

The Irish Catholic

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Catholic parents voice anger at exclusion from school talks

Jason Osborne

Representatives of Catholic parents have expressed frustration that they have been excluded from key discussions between the Department of Education and other stakeholders about issues as vital as getting children back to school.

The Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association (CSSPA) is the representative body for parents with children in Catholic secondary schools in Ireland, and they promote those interests at both a local and national level. The CSSPA say this means that 340,000 parents have no voice at the table.

Sean O'Riordan President of the CSSPA expressed "disappointment and frustration" that his body – which represents 50% of secondary schools in the Republic – is not represented at the talks.

"We have written to the minister [for education] on numerous occasions and are very disappointed that our letters have not been acknowledged," Mr O'Riordan said.

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Lift-off for Trócaire's Lenten Appeal



Helping to launch Trócaire's annual Lenten Appeal are siblings Connla and Liadh Fallon, with cut-outs of children previously featured on Trócaire Lent boxes. Photo: Mark Stedman

Covid-19 restrictions put Trócaire Lenten appeal 'at risk'

Chai Brady

Trócaire has warned that one-third of its annual donations have been put at risk after Covid-19 restrictions severely curtailed the distribution of Trócaire boxes this Lent.

The Church-charity's Lenten Appeal began on Ash Wednesday but the closure of schools and public Mass restrictions due to the pandemic have meant Trócaire boxes won't reach many homes this year.

While boxes are available to be picked-up at churches nationwide, there are up to 50% fewer boxes in circulation.

CEO Caoimhe de Barra said: "Covid-19 restrictions mean this Lent will be the first time in almost 50 years many Irish homes will be without a Trócaire box. Boxes have been left in churches for people to pick-up and we urge supporters to pick-up a box if it is safe and within the public health guidelines to do so."

Trócaire raises approximately €8 million each Lent, which amounts to roughly one-third of its annual donations. The charity has warned that its inability to distribute boxes this year may

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ENDING EXTREME POVERTY WHATEVER IT TAKES

We need to be consistent in our pro-life ethic

I asked a friend over the weekend – via a phonecall lest I be accused of flouting rules – if he was planning on giving up “the drink” this Lent as has been his custom for many years. “I think I’ll drink more,” was his joking response.

It is a sentiment that will resonate with many people given the sacrifices that have been made over the last 11 months in the fight against Covid-19. The fact that many of us have had no choice in the sacrifices makes it all the more difficult since there is a piercing sense that we are no longer masters of our own destinies. That is a difficult concept in a world where radical individualism and personal autonomy are often promoted as the ultimate goal.

Covid-19 has provided us with a shuddering reminder that yes, we are our brother’s keeper. Those of us who are (relatively) young and healthy have a responsibility towards the common good to protect those who are vulnerable and could die if they contract the coronavirus.

Duties

This should be no alien concept to Christians as our duties to one another are

at the heart of the Christian message. Jesus reminds us in Chapter 25 of St Matthew’s Gospel that we will be judged according to how we treated those who are vulnerable.

“Covid-19 has provided us with a shuddering reminder that yes, we are our brother’s keeper”

I was shocked recently to see a Catholic woman – who is evidently Christian and good-living in so many ways – respond to a theologian who said there is a “moral duty” to get a Covid-19 vaccine say that “my only moral duty is to myself”.

That sentiment is the very antithesis of the Gospel and is everything we work to overcome in our world. Pope Francis might even describe it as part of the “throwaway culture” that he often

laments in contemporary society.

The Church is the ‘family of families’ and our duty is to look out for one another. Ultimately, of course, what we want to do is get one another in to Heaven by growing in holiness and good example. But, we have a responsibility as well in our mortal combat against the coronavirus to ensure that we do not act in a way that puts other people in danger. I will get the Covid-19 vaccine when it comes my turn. If it is a vaccine that is tainted by the use of cell-lines from aborted babies, I will make my protest known to the health authorities but I will take my lead from the Church and I will not refuse the vaccine. I will accept the vaccine not because I am frightened that I will get sick and die from Covid-19, I will do so because I am frightened that if this deadly virus continues to spread in the community many more people will die who could’ve lived.

Editor’s Comment
Michael Kelly



Ethic

We need to be consistent in our pro-life ethic. Any person dying of Covid-19 because people are refusing to get vaccinated is an affront to human dignity. A few years ago when we fought passionately to save the pro-life amendment in our Constitution, we proudly marched under the banner ‘every life matters’. It’s true and we need to embrace that truth. Almost 2,000 years ago Christianity thrived in a pagan culture because people marvelled at how much Christians loved one another. That’s a witness more powerful than any preaching.

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Parents voice anger at exclusion from talks

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Longford-Westmeath Senator Micheál Carrigy brought this issue to the Seanad on Monday, saying he’s “concerned” that the voices of parents, particularly the parents of children in the schools of his own constituency, have not been heard.

“At present, no post-primary school in my county is being represented by the National Parents Council that is in the talks. In fact, 85% of

schools, or 612 out of 726, accounting for 340,000 parents, in either the Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association or the ETB Schools National Parents Association are not part of the National Parents Council at present, which is a worrying situation,” Senator Carrigy said.

Aware

Senator Carrigy made the Oireachtas aware of the fact that the elected directors of the CSSPA have been denied

access to meetings and are not being informed of what has been discussed.

Speaking to this newspaper, the senator said the issue “needs to be addressed”.

He added that the lack of representation of all parents voices “at the most critical time ever of the discussions in the education sector in the history of the State” needs to be dealt with “immediately”.

A spokesperson for the Department of Education did not respond directly to queries about the exclusion but said: “It is understood that, up until recently” the CSSPA was a constituent body of the National Parents’ Council Post-Primary.

“The Department has been informed that the boards of the National Parents Council Post Primary and of the National Parents Council Primary have agreed to work together to progress plans to form a new National Parents Council representing all parents in order to strengthen the voice of parents from early years right through to the end of second level education.

“A single representative body for all parents of Irish schoolchildren will be able to provide advice and services to all parents and engage effectively with all key stakeholders to ensure that the parents’ voice in education is strong,” the spokesman added.

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Anne Fitzgerald RIP

The death has occurred of Anne Fitzgerald (née O’Connell) mother of our esteemed columnist and friend Rory. Mrs Fitzgerald died on February 13 and is survived by her husband Peter and her sons Rory, John and Paul and their families. She is predeceased by her brother Aidan and will also be missed by her sisters Aileen, Mary, Clare and Colette.

Mrs Fitzgerald was a popular teacher at Carrigaline Girls’ National School and will be missed by the many former pupils whose lives she touched, and her wider family and friends.

On behalf of *The Irish Catholic* we extend our sincere sympathy to Mrs Fitzgerald’s family. May she rest in peace.

Outdoor Mass could be key for Easter return to public worship

Chai Brady, Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

If public worship is still restricted at Easter, a prominent TD has urged the Government to allow Mass to be celebrated outdoors.

Clare TD Michael McNamara has said due to the religious significance of the period outdoor Masses should be considered if the Government is not willing to permit Mass indoors.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* he said: "Obviously, churches by-and-large are large, cavernous spaces. Not all of them, but the majority of them are. I would've hoped that it might be possible to say Mass safely, particularly given that Easter is obviously the most important liturgical event in the Christian calendar."

Necessary

"If it was deemed necessary that Masses be celebrated outdoors... I'm sure it's something that priests and their congregations would be willing to consider," he said.

