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Breda O'Brien: Now is the season of hope despite pandemic challenges – Page 7

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Govt delays over visas leaving missionaries in the lurch

Ruadhán Jones

Missionary orders fear that a number of their foreign-born missionaries based in Ireland could have to leave next year due to “disruptive” delays in their visas being renewed by the Department of Justice.

The ‘Minister of Religion visa’ has to be renewed every three years, but the process is taking up to 12 months, missionary orders told *The Irish Catholic* this week.

The Irish bishops’ conference and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) are in negotiations with the department over the process.

A source close to the negotiations said the delays are “not good enough”.

“We have missionaries who will have to leave the country after six years,” the source said. “The tardiness is incredible at this stage. People may have to leave next year.”

One order active in Africa said that a recent application was submitted August 2020, but wasn’t confirmed until almost a year later.

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I promise Santa, I’ve been good this year...



School children pray during a Mass celebrated by Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown to mark the 1,500th anniversary of St Columba’s birth, December 7. See page 6

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Contemplating God through his cosmos

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LEAH DARROW

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FRANCIS BRENNAN

A man of meticulous Faith

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Christmas as a story of struggle



Editor's
Comment
**Michael
Kelly**

If someone who had never heard the story of Jesus were to ask any of us about his origins, we would, I suspect, begin with the story of his birth in Bethlehem. It's a story that we're all familiar with from childhood.

In schools and parish halls across the country, countless generations of Irish children have told and re-told the story in nativity plays.

But, amid the carols and candles, the presents and parties, there is a profound, but simple truth at the centre of Christmas that can sometimes escape us in the midst of the hustle and bustle: God became man.

“Despite the exit of the Troika, money is still scarce, loved ones are overseas”

Meaning

It's a simple story with a profound meaning: for the religious believer, Christmas transforms everything. It is a moment in human history that, in the humility of a little baby, God, the Creator of the world, entered into human history.

I love the story of the Magi visiting from the East, expecting to see a king clothed in grandeur and surrounded by a royal court. What they encounter, instead, is a baby laid in a manger, the child of poor people. The Christmas story contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of this world with the defenceless power of love in a little baby, for who can fail to be moved by the unconditional love of a baby? Or the story of the Holy Family forced to flee as refugees to Egypt far from the land of their birth?

“In schools and parish halls across the country, countless generations of Irish children have told and re-told the story in nativity plays”

But, unless Christ is born and reborn in the cradle of our heart, the nativity narrative from a stable or a cave on the outskirts of Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago remains little more than a beautiful story.

Intend

Many people will not have the Christmas they intended this year. Despite the exit of the Troika, money is still scarce, loved ones are overseas. In many homes, cherished companions are no-longer with us. But, maybe we can find hope in the vulnerability of the Christmas story. For it is not a story of sentiment: it is a story of struggle. The fear of the young woman Mary found to be with child outside of marriage; the bewilderment of Joseph; the newborn child with a manger for a bed. This new family forced to flee as asylum seekers into Egypt far from their home and families. This is the message of Christmas: a message of a God who is called 'Emmanuel' – a word which means 'God-is-with-us'.

“It's a simple story with a profound meaning: for the religious believer, Christmas transforms everything”

“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

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Govt delays over visas leaving missionaries in the lurch

» **Continued from Page 1**
“Foolishly and we'll never do it again, we had told another man you'll be out of this job because so-and-so will be coming in and you'll have three months to train him,” a missionary told *The Irish Catholic*.

The missionary cited “big problems” with the Department of Justice asking for documents already submitted and for other documents, such as evidence of salary, which are not relevant to the order. The missionary order now has to use an immigration company to help them.

Recently, the missionary added, one of their men in Ireland whose visa is up for renewal received a letter asking if “he's doing a job needed to be done by him”.

“This is a new thing we never saw before,” the missionary said.

A representative from the Presentation Brothers told this paper that there are “very disruptive” delays in getting “the whole thing processed from start to end”.

“The delays and the length of time” are “definitely an issue”, Bro. Barry Noel explained, pointing out that while Covid-19 added to the issues, “even before that there were long delays.”

“I have an application in at the moment, and we're waiting for it to be sorted and it's taking an awful long time. It's difficult and it's challenging,” Bro. Noel said.

He cited difficulties with the inflexibility of the process, a problem also facing the Spiritans.

A priest appointed to Ireland was refused a visa “because he did not meet the requirement to have at least three verifiable years of service as a Minister of Religion”, the order said in a statement.

“This despite the fact that he had spent some two years of his formation (pre-ordination) in Ireland... and had also given service in his home country and in one other African country.”

Meanwhile, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly Kieran O'Reilly SMA, who worked previously as a missionary in Africa, said the bishops are “keen to work it [issues with the visa process] out as best we can with the State”.

“The main thing is that we feel that the Department is listening to us,” Archbishop

O'Reilly said. “There will be some progress. It just takes time with Covid and people working from home and all this.”

The bishops' conference and AMRI are conducting a survey of the missionary orders' experience of the visa process to give to the Department of Justice.

“Generally, the feeling's fairly positive and we believe it can be worked out,” Dr O'Reilly explained. “There's good will on the department's side.”

He emphasised the importance of the Church and orders presenting their documents correctly: “I think very often that is something that has to be very carefully done,” the archbishop said.

Senator calls for diplomatic boycott of Beijing Winter Olympics

Jason Osborne

Senator Rónán Mullen has encouraged Ireland to follow the examples of the US, Britain and Australia by diplomatically boycotting the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Senator Mullen advised Ireland not to be “laggards” on the issue.

China stands accused because of widespread allegations of atrocities carried out against the Uyghur Muslim community in the country’s western region of Xinjiang, as well as suppression of other religious groups, including Christians.

Some human rights groups and Western governments have accused China of genocide, as a result of reports of many detention camps for the “re-education” of the Uyghur people.

Senator Mullen said he supports a diplomatic boycott

of the 2022 Winter Olympics, and said that he organised the signing of a letter by a number of members of the Seanad and Dáil addressed to the Olympic Federation of Ireland “expressing our concerns about the fact that the Olympics were taking place in Beijing”.

“Now there’d be relatively few Irish athletes involved, but saying that, first of all, the Olympics shouldn’t take place there. Secondly, if they did take place there, then consideration should be given to whether Irish athletes should compete under an Irish flag in that situation or just independently,” Senator Mullen said.

“Each country taking part with its flag ties in, in some way, with the prestige that goes with the Olympics. At the very least, there shouldn’t be any Irish diplomatic involvement from the Irish Government’s side, or indeed, from officials’ side,

in terms of the Irish Olympic Federation.”

He said that the Beijing Winter Olympics were a way for China to “foist” its self-image on countries around the world, and on its own citizens.

“So the involvement of Irish diplomats or Irish Olympic officials in this event is part of China’s messaging to the world and to its own people about its acceptability and indeed its triumph. We shouldn’t be involved in that,” Senator Mullen said, adding that the Irish Government tends to “speak out of both sides of its mouth in relation to China”.

“As I’ve been putting it in the Seanad, it’s a nod to human rights and a wink to trade.”

“Economic interests are legitimate and important, but I don’t think you can sacrifice human rights on the altar of trade and prosperity,” he concluded.

A beautiful bambinelli



Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan blesses a figure of baby Jesus on Bambinelli Sunday, December 12, in the Cathedral of Ss Peter and Paul, Ennis. On Bambinelli Sunday, children around the world are encouraged to bring their Nativity sets to church to be blessed.

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Jeremiah Gwafa, Ophthalmic Nurse, screening and diagnosing children in Zimbabwe. (Photo taken before Covid-19).

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Mount Argus opens jubilee year celebrations of St Charles



Jason Osborne

Mount Argus Parish in Co. Dublin celebrated Saturday with Archbishop Dermot Farrell the bi-centenary of the birth of Dutch Passionist priest, St Charles Houben, and the opening of the jubilee year of St Charles, which was a “very prayerful moment” and recognised as “very special” by the parishioners, according to parish priest Fr Paul Francis Spencer CP.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr Francis said “it’s a blessing for people”.

“I think the Jubilee, for all of us, it’s a chance to renew our sense of God’s presence to us, God’s closeness. That’s an important thing at this time because I think people, they feel a bit isolated with all that they’ve been through, so this sense of



Parishioners pray before the shrine of St Charles of Mount Argus. Photos: Sancta Familia Media.

God reaching out to us with his message and his love, I think it’s very significant at the moment.”

Fr Francis said that the theme of the jubilee year is taken from St Matthew’s Gospel: ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’.

In the letter requesting the jubilee year, the Passionist Provincials of Ireland and Scotland and of the Netherlands, Frs James Sweeney and Mark-Robin Hoogland, wrote: “In this time when so many lives have been touched by suffering due to the coronavirus pandemic and its many consequences, the faith of Saint Charles in the healing power of God is

an example to all who are in pain.”

Fr Francis said that another thing the Faithful see in St Charles is somebody “who is a person of prayer, so in the midst of all the things he had to cope with in life, he kept his life and himself focused on Jesus, and that’s something that’s important for us at any time, but I think particularly at the present time”.

Parishioner Anne Renahan welcomed the celebration of St Charles, saying over the years, “I have prayed to St Charles or visited his shrine when I needed his help either for myself or others.

“I feel a great sense of peace when I share my trou-



Sancta Familia Media’s Brian Timmons and John Mallon with Fr Paul Francis and a first class relic of St Charles.

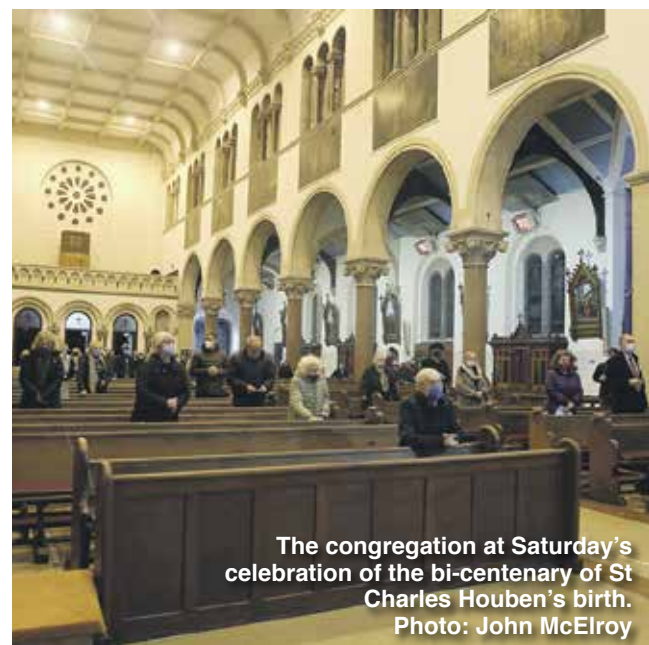


Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell opening the Holy Doors at Mount Argus, Saturday, December 11. Photo: John McElroy

bles with St Charles and in knowing he will do all he can to help me. I know if I don’t get what I want he will give me the strength and courage to deal with the outcome.”

Looking to the jubilee year ahead, which runs from December 11 2021 through to January 5 2023, Fr Francis said they’ll have “various events” throughout the year, the details of which will be on the website.

“If groups wanted to come, Covid permitting, if parish groups or deanery groups or Catholic associations wanted to come for a pilgrimage visit, we’d be very happy to facilitate that....they can get in touch with the monastery,” Fr Francis said.



The congregation at Saturday’s celebration of the bi-centenary of St Charles Houben’s birth. Photo: John McElroy

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11: 28

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A significant poetry anniversary...

We can expect the literary focus of 2022 to be the centenary of the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*: but an equally important milestone, especially for Christians, was the appearance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in 1922.

This long poem burst upon the world with considerable fanfare, as Eliot's biographer Richard Ellmann put it, being regarded as at once outrageous and a completely new departure in poetry. Beginning with the now famous line "April is the cruellest month breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land", it mixes allusions to St Augustine and the Bible, with Shakespeare, Baudelaire, with the topical and colloquial.

Its impact patently drew on the wrecked landscape



Mary Kenny

– and sometimes wrecked psyches – of the First World War – "I was neither living nor dead": "I will show you fear in a handful of dust". It's a compelling poem, and it was, surely, the beginning of the era of unconventional modern verse: the lines can seem a disconnected jumble, and yet, they make sense, forming a mosaic.

“Tom Eliot was also a renowned literary critic and playwright”

Eliot would become, later, possibly the most internationally significant Christian and Anglo-

Catholic poet of the 20th Century: he was confirmed as a High Anglican in 1927, and his poetry traced his spiritual journey, through *The Hollow Men*, *Journey of the Magi* ("A cold coming we had of it/Just the worst time of the year...") and *Ash Wednesday*, with its mesmerising opening ("Because I do not hope to turn again/Because I do not hope...").

Missouri

Though he settled in England, Eliot was born in St Louis, Missouri – youngest of seven, in a family with a Unitarian background. He had studied philosophy at Harvard and had

“Eliot was active in parish life – he was a churchwarden, sat on parish committees and wrote a book on *The Idea of a Christian Society*”

● I have friends who live in Umbria in Italy who travelled to Rome last Wednesday, December 8, with the intention of having a day out in the city, visiting various sites. They were disappointed to discover that almost everything they planned to see was closed: the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a public holiday in Italy.

Italy is defined in its constitution as a

secular republic, but that doesn't mean the Italians have abolished their traditional religious feasts, which they see as part of the fabric of their culture, history and society. Bravo to Italy: this is partly what keeps that country rooted confidently in its identity.

For Italians, being altogether 'European' and standing by their own traditions isn't a conflict. Nor should it be in Ireland.



A mother and daughter watch as firefighters place flowers on a tall Marian statue overlooking the Spanish Steps in Rome on December 8, 2021, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Religious celebrations are an important part of public life in Italy. Photo: CNS

Quality Catholic education

Catholic schools in the United States, which saw a fall in numbers in recent years – 5.2 million pupils in the 1960s, down to 1.6 million last year – have reported an upturn in enrolments this autumn, according to the National Catholic Educational Association.

Numbers are increasing in most of their diocese. In the Brooklyn-Queens diocese – one of the largest in the US – it's reported that some 60% of its schools are growing. In New York

and Cleveland, a network of Catholic schools called Partnership Schools reported an increase of 16%; Washington, Baltimore, Chicago, are all experiencing the same trends.

One reason given is that Catholic schools apparently paid more attention to in-person learning during lockdowns, and word spread among families that Catholic schools were more focused on the needs of the child's education. Many families strug-

gled with remote learning and many parents couldn't work from home.

Many of the children enrolled in Catholic schools are not themselves Catholic or from faith homes, but that doesn't seem to matter to the educators. Kathleen Porter-Magee of Partnership Schools likes to quote the late Cardinal Hickey of Washington who said: "We educate communities, not because they are Catholic, but because we are." An admirable attitude of service.

been interested in Indian mysticism, but his Christian journey made sense of his poetic and personal quest. In his first marriage, he was extremely unhappy and his wife was mentally unwell: yet the angst that he experienced fed his poetry, and prompted his faith.

Tom Eliot was also a renowned literary critic and playwright: his play about St Thomas a Becket, *Murder in the Cathedral*

was ground-breaking. *The Family Reunion* is a verse play about the expiation of sin and *The Cocktail Party* an unlikely title for the theme of existence and redemption. He also had an amusing side, in his verses about cats – subsequently made into the musical *Cats*.

Parish life

Eliot was active in parish life – he was a church-

warden, sat on parish committees and wrote a book on *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

The Waste Land is powerful stuff, although I think my own favourite Eliot poem is the melancholy *Four Quartets*, which encapsulates bitter regrets, yet hope, and draws on Mother Julian of Norwich's "all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well".



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Derry diocese celebrates St Columba's 1500th anniversary

Ruadhán Jones

Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown celebrated Mass in Long Tower Church, Derry, to mark 1,500 years since the birth of famous Irish saint, St Columba.

Born in 521, the saint, warrior and poet – also known as Colmcille – was integral to the development of the early Church in Ireland.

At the end of the Mass, the winners from the 'Colmcille 1500 Schools' Project' were presented with their prizes.

The primary school competition was shared between St Eithne's Primary School, Long Tower Primary School and St Colmcille's Primary and Nursery School, Claudy.

Thornhill College Derry took home the post

primary school award, while all schools that entered received a gift.

In a statement from Derry diocese, the independent adjudicating panel acknowledged the variety of approaches used and the way in which the project incorporated so many different areas of the curriculum.

"All of the schools from the Derry diocese have produced very good projects, each in their own way," the panel said. "Presentations were engaging with a good balance of knowledge and creativity."

The panel praised the standard in both categories, adding that "choosing winners was a very difficult task".

The competition was a joint project between the Diocese of Derry and the Diocese of Raphoe.



Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown celebrates Mass in Long Tower Church, Derry. Photos: Stephen Latimer.



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Breda O'Brian

The View



Now is the season of hope despite pandemic challenges

Advent and Christmas are meant to be seasons of hope and joy. Nonetheless, many people have found 2021 much more distressing than 2020, as our resilience has been tested by the ongoing strain of the pandemic and the restrictions that accompany it.

We have seen our church-going friends give up going to Mass, and not returning. We have seen friends grow ill from Covid-19 and other illnesses and the waiting lists for specialists lengthen ominously.

We have seen the solidarity of the early months of the pandemic descend into querulousness and fatigue and sometimes, into a reckless disregard of basic health and safety precautions.

This would be bleak news if we had not also seen the practical application of the great theological virtues, faith, hope and love. Neighbours and friends continue to support each other. Frontline workers from medical professionals to supermarket workers continue to serve us.

While the greatest of the theological virtues is love, I believe hope is the greatest need many of us have right now.

When you consult the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it anchors hope firmly not in protection from disaster but in seeking the kingdom of God.

"Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CC 1817).

Hope is also often confused with optimism, which in positive psychology, according to Charles S. Carver of the University of Miami, "is a dimension of personality defined by the expectation that good (vs. bad) things will happen to oneself. Generalised optimism pertains to the person's entire life, rather than to just one domain or another."

Optimism is a lovely personality trait. I categorise myself more as a defensive

pessimist. Pessimists expect bad things to happen but defensive pessimists analyse the chances of things going wrong and work diligently to prevent the possible negative outcomes.

Hope as a theological virtue should not be confused with either of those two stances. Positive psychology has analysed extensively the impact of a generally optimistic and generally pessimistic viewpoint but it ignores one of the most vital realities in any believer's life - transcendent grace.

That is why the Catechism puts the spotlight firmly on desiring "the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness" and "placing our trust in Christ's promises".

This is a fundamental shift away from reliance on ourselves and towards reliance on God. We may feel that such a fundamental shift is impossible but again, that is only if we are relying on our own strength.

“When you go back to the original source, however, you discover that Julian was troubled by why God had allowed sin in the first place”

Julian of Norwich, the great English mystic, is a wonderful guide to hope. Her best-known words are: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." It is often quoted in online articles on the benefits of optimism.

When you go back to the original source, however, you discover that Julian was troubled by why God had allowed sin in the first place. In one of her revelations, she hears Jesus saying: "It is true that sin is the cause of all this suffering." It is in that context that the Lord declares "all shall be well". The focus is on Christ, who saves us and offers us cause for hope.

As we approach Christmas, we think of Mary and the challenges that faced her. Julian has a great



love of Our Lady but one of the distinctive marks of her revelations is that she also sees Christ as our mother.

We often think of God as father, and sometimes as mother but Julian goes even further - she describes Christ as "our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born, and out of whom we shall never come to birth".

For Julian, we are constantly both being born and being sheltered in Christ's protective womb. It is a beautiful, profound metaphor. Maternal imagery is not unknown in the gospels, including that striking image in Matthew 23:37 when Our Lord is mourning over Jerusalem and says: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

In our cruel world where hens are often battery farmed, we rarely see normal hen behaviour. Hens are the most maternal of creatures. They will normally turn and flee from a dog or a cat but if they have chicks, they will not only stand their ground but often will be so protective that they frighten the other animal away.

These images of Jesus as mother and even as a mother hen, show us that all the theological virtues are inextricably entwined. Our faith rests on love and from that love, hope grows.

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Overturning the ignorant caricature of the Middle Ages



The vast network of monasteries helped to lay the foundations of the welfare state we are now so familiar with by helping the poor in organised ways writes **David Quinn**

Back in 1986 a movie called *The Name of the Rose* went on release internationally. It was based on the book of the same name by Umberto Eco and starred Sean Connery as the monk-detective, William of Baskerville, who is sent to a Benedictine monastery in northern Italy to investigate a possible murder.

To cut a long story short, the movie gives us a grotesque caricature of the Middle Ages. It is presented as an almost irredeemable time of fanaticism, ignorance, superstition and obscurantism in which religion above all is holding back the upward march of humanity.

This view of the Middle Ages is itself almost irredeemable, but it is seared into the Western imagination. One of the most damning adjectives you can use to describe an attitude or practice you dislike is 'medieval'.

'Whig' version

We were rescued from the Middle Ages, we are told, by the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. This is what has been called the 'Whig' version of history (the 'Whigs' being the reform party in Britain) which presents history as a march from darkness into light.

For Protestants and secular humanists alike, it was the Catholic Church which domi-

nated the Middle Ages and held us in darkness.

But the caricature of the Middle Ages is precisely that, and is itself ignorant and obscurantist.

Yes, the Middle Ages was sometimes fanatical and often violent. It was the period of the Crusades and the Inquisition, and the Church did at times oppose the advance of knowledge.

But all ages have been violent, and all have had outbreaks of fanaticism. The very worst in history was probably the 20th century when tens of millions died at the hands of ideological fanatics. But no-one ever says sometime is 'positively 20th century' as a generalised term of abuse.



Sean Connery in a scene from the 1986 film *In The Name of the Rose*.

In fact, the Middle Ages was the era in which Europe began its upward ascent in the world, for good and ill.

It was during the Middle Ages, for example, that universities were founded, with the very first being established in Bologna in Italy in the late 11th Century to be quickly followed by universities in places like Oxford, Cambridge and Paris. (Sometimes they formally became universities after they started teaching).

At the same time, the writings of ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle began to circulate in Western Europe again and for the most part were eagerly embraced. Thomas Aquinas did more than anyone else to find compatibilities between Aristotle and Christian theology, a legacy that lasts to this day.

During this time there were advances in mathematics, science, philosophy, law and theology. The Church did sometimes crack down on knowledge it found threatening, occasionally violently, but for the most part it promoted the advance of knowledge. It would not have founded universities otherwise.

University academics were extremely likely to be monks as well, as was the case with Aquinas. In other words, the monastic life was associated with knowledge, as well as with good works and contemplation. To simply dismiss the monasteries as corrupt, or obscurantist, or both, is really a form of anti-Catholic bigotry.

The monasteries helped to bring civilisation and order to much of Europe after the chaos of the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

The vast network of monasteries helped to lay the foundations of the welfare state we are now so familiar with by helping the poor and sick in organised, systematic ways.

The renowned legal scholar and historian, Harold Berman,

argued that the foundations of modern law were laid in the 11th Century and not in the 16th as the Whig interpretation of history would insist. It was in the 11th Century that canon lawyers, encouraged by the papacy, began to systematically organise the law and theorise about it.

They established universal legal principles that had their ultimate origin in the Judeo-Christian belief that we are all morally equal in the sight of God, and therefore should be in the eyes of the law as well, even if this took a long time to fully realise in practice.

“Italian merchant communities were founded in many trading cities”

This organisation and interpretation of the law by canonists was part of a bigger project that has been called 'the Papal Revolution'.

The Middle Ages also saw the rise of modern banking and a merchant class, especially in Italy. Italians established trade with as many parts of the world as they could and famous traders like Marco Polo went as far afield as the court of the Mongols to establish trading routes.

Italian merchant communities were founded in many trading cities. The most famous trading city of all was Venice.

If you go to Siena in Tuscany, you will find the headquarters of the oldest existing bank in the world, namely Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, founded in the 15th Century.

A combination of banking with the new merchant class led to fantastic city-states like Venice, Florence, Pisa and Siena with which Italy is synonymous.

Art flourished in these cities before the Renaissance.

They paved the way for it, and as we have seen, knowledge and classical learning were already advancing in the Middle Ages and did not need to wait until the Renaissance.

It was also in the Middle Ages that the clan system began to collapse in much of Europe. Before it did, people's lives were shaped very much by the clans they belonged to and there was little room for individual freedom, never mind representative government.

But as the clans began to fade, voluntary associations like guilds began to rise up instead because people still wanted to belong to something. The guilds were still sometimes dominated by families, but nonetheless, they needed rules of fair play which would govern relations when people were not related to each other by blood, and they had elected leaders.

