THE BEEHIVE

FAITH FORMATION FOR ALL

ISSUE 1 | NOVEMBER 5, 2026





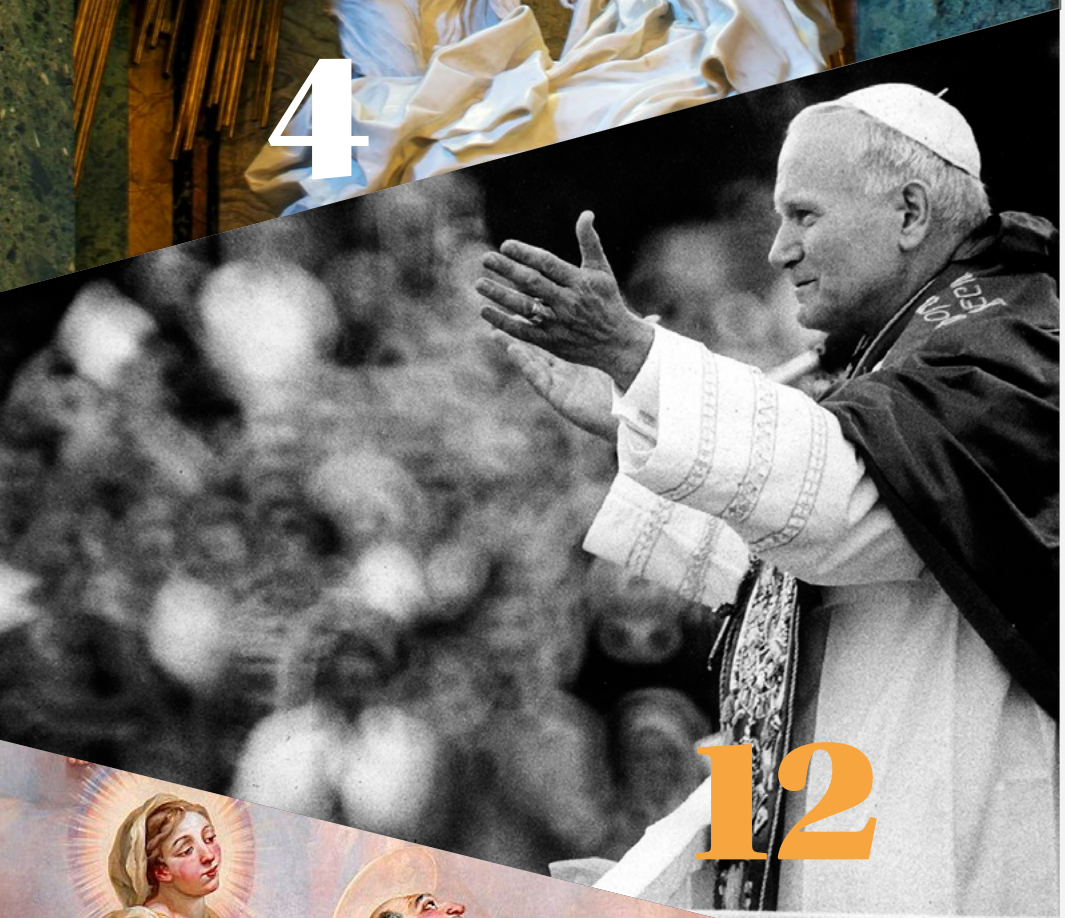




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MAKING THE TRUE FAITH KNOWN



Garry O'Sullivan
Editor

> "We have also lost touch with our own history. The Mass rocks and penal-era chapels tell of a people who kept the faith at real cost, under laws that outlawed it"

The Vatican has issued a document, Venite ad Me ("Come to Me"), on passing on the faith in what it calls a time of "epochal change". It draws on contributions from bishops' conferences around the world and on personal testimonies. It names a crisis in handing the faith from one generation to the next, especially in the West, and asks how the Church should respond.

The overall desire is clearly for faith formation, and in Ireland that need has been plain for some time. So how did the Land of Saints and Scholars go from such a lofty height to a remnant Church, searching for its identity in a changed world? The Vatican wants to understand how countries like ours, where the faith was so deeply embedded, have ended up where we are. Here are some reflections.

There was no golden age

It would be easy to tell this as a simple fall from grace, with a devout Ireland holding firm until the 1960s before crumbling. History does not bear that out. Scandal, laxity and division run through every chapter of the Irish Church's story. The Catholicism of the mid-20th century was sincere, but it was also woven into the social fabric, a matter of belonging as much as belief.

That is part of the problem. Ours has long been a culture that values fitting in. Many practised because their neighbours did, and when the tide turned they drifted out with it. Few made a conscious decision to walk away from God; for most, faith simply faded through neglect. Faith lost that way is not necessarily lost for good, and that should give us hope.

Truth was neglected

The first loss was intellectual. Irish Catholicism has rarely prized the life of the mind. As one Dominican friar observed recently, there was a time when the bishops showed little enthusiasm for third-level education for the laity; a grounding in the essentials was thought sufficient. Curiosity and serious inquiry were not encouraged.

In the decades before the Council, the catechism was at least taught thoroughly. Afterwards that foundation was largely abandoned, and nothing of equal substance took its place. Many came through Catholic schools with only a hazy grasp of what the Church teaches, and little sense of what they were missing.

Those charged with teaching religion were often formed the same way. Few were introduced to the depth of the Church's thinking, from the Fathers to Aquinas and beyond. That is a failure of the system, not of the teachers.

Goodness betrayed, beauty neglected

Goodness was the next casualty. From the early 1990s came revelation after revelation: clerical abuse, its concealment by those in authority, and the harsh treatment of women and children in institutions run in the Church's name. Irish Catholics had trusted their clergy deeply. The sense of betrayal by some clergy and bishops was personal, and it cut to the bone.

No account of decline can set the abuse aside. Yet it is not the whole explanation.

Beauty, too, was allowed to fade. Many priests, choirs and parish musicians celebrate the liturgy with great care and devotion. But as a Church we have not always treated music and the visual arts as ways into the mystery being celebrated, rather than as optional extras. Over the same years, Irish artists and writers drifted far from the Church, and the Church made little effort to keep them close.

A faith that lived only in the parish

Where faith was nourished at home, people could hold on to Christ even when his ministers failed them. Where it depended on the parish alone, the scandals left little to fall back on, and many quietly stopped coming. Venite ad Me makes the same point: the family is the first place the faith is handed on, and in many parts of the world that handing on has been interrupted.

We have also lost touch with our own history. The Mass rocks and penal-era chapels tell of a people who kept the faith at real cost, under laws that outlawed it. Yet the Church is now remembered chiefly as powerful and controlling, rather than as the faith of the persecuted. A Church that forgets its past finds it hard to explain why it matters now.

Overlaying all of this was the broader secularisation of Western society, which arrived here late but advanced with unusual speed.

Is the Church ready for those coming back?

Yet there are stirrings of new interest, particularly among younger people. Many are discovering the faith's intellectual depth, its music and its saints online, often before they ever set foot in a parish. Venite ad Me notes a similar rise in conversions and returns, while cautioning against triumphalism.

The real test is whether they find a welcome when they do come. After decades of falling numbers, it is easy to stop expecting anything else. Those who return looking for help with prayer do not always find priests or parishes ready to offer it. And a lingering embarrassment about taking faith seriously can make real conversation about God difficult.

If *Venite ad Me* is right that the answer lies in formation, Ireland's task is clear. We must recover the intellectual tradition we neglected, the beauty we let slip, and the confidence to speak of prayer and of God. That is the work The Beehive exists to support, in parishes, in schools.

You can help in this work of formation and evangelisation simply by passing The Beehive on to someone who might read it. Or you can support our work so that schools can receive free subscriptions; contact editor@irishcatholic.ie

In times of Epochal change, everything can seem a daunting change as we navigate changes we don't understand and are beyond our grasping. But then we think of the beehive, each bee doing their allotted job with hardwork and fidelity and together as a hive, they make sense of the world, they make sense of it together. Be Not Afraid.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: IMAGINING GOD'S PEACE



Dr Jessie Rogers

The opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' vision of discipleship, are a list of makarioi: the blessed, the flourishing, the fortunate. Before Jesus tells his disciples what to do, he gives them a vision of the world as it looks under the reign of God. It is a very upside-down kind of world. Jesus celebrates a very different kind of person.

Matthew has arranged these Beatitudes carefully. There are eight in the third person: "Blessed are the poor in spirit ... those who mourn ... the meek ... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ... the merciful ... the pure in heart ... the peacemakers ... those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." After those eight, the form changes. Jesus turns directly to his disciples: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you", the eighth Beatitude is expanded and brought home to those listening. Living this way may have difficult consequences.

The first and eighth beatitudes have exactly the same promise that creates a frame around the whole collection: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Everything between belongs within this picture of God's reign. Those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" are the fourth group named; those "persecuted for righteousness' sake" are the eighth. Righteousness belongs right inside Matthew's vision of the kingdom.

The first four beatitudes focus on those who experience need. The next four have a more active quality: showing mercy, pursuing purity of heart, making peace, enduring persecution for righteousness. Those who long for God's world to be put right are also drawn into living differently within the world as it is. The first and eighth beatitude say that the kingdom is theirs. The promises in between look to the future: they will be comforted, inherit the earth, be filled, receive mercy, see God and be called children of God. Present and future are held together.

Human beings live by the stories they tell themselves about the future. If I believe that the future inevitably belongs to the strongest, I will organise my life accordingly. If we become convinced that conflict between certain groups is simply inevitable, that too begins to determine how we behave. Biblical writers also give us stories of the future. They invite us to imagine what the world looks like when God's purposes come to fulfilment. One of the most extraordinary of these visions is found in Isaiah 11:1–9. Isaiah lived in the eighth century before Christ, as the Assyrian empire expanded through the region, and Jerusalem's leaders made short-sighted, fear-driven decisions. It is within that conflict-ridden world that Isaiah asks his hearers to imagine a different future.

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1). Notice that it is a stump. Isaiah is imagining new life coming out of something that looks finished. The shoot from Jesse represents a renewed Davidic ruler, endowed with the spirit of the Lord and with wisdom and understanding. counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. And before Isaiah gives us his famous picture of peace, he talks about justice. This ruler will not judge by appearances, but "with righteousness he shall judge for the poor and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth." (Isa 11:4) The Hebrew vocabulary of tsedeq and tsedaqah, righteousness and justice, is concerned with people and communities standing in right relationship. Biblical righteousness includes personal conduct, but it is not merely about being a morally respectable individual. It has social consequences: what happens to the poor and to those without power?

And then, without explaining exactly how we get there, Isaiah gives us his extraordinary future. "The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them." (Isa 11:6). This picture is, of course, ridiculous. We know that wolves eat lambs. But that is the power of the image. Isaiah takes relationships that we regard as just the way things are - predator and prey, powerful and vulnerable - and asks us to imagine them utterly transformed. Try imagining the very wealthy and the very poor living together in such a way that resources are genuinely shared and everyone flourishes. Isaiah does not give us the ten steps by which wolves and lambs are to achieve peaceful coexistence. He gives us something that has to come first: the possibility of a different world. If we cannot imagine a world different from the one we inhabit, we are unlikely to work very hard to create one.

These are the Scriptures that formed Jesus. Sometimes Christians tell the biblical story as though the Old Testament God was rather violent, and then Jesus arrived with the innovative idea of peace. But Jesus stands within Israel's prophetic tradition. Isaiah had already imagined God's future as a world in which "they shall not hurt or destroy". So when Jesus announces the "kingdom of heaven", this great biblical hope is in the background. The word "heaven" can mislead modern Christian ears. We think immediately of somewhere we go after death, replacing this world. But that is not what Matthew means. "Kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's characteristic way of speaking about what the other evangelists usually call the "kingdom of God". Basileia can be translated "kingdom", but the important idea is reign or rule. That is why, in this same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God's future is not disconnected from this world.



'The Sermon on the Mount' by Carl Bloch, 1887. Photo: Wikimedia commons / Public domain.

And that takes us back to the Beatitudes. The kingdom is theirs; they will be comforted, inherit the earth, be filled, receive mercy, see God and be called children of God. The future reaches backwards and changes how we inhabit the present. It is within this vision that Jesus says: "Blessed are the peacemakers." The Greek eirēnopoioi is an active word. Jesus does not say blessed are the peaceable, or blessed are those who manage to avoid conflict. He blesses those who make peace. And notice where the peacemakers stand in the Beatitudes. Immediately after them come those who are persecuted for righteousness. That should stop us imagining that peace-making is simply about keeping everyone happy. Sometimes peace-making produces conflict.

The promise attached to peace-making is striking: "they will be called children of God." The child shows the character of the parent. So we could turn the Beatitude around. If peacemakers bear the family resemblance, what does that tell us about God and about God's dream for the future? It tells us that the God whose children we are is a peace-making God. To make peace is therefore to participate in God's own work and to display something of God's character in the world.

And that matters for the present. The Beatitudes are not simply a list of virtues required for admission to heaven. Nor is Isaiah's vision there simply to reassure us that everything will eventually be all right. These biblical visions of God's future are intended to form the imaginations of God's people now. But if the future belongs to the little ones and to the peacemakers, what will it look like to begin living towards that future now?

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QUESTIONS OF FAITH?

AT WHAT POINT DOES BEING A PRO-CHOICE CATHOLIC BECOME SINFUL?



Jenna Marie Cooper



> "The only people who are guilty of the canonical crime of abortion are those who were directly involved in bringing about a specific abortion in real life"

Q: Catholic governors commit an obviously sinful act when they sign extremely permissive abortion laws. On the other hand, there is an extraordinary minister of holy Communion in my parish who told me she is pro-choice, but I'm not aware she has done anything to support abortion except maybe vote for a pro-choice candidate. My question is: at what point does being a pro-choice Catholic become sinful?

A: I think there are a couple of implied layers to your question. That is, we can ask at what point supporting abortion becomes sinful, and we can also consider at which point this support becomes sinful in such a way where the Catholic in question would run into canonical consequences.

On this first level, I would think that any support of abortion whatsoever could be considered a sin, in the sense of it being an act which offends God and damages our relationship with him.

Though as a caveat, by 'supporting abortion' here I mean supporting the direct and intentional ending of an innocent human life in the womb. I'm not referring to tragic medical situations where an unborn child dies as the foreseen but unintended result of a gravely necessary medical procedure, and certainly not to cases of unintended miscarriages.

I would argue that even privately regarding the direct and intentional killing of an unborn child as morally acceptable in one's own mind – especially when one has had adequate catechesis and Christian formation and is not simply struggling with a sincere doubt – would constitute a sin, albeit clearly not as grave a sin as actually facilitating an abortion.

We are called to love God with "all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind" (see Mt 22:37), and intellectually subscribing to a belief that is contrary to God's law is falling short of this standard.

This is one reason why at the beginning of every Mass, we pray: "I confess to almighty God ... that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words" along with "in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do."

But this kind of very hidden sin would be a matter of what canon lawyers call the "internal forum." This means that while someone who committed a purely interior sin would do well to bring it up in confession, the Church would never seek to impose exterior consequences for a sin that is truly between an individual and God.

Things get a little more complicated when we are talking about sins committed in the "external forum," meaning sins that are outwardly observable by third parties.

Some but not all observable sins are also considered crimes in canon law, and often entail canonical punishments. Abortion is one such sin, which is punished by an automatic excommunication (see Canon 1397, 2 of the Code of Canon Law).

However, the only people who are guilty of the canonical crime of abortion are those who were directly involved in bringing about a specific abortion in real life, such as the doctor who actually carried out the operation.

This means that those who support abortion in general -- even in very practical ways like fundraising for pro-abortion political candidates – generally would not incur the specific penalty of excommunication based on this generic support alone.

Yet, even if a specific sin does not rise to the level of being a canonical crime, it can still have consequences in canon law. For instance, as a matter of sacramental discipline, those Catholics who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" should be denied holy Communion as per Canon 915.

So for example, in theory, if a Catholic who vocally promoted abortion in general was warned by his or her bishop or parish priest about the sinfulness of his or her situation, but still refused to change his or her ways, he or she would not be permitted to receive Communion, despite the fact that he or she wouldn't necessarily be excommunicated.

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

SAINTS IN A YEAR

ST TERESA OF ÁVILA AND THE FLOW OF GRACE



Fr Billy Swan

In the Gospel story of his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus describes the life of God within the believer as being like a well-spring of fresh water: "The water that I will give them will become a spring, welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). With this image, Jesus teaches us that the spiritual life is anything but static but rather dynamic and always new.

This symbol of God's grace as flowing, living water was a favourite of St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), whose feast we celebrate on October 15. In her famous work Interior Castle, she wrote: "I don't find anything more appropriate to explain some spiritual experiences than water; and this is because I am so fond of this element that I have observed it more attentively than other things" (Book 4, 2, 2).

For Teresa, as water makes the earth fertile, so too the gift of the Spirit leads to growth within us and the fruits that manifest themselves in a holy life. Attentiveness to the heart is important for that is where maturity and growth happens. In the words of Teresa: "It is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves, coming to know ourselves, reflecting on our misery...and begging him often for mercy" (Interior Castle, 2, 1, 11). In this light, to be humble is to be real and requires facing the truth about ourselves.

Teresa continues: "To be humble is to walk in truth, for it is a very deep truth that of ourselves we have nothing good but only misery and nothingness. Whoever does not understand this, walks in falsehood" (Interior Castle, 6, 10, 7-8). This stands in stark contrast to an overly positive view of the human condition en vogue today where everything needs to be affirmed, even if it delusionary. Knowing our brokenness is the first step to knowing our dependency on God.

For Teresa, the adventure of the spiritual life was understood as a progression or movement through what she calls 'mansions' that form part of an 'Interior Castle' where the soul is in intimate communion with God.

As we mature and progress in the life of union with God, love becomes more evident and visible: "Love is continually bubbling up in us. It cannot remain where it is, just as the spring-water seems unable to remain in the earth, but issues forth from it. So is it with the soul. It is already soaked in this water. It would want others to drink of its love so that they may help it to praise God" (Life, Ch. 30:19). Here Teresa points to the necessary correspondence between the inner spiritual life and our public moral lives. Morality is the public face of spirituality.

Teresa also spoke and wrote on the friendship of Christ. For her, Jesus is Lord and Master but also our best and truest friend. "Whoever lives in the presence of so good a friend...who went ahead of us to be the first to suffer, can endure all things. The Lord helps us, strengthens us, and never fails; he is a true friend" (Life 22,6). Prayer then is a conversation and an exchange between people who enjoy a bond of friendship that is deep and intimate. It is a sharing of how the other really is, without the fear of being rejected by what the other might say. In Teresa's words: "Prayer is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with him who we know loves us" (Life, 8, 5).

Teresa of Ávila is a prophetic voice for our times who keeps before us the central mystery of our faith in the incarnation – that out of love for humanity, God became human so that we might become divine. On this point she teaches:

"I see clearly...that God desires that if we are going to please him and receive his great favours, we must do so through the most sacred humanity of Christ, in whom he takes his delight" (Life, 22.6-7).

St Teresa of Ávila's beautiful insights into the Christian life, reveal a woman with a lively soul who helps us access God in a delightful, earthy and ordinary way – a woman of deep spirituality, fully human and fully alive. The witness of her life was instrumental in the conversion of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) becoming Christian and then later to become a fellow Carmelite sister. May the witness of her life continue to impact on us as we welcome the flow of God's grace every day that arrives like fresh, life-giving water.