He added that he "would certainly support it" and "at the very least, I think they [the Govern-

ment] should consider allowing Masses to take place outdoors - at the very least."

Tipperary TD Mattie McGrath said reopening for public Mass by Easter "shouldn't be a pipedream" as "there has been no evidence of any transmission of the disease that I know of in any place of worship".

The Easter period is "hugely important for people of faith, the Passion, the crucifixion and the resurrection", he said, adding that there has been "sheer utter disappointment" among his constituents due to the continued closure of churches for public Mass.

Peadar Tóibín TD of Meath West said there is still a need to be cautious but that public worship should be recognised as "an essential element in many people's lives" in the new roadmap for the reopening of society - expected to be published next week.

Regarding an Easter reopening Mr Tóibín said the Government should be looking at it as a possible date for public worship to return but Covid-19 cases, mortalities and vaccination figures will "play a major role in this decision".

He stated that religious worship

is a human right according to the universal declaration of human rights and "is an essential element of people's lives".

“If it was deemed necessary that Masses be celebrated outdoors... I'm sure it's something that priests and their congregations would be willing to consider”

"I think unfortunately this country has looked at it as a non-essential service up until now," he said, "There's no doubt in my mind that the Government haven't weighted the level of importance of religious practice as the reality is in many people's lives. A strong message needs to be sent to the Government," he said.

Senior Fianna Fáil TD and former Minister for Agriculture Dara Calleary said that he does not

believe by first weekend of April it will be allowed to hold public Mass.

Indication

"I'm just not seeing any indication that we're going to get there and I think it would be wrong to give false hope because it means something very important to people. I don't think we're going to be able to have that number of gatherings this Easter," he said.

He added that it's not about the church as a venue, but the movement of people - which creates the conditions for the virus to spread.

"For public worship I think it's incredibly important to people, some people find the online experience works but most people don't, let's be honest. I think what we need to do is do it [a return to public worship] in a manner that is safe and in a manner that doesn't put anybody at risk - that's the most important thing.

"At a time when it is safe, it has to be safe, then we can get back to having Mass and having faith-based services," the Mayo TD said.

'Victory for the grassroots' after Green's U-turn on Moyross road

Ruadhán Jones

The Moyross community is celebrating a "victory for the grassroots" after Green Party leader Eamon Ryan signed off on a promised road which is integral to developing the community.

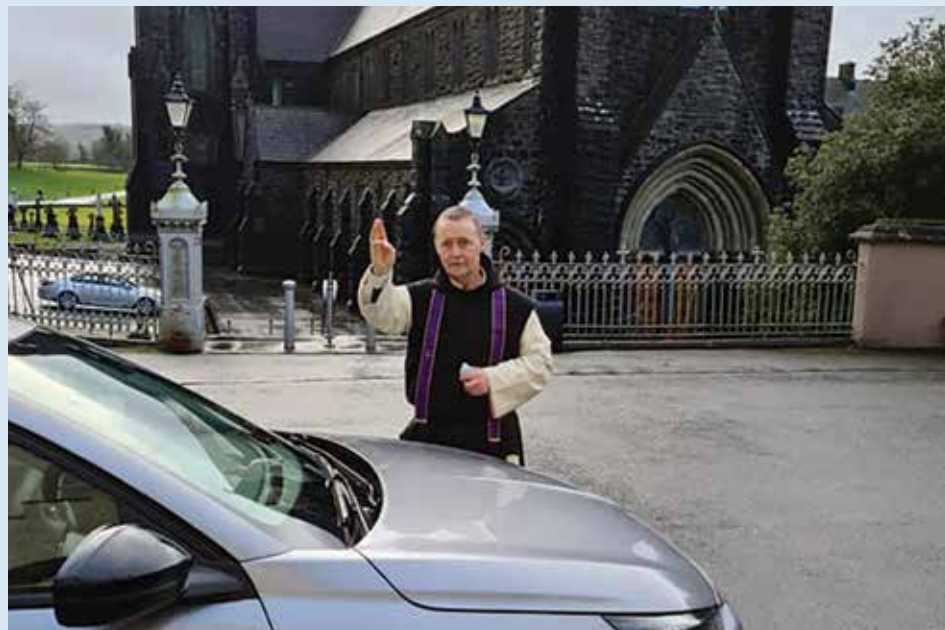
The Green Party's decision came after pressure mounted on Eamon Ryan over his failure to progress a link road between Coonagh and Knockalisheen at Moyross, Limerick.

Fr Pat Hogan of Moyross told *The Irish Catholic* that everyone is "pleased and relieved that the battle is over".

"The grassroots spoke up, not just Moyross but the whole of Limerick so why would they be against it," Fr Hogan said. "It brings a lot of potential for jobs, for industry, for all kinds. As it turns out there's very strong interest in bringing stuff here.

"There's a report of one hospital coming in, building houses and there's other stuff interested as well," he said. "It's a victory for the grassroots."

Roscrea Cistercians go green with environmental ethos



Dom Malachy Thompson blesses the community's new electric car, an Opel Corsa E from Young's Garage Roscrea, as the community aims to go green.

Ruadhán Jones

The Cistercians at Mount St Joseph, Roscrea, are going green, having traded in their two diesel cars for a new, zero emissions electric car.

Dom Malachy Thompson told *The Irish Catholic* that it's a small part of a campus wide "environmental ethos".

"When I was appointed superior, I felt that we needed a campus wide vision which not only included the monastery, but the farm and the college, that we would try and embrace some of the teachings of *Laudato Si'*," Fr Malachy said. "The car's just a small part of it."

The Roscrea Cistercians have made

a number of improvements already, Fr Malachy explained: "In the monastery, we've improved insulation and put in double glaze windows, we've done an awful lot of work over at the college."

While there is a broader policy, Fr Malachy said it's also important that everyone do what they can themselves.

"It's also that each of us can make a small difference as well. It's a mindset. As *Laudato Si'* says, we can all contribute to the care of creation, we all have our part to play. With the new car, it's completely electric so zero emissions. But at the same time, we'd be hoping to save on fuel. We're thinking it will pay for itself in about five years."



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Artane parish remembers Stardust 40 years on

Jason Osborne

Artane parish has made an extra effort to commemorate the Stardust tragedy this year, with Fr Peter O'Reilly unveiling a display in memory of the victims, both dead and injured.

The parish in which many of the victims were buried, Artane is deeply connected to the Stardust tragedy, Fr O'Reilly told this paper.

"This year because of the pandemic, we said we have to make an extra effort to try and reach them and came up with this idea," Fr O'Reilly said.

"Among other things I moderate a site called 'Dublin Memories Old and New', and I got 700 hits from it. I put out a

more detailed photo, and it got lots of prayers, and thoughts and appreciation. That would be all over Dublin now, and all over the world.

"Even, I thought, it was a nice way to remember the injured. The 48 are mentioned, but some people were horribly injured and that's what they remember. So there would be a whole lot of interest – ongoing interest," he said.

With many of the relatives of victims coming for a remembrance Mass each year, Fr O'Reilly is closely attached to the incident, and said that a proper inquest is needed if closure is ever to be reached.

"Closure is what they're looking for, and the inquest would do it...every obstacle

should be removed to give them closure. I mean, 40 years is long enough," Fr O'Reilly said.

His comments come after Archbishop Dermot Farrell's homily in Bonnybrook parish, which Fr O'Reilly said was a "very strong pastoral move".

"Who could fail to be moved by the suffering, the weight of hurts and memories, festering for forty years now, of the families who lost 48 loved ones in the Stardust disaster, and of the more than 200 who were injured," Archbishop Farrell asked in his homily.