Crucially, ocean-going vessels were developed during the late Middle Ages, and with that, the Age of Exploration began. Columbus got to the Americas before the Renaissance began in earnest, never mind the Enlightenment.

So, as we can see, therefore, the foundations of life as we know it today in the West, and in most of the rest of the world besides were laid in the Middle Ages, from universities to the welfare state, to modern trade and banking, voluntary associations and representative government.

We can say, of course, that the rise of Europe was bad in many ways for the rest of the world, but what cannot be said with any real justification is that the Middle Ages held back Europe in any serious way. In fact, it is the era in which we achieved escape velocity and began to prosper and advance in many new ways.

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Spiritual Multiplication of Irish Missionaries



Letterkenny Cathedral Team 21/22 - Jamie Nolan far right



“As a teenager, I had drifted a bit from the faith I’d had as a child. The NET team - and Denis in particular - were so confident in their faith and they really affirmed me and helped me to grow.” Tammie Richardson (23) from Ashbourne, Co. Meath, is a mission staff member with NET Ministries Ireland. The eldest of 12 children, faith was very much a part of her

family life, and she credits her parents with helping her to have a personal faith as a young child. It was the influence of the Dunshaughlin NET team of 2015/16, that she says helped her to come back to that place of relationship with God and take her faith seriously as an adult. “I began to go to Youth Group, and events for secondary school students. Then I went on a Surf Sand Son retreat, and Denis gave a talk on God’s love. I was watching Denis talking, and I realised how much God loved me - and I knew that I wanted to be able to do that: to tell people about Jesus. That’s

when I started thinking about becoming a missionary myself. But it was Denis’ constant joy that got my attention. And he hasn’t changed!”

Footsteps of St Patrick

Denis Nuwagaba, the NET team member that had such an impact on Tammie’s life, came to Ireland from Uganda in 2015. He is now the Program Director of NET Ministries Ireland and says that he feels blessed to be following in the footsteps of St Patrick. “I’ve found that the youth of Ireland are very receptive to the faith. Yes, the challenges are there, but I am always encouraged at how they are willing to respond to the truth when they hear it, even when they have difficult questions to ask and social pressures to wrestle through. And it’s Irish people like Tammie who can be incredible witnesses to the love

of Jesus for those young people. It was a blessing to be able to help her grow in her faith.”

“They’re asking good questions - I think maybe the pandemic has something to do with it”

Tammie has been on mission to Irish youth with NET Ministries since 2017 in Cork City (17/18) Booters-town in Dublin (18/19) and Castlebar (19/20) and is now serving with mission staff in Donegal. During her years of service she has reached out to many hundreds of young people, and also has focused on intentional friendships with particular students: Discipleship Ministry. This approach has seen three of those young people become missionaries themselves, two this year: Anna Walsh and Jamie Nolan.

Anna (25) from Cork City, says that she is surprised at how open young people are to hearing about her faith when she visits schools with the Mission Team, who are working in Lisnaskea Co. Fermanagh (NET’s first year-long mission in Northern Ireland) and the Diocese of Elphin. Her team is mostly engaged in Encounter type ministry - outreach to students with the basic message of the gospel in a day-long retreat format.

“They’re asking good questions - I think maybe the pandemic has something to do with it. I was expecting that they wouldn’t be interested at all, but there are so many that are suffering and that need hope. They wouldn’t tell you they’re suffering from depression or anxiety, but I notice in some of their eyes there’s trauma. There’s a need for them to experience the healing touch of Jesus, and as Catholics we’re called to bring Jesus to them. They’re



Anna, Mission Team 21/22



Letterkenny Team 21/22 at Doagh Castle.

Bringing Hope to Irish Young People

interested in the fact of being able to have a personal relationship with Jesus – they didn't know that was possible."

Connection

Jamie Nolan, who also experienced discipleship with Tammie's NET team in Castlebar, says that he is able to relate to the experience of the students that he meets in schools, having had a stagnant faith as a teenager. He also sees the impact that a simple human connection can have with young people.

"I found the NET team very strange at first - I couldn't figure out why they were so happy and full of life. I didn't know what was causing that and I wanted it. Now, as a missionary with a strong faith, I love working with the Junior cycle students especially."

Jamie's team, the fifth team that Letterkenny Cathedral parish has had, has a mixture of Encounter style ministry, and Discipleship Ministry, which in the parish is creating a sense of hope and casting a light on what God is doing: the Light-house effect. He says that even in the difficult times in which we find ourselves, there is still reason for optimism.

Hope

"Recently, we did a "Lightfever" event, which is based around Eucharistic Adoration in the church. We go out to the streets and invite people of all ages to come and light a candle, and stop for a moment of prayer. That day

we did it over lunchtime, and it was mainly students who came in from the local secondary schools. You count the candles that are lit, so you know how many people came in. That lunchtime, 179 young people came in to pray in the church. That to me is very hopeful."

“We go out to the streets and invite people of all ages to come and light a candle, and stop for a moment of prayer”

Denis, seeing the "spiritual multiplication" that is happening, says that there's no silver bullet, and bringing Ireland back to faith takes the whole Church. "I'm very encouraged by parents, teachers, priests and religious who are giving above and beyond to make sure that young people encounter Jesus and start living the life in abundance they deserve. There are so many men and women that are not giving up the fight, and we at NET Ministries are kept going by all those people. We're blessed to be working alongside them."

i If you would like to support the work of Denis, Tammie, Anna and Jamie in 2022 with the young people of Ireland, please consider joining their support team by donating at netministries.ie or by calling the office at 074 9190606

“They wouldn't tell you they're suffering from depression or anxiety, but in some of their eyes there's trauma. They need to experience the healing touch of Jesus, and as Catholics we're called to bring Him to them”



Denis Nuwagaba (Current Program Director)



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A man of meticulous Faith



Popular hotelier and TV personality, Francis Brennan.
Photos: Barry Murphy



Francis Brennan tells Ruadhán Jones about the excitement of Christmas and his faith

Ever charming and chatty, the hotelier and popular TV personality Francis Brennan is also a man of sincere Faith, in his own mould. Well known for his meticulous attention to detail and his precise personal habits, he opened up on how his faith finds expression in the Angelus, daily prayer and annual trips to Lourdes.

Prayer

For Mr Brennan, prayer is automatic, to the point that he doesn't even notice he's doing it.

"I always had a good faith and I believe in God and the hereafter and those sort of things – and I abide by the rules," Mr Brennan tells me. "So yeah, always since a young fella. Not holy Joe-y, but I would always have said the Angelus and those sorts of things. It's just automatic,

I don't even notice, even though I have been aware of my religion all my life."

His particular devotion to Lourdes comes up quickly, and Mr Brennan says that it came about from a casual conversation with a friend.

"I was going to Dublin one day on the train a hundred years ago – well, it's over 40 years ago now – and Dermot Kinlen, who ended up a high court judge, was a good Lourdes man. He asked me, 'did you ever go to Lourdes?' And I said not at all.

"He said, 'well I'll tell you now, you're made for it. I'll get in touch when the time comes'. So anyway, I headed off with Kerry Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. I've been going for 37 years, or maybe 36. With lockdown we haven't been twice now, so there's been two years we didn't go. I'd been there 37 years on the trot. I enjoy it so much. I think it's just great to be able to give a week of your busy life to a cause for those who are not as lucky as us."

When in Lourdes, Mr Brennan's experience as manager of the Park Hotel Kenmare is put to good use, organising meals for pilgrims who have special diets.

"I work in the kitchen actually, with a girl, Angie, a colleague from Killarney, where we look after those who have special diets and that kind of thing," he explains. "Because nowadays in Lourdes everything is serviced – we'd have maybe 600 people on the pilgrimage, and they'd all be in the hotels and we'd have maybe 40 or 50 patients that would need medical care.

"They would be in the hospital. I volunteer with Angie and we look

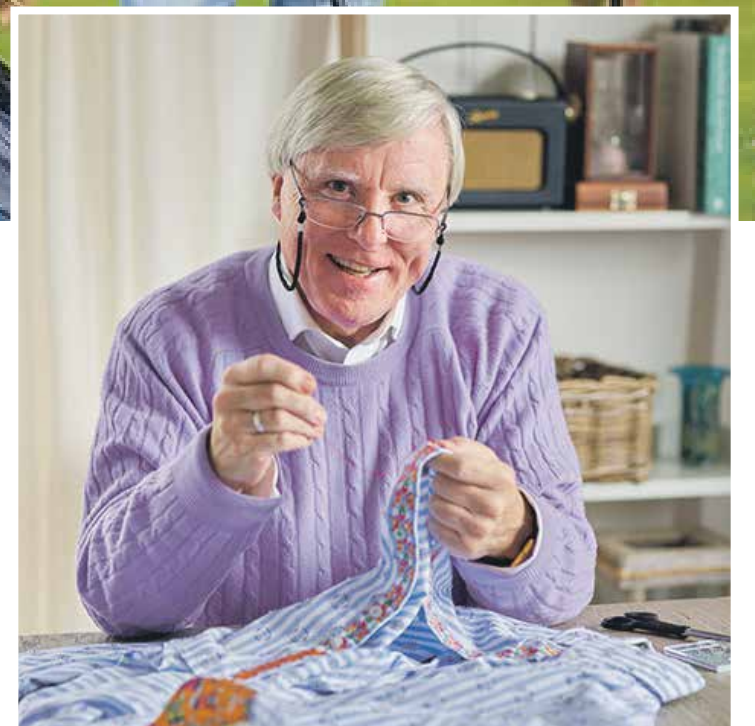
after the kitchen there. So, we look after those 40 patients, if they have special diets like gluten free or sodium or lactic acid. You know, whatever it would be – I'm given a sheet a week in advance so I know what people can get.

"We cook for those individuals and we look after them. It's full on, it's three meals a day and an hour's preparation before and an hour's tidy up afterward. You start at seven in the morning and you don't finish until half nine, 10 o'clock at night. But it's grand, I enjoy it."

“It's been a tough year for anybody working in the hospitality business, as Covid-19 led first to a lockdown and now to staff shortages and complicated travel restrictions”

At the time of our interview, Mr Brennan said that he hadn't been able to visit Lourdes this year, but he was determined to go next year: "We always go the first week of September. I always know in my diary, if anybody's looking for me for anything, I always hold that week, as in I'm not available, I know I'm going to be away."

It's been a tough year for anybody working in the hospitality business, as Covid-19 led first to a lockdown and now to staff shortages and complicated travel restrictions. Mr Brennan says that he was lucky in the first lockdown that it



afforded him a rare opportunity to take time to himself.

"The very first lockdown in February to April last year, the weather was just beautiful," he recalls. "I was at home in my own house. I never had time at home ever before. I did spend some of that time writing some of next year's diary, which was out just a few weeks ago with Gill [Books]."

Opportunity

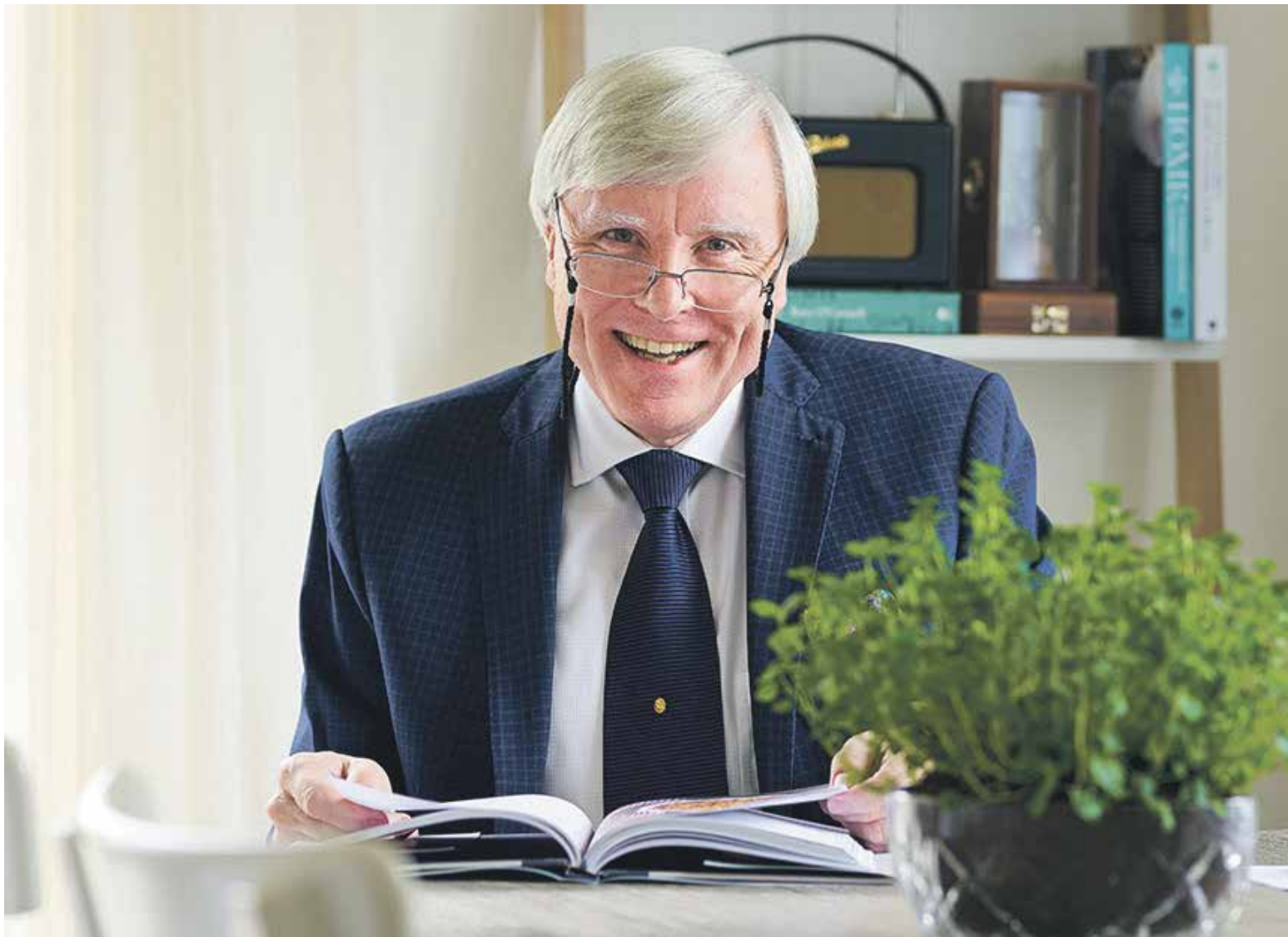
"I gave them their book two months early. I'm usually a month late, so everyone was delighted about that! I got that opportunity because of lockdown. But we were lucky because the weather was lovely. In Kerry, it was just beautiful. I got out for a two mile walk every day. That's all you could do because you couldn't go further than five kilometres. So I just walked the roads of Kerry near my home, I wrote my diary, I read books, and ended up in great form.

"Of course, it was difficult for the hotel because we were closed and we had a responsibility to the staff and we had ongoing bills that you have in life. But listen we're here now and we've a few bob in the bank, so we're grand."

“We do cookery things, like gooseberry fool for the autumn and strawberries in the spring”

The book that Mr Brennan is referring to is the 2022 edition of his *Homekeeper's Diary*. It's the second year he has written the diary, and he's very happy with how it turned out.

"It's always easier to do the second one because you have a template," he explains. "So we just worked off the template and were



driven by the seasons. Like we have daffodil clipping in May and June, and we have you planting the daffodils in October and November. It's a full circle. It depends on what month you are in, we do things based on that month. We do cookery things, like gooseberry fool for the autumn and strawberries in the spring.

"We're driven by the seasons, when we sit down together. Then we change little stories here and little stories there and that kind of thing. And then we do photography for it. But when you open the two pages, there's information on the left-hand side and then there's a Monday to Sunday on the right-hand page you can fill out. I always think that if you leave it open, you are able to see what the week holds."

TV personality

As well as managing a hotel and writing a homekeeper's diary, Mr Brennan is also something of a TV personality on Irish screens. RTÉ's *At Your Service* in 2008 made a household name of him and his younger brother, John. The show, in which he and John give make-over advice to B&Bs, guesthouses and small hotels across Ireland, returns to television in 2022.

"I was filming all this week," Mr Brennan says. "I was up and down to Dublin. I was in Dublin, then we went to West Cork to Blair's cove, where we were filming for next year. And then, I came up to Co. Wicklow, where we were in the K2 Alpaca farm in Newtown Mount Kennedy. I was there yesterday, they're building seven new cottages.

"They're delayed on everything. They can't get labourers to work, no plumbers and the electrician

appeared for two days and is gone again. All the industries have the same trouble with staff, it's amazing. We're doing four new shows for next year. They're one hour shows, we usually only do half hour shows. We're working in a caravan park in Dunmurray, it's up the walls because they didn't get planning permission as they'd hoped because the planning offices aren't working together as they should have been because of Covid – it's nobody's fault really.

“Being able to film *At Your Service* has afforded Mr Brennan the opportunity to travel again, something which he did often before Covid-19”

"We're doing the Smugglers Inn in Waterford. It's finished, we did a fantastic job and we're having an opening in the next two weeks. But out of the four shows, only one was finished. It's ongoing filming there, so that's good. They're all good stories you know. We'll be able to show the real trauma of Covid on business."

“I love Christmas, I love the excitement of Santa Claus coming and the children get their presents and everyone is delighted”

Many businesses in the hospitality sector have struggled to find staff after lockdown ended. Mr Brennan says that he was talking to a colleague in a Dublin hotel, where he was staying overnight, who told him it's "all hands on deck" due to the lack of staff: "He's a general manager and he was clearing tables this morning. Everyone just has to get in and do the job, because there's nobody available. Staff are very tight this year in the hospitality industry."

Travel

Being able to film *At Your Service* has afforded Mr Brennan the opportunity to travel again, something which he did often before Covid-19. The pandemic, he says, "very much clipped my wings".

"But listen, I'm one of those people, if that's the way it is, that's the way it is, what can we do. I don't get excited about it, because there's no point in beating yourself up or getting into a depression because you can't do what you want to do. You find something else to do. But we had a very busy summer at the hotel. That was good, we were kept very busy."

With the summer months long behind, Mr Brennan's mind turned to Christmas, a season which he

loves greatly. It's an exceptionally busy time of the year for him and his staff at the Park Hotel Kenmare.

"I love Christmas, I love the excitement of Santa Claus coming and the children get their presents and everyone is delighted," he declares happily. "We're closed always for two weeks before Christmas, from December 10 or so. We only open up for Christmas and close in January again. It's a very concentrated 10 or 12 days at Christmas time. We always have a full house and a lot going on. We do a three-day Christmas programme from the 24 to the 27. You have to stay three days, it's a package. I think it's sold out already, but it's very near anyway."

When asked how he spends his Christmas day, Mr Brennan laughs affably, saying "it's hilarious". He then treats the subject with customary fastidiousness, with no detail escaping.

"I'm in the hotel from about a quarter past seven on Christmas morning," he begins. "It's pitch black dark coming into work. You always know the houses with children, they're the houses that have lights. They're up at six, rather than at eight. I drive into the hotel. The one thing about Christmas is that you have to have all the batteries available, like double As and

triple As and double that and TCs this because children get presents with batteries nowadays and you have to have batteries available. We always have them at reception.

"Also, in the last number of years, they've screwed the battery in, so you have to have a tiny, tiny screwdriver, which I buy in America every year. I have them at the hotel in a drawer, where you can open these tiny little screws from a moving doll or Skywalker or whatever it is. So we spend our first hour or two getting children organised and battered up and all that. And then we have breakfast, which is late always on Christmas morning, until about 11, then people go to Church or whatever. We have a staff lunch at 11:30.

“In part, all of this is possible because Mr Brennan doesn't have family in Kerry – his brother John comes and goes much more, he says, as he has family at home”

"I give my staff a glass of wine that day, and hope they don't take two – that can affect our service later in the day," he jokes. "Then we have lunch for the guests, followed in the afternoon with games and competitions. Then we have afternoon tea, mince pies and Christmas cake."

Mr Brennan confesses that he doesn't know where people put all the food, "but they do take it and eat it". The day is capped off with a gala dinner at night.

"We used to do black tie, but we don't do that anymore, it's just a gala dinner," he says. "We have carols in the lounge afterwards, and then we have a band, we only have one three nights a year. On Stephen's day, we do treasure hunts where you have to find all the things we suggest on a sheet. That's great because mums and dads can do it. Everybody goes off, there's a bit of rivalry between families that come every year to see who might win. Then we have a reception at night again and then dancing. It's a very, very busy time, particularly for me."

In part, all of this is possible because Mr Brennan doesn't have family in Kerry – his brother John comes and goes much more, he says, as he has family at home. "We do have at half six a management dinner with all the heads of department. It's the one day of the year we do that, where we're all together."

With all the preparation that goes into it, the fear always remains that something outside Mr Brennan's control will go wrong. "One year, the weather was impossible and 40% of the people couldn't get to us, which is no good, you can't recoup that," Mr Brennan laments. He ends on a positive note, however, placing the whole thing in God's hands: "We just pray for good weather so that people can get there."

Keeping a Catholic ethos alive and vibrant



It has never been more important to stand up and defend our schools so our students can shape a better world, writes **Philip McMaster**

In an era where it seems Catholic education is increasingly under attack, the forthcoming centenary of the foundation of St Joseph's Grammar School in Donaghmore, Co. Tyrone represents a timely opportunity to take stock and reflect on the unique contribution Catholic education has made to generations of young people from our community and the wider mid-Ulster area.

In 2022, St Joseph's will celebrate the centenary of its foundation by the Daughters of the Cross of Liège, Belgium. The history of the sisters in Donaghmore dates back to 1920 when Canon Joseph O'Neill invited the congregation to the parish. After an unsuccessful attempt to open a hospital, approval was eventually given by the archdiocese to open a boarding school in 1922. Such humble beginnings for this new school, when one of the first sisters recounted in her diary that classes were often held in what is now known as the parlour and sometimes even in the byre with the donkey as an interested onlooker, seem like a very distant memory.

Achieving

Today, St Joseph's consists of both a high achieving grammar school and a high achieving non-selective Irish medium stream, Scoil Iósaef, with a total school enrolment of 854 pupils from aged 11 to 18.

Despite the passage of time, the entire St Joseph's school community recognises that our successes are



Archbishop Eamon looks at a historical archive with pictures of the school and past pupils going back to the 1920s.



Archbishop Eamon Martin celebrated Mass to inaugurate the award.

built on the sacrifices of those who came before us. We believe that our strength is found in our Catholic ethos and the core values passed down from the Daughters of the Cross.

As we prepare to enter our centenary year we are clear that at the core of our mission is ensuring that the legacy of the sisters remains at the forefront of daily life in St Joseph's. The mission of the congregation is simple, "to be a compassionate heartbeat in the world". This mission, and the mantra of the sisters, to "be kind, be kind, be kind" continues to form the bedrock of our pastoral care system today.

“Today, St Joseph's consists of both a high achieving grammar school and a high achieving non-selective Irish medium stream”

Like all Catholic schools in Ireland and around the world, ours is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and welcomes young people from all cultures, backgrounds and faiths. The measure of our success as a Catholic school is found in the reality that every aspect of life in St Joseph's reflects the teachings of the Gospel. We understand that Jesus is the invisible member of every classroom and we endeavour to ensure that every child is treated

with dignity, equality and respect, as a spiritual reflection of Christ. All our actions focus on making the loving presence of Christ a reality for everyone who walks through our door.

Active faith

We recognise that we are called to an active faith, a faith that transcends words and finds substance in practical outreach and social action. Earlier this year, as part of our commitment to ensure the faith legacy of the sisters continues to be passed on for generations to come, we officially launched our new Daughters of the Cross faith development award for 'key stage 3' students. Archbishop Eamon Martin celebrated Mass with our year eight students to inaugurate the new award. During Mass one of our students read a prayer that he had written during RE class. In his prayer the student described a strong connection he felt with the mission of the Daughters of the Cross, to bring compassion to a fractured world, despite not even being born when the sisters left in 2007. This prayer struck me because it spoke of the rich legacy of faith that continues to exist in our school. It reinforced, as a teacher and a leader, the importance of continuing to model and promote the ethos left by the sisters. Archbishop Eamon spoke about the importance of our students using their gifts and talents for the good of God and others and took time to reflect on the faith legacy left by the sisters and encouraged our students to be torch bearers of our ethos by using their gifts and talents to bring about goodness each and every day.