Bernini's Ecstasy of St Teresa in the Cornaro Chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, depicting a mystical experience of St Teresa of Ávila. Photo: Livioandronico2013 / Wikimedia Commons.

"I see clearly...that God desires that if we are going to please him and receive his great favours, we must do so through the most sacred humanity of Christ, in whom he takes his delight"

FEATURE

WHY STUDY THE CATHOLIC FAITH AND COME TO KNOW GOD?





A priest is pictured in a file photo praying with a Bible. Photo: OSV News /courtesy Mundelein Seminary.

Coming to know God – that he is, what he is and who he is – enables us to love him as he deserves, writes **Dr Robert McNamara**

All Catholics worth their salt know that love is the meaning of life. In the First Letter of St John, we read that "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8), and in response to the lawyer of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus confirms that the summation of the law and prophets is found in love, affirming, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind… [and] your neighbour as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-39).

These are familiar words; we all know them, and, ideally, by orchestrating all our energy toward their realisation, we strive to live up to them throughout our lives. The great challenge, then, is not found in knowing what we must do, but rather in living up to these words and making them a reality—in ourselves and in all those entrusted our care—while difficulties and sufferings abound.

But if this is the case, if love is all we need, what on earth could motivate us to study the faith? What good could possibly be achieved in spending our time studying the things of God? Or, more simply put, what value is love to find in knowledge and what good is knowledge to love? And even if there were such value and goodness in knowledge, could we actually hope to find answers to the questions we ask? Or indeed, answers with sufficient clarity to actually matter in our lives? Would not the whole thing be just a massive waste of time and effort? Or worse still, would it not make us more like the pharisees, sanctimonious and self-righteous, knowing the life of faith in a sophisticated way but failing to live out its central dynamism: that of love of God and love of neighbour?

Well, before exploring a fulsome assessment, let's give an immediate answer: Without knowledge there is no love, for we simply cannot love what we do not know. Hence, knowledge of God is necessary to our love of God. Since knowledge both brings what is lovable before us and carries us forth toward our beloved, and since knowledge sets lover and beloved in relation to one another while also mediating between them, it must be that knowledge opens the way and facilitates the movement of love. Thus, knowledge is a condition of the possibility of love, and knowledge stands at the heart of the self-giving communication of love.

Therefore, if we do not come to know God—that he is, what he is, who he is—and if we do not come to know him better and better as life progresses towards its culmination, then we will not be able to love him as he deserves. We will not be able to love him as the supreme and universal good in whom our happiness abides. And, on the other hand, if we do not come to know the privileged place of the human being within the created cosmos, standing before the face of God as his image, then we will not be able to love one another in the way God so dearly desires, and nor will we even be able to love ourselves as he wishes.

And so, we simply must study the faith. Through such study we come to a deeper and fuller knowledge of God and ourselves, in addition to the whole of the created world. We come to know the whole of reality—both God and creation—from the perspective of God himself, precisely as he has revealed it to us and as we have communally reflected upon throughout the centuries since the beginning of Revelation.

In a word we will come to God with the knowledge of God, and his creation with this same knowledge. This unparalleled knowledge of things divine will then capacitate us to realise a deeper and fuller love for God himself, with our whole being, for his own sake, and for our neighbours, those immediately entrusted to our care, and for ourselves, we who live our lives under his loving gaze.

But even should this be granted, why not just come to know God through prayer and reading Sacred Scripture? Why must we also study the faith?

Though we should certainly come to know God through a living prayerful relationship with him, by living a life aware of his presence, as well as through reading his revealed word, we must ask why we would exclude exploring of every possible avenue of knowledge? Would not study complement our prayerful devotion to God with the kind of knowledge that augments and enhances our relationship with him.

Study is a kind of devotion—for 'to study,' from the Latin 'studeo,' means to devote oneself—and study is also a kind of striving—for the Latin original also means to strive. As to the first, study involves applying attention and understanding, with focus and concentration, toward gaining insight, and, as to the second, study also involves meditation and reflection, mulling thoughtfully over things and pondering their meaning. When we put these things together, we discover that study involves engaging all one's human power and energy, with diligence and persistence, toward gaining intimate knowledge of the studied object.

Now, if God is in fact God: the fullness of truth in whom all goodness is found, then in addition to our prayerful devotion he certainly deserves this kind of studious devotion. If anything is worth studying, and there is certainly much that is, then surely God, the first principle and final end of all things, our alpha and omega, is worth studying—and so with priority. It is then most fitting to add this particular devotional practice to our other devotions. Though these others have priority with respect to our relationship to God, and though these others also most certainly intensify our love, studious devotion is a highly significant avenue toward the love of God.

Indeed, it is a kind of loving-knowing that you simply cannot find elsewhere.

Now, trusting that I have won your confidence in the truth of devotional study, let us look a little more closely at why such study is the ordinary path for Catholics. The Catechism of the Catholic Church struc-

tures its exposition of the faith around the call of God and the response of the human being.

In creating us according to his image, God calls all humans to himself and desires that all come to know and love him through their own free response to his creative and redemptive love. God's call is then a call to enter into relationship with him, while he creates us with a deep longing to find him and become his friend. As St Augustine puts the matter, "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

Call and response run deeply into the structure of reality and entirely coordinate our relationship with God. We could even say that call and response is the structure of reality. We recall that the Bible begins with the revelation that God creates by speaking things into being: "In the beginning God created... God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." (Gen. 1:1-3), with this sequence repeating throughout the successive days of creation until the culminating seventh day of God's rest.

This opening revelation is then expanded upon in the prologue of the Gospel of St John where we find the following beautiful revelation:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."(Jn. 1:1-3, 14).

Now, from these central words of the Sacred Scripture we discover that God's Word is both creative and redemptive. God first calls all things into existence through his all-powerful Word, before proceeding to call us to himself on the basis of this same Word, Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate. This means that our encounter with and entry into relationship with God is brought about in and through the Word of God, a Word that is expressed in one way in the Mystery of Creation and in another in the Mystery of Redemption—though with both possessing the same pattern.

This is why at the very beginning of the Catechism we read that the Christian life is coordinated around our orientation toward truth. Though Christianity proclaims love to be the highest fulfilment of our relationship with God, this fulfilment by love is entirely mediated by truth—the truth of God's word expressed in Creation and Redemption. The reason for all this is quite simple: the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, is "the way, the truth, and the life." (Jn. 14:6). He is our life, this life is truth, and our way is to follow the truth. The Catholic faith is then a question of truth—truth stands at its centre.

God himself is truth, and all things—having been created through his Word—have been made in, through, and with this truth of God. Indeed, this is why all things are meaningful, because they bear the truth of God.

As a result, whenever we seek truth, genuinely and sincerely, we are seeking God, and whenever we seek God, honestly and actually, we find him in truth. This means that we can draw close to God only by knowing him in truth, and moreover, we can cling to God only by clinging to him with truth. In all circumstances, then, and at all times, it is only by the way of truth that we can enter into the love of God, and continue to participate in that love through friendship.

We can illustrate all this in another way by asking how it would be possible to love what we do not know? Without knowledge there is no love, for we simply cannot love what we do not know. Love is not in fact blind but is rather seeing—a true and deep knowing. Therefore, should we come to know God—that he is, what he is, and who he is, all to their proper depth—then we can discover in ourselves an intense and lasting love for him. However, should we fall back from seeking knowledge of him, we simply will not be able to love him as he is in himself... and we will thereby foil the meaning of our own lives.

Over this sixteen part series, I will be exploring the content of the Catholic faith. Through this study, your faith should deepen and grow stronger, while also developing and maturing, and your life should take on a new vigour as the vitality of the faith enters your life in new and interesting ways. Fortified in this way, you should then be empowered to rise more powerfully toward a greater love for God and his creation.



'St Jerome in his Study' by Antonello da Messina, circa 1474. Photo: Wikimedia commons / public domain.

> "God himself is truth, and all things—having been created through his Word—have been made in, through, and with this truth of God. Indeed, this is why all things are meaningful, because they bear the truth of God"

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FEATURE

GRASPING THE DEMANDS OF MORAL LAW THROUGH GRACE





Fr Kevin O'Reilly

"Charity (agape)," writes St Paul in his Letter to the Romans, "does no wrong to one's neighbour; therefore charity is the fullness of the Law." Charity does not denote any kind of love. It is a love whereby one sacrifices oneself for God and, consequently, for one's neighbour. It is, moreover, a supernatural kind of love: it is possible only by God's grace. Charity – love of God and love of one's neighbour for the sake of God – is thus possible only for someone who is in a state of grace.

The Law that charity fulfils is the Old Law. In this regard, the Ten Commandments, St Thomas Aquinas tells us, are in effect a restatement of the natural law – the moral law that human beings are able to discern by virtue of their possession of the faculty of reason. Moral reason, however, does not operate like a computer. Rightly ordered desire is required for it to function properly.

Disordered desire, in contrast, dims the light of moral reason. It inclines a person to sin. Sin in turn cultivates disordered desire and further dims the light of moral reason. It was precisely because of this kind of dynamic that God revealed the Commandments to Moses: over the course of time sin had greatly undermined the human capacity to discern right and wrong.

The Ten Commandments served to illumine moral intelligence, which had become engulfed in darkness on account of sin. Even this divine intervention, however, was not sufficient since the Old Law did not communicate grace. Without grace, whereby the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – dwells in the soul, human beings inevitably fall into sin. And sin dims the light of practical reason.

Grace flows upon us from Christ, the Mediator between God and human beings (1 Tim. 2:5), inasmuch as He is the Head of the Church and we are the members of His Body. Grace, by which we share in the Divine nature, is ordinarily communicated through the Sacraments. (Having said this, the Church recognises the possibility for non-Christians, the number of whom we cannot know, to share somehow in the grace of Christ.

With grace, the theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—are infused. Since faith, hope, and charity are essential for understanding the demands of the moral life, the Sacraments too are fundamental in this regard – for they are the ordinary means of grace. Indeed, the Sacraments, St Thomas tells us, "obtain their effect through the power of Christ's Passion" (ST III, q. 61, a. 1, ad 3).

The most sublime act of charity is the charity of Christ as He underwent His Passion and death on the Cross. Indeed, in His Passion Christ fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law. Among these are the moral precepts, which He fulfilled our of charity inasmuch as He suffered and died on account of His love for the Father and His love for His neighbour.

Charity is sacrificial in character, as already emphasised. As the most important of all the virtues, it animates all the other infused virtues, including faith. And yet there is a sense in which it presupposes faith. Just as I cannot love anything unless I first know it, neither can I love God or neighbour with the love of charity unless I first know God through faith.

Faith, however, has a content, namely the articles of the Creed and the dogmas that have been defined throughout the centuries. This content is both definite and fixed. This definite and fixed content means that the apostolic faith, when it works through charity (see Gal. 5:6), issues in a distinctly Catholic morality.

Faith, hope, and charity transform a person's moral vision. As these theological virtues deepen, one's moral vision becomes more and more illuminated by the light of grace. One sees things more and more as God sees them. In other words, one's moral understanding becomes more objective.

The true faith, moreover, expresses itself sacramentally. Through Baptism we are incorporated into the Body of Christ. Subsequent mortal sins, which bring the life of grace in the soul to an end and therefore destroy the possibility of eternal life in the presence of God, require the Sacrament of Confession. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ's sacrifice on Calvary is made sacramentally present, and those who are in a state of grace receive His true Body and His true Blood.

Faith, hope, and charity morally enlighten those who are divinised by the power of God's grace, given to us through the humanity of Christ crucified, from whose side flowed the waters of Baptism and the Blood of the Eucharist.

Hence just as Christ "carried his cross as a teacher his candelabrum," so too His disciples' illumination by His teaching is bound up with participation in His Cross.

FEATURE

HOW FAITH AND REASON WORK TOGETHER IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

In a world that tends to set faith and reason in opposition, understanding their nature reveals their close relationship, writes **Dr Robert McNamara**

The 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously declared, "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown." Nietzsche here expresses a central claim of the modern era: the non-existence of God and the enduring faith of the foolish—those who are willing to believe in God despite the apparent evidence to the contrary.

One of the atheism's most famous contemporary figures, Richard Dawkins, captures much the same when he says, "Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."

But is this the case? Is God 'dead'? Is He missing, absent, non-existent? And is faith simply a comfort blanket for those who can't cope with life, what Karl Marx notably called the "opium of the people"? Is faith without evidence? a leap into the dark unknown in the hope that God might catch us? No. It most certainly is not. In fact, the Bible places the foolishness on the opposite side, repeating, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." (Ps. 14:1, 53:1).

Yet if this is so, faith and reason must not be in contradiction but rather must have some deep accord. In the opening of the encyclical Fides et Ratio Pope St John Paul II puts the intimate relation in the following way, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."

Let us then explore the nature of faith more fully so that we might see its deep accord with reason—and indeed, so that we might how rational faith actually is, and how reasonable it is to be a person of faith.

Already from the above quotation of St John Paul, we see in what way faith and reason have accord. Since both faith and reason have the same object and serve the same purpose, namely, the truth, their place and role in human life is wholly symbiotic. Since truth is evidently one seamless garment in which there is no contradiction, the truths of reason and the truths of faith cannot actually be contradictory but must rather be complementary—like two wings that enable us to sore toward the heavens.

This community of faith and reason over truth is easiest to understand, at least initially, by approaching it from the perspective of 'human faith'—the faith we have in one another. With a correct understanding of human faith in place, we will then be able to better understand 'divine faith'—the faith we have in God. Now, when I have faith in another human individual, it means first that I trust them as a person, and then that I listen to their word and take it to be true.

On the other hand, if I do not trust another, for whatever reason, I will not listen to their word and can have no faith in him. So considered, we see that human faith is the personal basis of my relationship with anyone and everyone, and everything significant between persons proceeds on the basis of human faith. Every time I ever listen to the word of another, every time I place my trust in them and their word, my relationship with this is mediated by my human faith in them.

In fact, if we extend this outward into life as a whole, we will see that most of what we know has come to us through human faith, for every time I have listened to the instruction of another, heard the report of another, or read the writings of another, I have come to further truth through my human faith in them. And that is to say that the greater part of my standing in truth as a rational being has come to me through others and my faith in them. Though much of it I could perhaps investigate for myself, in actual fact I have learned from others through faith. Thus, as a result of my faith in others, through learning from others, my grasp of reality has immeasurably expanded. I know most of what I know through human faith, and my understanding of reality would be greatly impoverished should I not have trusted others in this way.

Human faith then also coordinates other human relationships of significance. Whenever I go to a doctor to explain my symptoms and learn my diagnosis, I do so on the basis of faith, by trusting in the doctor and medical science. And whenever I submit a prescription to a pharmacist to receive my medication and get well by taking this same medication, I do so on the basis of faith, by trusting in the pharmacist and pharmaceutical science.

Then, even more significantly, in all truly personal relationships, especially with family and friends, whenever another tells me about themselves and shares their history or inner life, how they feel and what they think, I come to know them personally and have a relationship with them through faith in them. And, more importantly still, whenever anyone declares their love for me, I can receive and know this precious truth only through an act of faith. Even though such a declaration exists on the basis of their trustworthiness and comes to expression in innumerable ways, such an absolute as personal love simply cannot be proven.

Now, when we finally see human relationships in this light—clearly, and as they really are—we come to understand that everything genuinely human is held together by human faith. By trusting in one another and receiving one another's word via this same trust, we are knit together in all kinds of human relationships, from the most significant, such as those spousal, parental, and friendly, to the most general, communal and associational alike. And indeed, rightly understood, the whole of society, its politics, industry, and economy, is held together in a foundational way through our faith in one another.



Pope John Paul II signs his 13th encyclical, Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason) October 15, 1998 at the Vatican. Photo: CNS / Arturo Mari.

> "I know most of what I know through human faith, and my understanding of reality would be greatly impoverished should I not have trusted others in this way"

Let us then summarise the nature of faith from the perspective of human life. The core of faith is interpersonal trust. On the basis of such trust, we come to participate in another's knowledge, because we hear their word and assent to it as true. Through faith we learn to share the same world with one another, we learn to share in an expanded worldview, and our grasp of reality becomes more clear and precise, more comprehensive and adequate. Without

such faith, we would be greatly impoverished in our understanding.

Who on earth would I be if I had never listened to the words of another. I would be isolated, alone and idiotic—for this is the proper meaning of idiot, one who has private knowledge alone. In faith, we get a vantage point upon reality beyond ourselves, the other's vantage point, and we learn to partake of the one another's perspectives.

Now, if this is the case with human faith, then what about divine faith?

Well, if God actually exists, and if God really is our Creator, and if God is in fact all-knowing—all of which can be known, as I will later show—would it not be utterly foolish to not place our trust in Him, to not listen to His word, to not take His word to ourselves, and to not learn to entrust ourselves to God through His word as we daily struggle to meet the difficulties of life with some degree of poise and composure? Would it not in fact be highly irrational to turn away from the word of God, to close one's heart to that word, and to fail to let that word become a light for the path of our lives? Would we not be the most unreasonable of creatures, to withhold our assent from the word of our Creator?

Rather, we are entirely within the dictates of reason to be persons of faith, and thereby to participate in the knowledge of God—for that is the essence of faith, to participate in divine knowledge: in God's knowledge of Himself, and in God's knowledge of creation. By faith we know God with God's own knowledge, and we know ourselves with his knowledge of us—at least to the degree that He reveals this knowledge in the Sacred Scriptures and the Tradition of the faith.

Yet the accord of faith with reason goes still further than this. As we have seen, since faith is about truth—the truth of God and the truth of His word—the seat of faith in human person is reason itself. Faith abides in reason as an act and habit of reason. Since reason is the capacity by which we attain knowledge, and since divine faith is participation in the knowledge of God, we assent to the articles of faith as true by the power of reason—reason graced, for sure, but reason nonetheless.

These truths taken on faith then become even more certain for us than things we know naturally, for when we trust someone and their word, the ground of our certainty is now properly personal—but what better foundation for certainty than the personal God, "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). In life, then, the foundation upon which I stand is my faith in God, for "the Lord is my rock" (Ps. 18:2).

Now, because the contents of faith are higher (being divine) and more certain (being from God), faith obviously also involves an elevation of reason, and in two senses. First, since our knowledge is often partial or mistaken, when God shares His knowledge with us, it completes, clarifies, and corrects our understanding. Thus, simply stated, the word of God heals reason of its errors. Then, since faith stretches reason beyond what can be known naturally, so that we can enter into what is above nature, into the supernatural things of God, faith takes reason to a higher plain of truth. Thus, simply stated, the word of God perfects reason in its truth.

Now, at the end, let us summarise the accord of faith and reason. Faith is consonant with reason, faith is a reasonable act, faith is of reason as its act and habit, the articles of faith are harmonious natural knowledge, and faith elevates the activity of reason while giving reason objects higher than its natural kin. Moreover, let us attend to how rich life can become with faith. Since faith capacitates us to share in divine thought, should we match this union of thought with an affirmation of will to the goodness of this truth, then we come to share a union of mind and heart with God—which is nothing else than friendship with God and our own holiness.

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Members of the Sisters of the Holy Child Mary measure star positions from glass plates as part of a Vatican Observatory project to catalogue the stars and create a photographic map of the heavens. The sisters worked on the project between 1910 and 1921. Photo: CNS/Vatican Observatory.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: CAN THERE BE PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE?

DR JESSIE ROGERS



Dr Martin Luther King Jr joins hands with Catholic clergy and other religious leaders during a civil rights gathering in 1964. Photo: OSV News/courtesy University of Notre Dame.