Offering spiritual consolation, he quoted poet Amanda Gorman, saying this is a "loss we carry, a sea we must wade".



After Covid's impact Lent 2021 may 'change people forever'

Chai Brady

The pandemic has given many people the opportunity to reflect and think about the meaning of their lives which is a perfect jumping off point for the Lenten period, according to a Cork-based presentation sister.

Former Provincial Sr Sheila Kelleher said: "I have heard people say that despite the dif-

ficulty of lockdown it has benefited them in the sense that they have realised now that the race they were part of, the rat race, is really not what life is about and that it's passing them by, for that reason I think people are in a better place this year to buy-in to Lent because Covid has slowed them down."

People often misunderstand the meaning of Lent, she said, which has led to the belief that

it is just about giving things up – giving it negative connotations. For her, it's about building a "better relationship with myself, with God and with the people around me".

She adds: "I think for some people Lent will have changed them forever because of the time and the reflection. For other people it has been very, very difficult because if you're working from home, the house has turned into

an office, children are being taught from home, the kitchens I've seen in some houses have been turned into classrooms, that's not easy and those parents get very little time to reflect because life is maybe as busy or busier, but I think overall Lent will mean something very different to most people this year."

See pages 14-15.

Aontú leader proud as party poll from strength to strength

Ruadhán Jones

Peadar Tóibín, Meath TD and Aontú leader, said it was an "amazing boost" to see the party polling so well, putting it down to a strong grassroots membership.

Aontú achieved their highest poll rating so far at the weekend. They have reached 4.1% according to the Toghann

Éire (Ireland Elects), putting them ahead of People Before Profit and on par with Labour and the Green Party.

"It's incredible, Aontú has been polling at 4% or more in that poll for the last three months, which is an amazing boost," said Mr Tóibín. "Aontú is a different party, it has a different approach, it is common sense, logical, practical approach to life."

The Meath TD added that they have pushed hard to develop a grassroots membership over the past six months.

"A lot of the establishment parties have forgotten those grassroots, they no longer have that connection with people on the ground. With us, one of our major objectives was to build that grassroots organisation," he said.

Covid and the Cross



Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin making a recording on February 15, for the diocese's Stations of the Cross, which will involve reflections from different people across the diocese whose lives have been severely impacted by Covid-19.

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Weigh the good beside the bad

Our President, Michael D., has been giving a discourse on the evils of the British Empire, its violence, brutality, and class oppression (and a British newspaper, *The Guardian*, has chosen to publish his thoughts). He is right in much of what he says: imperialism was violent and brutal. He is also correct in saying that “attitudes to the Irish [within British Imperialism]



Mary Kenny

were never, and never could be, about a people who were equal”. Equality never featured much in any form of imperialism.

Disservide

However, we would be doing a disservice to history, and to truth, if we didn't weigh the

good with the bad: or consider our own part in British imperialist ventures. Imperialism – British, Roman, French, Spanish, Ottoman – often brings positive developments as well as conquest and oppression. Railways, schools, hospitals also followed empires.

European rule often brought more emancipation for women: the banning of *suttee* (involuntary burning on the funeral pyre for widows) in India, of foot-binding in China, of honour-killings in what is now Pakistan. And, facilitated by the British empire, convent schools for girls were launched in the Indian sub-continent and Africa. Irish nuns in China saved female babies from infanticide, enabled in their work by British officials.

Missionaries

Irish missionaries, founding schools and hospitals, were facilitated by the British – and indeed, the French – empire. In parts of Africa, Irish missions were a point of contact between the British and the French – since the mission orders were often of French origin (like the *Saint Esprit* – the Holy Ghost fathers) but were operating, before 1921, under British aegis.

From Edel Quinn to Mary Martin – founder of the Medical Missionaries of Mary – from Bishop Shanahan of Nigeria to Mother Kevin of Uganda, Irish Catholic endeavours worked in co-operation with, and with help from, the British imperial

● Reading the News' is a theme portrayed by several Irish painters during the Victorian era: it usually shows a single reader relating the daily news and political reports to a group, some of whom might be able to read. 'Reading the Nation' in 1850 by Henry McManus, hangs in the National Gallery of Ireland, and there were several other Irish pictures with a similar narrative theme, notably the Cork Crawford Gallery's poignant 'Letter from America', with a child reading a missive aloud. The new Tom Hanks movie *News of the World* called to mind those images, when newspapers brought the outside world to remoter communities and a single reader sometimes read them aloud. Hanks plays a veteran Confederate officer – and former preacher –

who earns a nomadic living by entertaining rural communities with newspaper readings. And yet, the film is not really about the 'news of the world': it's really about adoption, and the way in which attachment can grow through experiences of adversity. By chance, the captain has to take charge of a feral child, who has lost two families and speaks no English. He doesn't relish the duty thrust upon him but the attachment grows on him, as it does on the young girl, and on us, as we follow their journey through the Texan landscape. Hanks, like James Stewart before him, has come to symbolise the 'decent American', and the way in which love, and goodness, survive the darkness. A genuinely heart-warming film.

Meditating on St Martin

My second Lenten saint in art is St Martin of Tours, one of the most frequently painted of saints throughout the Renaissance period, when perspective was developing. He was pictured by Simone Martini in 1315-16, by Bartolomeo Vivarini in 1491, by El Greco in 1597-99, and by Eustache le Sueur in 1654, among others. Martin is often portrayed helping 'the poor man' or the beggar, as he famously halved his cloak with a mendicant. El Greco portrays him in knightly armour but the French painter, Le Sueur, pictures Martin at Mass, where the priest sees a globe of fire over his head.

Martin was born in Pannonia (in Hungary today), in 315 AD, the son of a Roman official: he converted to Christianity, and experienced a conflict of conscience between his soldierly role and his Christianity. Eventually he founded a monastery in France and became bishop of Tours.

However, I think that many Irish Martins are called after Martin de Porres, the 17th Century mixed-race Dominican who has inspired more than 200 popular holy pictures. He has latterly been adopted as the saint of inter-racial harmony.



Saint Martin and the Beggar by El Greco

authorities. Yes, sometimes it suited the British to have altruistic people start up schools, hospitals and missions. But nevertheless, it is a fact of history that Irish energies were part of that out-

reach to colonialist parts. And as we can see, from the African priests who now come back to Ireland to serve, the outcome was often fruitful: we should see the blessings as well as the negatives of history.

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'Terrible distress' over 'do not resuscitate' orders for covid patients with learning disabilities

Ruadhán Jones

Carers and families are "terribly distressed" over revelations that people with learning disabilities in UK hospitals have been given do not resuscitate (DNR) orders during the pandemic, an Irish theologian said.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Dr Liam Waldron criticised the "unacceptable" actions of UK hospitals, saying it creates "a hierarchy of worth" and is causing "terrible distress".

"This was actually an issue in the first lockdown and it was queried at the highest levels by the Care Quality Commission, which is like HIQA in Ireland. They castigated the health service for their approach and said it should end. These DNR notices are still being used which is absolutely unbelievable," said Dr Waldron, who specialises in philosophy and practical and pastoral theology at Aberdeen University.

"What strikes me is that there's some kind of a hierarchy going on here, a hierarchy of

worth. Some people seem to be more equal than others. It's really shocking to those of us who work in this field," he added.

The DNR orders suggest a "potentially fatal" misunderstanding of human dignity, Dr Waldron said.