Opportunities

Through the award it is hoped that our students will be provided with opportunities to grow in faith and recognise the core role each and every one of them play in our community of faith both in St Joseph's and the wider Church. This new faith development award seeks to build solid foundations for our students to progress onto the diocesan Muireadach Cross and St Pope John Paul II Awards. The social outreach aspect of the award recognises that the mission



Head Boy Anton Quinn is pictured with Archbishop Eamon Martin.



of the sisters is to bring active help to those most in need. The award challenges our students to practice an active faith and recognises that the love of God must never be separated from the love of people. During the three year programme our students will be supported to engage in the faith life of school, the parish and the wider diocese. There will be explicit opportunities for their families to also come together in prayer in recognition of the core role families play in the faith education of their children. The students will work towards bronze, silver and gold awards with

one student being awarded the Sr Mary Brogán Award at the end of year ten for commitment to promoting our ethos in junior school.

We believe that it has never been more important to stand up and defend the role of Catholic education and ensure that our students are grounded in the core tenants of their faith so that when they leave school, they understand their role to positively shape the world around them.

Philip McMaster is a senior teacher at St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore, Co. Tyrone.

Madagascar Food Crisis



The Madagascar food crisis has brought the country to its knees, leaving the elderly at greatest risk. © CBM / Viviane Rakotoarivony.



The island country of Madagascar off the coast of East Africa is in the grips of a double headed disaster, with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting lives and livelihoods and the worst droughts in 40 years creating a humanitarian crisis that has forced thousands to the brink of famine.

About 1.5 million people need urgent assistance and tens of thousands are experiencing critical food insecurity, according to the United Nations' World Food Programme.

Already, three out of every four families are starving in some regions of Madagascar, and others are eating locusts and raw cactus fruits to survive. Tragically, the crisis is predicted to worsen due to insufficient food supplies and the increasing price of essentials due to COVID-19.

Situation

Satry Ramaroson, who is managing the humanitarian response from the CBM country office in Madagascar, describes the perilous situation as a once in a generation event. "People with disabilities in the Southern regions of Madagascar are more

likely to be excluded from public life and so they go unnoticed by humanitarian organisations and face various barriers to access aid," he says

“Haova and her family, as well as about three-quarters of Madagascar’s population, live in poverty

People with disabilities – like single mother Haova – are more likely to be deeply impacted in times of disaster.



Thanks to CBM supporters Haova was able to develop a small income-generating activity and provide food to those who need it most. © CBM / Viviane Rakotoarivony.

Even before the current disaster, Haova said her greatest challenge in life is to provide for her three children. She has a physical disability and resultant pain in her foot, which is a barrier to completing daily activities and engaging in the local community. Even fetching water is something Haova cannot do independently and requires the help of her children to do.

Poverty

Haova and her family, as well as about three-quarters of Madagascar's population, live in poverty. Financial problems mean their staple diet is sweet potato and cassava leaves.

“People with disabilities are dealing with food distribution points that are not accessible to people with physical impairments”

The family was already struggling to make ends meet before drought struck, leaving thousands of people across Madagascar in catastrophic conditions.

The team from CBM's country office in Madagascar says that before the crisis, people with disabilities already faced complex barriers to access aid.

Disabilities

Now, people with disabilities are dealing with food distribution points that are not accessible to people with physical impairments, and some humanitarian aid delivered in a way that is not suitable for people with intellectual, hearing or vision impairments.

People like Haova and her children need support to be able to access food, water, medication and other essentials to make it through this crisis and lead positive and healthy lives.

This is the worst drought in 40 years, sandstorms and disease, have destroyed crops and livestock. This, combined with the impact of COVID-19, has created a deadly crisis. More than 1.5 million people are hungry. In some districts, three out of every four families are starving. CBM are on the ground working directly with local partners to provide life-saving aid and livelihood programs to reach the most marginalised.

ABOUT CBM

CBM works alongside people with disabilities in the world's poorest places to fight poverty and exclusion and transform lives. Drawing on over 100 years' experience, we work with the most marginalised in society to break the cycle of poverty and disability and build inclusive communities where everyone can

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The yearning for God can sometimes manifest itself in the most unlikely of ways, writes **Maolsheachlann Ó Ceallaigh**

In 1982, the British heavy metal band Iron Maiden released their third album, *The Number of the Beast*. The album was hugely popular, entering the UK charts at number one and remaining there for two weeks. It made Iron Maiden superstars around the globe, but it also created controversy among Christians and social conservatives. The title song is sung from the perspective of the Antichrist, and ends with the lines: "I have the fire, I have the force, I have the power to make my evil take its course". The album's cover is a painting of the devil standing among the flames of Hell, and also features the band's mascot - a demonic figure called Eddie - standing over the devil himself, pulling his strings like a puppet.

Christian groups protested the album, burning copies of the record, as well as smashing them up with hammers. Iron Maiden were unrepentant, provocatively including a 'backward message' on their fourth album *Piece of Mind* (there were at this time many rumours of Satanic messages hidden in heavy metal albums, only comprehensible when the record was played backwards). The backward message in this case was simply the band's drummer Nicko McBrain quoting some words from a comedy sketch about the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

“I'd never been to a church where there was this contemporary rock music”

It was perhaps surprising, then, that in 1999 the same Nicko McBrain experienced a conversion to Christianity, about a year after his wife Rebecca had become 'born-again'. The story of his conversion, which happened when he accompanied his wife to church, might surprise those who insist that contemporary worship music is a convert-repellent: "The band was phenomenal. I'd never been to a church where there was this contemporary rock music. And I remember standing, listening to this music, thinking, 'This is fantastic'. The pastor comes out, starts his sermon and he said a prayer. Normally, later on, he would

Headbangers for Jesus...



Iron Maiden

close in prayer. And he basically said, 'Where you're standing now, ask God into your life. Ask Jesus Christ to come in there. Give your heart to him.' And I stood [with] closed eyes, and I swear that God and Jesus pushed me, and I kept moving forward as though I was being pushed over. I couldn't feel anything. And this is the God's honest truth - I thought, 'I haven't had a drink. I'm not in a hangover here.' I felt his presence. And right there and then, I gave my heart to God, and I asked Jesus in my life."

Contradictions

Mr McBrain denies there is a contradiction between the demonic imagery of Iron Maiden's music and his Christian faith: "To still be able to be in such a great band, where people think we're demonic or Satanic, most people that know and have a modicum of sense and intelligence know that not to be true. It doesn't take an Einstein to listen to the records and listen to the lyrics of the songs to know what's going on."

His case is not alone. Most people would have some awareness of Alice Cooper, the heavy metal singer who came to prominence in the early 1970s. Cooper, whose real name is Vincent Damon Furnier, drew on

the horror genre for his band's stage show. It featured dolls made to look like dead babies, dancing skeletons, and even a mock execution where Alice would be 'decapitated' with a guillotine...and then continue the show while holding the fake severed head. His album titles included *Welcome to my Nightmare* and *Alice Cooper Goes to Hell*. In 1973, the British Labour MP Leo Abse called for Alice Cooper to be refused entry to the UK, and the Christian campaigner Mary Whitehouse successfully campaigned against one of his songs being played on *Top of the Pops*.

Similar journey

Alice Cooper was, in fact, the son of a Christian pastor, and he made a similar journey to Christianity as Nicko McBrain - once again, it was the urging of a wife that made the difference. When he gave up drugs, she insisted he show he had changed his ways by going to church. "I knew who Jesus Christ was, and I was denying him," he remembers. "I knew that there had to either come a point where I either accepted Christ and started living that life, or if I died in this, I was in a lot of trouble."

After his conversion, Alice Cooper thought about changing

his stage persona, but his pastor advised him that he would be a better witness to Christ by remaining within hard rock as a faithful Christian. "Jesus is the ultimate rebel," Cooper insists. He continues to release albums that use dark themes and imagery, and has been presenting a successful radio show called *Nights with Alice Cooper* since 2004.

“After his conversion, Alice Cooper thought about changing his stage persona”

Another heavy metallor who embraced Christianity, Dave Mustaine of Megadeth, describes Alice Cooper as his 'godfather'. Megadeth were enjoying massive success with their 1986 album *Peace Sells...But Who's Buying?* Mr Mustaine was indulging in the usual excesses of the heavy metal lifestyle, but on a tour with Alice Cooper the older rocker took him under his wing: "Alice called me into his bus and talked to me about pacing yourself and said he was watching me. He showed he loved me by being willing to go out on a limb and say something

to someone he doesn't know and risk a bad outcome 'cos he cared that much about me. It broke the hardness around my heart." In 2002 Mr Mustaine (who was raised a Jehovah's Witness) became a born-again Christian. For a time he refused to tour with bands who used demonic themes and imagery. When questioned on same-sex marriage, he expressed opposition to it on the grounds of his Christian faith. On the other hand, he denies being 'into religion': "Religion's for people who are afraid of going to hell," he once said, "and spirituality's for people like me who've been there."

List

The list of heavy metallors who have become Christian (or who always were) could be extended much further. Even Ozzy Osbourne, one of the founders of the genre and nicknamed 'The Prince of Darkness,' told *The New York Times* in 1992 that he was a member of the Church of England and prayed before performances.

In a way, it's not surprising that heavy metal musicians so often turn to God. The themes of heavy metal music very often concern truly 'heavy' subjects such as death, suffering, evil, and the supernatural. Musicians and fans who are drawn to such themes are more likely to be exercised by the 'big questions' of human existence, and to find their ultimate answers in the Christian revelation. It's a demonstration, perhaps, of how the yearning for God continues to manifest itself in our modern culture, sometimes in the most unlikely ways.

“Christian groups protested the album, burning copies of the record, as well as smashing them up with hammers”



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The joy of the Visitation

Children are counting down the days. After this Sunday, only six more days till Christmas. Excitement is bubbling up. I could feel it myself when watching the television commercial where a little boy keeps asking “Will he really come?” Of course, we all think that he is waiting for Santa Claus. But no, it is Grandad he is waiting for. There is such a smile on his face when he sees Grandad. “I knew you would come.”

“Will he really come?” Many Jewish children must have asked that question as their elders recalled the story of the original fall and the promise that someone would come. Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve, God promised that there would be a woman whose offspring would crush the head of the serpent.

“Mary is somebody who was specially chosen by God and addressed by the angel as full of grace”

Years, centuries, went by and that story of hope was passed on from one generation to the next. The great prophet, Isaiah, spoke of a time of peace and reconciliation between traditional enemies. The wolf and the lamb would live side by side, the calf and the lion cub feed together and a little child would lead them. Furthermore, this child would be of the lineage of Jesse, in other words, of the line of David. David, born in Bethlehem, was the shepherd boy who was chosen and anointed as king. Jesus, also born in Bethlehem, was the king who identified himself as the Good Shepherd.

Will he really come?

“Will he really come? When will he come?” The story was passed on. Surely, when it would eventually happen it would involve important people in important places. But the God of surprises acted differently. The news of great joy was announced in Nazareth! A village in Galilee, never even mentioned in the Old Testament, and now housing the migrant

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



workers employed in one of Herod's great building schemes.

And the person to whom the message of motherhood was announced ... the most unlikely woman, was a consecrated virgin! “How can this come about since I am a virgin?”

Mary's visit to Elizabeth

Mary was informed by the angel Gabriel that her ageing cousin, Elizabeth, had conceived and was in her sixth month. Mary knew that Elizabeth would welcome her assistance, so she set off over hill and vale as quickly as she could. But it is likely that caring for Elizabeth was not her only motive. The deep experience of God that she received at the angel Gabriel's annunciation was something she needed to share with another who had a divine experience. The moment they met was a wonderful celebration of divine presence. Mary had already experienced the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Now, as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, she too was filled with the Holy Spirit and the child in her womb leapt for joy.

John the Dancer

An American priest, Isaias Powers, wrote a beautiful Advent reflection about baby John's dancing in the womb. We usually think of John the Baptist as a good man who was ascetical, strict and confrontational. We overlook that Spirit-filled performance in his mother's womb. Isaias Powers called him ‘John the Dancer’. Elizabeth, his mother, took up the dance music and proclaimed the three great blessings of Mary. Then Mary completed the celebration with the Magnificat. “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” But it was John, as always, who prepared the way.

The three blessings of Mary

The evangelist Luke is the evangelist of the action of the Holy Spirit and he celebrates the Spirit's

presence on the blessed day of the Visitation. That beautiful word ‘blessed’, which tells of God's giving, is heard three times.

“Of all women you are the most blessed.” Mary is somebody who was specially chosen by God and addressed by the angel as full of grace. In the words of William Wordsworth, she is our tainted nature's solitary boast: the most blessed of all people.

“Blessed is the fruit of your womb”. In this second blessing, Elizabeth celebrates how the grace bestowed upon Mary will be the source of divine fruitfulness for all of us.

“Years, centuries, went by and that story of hope was passed on from one generation to the next”

The graces that God offers have to be accepted in total trust. This is where Elizabeth recognised Mary's third blessedness. “Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.” Perhaps Elizabeth was thinking of her husband, Zechariah, who doubted the angel's promise and lost the power of speech until their child was born. Mary expressed her total acceptance of the annunciation. “Let it be done to me according to your word.” Later in the Gospel we hear Jesus praise her faith and total obedience: “Blessed is she who heard the word of God and put it into practice.” She is the model of the Church.

What can we do?

Is there anything of a practical nature that we can learn from the Visitation, the second joyful mystery of the rosary? Mary set off over hilly country when she heard that Elizabeth might need support. Is there anybody or group of people who need my support? Christmas is dreaded by many people ... living alone ... grieving the loss of a loved one during the year ... burdened with bills ... having nothing to give to the children. Charitable organisations do fabulous work. It is not too late to make a donation or to offer to be a driver to deliver parcels.



Mary and Elizabeth are depicted in a 15th Century oil painting by Piero di Cosimo. The title of the painting is *The Visitation with St Nicholas and St Anthony Abbot*. Photo: CNS.

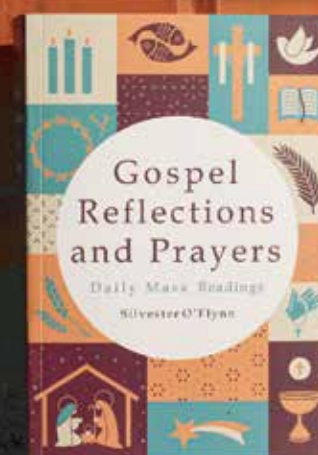
Then there is the delicate matter of breaking the cold silence which keeps people, even family members, apart. It might not work but somebody must make the first step. And since Christmas is a season of great grace who knows what might happen? As the Angel Gabriel said regarding the unlikely pregnancy of Elizabeth, “Nothing is impossible to God.”

The Visitation Prayer

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

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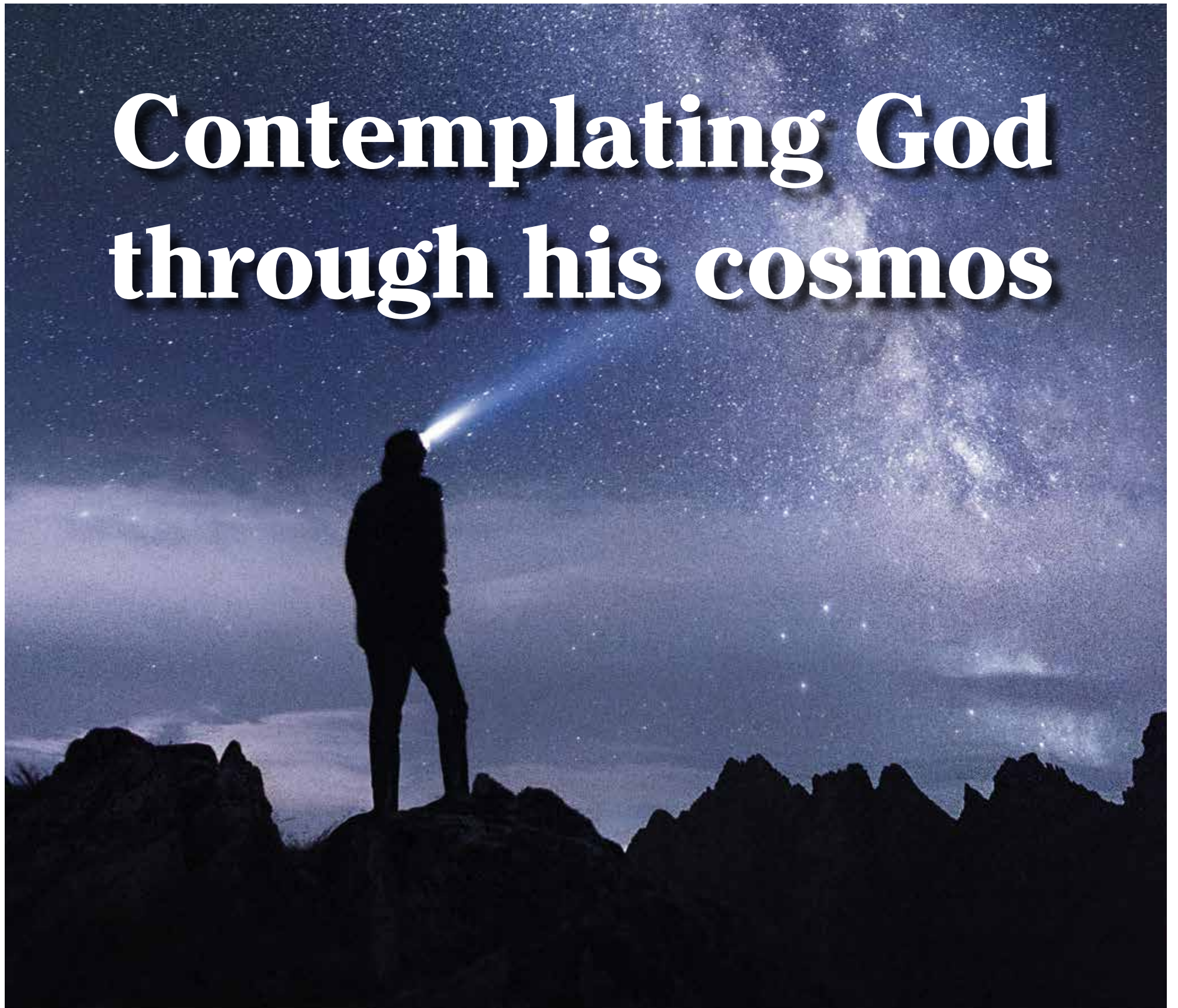
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Contemplating God through his cosmos



The Vatican's chief astronomer Bro. Guy Consolmagno sees science and faith as going hand in hand, writes Jason Osborne

Psalm 19 informs us that, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge”. God has always revealed himself to people through his creation; he speaks to them through it, as the psalm puts it. So, what do you hear, and what do you see, of God when it’s your job to peer into creation at a depth few ever reach? In an age that believes science and faith to

be firmly opposed, does he still speak as loudly through the works of his hands?

Answer

Director of the Vatican Observatory and President of the Vatican Observatory Foundation, Bro. Guy Consolmagno is better positioned to answer these questions than most. Also widely known as the ‘papal astronomer’ and the ‘Vatican’s science guy’, Bro. Guy occupies a unique intersection which has afforded him a clearer view on

the relationship between science and faith than many ever attain.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bro. Guy says the notion that science and faith are in harmony was always “natural” to him.

“I think it came from my age. This idea of a conflict [between science and faith], it was a Victorian idea that died by the middle of the 20th Century, and then was resurrected in the 1970s. I think in part for political reasons; it has nothing to do with science, nothing to do with religion,” Bro. Guy explains.

Family

“I grew up in a household that was very Catholic. My father was – we’re both Americans – but my father came from an Italian background, and my mother is Patricia Clare Duffy, so you can guess where that’s from,” he laughs, continuing, “But they were also both college educated and grow-

ing up in the 1950s, I was a child of the space age.

“Bro. Guy occupies a unique intersection which has afforded him a clearer view on the relationship between science and faith than many ever attain”

“So the nuns in my school taught science and, you know, we were all science crazy and space crazy at the same time as we were learning our religion. We just learned the two of them together. It never occurred to anybody that you could find a conflict. And in fact, you have to work really hard to make there seem to be a conflict. You either have to ignore what science is, or ignore what religion is, or both.”

Despite this, imagine a conflict people do, and that notion has been spread far and wide. It was popular during my school days to claim that science had “disproved God” and the religious worldview, and that can be a difficult opinion to dialogue with – coming from ideologues as it often is.

Asked how he approaches the topic of religion’s compatibility with science, Bro. Guy says there are “three points that seem to get the idea across”.

“The simple explanation is that my religion tells me that God made the universe, my science tells me how he did it. That’s the first summary of why they complement each other beautifully. The second is, if you have a little more time, is to look at the creation story in Genesis.

“Of course, there are several different creation stories, which tells you that what’s important isn’t the particular creation story – whether

it was chapter one or chapter two [of Genesis], or the second book of Maccabees, or the book of Job or any of these other places where creation is talked about. What is common to all these stories is not the how it happened, but the role of God in creation, and that's the message that's true across all of the stories," Bro. Guy says.

"But the fastest place to see that is chapter one of Genesis: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'. Notice the first thing: God is already there in the beginning, before there is a heaven and an earth. That's different from the Babylonian myths. There is one God, rather than an army of them fighting each other. That's different from the Babylonian myths. You find that the science, the way it happened, that you see in Genesis chapter one, is Babylonian and the scholars tell us that it was the Jewish scholars in Babylon, during the Babylonian captivity, who wrote chapter one.

“Playing devil's advocate, I put to him the popular atheistic refrain that the 'why' questions that so occupy religious believers could be a delusion”

"They were using the best science of the day. So, what's important is not where they copied the Babylonians, because that turns out to be wrong. What is important is where they went different from the Babylonians, by saying there was one God, and that God is super-natural. It's not a nature god. Only a God outside of nature gives nature a chance to have a meaning."

Novelty of creation

To some, this may seem like a moot point, but its significance can't be overlooked. The Jewish proclamation that God was super-natural, uncreated, and the origin of all creation was utterly novel. The ancient world was full of religions peopled with created deities and personages, no more above creation than the humans that worshipped them. As Bro. Guy says, the worship of the creator-God is the key revolution the Judeo-Christian creation picture brings to the world.

"But the other points that come out of Genesis are, it's done in the light – the first thing made is light – so nothing is hidden. It's done in a logical fashion, as orderly as day following night, so it's done with a purpose, it's not haphazard, it's not chaos, it's not random. It is good. God continually says it is good, so studying creation is good, because it's studying something that's good. There are a lot of religions that want to tell you that the physical world is evil, somehow we have to meditate above it. That's not Judaism, that's not Christianity," Bro. Guy says, commenting that there are worse times than Christmas to reflect on the "incarnated" goodness of creation.

However, the final point Bro. Guy relies upon in approaching the topic of faith-science relations is that the "ultimate goal"



of creation is laid out right in the first chapter of Genesis: "It's the seventh day," he says.

"It's the day when we no longer worry about feeding ourselves or building homes to keep warm, but when we spend the time to contemplate nature and God in nature, and God as creator of nature. So that means that the scientific enterprise is not only allowed, it's in fact why we were made."

Devil's advocate

Playing devil's advocate, I put to him the popular atheistic refrain that the "why" questions that so occupy religious believers could be a delusion, or a mistaken question. This is the line taken by prominent new-atheist of today, Richard Dawkins. This line of thinking sees all questions that can't be answered via the scientific method as, ultimately, nonsensical.

"It's because if you assume that science has all the answers, you don't prove that, you assume that as your axiom at the beginning," Bro. Guy says.

"Then you decide that any answer that science can't give

you must be a delusion. It's not a proof, it comes directly out of your assumptions. It's what you assumed in the first place. And the same is true in the other direction, you must insist. That if you assume that there is a good, creator God who reveals himself in nature, you will find that God. But it doesn't prove that God because you had to assume he was there before you could see him. So science doesn't prove God, but certainly science supports the faith that we have when we go in."

“God created the heavens and the earth’. Notice the first thing: God is already there in the beginning, before there is a heaven and an earth”

However, the "assumption" of God is a wise one, as Bro. Guy says, "God created rationality". If you assume that the origin of creation is rational, there's a good chance that the created world will be rational, too.

"God created rationality. Think

of the opening of the Gospel according to John. 'In the beginning was the Word'. Well, I remember a little bit of high school Greek, '*En arkhei en ho Logos*. In the beginning was the Logos'. Well, 'logos' is the same root from which we get the word 'logic'. You can think of, 'In the beginning was logic, in the beginning was reason'. And reason is an incarnation of God."

God's glory

The Scriptures speak wonderfully of God's glory in nature, and who hasn't felt awe settle upon them after spotting a blazing sunset or beholding a star-strewn night sky. I asked Bro. Guy whether "God's glory" in creation appears different to him now, after so many years spent scanning and contemplating the heavens.