When Jesus blesses the peacemakers in the Sermon on the Mount, he is not talking about people who simply avoid conflict or keep everyone happy. He also promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will have that hunger satisfied (Matt 5:6). The vision of peace that Jesus inherits from Israel's prophets is inseparable from justice. Yet often peace and justice are treated as alternatives. Ending violence does not necessarily address the issues that contributed to it. We may achieve a peace of sorts while leaving injustice firmly in place.

Jesus and his first hearers knew something about this kind of peace. They lived under the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. Roman occupation brought stability through military force and the threat of violence, while extracting taxes and resources from conquered territories to sustain the wealth and power of the empire. There was nothing just about this peace. That is not the peace of the kingdom of God, the peace that promotes human flourishing. But if true peace cannot be built upon injustice, how do we respond to injustice without simply creating new cycles of violence? Jesus addresses precisely this question in Matthew 5:38-42.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'" (Matt 5:38). We may hear this ancient principle as an invitation to revenge, but it was intended to limit retaliation through proportional justice. Jesus asks his disciples to go further. Responding to injury with an equivalent injury may limit revenge, but it does not create peace. We remain caught within a pattern of aggression and retaliation. This is where Jesus' teaching becomes particularly challenging. What does he mean when he tells his disciples not to resist an evildoer? (v 39). Is he telling those who suffer injustice simply to accept it? Historically, this command has sometimes been invoked to justify submission to oppression and passivity in the face of evil. But that is a very troubling way to read Jesus' words.

The Greek verb anthistemi can describe forceful opposition, including armed resistance. Jesus' teaching can be understood as a rejection of violent retaliation rather than a command to surrender all resistance. He is speaking to disciples who live in a world where power is very unequally distributed. How can they challenge injustice without reproducing the violence they oppose? Jesus gives three extraordinary examples. Each presents a situation in which one person has power over another, and each invites us to imagine a response that is neither violent retaliation nor passive submission but a surprising third way.

"If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matt 5:39). In his little book Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way, Walter Wink has provided a compelling interpretation of this action by drawing attention to the social meaning of a blow to the face in the world of Jesus.

In a world where the left hand was not used for anything in public, if someone strikes another person on the right cheek using the right hand (the only socially acceptable possibility) the blow would be a backhanded slap. Such a slap is not simply an act of physical violence. It is an insult, a way of showing contempt for someone regarded as inferior. The person who is struck is expected to internalise the contempt and to slink away. But Jesus says: turn the other cheek. Imagine what happens when the person who has been struck refuses to cower. Instead, they stand their ground, look the aggressor in the eye and offer the other cheek. "If you have a problem with me, if you think I deserve to be struck, here I am. But it cannot be a humiliating backhanded slap."

Agency

The person who was supposed to accept humiliation has reclaimed some agency. Jesus is not asking people to become doormats, but to challenge the relationship of power itself. The aggressor must now make another decision. Perhaps they will strike again, perhaps they will walk away. There is no guarantee of a peaceful outcome, but the expected pattern has been interrupted, opening the possibility of a different response.

Jesus' second example is equally startling: "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well" (Matt 5:40). Here we are in the world of debt and economic inequality. A creditor takes someone to court to recover what is owed, demanding clothing as payment. And Jesus says: give them the rest of your clothes! Imagine the scene. The debtor ends up standing there naked. What appeared to be legitimate debt collection is suddenly exposed as something shocking. The creditor is confronted with the human consequences of what they are doing and the bystanders see someone being stripped of everything they possess.

Perhaps the creditor will reconsider, perhaps not. But the person without power has interrupted the expected sequence of events. Rather than retaliating or being crushed by the system, they have reclaimed agency, exposed the injustice of the situation and created the possibility of change.

The third example would have been immediately recognisable to people living under Roman occupation. "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile" (Matt 5:41). Roman soldiers could compel civilians to carry their equipment for a mile, a reminder of the power dynamics of occupation. But imagine reaching the end of the mile and saying, "I'm enjoying your company. I'll come another mile with you!" Suddenly, the soldier's command has become your choice. There is even humour in the scene: the soldier who expected resentful obedience is confronted with unexpected friendliness from someone they regarded as inferior.

We need to be careful about how we apply these texts. Jesus is not giving a set of techniques guaranteed to work in every situation. Nor should these passages ever be used to place an obligation upon people experiencing abuse or violence to remain in danger. Nonviolent resistance is not the same as refusing to protect oneself or others. But Jesus is asking us to think differently about the relationship between justice and peace. We often assume that we have two choices. Either we accept injustice for the sake of peace, or we challenge injustice through confrontation that risks further violence. Jesus' examples invite us to imagine another possibility.

Peace-making can itself become a form of resistance. It can involve refusing humiliation, exposing exploitation and challenging the structures of power that permit one person to dominate another. It is not simply about bringing conflict to an end. Sometimes making peace means confronting the injustice that a supposedly peaceful arrangement conceals. This requires imagination as we explore ways of responding differently from what our opponents expect. We need to discover possibilities beyond submission and retaliation.

There is one more instruction in this passage that is easily overlooked. After these three examples, Jesus tells his disciples to give to those who ask and not to turn away those who wish to borrow (Matt 5:42). Peace-making is not only about how we respond when someone wrongs us. It is also about the kind of society we are trying to create: one marked not by coercion, exploitation and fear, but by radical generosity.

Isaiah's vision of a world where the wolf and the lamb live together, where the powerful no longer prey upon the vulnerable (Isa 11:6-9) may seem impossibly distant. Yet Jesus invites his disciples to begin practising something of that future in the present, even in situations of humiliation, exploitation and coercion.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." Not those who simply keep the peace, whatever the cost. Not those who accept injustice in order to avoid conflict. Blessed are those who have the courage and imagination to create the possibility of peace without abandoning righteousness.

"Peace-making is not only about how we respond when someone wrongs us. It is also about the kind of society we are trying to create: one marked not by coercion, exploitation and fear, but by radical generosity"

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT: LOVE THAT BECOMES VISIBLE

FR DOMINIK DOMAGALA

Mass readings: Exodus 22:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Matthew 22:34-40.



'The Good Samaritan' by Guillaume Bodinier, 1826. Photo: Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

There is an old joke about Stalin, a child and a radio commentator. A child approaches the Soviet dictator and asks, "Comrade Stalin, will you give me a sweet?" Stalin replies with an abrupt command to go away. The radio commentator then announces, with remarkable enthusiasm, "He could have had him killed!"

This joke exposes a peculiar human tendency: we can become so accustomed to praising someone's supposed virtues that we interpret even their absence as evidence of excellence. The boor who ridicules others may congratulate himself on his sense of humour, while the person who prides himself on speaking the truth may fail to recognise that charity sometimes requires silence.

The readings for this Sunday expose the same contradiction in faith. It is possible to know God's commandments, to defend them vigorously and to take pride in our religious convictions, while neglecting the love that gives those commandments their purpose.

Exodus: the stranger at the heart of the covenant

The first reading takes us back to Mount Sinai, where the Israelites, liberated from slavery in Egypt, entered into a covenant with God. The commandments were not arbitrary restrictions, but the terms of a relationship initiated by divine mercy. God had acted first, rescuing Israel from oppression and promising to remain faithful to his people, who were called to live according to his law.

Its instructions concern the treatment of foreigners, widows, orphans and the poor. The demand to love one's neighbour is translated into concrete obligations, ensuring that nobody can hide behind religious observance while exploiting those least able to defend themselves. Israel is instructed not to oppress the stranger, because the Israelites themselves had experienced life as strangers in Egypt. Their memory of suffering was supposed to become a source of compassion rather than indifference. Having received mercy, they were expected to extend mercy to others.

This is an enduring lesson for Christian society. Human dignity does not depend upon a person's influence, usefulness, wealth or ability to return a favour. Nor can charity be restricted to those who belong to our family, community or political camp. The covenant teaches Israel that its relationship with God must transform its relationships with others; the Christian, who has received redemption in Christ, cannot expect less.

Thessalonians: when faith becomes witness

St Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, shows how the Gospel is received genuinely. Paul praises the Thessalonians because they accepted his message, became imitators of the Lord and, despite suffering, experienced the joy given by the Holy Spirit. Their conversion became a public witness, so that news of their faith spread throughout Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul describes their transformation as a turning away from idols towards the living and true God. In the ancient world, idols were not simply statues; they represented the attempt to locate ultimate security and meaning in something other than the Creator. Although modern people may not worship carved images, the temptation remains whenever money, status, political power or personal success is treated as the highest good. To turn towards the living God means more than accepting his existence. It means entering his service, allowing his will to challenge our ambitions and permitting the Gospel to reshape our behaviour.

Paul connects conversion with imitation: the Thessalonians have received the faith, and now their lives must increasingly resemble Christ's. The question is whether our own lives make that faith credible. When people encounter Christians, do they discover greater patience, honesty, generosity and mercy, or the same rivalries, resentments and self-interest that characterise life without the Gospel? We cannot control others' decisions about religion, but we should examine whether our conduct has helped them recognise the goodness of God.

Matthew: two inseparable commandments

The Gospel presents Jesus in conversation with a lawyer who asks which commandment in the Law is the greatest. The question arises amid a confrontation between Jesus and the religious authorities in Jerusalem, and Matthew tells us that the questioner intends to test him. Given the complexity of Jewish legal tradition, the question could become an opportunity to accuse Jesus of neglecting one commandment in favour of another. Jewish tradition counted 613 commandments in the Torah, encompassing positive obligations and prohibitions.

Jesus responds by bringing two passages of Scripture into a single answer: Deuteronomy 6:5, which commands Israel to love God with its whole being, and Leviticus 19:18, which commands the people to love their neighbour as themselves. Love of God stands at the centre of the covenant, but cannot be separated from love of neighbour, because God commands us to respect the dignity of those whom he has created. Equally, Christian love of neighbour is not simply a vague commitment to being pleasant; it arises from our relationship with God and is shaped by the truth about the human person.

The commandments cannot be replaced by a sentimental declaration that love is all that matters. The law gives love a definite form, while love reveals the purpose of the law. Without the commandments, we risk defining love according to our preferences, excusing whatever suits us and condemning whatever inconveniences us. Without love, however, the commandments can become rules we use to judge others while remaining blind to our own failures.

All Saints: what love can become

The Solemnity of All Saints offers a continuation of today's teaching. The saints are not simply exceptional religious personalities to be admired. They are witnesses to what happens when God's grace is welcomed and the commandments of love become the principle of a human life. Their circumstances were diverse, but what united them was their response to God's grace, enabling them to love him and their neighbours with increasing generosity.

All Saints should challenge the assumption that holiness belongs to a spiritual elite. Every believer is called to holiness according to one's vocation and circumstances. The saints also remind us that love is not measured solely by the visibility or magnitude of achievements. Its deepest measure is fidelity to God in the circumstances in which we have been placed. Their lives show us that the commandments Jesus summarises in the Gospel are not an impossible ideal, but a path made possible by grace.

The following day, on All Souls', the Church turns our attention to the faithful departed, reminding us that those who belong to Christ remain united in him, even though death has separated us. Those who die in God's grace but still require purification before entering heavenly glory are remembered in the Church's prayers, and we commend them to God's mercy through the offering of the Mass and other suffrages. Prayer for the dead is an expression of charity, not an attempt to purchase salvation or alter God's justice. We entrust the departed to the mercy of God, whose love is greater than our understanding.

All Souls' Day also reminds us that Christian love is not confined to those who can thank us, repay us or acknowledge what we have done. Just as Exodus commands Israel to protect the vulnerable, the Church encourages us to remember those who depend upon our prayers. The living and the dead remain within the horizon of Christian charity, although the way we express that charity differs.

As we prepare to celebrate all the saints and the faithful departed, let us remember that these feasts are not isolated entries in the Church's calendar. They remind us of the faith we have received, the holiness to which we are called and the communion in Christ that sustains our hope beyond death. Above all, they return us to the commandment at the heart of the Gospel: to love God with our whole being and our neighbour as ourselves, until the grace we receive becomes the charity through which others encounter Christ in us.

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SAINTS IN A YEAR

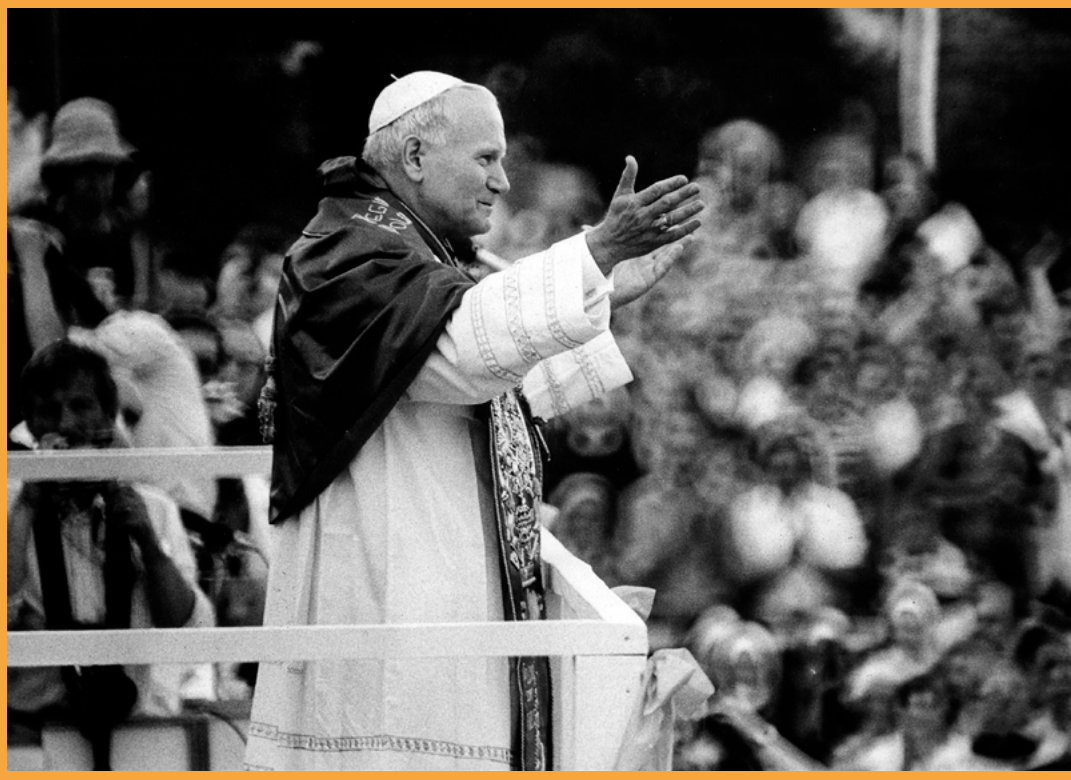
POPE ST JOHN PAUL II AND THE EXPANDING SOUL

FR BILLY SWAN

We all admire people who are magnanimous. These are people who have a soul that is wide and deep enough to embrace everyone and who have a universal scope to their vision for a better, united and more humane world. The opposite to an Anima Magna or large soul is the Anima Pusilla– the puny soul that results from living within the confines of our own needs, fears and desires, that prevent us from seeing beyond them.

On October 22, the Church celebrates the feast of Pope St John Paul II (1920–2005). He is a saint who challenged all believers and all humanity to develop an Anima Magna. He did this by calling people to a greatness of soul, stirring up the Spirit in his listeners in a way that expanded the soul to imagine its place in God's kingdom. Here I offer two examples of how he masterfully did this, the first on a national level in his native Poland and the second with his direct words to the youth on World Youth Day.

When Pope John Paul II stood up to address the crowds in Victory Square in Warsaw, Poland, on June 2, 1979, to say that he knew his audience is an understatement. He was a loyal son of Poland who knew intimately the history and struggle of his own people. The people John Paul addressed that day were a people who had forgotten who they were, robbed of their identity for decades by the ruling Soviets and previously by the Nazis. He reached into people's memories and hearts and evoked the history and soul of his native country with the conviction that culture, and not politics or economics, holds the key to a nation's greatness.



St John Paul II greets throngs of Poles waiting for a glimpse of their native son at the monastery of Jasna Gora in Czestochowa during his 1979 trip to Poland. Photo: CNS /Chris Niedenthal.

Subversive

His most subversive words were about Christ and therefore about the truth of humanity. To a people denied religious liberty and oppressed by two atheistic regimes, John Paul II stated emphatically: "The exclusion of Christ from the history of humanity is an act against humanity. Without Christ, it is impossible to understand the history of Poland... The history of the nation is above all the history of people." These words amounted to a revolution of identity that said to the Poles: "You are not who they say you are... Let me remind you of who you really are". On that fateful day, John Paul II was recasting the identity of his own people with the power of the Gospel, calling them away from a national Anima Pusilla and summoning them to a new Anima Magna with the promise of hope and true freedom.

The second example of St John Paul's summons to greatness of soul is his encounter with young people. As someone who grew up with Pope John Paul II as Pope, his words to us when we were young, were electric.

In speaking to the youth, he followed a similar strategy to what we saw in Poland in 1979. Instead of attacking a perceived enemy directly, he deftly argued that the human soul is made for something much more than material things or the sensual fulfilment of our desires. He challenged the youth not to live for themselves but for God and his kingdom. He told them they were right to be disappointed with "hollow entertainment, passing fads and aiming at too little in life".

Gift

He encouraged them to embrace 'the law of the gift' where we receive back true freedom and happiness in the measure that we give ourselves away in service and love. To the hundreds of thousands of young people gathered in Rome for World Youth Day 2000, the Holy Father spoke about the love of God in Jesus Christ that created them for a special purpose: "It is Jesus whom you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted... It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity".

St John Paul II raised up nations and peoples to see the greatness to which God calls us and the constant need to expand the embrace of the human soul that is always in danger of shrinking and settling for less.

Here is the power of faith. It fires the human imagination to see beyond the narrow visions and boundaries that we construct for ourselves. May St John Paul II inspire us to have magnanimous hearts and souls and to 'set the world on fire' by becoming all that God created us to be.

"It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity"

HOW FAITH DRAWS US INTO FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Faith and friendship share the same foundation in trust, drawing us into deeper relationship with one another and with God, writes **Dr Robert McNamara**



Two friends take advantage of a shady spot. Even before the time of Christ, Aristotle wrote beautifully on the subject of friendship. Many are familiar with a phrase of his composing, a friend is "a single soul in two bodies." Photo: CNS /Nancy Wiechec.

As we have seen in the last piece, faith is something properly personal. At its core, it is a relationship founded on interpersonal trust—this is the structure of faith. And those who have faith listen to the word of one another and hold it as true—this is the content of faith. This is then true of both human and divine faith, since both have the same basic structure and the same basic content. The primary significant difference that separates the human and the divine bears reference to both their structure and their content. Unlike with human faith, the structure of divine faith includes the divine persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, and its contents include those which are properly supernatural.

Moreover, we can trust God and his word only through the grace that He bestows upon us in Redemption, in the sacraments, and through his free gift when we dispose ourselves in prayer and good deeds. Through such grace we can rest in God's help, for "our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." (Ps. 124:8).

Faith and friendship

Now, those who consider the matter aright will have noticed that friendship has the very same character as faith. Just like faith, friendship is a relationship of interpersonal trust that involves listening to the word of one another, in addition to seeking what is truly good together with one another.