"With all the talk about build-back-better and reset, we see a very old traditional and really unacceptable view of people with learning disabilities, which is that they are really not up to speed and therefore really not worth

bothering about too much," he finished.

If we are going to build a better society after the pandemic, Dr Waldron said, we must start with the vulnerable.

"I think what we see in this is a very good example of a kind of hypocrisy at the heart of this talk. If we're going to have a different kind of society afterward, like people talk about, if we're going to have a better way of living, being kinder to each other, it starts with the most vulnerable," Dr Waldron concluded.

College undertakes €1m Catholic education initiative

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) will lead a global initiative with the aim of making a "decisive contribution to the repositioning of Catholic education in Ireland" and globally, said one of the project leaders.

The Global Researchers in Catholic Education (GRACE) project will enable a new generation of Catholic educators at MIC to connect with top-level experts in Catholic education in the USA, Australia and the UK, Fr Eamonn Conway, head of Theology and Religious studies at MIC, told *The Irish Catholic*.

Fr Conway wants the project "to imagine a future for Catholic education in Ireland, to present a vision for that and hopefully this will contribute to the whole policies around divestment and so on, which at the moment

are not working off solid research".

The project is funded by the Presentation Sisters in Ireland, the All Hallows Trust and the Irish Jesuit Province, which will allow MIC to award six scholarships to researchers in Catholic education, as well as five bursaries to postgraduate students studying on the MA in Christian Leadership in Education.

The project was founded and led by Professor Eamonn Conway, along with Dr Eugene Duffy, lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, and Dr Daniel O'Connell, lecturer in the Department of Learning, Society, and Religious Education.

See pages 17

Opera star Cara O'Sullivan's faith 'consoled' her during fight with illness

Staff reporter

Opera star Cara O'Sullivan, who died recently aged 58, has been described as a "deeply committed Catholic", which "consoled" her during her illness, according to her family friend, Canon Jim O'Donovan.

Fr O'Donovan, who officiated Ms O'Sullivan's funeral, told *The Irish Catholic* that she drew comfort from her faith during her struggle with dementia.

"She was a deeply committed Catholic

and her Faith was very important to her," he said. "It was a great consolation to her at the time of her illness."

Fr O'Donovan added that she will be remembered for her talent and a "voice of splendour and beauty".

"She was a very talented operatic singer," he said. "She performed all over the place. She came from small beginnings when you look at it. She was a colossus of a lady, she had a big, kind heart and a voice of splendour and beauty."

Our Lady of Lourdes continues to heal



Bishop Michael Router celebrates Mass on Our Lady of Lourdes feast day, February 11, with the residents and staff of Dealgan House, Dundalk who had all been vaccinated recently.

Advertorial

Resources for Lent

Ignatian Workout for Lent

Tim Muldoon

(Loyola Press, €5.99)

For many of us, Lent is a time to give something up and engage in more good works. While not denying these can be meaningful, Tim Muldoon believes Lent is ultimately about internal change. To help us achieve this goal, he's put together 40 brief exercises each containing a reading, meditation, prayer suggestion and most engaging an opportunity for action. Written in readily accessible language, this Lenten-length experience of Ignatian spirituality invites us into a daily conversation with God where obstacles to grace are removed and a deeper love for God and the world is nurtured.

Whole Parish Catechesis for Lent & Advent

Breige O'Hare

(Columba Books, €15.99)

An ideal book for organising online parish retreats or prayer groups *The Whole Parish Catechesis* is a small scale, sharply focussed project which provides gospel based reflection and activity for use in Advent and Lent. During this Lent in particular when prayer groups will meet via zoom, Breige O'Hare's selections provide focus and structure, strengthening links between parishes and lay people. Even further down the line, this book is a valuable tool to any parish or group seeking to encourage and support lay involvement in the process of faith development.

Adoration Companion

(Magnificat, €9.99)

The perfect booklet to help you adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. One of Magnificat's newest companions contains scriptures and meditations to encourage us to enter deeply into the Real Presence, profiles of saints who were known for their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and prayers, hymns, and litanies drawn from the treasury of the Church. Now is the ideal time to equip yourself with a tool that will help you stay close to the Lord in adoration and love no matter the circumstances— before a monstrance or tabernacle, or in the privacy of your home.

Eucharist: Enhancing the Prayer

Donal Harrington

(Columba Books, €19.99)

Much can be done to enhance the celebration of the Eucharist, deepening prayer and contributing to the quality of the liturgy. Donal Harrington has compiled resources to use at various moments during the Mass to do just that. Part One breaks down seven different points of the celebration where 'prayer moments' are to be found. Part Two then provides sets of prayers of the faithful for the full three-year cycle. There is also an index of Scripture references, to facilitate the use of the intercessions for Scripture-based prayer. A wonderful resource for clergy and laypeople alike.

Praying Lent: Renewing Our Lives on the Lenten Journey

Andy Alexander, SJ and

Maureen McCann Waldron

(Loyola Press, €5.99)

For many, the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter is an endurance test, a struggle between what we *should* do and what we *actually* want to do. But when the only focus is on depriving ourselves of something, we can actually deprive ourselves of the true gift of Lent. In reality it's a time for us to grow prayerfully and powerfully in our relationship with God. *Praying Lent* reminds us that if we focus too much on what we give up we may miss the message of what God wants to give us during this grace-filled time.

To order one of these books and enhance your Lenten journey, phone our offices on 01 6874096.

Nuala O'Loan

The View



Catholic lawmakers cannot legislate to enable death

The past year has been so very strange for all of us - our ways of being and doing were suddenly and utterly changed. We ceased to be in charge of our own lives. Once we were able to gather as a community of God, pray together and celebrate the great joys of our faith together. We were able to travel - for business, for holidays, to visit our family and friends, to celebrate birthdays, weddings, baptisms, even just the joy of being alive. We were able to sit and eat together, to go for a drink, to have a coffee with friends, to shop, to visit interesting places, go to football matches...I could go on and on. Yet it was all taken away from us because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Disease

It was taken away so that the disease would not spread. Each human physical contact brought with it the possibility of the transmission of the disease. Therefore, it was decided, human contact must be limited. That did not solve the problem - there were still too many physical contacts between us, and so governments across the world moved to strip away the freedoms which we have all taken for granted for so long. We acquiesced because we knew it was necessary for the common good - to prevent the spread of what, for the majority is but a passing inconvenience, but which has the capacity to destroy vital organs and to kill. Almost 2.5 million people across the world are recorded to have died from Covid-19.

We have faced a very stark reality: that disease prevention actually lay in our own hands here today in Ireland - that we had the power and the duty to deny ourselves for the good of others whom we might never know.

The cost has been enormous, It has undoubtedly brought very real suffering, loneliness, isolation, separation from much of what we know and love. It has been demanding. It has been hard. I think that for our priests it must have been particularly hard - their lives are lived in the service of God and his people, celebrating the sacraments which we have missed so much, being with people in their joys and in their sorrows, yet that has not been possible to the same extent or in the same way.



US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi. Photo: CNS

In some ways it has been reflective of Lent - of that time when we try to strip away the things which we allow to keep us from God and to bring ourselves closer to God, to remind ourselves of what we believe and to try and live that faith in all its fullness.