"Well, imagine you're looking at a photograph of a bunch of people. Some are tall and some are short, and some are pretty and some are homely. But it's, you know, a nicely composed photograph, and you say, 'This is a wonderful view of a bunch of Irish people'," he says.

"Imagine the difference if that's your family, and you know

all of their names and all of their stories. When I look at the sky as a child, I see a bunch of pretty dots of light and the beauty is enrapturing. But when I look now, I also know their names. I know their stories. I even know the stories of the time that I pointed my telescope at that particular place, and saw that particular image, and learned that particular thing, so there's a personal story along with the bigger, scientific story. And that means that the same glory and the beauty of the night-time sky has a new dimension, the dimension of knowledge of a personal history that goes along with it."

“The universe is bigger than whatever seems crushing today. The sun is going to come up tomorrow, the stars will continue to shine”

His explanation is a reminder of God's purpose with his creation – to pull us out of ourselves and into relationship; with him, with others and with his created world. Our lives take on a "new dimension" when the element of personal relationship or history is added to them.

More than a curious feature of his study of the stars, Bro. Guy also says that astronomy "pulls us out of ourselves" and "puts all of our woes and problems into a perspective".

"It can remind us that the universe is bigger than whatever seems

“If you assume that science has all the answers, you don't prove that, you assume that as your axiom at the beginning”



Bro. Guy Consolmagno SJ, director of the Vatican Observatory is pictured at the observatory in Rome in this 2007 file photo. Photo: CNS.

crushing today. The sun is going to come up tomorrow, the stars will continue to shine. They will continue to be beautiful. That sense of perspective over time and space makes us realise that today's problems can be dealt with."

Doubt

It's an interpretation very reminiscent of Jesus' exhortation in the Gospel according to Matthew, in which he teaches the disciples not to doubt in the providence of a God who oversees a creation so much bigger than they are. Creation sings of a God much more intelligent than we can fathom or understand, and Bro. Guy's study of it has only deepened his appreciation of the mind at work behind the world.

"It's interesting. The pagans saw nature and assumed that everything that occurred was the whim of some nature god. There was a lightning bolt, Jupiter threw the lightning bolt," Bro. Guy says.

"We don't believe in nature gods. We believe in one God, or at least one God at most. And so we have to rely on laws of nature to explain why we see the things we see, and that's a good thing, and nature would have to be logical or else it would not function. It would all fall apart. That's to be expected.

"What is not expected," he says, "is that it's not only logical, but beautiful. That, of course the sun is going to set at the end of the day, but who said the sunsets have to be beautiful? And the beauty goes deeper, because when you understand the physics of why they are those colours – the very logical physics – the physics themselves,



Bro. Guy gives Pope Francis a gift during a 2017 scientific conference at the Vatican. Photo: CNS.

the equations, become beautiful. They become poetry. And it makes your heart leap with joy when you understand all the things that are going on in beautiful sunset. So, it's not only the beauty, but the joy that's connected to the beauty. There is God [in it]."

“In a world so riven with poverty and social strife, a charge is often levelled against the Church because it hasn't deployed every penny towards social causes”

The joy Bro. Guy finds in his contemplation of God's cosmos reminds him of a passage from G.K. Chesterton, whom he says is an author he keeps going back to.

"An author I keep going back to, who I think has a wonderful, intuitive sense of how we as physical creatures in the physical world can find God there, is G.K. Chesterton. I keep going back to *Orthodoxy*, which is a book that's twice as long as it needed to be, and he would never tell one story when five would do, but there are so many wonderful nuggets there.

"One particular section that I think is so important, especially when we're worried about the environment and worried about what we're doing to nature, what we're doing to creation, is a passage where he contrasts the Christian view of nature to that of the pagans, who thought that God was nature and nature was God, and at the very least a very stern mother, mother nature.

"He contrasts that, whether it was the pagans of Egypt and

Greece and Rome, or even the poets of the eighteenth century, who were deifying nature. He contrasts that with St Francis, in that famous poem, *Laudato Si'*, that was the inspiration for the Pope's encyclical. He says to Francis the physical universe is not a stern mother, but a sister, and even a little sister, a dancing sister, somebody you can laugh at as well as love. We can be proud of her beauty, because she's our sibling, and we shared the same Father. That means that we don't dominate, we don't enslave our little sister – but we also aren't afraid of living and playing with her. Being part of this universe, as long as we do it with respect."

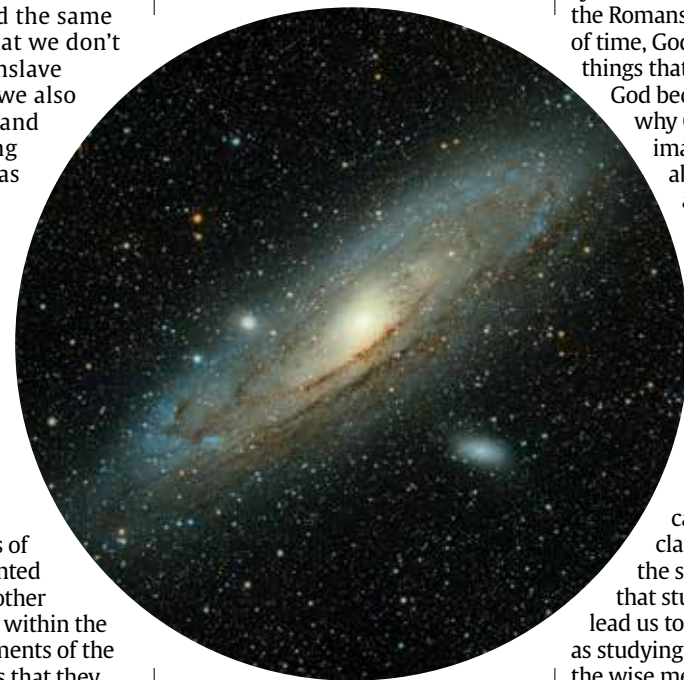
Riven

In a world so riven with poverty and social strife, a charge is often levelled against the Church because it hasn't deployed every penny towards social causes. The beautiful churches, cathedrals and basilicas of the world are often pointed out as opulent. On the other hand, sometimes those within the Church take aim at elements of the Church and its activities that they see as frivolous and unnecessary, and the Vatican's observatory could fall into this category through misunderstanding. I ask Bro. Guy why the observatory is such an important part of the Vatican's operations.

"Well, the importance in this world where there are people out there trying to sell you their philosophy of, 'You know, we don't need God', and they will do it by saying, 'Science doesn't need God'. Well, it's not a matter of need. We wouldn't

do the science, if it didn't give us joy. We wouldn't do the science if we didn't find truth in it. We wouldn't do the science if there wasn't God there," Bro. Guy says.

"Now, a lot of my friends who are atheists, the God they don't believe in, I don't believe in either. They've got a bad picture of God, but you have to have a picture of God before you can say, 'That's not what I believe in'. It's



a matter of time before they find the God they do believe in. But the real value today, is not just that it reminds the atheists that the Church is not afraid of science and not afraid of scientific truth, but embraces it."

Real value

"I think the real value today is to remind the people in the pews not to be afraid of science, not to think that

the science is the realm of atheists, that you have to be an atheist to be a scientist. The Church invented science. It came out of the medieval universities. It's our patrimony. We shouldn't give it up to the people who are trying to steal it from us. We were there first, and we were there first because we use science as a way of getting closer to God."

There's a heritage of thinking like this, Bro. Guy says, continuing, "you can find that in Paul's letter to the Romans... Since the beginning of time, God reveals himself in the things that are made. That's why

God became incarnate. That's why God so loved the world... imagine what that says about being a scientist. We are studying a world that God has made sacred, and again, that's not original with me, that's St Athanasius, in his book on the Incarnation.

"Christmas is a wonderful time to remember that by becoming incarnate, God has made the physical universe, that proclaimed his presence from the star of Bethlehem on, and that studying the universe will lead us to the Christ-child as well as studying the star of Bethlehem led the wise men."

In a world increasingly in need of God and his guidance, any path to him is most welcome indeed. Bro. Guy's work is a compelling testimony to the world that God's glory continues to shine upon us from above.

i Bro. Guy's latest book, *My Theology: Finding God in the Universe*, recently released in Ireland and the UK, and is available online and in bookshops



The emptiness of the modelling industry drove Leah Darrow right back into the arms of Christ, from where she now seeks to spread an authentic vision of femininity, writes **Jason Osborne**

One of the central demands of our Faith is the renunciation of the harmful temptations of the world. Creation is surely good, but becoming fixated with the finer 'things' in life soon leads our souls away from God. Catholicism is full of saints who opted against riches and glamour in favour of God's glory, and one such person who did so more recently is author and speaker Leah Darrow.

Most widely known for appearing on mega-TV show, *America's Next Top Model*, Ms Darrow spoke to *The Irish Catholic* about what led her there, and why she turned her back on it.

"I was born and raised in Oklahoma...I grew up with a wonderful, Catholic family. Mom and Dad who had a deep, deep devotion, and still have a deep devotion, to Our Lady and the most holy rosary. We would pray the rosary every night together. I'm one of six kids, so a big, Catholic family and we prayed the rosary. It was not as glamorous as that sounds," she laughs.

"It was a normal rosary, where the kids are fighting in between the prayers, but my parents were still very consistent in praying the rosary. I very much thank them for that."

Path

The siren song of the world rings loudly in adolescent ears, though, and that was exactly what Ms Darrow experienced as she left childhood behind and stepped into high school. It was here that her path to an "empty" life in modelling was set, she says.

"I'm in high school and that's where things began to really become challenging for me. I was in a new high school with new friends,



From modelling to Holy Mother Church

and I didn't have any Catholic friends, so nobody was around me that supported my faith, supported what I believe.

"Our communities are so important to us and the people that we have around us, they influence us greatly," Ms Darrow says, testifying to the first apostles' insistence on fellowship as an essential element in the life of a saint.

Influence

"So, the influence that my friends had on me was definitely not a Catholic influence. It was an influence that just said, 'Do whatever you want, it's fine' with no thought of consequences. And so, in high school when I was 15, I lost my virginity and that was the big thing. To make a long story short, that was the big kicker for me that really put me on a different path that I didn't plan.

"So, after that happened, I just really was worried and concerned and not sure if God would really forgive me. The devil really spoke lies into my ear during that time and the devil would just say things like, 'You should have known better. You come from this great, Catholic family and you should know better, you shouldn't have done that, and because you knew better, God's not going to forgive you'.

"And I believed those lies. I had so much shame from my sin, that really pulled me slowly away from my faith. And so that pulled me

away from my faith and I allowed that to happen. Instead of running to Christ, instead of going to Confession, I listened to the enemy, who said, 'No one is going to love you anymore, you're never going to find a great guy. You've ruined it, you've screwed up totally. You can't go back to Church because, again, you knew better'. And I believed those lies. I did. Because I did that, I slowly pulled away from prayer, I pulled away from the practice of my faith, and by the time I was 25, ten years later, I was not practicing my faith at all."

“The influence that my friends had on me was definitely not a Catholic influence. It was an influence that just said, ‘Do whatever you want, it’s fine’”

Ms Darrow's experience is an eminently relatable one in today's world, with temptations and activities often lauded as harmless or 'just a bit of fun' running amok among young people who've never truly encountered Christ. However, she compellingly narrates how incremental, bad choices paved the road to a place she had never wanted to be.

"Fast forward ten years after that when I was 25, I had begun a

modelling career, working in the fashion industry. I was on *America's Next Top Model* and that skyrocketed my journey, so to speak, in the modelling world. I lived in New York and stayed in New York after the show ended and was getting modelling jobs.

"That led me into my conversion. So, my conversion happened in the middle of a fashion-photo shoot, where I just heard God in the middle of that speak to my heart, in such a deep and profound way that I could not ignore it. And that process completely changed me. I ended up walking out of the fashion shoot right in the middle of it, did not get paid for it, just walked right on out, and I just knew I couldn't do it anymore. I knew that the voice of God that I heard in my heart was real, and that it was true, and that no matter, even if I was scared to believe it, I knew it was true. And because it was true, that was enough for me to have the courage to walk out and walk away," she says.

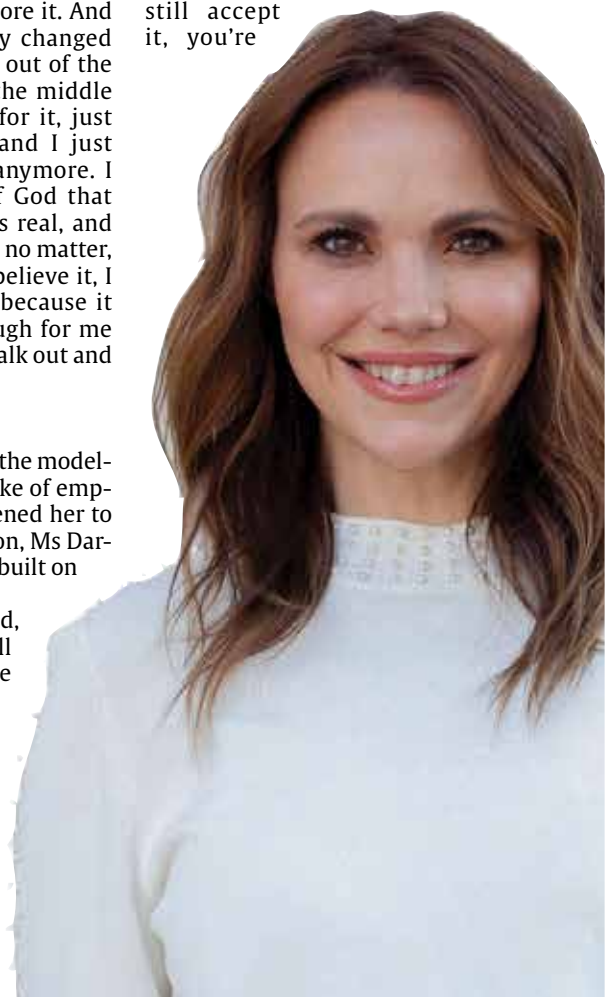
Modelling

Asked what it was about the modelling industry that so spoke of emptiness to her, that so opened her to needing God's consolation, Ms Darrow says it's an industry built on "illusion" and "deceit".

"The modelling world, the modelling life is full of emptiness. Because one of the goals of the fashion industry is illusion. It's deceit. It's to trick you into thinking that this anti-aging cream that you're going to buy – you're going to look just like the model. The model, who is modelling the anti-aging cream, is 17 years old, and it's

marketed towards women in their 50s," she says.

"It's all about illusion. It's not about true beauty, it's about the physical beauty that will fade and will die and decay. So, everything in the modelling industry really is built on this lie of illusion and deceit, and even if we know it, it doesn't keep us from being harmed by it. I think that's an important piece, which is that just because you know it's wrong, and you still engage and you still accept it, you're



“Ms Darrow’s experience is an eminently relatable one in today’s world, with temptations and activities often lauded as harmless”

“If you take a look at the picture, Eve is there, and she’s underneath the arm of God. Eve is not an afterthought; woman is not an afterthought”

not protecting yourself. You really have to cut yourself off from that world, and that’s what I ended up doing. I never will go back, ever.”

It’s one thing to walk away from that which does you harm, another to walk towards that which does you good. What drew Ms Darrow back with finality into God’s presence was the holy guidance of her family.

Call

“From there [the last fashion shoot], I walked back to my apartment and the first person I called was my dad. I called my dad and I just said, ‘Dad, if you don’t come and get me, I’m going to lose my soul’. Pretty heavy statement, but Dad responded. There was a long pause but Dad, when he finally spoke, said, ‘Ok baby, I’m coming to get you’. My dad drove over 2,000 miles to come and pick me up.

“The Church does not pit truth against love, the world does that, and they’ve created the division, but God and his Church have not”

“When my dad came to pick me up, the first place he took me was Confession. I did not know that – that was not a part of my plans, but it was a part of my dad’s plans, and it was part of my parents’ plan to come and get me. So, my dad came to get me, he took me to Confession, and initially I just said, ‘No Dad, I can’t, I can’t’. And he just said, ‘Leah, you called and you said you wanted to go home, and I’m here to take you home. Jesus is home. The Catholic Church is home. If you want to go anywhere else, you can call Southwest Airlines’. That brought me in to face Christ, and I faced him, and I told him what I did, I told him all the wrong I’d done. I told him I was sorry, and he gave me his mercy and his peace and I walked out of that Confession and it was a completely new life,” she says.

“It still had the same struggles, but it was a new life. It was a new chance. I walked out of my tomb. I was walking out of my tomb, it was my Easter Sunday. And so, that’s been transformational to this day for me. I’m still walking out of that tomb, so to speak. It’s a long journey, but I walk with Christ.”

Now married to a US Army Green Beret and with six children, Ms Darrow says God

has changed “everything” for her. Not least among the changes is her understanding of womanhood and femininity, which had been formed by her modelling experiences for so long. God’s presence in her life has granted her a new vision of her, and all women’s, role in God’s creation.

“Everything. He has changed everything. I don’t think I really knew what it meant to be a woman, and that sounds crazy to say that. It sounds crazy, because I am a woman! I was born a woman, I had a great mom. But the training, of what that is to be a woman, the training of your mind and of your heart and your soul – yes, Christ can train us and teach us in that, each one of us, man or woman, and Christ did. He absolutely did,” she says.

“In fact, one of the things that really profoundly impacted me in understanding who I was as a woman was going to the Sistine Chapel. I went to Rome soon after my conversion and I looked at the Sistine Chapel and I saw the painting on the ceiling, that Michelangelo did, and it’s the section of creation where it’s the creation of Adam. I know everybody focuses on the part where the fingers touch, but my eyes were drawn to Eve, and most people forget, I think, that Eve is in this picture.

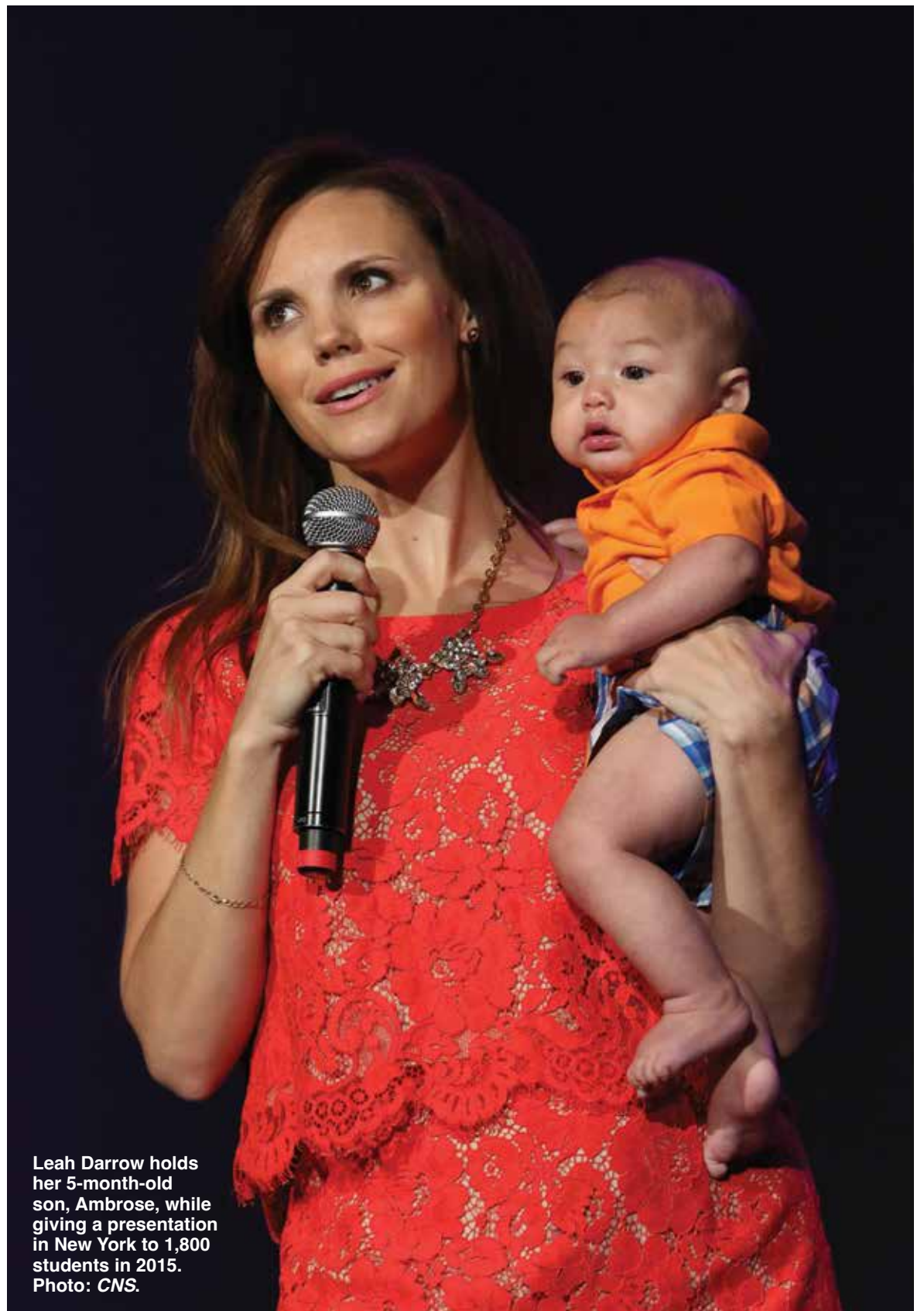
Eve

“If you take a look at the picture, Eve is there, and she’s underneath the arm of God. Eve is not an afterthought; woman is not an afterthought. Woman has been thought of in the mind of God from the beginning of time. Woman that complements man, that is strong and underneath the arm of God, is always looking to God the Father for her identity and for her worth and for her value.

“That painting really spoke to me in a way that I don’t think words could have done in helping me see exactly what that was to be a woman. And am I today still under the arm of God? Am I allowing the Lord to lead me? And in my role as a wife and mother, am I allowing my husband to lead me? Am I helping to lead my own children to God the Father? It’s a continued evolving process, but it’s been very beautiful.”

“When my dad came to pick me up, the first place he took me was Confession”

Finding God and his love these days, or perhaps more accurately, allowing yourself to be found by God and his love, is no easy thing. Ms Darrow says two of the most troubling developments in many parts of the world today are the belief that God and his Church are “optional” and that our culture seems to have pitted truth against love, reality against compassion.



Leah Darrow holds her 5-month-old son, Ambrose, while giving a presentation in New York to 1,800 students in 2015. Photo: CNS.

“I think that’s a damaging misconception about God and his Church. The Church does not pit truth against love, the world does that, and they’ve created the division, but God and his Church have not. Truth and love are the same, and they have strong boundaries for both.”

Challenges

Some of the greatest challenges women face today are a result of these misconceptions, Ms Darrow says. To her mind, abortion and gender confusion constitute the greatest difficulties young women have to navigate today.

“If abortion is a trend, which it is unfortunately, yes, that definitely concerns me so much... Abortion, and then I think, transgenderism greatly trouble me. If we can kill our own child within our womb, if we can kill something within us and think that that’s ok, that it’s fine, that it’s just my choice, we have a very big problem,” she says.

“We also have a big problem with transgenderism, with the idea that how God made us is wrong, and that we’re going to choose to be the opposite sex. It’s an attack on our identity, it’s an attack on us being children of God that the enemy is threading through this entire world, and we must speak out in love and charity and truth about that.”

“Finding God and his love these days, or perhaps more accurately, allowing yourself to be found by God and his love, is no easy thing”

Despite all of this, Ms Darrow doesn’t fear. She’s seen the wonders God has worked in her own life, and continues to place her trust in him, speaking regularly to her many followers of his plan for their lives.

She’s found following God utterly rewarding, and she encourages everyone to do the same.

“It’s so rewarding being a wife and a mother. Yes, I’m not saying that there’s not long days, I’m not saying that there’s not challenges, but you’re asking me what’s most rewarding. What’s most rewarding is my six kids and my husband. Absolutely, one thousand times over. My six kids and my husband are the most rewarding aspect of my life, that God accompanies me in and through and with. I wish more women knew, more young ladies knew that getting married and being a stay-at-home mom and having children and loving and honouring your husband is a glorious life. A glorious life. It truly is, but we’ve been conditioned to think that that’s something us women should revolt against. It’s not. If your dream is to be a wife and mother, ladies, that is a very good dream. And don’t let go of it, because God will fulfil the plans he has for you.”



The Devil rewards those who leave the Church, musician Johnny Duhan, tells **Chai Brady**

Being an openly Catholic musician comes with its challenges, it may even lead to the loss of friends but for Johnny Duhan his Christmas hope is that those who drifted from the Church like he once did come to the same realisation that “there’s nowhere to go”.

