Durcan at 80**  
edited by Niall  
McMonagle, with an  
introduction by Colm  
Tóibín  
(Harvill Secker, £16.99 / 19.  
99hb)

**Thomas McCarthy**

**P**aul Durcan was born in Dublin in 1944 into a legal family with Co. Mayo connections. Educated at Gonzaga and UCC, he has become the leading poet of his generation, a former Ireland Professor of Poetry and recipient of Doctorates at both UCD and Trinity College, Dublin.

His magnificent collection, *The Berlin Wall Café*, was a Poetry Book Society Choice in 1985 and *Daddy, Daddy* won the Whitbread Award in 1990. *His Crazy About Women* (1991) and *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* (1999) enjoyed huge popular success, bringing him a devoted readership and huge national fame.

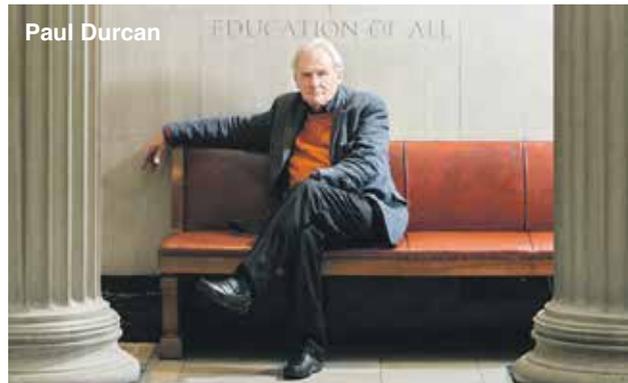
His distinct sensibility and style, combined with a riveting dramatic flair, created a kind of following that was rivalled only by that of Seamus Heaney. His more than twenty collections of poetry have created a body of work in Irish literature that is unparalleled and magnificent.

Recently, to celebrate the poet's eightieth birthday, the editor and scholar Niall McMonagle created this shrewd and important selection of eighty Durcan poems.

### Power

Colm Tóibín, himself a fine poet as well as a famous novelist, has written a perceptive and affectionate Introduction to this McMonagle selection: 'Durcan's public poems are risk-taking explorations of the intersection where tragedy and comedy meet in contemporary Ireland. He can put an antic disposition on, for example,' writes Tóibín, 'to explode the power of the Catholic Church in a poem such as 'Cardinal Dies of Heart Attack in Dublin Brothel.'

In 'The Divorce Referendum, 1986,' on the other hand, his indignation at a



sermon in a church is more unequivocal.' But Tóibín also signposts that other equally important aspect of Durcan's work, his humanity, a pitiful, humorous but empathetic humanity that is found in one of his earliest famous poems 'Tullynoe: Tête-à-Tête in the Parish Priest's Parlour'

'He had: he had a sister a hairdresser in Kilmallock.'

'He had: he had another sister a hairdresser in Ballyunion.'

'He had: he was put in a coffin which was put in his father's cart.'

'He was: his lady wife sat on top of the coffin driving the donkey.'

'She did: Ah, but he was a grand man'

'He was: he was a grand man...'

'Good night, Father.'

'Good night, Mary.'

**“ Giving us a picture of the rise and fall of the dead man with his son the doctor, the ebb and flow of fortunes”**

With our post-modern sophistication it would be easy to underestimate the power of the above words, but they are powerful at many levels, telling us of the settled ease of old priest and housekeeper, of the certainties of a rural background, of class and faith.

The earlier part of the poem is the housekeeper's litany of car brand-names, from Audi to Avenger to Volvo, giving us a picture of the rise and fall of the dead

man with his son the doctor, the ebb and flow of fortunes.

Being able to write like this is Durcan's signature gift. His style would have many imitators, but no real rivals, the poet exploring celibacy and bemoaning solitude, as Tóibín says. In Durcan the bourgeois ordinariness of Irish daily life seemed to speak fully for the first time in poetry: his effect was revolutionary.

### Impact

A real signal of his permanent impact over time has been the memory of those great Durcan titles, poetry titles that are almost poems in themselves: 'Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail,' 'Making Love outside Áras an Uachtarán,' 'The Drimoleague Blues,' or 'The Pièta's Over.' The latter poem is one of the most astonishing, heart-breaking texts ever written on the break-up of a marriage:

'The Pièta's over - and now, my dear, droll husband, As middle age tolls its bell along the via dolorosa of life,

It is time for you to get down off my knees

And learn to walk on your own two feet....'