“Above all it needs real leadership, laying aside partisan politics for the common good, as they have been laid aside (largely!) to fight Covid-19”

Over this year many things have happened - our new abortion laws have resulted in 1,000 lost lives here in Northern Ireland. Britain has left the EU, yet the North is in some strange limbo where we are in the European single market, yet no longer part of the British internal market. We have yet to work out how to make this work for us, but we must, and it can. Above all it needs real leadership, laying aside partisan politics for the common good, as they have been laid aside (largely!) to fight Covid-19. The American elections have brought a new president. America is very divided - her politicians have yet to find the language that will bring about some healing in a country, and indeed a world, in which the freedom to speak in opposition to the received wisdom seems to be diminishing.

So perhaps we need to go into Lent as a kind of time of discernment, in which we

can try and work out what true faith demands of us as citizens of this world, and above all as Catholics.

One of the questions I ask myself as a legislator and member of the House of Lords is how must I live my faith, trying to ensure that laws are passed which will provide the greatest common good, and what are the lines in the sand which I cannot cross? I think there is really just one line and it relates to the sacredness of life from birth to death. That derives from my understanding that our lives are not ours to live as we will, but rather they are a sacred gift from God. Our experience tells us that each of our lives is connected to others, and we grieve the passing of those whom we know and love. Their leaving renders us lost.

Human life

Politicians often say, when thinking about things like abortion and euthanasia that they are personally opposed to laws which permit the taking of human life, but they do not think they should impose their views on others.

I have come to believe that for Catholics, this is not a permissible distinction to make. If we legislate for abortion, or euthanasia, then by our actions we enable death. We impose our views on all those little children who will be killed in the womb. They have no choice, no freedom. This we should never do.

I do not believe that a Catholic can ever legislate to take the life of an unborn child, other than when the mother's life is at risk and so mother and baby may die. We are not called to judge

each other. We leave that to God. Yet those who occupy positions of power influence how people think, and when people like Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi proclaim, as Catholics, that abortion is a healthcare to which people

have a right, they make it seem that enlightened Catholics can speak like this in truth. Yet that is not the case. Of course, we must provide healthcare, but we must never destroy life. I believe that, each one of us, no matter how big or how small our sphere of influence, must cherish the great gift of life which comes from God alone, in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Gift of life

Cherishing that gift of life has many forms: there is so much that we need to do to make this world a fairer, better place. We need to harness the powers of creativity and entrepreneurship and enable real development without allowing unaccountable big business to take over the world. We are amateurs at the business of running our national and global affairs. Global tech

giants like Amazon, Google, Facebook and Apple gather far more information about us than our governments do. In so doing they are able to influence what we do, think and even believe. Yet we need these great communication facilities. We have much to think about.

Above all during this Lent perhaps we need to recognise again that there is a constant battle between good and evil in this world, and hear again the words of Teresa of Avila: “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

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The Irish Catholic

NI Brexit tensions must be handled before control lost – priest

Chai Brady

Tensions in relation to the so-called Northern Ireland protocol must be handled with “wise leadership” from politicians with a view to making it work, a Belfast priest has warned.

Fr Martin Magill PP told *The Irish Catholic* that although the vast majority of his West Belfast parishioners and himself would have been against Brexit there's a need to “get on with it”.

He said: “I think this is where cool heads come in, we need wise leadership from our political leaders at this stage to try and work through this. We are where we are with this, there's no point in living in the past.

“What I'm certainly picking up is that obviously there are concerns for those who are directly impacted by it, the likes of those involved in bringing things in to Northern Ireland. What I'm also seeing is that there seems to be a real desire to work through the issues and make the Northern Ireland protocol actually work. I suppose that's the most important thing at this stage,” he said.

His comments come as members of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) are threatening to bring down the region's power-sharing executive if the protocol is not abandoned.

Assembly member Jonathan Buckley said that

collapsing the Stormont administration was “on the table” as an option describing the protocol as an “unmitigated disaster”.

Fr Magill warned that “small things can very easily get out of control.”

He said the DUP were obviously in favour of Brexit, but when it comes to the “common good” people need to look “beyond our own particular interests or what we would see as our section of the community”.

“Politicians really have such a responsibility that they don't add to division. By all means of course argue things politically. [But] they've got to be concerned about the impact of words, in particular

the impact politicians' words can have on their supporters and members of their wider party,” he said.

“I don't like the idea of splitting Northern Ireland into this community or that community or the other community. I would much prefer to see it as one community with different sections which are one family but different members of the family.”

However, he said there is a real concern regarding potential job losses and there is a “worry” among parishioners as to what the future may hold.

Fr Magill is one of the founders of the 4 Corners Festival which promotes peace and cross community engagement in Belfast.

Redemptorists reach out with ‘light-hearted’ Jerusalem dance

Staff reporter

A Cork Redemptorist community has received “very positive” feedback after posting a video of themselves taking part in the Jerusalem dance, which members of An Garda, Ireland's fire department and defence forces have all taken part in.

Fr Gerry O'Connor CSSR and three other priests in the Scala community participated. The video has received thousands of reviews on Twitter and on the community's website.

“We had very positive feedback with lots and lots of emails and Facebook mes-

sages,” said Fr O'Connor, “I think we're all looking for ways to find highheartedness so there's no doubt about it that it's good for us and hopefully good for others.

“I think people are feeling an extra layer of pressure, you'd know by the phone ministry as I call it, listening to people there's an extra edge, people are feeling isolated and alone, so if it helps in that sense it's good.”

Fr O'Connor discovered there was spiritual origins to the Jerusalem song, which is a prayer to God, and spoke about it at Mass, which led to people challenging him to take part. As there there's



been a “significant disruption in people's lives”, he said the purpose was “reaching out to people with a bit of light-heartedness”. He has asked the Redemptoristines in Drumcondra to do the Jerusalem dance as well as their

colleagues in Brazil.

The gospel-influenced song and accompanying dance has seen health workers, construction workers, nuns, priests, police officers and flash mobs in different parts of the world participate.

Bishop Doran calls on Govt to ease funeral restrictions

Jason Osborne

Bishop Kevin Doran has called for the Government to allow 25 people to attend funerals, rather than the current ten.

In his homily last Sunday, the Bishop of Elphin homed in on the “inclusive” nature of Christ's mission, and said that the families of those whose loved ones have died have been at risk of exclusion too often throughout the pandemic.

“When you look at the idea of ten people being allowed, in many families that wouldn't even include the immediate parents, brothers or sisters – especially of a middle aged person maybe whose parents are still alive, and whose children are alive and whose brothers and sisters are there. So you're talking about a very, very mini-

malistic approach. In our churches obviously, there is scope for 25 people surely to gather safely,” he said.

“I understand the public health concern, which is related to the fact that some people have been extremely selfish in taking the view that the rules don't apply to them,” Bishop Doran added.

In the meantime, Bishop Doran also expressed his hope that there would be a return to Mass for Easter.

Acknowledging that the “difficult”, but “pro-life” option was to suspend public worship following the Christmas spike in cases, Bishop Doran said, “we're now looking towards Lent and Easter which are very sacred times for Christians, and the situation is changing. We would certainly hope, and I'd have no hesitation in supporting a call for us to have a return to public Mass.”

Continuous Rosary Initiative

The parish of Errigal Ciaran in Co. Tyrone is amongst those participating in a new continuous rosary initiative.

It began yesterday – Ash Wednesday – and the plan is that a continuous rosary will be offered up every minute of every day for peace and charity in Ireland.

Every parish in the country has a date and time allocated, the same for every year. Parishioners who want to see the date and time allocated for their parish should check out www.continuousrosary.com.

Organisers say it would be appreciated if parishioners could get family and friends overseas involved.