Folk singer and writer, Mr Duhan has been a professional musician since he was 16. He is well known for composing ‘*The Voyage*’, which became a hit for Christy Moore, as well as ‘*Just Another Town*’ and many more.

“The band signed to a record label called Deram, and released several singles and an album called *Honest Injun*”

He grew up in Limerick in a household he describes as similar to that of St Augustine – whose parents were also at odds regarding religion. Mr Duhan’s mother was a devout Christian while his father was an agnostic who had no belief in an afterlife and would quip that after his death they could put him in a dustbin and throw him in the Shannon.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Duhan said: “I was leaning towards my mother’s side, I always attended Mass right up until I left school – very young aged 16. I went to London with a band called Granny’s Intentions and they were very popular over there. I used to even go to Mass then, while still playing in the big nightclubs.”

The band signed to a record label called Deram, and released several singles and an album called *Honest Injun*. They weren’t destined to go further than that.

“We used to play in a club called The Speakeasy, the first night we played there, Jimi Hendrix walked in, then Brian Jones from the Rolling Stones and then following him a guy from Canned Heat walked in – they had a beautiful song at number one at the time ‘*Going up the Country*’. I’ll never forget it because within a year, all three of these characters were dead,” Mr Duhan recalls.

“They were all dead from the

Finding God and your songwriting voice

excesses that we all engaged in at the time, the madness of the drug culture which had been rampant in the jazz age in America but it had now spread to England, different cocktails of whatever they were taking.

Madness

“It was a wake-up call for me, I engaged in all that madness up until the age of about 19. It suddenly dawned on me the madness of it all. I keep reminding my own kids of this, by the time I was 21 I had left all that behind. It was impossible to still be in a band and to go against that lifestyle at the time because that was part and parcel of what you did in the 60s revolution,” he says.

After the band broke up he was at a “lose end” for a number of

years, working towards becoming a more serious songwriter. He was reading a lot of Russian writers at the time, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, which he said helped him get his bearing and slowly start returning to the Faith.

“While I was writing those songs, that’s when the sparks started coming back into me about religion”

Mr Duhan returned to Ireland and lived with his girlfriend on her parent’s farm for three years, where he brought “tonnes of books”.

“I studied deeply then and listened to very good music and

managed to find my own voice as a songwriter which is an almost impossible thing to do really. I’d been trying to write songs since I was 16-17, and I didn’t write my first one until my mid-20s. I was 27 when I wrote *Just Another Town*,” he explains.

“While I was writing those songs, that’s when the sparks started coming back into me about religion. One of the songs is called ‘*Benediction*’, another called ‘*Mary*’, which is about Our Lady, there’s another one called ‘*Two Minds*’ which is about the dichotomy that was going on in me because of my parents’ opposing views on whether there is or isn’t a God or meaning to life and that’s really summed up in that song.

“It’s about a young kid sitting with his friend, there’s prostitutes

coming down the street, they’re heading towards the docks, and at the same time there are all these elderly people heading up towards the chapel and the kid is trying to decide which way is he going to go. It’s probably one of my best songs,” he says.

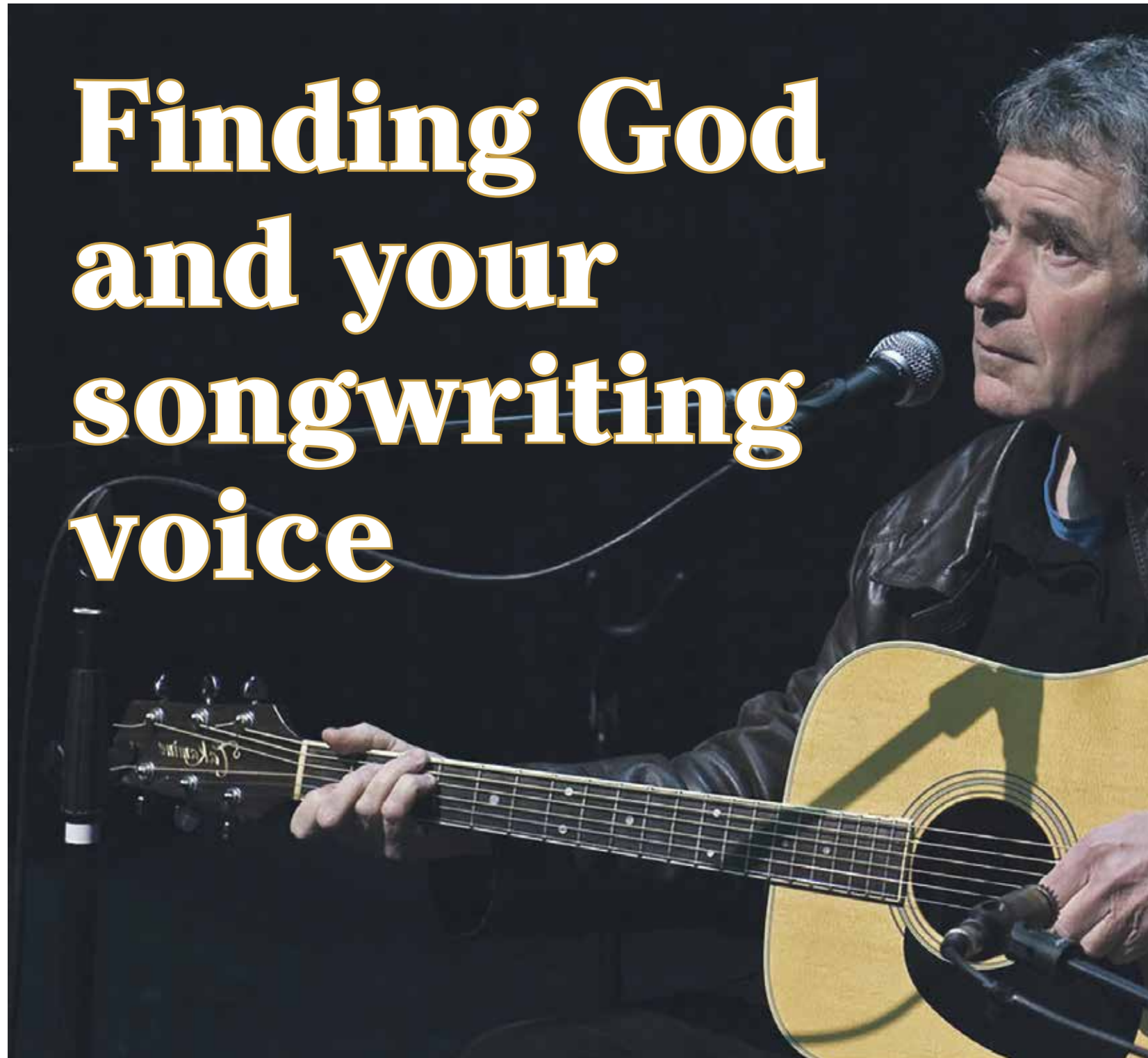
Mr Duhan says that the 1992 album, which has the same name as the song, ‘*Just Another Town*’ reflects the time in which he was raised and how religion was beginning to be left behind.

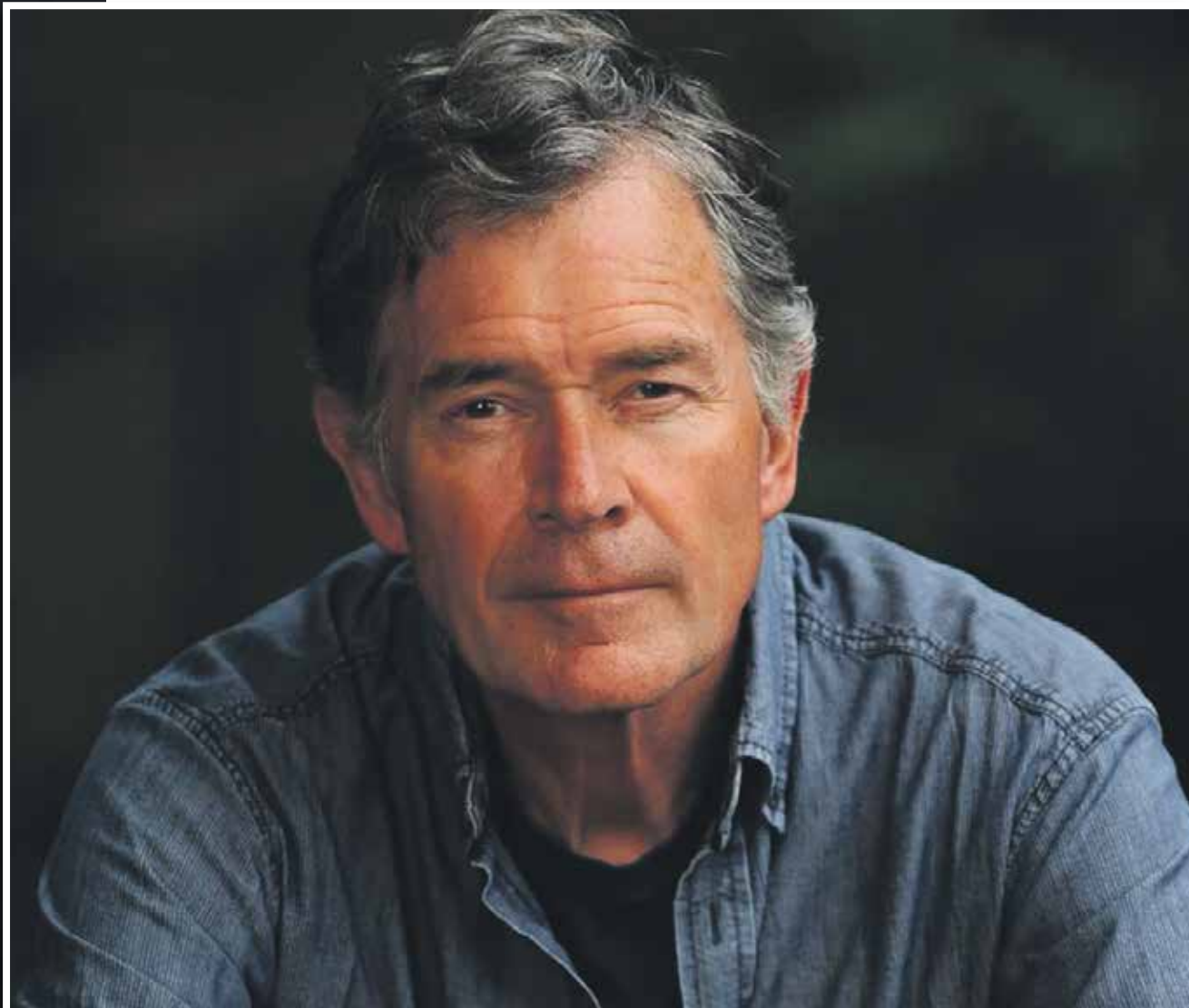
Friendships

In modern times, he says: “More and more people have given up the Faith, lots of my friends. I’ve lost lots of friendships because of my faith, I think. People feel uncomfortable with somebody who has faith when they have come to a decision that there is nothing in all of this religious business, and this God business.”

“I’m a bit of a thorn in their side because they all have this feeling they could be wrong. When I moved from being an agnostic to being faithful, it wasn’t that much of a leap, there was no St Paul moment for me, I

“People feel uncomfortable with somebody who has faith when they have come to a decision that there is nothing in all of this religious business, and this God business”





just studied an awful lot, read the Bible cover to cover a few times and read and read, poets, literature, just trying to assess exactly where I stood in the world and I just came to the conclusion that I couldn't stand anywhere if I didn't have Jesus Christ at the centre of it," he says.

Pandemic

Asked about whether he has been affected as a musician by the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr Duhan says he doesn't do that many gigs anyway, preferring to focus on his songwriting in what he calls his 'cell' – the room in which he works. Despite this, he ended up contracting Covid-19.

He says: "I left my cell it must be nearly six weeks ago now, I performed in a festival down in Drimoleague in Co. Cork. It was in a Methodist Church. When I got back from that festival, and I don't think it had anything to do with the festival itself, I was staying in a B&B with a pub underneath, I went down there for a pint after the gig before going to bed, I think it may have been while I was there."

Fortunately, he wasn't badly affected, with the 71-year-old musician citing his healthy lifestyle as a contributing factor.

Musicians

For musicians starting out, Mr Duhan says that on top of the pandemic it has always been hard to break into the industry. There needs to be both talent and staying power, he says, adding that he wouldn't consider himself very successful commercially. While he says his Catholicism was a contributing factor to this, it could also be down to the fact he always had one foot in music and the other in writing.

“Mr Duhan also speaks about a new book he is looking to get published called *Blood of My Soul*”

He explains: "A friend of mine said to me one time, 'the reason you haven't really clicked is because you've spent so much time reading books and studying'

“The Church is the only institution that I'm aware of that has lasted as long as it has, for 2,000 years and still has the basic message of love”

– that's another part of it.”

Mr Duhan also speaks about a new book he is looking to get published called *Blood of My Soul*. While it took him 17 years to write his autobiography, *The Voyage*, he says it took less than six months to write this new book.

"It's all about faith, having faith, clinging to faith, when everybody all around you is losing theirs," he says, "It's pinpointing why they are losing it."

The first half is about famous people who apostatised, he explains, which starts with James Joyce who he says is one of the "key figures" who influenced him in the way he wrote originally – a person he says "never really left the Church".

Speaking of Joyce's first novel *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, Mr Duhan says it shows Joyce "was very unsure when he was leaving the Faith but he was drawn away by the current that was going on in Europe at the time in its culture".

"Old Nick, the Devil himself, rewards those who go off on a tangent and leave the Church, and I think that's what happened to James Joyce and it happens to all the artists who decide to jettison their faith. It's a bit like a drug addict, his first few hits of whatever drug, heroin or whatever, they are wonderful, they feel wonderful, but soon that wonderful turns into a nightmare," he says.

Christmas

Speaking about Christmas, Mr Duhan says it has become "too commercialised" and while presents are a welcome aspect, how Christmas is celebrated now "completely overshadows the main purpose of preparing for Christmas".

Christmas in 2020 was severely impacted by the pandemic, with restrictions on attendance and much stress regarding organising churches in order for people to be safe. While there is still some fear and anxiety in the run-up to this Christmas, Mr Duhan says that his main hope is that people find meaning in the Church.

“Philip Larkin, if you read his final poems they are very bleak, you wouldn't want to read them. A bit like Samuel Beckett”

"My hopes are that people will begin to realise what I realised when I went away from the Church, that there's nowhere to go, it's a very cold place out there and there is nothing there. It will lead to nowhere. I've noticed that the most popular, the greatest modern writers have come to the

same conclusion, even the atheists," he says.

"Philip Larkin, if you read his final poems they are very bleak, you wouldn't want to read them. A bit like Samuel Beckett.

"It's just to try and find meaning... there is a meaning, when I look up to the sky and see all the stars, the whole fabric of the universe, I see it is a design and I just believe there is a designer there and if we try and get in touch with him then we will be all right. You might fill it up with all these crime dramas that are now appearing on television, which are despicable, it shows you the sign again when people lose meaning that's what they'll end up doing, watching gratuitous violence."

Institution

"The Church is the only institution that I'm aware of that has lasted as long as it has, for 2,000 years and still has the basic message of love. That is the only way, there is no other way. Otherwise, Darwin is right, the world is without God, it is a vicious place, for me life would be meaningless and I think it has become like that to all the deep thinking writers who have thought about it: The ones who haven't escaped into doing crime fiction or whatever, just to make money."

Pope in Cyprus and Greece

Pope tells young people to dream big

Spending a bit of time with young people before leaving at the end of his apostolic trip to Cyprus and Greece, Pope Francis encouraged them to have the courage to hope, to dream and even to question their faith. He met with Catholic teenagers and young adults from across Greece at St Dionysius School in Maroussi, a suburb of Athens, on December 6. Three of them had a chance to briefly share their stories with him.

Having read their experiences beforehand, Pope Francis' lengthy talk gave a detailed response to each of their concerns, revelations and questions with the understanding that their unique experiences also reflected something many other young people have in common. For example, Katerina Binibini, whose family came from the Philippines, said she sometimes feels angry or jealous when she sees people without any faith easily coast through life without any problems, while as "a faithful Christian, I feel constantly put to the test." She said she finds it hard to explain her faith to others, especially when there is so much suffering or injustice in the world. But, nonetheless, she still recognises the strength, graces and opportunities she has had because of her faith and is grateful for God's love.

Pope Francis said all those moments of doubt in life are "vitamins" for the faith, making it stronger, more resilient, wiser and more mature. "Faith is precisely that: a daily journey with Jesus who takes us by the hand, accompanies us, encourages us, and, when we fall, lifts us up," he said. Never be afraid to reflect and ask questions because "you cannot walk this path of faith blind."

United in faith, Cypriot Christians have mission to console

The hope, consolation and unity all Christians and all residents of Cyprus yearn for will be realised only with patience, commitment and collaboration, Pope Francis said. Meeting with Archbishop Chrysostomos II, head of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the Pope heard a long litany of the offenses and atrocities Orthodox and other Christians of northern Cyprus have suffered at the hands of Turkish Cypriots and the Turkey military since the island nation was divided in 1974. Still, the archbishop said, "We firmly believe in the peaceful resolution of our differences, whether they are civil or religious, and that the right path is only through a truly honest dialogue."

During the meeting with the Orthodox and later celebrating Mass at a local stadium, the Pope focused on how faith, while flowing from a personal encounter with Jesus, must be supported and lived out in community. The Church as a whole - no matter the denomination - is called to bring consolation to all who are troubled or frightened, he said at the meeting with the Orthodox. And so, "even before we say a word, we need to listen, to let ourselves be questioned, to discover others, to share. Because the Gospel is not handed on by communication, but by communion."



Pope Francis is greeted by Nikos Dendias, Greek minister for foreign affairs, as he arrives at the international airport in Athens, Greece, December 4, 2021. Photos: CNS.

Plea to attack causes of migration

Standing in a tent on the shore, Pope Francis said the Mediterranean Sea, "the cradle of so many civilisations, now looks like a mirror of death." He was speaking to Greek and UN officials, but especially residents at the Mavrovouni refugee camp. But he also was speaking to the nations of the European Union (EU) and to governments around the world.

About 2,200 people, including minors who made their journey across the sea without a parent or other adult, call Mavrovouni home. They live in orderly rows of tents and small pre-fab shelters on the Greek island of Lesbos outside of Mytilene. The centre replaced the infamous Moira camp after a fire in 2020. Mohammadi Zagul, a 34-year-old mother of five from

Afghanistan, said she and her family have been on Lesbos for two years. They want to leave the camp and start a real life, she said, but it does not really matter in what country. Christian Tango Mukalya, a 30-year-old Congolese Catholic who arrived on Lesbos more than a year ago with two of his three small children, told Pope Francis that he and the others want only "a safe place in Europe for the future of our families." Visiting the camp on a Sunday morning, Pope Francis used verbs from the Advent Scripture readings to pray that God would "rouse" and "shake" and "awaken" the consciences of everyone to respond to the desperate plight of migrants and refugees in Greece and around the world.



Pope Francis talks with Orthodox Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and all Greece during a meeting with their delegations in the Throne Room of the archbishopric in Athens, Greece, December 4, 2021.



Pope Francis greets a child as he visits with refugees at the government-run Reception and Identification Centre in Mytilene, Greece, December 5, 2021.

God's power is 'revealed in love'

God the Almighty almost always chooses the least mighty people and the most desolate places to reveal the power of his love, Pope Francis said. Celebrating Mass in Athens' Megaron concert hall, the Pope touched on a theme he had explored in depth with Catholic leaders the day before: the blessing and spiritual advantage of being a small community without power and without pretenses. Catholics make up less than 2% of the population of Greece; more than 90% of the country's residents belong to the Orthodox Church. Noting how the day's Gospel says the word of God came to John the Baptist "in the desert," Pope Francis said, "There is no place that God will not visit."

"Today we rejoice to see him choose the desert, to see him reach out with love to our littleness and to refresh our arid spirits," he said. "Dear friends, do not fear littleness, since it is not about being small and few in number, but about being open to God and to others." The late-afternoon Mass was the Pope's last public event in Greece.



Pope Francis greets a young woman as he visits with refugees at the government-run Reception and Identification Centre in Mytilene, Greece, December 5, 2021.

Francis expresses concern for democracy's decline in Europe

From Aristotle to St Gregory Nazianzus, and from the Acropolis to the olive tree, Pope Francis drew from Greek history and culture to appeal for a faith that is lived in good works and a politics that truly seeks the common good. Arriving in Greece from Cyprus, Pope Francis went directly from the airport to meetings with Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and then a large group of political, civic and cultural representatives. "Here democracy was born," he told the representatives. "Yet we cannot avoid noting with concern how today - and not only in Europe - we are witnessing a retreat from democracy."

"Democracy requires participation and involvement on the part of all; consequently, it demands hard work and patience," he said. "It is complex, whereas authoritarianism is peremptory, and populism's easy answers appear attractive." A political stance that seeks only popularity and easy answers is not worthy either of the description politics or of a place in a democracy, Pope Francis said. "Politics is, and ought to be in practice, a good thing, as the supreme responsibility of citizens and as the art of the common good," he said. "So that the good can be truly shared, particular attention - I would even say priority - should be given to the weaker strata of society."



Pope Francis watches as dancers in traditional attire perform during a meeting with young people at the Ursuline Sisters' St Dionysius School in Maroussi, Greece, December 6, 2021.



Boys walk in the government-run Reception and Identification Centre for refugees in Mytilene, Greece, prior to the visit of Pope Francis, December 5, 2021.

Pope tells reporters Paris archbishop was hounded out by gossip

Pope Francis told reporters he accepted the resignation of Archbishop Michel Aupetit of Paris because the archbishop's reputation had been destroyed, making it impossible for him to continue leading the French archdiocese. "There was a failure on his part, a violation of the Sixth Commandment, but not a complete violation, because it involved little caresses and massages that he gave his secretary. That's the accusation," the Pope responded when asked by a French reporter.

The archbishop had said he offered to step down to avoid "becoming a source of divisions," and the Pope accepted his resignation on December 2. The French archbishop's actions

were "sinful," the Pope said, "but it's not among the most serious sins. The most serious sins are not sins of the flesh," but sins like pride and hatred, especially when committed by those who pretend to be "angelic." Too many people today pretend that they are sinless and almost demand that their bishops are, too, when "we are all sinners," the Pope said. Pope Francis spent just over 30 minutes responding to questions from reporters on his flight to Rome from Athens at the end of a five-day trip that took him to Cyprus and Greece. Most of the questions involved migration and relations with the Orthodox churches, two of the major themes of the Pope's visit.

God dreams of a world where all are welcomed as family, Pope says

Pope Francis told migrants that, like them, God dreams of a world where everyone recognises each other as brothers and sisters. God "asks us not to be content with a divided world, divided Christian communities, but to journey through history drawn by his own dream: the dream of a humanity freed of walls of division, freed of hostility, where there are no longer strangers,

but only fellow citizens," he told migrants during an emotional ecumenical prayer service in the Church of the Holy Cross in Nicosia. Thamar da Silva, who came from Sri Lanka, told the Pope: "Every day, I have to reduce everything that I may be, or hope to be, or want to become, into a check mark next to a box on a form. I have to use a word or two to explain

myself to one of the few who might choose to ask or to acknowledge that I am even here. What do I say? Usually I must choose *xenos*, 'foreigner.'"

"But what I want to scream is 'person,' 'sister,' 'friend,' 'believer,' 'neighbour,'" she said. Mariamie Besala Welu, from Congo, described herself as a person "full of dreams," big

dreams. "I dream of a world where no one is forced to fight, to do battle, give up, flee or cry - except maybe for joy," she said. But she said she has "small dreams," too. "I close my eyes and dream of the smell of my grandmother's cooking, the fields after a good rain that will nurture the seeds, the sea breeze."

"I dream of smiles," she told the Pontiff.

Letters

Letter of the week

A prophet is never accepted in his own land

Dear Editor, Dr John Murray is so right when he states that “there exists a huge need for teaching Catholic doctrine clearly, wholistically, energetically, and honestly, and calling all Catholics, and indeed all people willing to listen, to personal conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ” [*The Irish Catholic* – November 25, 2021].

It is obvious that very many Catholics do not know the actual teaching of the Church but, rather seem to base their opinion of the Church on information gained from the media. After

celebrating the centenary of the Legion of Mary it is an opportunity to actually look to the work done by the Legion, not just in Ireland, but throughout the world, and to recognise its value in evangelising. How many know that its founder, Frank Duff, was one of the few lay people at the Second Vatican Council, where he received a standing ovation from those attending, in recognition of the work of the Legion in energising the Church and, in fact, being the means of the survival of the Faith in China during the communist

persecution. Jesus said that a prophet is never accepted in his own land and this certainly has been demonstrated in Ireland where its value has not been appreciated and it is a shame that we have not succeeded in having Frank Duff canonised.