Friends see the true good in one another via the trust they have in one another, and they consequently desire to live alongside one another in the presence of that goodness, while also striving for the good together with one another and for one another. And this is just what it means to bring love to completion. The love of friendship is personal love brought to completion. And this personal love is then also found in faith brought to life, what we call living-faith, when basic belief is animated by the love of charity.

Only this kind of faith saves, for though faith resides in reason and involves participation in the knowledge of God, charity resides in the will and involves participation in the love of God. Though faith is knowing with the knowledge of God, charity is loving with the love of God. Both are necessary if we are to enter into the fullness of our relationship with God. In a word, this fullness is friendship, in our return of friendship to the God who offers us friendship. All this becomes clear if we look at the formula of faith first given by St Augustine, the great theologian, philosopher, and bishop, namely, "Credere Deum, credere Deo, credere in Deum."

> "'*Credere in Deum*' means believing into God. It is trustful surrender to God on the basis of our trust in Him and His word. Because we have come to trust God and His word, in this final movement of faith we learn how to surrender our lives to Him through His word"

Three movements of faith

Let us look at each clause in turn.

'Credere Deum' means to believe there is a God. It is belief that God exists. Though it is a significant step in the life of faith, this step of faith is only the beginnings of faith, it is only faith in bud.

In fact, since one can also know that God exists by rational reflection on basis of what we experience of the natural world, properly speaking the existence of God is not first a question of faith but of natural knowledge. As St Paul says, "Ever since the creation of the world God's invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." (Rom. 1: 20).

This given of natural knowledge then becomes the natural foundation for the act of faith, a preamble that leads us to the cusp of faith. In similarity to the way my faith in my wife is grounded in my knowledge that she exists and is trustworthy, so to my faith in God is grounded in my knowledge of His existence and trustworthiness. And just like my faith in my wife would be one shaky ground if she were fictional, so too our faith in God would be vacuous without our knowledge that he exists.

'Credere Deo' means to believe the word of God. It is belief in God and his word on the basis of our trust of Him. This means that on the basis of our prior knowledge of or belief in the existence of God, and thus also in His divine nature, which is truth itself, we learn to trust God and take His word to be true. This movement takes our faith beyond mere assent to the existence of God to trust in Him and assent to His word. Now, this is obviously the most natural thing in the world, to take the word of God to be true on the basis of our trust in Him, for, as the hymn goes, "unless truth Himself speaks truly, there is nothing true." Moreover, this leads to an immeasurable expansion of our knowledge, for we then come to know God and creation not only from our own limited perspective, but from the vantage point of God Himself—the ultimate vantage point upon reality.

'Credere in Deum' means believing into God.

It is trustful surrender to God on the basis of our trust in Him and His word. Because we have come to trust God and His word, in this final movement of faith we learn how to surrender our lives to Him through His word.

This is when faith becomes most personal, a daily existential task that we strive to realise over the course of life, together with all its circumstances, in all its vagaries. This is the challenge of daily conversion, a challenge we rise to by daily turning toward God while we face the joys and sorrows of life. In this daily turning toward the face of God, our faith matures as we progressively learn to surrender ourselves to Him in all things, so that our faith finally ripens into fulsome friendship with Him. This is the goal of our lives, to personally surrender to the friendship of God by learning to live in collaboration with Him toward an intimate union of life and love. Faith is the means, friendship the end.

Friendship with God

Christ taught us all this directly and with great simplicity. He says, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (Jn. 15:15). Though we often pass over these and similar words in the Sacred Scriptures without grasping their proper significance, we need to tend to these words in particular in order to enter into the depth of their meaning, a meaning that has unparalleled significance for us.

We do so by reflecting on what it could possibly mean for God to call us who are His creatures His friends, for naturally speaking, friendship with God is impossible.

Since friendship in general is possible only on the basis of some equality of being and life, and since God is the Creator and we are His creatures, there is no natural equality of being and life, and so no basis for the possibility of friendship. Yet, when God became man and assumed human nature in the Incarnation, He opened for us the amazing possibility of entering into friendship with Him. As the hymn recounted by St Paul explains:

"Though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death – even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:6-8).

This central event of human history creates the possibility of friendship with God. In coming to know Jesus Christ and experiencing His goodness as the Word of God, we have the foundation of our trust in Him, and the basis of our friendship with Him. Our friendship then develops and deepens when we learn to take His words to ourselves as true and ponder them in our hearts—in like manner to the way they were pondered by the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is in and through this pondering that the Christian faith takes its proper shape in our souls and our lives are transformed in such a way that we are made capable of returning His friendship with our own.

Friendship in action

This return of our own friendship for God stabilises as we develop the virtues of Christ in our lives, and thus gradually learn what it means to be His faithful friend. Christ teaches us exactly what this looks like when it is brought to completion, both by telling us what true friendship is, and by exhibiting such friendship in his own life. First, He says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." (Jn. 15:14). Hence, we are the friends of God if we come to know Him and His will, and if we then match this knowledge with the conformity of our own wills with His through the decisions we make and the actions we perform.

Then, He clarifies, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (Jn. 15:13). This means that our friendship is brought to its proper completion when we are prepared to lay down our lives for God.

Both features are then exhibited in the life Jesus Himself. He is both perfectly obedient to the Father, and He lays down His life for the Father and for us. Through His loving actions we see the nature of friendship writ large, and, more importantly, we are given the power to do the same with our own lives—to listen to and live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Father and lay down our lives in service of this truth. Should this love actually come to animate our hearts, infuse our disposition, and bear fruit in action, then we will know ourselves as friends of the divine.

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A married couple enjoy a quiet moment together at home. Photo: CNS/Lisa Johnston, St Louis Review.



This is an American 18th century painting entitled 'Christ on the Road to Emmaus', c, 1725/1730. Photo: OSV News /courtesy National Gallery of Art.

SAINTS IN A YEAR

ST CHARLES BORROMEO AND THE SYNODAL PATHWAY

FR BILLY SWAN

On Saturday October 17, the National Synodal Assembly took place in Gormanstown, Co. Meath. Following this Assembly, the synodal journey now enters a new phase of implementation so that our parishes and dioceses become more synodal spaces and fit for the challenges of mission today. As it has been said many times, the synodal process is not something new but rather a retrieval of a way of being Church that was seen in times past. On November 4, the Church celebrates the feast day of a saint who lead a synodal Church in his day, with great commitment and a resolve to reform.

Charles Borromeo was born in Arona, Italy, in 1538. He became a priest at 25 and two years later, he was chosen to be Archbishop of Milan which was the largest archdiocese in Italy with about 3,000 priests and 800,000 people. He was a nephew of the pope at the time - Pope Pius IV, who invited him to take part in the final stages of the Council of Trent. This detail is important for it introduced Charles to the work of a synod when the Church gathers to discern matters of doctrine and pastoral care. For the next 21 years, Charles worked tirelessly to implement the reforms of the Council across his archdiocese, meeting with people and priests and providing the spiritual leadership required for his reforms to be successful. There are a number of hallmarks of the ministry of St Charles that are important to note.



'Intercession of Charles Borromeo supported by the Virgin Mary' by Johann Michael Rottmayr, 1714. Photo: Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

Strengths

First, he was close to his people. As a servant of God and father to his people, Charles was an outstanding example of a bishop whose care for the people was tested by fire. In the 1570's, Milan was struck by a plague that was made worse by a shortage of food that left many people malnourished and more at risk of disease. Faithful to his episcopal motto 'Humilitatis' or 'Humility', he visited and comforted the sick, sparing no expense of his own to care for the afflicted. His example of pastoral care, compassion and spiritual leadership made the people of Milan look upon him as one of their own and yet as their true shepherd and priest.

Second, he was an exemplary teacher of the Gospel. Following the Council of Trent, Charles dedicated himself to the reform of the Church, not just structurally but spiritually. He supervised the writing of a new catechism in a language and style that made the possibility of faith more accessible and attractive. He formed a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine for catechists and might be regarded as the founder of the Sunday School model for helping people engage more meaningfully with the Gospel and to grow in faith.

With all his reforms, Charles' great instrument was the synod. He made a pastoral visitation of the whole archdiocese three separate times – a feat that was extraordinary given the limited means of transportation and the size of the Archdiocese of Milan. He founded seminaries, built churches, schools, colleges and hospitals. He achieved all of this, not by working alone, but with other people whose respect he earned over many years. In all, he held about eleven diocesan synods as well as a number of provincial councils. These were not democratic assemblies but occasions when Charles could present to the whole archdiocese the findings of his journeys and visitations. They were also opportunities for him to teach the faith at which he excelled.

Finally, Charles courageously renewed ecclesial structures to make them fit for purpose and fit for mission. He encouraged priests, deacons and religious to believe in the strength of prayer, penance and encouraging a love of holiness. He famously said that "souls are won only on one's knees". His warning to priests against activism at the expense of prayer and self-care has huge relevance for priests today.

"Like many of the saints in every age, Charles is remembered as a great reformer. From the life of St Charles, we see that structural reform is not enough. What matters most is a spiritual reform"

Reformer

To summarise what we can learn from the witness of St Charles. First, the synodal pathway is a route for the Church for greater communion with God and each other. Through many gatherings of the Church, Charles drew close to his flock and because he did, his teaching of the Gospel was heard and was effective. Second, being synodal is at the service of our primary mission which is bring all people into communion with Christ and his Church. St Charles was a man of God and shared his intimate knowledge of God with his people to whom he drew close. During the councils, synods and gatherings convoked by Charles, the process and the message converged on the person of the Redeemer. Third, like many of the saints in every age, Charles is remembered as a great reformer. From the life of St Charles, we see that structural reform is not enough. What matters most is a spiritual reform. For in the words of Charles: "Nothing pleases God more than to be his son's helpers and to undertake the charge of saving souls".

On this feast of St Charles Borromeo, may each of us become reformers of the Church from within, beginning with ourselves.

QUESTIONS OF FAITH?

IF THE CHURCH'S LAW IS SILENT ON HOLDING HANDS DURING THE 'OUR FATHER,' CAN'T PEOPLE INTERPRET IT AS BEING APPROPRIATE?

JENNA MARIE COOPER



Q: In a recent column you wrote that it "wasn't appropriate" to hold hands during the "Our Father" at Mass, because the Church's law is silent on this point. But couldn't you read it the opposite way, meaning that since it's not actually forbidden then it should be allowed? My family has always held hands during the "Our Father" and I don't see why we should have to give that up.

A: You make a reasonable point about the Church's silence in paragraph 81 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) regarding the posture or gestures of the faithful during the "Our Father." However, I would say there are a few reasons why silence in the Church's law isn't necessarily the same thing as a 'blank check' allowing for absolute freedom or creativity.

Although many people assume the Catholic Church loves making nit-picky rules, the Church's law actually works from the standpoint of presuming (for better or worse!) the good faith and common sense of those whom it governs. That is, the Church actually leans more towards under-legislating rather than over-legislating, and often things will only become explicitly prohibited if they are causing serious and widespread problems.

To give a fairly ridiculous example, the Church's law is also completely silent on whether or not a priest can use bad language or swear words during his homily. Yet, this would clearly be a wildly inappropriate and offensive thing to do! Since it is already so obvious to everyone that a priest shouldn't swear in his homily, there is no need to make a special rule against this.

> "The only people who are guilty of the canonical crime of abortion are those who were directly involved in bringing about a specific abortion in real life"

Circling back to your concerns, keep in mind that when I receive questions, I only know the limited information of what the writer chooses to tell me. With the earlier column you referenced, it seemed to me that it was a situation where the entire parish had a custom of hand-holding during the "Our Father," and their parish priest was trying to lead them away from this.

Often when a whole parish has this practice, there can a common misconception that everyone must hold hands in that parish, or even – for those that might not have had the time or interest to read through the General Instruction of the Roman Missal for themselves – that hand-holding during the "Our Father" is what the Church actually requires.

If this were what was happening, then the individual parish community would in a sense be creating a new pseudo-law, or essentially adding to the Church's liturgy on their own initiative which is not licit and is against the very nature of the liturgy as the official prayer of the Church.

In such a scenario, the priest would do well to curb this practice. And it should be noted that, as per GIRM 43: "With a view to a uniformity in gestures and bodily postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the instructions which the Deacon ... or the Priest gives."

Admittedly, individuals or families that spontaneously and discreetly hold hands among themselves during the "Our Father" is a different situation and more of a grey area. It could be reasonably observed that the Church doesn't forbid this any more than she forbids other personal gestures during the Mass, like crossing one's arms during the homily or holding a restless toddler during the general intercessions.

Still, my own thought is that in the case of the Church's silence on a point of law, it's always good to try to "think with the Church" and consider the broader nature and purpose of the situation at hand.

While fellowship with our neighbours is praiseworthy, the "task" of praying the "Our Father" at Mass is more about focusing on God and preparing ourselves for holy Communion. So it might be worth prayerfully reflecting on whether holding hands during the "Our Father" furthers this goal, or whether it may potentially distract from it.

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

SCRIPTURE

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: BECOMING COMMUNITIES OF PEACE

DR JESSIE ROGERS

Our longing for peace is often directed toward the world stage, to wars, to political negotiations, to those we believe have the power to bring violence to an end. But what about our own agency closer to home? Are we making peace or undermining it in our own relationships and communities?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20). He then gives six examples of what this righteousness looks like in practice. Each begins with something his listeners have already heard, followed by Jesus' own teaching: "But I say to you …" The first concerns murder, anger and reconciliation; the last concerns love of enemies.

When Jesus quotes the commandment 'You shall not kill', he immediately highlights anger, insults and contempt (Matt 5:21-22). Long before anyone raises a hand against another, relationships may already be damaged by seemingly small acts of aggression. Jesus warns against the everyday hostility that erodes the relationships on which peace depends.

Reconciliation begins close to home

Jesus goes on to instruct his disciples: "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5:23–24). Notice that Jesus asks the person who knows someone else has an issue with them to take the initiative.

Of course, reconciliation works both ways, but there is something challenging about being asked to act when we might not consider ourselves the injured party. It is about paying attention to the quality of our relationships and recognising when something needs to be put right.

I am also struck by the priority that Jesus gives to reconciliation. If there is something breaking a right relationship between you and someone else in the community, you are to attend to it before worship. Leave your offering at the altar, go and be reconciled, and then return to offer your gift. Reconciliation matters even more than fulfilling our religious obligations. Perhaps the willingness to reconcile with others is the most important gift we have to offer God.

Immediately after, Jesus continues with another example where reconciliation is needed: "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him" (Matt 5:25-26). The first example imagined a breakdown in relationships within the community, the second places reconciliation in the context of a legal dispute. Jesus is concerned not only about the attitudes that lead to conflict, but also about taking action before a disagreement becomes more destructive.

Peacemaking requires active efforts to de-escalate conflict. Jesus does not simply tell us to avoid anger. He describes what it might mean to interrupt its destructive consequences.



Catholic Archbishop Eamon Martin and Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell, who have worked together on peace and reconciliation initiatives, pictured in Armagh. Photo: CNS/Sarah Mac Donald.

Love your enemy

Jesus does not stop with reconciliation among those who already belong to our communities. Towards the end of Matthew 5, he makes an even more challenging demand:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:43–44).

There is an interesting detail here. The command to love your neighbour comes from Leviticus 19:18, but the command to hate your enemy does not. In fact, Israel's Scriptures also speak of loving the foreigner (Lev 19:34) and helping an enemy whose animal has strayed or fallen under its burden (Exod 23:4–5). Jesus is not simply replacing an Old Testament ethic of hatred with a New Testament ethic of love. Rather, he is challenging the ways in which people draw boundaries around those whom they consider worthy of their love and concern.

I am reminded of Tanita Tikaram's song 'Good Tradition', with its striking phrase, "a good tradition of love and hate." Communities are often built around shared loves and shared hates. We know who we are for, partly because we know who we are against. A shared enemy can bring people together, even when that enemy is simply someone identified as different.

Jesus explicitly rejects this mechanism of community formation. We cannot nurture hostility towards outsiders while claiming to be communities of peace. One of the cornerstones of being a peacemaker is learning to redefine who belongs. Reconciliation restores broken relationships, but Jesus asks something more, that we reconsider the very boundaries of community itself. What if our sense of belonging did not depend upon having someone to exclude?

Practical

Jesus also gives us something practical to do: "Pray for those who persecute you." It is difficult enough to summon up feelings of love for people who annoy us, never mind those we might regard as enemies.

But Jesus does not ask us to begin with feelings of love. He asks us to pray. In my own experience, this can be a profoundly transformative practice. Prayer may begin with rehearsing before God all the reasons we dislike someone, even all the reasons God should intervene against them! But as we continue to pray, particularly as we ask God to bless them, our own attitudes can begin to change. We may find ourselves less able to confine the other person to the categories in which we have placed them.

This does not excuse wrongdoing or mean that reconciliation is always possible. But prayer can gradually open us to seeing another person differently.

Pay attention to the reason Jesus gives for loving our enemies: "so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:45). Remember the Beatitude? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Children show something of their parent's character. Our God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45). God's generosity is not confined to those whom we think deserve it.

Jesus presses the point further. "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (Matt 5:46). If you greet only your 'own', what are you doing that is extraordinary? Even those whom you regard as outsiders do that! Jesus is not dismissing the importance of loving those closest to us. He is asking what distinguishes a community shaped by God's reign from any other community. If our love extends only to those we consider to be 'us', how do we resemble the God who sends rain and sunshine on everyone?

Jesus concludes this section of the Sermon on the Mount with a rather daunting instruction: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). The Greek word teleios, translated as 'perfect', carries the sense of completeness or wholeness. In this context, Jesus is not simply demanding flawless moral behaviour. He has been speaking about the love of God that extends beyond the boundaries we draw between friends and enemies, good and bad, insiders and outsiders.

The perfection to which he calls his disciples is a love that is not limited to those who love us in return. To be children of this God is to learn something of that generosity, allowing our concern for others to extend beyond the boundaries of our own communities. Peacemaking begins with reconciliation in the relationships closest to us, but it leads us towards a radically inclusive understanding of community. Perhaps the wholeness to which Jesus calls us is not something we can achieve while there are still people we are content to leave outside the circle of our concern.

FEATURE

WALKING TO ASSISI IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST FRANCIS



Johnny Higgins



Members of the Irish pilgrimage group pictured outside the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi during the Go Assisi festival. Photo: Johnny Higgins.

When the Holy Spirit calls on you to go on pilgrimage one must follow this command. This was a call which I received in the modern incarnation of a notification in a Young Irish Catholic WhatsApp group. The post was made by the Franciscan community of Galway where Brothers Ronan and Jacopo had announced that they would be bringing the first Irish group to the Go Assisi festival, where the group would arrive after a four-day pilgrimage. Added into the appeal was a Papal Mass with Pope Leo at the Papal Basilica of St Mary of the Angels, during the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis.

Being a native of Clonmel in Co. Tipperary I always had an affiliation towards the Franciscans, as we had a beautiful friary for over 700 years in the town which sorrowfully closed in 2023. In partaking in the pilgrimage, I saw it as an opportunity to live and breathe the Franciscan experience which was no longer available in my locality.

Discussion

The first step began with a discussion with Brothers Ronan and Jacopo. They explained that this was not a typical holiday: there would be elements which would test you spiritually and physically but, as a result, you would come away with a changed outlook on living in simplicity and a clear faith in God's path which is laid out for you. They also explained that physically carrying our luggage would symbolise a weight which we may be carrying in our minds in everyday life that may need to be relinquished for our inner peace.