All of the poems in that collection, *The Berlin Wall Café*, have a Pasternak-like quality that lifts Durcan's voice into a humanist sublime. And this is the level at which he continues to write across a career that spans more than sixty years of publishing.

This apt and generous selection by John McMonagle will introduce a new generation of poetry lovers to the work of an Irish poet who is both verbally unique and politically important.

## Reflections on Canada, its sovereignty and culture

**Peter Costello**

**A**nyone wishing to understand the nature of Canada as a nation could well begin that exploration by first making a visit to our own National Museum in Dublin.

There in Kildare Street there is to be seen among the select moments and events in our long island history, a lavish display dealing with the Irish Republican attempts at invading Canada in 1866 and again in the early 1870s, a wildly foolish and unsuccessful effort to break the union of Ireland and Great Britain which only served to create an even greater and stronger union among the British territories of North America resulting in the creation of the Canadian Federation in July 1867.

It also gave rise to a wave of Canadian antipathy to the United States of America, that is echoed today in the current expressions of outrage in Canada over the recent actions of the US administration.

But what President Trumps ignores now, as the Fenians did in the 19th century, is that Canada basically was founded and inhabited by those settlers of British, Irish and French origin who simply did not want to live in the republic to the south.

These included the Loyalists driven forcibly out of the thirteen colonies by the patriots of 1776, the French speakers of Quebec and the Laurentians, and later various other groups including for a time refugee Sioux Indians from the USA led by Sitting Bull, the victor of the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

From its foundation by the French in opposition to the British, Canada was essentially a more Catholic country. But the changes over time have meant that though Quebec and the Laurentians maintain their cultural identity, the country as whole reflects a different passage of history to that in the USA.

One essential characteristic of Canadian civil society is not just the parliamentary system, derived like ours from the nature of the parliament at Westminster. It was not intended, like the "American system", to be revolutionary but to be essentially conservative, retaining and building on long established ideals of civil rule going back indeed to the middle ages.

### Amalgamation

Literary critics in the US give little attention to what is written and said in the nation to the north of them. An exception to this, as in so many things, was the late Edmund Wilson of the New Yorker in his critique *O Canada* (1963), tellingly subtitled, "*An American's Notes on Canadian Culture*".

It a quite unique literary exploration, to set beside Wilson's other book about native American culture *Apologies to the Iroquois* (1960), another ignored aspect of US life. Neither title I imagine are on the shelves of President Trump.

Wilson covered a wide range of writers. Since then other names might be added to his selection, such as Leonard Cohen, François Mallet-Joris, Morley Callaghan, Mordecai Richler, Margaret Attwood, Roberson Davies and many, many others. One begins to see that where these writers achieve great fame these cease to be "Canadian" writers, but American writers, much as Irish writers and artists so casually become seen by some as "British".

The country north of the Great lakes is not as some in Washington DC seem to think a second rate USA. It is in fact a first rate nation of its own, and one where over forty million civilised, respectful, polite, peace loving people of great diversity feel happily at home, with their diversity calmly recognised. Happy to, the great majority of them, even those of French and Irish origin to be formally ruled over by King Charles III, direct descendant of the still loathed King George III.