Hopefully all this emphasis on the synod will lead to a renewal of faith here as outlined by Dr Murray.

Yours etc.,
Mary Stewart,
Ardeskin, Donegal

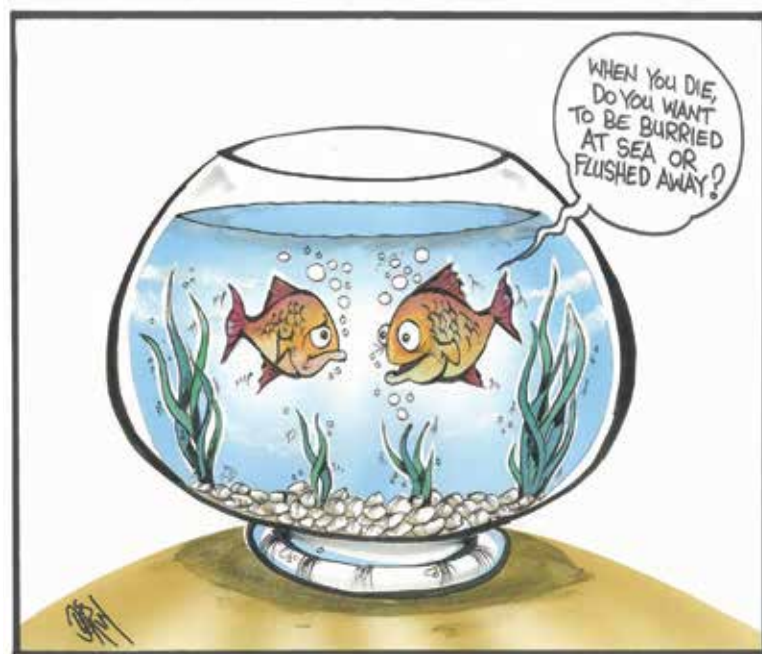
Listening can be done in confession

Dear Editor, Dr John Murray's letter certainly hit the nail on the head in his response to Garry O'Sullivan's recent article on the Killala assembly [*The Irish Catholic* – November 25, 2021]. It is certainly true today that there is “a huge need for teaching Catholic doctrine”.

The Church is explained in about 30 pages of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Matters of faith and morals, and even Church discipline, are not determined by popular vote.

Moreover, the Church should be a teaching Church rather than a listening one in my opinion. I am not sure that a huge clamour of voices is going to be helpful. The listening can be done in Confession.

Yours etc.,
Brid Ní Rinn,
Naas, Co. Kildare



Puzzled about critiques on book focused on Jesus

Dear Editor, I write to offer some comments regarding Peter Costello's review of my *The Birth of Jesus the Jew* (*The Irish Catholic* – November 25, 2021). His readers will be excused for thinking that I endorse an understanding of Christianity as an ethical religion only, rather like versions of Buddhism, when I do no such thing. My point is that, in the shadows cast by the Holocaust, some Christian beliefs necessitate reappraisal.

Whilst agreeing with Mr Costello that issues addressed in the book have a long history in academic circles, my intention in this volume, to be soon followed by *The Death of Jesus the Jew*, is to render that scholarship more accessible and more widely available (not everyone will agree with my conclusions, of course).

I am puzzled as to why the strangulation of two of Herod's sons (7BCE, by order of their father, and alluded to by Mr Costello) invalidates

what I write about the massacre of the innocents as a midrash on Exodus 1:15-22. His additional reference, to the murder of children in that region of the world, though certainly appalling, is not relevant to my argument.

There is some value in what he says about midrash and its rabbinic development post c. 200AD, but a cursory knowledge of how academics like the late Raymond Brown and Geza Vermes (the world's greatest Jesus scholar) – to

name but two – employ the term, demonstrates that my use of it pertains, rightly, to the first century.

Mr Costello ignores the critique of (mis-translated) Matthew 1:23 and, concerning what he writes about 'Bethlehem', I say this: Christmas should continue to be celebrated in its traditional form, but we don't need to literalise its 'location' all of the time.

Yours etc.,
Peter W. Keenan
Kinsale, Co. Cork

Trust in the Spirit needed for synodal pathway

Dear Editor, Dr John Murray expressed concerns that the 'synodal pathway' may be used as a parliamentary-type process to pressure Rome to substantially change Catholic teachings, on doctrinal issues such as the sacraments of holy orders and matrimony, and on sexual ethics [*The Irish Catholic* – November 25, 2021].

While he may prove to be right, I can only hope that all of us who minister within our Church can share our understanding of why we believe what we do, and that those who are taking on the role of 'animators' can facilitate a process where everyone is accepted, encouraged to listen foremost, and be open to the voices of all. Ultimately as Christians, we must trust in the Spirit that is our 'Alpha and Omega' and at the heart of whatever we do in sincerity.

Yours etc.,
Deacon Frank Browne,
Rathfarnham, Dublin

Christ came into this world to bear witness to the truth

Dear Editor, Having read Garry O'Sullivan's piece 'It's good to talk...so let's talk and talk and talk' and comments from Patricia Melvin [*The Irish Catholic* – December 2, 2021]: some observations.

There are voices “demanding” that the Church “change”. This is not the same as much needed reform. There are truths that are non-negotiable, doctrinally and morally.

There can be no accommodation with views that are at variance with Scripture and Tradition.

The truths to which we must adhere are not welcome in modern society. Should we be afraid that people will walk away from the Church in droves? It is

already happening. We must accept it.

Christ allowed people to walk away when they would not accept his teaching (John 6:66-68). We should not fear being a faithful remnant in the 21st Century. We must obey God.

The Church is inevitably going to become smaller. This is no cause for alarm. It is an opportunity for bearing more faithful witness. The Church must call society to conversion – not conform to its fashions (Romans 12:2).

A person, having been baptised a Catholic, may factually be a 'real Catholic'; but Baptism, by itself, does not guarantee our salvation. The bottom line is the salvation of our souls. We will

only be saved by fidelity to God (Matthew 7:21).

Those 'liberal' denominations that have enthusiastically embraced current ideologies are not faring well. The synodal path cannot take the direction in which they have strayed.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to bear witness to the truth and all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice (John 18:37). Those who truly belong to him do not listen to the voice of strangers, nor do they follow them (John 10:5).

Yours etc.,
Fr Patrick McCafferty
Corpus Christi Parish, Belfast

facebook community

Each week we publish a selection of comments from *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

Poll predicts post-Covid Mass attendance will drop by 12%

Which shows they have no understanding of what the Eucharist is and how important is the real presence. – **Chris Curley**

Not surprised the Church caved in so quickly to stopping spiritual worship. – **Catherine Rose**

Holy Mass is the greatest gift. I love to attend Mass as much as possible. Very sad people have moved away. – **Jackie Carpenter**

Bishops, priests and faithful Catholics get working on those who are fearful about returning. Tell them about the real presence. The love of Jesus. – **James O Connor**

Well I am more positive and hopeful post-Covid, whenever it will be! People will reflect on life and with such great youth ministry we will have a vibrant more faithful Church. It is up to us to light the world. – **Deirdre Quinn**

What do you think? Join in the conversation on *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

Letters to the Editor

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

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

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

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Embracing radical kindness will bring us back together



I could never be a literary critic, not because I can't tell good literature from bad, but because I lack the hard edge. If I dislike a book, I hesitate to say so. Conversely, if I like a book, I tend to be more its cheerleader than its critical assessor. Be that as it may, I want to strongly endorse Ashlee Eiland's new book, *Human(Kind) – How Reclaiming Human Worth and Embracing Radical Kindness Will Bring Us Back Together*.

“The book is a series of stories from her life, all of them told by a gifted storyteller and all of them written with an aesthetics that never sinks into sentimentality or self-pity”

This is not some sentimental, feel-good book on how we need to be kind to each other. It's more like a Sermon on the Mount for our time, or at least how we might work towards living the Sermon on the Mount. How do we remain soulful, warm, and human inside all the things that tend to unhealthily either inflate or embitter our hearts? Here's how she describes her book.

“This is my story – a story of a black woman who grew up in the South and who discovered some wholeness and some holes along the way. As I looked back



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

over my life, there were moments I remembered so vividly. Upon reflection, they were vivid because they mattered. They marked me in both beautiful and painful ways. But as I sat with these moments and memories, I realised they mattered because they taught me to be kind to my own worthy self. Recalling them helped me acknowledge the good gifts I've been given, the gifts I now hope to give to others, and enabled me to see the painful and hard moments as opportunities to be more fully human, to remind myself to receive grace where there's been grievance.”

The book is a series of stories from her life, all of them told by a gifted storyteller and all of them written with an aesthetics that never sinks into sentimentality

“On the one hand, her life has been one of privilege – loving parents, the opportunity for a first-rate education, never economically desperate, and always with a supportive family and community around her”

or self-pity. And they are stories both of being graced and being wounded. Eiland's life has been one of contrasts.

First-rate education

On the one hand, her life has been one of privilege – loving parents, the opportunity for a first-rate education, never economically desperate, and always with a supportive family and community around her. On the other hand, she has lived as a black woman inside a world of injustice and inequality. She has had to live as one who must forever be conscious of the colour of her skin, who every time she walks into a room needs to look around to see how many others like her are in the room. She also had to endure the ultimate racial slur

being shouted in her face. And so, as she says, she has been deeply scarred both in beautiful and painful ways.

For example, one of her stories recounts an incident in which she went out to a restaurant with some Asian friends for a Korean specialty of pork dumplings. The evening went well, and driving back from the restaurant and laughing with each other in the car, she felt a life-long weight lift from her. “For the first time, I didn't feel as if I had to qualify the conversation with a reminder to my friends – or to myself – of my actual race. ...Before that day, I felt I had to tiptoe out of one world into another. But that kind of posture, I realised, is laced with shame. It allows the ‘not fully enough’ narrative to run rampant, terrorising what is oftentimes the best part about sharing our lives with one another.”

“Moreover, there is an ever-intensifying hypersensitivity where even a well-intended word is a potential landmine”

We need her narrative. We live in a time of bitterness and division, when civil discourse and respect have broken down, where we demonise each other, where injustice, inequality, and racism still define us more

than their opposites, and where kindness is often seen as a weakness. Moreover, there is an ever-intensifying hypersensitivity where even a well-intended word is a potential landmine. Paranoia has replaced metanoia, bringing out the worst in us.

Ashlee Eiland gives us a formula for bringing out what is best in us. How do we react to injustice, offense, and demonisation? For example, here is how she reacted after trying to be good to someone and being repaid for her effort by the ultimate racial taunt being hurled in her face: “Humiliated, I went about my day, doing as much good as I could for an afternoon... but knowing that sometimes even doing good is not enough. Sometimes we just have to sit with what's hard and humiliating about the difficult work of unity and do our best not to let it kill us. Instead, we need to let it shape us in some other way that sobers us up and forces us to take off our rose-coloured glasses, to admit that sometimes moving closer and trying to do good and closing the gaps between us and others doesn't work out the way we want. But maybe it's worth showing up anyway.”

Soul music

Lacking the critical edge, I'm not always sure of what constitutes ‘soul music’, but I can still recognise ‘soul literature’.

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, December 16, 2021

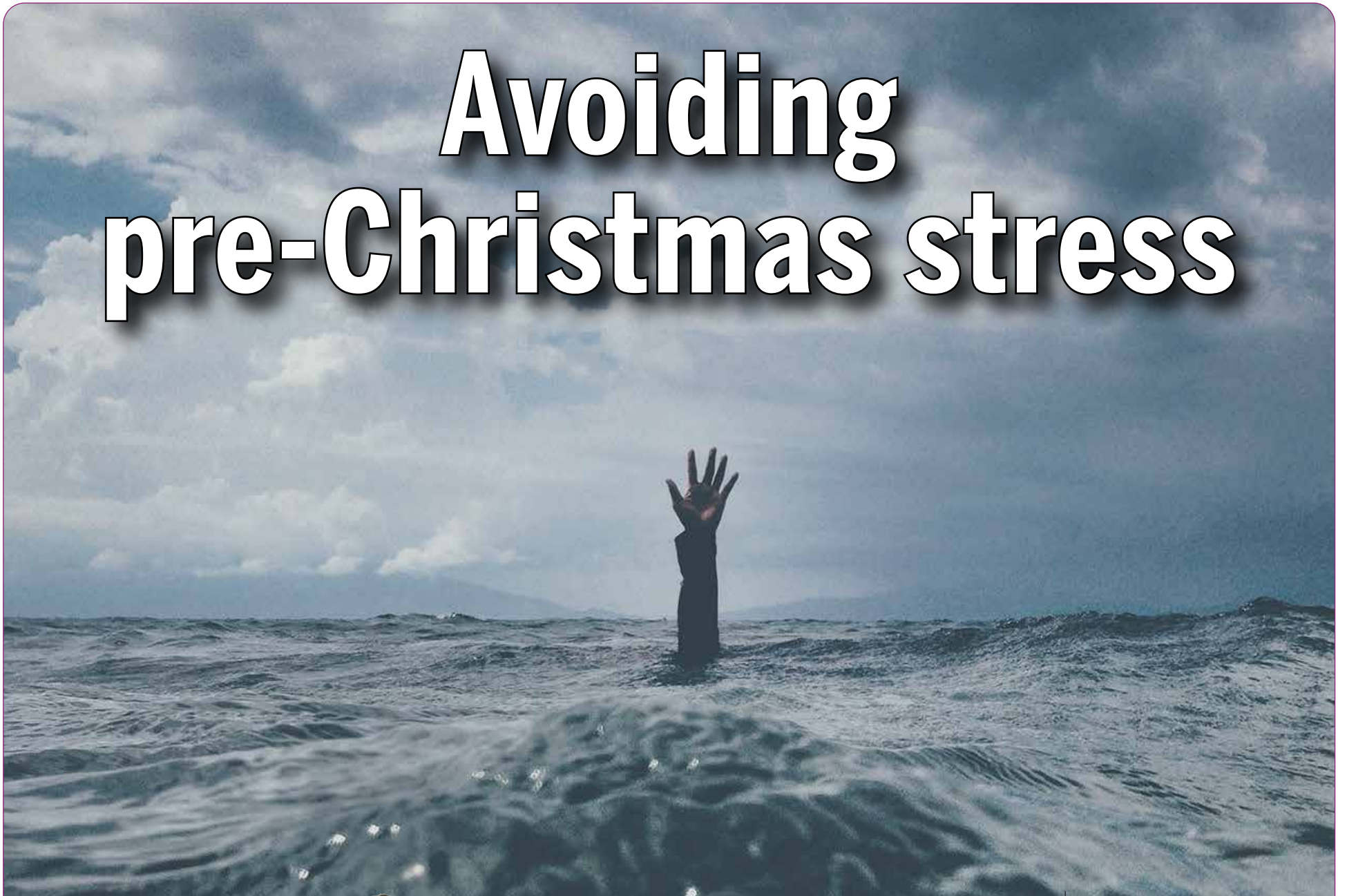
Personal Profile

A life dedicated to people on the margins

Page 34



Avoiding pre-Christmas stress



I recently wrote about preserving our Advent experience, but these days, it's impossible not to run through some of the Christmas logistics early on in December, even just a little bit! With that in mind, December can be a stressful time of year. Managing that pre-Christmas rush at work and school, planning time with family and friends, buying presents for those around us – it's a busy schedule.

On top of that, we're heading into a second Christmas chock-full of uncertainty, rules and restrictions. There's a sense in which this is the long-awaited 'new normal', even though there's nothing normal about it. As such, it's no surprise if the usual stresses and strains of the festive season feel amplified this



Stress always threatens in the run-up to Christmas, but there are ways to manage it, writes Jason Osborne

year, just as they perhaps did last year.

If there are to be restrictions this Christmas, make sure they're on your stress levels. Stress is a normal, even healthy, part of human existence, but too much stress is anything but that. If we didn't stress, it's unlikely we'd get a lot of the daily necessities done. However, excess stress is detrimental to us on every level – from the psychological and emotional, all the way to the physical. So, how do we manage the thin

line between a healthy, normal level of stress and an unhealthy, destructive amount? There are quite a few ways.

What not to do

The temptation, when overwhelmed by worries and stresses, is not to do the hard work of slowing down, calming down and examining the sources of your troubles. The temptation is to take the easy way out and to turn to something unhealthy to help you cope, such as smoking,

drinking or more caffeine.

Men are generally more likely than women to do this, and it's known as "avoidance behaviour". Women are usually better at seeking support from their social circle.

There is a solution to every problem, and not taking stock and control of the situation only makes problems worse. Rather than taking the easy road, make sure to implement healthy, sustainable solutions to stress.

In the long term, these aids won't solve your problems. They'll provide temporary stress-relief, while potentially piling up problems further down the road.

Identify the cause

Oftentimes, the most important step is to stop for a moment and figure out what's wrong, and this

is especially the case when dealing with excess stress. Our head's in a tizzy, it can be difficult even to think clearly. Psalm 46:10 tells us to, "Be still, and know that I am God".

It's probably the last piece of advice we want to hear when we're stressed, but it's arguably the most important. We can't fix a problem if we don't know what the problem is, and it's hard to do that when we're moving one million miles an hour internally.

Visit the Eucharist in a quiet church with a notepad, just as St Thomas Aquinas used to do when struggling with a problem. If that's not possible, against all the odds, carve out even 10 to 15 minutes to sit down at home, again, with a notepad. I've seen

» Continued on Page 33

Family News



AND EVENTS

ITALIAN TRIES TO DODGE COVID JAB USING FAKE ARM

An Italian man who wanted a coronavirus vaccine certificate without actually having the jab tried to play the system by presenting health workers with a fake arm, an official said.

Despite the realistic skin colour, nobody was fooled by the silicone limb, and the man – in his 50s – was reported to local police following the incident in Biella, northwest Italy.

“The case borders on the ridiculous, if it were not for the fact we are talking about a gesture of enormous gravity,” the head of the Piedmont regional government, Albert Cirio, said in a statement on Facebook.

The fake arm incident came ahead of a tightening of the rules in Italy for people who have not yet been vaccinated against Covid-19.

SCIENTISTS CLAIM BIG ADVANCE IN USING DNA TO STORE DATA

Scientists say they have made a major step forward in efforts to store information as molecules of DNA, which are more compact and long-lasting than other options, the BBC reported.

The magnetic hard drives currently used to store computer data can take up a lot of space, and must be replaced over time.

Using life’s preferred storage medium to back up data would allow huge amounts of information to be archived in tiny molecules.

The data would last thousands of years, according to scientists.

A team in Atlanta, US, has now developed a chip that they say could improve on existing forms of DNA storage by a factor of 100.

“The density of features on our new chip is [approximately] 100x higher than current commercial devices,” Nicholas Guise, senior research scientist at Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI), told BBC News.

AUSTRIAN SURGEON FINED FOR AMPUTATING WRONG LEG

An Austrian court has fined a surgeon for amputating the wrong leg of an elderly patient, a spokesperson for the tribunal in the northern city of Linz has said.

While the 43-year-old defendant said her actions were due to “human error”, the judge found her guilty of gross negligence and fined her €2,700 euros, with half the amount suspended, the spokesperson said.

The surgeon had marked the wrong leg of the 82-year-old patient for amputation ahead of the operation in May in the central town of Freistadt, only noticing the mistake two days after carrying out the surgery.

The court awarded €5,000 in damages plus interest to the widow of the patient, who died before the case came to court.

The surgeon said there had been a flaw in the chain of control in the operating theatre.

She has since moved to another clinic and can appeal the judgement.



Advent – A call to live life to the full

We are all called to live life to the full. That calls us to live beyond the limitations of the ego.

Psychology teaches us that in the first part of our life we need to develop the ‘ego’, as part of our survival instinct. We need a healthy and balanced ego, which provides a strong sense of ‘self’ if we are to navigate both our external and internal worlds realistically. The ego serves a function – it’s a vehicle. In Sanskrit the word closely related to ego is ‘ahamkara’ which comes from two words or two senses, one of which is ‘I am’ (aham), and the other is kara which gives us the word ‘carriage’ or ‘car’ or ‘vehicle’. Vedic philosophy says that when one’s mind is in a state of ahamkara, one is in a state of subjective illusion.

“Meditation deepens our understanding and acceptance of levels of consciousness beyond the egoic”

Modern psychology might describe it as being imprisoned by our own ego, and its needs, desires and attachments. This can happen when our life circumstances lead to an unbalanced ego which closes off any sense of being beyond the confines of the ego. By contrast, there are periods in our life where ‘ego-development’ goes hand in hand with a growing awareness that there is more to our being than the ego. We become keenly aware of the primordial, spiritual ‘self’ and a heart-felt desire to deepen that awareness. This desire to go beyond does not come from the ‘ego’ which may in

Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



Instead, that call arises from the deepest aspect of our being, from a deeper level of consciousness seeking to make its presence felt.

For some, this call may be experienced by the ego as irrational; but is in fact trans-rational. Meditation helps us to move beyond the illusion of the ego as ultimate reality and to see it as a vehicle or a platform for enabling the discovery of the true self, when we are ready. As human beings in development we are always a work of maturation in progress. A healthy ego allows us to detach from our attachments, even though such a process inevitably involves suffering.

Meditation deepens our understanding and acceptance of levels of consciousness beyond the egoic. As the psychologist William James wrote: “Our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, while all about it parted from it by the flimsiest of screens there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.”

An important step then is to appreciate that we live both in a material and spiritual reality. Meditation deepens our awareness of wholeness, of this holistic reality. It helps us to connect with our spiritual nature and leads us in the direction of wholeness and

integration.

Meditation awakens us to the true-self that lies beyond the ego; it makes us aware of the stranglehold that the ego can exert on us. When the ego has a hold on us, we tend to react to situations in life from that false sense of who we are rather than respond from our deepest, truest self.

Advent

For Christians, the season of Advent is a time for reflecting on this call because our faith tells us that the spirit of Christ dwells within every human person. It is a common misunderstanding to see Christmas as the celebration of a once-off event – the birth of baby Jesus, the ‘coming’ of Christ – that happened 2,000 years ago. But in reality, Christmas and Advent are a call to prepare to give birth to Christ, to make him visible to others, within ourselves.



Yet we find it difficult to comprehend that we are called to give birth to Christ today, where we live. Mary, who allowed herself be open and vulnerable to receive spiritual gifts – in fact, the spiritual gift – offers us a profound model. We learn from her how to let

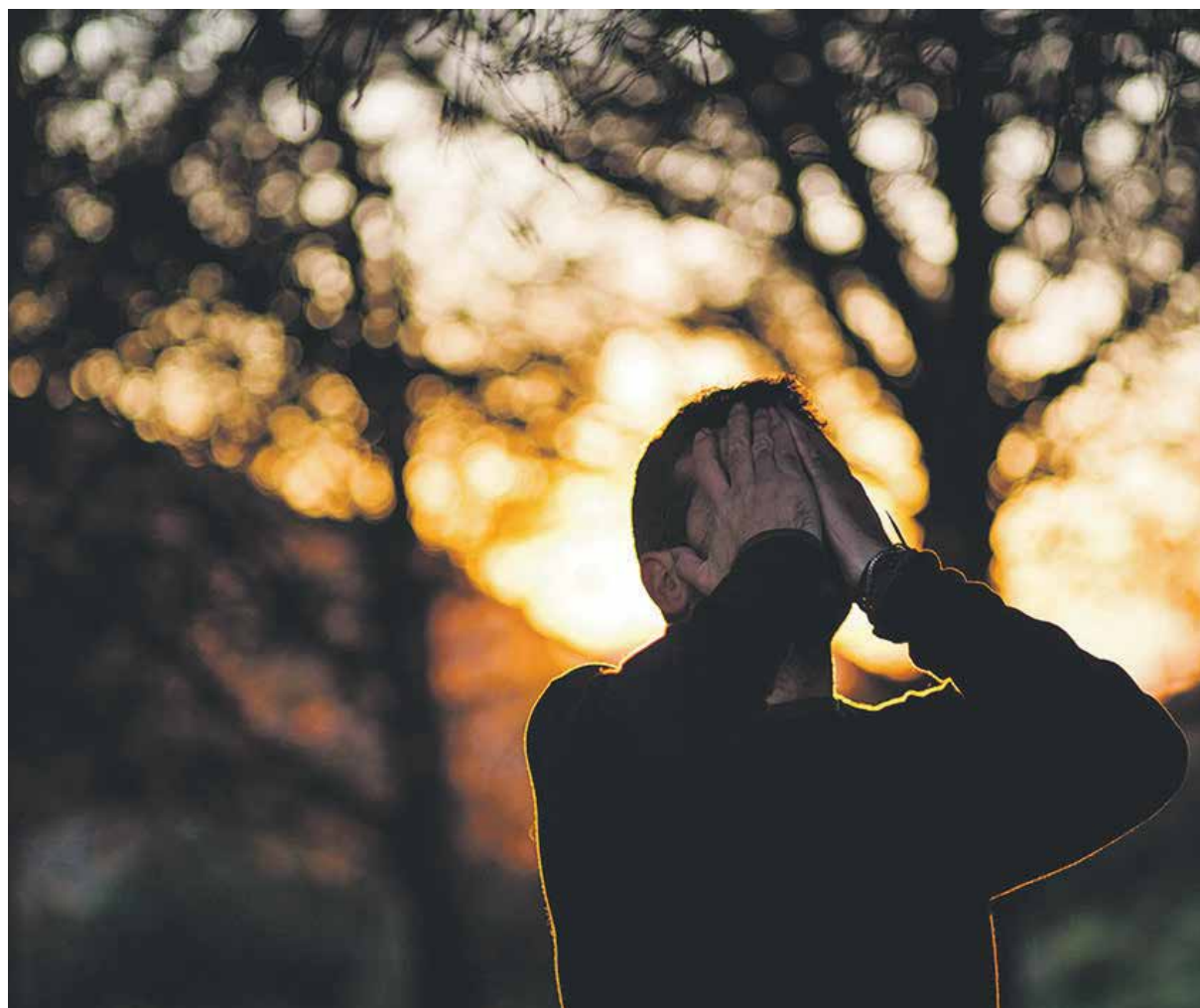
of our attachment to the ego, to our small separate self to make room for the birth of Christ within us. And to allow whatever that asks of us in our lives, without trying to manage or manipulate the spiritual energy that flows from that birthing within. Meditation helps us to let go and receive what is given freely.