When we arrived in Rome we first had Mass at the airport. It was immensely peaceful to take time in a stressful and at times chaotic environment to sit with God and reflect on what we hoped to achieve from the days ahead. This was followed by a four-hour bus journey to Città di Castello in Umbria, where we stayed in the now vacant convent of the Poor Clares.

The following morning we began our first leg of the walk to Umbertide at 6.30am after Morning Prayer. This was the first taste of a walk akin to the Roman Legion's marches two thousand years ago through fields of sunflowers, tobacco and tomato plants. As the temperature steadily increased to 39C, one would be lying to say it was an easy task, but it was the figurative cross to carry in order to reach Assisi in the Franciscan manner. The motivation of knowing we would see the Pope also gave us energy when lagging in such heat. With water and a lot of prayer, one can press on further than initially imagined.

The next destination after Umbertide was Farneto, where at the Friary of Santissima Pietà we were treated to homemade olive oil and vegetables grown on site by the postulants. Speaking to one by the name of Davide about his journey from a successful engineer to a Franciscan Religious, it became clear to me that the future of the Franciscans was very bright.

The third day of our walk was our procession to Assisi. As we made our way through the Umbrian hills and cornfields, the physical and spiritual goal of reaching Assisi was at the forefront of our hearts and minds. When Assisi came into sight, Brother Jacopo pointed out that we were walking through the terrain where St Francis was defeated in battle and humiliated as a young soldier, which started a turning point in his life towards one of poverty and service to the poor. Walking through where such a realisation happened for the saint was both fascinating and an honour.

Immediately on our arrival to Assisi, we were called to process from the bottom of the Piazza into the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels and through the doors of the little chapel of the Porziuncola. When we were called out to "this is a group from Ireland", this was the first time that was ever announced in the 44 years since the Marcia Francescana began in 1982 and hopefully not the last. As we kissed the ground to mark our journey's completion we were greeted with the moving words of "Welcome Home!" by the people of Assisi.

Our accommodation in Assisi was with Franciscan Sisters predominantly from Africa and Asia. It was incredible to meet and speak with the Sisters and gain a first-hand insight into the challenges and persecution Christians have to live with in parts of the world where they are a minority. During the days before the Papal Mass we also had the pleasure of visiting places associated with St Francis and St Clare, as well as the tomb of Carlo Acutis.

On August 6 came the event that will live with us forever: our first-hand experience of seeing Pope Leo at the Papal Mass inside the Papal Basilica of St Mary of the Angels and directly in front of the little chapel of the Porziuncola. Due to strict security measures we entered the building four hours before the Mass began. As the hours ticked by the excitement grew and, as the screens inside the church showed Pope Leo's car arrive, the atmosphere was almost as raucous as a Milan football derby, with chants of "Papa Leone!" ringing through the church.

Privileged

As a group we were privileged to be standing a few feet away from the Pope as he entered the church. Although holding the office of the Pope, the Holy Father walked in with the grace and humility of a humble shepherd, calmly smiling with no sense of grandiosity. We were so close to him that one was longing to reach out a hand and fulfil a lifetime dream of meeting him. Unfortunately, at least on this occasion, this was a moment which will have to wait for another day.

To sit in the presence of the Holy Father and watch him present the Gospel to the congregation and consecrate the Body of Christ was a godly experience which words simply cannot do justice. Aisling O'Rourke made our group immensely proud by reading a prayer of the faithful during the Mass.

As Pope Leo concluded the Mass, joyous shouts of "Viva Papa Leone!" filled the basilica. The Holy Spirit was clearly alight in the next generation of young Catholics, with passion and fervour for the faith alive and well in spite of the challenges which the Church faces from the modern and secular realm. As Pope Leo walked out of the Basilica, it was apparent that we had been in the presence of a humble but extraordinary servant of God. Needless to say, I said one final prayer that I would be some feet closer on another occasion and get to meet him.

After the Papal Mass, we got the train back to Rome to then fly home to Dublin. Brothers Ronan and Jacopo left us with the wise and true guidance that "the Pilgrimage continues in your day to day life" when you are home; it does not end in Umbria or Rome. I have learned that our spiritual journey only concludes when you are with God in heaven for eternity. Until then we are all on Pilgrimage.

Viva Papa Leone!

DISCOVERING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND HIS ULTIMATE GIFT OF GRACE

Our faith is trustful surrender to the one we already know, in whom 'we live and move and have our being', writes

Dr Robert McNamara



A woman prays at St Cajetan Church in Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 7, 2022, during feast day celebrations for St Cajetan, patron saint of labour and bread. Photo: OSV News/Agustin Marcarian, Reuters.

One of the most pervasive and pernicious lies of the modern era bears reference to the nature of faith. By many today faith is unthinkingly taken to be blind belief in God in the face of an obvious lack of evidence, or even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Yet this is not the nature of faith. Faith is not blind, nor is it irrational, and it is certainly not foolish. We have seen all this already in previous articles, but this earlier explanation of the reasonability of faith is entirely groundless if we don't come to know God. We can have a genuinely grounded faith only if we must come to know God – both 'that' He exists and 'what' He is, His existence and power. Accordingly, we turn to this question in the present article – the question of the existence and nature of God.

Now, despite the exalted character of the conclusion, we begin our way to God very simply. When we encounter the world and its many things, we are arrested by the experience of wonder: we wonder at our wonderful world. In our better days, this means that we are awe struck by at its majesty, but even in our worse days, we are caught up in wondering about the nature of things and their meaningfulness. We see this latter movement of wonder in every question we ask, in all our inquiries and explorations, for from the child to the adult, we are questioning beings – this is the primary dynamism of the human mind.

Why

We begin by asking 'what' things are and 'how' things work, before proceeding to ask 'why' things are the way they are. 'What' and 'how,' these are our most basic questions, and they open outward toward the further question, 'why,' the most interesting of questions.

This last question arises naturally out of the 'what' and 'how,' and grows in intensity as its path is traversed and preliminary answers are attained. We intuit that our questioning spirit is satisfied only when we find an answer to this question, for questioning 'why' leads us right to the origin and end of things. We dearly want to know the source of things, and we even more dearly want to know their ultimate purpose. This provides us with a sense of their meaning.

Now, on the basis of this questioning and the answers we attain, we can come to an insight of primary significance. When we reflect upon what we have experienced, on everything that we have experienced, we notice that nothing we have ever encountered wholly accounts for itself. Nothing explains itself. Indeed, if we ever encountered something that explains itself, 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' it is, we would have discovered something that is its own origin and end – something necessary, something that is, was, and always will be. But there is nothing like this in the field of our experience. Nothing. Everything we have ever encountered is manifestly caused, and we can search out its causes, getting answers at all turns. The whole of our rational life is based on this search and find, this seeking of reasons and this getting of answers.

Therefore, on the basis of this insight, we simply must ask the question: from whence has everything come? Is there any explanation to be found?

There most certainly is; and again, the path of reasoning is quite simple: If everything we have ever encountered is manifestly caused and in need of explanation, then we have an explanation of the existence of all things only if we conclude to an uncaused cause that wholly explains itself and everything else. This is a necessary conclusion on the basis of the facts – it is a conclusion we simply must make if our questioning is to find a sufficient explanation.

Plainly restated, the fact of the existence of things that don't explain themselves can be explained only by concluding to a being that wholly explains itself and everything else. And this is God.

Existence

On the basis of this same path of reasoning, by pulling on the thread of various features of the natural world, we can come to know not only of the existence of God but of a whole array of key divine attributes. We can come to know that God is the completed fullness of being, prepossessing in Himself all perfection; that He is all powerful and all perfect, immutable and eternal; that He is goodness, truth, and beauty itself. Again, we can come to know that God is a personal being, intellectual and free, wise and loving, that He is our creator, the beginning and end of all things, and that His deity is manifest in absolutely everything and in absolutely every way. Finally, we can know that God cares for us and provides for us, that he is interested in our lives and seeks us out, and that He wants a relationship with us and is attentive to how our lives unfold.

Now, all this we can know – not just believe, but know. This is why the Psalmist says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.' (Ps. 19:1). And this is why

> "Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason"

St Paul clarifies, 'What can be known about God is plain to men, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.' (Rom. 1:19-20).

And this is why the Catholic Church – in the document Dei Filius [Son of God] of the First Vatican Council – declares that "Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason." And it is also why, in quoting this document, the Catechism of the Catholic Church continues, "Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God's revelation."

This "welcome of God's revelation" is faith itself.

God reveals Himself to us who have been made to His image, and those who have faith hear His voice and respond to His word with trust – in God Himself and in His word. But, as the Catechism clarifies above, our faithful trust in God is grounded in our natural capacity to know Him. Because we can know God naturally, we can entrust ourselves to Him supernaturally, because our natural knowledge of God enables us to hear and heed His words – and thus surrender our lives to Him. Otherwise stated, since God is truth itself, we can trust Him, and since God is goodness itself, we can surrender to Him. This is faith. And it is built upon the foundation of nature, which it then perfects.

And this is why the Catholic Church calls natural knowledge of God a preamble to faith. It is the path we walk (amble) in a purely natural way before (pre-) we learn to ascend "the mountain of the Lord with clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 23:4). This ascension is faith, and it is wholly necessary to ascend this mountain if we are to rise to meet God and experience His presence. This ascent is then also essential to becoming fully human and attaining our own individual stature as beings created to God's image. Yet we set out on this ascent of faith with due fervour and solidity only if we are deeply rooted in our created nature by leaning into what can be gleamed of God on the above detailed purely natural foundation.

Vital

And it is precisely here that we find the vital key that unlocks the mystery of the relationship of faith and reason. This key is grace – the ultimate gift of God. It is a gift that makes possible the life of faith, and it is a gift that comes together with the life of faith. As beings endowed with reason, we are made for God, and faith brings this natural orientation toward God to its proper completion via the gift of grace. While reason charts our initial course toward God via creation, grace-filled faith takes over by uniting our search for God with His own self-revelation. Faith is then well understood as our personal answer to the God who has revealed Himself to us. Should we seek God and rise toward Him in faith, we then begin to live a life of adventure – for, as St Irenaeus has taught us, "the glory of God is man fully alive."

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The likeness of St Irenaeus of Lyon is pictured in a stained-glass window at the Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate in Guelph, Ontario. Photo: OSV News file/The Crosiers.



This is an American 18th century painting entitled 'Christ on the Road to Emmaus', c, 1725/1730. Photo: OSV News /courtesy National Gallery of Art.

SAINTS IN A YEAR

ALL THE SAINTS OF IRELAND AND THE NEED FOR MORE OF THEM

FR BILLY SWAN

Thomas Merton, the great American spiritual writer of the last century, told the story of a conversation with a friend that changed his life. His friend asked him one day what he would like to be in life. Merton answered: "A good Catholic". His friend reminded him that his desire was too narrow and too weak. "What you should desire most of all is to be saint" his friend said. "All that is necessary to be a saint is to want to become one. Don't you believe that God will make you what he created you to be, if you will allow him to do it? All you have to do is desire it" (From Seven Storey Mountain).

On Friday. November 6, we celebrate the feast of All the Saints of Ireland when we honour the great army of women and men from the past whose lives are a great source of inspiration to us of how to live a good Christian life today. But instead of focusing exclusively on the Irish saints of the past, what about the Irish saints of the present and the future? Who will they be? Do we want to be saints? Probably not. Why? Because, like the younger Merton, we think that to be a saint is to be perfect which we are not and secondly because we don't want to be. We prefer instead to keep a safe distance from God for fear he will ask too much of us. We prefer to keep our friendship with Him on our terms.

Place

For St Paul, to be a baptised Christian is to take our place among the saints (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). We belong to the communion of saints in the family of the Church that is composed of the pilgrim Church here on earth, the Church in heaven and the Holy Souls. We are united to them in God for all the baptised form part of the Body of Christ.

Recent Popes have reminded us of our call to be saints. On World Youth Day 1999, Pope St John Paul II addressed these words to the young people of the world: "Dear young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Pope Benedict XVI often shared his conviction that the greatest argument for the credibility of the faith against every objection is the witness of the saints and the beauty their lives have produced. In his Apostolic Exhortation, Rejoice and Be Glad, Pope Francis wrote about "the saints next door" and encouraged all of us to live our call to holiness in everyday life. In September this year, Pope Leo XIV spoke to 80,000 young people and said to them: "You are the saints of France".

In the same spirit, Christ is saying the same to Irish Christians: "Do not be afraid to be the saints of Ireland today! Do not be afraid to saints in your own home, in your school, in your work and in your parish. Do not be afraid to carry God's light of goodness, truth and beauty to everyone who is part of your life. Do not be afraid to be the salt of the earth and light to the world!"

"Take this light of Christ into all areas of your life. Bear that light of truth and apply that Gospel wisdom to every nook and cranny of Irish culture. Bring the Gospel's power of healing, forgiveness and peace to the people and places that need it most. Love our nation and all her people. Know our history, both its light and shadows. Believe in the good that God is doing in your life. Come together with your peers in the Church to support each other in faith. Trust in the beauty that your life is generating when we are faithful to Christ and the Gospel."



A stained glass window from St Muredach's Cathedral, Ballina, Co. Mayo, Ireland, featuring saints Laurence O'Toole, Patrick, Bridget, Kevin, and in the lower row the Muredach, Dympna, Asicus, and Columbkill. Photo: Wikimedia Commons / Andreas F. Borchert.

"Be witnesses to hope and to an alternative way of life that does not settle for mediocrity. Fall in love with Jesus Christ. Become fascinated with his life and his story. Allow him to win your heart. Allow the saints to help and inspire you. They know our challenges for they faced them too. They are with us and wait for us to join them once our earthly life comes to an end".

Honour

How important it is to honour the saints of the past but doing so calls forth the saints of the future! The world needs new saints today like never before. Ireland needs new saints like never before. The only thing stopping us being saints is not our faults but our desire. Desire to become a saint. The French novelist Leon Bloy once said that "the only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint". Think of our call to become saints in Ireland in 2026. This is our calling. Know it. Want it. Embrace it.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: JESUS THE PEACEMAKER IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

DR JESSIE ROGERS

Jesus blesses peacemakers, commands his followers to love their enemies, and challenges them to respond to injustice without resorting to violence. But what about Jesus' own ministry? What does Jesus actually do to bring about peace? Luke's Gospel provides some insightful answers.

Peace announced

The Gospel writer uses canticles (songs) inserted into the stories of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus to signpost some of the key themes of the Gospel. Zechariah celebrates God's coming rescue of God's people, including the forgiveness of sins, and looks forward to God guiding our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79). The angels announce peace on earth as the gift of God's favour (Luke 2:14), while Simeon speaks of the peace of hope fulfilled as he holds the Christ child in his arms (Luke 2:29).

Mary's Magnificat is perhaps the most radical. She celebrates the great reversal that God is bringing about: the powerful brought down from their thrones, the lowly lifted up, the hungry filled and the rich sent away empty (Luke 1:52-53). Liberation for some may mean the loss of privilege for others.

Another place that the evangelist signals key themes is at the opening of Jesus' public ministry, in the announcement of his mission in the synagogue in Nazareth. Reading from Isaiah, Jesus declares that he has been sent to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18–19). This is a vision of peace as liberation, an active intervention for human flourishing. The passage in Isaiah continues with the announcement of "the day of vengeance of our God", but Jesus leaves that out. God is coming to set people free, but Jesus does not couple that freedom with the destruction of enemies.

Peace as liberation

The first deed of power that Luke narrates after Jesus' announcement at Nazareth is an exorcism (Luke 4:31–37). Jesus confronts and expels the powers that hold human beings captive. Later, Jesus explains his exorcisms by saying, "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). He describes his work via a parable of a strong man being overcome by someone stronger who plunders their treasures (Luke 11:21-22). Every exorcism is a sign that the kingdom of God is displacing the powers that destroy human flourishing.

There is something important here for our understanding of peacemaking. The language of demons may seem strange to modern readers, but we recognise the reality of destructive forces that take hold of people and communities, shaping their behaviour and sometimes overwhelming their freedom. There are powers at work in our world, embedded in structures and systems, that keep people in poverty, deny them dignity and stand against human flourishing. Jesus recognises that such forces must be confronted and overcome. But how are these powers to be overcome? It is striking that Jesus generally drives out unclean spirits with a command. He does not overcome with violence. The coming of God's reign means that the powers of darkness are being pushed back so that life can flourish. Sometimes it means confronting and overcoming the very powers that make shalom impossible.

"Go in peace"

Twice in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells a woman, "Go in peace." These are beautiful stories of how Jesus brings about wholeness in people's lives. In Luke 7, a woman known in the community as a sinner enters the house where Jesus is dining and anoints his feet. Simon the Pharisee, Jesus' host, is scandalised. But Jesus turns the situation around. He draws attention to her extravagant expression of love and gratitude, rather than allowing her to be defined by her reputation. He declares her sins forgiven, commends her faith and sends her away in peace.

In the following chapter, another woman approaches Jesus. She has suffered from bleeding for twelve years and has been unable to find healing. She comes up behind Jesus in the crowd and touches his clothing. Immediately she is healed. She might have slipped away, taking her healing with her, but Jesus stops and asks who touched him. When she comes forward and tells her story, Jesus addresses her as "daughter". He commends her faith and says, "Go in peace" (Luke 8:48).

But something more happens in this encounter. She is seen, affirmed and publicly acknowledged. Instead, she can tell the story of how Jesus recognised her faith and called her daughter.

In both encounters, Jesus restores dignity and belonging. This is shalom, the Hebrew understanding of peace as wholeness, wellbeing and flourishing. It is the peace that follows forgiveness, healing, acceptance and restored relationships. Jesus is not merely wishing these women peace. He has actively brought peace into their lives.

Peace around the table

One of the most striking ways Jesus makes peace in Luke's Gospel is through table fellowship. Meals are never simply about eating. Sharing a meal creates or cements relationships and obligations.

Jesus eats with all sorts of people. He shares meals with tax collectors and those labelled sinners, but he also accepts invitations from Pharisees. Those meals frequently have an undercurrent of suspicion and judgement. Jesus, in turn, challenges their assumptions about status, purity and belonging.

At one such meal, Jesus notices how the guests are choosing places of honour. He challenges his host to invite those who cannot repay him: the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind (Luke 14:12–14). Table fellowship should not simply reinforce existing relationships of privilege and mutual obligation. It can become a way of creating community and welcome.

Unsurprisingly, Jesus' inclusive table fellowship provokes resistance. The religious leaders grumble that he welcomes sinners and eats with them (Luke 15:1–2). By eating with people whom others regard as outsiders, Jesus challenges the boundaries that have been drawn around the community. But he does not respond by excluding those who object. Instead, he tells stories, such as the ones about a lost sheep, a lost coin and two lost sons, inviting his critics to reconsider what God is like. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the older son, angry at his brother's welcome home, is invited to join the celebration.



'Christ and Zacchaeus' by Niels Larsen Stevns, 1913. Photo: Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

The story of Zacchaeus brings together these different dimensions of Jesus' peacemaking (Luke 19:1–10). Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector, a man who has become wealthy through a system associated with exploitation and collaboration with Roman power. When Jesus sees him in the sycamore tree and invites himself to Zacchaeus' house, the crowd grumbles that Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

But this encounter transforms Zacchaeus. He promises to give half his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold anyone he has defrauded. Jesus' welcome does not mean that injustice no longer matters. Jesus declares that salvation has come to this house, "because he too is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). Zacchaeus is restored to the community, but not without a change in how he relates to others. His story shows us how welcome and justice belong together in the work of peacemaking.

Throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus makes peace by restoring what has been broken. He brings freedom to those held captive, dignity to those who have been shamed, forgiveness to sinners and belonging to those who have been excluded. He also challenges the powers and practices that stand in the way of peace. In the biblical sense of shalom, peace is not simply the absence of conflict. It is the flourishing of individuals and communities in right relationship. This is the peace that Jesus brings into people's lives.

"He draws attention to her extravagant expression of love and gratitude, rather than allowing her to be defined by her reputation. He declares her sins forgiven, commends her faith and sends her away in peace"

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

DON'T BE FOOLISH! THE WISDOM OF BEING READY

FR DOMINIK DOMAGALA

Mass Readings:
Wisdom 6:12-16
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13



'The Parable of the Ten Virgins' (section) by Phoebe Traquair, Mansfield Traquair Church, Edinburgh. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

"Don't be foolish!" is an expression most of us have heard from our parents, teachers or someone trying to prevent us from making an avoidable mistake. Yet, when Scripture speaks of foolishness, it is not necessarily referring to a lack of intelligence. A person may be highly educated and remarkably clever, yet still make profoundly foolish decisions. Biblical foolishness is rather the refusal to use the understanding one possesses: choosing what is immediately convenient without considering its ultimate consequences. The readings this Sunday invite us to distinguish between intelligence and wisdom. They speak of the search for wisdom, the reality of death and the coming of Christ, reminding us that earthly existence is not the whole story. A Christian is called to live with the awareness that one day we shall stand before God. The choices we make today therefore have an eternal significance.

Wisdom is not reserved for the powerful (Wisdom 6:12-16)

The first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, describes wisdom as something readily available to those who genuinely desire it: "She is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her." Wisdom is not the exclusive possession of an intellectual elite. She is accessible to anyone who searches sincerely. There is, however, a detail in this Sunday's passage that deserves attention: the author is addressing rulers and those who exercise authority. They are reminded that their position brings greater responsibility before God: "Severe judgement awaits those in high places." The principle is straightforward: the greater the authority entrusted to someone, the greater the responsibility for how it is exercised. This warning, however, cannot be reserved for kings, ministers or political leaders. Most of us exercise some authority over others, whether in our professional lives, within our families, in our parishes or through responsibilities entrusted to us by society.

The author concludes with a striking invitation to rulers: if they desire their thrones and sceptres to endure, they must honour Wisdom. The following psalm expresses the same truth through prayer: "O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting." God Himself is the source of wisdom. To seek Him and allow His commandments to guide our decisions is not an escape from practical life; it is the beginning of genuine wisdom.

We do not grieve like those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

The second reading, from St Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, turns our attention from how we should live to what awaits us beyond death. Paul writes to a community troubled by the death of some of its members. What will happen to those who have died before the return of Christ? Will they be disadvantaged compared with those who remain alive? His answer is intended to bring consolation: "We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have died, to make sure that you do not grieve about them, like the other people who have no hope."

Paul does not suggest that Christians should be indifferent to death or that the loss of someone we love should not cause sorrow. Death remains a painful separation. Christian faith does not eliminate the tears of mourning, but it gives them a different meaning. We grieve, yet not as those who believe that death has the final word. Our hope rests on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because He has passed through death into life, those who belong to Him are called to share in His victory.

Paul's words reach their beautiful conclusion in a sentence that expresses the heart of Christian hope: "We shall stay with the Lord for ever." Heaven is not merely an endless extension of earthly existence. Its deepest meaning is communion with God, being forever with the One who created us, loves us and calls us to share His life. This is the promise that allows Christians to face death without despair.

The oil that cannot be borrowed (Matthew 25:1-13)

The Gospel presents the same eternal perspective through the parable of the ten bridesmaids. Five are described as wise and five as foolish. Jesus is not comparing their intellectual abilities. All ten are waiting for the bridegroom, and all know that he is coming. The difference lies in how they prepare for his arrival.

The bridegroom is delayed, and all ten bridesmaids eventually fall asleep. When the announcement comes that he is approaching, they rise to prepare their lamps. Only then does the difference become apparent: the wise have brought additional oil, while the foolish discover that their lamps are going out. Their request to borrow oil comes too late, and by the time they return, the doors to the wedding feast have been closed. There is an apparent paradox here. Jesus tells His disciples to remain watchful, yet every bridesmaid falls asleep. Surely the distinction is not that some remain physically awake while others do not. The wise women have simply prepared themselves for the possibility of a long wait. Their vigilance consists in being ready even when the bridegroom does not arrive according to their expectations.

This is a valuable lesson for Christian life. We cannot know the day or hour of our death, nor calculate the moment of Christ's final coming. But we can decide how to live while we wait. The oil in our lamps can be understood as the fruit of a life lived according to the Gospel: faith expressed through charity, good works, perseverance and daily fidelity to Christ.

The oil cannot simply be borrowed at the last moment because no one can live another person's life of faithfulness. We cannot rely indefinitely upon the goodness of our parents, the holiness of our grandparents or the good intentions we hope to fulfil one day. Each of us must respond personally to God's grace.

The wisdom of being ready today

The ancient spiritual tradition preserves a short but powerful expression: Memento mori — remember that you must die. It is not an invitation to pessimism or an unhealthy preoccupation with death. Rather, it reminds us that our time is limited and that the opportunity to love, forgive and serve belongs to the present moment. A Christian cannot be satisfied with a respectable past while neglecting the responsibilities of today. Nor should we postpone living faithfully according to the Gospel until circumstances become more convenient.

We sometimes convince ourselves that Christ's demands are unrealistic: that honesty is impractical, forgiveness too difficult or charity something to be attempted when we have more time and resources. Yet the shortcuts offered by the world can lead us away from the very good we seek to achieve. Even within the Church, how many wounds and scandals might have been avoided had we remained faithful to the Gospel?

The wise bridesmaids remind us that preparation for eternity cannot be reduced to a last-minute effort when the Bridegroom is already approaching. It is formed through the ordinary decisions of daily life, often unnoticed by others, in which we choose what is good because Christ has called us to follow Him. We do not know when the Bridegroom will come. But we do know what He asks of us while we wait. The truly wise person is not the one who knows the date of the end, but the one whose lamp is still burning when the Lord arrives.

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THE BITTER BILE OF A LATE GEORGIAN JOURNALIST



Peter Costello
The Books Editor

John Boyle, the Freeholder and pre-Famine Cork Society,
by Neil Cronin
(Four Courts Press / Maynooth Studies in Local History, €12.95 / £11.95)

Thomas McCarthy

The despicable John Boyle was a man of appalling character. His current biographer, Neil Cronin, must have had to hold his nose while shovelling through the toxic detritus of gutter journalism by which Boyle's name has survived.

Boyle always published his own sensational words, firstly through his Boyle's Weekly and more abundantly through the long-surviving Freeholder. The latter newspaper, or, more accurately, periodical, survived for decades by depending entirely on private subscriptions rather than advertising.

The over-excitable Boyle hated pomp and wealth, but he especially detested pompous Cork neighbours: "A blind man would suppose that Cork was all a great military depot, for nothing assails the ears but Colonel Deane, Captain Jack Jones, Captain Harris, Colonel Chatterton, Captain Lloyd and a host of other puppy-headed Militia half-pay Ensigns too insignificant to trouble you with...."

Nor were the clergy of the Established Church safe from Boyle's prurient interest. When, in July 1822, Percy Jocelyn, Anglican bishop of Clogher, was found 'in a compromising position' with a Grenadier guardsman, the Freeholder had a field day. Bishop Jocelyn was not only a Commissioner of the Board of Education but a member of the Society for Discountenancing Vice; in other words, a delightfully perfect target for the gutter press.

Boyle was a typical Regency character and early Victorian. Like Charles Dickens and "Father Prout", he liked to emphasise his "humble origins" as an orphan. But his 1780s background is more nuanced than the blurb for this present monograph might reveal.

Technically, he was an orphan, as his mother had died when he was young, but his father was a woollen merchant who sent him to the most exclusive fee-paying Catholic school in Cork, Fr Keating's Brunswick Street Academy, the forerunner of present day "Christians" or "Pres". No simple orphan would have been able to afford its annual fee of four guineas.

Time spent in an orphanage seems almost a requirement for popular writers in the early Nineteenth Century. Perhaps this myth of humble origins was used by Boyle to justify his vicious adult character and to court public sympathy in his many periods of near bankruptcy.

The fact is, he always seemed to know the right people in Cork, the ones who might bail him out when things got rough. The fact that Boyle survived his own volte-face on the "Veto" issue points to a man with seriously embedded connections in middle-class Cork society.

"The Veto" was the single greatest public obsession in Cork politics of the early Nineteenth Century, greater than arguments over Emancipation or Repeal. "The Veto" referred to a proffered deal by which Catholic Emancipation would be granted provided the English Crown had a veto over the appointment of Catholic bishops.

Cork was virulently "anti-Veto", and Boyle eventually changed the editorial position of the Freeholder to support this view. By 1830 John Boyle was very much the insider, seated beside Daniel O'Connell's Cork agent when nine hundred Repealers sat to dinner in McDonnell's Great Rooms in Patrick St.

Neil Cronin chronicles well the decline of both the Cork economy and the Freeholder in the years after the Battle of Waterloo. Cork became the dreary backwater so well described in Daniel Corkery's masterpiece, The Threshold of Quiet.

Boyle shut down his publication on New Year's Eve in 1831. Cork society became dead quiet, the only obsession was one of escape and exile. The era of wild, vituperative polemic gave way to insufferable anthologies of sentimental songs and poems.

And that long era obscured the fervid putrefaction of John Boyle's Freeholder, a toxic hoard brilliantly unearthed by Neil Cronin in this Four Courts monograph.

"Boyle was a typical Regency character and early Victorian. Like Charles Dickens and "Father Prout", he liked to emphasise his "humble origins" as an orphan. But his 1780s background is more nuanced than the blurb for this present monograph might reveal"

THE LAST ADDITION PERHAPS TO THE 'BLASKET LIBRARY'



Méiní Dunlevy, the Blasket midwife and nurse, in later life. Photo: Leslie Matson.

Méiní: The Blasket Nurse,
by Leslie Matson
(Mercier Press, €15.99 / £13.99)

Peter Costello

This book was first published back in 1999, and I cannot believe that at the time I missed it. But as it has remained in print down to today, I think it worth saying a few words about it now, as for many it will cap what they already know about the literary efflorescence of the Blasket islanders. An interesting book never ages, so they say.

The Blasket writers are authors known to everyone who went to school after the 1930s. Mrs Kennedy's original edition of Péig Sayers story of her life was an Irish text of the Department of Education at my school, so too was Maurice O'Sullivan's Twenty Years A-Growing read for our English course to acquaint us with Irish writers of various kinds.

“Matson records the disdain her husband Seán Eoghain Dunlevy had for O’Crohan and ‘the red lies told by that little scrap of a man’”

O’Sullivan’s book was perhaps better crafted the Péig Sayers book; I still recall the shock of unbelief in my class on reading that scene in her book where the islandmen arrive at her home on mainland, and leave at the end of the evening with the girl still not knowing which one she was engaged to.

If there were aspects of life on the island that Péig’s, her son, and Tomás O’Crohan did not delve into we were not made aware of them.

But in this book the island’s nurse tells a very different story. She was not, needless to say, a State Registered Nurse; she was in fact what the French refer to a sage-femme, the life-wise woman of the community who acts as midwife and health adviser to those around her. She was intimately involved in all matters of life and death on the island. This is a social role which for an anthropologist goes to the heart of community life in every social group.

It is this fact that places this book on the shelf closer to John Messenger’s writings on Aran than to the other island books. We have to keep in mind what psychiatrists call “the West Coast syndrome”, of winter depression among the people after the hectic summer days of the tourists give way to the bleak days of February.

Unusual

The book follows the model provided by the other writers of telling an individual’s life story, through the very unusual career of Mary O’Shea, born about 1876, as Leslie Matson (a retired teacher) has reconstructed it.

She was born in America, in Massachusetts, which was almost an Irish colony. But she was sent back to Ireland and was raised in Kerry by her grandparents. Self -willed, she ran off to the Blaskets to marry a widower.

Matson records the disdain her husband Seán Eoghain Dunlevy had for O’Crohan and “the red lies told by that little scrap of a man” - a question perhaps of “great hatred, little room” perhaps. Here then is another aspect of the Blasket story.

Revelations

Those interested in any way with the Blaskets, as what literate person in Ireland is not, will read this book and Méini’s revelations of life and death on the island, and of the long afterlife of the islanders after the government moved them to the mainland, with great relish, for it contains truths of women’s lives on Blasket not evident, I think, in the other books.

‘FROM THE EDGE OF THE KNOWN’: THE GEOGRAPHY OF GULLIVER’S TRAVELS



Dean Swift, portrait by Offaly-born artist Charles Jervas or Gervais, c. 1710. Photo: Wiki images.

Peter Costello

This year marks the 300th anniversary of the appearance of Gulliver’s Travels in the autumn of 1726 from a printer in London. The publication date is usually held to be November 30, but it is today often compounded with the date of the demented Swift’s death on October 19 (in 1745), which is to be marked this year by various events.

The full title was actually *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World in four parts, by Lemuel Gulliver*, first a surgeon and then a captain of several ships. The book proved to be an immediate success and was quickly translated into several European languages. It even had the dubious tribute of a forged fifth part being issued in London the following year.

Though not at first credited to Dean Swift of Dublin, the book has never been out of print since. To this day it holds permanence as the Irish book most widely held in libraries around the world.

Puzzled

At the time, Swift claimed in a letter to his Catholic friend Alexander Pope that it puzzled a Church of Ireland bishop, who had declared the book was full of improbable lies, “and for his part, he hardly believed a word of it”.

(Swift himself felt much the same way about his rival in the way of imaginary islands, Daniel Defoe: “a grave, sententious dogmatical rogue,” Swift said. Yet Robinson Crusoe brought Defoe a thousand pounds, five times more than the initial publication of Gulliver brought Swift.)

Though intended satirically, in recounting Gulliver’s voyages between 1699 and 1711, Swift was remarkably careful to place his “several realms” into the then current framework of the known world. Or rather, the edge of the unknown world.

Given the little people, the land of giants, the flying island and other episodes, Swift’s savage satire was soon disarmed by converting the text, by excisions of what was considered gross and unsuitable, into a simplified children’s book, often with illustrations. The best of these were by the French artist Grandville and by the modern British artist Rex Whistler. But the illustration by providing a visual narrative also moved Swift himself further into the background.

The original book had no pictures as such. It was decorated with five maps and one diagram, but these formed an essential part of the text, though these days they are as often as not eliminated from popular editions.

The maps are important because they provide a setting for the reports of Surgeon Gulliver, linking his voyages into the context of actual exploration.

The first map, to part one, locates the realm of Lilliput, “discovered in 1699”, as the caption on it reads, as two islands located southeast of the island of Sumatra, towards Van Diemen’s Land, as what was known of Australia, the great southern continent, was then called.

This location is roughly where the Cocos Islands are today. These had been reached in 1609 by a British seaman, but were not settled until the time of 1826 in the reign of George IV, so in Swift’s time they were quite obscure.

Swift conceived Lilliput to be at the very edge of contemporary maritime exploration. This was also true of the other realms. Brobdingnag, the land of the giants, reached by Gulliver in 1703, was located well north of Monterey in California, in Sir Francis Drake’s “New Albion”, claimed by him for England in 1579.

But this region was in obscurity then, for Swift’s map indicates the totally fabulous “Streights of Annian”, which provided, it was thought by some, a channel to connect the Pacific coast with the Atlantic, a sort of counterpart to the Straits of Magellan. The giants lived on a peninsula in what is now the state of Oregon in the USA.

Next Laputa and Balnibarbi are shown as some way east of the “Land of Jesso”, the contemporary name for the Japanese island of Hokkaido. This too was a mystery region, the geography of which was only fully revealed much later by the French navigator La Perouse.

So again the island is placed partly on the edge of the known world. A fourth map is devoted to the scheme of the Island and its strange flying island. This is described as a lodestone, and must owe something to the Muslim legend of the flying tomb of Mohamed, upheld between two giant magnets.

But a large part of this section is devoted to the strange deluded schemes of scientists for improving the world. Among these is a mechanical machine for generating language, worked by a series of wooden handles acting on cubes with inscriptions.

These days this notion brings to mind immediately an ancestor not only of Babbage’s calculating machine, but the activity of the internet and the advent of AI. What was presented by Swift as a ludicrous ambition in the days of George I and the early days of the Royal Society, is now at the leading edge of scientific research.

The final map reveals the location of Houyhnhnms Land, “discovered in 1711”, ruled by intelligent horses. This was on the west coast of Australia, again in those decades before the explorations of Captain Cook, a region of rarely sighted fragments of land rather than fully known territory.

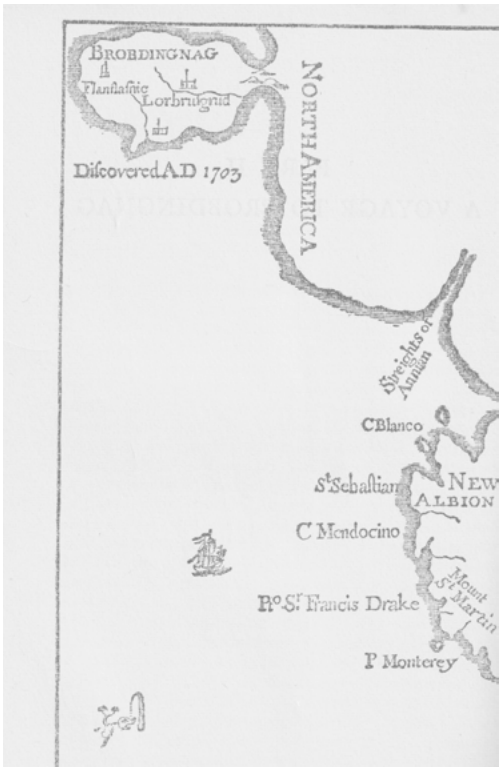
Gulliver describes how after this voyage and his experiences of the superior creatures the Houyhnhnms and the bestial Yahoos, returns at last to his family at Redriff, a popular name

then for Rotherhithe on the south bank of the Thames, home at last among the malodorous Yahoos of Britain.

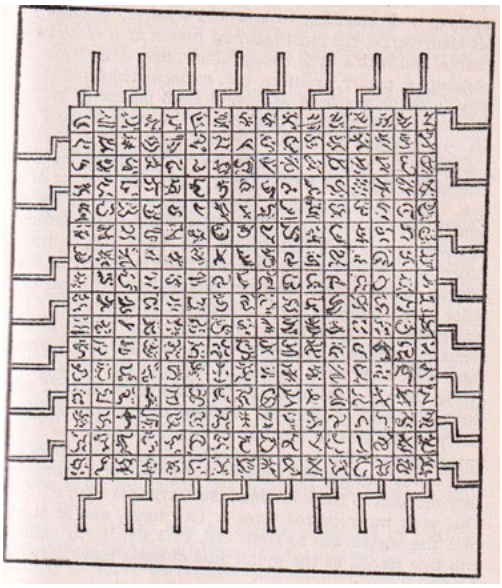
Scathing

These last pages represent Swift's most scathing impressions of the nature of man. However, the idea of the horse as superior being would certainly seem to be a very Irish notion.

As a part of the "Gulliver at 300" celebrations an exhibition has been mounted in the Old Library at Trinity College where a large number of illustrated editions of Gulliver's Travels will be on display, The exhibition can only be visited as part of the standard Old Library Tour, entrance tickets to which must be booked in advance on line for a timed visiting slot.