According to parish priest Fr Michael O'Dwyer, the parish of Errigal Ciaran

has been allocated the second day of every month:

January, February, March surname A-L 17.24-17.42; surname M-Z 17.42-18.00

April, May, June surname A-L 23:24 - 23:42; surname M-Z 23:42 - 00:00

July, August, September surname A-L 05:24 - 05:42; surname M-Z 05:42 - 06:00

October, November, December surname A-L 11:24 - 11:42; surname M-Z 11:42 - 12:00

For example on March 2, Fr O'Dwyer will pray the Rosary at home between 17.42 and 18.00, along with others whose surname begins M-Z.

Putting faith in Our Lady



Fr Tom Ryan, Killaloe Pilgrimage Director, and Br Damian Casey OFM, Franciscan Pilgrimage Director, stand beside the altar of Ennis Cathedral, which hosted their first ever Novena to Our Lady of Lourdes 3-11 February, organised jointly by the Franciscan Pilgrimage Committee and the Killaloe Pilgrimage Committee.

Covid-19 restrictions put Trócaire Lenten appeal ‘at risk’

» Continued from Page 1 “severely damage its life-saving work around the world”.

The charity said that if it is unsafe to collect a box, annual donations can be made online at trocaire.org.

“Lent is the engine that keeps our programmes going throughout the year. The public in Ireland always rally behind our campaign. While this year will be different, we hope the public will continue to support our life-saving work overseas.”

Ms de Barra said.

“Our campaign this year focuses on people who are trapped in long-running wars, such as those affecting places such as South Sudan and Somalia. Generations of people in these countries have been forced to live through conflict. Their resilience and determination to help each other is remarkable. By donating to our Lenten Appeal, you will be helping them to help themselves.”

Caricaturing the ‘mother-in-the-home’ provision in the Irish Constitution



If you want to understand the past, one thing you must do is look to the economic conditions of the time, writes **David Quinn**

Why were attitudes often harsh in the past? Is it because the people then were more horrible than now, and we are far more enlightened, or could it be that social attitudes were shaped by poverty and sometimes the fear of actual hunger? Anything seen as a threat to a family's economic survival was sometimes dealt with extremely ruthlessly, not least unmarried mothers and their children.

At the weekend, the Citizens' Assembly met again – online of course – in order to discuss Article 41.2, the provision in the Constitution which says that mothers “shall not be obliged by economic necessity

to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home”.

This provision is now seen as the product of a deeply sexist, even misogynistic time, and nothing more.

Place

But note first of all what it does not say. It doesn't state that a woman's place is in the home, contrary to popular belief. It simply says that a mother should not be forced out of the home and away from her children in order to make ends meet. It is actually an attempt to give mothers a bit of economic freedom.

The background is that at the time, many people were so poor it was difficult to keep the wolf from the door unless every member of the family who could work outside the home, did so.

“We often imagine today that women back then were being held back from fulfilling jobs, such as often exist today”

It was somewhat different if you were on a farm. In that case you worked very close to your home and to your children and you could keep an eye on them while you worked, or else you might have had an older family member who could do so.

“Anything seen as a threat to a family's economic survival was sometimes dealt with extremely ruthlessly, not least unmarried mothers and their children”

Sometimes children didn't even live with their parents because there was no room. One of my grandmothers when she was growing up spent time living with an aunt.

But if you had come to work in the city, in a factory say, you might well have moved away from your family. If both the mother and the father had to work, who would mind the children during the day in that case?

In fact, for a large part of the 19th Century, the children themselves often ended up working in the factories, or sometimes overburdened parents even delivered them to industrial schools.

In this kind of economic context, trying to create the conditions whereby a mother did not have to go out to work, was a massive step forward.

We often imagine today that women back then were being held back from fulfilling jobs, such as often exist today, but typically they were backbreaking jobs involving extremely long hours and terrible working conditions.

The men also worked in similar circumstances.

Transport

If you could transport the people of today back to 1920 or 1930 and confront them with the very real prospect of having to work very long hours in terrible jobs away

from their homes and children in order to make ends meet, and you then held out the prospect that mothers would no longer be forced out of the home, into the workplace, what do you imagine they would think? They would obviously leap at the freedom granted.

This was the background to Article 41.2.

Provision

In fact, while Ireland was unusual in inserting this kind of provision into our Constitution, the thinking behind it was not at all unusual. On the contrary, it led to widespread support for something called ‘the family wage’.

This was a wage big enough to look after a family without both parents, or the children for that matter, having to work. The mother would be freed from a probably unrewarding job and the children could stay in school, rather than having to quit aged 12, if not before, which was commonplace until relatively recently.

‘The family wage’ was very strongly supported by trades unions in various countries, not least Ireland, Britain, France, the US and Sweden. While it was certainly supported by the Catholic Church, it was not a Catholic invention.

It is, by the way, why men were often paid more than women for the same job. If it took two people to

earn a family wage, then it defeated the purpose of it, which was to allow one parent to stay at home.

It would have been fairer if either the mother or the father could ask for the family wage, but paying men more had very widespread support.

Indeed, even in social democratic Sweden, the family wage was supported by the unions right up until the 1960s, when equal pay replaced it, as in other countries.

“This was a wage big enough to look after a family without both parents, or the children for that matter, having to work”

Today, of course, we are back to a situation whereby both parents are often forced into the workplace and the demands of the economy have overwhelmed the domestic sphere. For the most part, what the State now offers is day-care centres for children so we can all spend long hours at work and commuting back and forth, although it remains to be seen what will happen post-pandemic.

Is this liberation? Is it progress? Opinion polls in Ireland and elsewhere consistently show that once women become mothers, many would rather spend more time at home and then take-up part-time, rather than full-time work.

But these mothers are mainly ignored by a State that wants as many of us as possible to become taxpayers. Is this really progress? It's highly debateable.

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'End of an era' as the Cross and Passion Sisters leave Ballycastle after 109 years



The Cross and Passion Sisters of Ballycastle pictured after a Mass celebrated by Bishop Noel Treanor in thanksgiving for their contribution to the Ballycastle community, February 14 2021.

Ruadhán Jones

The Cross and Passion Sisters, who founded a well-known school in Ballycastle, will be "greatly missed" by the community after they decided to close their convent in the Antrim parish.

The decision was a "natural progression" for the sisters, who had not been involved in the school for several years, explained Sr Margaret

Rose, former principal of the Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle.

"The decision was made peacefully and by choice," Sr Margaret said. "The sisters who were there, they feel that the time has come for them to retire.

"They have not been involved in the schools for some time, just doing pastoral work and spiritual ministry the last few years. So they've decided it's time to gracefully call time and move on."

The Cross and Passion Sisters first arrived in Ballycastle in 1912, where they contributed to the provision of education through a number of primary and secondary schools, the most well-known being Cross and Passion College. Since 2013, the remaining sisters had been conducting

pastoral work in the parish of Ballycastle and were no longer involved in the school.

Sr Margaret said the "hospitality and companionship" they provided throughout the years will be "greatly missed" by the community of Ballycastle.

"It has come a full circle, there were five sisters at the ceremony on Sunday and there were five sisters when they first came, back in 1912, and in between that there were very big communities of sisters and from there a lot of sisters have gone on missions. It's the end of an era, but a good history."

The bishop of Down and Connor, Dr Noel Treanor, celebrated a Mass on Sunday, February 14 out of "gratitude for what's been done" by the sisters in the Ballycastle area, Sr Margaret finished.

Joint statement issued on NI institutional abuses

Jason Osborne

Archbishop Eamon Martin, along with Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell and representatives from other bodies met to discuss the Hart recommendations for victims and survivors of institutional abuse.