The interior of the Canadian Houses of Parliament in Ottawa

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## Crossword

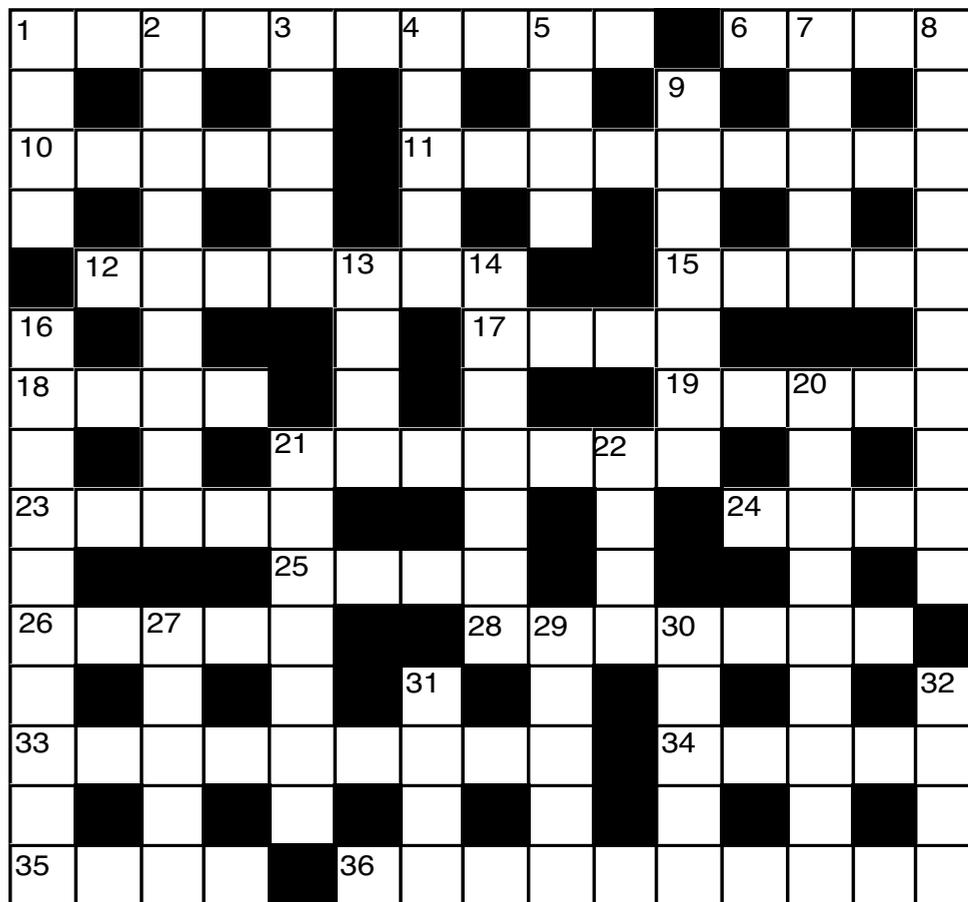
Gordius 708

### Across

- 1 Snacks named for a famous gambling addict (10)
- 6 Was in debt (4)
- 10 Group of eight (5)
- 11 Mechanical devices (9)
- 12 Iraqi capital (7)
- 15 Daft (5)
- 17 Greek drink (4)
- 18 Film director Mr Jordan, perhaps (4)
- 19 Valetta is the capital, and Birkirkara the largest city, in this Mediterranean island country (5)
- 21 A letter from St Paul, for example (7)
- 23 Take it easy (5)
- 24 A nautical mile per hour (4)
- 25 Where Jesus performed His first miracle (4)
- 26 With which to dry oneself (5)
- 28 Chorus (7)
- 33 & 34 It is often depicted as a apple in Eden (9,5)
- 35 Produces eggs (4)
- 36 Liquid that's important for motorists in winter (10)

### Down

- 1 Desist (4)
- 2 Alternative name for



- the apostle Bartholomew (9)
- 3 Sorceress (5)
- 4 Punctuation mark (5)
- 5 Engrave with acid (4)
- 7 Castor (5)
- 8 Impresario who presented the Savoy Operas of Gilbert and Sullivan (1'4,5)
- 9 Charming, sweet (7)
- 13 Profound (4)
- 14 English name for Sirius (3,4)
- 16 Showing no gratitude (10)
- 20 One's position east or west of Greenwich (9)
- 21 Shout (7)
- 22 Piece of foliage (4)
- 27 Fret (5)
- 29 From the French, boredom (5)
- 30 Allude (5)
- 31 Greatest of the Viking gods (4)
- 32 Eye infection (4)

## SOLUTIONS, MARCH 20

### GORDIUS No. 707

#### Across

- 1 Sackcloth and ashes 7 Owl 9 Mend 10. Tissue 11 Know 15 Sauce 16 Solo 18 Polio 21 Abbot 22 Feign 23 Handy 24 Girl 25 Amour 26 Polar 29 Tote 33 Marina 34 Mass 36 Raw 37 Short-sighted

#### Down

- 1 See 2 Code 3 City 4 Oasis 5 House 6 Down 8 Low Countries 9 Manslaughter 12 Number 13 Perth 14 Aspen 17 Orison 19 Layer 20 Offal 27 On air 28 Aries 30 Tows 31 Rang 32 Emit 35 Sad

## Sudoku Corner 576

### Easy

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

### Hard

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

### Last week's Easy 575

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

### Last week's Hard 575

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

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



# May St Joseph bring the best out in us all

Dear Joseph, I have often thought of writing to you. I suppose, given the month that's in it and that your Feast Day is recent, now might be as good a time as any. There is something very reassuring and uplifting in a letter that acknowledges a person and expresses gratitude and, that is what this letter is about.