The Land of the Giants: the location of Brobdingnag, off the then little-known coast of Oregon.



The word machine invented by the Grand Academy of Lagado - an imaginary ancestor of the word processor and AI.

A FREE PRESS IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL OF US



An historian among the honoured dead: Dr David McCullagh at de Valera's grave in Glasnevin. Photo: Courtesy History Ireland.

Freedom of Speech in the Press in Times of Conflict: Historical Perspectives from Ireland and Europe,
ed. by Richard C. Allen, Felix M. Larkin, Oliver O'Hanlon and Aoife Whelan
(Peter Lang, in association with the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies, €49.40 / £36.45)

Peter Costello

Life is short, art is long: this book began its life as a collection of papers read at a conference held a decade ago. But, what with COVID and other delaying factors, such as human frailty, it has only this year seen the light of day. But its insights have not been dimmed by time.

The formal launch of the book was held the other week at the Museum of Literature Ireland, housed now in what earlier generations always thought of as "No 86" and the Aula Maxima of the original UCD, buildings associated with G. M. Hopkins and James Joyce, and indeed the whole founding generations of the modern Irish state.

This was once the home of the Literary and Historical Society, founded by St John Henry Newman, a venue in which many lawyers, politicians and other leading figures of Irish life in many fields - one thinks here of someone like Dr Tony Clare - made their first attempts to mould public opinion in a venue where free speech was both welcomed and encouraged - and it has to be said, comments from the floor of the house.

Notice

A preliminary notice of this book was printed here a while ago, but at the launch the book David McCullagh, the historian and RTÉ correspondent, drew special notice to certain aspects of it especially relevant to the very present moment.

Dr McCullagh, the author of two well received studies of the political career of de Valera, on this occasion was speaking, of course, as an historian.

"All of us who work in the media, or rely on the media, are facing an existential crisis at the moment," he said in part.

"Why buy a newspaper or listen to the radio or watch the television when you can have all the news you need for free online - and who knows, some of it might even be true... But of course there are more serious challenges than the financial. From the Ukraine to Gaza, media workers are, quite literally, in the firing line - we have never seen so many journalists killed simply for doing their job.

"Even if their lives are not under threat, journalists face constant abuse online, and in some countries constant abuse from the government, with attempts to prevent them doing their job by denying access or threatening legal action.

"And when the media is threatened, it doesn't just affect those of us who work in the industry: it threatens our very democracy by undermining the citizen's right to be properly informed."

As regards politicians and their protests, he quoted very appositely the late Enoch Powell, who once said: "For a politician to complain about the press is like a ship's captain complaining about the sea."

In welcoming the books varied historical perspectives (already remarked on by our earlier reviewer), Dr McCullagh concluded that "Politicians actually need the press. So when the media is under threat, as it is now, and as it was in many of the essays in this volume, politicians need to pay attention, because while it might suit you at a particular point in time to restrict freedom of the press, that restriction could come back to bite you."

His audience on this occasion were all well aware, from their varied very perspectives, it might also be said, from yet another perspective, that as the Mid-Term Elections in the USA in twelve days time, and the situation in Eastern Europe becomes ever more involved and dangerous, we need a free press more than ever.

Complained

Many Catholics have in the past complained when the press, as in Boston and many other places, brought the "sins of the fathers" to the attention of the world.

Yet if Catholicism is to defend its own truths it needs a free press to expound them. So press freedom affects every single reader of this newspaper, both as a citizen and as a moral being.

This book, as Dr McCullagh observed, presents examples from Europe and Ireland over the last two centuries; in another decade we might add, a similar volume will doubtless appear to cover these days of doom and gloom we are living through with our fingers crossed.

EXILES FROM ERIN: PADRAIC AND MARY COLUM IN AMERICA



Cottage industry: Padraic and Mary Colum hard at work on a project at the McDowell Colony in the summer of 1948, photographed for Life magazine.

Mary and Padraic Colum: Lives and the Dream,
by Margaret Kelleher
(UCD Press, €25.00 / £21.50)

Peter Costello

I am one of those who for years has been curious about the lives of Padraic and Mary Colum: here at last is the book we have longed to have, the whole story of their lives told from archival sources and shaped into a continuously fascinating and informative narrative by Margaret Kelleher, the chair of Anglo-Irish Literature in University College Dublin. It is altogether a wonderful and engaging read.

1914

Padraic Colum, and his wife Mary Colum, travelled to the United States in 1914. They planned only to stay a few months, but in effect they were emigrating (like so many Irish people in those days). They would spend the rest of their lives in that new world.

Padraic Colum was at that time not just a well regarded poet of the generation after Yeats - what we might call for simplicity, the generation of James Joyce. Some of his poems were widely admired, one of them, "She Moved Through the Fair", had quickly become a part of the national repertoire of folk song, where it remains to this day.

Mary Colum was a proud graduate of the National University of Ireland, a part of the generation of educated women who played such a large role in Ireland's revolutionary years.

There is a very moving passage in this book, taken from her memoir Life and the Dream, where the Colums in New York had to find words to express their dismay at the executions after the Easter Rising.

People in their boarding house would ask if they knew these people. "The names of the leaders stared out at us from the paper, the young men I had worked with, had danced with, had read poetry with - Padraic Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Willie Pearse, Joseph Plunkett; older people we knew well - Countess Markievicz, Roger Casement, the O'Rahilly, Eamon de Valera."

She felt the eyes of the people in their boarding house on them, some indeed with anger. She stumbled to explain: "they were our friends".

This moment seems like a pivot point. They would find themselves cut off from the emerging new Ireland, out of place there, with working lives still to live in the US. But as time went by the couple passed out of the memory of their readers in Ireland.

Heroic

This book is the account of heroic careers devoted to poetry and to understanding literature to the end of their long lives.

Whole narrative from their rural roots obscured and in place deliberately occluded by unhappy events, was at times a trial. A mixture of both great success, and of hard times too, when money was scarce, the days difficult, the nights bleak.

Dr Kelleher lets the sources tell the story; she does not impose herself on the narrative, as so many biographers do. Though she lays out clearly the trajectories of their lives, she also casts light on many minor episodes.

One such is the arrest of Padraic Colum's father during the protests in the Abbey at the first night of The Playboy of the Western World. We knew of this in passing from the letters of James Joyce. But here the whole episode is revealed in detail, from which neither Yeats or indeed Richard Ellmann emerge with credit.

Indeed, she shows how Ellmann misquoted one of Mary most effective apercus - "Yes, the rich are different from us - they have more money", preferring to attribute it to Ernest Hemingway. The attention she gives to such small details is an indication of the craft with which she lays out her materials.

In America the Columns established themselves in a way they could never have done in Ireland. Padraic became a well-selling reteller of ancient myths and legends for young readers. This was a worthy achievement proving materials that would shape the imagination of younger generations. Mary too established herself at an early date as an admired reviewer and a critic, one to be ranked with Edmund Wilson and others.

Important

But Edmund Wilson adroitly converted what was originally journalism into the materials of important books such as To the Finland Station, Patriotic Gore and The Scrolls from the Dead Sea which remain not just readable, but important.

Mary never managed to do this. The extended difficulties she had with her publisher Scribner's and her editor Maxwell Perkins over her book From These Roots is disheartening to read. He saw her as a critic only, and would not facilitate her efforts to move into the realm of more creative fiction.

This is a book to be read, not for what it says about Irish writing, but for what it reveals about how literary life was lived by two very courageous people in the 20th century. With his retellings and her critiques, and lectures at American colleges they achieved a great deal of what they had hoped to achieve in life. As a couple they were not merely liked by people, but loved for what they gave back to others.

Overall, the book is a wonderful read, and worthy in itself for some sort of prize.



Padraic Colum as a young man in Dublin, courtesy of Prof. Helen Solterer.



Mary Colum, before her marriage, circa 1907, wearing her Gaelic costume, courtesy Special Collections Binghampton University.

WHAT YOU CAN READ OF PADRAIC AND MARY COLUM TODAY

Peter Costello

One sad aspect of the reputations of both Padraic and Mary Colum is their neglect by Irish publishers. This is an old story, of course; the desire to only support the new seems unique in Europe, where most countries have well established series keeping their classic writers in print, not just in expensive academic editions, but also in popular editions as an accommodating price for ordinary readers.

These available are those by Padraic aimed at a younger readership which have been in print since the 1920s but only in American editions. On this point though it is worth keeping in mind the citation of an award that Padraic Colum received back in the 1906s.

In 1961, Padraic Colum was awarded the Regina Medal of the Catholic Library Association in the US, "awarded annually to a living exemplar of the words...only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young."

This is so very true. Writing for children is not a secondary task, as it is often seen by some academics intent only on teaching a limited "canon of Irish literature".

However, all is not lost. That grounded and creative team at Cluny Media in the US has a selection of his titles in print in beautifully produced editions.

These include, The King of Ireland Son [1916], derived from Irish legends; The Big Tree at Bunlahy [1933], with illustrations by Jack Yeats in his native Longford; The Legend of St Columba [1935], with illustrations by Elizabeth McKinstry; The Island of the Mighty [1919], fifteen tales retold from the Welsh Mabinogion; The Adventures of Ulysses and the Tale of Troy [1918], which weaves together the narratives of the Iliad and the Odyssey; The Golden Fleece and the Heroes who lived before Achilles [1921], which won the prestigious John Newbery Medal for Children's Literature.

Of Mary Colum's books Life and the Dream is seemingly out of print, but available as a collectors' item, as are many of Padraic's verse collections, at inflated prices.

However, what she saw as her most important book From These Roots: Ideas That Have Shaped Modern Literature [1937] is still available from Columbia University Press.

No one interested in the history of Irish literature should neglect to read their joint book, the humane and insightful memoir Our Friend James Joyce (New York, 1959), which inter alia, relates many aspects of their own lives, which is also valuable as a collectors' item.

In seeking out these editions which are in print readers would be advised to order them through independent booksellers - another aspect perhaps of preserving a free press - rather than such online sites as Amazon.

LITERACY MATTERS: BOOKS AND NEWSPAPERS REMAIN AS IMPORTANT AS EVER



'Reading The Nation', painted by Richard Cahill in the 1850s, illustrates the influence of literacy on the development of Irish life that continues down to today. Photo: Wiki Commons.

The New Dark Ages: The End of Reading and the Dawn of a Post-Literate Society,
by James Marriott
(The Bodley Head, £14.99 / £16.99)

Felix M. Larkin

When did you last read a book? Indeed, do you still read books at all? If you are reading this review, you are likely to answer the second question in the affirmative. Bravo, but I must temper that expression of approval by telling you that you are something of a dinosaur in what the author of this book, the British cultural journalist James Marriott, calls "our post-literate society".

Evidence

There is abundant evidence that reading books is in decline among all cohorts of society, but especially among the young. Books and newspapers "have been replaced by ubiquitous screens ... [and] the age of print gives way to the age of the screen", to quote Marriott. His purpose in writing the book is "to persuade you that literacy matters profoundly to our civilisation".

The reason it matters is that the rise of reading in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries revolutionised intellectual life and was responsible for the spread of the Enlightenment ideas and values that underpin our civilisation.

Marriott cautions that "we must not take the achievements of the Enlightenment for granted ... the rare and precious achievement of a civilisation founded on rational thought". Without reading books, he suggests, "our culture loses its capacity to sustain complexity and difficulty ... [leading] to an increasingly inadequate understanding of the world". He refers to this as the Great Simplification.

The most disturbing part of Marriott's book is his consideration of the implications of the decline of reading for the future of democracy. Simply stated, it weakens the "public square" – Jürgen Habermas's concept of the intellectual space in which cultural and political issues can be debated by ordinary citizens who are informed about these issues, aware of their "complexity and difficulty" – and so democracy is compromised, if not impossible.

As Marriott writes: "Newspapers and books joined the dots between apparently disconnected events and items of gossip, helping readers to see their problems in abstract, systematic and political terms". He adds that a "poorly informed public lacks the information necessary to hold its leaders to account". Can democracy survive in any meaningful way without mass literacy?

It may be claimed by some that reading is what they are doing on their screens – and certainly we use our smart-phones to check emails, browse the news headlines and scroll through all kinds of data (or pseudo-data).

Attention

However, Marriott argues, "scanning through fragments of text on a screen is very different to the 'deep reading' associated with printed books ... we pay less attention, we understand less and we think less critically about what we read". The consequence is that "political discourse which was once conducted in print – with its remarkable capacity for sustaining logical thought and extended argument – now takes place amid the moronic inferno of social media".

Just in case readers of this review think Marriott is too alarmist, here are some statistics that he offers: reading for pleasure in America has dropped by 40% in the twenty-first century already; more than a third of adults in the UK say they have given up reading for pleasure; and children's reading in the UK is now at its lowest level on record.

Struggling

Moreover, university students are reported as struggling to read the books their professors assign to them: one professor is quoted by Marriott as complaining that students were "intimidated by anything over 10 pages", and a recent study of English literature students at American universities found that many failed to understand the first paragraphs of Charles Dickens's Bleak House.

Borrowing a metaphor from those paragraphs, it seems fog is everywhere in the Dark Age of post-literacy that is now dawning.

AN IMAGINATIVE HOMAGE TO CATALONIA



The city of Barcelona with its illuminating culture.

Render,
by Billy Ramsell
(Banshee Press, €12.00 / £10.50)

Fergus O'Donoghue, SJ

This book is the Summer 2026 Recommendation of the Poetry Society, as well as being short listed for the T. S. Elliot Prize; so Billy Ramsell has already garnered high praise among his peers.

Beginning this review, I must declare an interest. I first visited Catalonia in 1974 and was immediately drawn to the language, history and culture of the region. The Catalan language, which I later learned to speak, was then marginalised in Spain. The late Pearse Hutchinson was perhaps the only Irish writer who promoted that language, when many were only hazily aware of its existence. There were very few direct flights from Dublin to Barcelona, whereas now Aer Lingus flies there daily and Ryanair has three flights each way every day of the year.

This poetry collection, coming from a supposedly "Catalan" writer, is a remarkable work of invention and creativity. Billy Ramsell offers us his 'translations' of the poetry and prose of Alberto Cenas, a Catalan poet born in 1952. We are told that Cenas has published seven collections, between 1978 and 2020, so the poems made available here are selections from all these collections.

Timeline

The book ends with a timeline of Cenas' life, beginning with the birth dates of his parents (Enric in 1920 and Anastasia in 1929). As industrialists, the Cenas family is deeply involved in the Spanish Civil War, but soon adjusts to the Franco era after 1939, including its prohibition of the use of the Catalan language.

Alberto's younger brother dies in a skiing accident in 1973, their father having died in 1966. In 1974 Alberto decides to write only in Catalan. To be truly Catalan, he should then have started calling himself 'Albert', but he continues to use the Castilian version of his given name. In 2020 he is living with his aged mother.

All the above information reads like a rather typical biography of a Catalan writer, but every word of it is fictitious. Alberto does not exist, so every line of his verse and every detail of his biography is the work of Billy Ramsell. Does he succeed?

The poems convey the atmosphere of Barcelona, and other regions of Catalunya so convincingly that they seem to be real translations of Catalan verse. It would be a challenge to translate them back into their 'original' language. Alberto presents himself as an observer rather than a participant in life. Was that the role he assigned to himself, having, perhaps, left the lively and engaging role to his younger brother, Nicolau? Alberto seems to have few sexual feelings and is not religious, so what sustains him?

Then, it can be asked if this fictitious poet is reputed to be successful, well-reviewed and well-regarded in Catalonia. Is he making a lasting contribution to Catalan literature? The poems exhibit a sustained, dazzling and rich tapestry of language. Ramsell himself conveys a sense of Catalonia to an astonishing degree, with a feeling of being once more in a café, on a beach, on a dull street or in an industrialist's workshop.

Civil war

Barcelona Cathedral was the only city church not burned during the early weeks of the Spanish Civil War. All the churches were rebuilt and most benefited from the loss of later accretions. They are full of atmosphere, but, unfortunately, Alberto doesn't visit them. This is in line with the secular ambience of Catalonia, where today only 15% of the population ticks the box allowing a tiny percentage of its income tax to go to Catholic charities, compared to 30% in the rest of Spain.

It would be good if this strikingly original book were brought to the notice of Òmnium Cultural or one of the many other groups that promote Catalan culture. The poems should be enjoyed and savoured by many readers, including those who are not catalanofils (admirers of Catalonia).

A SWEDISH ARTIST UNVEILED



An example of Hilma af Klint's 'wet on wet' watercolours, a later work, 'On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees', 1922. Photo: Courtesy of the Hilma af Klint Foundation via the NGI.

Hilma af Klint: Artist and Visionary,
essays by Jessica Höglund, Janet Mclean, Pádraic E. Moore
(National Gallery of Ireland, €39.00)

Peter Costello

The new exhibition, just opened at the National Gallery in Dublin, of works by Swedish artist Hilma af Klint, is not the first time she has been exhibited in Ireland. However, this show, arranged in collaboration with the Hilma af Klint Foundation, though selective, is certainly the most representative of the range of her work.

The artist was born in 1861 and died in 1944; but it has really been only since the establishment by her heir of a foundation to promote her work that she has become in any way widely. She is effectively a late nineteenth-century artist brought newly before us, in all her intricacies of thought, feeling and achievement, which makes for a very strange and intriguing experience.

She left behind some 1300 paintings and 124 notebooks amounting to some 26,000 handwritten and typed pages. Such a legacy takes time to explore, and poses many problems of understanding. I thought immediately on reading about her, even before seeing the show, that her creative evolution paralleled in many ways the development of W. B. Yeats, with the same trends and associations.

She was reared in the Swedish Lutheran Church, and became in her twenties what one of these essayists calls "an esoteric Christian". Though she often resorted to Christian symbols and attempted to established a sort of temple, where a series of her paintings would hang like icons she ranged over the various aspects of new thought and spirituality in her lifetime, spiritualism, communicating with higher powers, Theosophy, and the teachings of Rudolf Steiner.

Understanding

Following her through these regions of thought and feeling is rather like reading A Vision in the hope of understanding Yeats: both the art works and the poems exist to be understood and appreciated not on the makers' terms but on their own merits.

Debate about has naturally enough arisen since the astonishing success of a show at New York's Guggenheim Museum visited by more than 600,000 peo-

ple, of what relation she bears to other pioneers of abstract painting, such as Kandinsky and Mondrian - we can see the parallels in this show, yet. She was unknown to them it seems, and had no contact with them

But what we see here is revelationary. One painting, of a woman seated in a garden chair with a diaphanous white veil pulled over her: it might also be symbolic of the whole show in which we see, so to speak, the visions of the artist unveiled.

She led her life as an artist through several changing styles, so there is a great deal to enjoy and admire in this show without the need to plunge too deeply into the misty depths of her thinking. She found over the years an array of solutions to her artistic problems, which makes the exhibition a very varied experience for the visitor.

Accomplished

Technically, she was certainly an accomplished artist, and we can follow her development and changing forms of expression from the beginning to the end. The author of these essays also explore this life passage, with an emphasis it seems to me on her geometrical creations of the early 1900s. But there are also evocative landscapes of the Nordic forests, which are such an important part of the Swedish imagination.

But what really impressed me are her post-Great War paintings from the 1920s, which used a technique of "wet on wet", water colours painted on wet sheets of high grade art paper, in which the materials used take over the composition from the artist to create their own shapes by seepage through the texture of the paper. These are truly abstract. But also of great appeal, as are her studies of plants and flowers, in which the beauty is that of nature itself, or rather, the essential "nature of nature".