In a statement issued, it was said that a range of issues were discussed, including "progress on redress payments and provision of services for victims and survivors", as well as the "centrality" of the views of victims to an official apology".

The principles to underpin forthcoming discussions on contributions by the Institutions involved in the ownership and governance of children's homes to the costs of redress were also discussed.

All parties agreed that "acceptance of responsibility and recognition of the harm done were central to the way forward", and those present committed to work together to address the apology, memorial, and contributions to the costs of redress in a way that will put "fairness" at the core, as well as will meet the needs of victims and survivors.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Raphoe bishop to lead Irish language book club

An Irish language book club will be led by Bishop Alan McGuckian of the Diocese of Raphoe, beginning on Tuesday, March 2 at 8pm. It is based on the *Story of the Pilgrim*, a biography of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). It was translated into Irish by Bishop McGuckian. The book and postage and packaging costs €14.

Vocations Music Award open for submissions

An international song writing competition, the Vocation Music Award, is calling all young adults aged between 18-35 to enter a song-writing and composition competition on the theme of vocations.

The closing date for submissions is June 30 2021, with judging to start July 31. The winners will be announced in August, with a range of prizes to be announced soon.

For further information, you can visit www.vocation-music-award.com or else connect on Facebook.

You can also support the competition by spreading the word, contributing financially or through prayer.

Assisted suicide a 'failure to care for the terminally-ill' bishops warn

Staff reporter

Assisted suicide reflects a "failure of compassion on the part of society" the Catholic bishops have warned in their submission to the Oireachtas committee reviewing legislation that, if passed, would legalise euthanasia.

Good palliative care not assisted suicide "offers terminally-ill people the best possibility of achieving 'a dignified and peaceful end of life'," the Church leaders said in their submission.

They insist that assisted suicide "is a failure to respond to the challenge of caring for terminally-ill patients as they approach the end of their lives".

Legislation

The bishops also pointed to the fact that the legislation as drafted would "coerce the consciences of objecting healthcare providers in order to facilitate something they know to be gravely immoral and utterly incompatible with their vocation to heal.

"This burdening of conscience is unnecessary, disproportionate and seriously unjust," the submission added.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the bishops say they "have been deeply moved by the level of generosity and tenderness that has been shown by so many healthcare professionals and the sacrifices that have been made by so many to protect those who are most at risk.

"Alongside that positive manifestation of genuine compassion, we note, however, that some of the written protocols which relate to the difficult and essential task of prioritising critical care resources, are shot through with language which is essentially utilitarian in its assessment of the value of human life."

Prognosis

"Whatever our prognosis and however limited our capacity, our value as persons is rooted in who we are rather than in our life-expectancy or our ability to reach certain standards of physical or mental performance... We contend that, the committee would best serve humanity and the common good of society by recommending to the Oireachtas that this Bill should not be passed," the statement said.

Death in the pandemic – what have we learned?



While we are constantly being told we will learn from the pandemic, we haven't changed our understanding of death, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

Crisis, whether natural disasters like pandemics or man-made ones like war, force us to confront the unthinkable; what does my death mean to me? What does the sudden eruption of death mean for me, for my culture, for my society? The question is, how have we answered these questions during Covid-19?

Consider what are currently the two primary means of conceptualising death in the pandemic. The first and predominant mode is statistical. How many people have died? What is the excess mortality? How many cases? These figures are conveyed in daily news reports, are then debated and discussed and decisions are made based on what they tell us.

Quantification

The quantification of deaths is also an integral part of our modern grief-process. We use it to compare the scale of a disaster or the relative efficiency of a country's response. Are we doing better than Britain? Is Covid-19 comparable with World War II? The Spanish Flu?

We also use it as a means to recognise or acknowledge the deaths of thousands of people in a manner which is crisp, neat and democratic.

Stories

The second mode is through the stories of the dead and who they leave behind – the story behind the statistics. Whereas statistics are cold and faceless, these stories are particular and emotionally powerful. They are about grief-stricken wives and husbands, parents and children – in some cases, entire communities. These stories fit into a number of narrative frames, such as the tragedy of a life lost too soon, the importance of taking care of the elderly and the sick, we're losing the battle – or we're winning. In a society which encourages the act of sharing for the sake of mental health, these stories serve as a catharsis for both the teller and the hearer or reader.

“It is the question those who live on are left with and is largely the means by which the general question becomes personal

What these two modes share is a desire to explain 'why' in terms of 'how' and 'what'. By that I mean the question of why the person died is answered by showing how they died – through the negligence of others, their own negligence, systemic failures, biological or environmental causes. Correspondingly, the answer to the why questions is an action to be

carried out. *What* we can do to avoid such a future death is x, y or z.

“The quantification of deaths is also an integral part of our modern grief-process”

What neither of these modes provide is a means for answering, or even addressing, the fundamental question of why that person had to die at all and then, why do we have to die at all. Yet that is the question which is most integral to the nature of death and how we respond to it. It is the question those who live on are left with and is largely the means by which the general question becomes personal; death requires us to consider what it means for me to die.

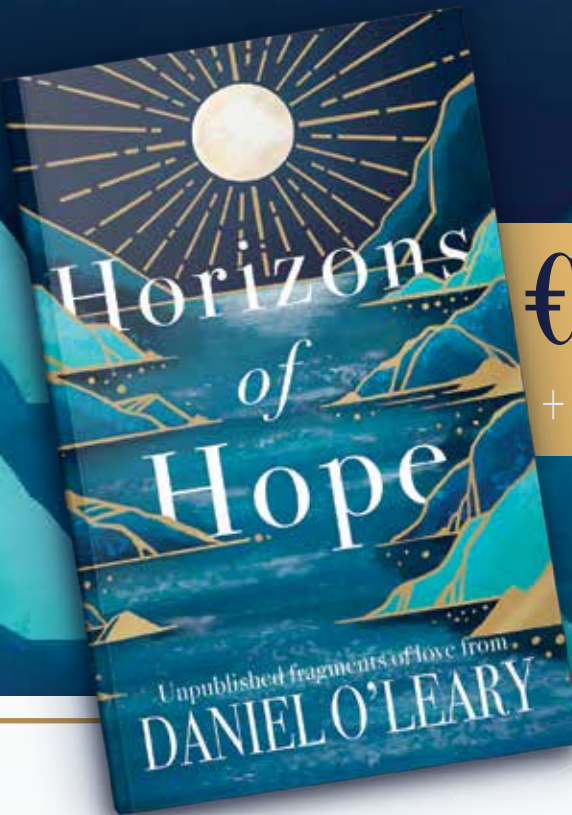
This is a question which has hardly been asked at all, except again in the sense of how and what: how did this pandemic come about, what can we do to avoid it happening again? Perhaps this shouldn't come as a surprise. Although Pope St John Paul II identified us as living in a 'culture of death', what characterises that culture in particular is an inability to think about death as such – so argues Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre.

“This is a culture in which death as such – my death – has become a ghost concept, a concept that haunts the culture but one that many people are unable to confront,” he said in a talk at Notre Dame University. The pandemic has failed to jolt us into confronting this final question because, as Prof. MacIntyre suggests, to do so would be to chase a ghost.

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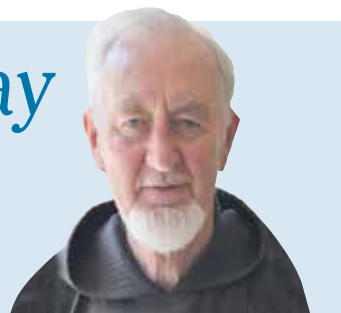
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St Mark records that the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert.