Put simply, Joseph, you are a mighty man. We don't hear much about you or from you and yet you were always there when needed. It wasn't easy for you either and no doubt you took your share of jibes not to mention the whispers that were beyond your hearing. Still somehow you heard the voices you needed to hear, quite often in the reassurance of a sound night's sleep. Quite often those words were focused on you

not needing to be afraid – that God's plan was being fulfilled in and around you – not least in the "yes" of the woman you loved as she readjusted her dreams that God's plan might be realised.

We still hear your repeated knocking on Bethlehem's doors, as you looked for a little space that Mary could be at ease. We hear with you the refusals, see again the shaking heads and our hearts are with you as you wonder how this will end. Then, and thankfully, someone saw in you what we see in you – a genuine man wanting to do the best by his family, and the shed is offered. It might not have been the ideal but it sufficed. "People make places" they say, and that night you, Mary and the child to be born, proved the truth of that old saying. You turned the shed into a haven of



Saint Joseph with the Infant Jesus by Guido Reni, c. 1635

possibility where Heaven and earth embraced, and our hope was born.

You welcomed people, shepherds, kings and locals and as they spoke of the newborn one, your faith in God's wondrous ways was deepened and strengthened. As time went on you needed to call again on that strength and depth as you took the child and Mary to safety and stayed there for as long as it took. That is one of the great attributes you have, Joseph, the ability to stay where you are needed and for as long as you are needed.

I am glad you met Simeon and

Anna – glad for them too since you and Mary allowed them into your "Temple moment" without fully knowing who they were or maybe even the full depth of meaning in their words. But you let them speak, knowing that their words were part of something beyond you and that their words would find a place for pondering in Mary's heart. Generosity, Joseph, could be your middle name.

The woman and child were never far from you and those three days when you searched for the lost child in Jerusalem must have been a nightmare. We are told

that Mary was the one to point out to Jesus how worried you both had been. I see you standing in the distance, just glad that he is found. By your side he lived and worked until the public ministry began. He learnt much from you and I am sure you were amused to hear him speak of planks and splinters as he encouraged respect in our words and dealings with others. With you, he knew better than most, the weight of the plank and the pain of the splinter. Maybe when they placed the cross on his shoulder, he thought of you again and remembered that the piece of wood can always be reshaped and given new purpose.

Anyway Joseph, thanks – hopefully you will bring out the best in all of us.

Vincent

## A prayer for our bishop

This Sunday, Kevin Doran will be installed as Bishop of Achonry whilst continuing to be Bishop of Elphin. Please remember him in your prayers as he embarks on a new chapter in his ministry. Pray too for both dioceses as we explore the shared path that stretches out before us. May we recognise God's guiding hand at work in us and for us, 'Pilgrims of Hope'.



## Sister Hellen appeals for urgent Little Way help for the hungry and sick in East Pokot, Kenya

We have received an urgent request for help from Sr Hellen Chepkirui, Servants of the Sacred Heart in Tangelbei, Kenya, whom we have helped in the past to provide vital aid for school children and groups of people living in poverty and disease. Sister writes to The Little Way Association: "Without your kindness, we would never have been able to save lives and protect families. The East Pokot region is still facing a severe crisis. Terrible drought combined with extreme poverty make it harder for families to afford food and healthcare. Our dispensary is the only source of affordable healthcare services for the local people. Among the most affected groups we target are the children, HIV-positive mothers, TB, diabetes and cancer patients, and those with chronic illnesses. We also target the neglected vulnerable elderly and those who live with various forms of disabilities.

### THE SITUATION IS DIRE AND WE HAVE RUN OUT OF FUNDS

"I have been praying to God to take care of this situation because we have run out of funds. We urgently need medicines in order to help many suffering from water-borne illnesses and also TB and malaria.

### PLEASE WILL YOU HELP SR HELLEN?

"Our founder Father Yermo left us with the motto: God Will Provide. We believe that He will inspire you and your kind benefactors to enable us to help the increased numbers of children, women and men relying on us for relief food and healthcare."

**If you can, please send a donation to The Little Way Association, in order that we can continue to help Sr Hellen and the many other Sisters in Kenya who turn to us for help.**



## LENT WITH ST THERESE

In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine:

"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 to Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

**The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Catechism says: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."**

**In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving**

The Little Way Association uses the world's network of missionaries to help those in direst need. Priests, Sisters and Brothers work in some of the world's poorest areas and in political trouble-spots. Our policy is never to deduct anything from donations earmarked for the relief of poverty or for missionary work.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

**THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION**  
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR  
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

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€..... **WELLS / CLEAN WATER**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS** (please state no. ....)  
We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass

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Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to [www.littlewaysassociation.com](http://www.littlewaysassociation.com)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**

IC/03/27