Richard Rohr reminds us that in the Gospels there is no mention of any moral worthiness or egoic achievement in Mary, only humble trust and surrender and so, she gives us all hope that we can do likewise. Rohr warns, however, that “if we ourselves try to manage God or manufacture our own worthiness by any performance principle whatsoever, we will never give birth to the Christ, but only more of ourselves.”

When we recognise that we live in a material and a spiritual reality simultaneously, we are enabled to find the Christ in every moment, in any event, and in every person. This is how God continually breaks into history – through you and me. May our meditation practice make us vulnerable and open to that happening in us, over and over again, so that we may live life to the full with ever greater authenticity.

After 40 years in the education sector Noel Keating was awarded a PhD for his research into the child’s experience of meditation and its spiritual fruits. Noel now leads, in a voluntary capacity, a project which offers free in-service to primary schools who may wish to consider introducing meditation as a whole-school practice. Noel is author of Meditation with Children: A Resource for

» Continued from Page 31



in my own life recently the therapeutic effect of setting down scattered thoughts onto the reassuring solidity of paper.

“The key is to put distance between yourself and the sources of stress, which will help you to consider them somewhat more objectively”

Seeing the sources of your stress set down humbly before you helps to consider them in perspective. Slowing down in silence helps you to do this, too. The key is to put distance between yourself and the sources of stress, which will help you to consider them somewhat more objectively. Usually, it helps you to figure out solutions, too! After this, you can set to work tackling them and managing your stress.

Manage your time

People, myself included, often waste vast swathes of time sitting around doing things that bring us no closer to the solution of our issues. It's well noted that such behaviour brings us to the conclusion that our lives are spinning out of our control, and that nothing can be done to stop it.

Time management is essential in stemming the flow of stress, as the days run away from us if we don't. The starting point is the aforementioned one – take a moment to stop and identify the problems at hand. Rare is the issue that denies you the chance to take a moment for yourself.

Once you've identified your concerns, make a to-do list and organise them in terms of priority level. A good break-down of this I once came across

is that there are tasks that are:

- Urgent and important
- Not urgent but important
- Urgent but not important
- Neither urgent nor important

People who manage their time well concentrate on the “not urgent but important” activities. That way, they lower the chances of activities ever becoming “urgent and important”. Of course, if you do have urgent things to be dealt with, that must be done, but this is just a guideline to keep in mind for the long-term.

The goal, of course, is to become better at reducing the number of urgent and important tasks we have, as those are the primary sources of stress. Again, this is a long-term goal, but it's wise to start this year as Christmas approaches.

Nurture your social life

A good social network around you, made up of genuinely loving family and friends, can ease your troubles and help you to reframe your burdens. The flipside of this is that if you don't form deep connections with people, you won't have anyone to turn to when you need them.

If you're suffering in silence, reach out. Go to a prayer meeting, join or club or society, get involved in your local parish, or re-establish contact with someone you used to be good



friends with. All are steps on the road to building up a strong support network, which will be there for you when you need it.

Try gratitude

The effect of gratitude on our mental state is remarkable, and we as Catholics are better placed than most to appreciate it. Scripture tells us time and again to “praise the Lord” and all he's done for us.

“Doing this simple mental exercise or prayer conscientiously works wonders in reducing the size of the concerns occupying your valuable mental space”

Yet most of us, especially in Ireland, are focused on our gripes rather than on our gifts. A useful activity for turning this around is, at the end of the day, no matter how stressful or difficult, call to mind three things you're grateful for. Doing this simple mental exercise or prayer conscientiously works wonders in reducing the size of the concerns occupying your valuable mental space.

The approach to Christmas is always bound to be stressful, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. However, for your own sake and for the sake of those around you, implement the few simple steps suggested here. You'll enjoy Christmas more, and you'll approach it more effectively.

Faith — IN THE — family



Christina Malone

“Lily please stand up,” I asked my daughter during Sunday Mass. Her reply: “Mammy, I don't want to. You know I am not into it like you are!”

This happened to me a while ago. My youngest daughter wanted to sit when others stood, she sat when others knelt. When I encouraged her (at the end I probably was begging her) she told me straight out what she thought about this all. Nothing.

In general, she is the one that mostly questions what we are doing and why. She does not like going to

Mass and makes it known every time I mention when we are about to go. Two weeks ago, I went to Mass alone. I came in, sat somewhere different (we humans are creatures of habit but I wanted to try something different). The bell goes, I stood and in walks the permanent deacon and the priest. I miss the altar servers, I am thinking while the two men enter the sanctuary.

I have to admit that Sunday morning I couldn't follow what the priest was saying and while I mostly disagree with displaying the full Mass on a screen, today I was delighted to be able to ‘read’ the Mass. However, I could not help it and I ‘drifted off’ a few times. I observed the people around me. Not many here today, I thought. This church used to be packed for this Mass but now I can see nearly everyone. Most are still social distanced. I wondered if those who have not come back yet will ever come back? What is going to happen this Christmas? Are people returning or not?

Looking around again I noticed a young mother with her two children, aged maybe five and three. The older one was watching something on her mother's phone and the younger one was enjoying sliding over the pews. I admired how calm the mother was. While I was observing my eyes stopped at the sanctuary. Another man walks up, the minister of the word. I couldn't help myself but feeling somehow annoyed looking at this. Three men in the sanctuary. For all my life I have been part of the Catholic Church and it is only the past two to three years that I noticed that I react to this.

The role of women within the Church has found a momentum within me. Of course, I always

knew I cannot become a priest. I cannot become a deacon and for years I was happy I focused on what I could do. I worked within it happily. I am aware there are many ways to live out our vocation. I enjoy sharing the Good News. However, in recent months I noticed how frustrating it can be as a woman in the Catholic Church. We talk about the baptismal call but how many

in leadership within the Catholic Church really believe in co-responsibility and minister accordingly? All lip-service. Where is this being lived out?

And now we have a synod. I am not sure if the synod can really

engage with those who are distant to the Church if those who are there are not even being taken serious or being heard?

I was delighted to have been part of the task force ‘Building Hope’ for the Archdiocese of Dublin and that in itself was a synodal way. The members had to navigate the 3,000 responses and it became clear that the majority of those who engaged in the process knew that if the Catholic Church wants to be alive moving forward, “real changes” are needed. Many, including myself are holding on to something.

Those who think praying for a better future will sort it out have to be challenged. It is time to trust in the Spirit of courage and wisdom and move with the times. And act. I believe if the documents of the Second Vatican Council would be read again and be fully implemented, the Church would be in a much better place. We have to wake up and be honest and real about changes.

I am around long enough to know that it needs more than a synod. We had a synod for the youth and the family and just because there is a synod in Rome it does not mean the people will respond, engage and get involved. And what difference has it made? It is time for real, authentic leadership. We need changes but who is going to be leading it? Pope Francis in Rome, the Irish bishops, you?

I don't have the answers but I could not blame the little child watching something on her mom's phone, I would have liked to do the same because the men at the front were unable to bring the message alive and across. Or like Lily often challenges me and says “Mammy, can I please stay at home? Mass is boring.”



A life dedicated to people on the margins

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Sr Ursula Sharpe, recently elected congregational leader for the Medical Missionaries of Mary, has spent the entirety of her vocation dedicating her life to those on the margins. Whether in leadership or on the missions, she knows that her vocation must be about people.

“For a time, the Sharpe family was based in Leitrim and this is where Sr Ursula had her early education”

Sr Ursula was born in Co. Donegal to Malachy and Angela Sharpe, and from her earliest days, the importance of the Faith was passed on to her.

“My grandmother would encourage us to say the rosary, whenever we’d visit her on holidays,” Sr Ursula remembers. “And I guess that continued for some years – often we may not have wanted to be kneeling down for all the trimmings, but you did it whether you liked it or not. So faith would have been important to us – not over the top, a normal kind of faith.”

For a time, the Sharpe family was based in Leitrim and this is where Sr Ursula had her early education. After finishing school, she trained as a general nurse in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, before heading to Bangladesh with Concern.



“I worked with Concern for 10 years, and somewhere early on in that, while I was in Bangladesh – it was the early 70s and things were quite challenging there at that time – I knew I had a vocation,” Sr Ursula explains. “I came back to Drogheda and joined the Medical Missionaries. That was fine, but after six months, when it was time to go into novitiate, I realised

I hadn’t saved a whole big part of the world! So I left, and went back to Bangladesh.”

But her vocation stayed “at me and at me”, she says. She and a friend went on a retreat, where one of the monks challenged them to “work for God directly”. So she decided to try again, entering in Rosemount, Booterstown, and this time completed her formation.

“My first assignment was actually to the United States to do mission appeals, because of my experience fundraising with Concern,” Sr Ursula says. “Then, I went on mission to Uganda. It was shortly after the war and President [Yoweri] Museveni had come to power. We were down in the South and the Tanzanian army had come right up that way. On their way back, because they weren’t being paid wages, they stripped houses and took everything. These were very poor communities.”

It was a difficult time for the local peoples and the missionaries. Sr Ursula herself had a close call when a gunman assailed her while she was on a hospital campus.

“On top of the suffering caused by war, the AIDS pandemic had just started in the region”

“Just as I was going into my room, a gun was stuck in my back. Instinctively, I screamed and somebody heard me. But still, I had to open up my room and he took everything. Eventually the night watchmen blew their whistles, and the gunmen ran. It gave me a terrible fright, to be honest and it was some months before I could go out on my own at night. It gave me a sympathy for what happens to people when they’re robbed.”

On top of the suffering caused by war, the AIDS pandemic had just started in the region. This left many children without parents, and caused great suffering, Sr Ursula says.

“Almost 18 years of my ministry was devoted to people suffering from AIDS. I started small, just going out to people’s homes, caring for people with aids, for orphans. Thousands of people died in that whole area, and that left huge

numbers of orphans. We had large programmes covering the whole gamut. Because we were innovative and early into the pandemic it wasn’t difficult to get funds – we were very fortunate.”

After 18 years in Uganda, Ursula was asked to return to Ireland. She said it was “heartbreaking” having to leave the communities which she had worked with for years.

“I found God among those who were suffering,” she explains. “I was often very angry with God when I’d see young people left without parents. But then, I had permission from the bishop to bring Holy Communion to our patients when we were out caring for them. And the faith of the poor people that had nothing. They’d say, thank you for bringing me Jesus. I’ll never forget that.”

Back in Ireland, she took on a number of leadership roles, including assistant congregational leader. All through that time, her work was always focused on people, she says. Now that she has been appointed full congregational leader, she knows that there are many challenges ahead but many things to be hopeful for too.

Congregation

“I really feel it’s about listening,” she begins. “To listen to the needs of the people, our sisters, our staff around the world. And then somehow making sense of it all. For me, it was very unexpected to be elected – it’s just a great privilege to be entrusted with this task.”

“I will be working with a team of five Africans, and they at the moment are working in different parts of the congregation. I’ll be the only Irish person, all the others are African, and for us as a congregation it is very new. It’s the way the congregation is going. I’m merely a bridge between the old and the new – it’s a big transition for the congregation.”

Sweet Treats

Kiley Britten



Stollen inspired Christmas cinnamon rolls

One Christmas food tradition I enjoy is a bread from Germany called stollen. It is a sweet bread with marzipan, currants and sultanas in it, and is really delicious toasted and buttered. I absolutely love having cinnamon rolls for special occasions, and thought that a cinnamon roll would be the perfect way to have all the flavours of stollen but with a little bit of Christmas spice. These rolls are excellent for Christmas morning since they can be made the night before and baked/reheated in the morning, or even baked up to a week in advance, frozen and re-heated.

Ingredients:

- Juice of ½ an orange
- 70g dried cranberries
- 70g mixed dried fruit
- 550g strong white bread flour, plus extra for kneading
- 2 x 7g sachets easy-bake dried yeast
- 85g golden caster sugar
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg

- 1 large egg
- 250ml warm milk
- 25g pistachios, chopped
- 250g golden marzipan
- Cinnamon sugar mixture: 2tsp sugar + 1tbsp cinnamon

Instructions

1. Stir together the orange juice, cranberries and mixed fruit in a small bowl and leave to soak.
2. Mix the flour, yeast, caster sugar and nutmeg in a large bowl. Rub in the butter. Beat the egg with the warm milk, then pour onto the flour mixture. Stir with a round-bladed knife, then use your hands to bring the mixture together as a soft dough.
3. Tip onto a work surface and knead for a couple of minutes, adding a little flour only if you need to stop it sticking. Oil the bowl, return the dough and cover with cling film. Leave to rise for 45 minutes-1 hour in a warm place until doubled in



4. Line and butter a large roasting tin with baking parchment. Roll the risen dough out firmly to a long strip about 70 x 18cm. Spread some butter on the dough, then add the cinnamon sugar mixture. Roll the marzipan out as thin as possible, trying to roll it out into a rectangle the same size as your dough. Place the thin sheet of marzipan on top of the dough. Don’t worry if it isn’t the same size or it breaks, just arrange it on top as flat as possible.

5. Add the pistachios to the soaked fruit, then scatter the mix along the dough.

Starting from one end roll the entire thing up into a log and cut into rolls then place in the buttered tray. Cover with cling film and leave to rise for 45 minutes-1 hour until really well risen or overnight in the fridge.

6. Heat oven to 170C fan/gas 5. Bake for 15-20 minutes until golden. Brush with melted butter and drench with icing sugar, or mix a little water into the icing sugar, drizzle over the buns and scatter over

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

Television and radio highlights

KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS, A CATHOLICS COME HOME SPECIAL PRESENTATION

EWTN Saturday December 18, 7pm also Thursday (night) December 23, 3.30am

A tour behind the scenes of the making of Santa's Priority, a Christmas evangomercial and discover what a small group of Catholics are doing to combat the secular war on Christmas and to glorify Jesus, the reason for the season.

IN CONCERT: CHRISTMAS IN VIENNA

EWTN Saturday December 18, 9.30pm

Celebrate Christ's birth with a special concert of international music by the Vienna Symphonic Orchestra, Singing Academy, and world-famous Vienna Boys' Choir performing Christmas songs from around the world.

VOX NOSTRA WITH VLAD SMISHKEWYCH

RTÉ Lyric FM Sunday December 19, 7.00am

The gift bag is full of early music this year - join Vlad for a pre-Christmas Vox Nostra with old favourites and new releases - yuletide carols and villancicos, Christmas sinfonias and concertos, and new early music releases for the festive season.

SUNDAY MORNING LIVE

BBC One Sunday December 19, 10.30am

Topical magazine show hosted by Sean Fletcher and Jacqui Joseph covering the week's talking points and exploring the ethical and religious issues of the day.

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday December 19, 11.00am

Fr Bill O'Shaughnessy celebrates Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Advent with members of the Tallaght community. Music is led by Arabella Voices.

HEAVEN MADE

BBC One Sunday December 19, 11.30am also BBC Two Christmas Eve 8.20am

Following the nuns and monks at three Benedictine abbeys in England and Ireland as they craft traditional gifts for the upcoming Christmas festivities. Includes Kylemore Abbey (Ep. 2).

GIVE UP YER AUL SINS



Brendan O'Regan

RTÉ One Sunday December 19, 11.50am also Christmas Day 8.55am

The Birth Of Jesus: Give Up Yer Aul Sins is an Academy Award® nominated short film, which humorously reenacts original recordings of Dublin schoolrooms in the 1960s.

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday December 19, 1.15pm

Katherine Jenkins looks forward to Christmas with a host of festive favourite carols from Westminster Abbey, including *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* and *O Come All Ye Faithful*. There are special performances from the Abbey choir and from Gospel singer of the year Monique McKen with Tessera.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT FROM KNOCK

EWTN Sunday December 19, 8pm also Christmas Day 9.30pm and *St Stephen's Day* (night) 2am and Monday December 27, 10am

Experience the sights and sounds of Christmas from the Marian Shrine in Knock - concert of Christmas carols, sung by candlelight.

HAVE YOURSELF A MARY LITTLE CHRISTMAS

RTÉ One Monday December 20, 10.30pm

For 27 years, Mary Kennedy presented the annual Carols show on RTÉ One. Here, she re-visits some of her favourites from those shows, including performances by Enya, Johnny Logan, Sinéad O'Connor, Mick Flannery and Susan O'Neill, Donal Lunny, Ralph McTell, Imelda May, Loah and Lisa Hannigan and Eimear Quinn.

RECLAIMING THE CAROL

EWTN Monday (night) December 20, 4am also Tuesday December 21, 11am

The late Charles Dickens returns to find that *A Christmas Carol*, and the holiday it celebrates, has become

overshadowed by glitz and commercialism in this touching story about the true meaning of Christmas.

LUKE: MEEK SCRIBE OF CHRIST

EWTN Tuesday December 21, 2.30pm also Christmas Eve (night) 2am

Dr Timothy O'Donnell explains St Luke's focus on God's mercy, his sensitivity toward women portrayed in the Gospel, the events in Jesus' life, the Holy Spirit and how he writes in a historical context.

SCOTLAND'S SACRED ISLANDS WITH BEN FOGLE

BBC Two Wednesday December 22, 6.20am

Ben Fogle explores the ancient sea roads of the Inner Hebrides. He visits Iona, the cradle of Christianity, and learns how Columba's legacy inspires people today.

THE UNIVERSAL MASS WITH THE AFRICAN GOSPEL CHOIR

RTÉ Lyric FM Thursday December 23, 11am

A new sung Mass composed by J.J. O'Shea, who has invited various groups to perform it and give their own interpretation, drawing on their tradition, idiom and culture.

HEAVEN MADE

BBC Two Thursday December 23, 8.15am

Following the nuns and monks at three Benedictine abbeys in England and Ireland as they craft traditional gifts for the upcoming Christmas festivities. (Ep. 1).

AMAZING GRACE

TG4 Thursday December 23, 10.30pm also BBC Two Christmas Eve 11pm

Aretha Franklin: A critically acclaimed must-see Gospel concert documentary recording a seminal performance in Aretha Franklin's career



Dáithí Ó Sé host carols from St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

in 1972, with a local Baptist choir and the Revd James Cleveland - a huge inspiration in her early musical career.

CAROLS FROM KING'S

BBC Four Thursday (night) December 23, 12.30am

On the sixtieth anniversary of this Christmas institution, Juliet Stevenson narrates the story of Carols from King's, how it was first televised in 1954 and how each year the soloist is selected for the traditional opening of *Once In Royal David's City*.

THE UNIVERSAL MASS WITH EMMA LANGFORD

RTÉ Lyric FM Christmas Eve 11am

A new sung Mass, composed by J.J. O'Shea. The second setting is an accompanied Mass sung by award-winning singer Emma Langford in a setting for string quartet composed and arranged by guitarist and composer Paul de Grae.

CAROLS FROM KING'S

BBC Two Christmas Eve 6.15pm and Christmas Day 8.45am and BBC Four Thursday (night) 12.30am

Directed by Daniel Hyde, the world-famous choir sings carols old and new including *The Holly and the Ivy*, *In the Stillness* and *O Holy Night*.

SOLEMN MASS OF CHRISTMAS EVE

EWTN Christmas Eve 6.30pm

Pope Francis presides over Christmas Eve Mass from St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican

CHRISTMAS CAROLS: CHRISTMAS IN ST PATRICK'S

RTÉ One Christmas Eve 8.15pm and Christmas Day 9am

tion for this Eurovision Mass from la Chapelle du Christ-Souverain-Prêtre (the Chapel of Christ, the Sovereign Priest), La Clarté-Dieu, in Orsay, Northern France.

URBI ET ORBI

RTÉ One Christmas Day 11am also EWTN 11am

Pope Francis delivers his traditional message and blessing "to the city and to the world" from St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City.

AIFREANN LÁ NOLLAG

Raidio na Gaeltachta Lá Nollag 11.30am

Ó Séipéal Naomh Ainnín, An Cnoc, Indreabhán, Gailimh. An tAthair Clement Mac Mánuis is é an sagart.

THE ARCHBISHOPS' CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

RTÉ One Christmas Day 12.15pm

The Catholic and Church of Ireland Primates of All-Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin and Archbishop John McDowell, offer a Christmas message and blessing.

ANGELA'S CHRISTMAS

RTÉ Two Christmas Day 6.15pm

Set in Ireland in the early 1900s, *Angela's Christmas* is a funny, heart-warming and poignant story about the power of family and the innocent desire of a child to ensure everyone is safe, warm and loved at Christmas time.



ANGELA'S CHRISTMAS WISH

RTÉ One Christmas Day 7.25pm

Angela's Christmas Wish is a heart-warming story of a determined little girl who sets out on an adventure to reunite her family in time for Christmas. She and her family set out on a new Christmas adventure in their hometown of Limerick in the early 1900s.

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One St Stephen's Day 1.15pm

Daniel O'Donnell's faith journey: Claire McCollum is in Ireland to meet the ever-popular Daniel O'Donnell as he celebrates his 60th birthday to find out how his strong Catholic faith motivates his life and his singing.

Dáithí Ó Sé hosts this festive show in St Patrick's Cathedral, newly restored in time for its 800th anniversary. Performers and guests include Andrea Corr, Declan O'Rourke, Lisa O'Neill, the Choir of St Patrick's Cathedral and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra.

MIDNIGHT MASS

RTÉ One Christmas Eve 11pm

Mass of the Nativity presided over by Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin from the Church of St James, Grange, Co. Louth. Music led by Grange Parish Ensemble, with soloists Zoe Conway and John McIntyre.

MIDNIGHT MASS

BBC One Christmas Eve 11.45pm

Celebrate the traditional first Mass of Christmas with a joyful service live from St Chad's Cathedral in the heart of Birmingham.

A CHRISTMAS LEAP OF FAITH

RTÉ Radio One Christmas Day 8am

Michael Comyn offers a festive mix of warmth, music, inspiration and humour in the company of a variety of guests.

THE CORK NATIVITY

RTÉ One Christmas Day 9.55am

The people of Cork bring the Gospel story of the nativity to life in a variety of settings across the rebel county in this charming, multi award-winning short film.

MASS FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

RTÉ One Christmas Day 10am

Fr Tom McCarthy OP offers commentary and transla-

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Children's books for the Christmas season

Books are among the most acceptable gifts we can give to others, especially children. Here is a small selection of what is now available, for young people of all ages, with a reminder too that Christmas is still a religious celebration, whatever the bizarre commercial activities that now surround it. Remember books are not just for Christmas but for all the year round. Reading shapes growing minds and developing bodies.

Small children

Puffling and the Egg
by Gerry Daly, illustrated by Erika McCann (O'Brien Press, €12.99)
A delightful little fable of a small puffin on Skellig Michael, who comes upon an orphaned egg (if that is the right expression), in which he makes his way around that rocky outcrop to settle its future. A book that tells smaller readers a lot about life in an engaging way.