This points to the special purpose of abstract art, which is to find an underlying structure of reality. The explorations of modern science have revealed that nature - what some I suppose in another context might call creation - is based on repeated patterns which structure the material world. The abstract artist strives to recover and reveal those essential patterns that structure natural life - think for instance of the double helix of DNA, or of fractals.

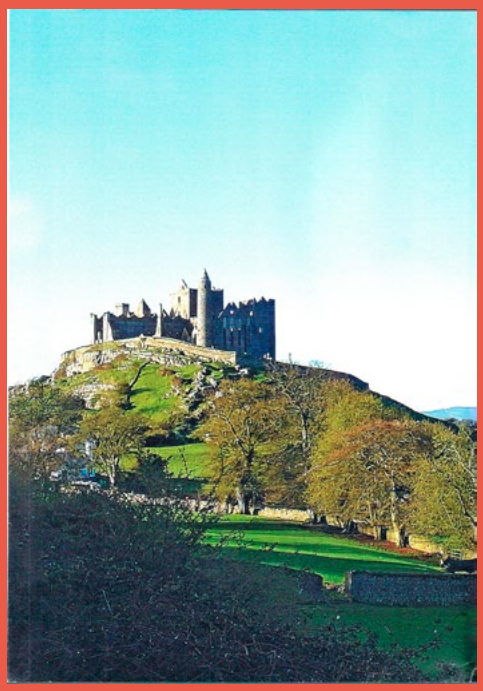
All told, this is a most intriguing exhibition, providing many images which are eminently engaging and beautiful, but it also provides food for thought for those interested in what it reveals of the underlying patterns of European art, poetry and social life from 1860 to 1940. Definitely a show to be seen and an artistic career to be explored, in all its strange mutations.

Exhibition runs to February 7, 2027, in the National Gallery of Ireland, Rooms 6-10; tickets from €0 - €16.



Hilma af Klint at work. Photo: Courtesy of the Hilma af Klint Foundation via the NGI.

WHAT "WE THE PEOPLE" OWN OF IRELAND



The great Rock of Cashel, "Ireland's Acropolis" - photo Dr Thomas P Nelligan, OPW Cashel

Legacy, Ireland's National Properties,
by David Hare
(Gill Books, €27.99/£28.99)

Irish Heritage Studies; The Annual Research Journal of the Office of Public Works, volume 2, 2026,
edited by Caroline Pegum
(Office of Public Works/Gandon Editions, €20.00)

America at Home: The Architecture and Politics of the US Embassy in Dublin,
by Cormac Murray
(Phibsboro Press, €38.00)

Peter Costello

The Office of Public Works (OPW), the government agency for managing its complex building and accommodation needs, as well as dealing with flood management and the provision of bicycle shelters at Leinster House, has the care of as many ecclesiastical buildings as the main churches.

This large property portfolio was largely due to the OPW taking over the historical buildings of the Church of Ireland at the time of disestablishment between 1869-1871.

These included such iconic remains as Gallarus Oratory, the Rock of Cashel, Clonmacnoise, the fragment that survives of Dublin's St Mary's Abbey (which once housed the largest medieval library in Ireland), and the Chapel Royal in Dublin Castle's lower yard.

Sites

All these are now to be visited under the aegis of the OPW, which many people do. This lavishly illustrated book gives a glimpse of some of these treasures. This book was intended to accompany his television series aired last year on RTÉ. Both are the creation of the experienced television director David Hare.

He writes here about some 39 properties, which include mansion, gardens, estates and even the Presidential portraits in Áras an Uachtaráin. This small selection has to be set in context.

Over all, the OPW manages more than 2500 sites, which includes some 780 national monuments. Yet among Hare's selection is not included, for example, the Rock of Cashel, once called the "Acropolis of Ireland" by an enthusiast in the 19th century: an account of the nation's legacy from the past that does not include this place must of necessity be very limited and partial.

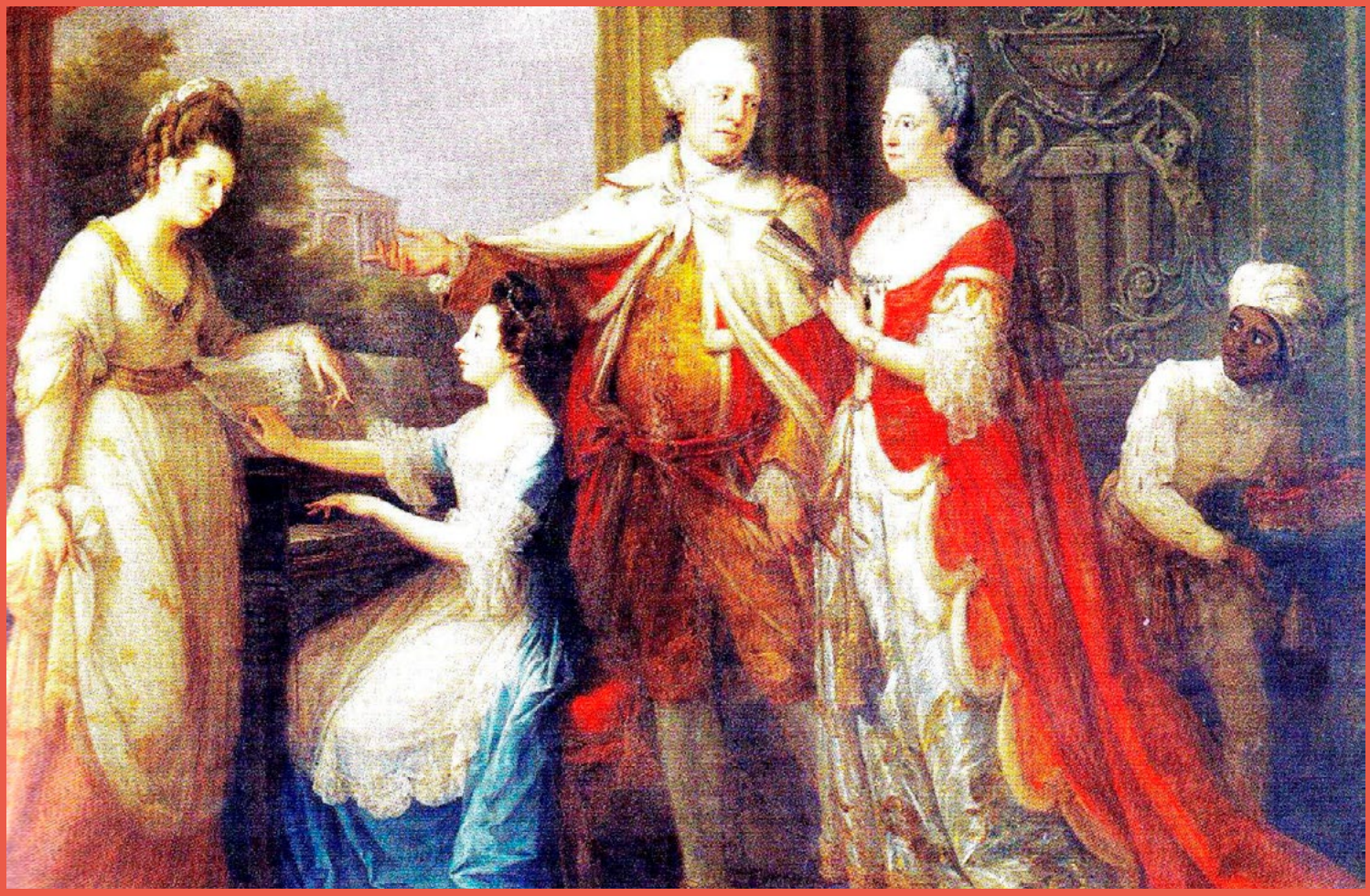
Some properties - Dublin Castle, Rathfarnham Castle, Emo Court - are listed not for their religious connections, but for their architectural interest. It is almost as if David Hare decided that in dealing with a government agency, he could not allow any hint of "sectarianism" to enter. Others may think rather of the dead hand of secularism; that religion, unless safely prehistoric as in the Boyne Valley, is better not mentioned today. But the legacy he is trying to reveal to the general reader is, I think, distorted in some ways by this approach.

But what is also strange is the profile of the legacy of "modern Ireland". This consists of three properties, the Presidential Portraits, the John F. Kennedy Arboretum, and the Great Blasket Island. Now of these the most important is undoubtedly the Blasket reservation. But is this part of "modern Ireland"? It is a sad reflection that there is not much to show here of what has been created since 1923.

In so far as it goes this is an interesting book. The properties he writes about are all of great importance and well worth visiting - I have already been to see several of them - but it has limitations as to its idea of what consti-



The United States Embassy in Dublin, freed of security screens



'The Ely Family', by Angelica Kauffman (1771) courtesy National Gallery of Ireland

tutes Irish culture and heritage.

Irish life and culture is the possession of the peoples of Ireland in and for themselves. It is not at any time the property of our political class, however much members of that may be admired.

But this perhaps is not a problem to be laid at the door of the OPW. It is an agency of government, and so reflects the elements of dissension that prevail over matters of culture and heritage all over this Island.

Heritage

To get a truer view of the OPW and its day to day work, and the quality of the people who work for it - let us call them the heirs and successors of the renowned Harold Leask - readers should look into the second annual volume of Irish Heritage Studies, the journal of the OPW.

The first issue of this was very impressive and was warmly welcomed. Certainly the pages of these journals give a more nuanced, engaged and penetrating picture of Irish culture as whole through the perspectives of the OPW.

The second issue now to hand contains nine articles on various aspects of the OPW's holdings, including the second part of an account of the evolution of Doneraile Demesne.

But two struck me of particular interest for their novelty. One by Eoin O'Flynn deals with the appearance of a Malabar servant boy named Caesar in a portrait of the Ely Family painted in 1771. Brown rather than Black, he was not a slave, but a retainer brought back from India (an echo of this practice is described in Conan Doyle's novel The Sign of Four of 1890). This is a glimpse of what will undoubtedly become an area of research in the future, the African and South Asians in Irish life in early modern times.

The other article was one dealing with various aspects of the vexed question of graffiti in heritage buildings focused on the restoration of the mansion on the Oldbridge Battle of the Boyne estate by Ellen Brickly. Though a wretched nuisance in recent days, such signs left by visitors in earlier centuries are an aspect of a site's history which might need to be preserved.

Altogether a rich array of scholarly endeavour, revealing just how well qualified and industrious the PW staff often are. The journal is a splendid new addition to our resources on Irish history, secular and religious.

On this question of modern Irish culture legacy the little book on the American Embassy building at the end of Clyde Road by Cormac Murray provides a case in point. He has over the years developed a passionate enthusiasm for this remarkable edifice, opened in 1964.

Embassy

It was rumoured at the time in the neighbourhood that a visiting American senator was brought to see the modernist building, coming from the city centre by way of some older shabbier route. Rather querulously he asked the ambassador why the embassy "had been built in a slum".

Well America has an infinite variety of its own slums, but his opinion was a surprise to the folk who then lived then on Elgin and Clyde Road.

Originally it could be seen as a prize example of modern architecture, designed by John M Johansen, as an exemplar of what American democracy could do.

But over the decades since the supposed needs of security have meant what was once an open site has been surrounded by a 20 foot steel fence, with specialised entrances for cars and pedestrians. It is guarded both by armed US marines (who used to live in a house on Clyde Road, until that was deemed too dangerous and they were moved to a safer site) and a security firm.

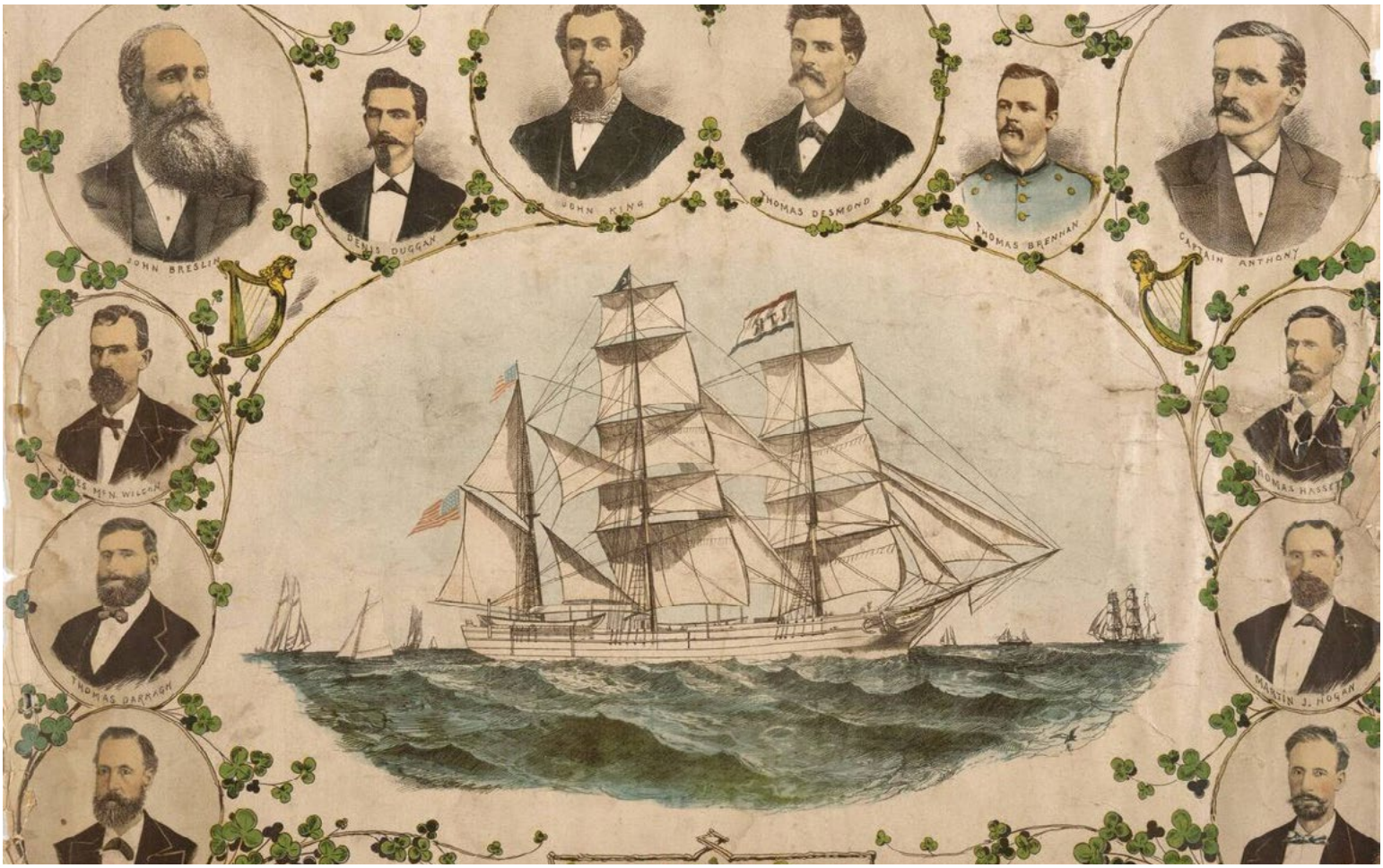
Now it has as well on a daily basis a single Garda officer patrolling the junction outside, keeping a calm eye of the regular flag-carrying pro-Palestinian protestors who have become a feature of the scene.

The embassy is to move in the near future to another, even more secure site nearby, on which work is under way to create another little "fortress America".

But what should be done with the building? Neighbourhood opinion is in favour of preservation, albeit with the immediate removal of the security fence, and its conversion into some sort of cultural use.

A museum dedicated to Irish-American presidents has been mooted, which would allow a display too of the Ulster Irish as well as the Southern Catholic contribution to American life. Perhaps a magnanimous US government will gift the building to the people of Ireland, thus passing it into the care of the OPW as an example of modern culture.

THE VOYAGE OF THE CATALPA: THE REMARKABLE FENIAN RESCUE MISSION "DOWN-UNDER"



The Catalpa, and the Fenians involved in the great rescue of 1876

Catalpa: The Epic Story of the Greatest Prison Rescue in Irish History,
by Michael B. Barry
(Gill Books, €24.99/£23.99)

J. Anthony Gaughan

The Catalpa was a whaling vessel built in 1844 and bought for $5,250 by Clann na Gael for the rescue of six Fenians from a prison settlement in Freemantle, near Perth, in Western Australia.

The six Fenians were Thomas Darragh, Martin Hogan, Michael Harrington, Thomas Hassett, Robert Cranston and James Wilson. They had been members of various British regiments and had taken an oath of allegiance to the IRB. Having been betrayed by informers, they were arraigned before the courts, convicted of mutiny, and condemned to be deported to the penal settlements in Australia.

Cost

Besides the initial cost of the Catalpa Clann na Gael spent a further $13,760 equipping it for a whaling expedition. But only the captain, George Smith Anthony, and one other member of the crew knew the true purpose of the planned voyage.

In the meantime supporters of the Fenians at Freemantle devised a plot to ensure that the six to be rescued would be free when the Catalpa arrived for them. Among those facilitating the rescue was Fr Patrick McCabe, from Co. Cavan. At that time he was ministering in the Freemantle area and acting as chaplain to the prison.

The rescue was planned by John Devoy and his agents, John J. Breslin and Thomas Desmond, but Devoy was the master-mind behind the entire project.

Devoy was rightly described by Patrick Pearse as "the greatest Fenian of them all". He lived then in New York where he worked for the New York Herald, and would later edit The Gaelic American. He was on hand when the Fenians bought the Catalpa. Later he was involved in the appointment of George Smith Anthony to captain the ship, and he directed all the communications between New York and Freemantle with regard to the proposed rescue.

On April 29, 1875 the Catalpa set out for Western Australia from the Massachusetts whaling port of New Bedford. The captain bade a sad farewell to his wife: it would be more than a year before they would be together again. As the ship reached open waters the captain read the final instructions given him by Devoy.

These read as follows: "You will cruise until Fall [autumn], about six months in the North Atlantic. Then you are to put in at Fayal in the Azores, in the mid Atlantic off Portugal], sail at once for Australia where we expect you to arrive early in the spring of 1876. You are to go to Bunbury on the west coast and there communications will be opened up with you from our Australian agent".

Voyage

The Catalpa arrived near the meeting place at Bunbury on March 28, 1876. With prison officers and police in hot pursuit, the Fenians to be rescued raced to the place where they were to be picked up. Captain Anthony manned a whaleboat to run ashore, collected the six Fenian prisoners and delivered them to the Catalpa.

As she sailed out to international waters the Catalpa was accosted by the Georgette, a coastal steamer. The captain announced that he wished to board the Catalpa. Captain Anthony replied that this he would not allow, as his was an American vessel sailing in international waters, under the flag of the United States.

The Catalpa began its return voyage to the US on April 19. It arrived in New York harbour to a huge reception on August 19, 1876. The captain and the crew were richly rewarded for their heroics. The captain received $3,166 and the Portuguese and African crew members received a $200 bonus, even the six Fenian escapees were compensated receiving $2500 each. The Catalpa was sold on: it was reduced to serve as a coal barge until it ended up in the breakers yard.

The epic head-line making rescue gave a much-needed morale boost to nationalist organisations in Ireland at that time and torch-light processions greeted news of the rescue-mission's success.

In this book Michael B. Barry provides a beautifully written, richly researched and expertly contextualised account of a little-known episode of Irish history.