'Twas the Night Before Christmas

Clement C. Moore, illustrations by P. J. Lynch (Walker Books, €14.99)
A long-time seasonal favourite, this poem was first published unsigned in 1823. Soon known, however, to be the work of academic, evangelical preacher and property developer, Clement Moore, it has become a Christmas fixture - especially in the US. There the holiday in some homes wouldn't be the holiday without a reading of it around the fire. Irish families too have long enjoyed it.

Einstein the Penguin
by Iona Rangly and illustrated by David Tazzman (HarperCollins Children's Books)

Gives a new meaning to the expression "pick up a penguin". Though it may remind many of a certain bear from Peru with a partiality for marmalade, this tale of a family who ask a smart bird back home from the zoo is great fun. I suspect he may be around for many holidays to come.

Ireland: The People, The Places, The Stories

A Hug for You
by David King (Sandycove, €11.99)

This is book which all the world loves, recalling little Adam King's appearance on the Late Late Toy Show back in 2020. The ever-circulating hugs he put in action then are still going because "they are for everyone". He is, as a lady - a complete stranger - he met in a coffee shop said to him, "a real light in dark times". In Adam's world there are no strangers, only people he has not yet hugged.



Adam King and his father David.

with a foreword by Dara Ó Briain (Scholastic, €12.99)

"A stunning celebration of the rich culture and fascinating history of Ireland featuring ten Irish illustrators. Discover everything that makes the Irish isle so special - from its famous landmarks to its myths and legends, from its epic battles to its incredible

music...and everything in between."

But that is only half of it. There is nothing teachery in this fine book that showcases the work of those ten Irish artists chapter by chapter, which makes for a very varied and inspiring treatment. And what curious and inquiring young reader could resist chapters on haunted Ireland, magi-

cal Ireland, underground Ireland and others that integrate people and landscape.

Girls Play Too, Book 2: More Inspiring Stories of Irish Sportswomen
by Jacqui Hurley (Merrion Press, €14.95)

The story of girl power on the playing fields continues. As girl's games at school go

back as far as boys do, it is curious that they should need special celebration, except for the fact that women athletes won fame and attention with their powerful performances, and if there are to be more of them in the future, girls may need in these days of growing up too quickly to be persuaded to play on. The author calls them role

models. Actually they were always heroines.

Older children

A poet for every day of the year

edited by Ellie Esiri (Macmillan Children's Books, €21.99)

A brilliantly simple idea that takes poetry completely out of school, where it really has no true place. Poetry is for private moments and personal enjoyment. Get the children in the household reading poetry at home now and they will read poetry forever (and be able to recite it too, which is more than many modern poets can do). Believe me, they will remember and thank the giver of this book for years to come.

Tree Dogs, Banshee and other Irish Words for Nature

by Manchán Mangan and illustrated by Steve Doogan (Gill Books, €19.99)

The Gaelic global traveller comes home, in a sort of way, with this enthusiastic exploration of Irish nature lore, some of it very strange, explored through the Irish language. This really takes you back, echoes here of the sort of love of nature and small creatures that we find in medieval Irish poetry.

Lilly's Dream A Lissadell Diary

by Judi Curtin, illustrated by Rachel Corcoran (O'Brien Press, €12.99)

Set in the Sligo mansion with which Yeats and his friends are associated, this novel explores an aspect of the Irish past - life for servants in a big house - that is quite neglected. Out of so many books to be found in the shops around now, this is one with an unusual and original aspect. It deals with Lissadell "out of season", so to speak in the more misty days no one talks about.

Gordon's Game - Lions Roar

by Gordon D'Arcy and Paul Howard (Sandycove, €13.99)

Grown-ups may often feel they have had quite enough

“Christmas is still a religious celebration, whatever the bizarre commercial activities that now surround it”

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



of a certain rugby maniac over the years, but an enthusiasm for the game begins early and now has a character to carry school sporting adventures and misadventures. For those boys who “don’t read” this might be an ideal stocking filler.

Young adults

Banshee Rising

by Riley Cain (Currach Books, €12.99) Here notions out of Irish traditional lore are re-imagined in the story of young Caitlyn McCabe’s encounters with a haunted past, aided by Prof. Sackimun Brody, through which she herself matures as a person of courage.

Make your own magic: Secrets, Stories and Tricks from a TikTok Magician

by Joel M (HarperCollins, €15.99) Having once been an enthusiast for *The Boys Book of Magic* found on the shelves at home - a leftover from the 1920s so far in the past - I was delighted to see this. Joel M is a star of TikTok, but as they say when it comes to stage acts ‘The auld ones are best’. The 23-year-old Ulster lad shares some secrets, but there are more to come. And there will always be an audience for magic shows of the

traditional kind, redressed for the modern day. And at €15.99 it is a book that may well persuade some young people there is more to life than becoming another accountant.

Spiritual and religious books for children

The Christmas Story

by Juliet David illustrated by Elina Ellis (Lion Hudson, €5.95) Retold from the New Testament in an accessible text for young readers and linked with reader friendly contemporary style pictures. Only through books like these can the true meaning of the season come alive for children. Every household should have a book like this.

A Robin’s Tale

by Noelle Rock illustrated by Sasha Sakhnevich (Currach Books, €14.99) In this present situation the passing of loved ones is a real presence. Noelle Rock in this tale for children presents a way in which parents can deal with the theme of death in the family in a way of love and compassion. A title to note perhaps, but many will find this book a great resource, if not for now, for some future date.

100 Best Christmas Poems

edited by Roger McGough (SPCK, €10.50)

A lovely collection of poems on Christmas themes brought together by long-established Liverpool poet Roger McGough. Ideal for reading in the family group, but also for personal reading. If Christmas means anything at all it is the continuity of tradition, but only by immersion in the past can modern children learn about tradition of both family and faith.

The Same but Different by Emer O’Neill, illustrated by Debby Rahmalia (Gill Books, €14.99)

“If we all looked just the same how boring life would be. The things that make me different are the things that make me me!”

Emer O’Neill is a mother of two. Born and raised in Ireland, she is Irish/Nigerian and a native of Bray, Co. Wicklow. She teaches physical education and is a presenter on RTÉ home school hub.

So this tale is very much a reflection of the author’s own experience. But we all need to be more aware of just how many new communities there now are in Ireland, and that everyone needs to do more to make Ireland a real home for us all.

Books can shape our later life

by the Books Editor

When they were in doubt about a book to give a child or young person, our parents, grandparents and great grandparents gave a classic and in doing so followed an important tradition. But it is one with for some people disconcerting results.

The philosopher L.P. Jacks, the once eminent editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, devoted to philosophy and religion - a Victorian who lived down to 1955 - was a man very sensitive to the past and to the formative influence of books on growing minds and imaginations, as he wrote:

“The critical moment in my history may be assigned to a certain date in March 1868, when my father, according to an entry in his journal, bought me a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* for four-and-six. Little did my father dream what he was doing. As he walked home that night my Destiny was in his pocket.”

Imaginative child

“A book absorbed by an imaginative child can give a lifelong climate to the soul, lending its colours to the experience of the coming years, tempering the quality of moods, laying all values under debt to its influence. The atmosphere of the author’s mind, which critics may never discover, is the first element the child appropriates, becoming thereby a visionary on his own account. In reading the letter he catches the spirit rather than the meaning, the sense rather than the idea; he pierces to the secret springs of imagery; he sees, hears, touches, tastes; and so, following the innermost impulse of the written word, his own imagination becomes creative, and a new world is woven out of the living tissue of his sympathies...”

“Had the eye of my father chanced upon some other book, all would have been different...then the lady who is now my wife would have belonged to another; my present children would not have been born, my strange life would not have been lived; and these lines would not have been written.

“*Robinson Crusoe* was the first book I read; nor have I ever read another with faith so complete, with imagination so on fire. The sources of thought were tapped; the waters of fancy were unsealed, and the channel cut in which they are doomed to flow until they are lost for ever in the sea.

“Like a stone dropped into the mouth of a geyser, the reading of that book let loose the floods that boil around the central fires; and a way was made for spirits that haunt the secret springs of life to come and go from that day to this.”

So it was too for Graham Greene from a Catholic point of view, as he writes in his, *The Lost Childhood*:

“**Robinson Crusoe was the first book I read; nor have I ever read another with faith so complete, with imagination so on fire**”

“Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives. In later life we admire, we are entertained, we may modify some views we already hold, but we are more likely to find in books merely a confirmation of what is in our minds already: as in a love affair it is our own features that we see reflected flatteringly back.

“But in childhood all books are books of divination, telling us about the future, and like the fortune teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water they influence the future. What do we ever get nowadays from reading to equal the excitement and the revelation in those first 14 years?”

Learned

He explains that the moment he learned to read by himself he kept it a secret. “I suppose I half consciously realised even then that this was the dangerous moment. I was safe so long as I could read - the wheels had not begun to turn, but now the future stood around on bookshelves every-

where waiting for the child to choose...”

He went on to read many books, but especially *King Solomon’s Mines*, with the witch Gagool...

Remained

“Yes, Gagool has remained a permanent part of the imagination, but Quatermain and Curtis - weren’t they, even when I was only ten years old, a little too good to be true?...A child, after all, knows most of the game - it is only an attitude to it that he lacks. He is quite well aware of cowardice, shame, deception, disappointment...These men were like Platonic ideas: they were not life as one had already begun to know it.

“But when - perhaps I was 14 by that time - I took Miss Marjorie Bowen’s *The Viper of Milan* from the library shelf, the future for better or worse really struck. From that moment I began to write. All the other possible futures slid away: the potential civil servant, the don, the clerk had to look for other incarnations...”

“Man is never satisfied, and often I have wished that my hand had not moved further than *King Solomon’s Mines*, and that the future I had taken down from the nursery shelf had been a district office in Sierra Leone and 12 tours of malarial duty and a finishing dose of blackwater fever when the danger of retirement approached.

“What is the good of wishing? The books are always there, the moment of crisis waits, and now our children in their turn are taking down the future and opening the pages. In his poem ‘Germinal’ George Russell (A.E.) wrote:

In ancient shadows and twilights
Where childhood had strayed,

The world’s great sorrows were born

And its heroes were made.

In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betrayed.”

📖 *The passage by Dr L.P. Jacks comes from Among the Idol Makers (1911). The passage by Graham Greene is from his essay ‘The lost childhood’, which can be found in his Collected Essays (1969).*

“**A book absorbed by an imaginative child can give a lifelong climate to the soul, lending its colours to the experience of the coming years**”

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.



To join in Sr. Stan's vision please contact cian.dikker@focusireland.ie or phone 01 881 5962

FOCUS
Ireland



Please remember GOAL in your Will

42 years on we continue to deliver lifesaving support to the most vulnerable people in our world. Leaving a gift in your Will is priceless.

Contact Courtenay on 01 2809779 or via email at cpollard@goal.ie

Registered Charity No. 20010980; CHY 6271



By choosing to leave a gift in your will to Missio Ireland, you are choosing to share God's love with those who need it most.

To learn more about the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission, call Fiona on 01 497 2035 or visit www.missio.ie



Remembering
MEMORIAM CARDS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
CARDS & NOTELETS
BOOKMARKS

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Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

Classifieds: 01 687 4094

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

HEAVEN'S MESSAGE

BISHOP JUAN GUEVARRA, Nicaragua has approved the divine revelations to Luz de Maria at www.revelacionesmarianas.com/english.htm. An important message by Our Blessed Mother on 20th November 2021.

ECCLESIASTICAL ART CONSERVATION

STATUES REPAIR and repaint – church size and small. Nationwide. Contact Dr Nicholas von Kerckhoff on 087 2203898 or antiquegallery@eircom.net.

PROFILING BED WANTED

PROFILING / ELECTRIC BED WANTED for older person in Dublin area. We are looking for one new or second hand such bed in good condition please. Please ring Ann on 087 9722754 if you have one to sell.

CATHOLIC CONNECTIONS

GOOD LOOKING CATHOLIC LADY 40 years old, believes in marriage and family and would like to find true love and a genuine man who believes in the same. Phone Kathy at 085 7201600.

KIND MAN AGE 50, single, looking to meet single lady for romance and maybe more. Catholic and to share true love. Contact 087 3631263.

We will pass on the flame of faith.

For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland. Help us pass on the flame of faith by remembering us in your Will.

Phone 01 6874028 info@irishcatholic.ie

The Irish Catholic PREPAID CLASSIFIED AD COUPON

STATE UNDER WHICH HEADING YOUR AD IS TO APPEAR:

Minimum charge of €24.60 (inc. VAT) for 5 lines (25 words). Extra lines €4.92 each.

No. of insertions: _____ weeks

Miracle Prayer €40

Please print your advertisement in the coupon, placing ONE word in each space. Below, please print your name and address. Do you require a Box Number? YES NO (Please tick ✓) Box Number €6 extra.

1					€24.60
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					€29.52
7					€34.44

Name and contact detail form **MUST** be filled out

Name

Address

.....

Landline Mobile

I enclose Cheque/PO: €.....I wish to pay by Visa Mastercard Laser

My Visa/Mastercard/Lasercard number is:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Expiry Date:Signature

The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Phone: 01 687 4094

Leisure time

Operation Smile

Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20054588 Revenue Number: CHY 15661

By remembering Operation Smile in your Will, you are leaving the gift of a lasting smile for a child born with a cleft condition.

Operation Smile envisions a future where health and dignity are championed through safe surgery. Get in touch with Kristen Bell, Legacy & Fundraising Manager, on

01 667 6659 or kristen@operationsmile.ie or visit operationsmile.ie/LastingSmile

The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift of just 1% of your estate to Irish Hospice Foundation can help us ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Clare Martin at clare.martin@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie



Homeless & Drugs Services



Your heart for the homeless

Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You may wish to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake, made by a client, for you.

This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering

Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email emma.murphy@mqi.ie

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork. Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmissions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

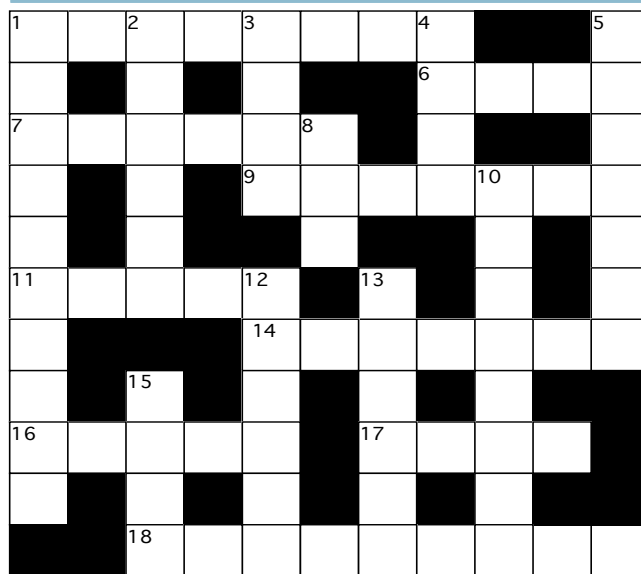
Trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call **Grace Kelly** on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 413



Across

- 1 There is a show called 'The X _____' (6)
- 5 A 'story' in your head while you are asleep (5)
- 7 Take your clothes and other things out of your luggage (6)
- 9 Hot drink (3)
- 11 Green jewel (7)
- 12 Has a victory (4)
- 13 Farmacyard bird (3)
- 14 Go here to see a play on stage (7)
- 16 Part of the body between your shoulder and your wrist (3)
- 18 Creatures (7)
- 19 Neatest (7)
- 20 Hatchet (3)

Down

- 1 Apples, pears, etc (5)
- 2 Officer in charge of a ship (7)
- 3 Many musicians playing together (9)
- 4 The biggest city in Northern Ireland (7)
- 6 Centre (6)
- 8 The name of the Emeritus Pope (8)
- 10 A female sheep (3)
- 13 It pumps blood around your body (5)
- 15 Take it easy (5)
- 17 Hippos love to wallow in it (3)

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 09

GORDIUS NO. 537

Across - 1 Map 3 Coincidence 8 Leeway 9 Required 10 No-one 11 Kyoto 13 Wrest 15 Our Lady 16 Slumber 20 Heats 21 Crisp 23 Bread of Heaven 25 Nil all 26 Radioactive 27 Pie

Down - 1 Melancholic 2 Premolar 3 Crane 4 Nureyev 5 Drunk 6 Narrow 7 End 12 Overindulge 13 Width 14 Tills 17 Blue lamp 18 Cabinet 19 Wished 22 Piano 23 Bribe 24 Oar

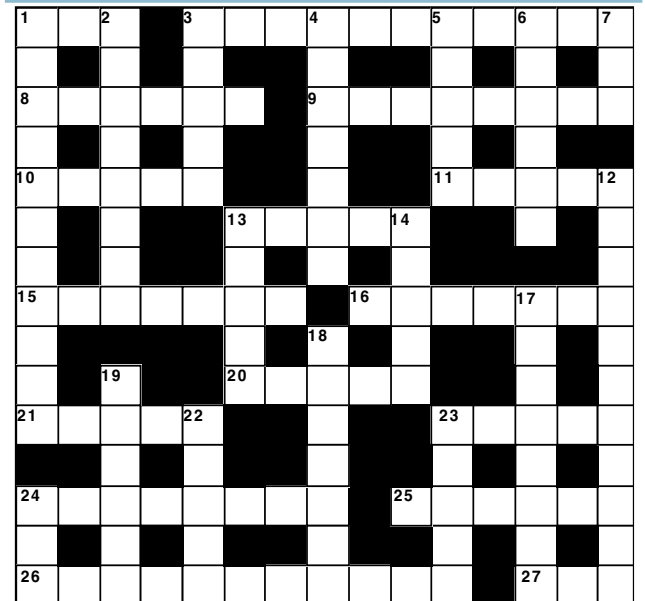
CHILDREN'S No. 412

Across - 1 Lizard 4 Even 8 Red carpet 9 Sty 11 Exam 13 Calendar 16 Ate 17 Rocks 18 Cool 19 Forehead 20 Eyes

Down - 1 Largest 2 Zodiac 3 Road 5 Vets 6 Navy 7 Sprint 10 Tortoise 12 Marched 14 Easter 15 Decide 17 Root

Crossword

Gordius 538



Across

- 1 The people in attendance at a mass (12)
- 7 White robe worn by a priest (3)
- 9 & 16a Location in London of Speakers' Corner (4,4)
- 10 & 15a Sailor Renee goes round this African country (6,5)
- 11 Type of car or type of skirt (4)
- 14 Fish that can glide on ice? (5)
- 15 See 10 across
- 16 See 9 across
- 18 Uniform jacket (5)
- 21 Pleasure-sailing vessel (5)
- 22 Animal of the Andes (5)
- 23 Aspirations (5)
- 24 A monk's hood (4)
- 25 Floating markers (5)
- 26 Sad poem (5)
- 29 Jeer, make fun of (4)
- 33 Uncivilised, ferocious (6)
- 34 Snare with part adjusted (4)
- 36 Item of neckwear (3)
- 37 Ceremonies that precede burial or cremation (7,5)

Down

- 1 Yell or sob (3)
- 2 Requirement (4)
- 3 Relax, take it easy (4)
- 4 One from Athens, perhaps (5)
- 5 One of a set of fortunetelling cards (5)

- 6 Member of Hitler's party (4)
- 8 Taking matters right to the edge may cause one to banish Mr Pink, strangely enough (12)
- 9 It will next be visible as it passes Earth in 2061 (7,5)
- 12 Russian capital city (6)
- 13 Sailor's sleeping-place (5)
- 14 Establish (3,2)
- 17 Great river of South America (6)
- 19 Unlikable (5)
- 20 Suit you'd use on the golf course (5)
- 27 Depart (5)
- 28 West African country formerly known as the Gold Coast (5)
- 30 The boss in the kitchen (4)
- 31 Turn sharply, swerve (4)
- 32 Let it stand - used to nullify a correction (4)
- 35 Sad, confused commercials (3)

Sudoku Corner

412

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 411

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

Last week's Hard 411

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



Fr Bernard Cotter

Notebook

Looking at funeral rituals through rose-tinted glasses

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED how faulty your memories can be? Think of the summers you enjoyed growing up: did the sun always shine for long days of fun? That's how I remember my growing-up days too, though meteorological reports for those years show just as much rain then as now. But I only remember the good bits. You may recognise this human trait in yourself also.

Rituals of the past are often seen through the same rose-tinted glasses: we remember the bits that were good and forget the downsides. Even though this pandemic is not yet two years old, some of what happened before is already seen in a similar way.

Affair

Take funerals. Up to February 2019, funerals had become a three-day affair in many parishes. In places I am familiar with, the rosary was said on the first night, often by the priest. The second night brought another public ritual, a removal to the church in some places, a 'reposing in the church' in others. The priest was key, to bless the body at the door of the church and to lead prayers at the end of the vigil. Lay people might help but could not replace



him. And in those places where the reposing of the body took place in the church, a lot went wrong, behind the scenes: sacristans fumed, churches were heated and lit, often at great expense, and every other liturgy had to be re-scheduled or abandoned.

Then came the pandemic, and liturgies before the funeral Mass suddenly became private, family occasions, with maybe a few neighbours helping to 'wake the body', often in the family home. The big public occasions might have been missed, but the new situation brought advantages too: mourning was more personal, with less pressure;

there was more time to quietly grieve. Condolences were written on rip.ie, people honoured the cortege to the church at the roadsides and funerals never lost their place in our hearts; we just adapted.

New policy

That was the context for a new funeral policy in the diocese I am part of (Cork and Ross). In this policy, the removal to the church directly before the funeral Mass becomes the norm. Vigil prayers take place the night before, often led by the parish funeral team, who may also assist at the removal on the day of the funeral Mass. The diocese has provided a shiny

new parish funeral book, which every family gets, to help them plan. And funeral directors help us by providing these directly to grieving families. The new policy promotes parish funeral teams, highlighting the ministry of the baptised – convenient at a time when priests are becoming all the more scarce.

How has this gone down? Some liked the more personal funeral that the pandemic brought; others are nostalgic for how things used to be, though the downsides of the previous practice are forgotten. How will it work out? Ask me in 50 years' time, when today's policy is viewed through new rose-tinted glasses!

Diocesan amalgamation complications

Amalgamation of Irish dioceses in once again on the cards. Or rather, an Irish solution to an Irish problem, with one bishop leading two separate dioceses simultaneously. One problem is definitely addressed: too many dioceses on too small an island. Two other problems remain however: the bishop who heads two dioceses will have two of everything, and will spend his time ping-ponging from one diocesan office and cathedral to another. Another, less mentioned, dilemma remains also: vocations to the episcopacy have often far exceeded vocations to the priesthood and diaconate. This imbalance will not be as easily sorted!

Things they didn't teach us in seminary

I am a member of a unique Facebook group, entitled 'Things they didn't teach us in seminary'. Members live in many countries and are professional leaders of many faiths, but for all our learning, it's often the practical problems that trip us up. Recent dilemmas highlighted include administrative tasks pastors are landed with, parish staff getting more money than clergy, detoxing after parish meetings, putting up with unfair complaints.

One pastoral worker recently shared that having just had a root canal, she would prefer a root canal any day to dealing with some of her congregation!

I like this group.



YOUR ADVENT GIFT TO SUPPORT OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN DISTRESS

Will you enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to those of our brothers and sisters in dire distress and in urgent need of help?

Your gift will mean a chance of health and happiness, perhaps even the difference between life and death. Please help The Little Way Association to respond to the hundreds of earnest requests received each week from bishops, priests and sisters all around the world appealing for help on behalf of their suffering people. Be assured that every euro you send will be forwarded intact to a missionary who will be happy to put it speedily to use to help a needy person/child in distress.

Thank you and may the God bless and reward your generosity.



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

- St Therese

YOU CAN HELP REPAIR A MISSION CHAPEL

The Little Way Association has a long history of providing humble places of worship for far-flung parishes in mission countries. Nature can take its toll on these simple buildings, and we receive requests from priests for help with repairs.

We humbly ask that you allocate some of your kind giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities.

The clergy and people overseas who benefit from your generosity invariably promise to pray for their benefactors' intentions.

Please can you spare a donation, large or small, to help a needy person or child

Every euro you send to The Little Way Association's fund for hungry, sick, deprived refugees and needy children will be used, without deduction, for the relief of suffering.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **HUNGRY, SICK, DEPRIVED & REFUGEES**

€..... **NEEDY CHILDREN**

€..... **MISSIONS CHAPELS**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
 (Please state no. of Masses _____)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
tinyurl.com/lwadonations

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.