Repent and believe

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



You may have missed out on the ashes this year but the message of Lent is unchanged: repent and believe in the Gospel. To repent literally means to think again, to take an honest look at your life. To believe in the Gospel means to be guided by the following questions: what would Jesus say, what would he do, what would he ask me to do in this situation?

The Gospel Reading for the First Sunday of Lent each year is about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. This year we have Mark's version which is shorter than Matthew and Luke. He does not mention the three specific temptations, yet Mark has his own dynamism.

"The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for 40 days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him." (Mark 1:12-13)

A Gospel of drama

Mark wrote his gospel for the Christians in Rome at a time when persecution had begun. The most popular writing at

the time was drama and Mark certainly was a dramatist. The actor, Alec McCowen, used the text of Mark for his one-man show on stage. It revealed a dynamism in Mark that the scholars had not noticed.

“Forty suggests a time of preparation as in the 40 years preparing the Exodus people for entry into the promised land as a free people”

In today's reading, the characters of the drama in order of appearance were the Holy Spirit, Jesus, Satan, the wild beasts and the angels. At the baptism of Jesus, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit

descended on him in the form of a dove. With the haste of a good dramatist, Mark leaps forward to tell us that, immediately after this, the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness where he remained for 40 days. Forty suggests a time of preparation as in the 40 years preparing the Exodus people for entry into the promised land as a free people. After the Resurrection, the apostles had 40 days of preparation before Pentecost. Not counting the Sundays, there are 40 days between Ash Wednesday and the celebration of Easter when we renew our baptismal promises, rejecting the lies of Satan and renewing our commitment to following the way of Christ.

Untamed wilderness

The wilderness, being wild and untamed, was regarded as the home territory of the evil spirits. By entering the wilderness Jesus was taking on Satan on his home pitch. The first engagement in this war was a contest between the champion warrior of each side like the old contest between David the Israelite and Goliath the Philistine. Jesus clearly won that first encounter. Mark has more exorcism stories than the other evangelists and he dramatizes each one as another skirmish won by Jesus.

Finally, in defeating death itself, Jesus has clearly won the war, but the battles have not ceased as we know from our own temptations. Satan hasn't retired.

Jesus warned us that Satan is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning. Satan's presence is seen in confusion of truth and in anti-life behaviour, whereas Jesus offers the truth and life in its fullness.

“Satan played on the greed of Judas to enter his soul”

The father of lies knows well that the most effective lie is the half-truth. The apple of temptation always looks attractive but the poison is hidden. Satan cannot enter directly into the inner soul which is like a city fortified by strong walls. But the devil can start working in the mind through untamed imagination and bitter memories. Classical spiritual writers have identified seven fault-lines in our defence, known as the seven deadly sins: pride, covetousness (greed), lust, envy, anger, gluttony and sloth. Satan played on the greed of Judas to enter his soul.

Wild beasts and angels

In the drama of Jesus in the wilderness, these untamed energies are represented by the wild beasts. But God does not leave us alone and the good angels were with Jesus to look after him. The wisdom of the

twelve steps of rehabilitation recognises the wild beasts in any addiction that has gone out of control. The angels represent the Higher Power offering strength, guidance and support.

Lent prepares us for Easter

After his 40 days of preparation Jesus was ready to proclaim the beginning of his mission.

"The time has come and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News." Lent is our season to prepare for Easter when we are asked to reject Satan and all his works and then to commit ourselves to the life of the Gospel. Taking on some form of penance or self-denial will strengthen our will power. Committing ourselves to more prayer and spiritual reading, will bring us closer to the mind and heart of Jesus. Acts of kindness will give the body to prayer.

Ask yourself: what would Jesus say, what would Jesus do, how would Jesus feel? That is the programme that clearly guides Pope Francis in his beautiful writing, bringing us back to the gospel.

Prayer of the day

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in our understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen

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Keeping hope and preparing for a Lent like no other



Despite its enduring popularity, the Lenten period is sorely misunderstood by many, **Chai Brady** writes

It has been joked that the Lenten period never ended last year as the rolling pandemic restrictions meant everyone having to make tough sacrifices, but Lent is much more than just forgoing pleasurable activities, food or drink – which it has been reduced to in the minds of many.

Conversion

In Pope Francis' message for Lent this year, which he delivered last week on Friday, he highlighted the basics and the need for hope during the Covid-19 pandemic. He said that "Fasting, prayer and almsgiving, as preached by Jesus (cf. Mt 6:1-18), enable and express our conversion. The path of poverty and self-denial (fasting), concern and loving care for the poor (almsgiving), and childlike dialogue with the Father (prayer) make it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope and effective charity". It seems most of the focus is on the self-denial aspect of Lent nowadays, which is certainly not going to be wholeheartedly welcomed after a year of lockdowns and tribulations of all shapes and sizes.

Importantly, the Pope also spoke of how it can be challenging to speak of hope during these times of "trouble, when everything seems fragile and uncertain". However, he said that Lent is the season of hope: a time when people turn back to God.

During Lent, he asked that the Faithful be increasingly concerned with "speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn". In order to give hope to others, he said it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be "willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference".

Highlighting the importance of love – following in the footsteps of Christ – the Pope said it is the highest expression of faith and hope. "To experience Lent with love means caring for those who suffer or feel abandoned and fearful because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these days of deep uncertainty about the future, let us keep in mind the Lord's word to his Servant, 'Fear not,

for I have redeemed you' (Is 43:1). In our charity, may we speak words of reassurance and help others to realise that God loves them as sons," he said.

The Pope's message goes a long way to describe the true meaning and richness of Lent and how it can be a fulfilling period instead of a slog. But why do Christians take part in Lent and how did it come to be in the first place? How can we fully take part in a Lent imbued with hope and love?

“In the rest of the Catholic world it was known as *quadragesima*, which is the 40 days, because obviously that was the period”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Dublin-based Bro. Richard Hendrick OFM Cap says that Lent remains in popular consciousness even when other elements of the Christian calendar have somewhat disappeared. He says: "I think Lent is actually something that as a cultural reference people know about, at least in their awareness of the practice of giving up something, we see every year the health campaigns and anti-smoking campaigns that are done and that do tend to be present or made more present during the



Sr Sheila Kelleher.

Lenten time. I suppose what maybe is missing is the understanding of where the period comes from and how it's fitted into the Christian understanding of human life."

The word Lent comes from the Old English word *Lencten* which meant a period of time leading to spring. Bro Hendrick says: "In the rest of the Catholic world it was known as *quadragesima*, which is the 40 days, because obviously that was the period. And it was paired off with various other lengths or fasts that took place throughout the Christian year, so obviously the advent fast would be one that people would be familiar with now.

"The Lenten fast was the 40-day period that was established very early on in Church history as a way to prepare for Easter but also as a particular time of preparation for adult catechumens who were pre-

paring for Baptism at the Easter vigil, the Easter celebration.

"Where that then extended out to the rest of the Church world as a way of preparing for the Easter Mysteries, calling ourselves to our baptismal promises that are made as a way of renewing our conversion each year."

Of course, as the majority of people know, in observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days.

Pillars

The pillars of Lent are a unified method of "recalling ourselves to the presence of God" and to the conversion that is necessary for everyone day by day, but in a special way during Lent, Bro. Hendrick explains, "They are of course increased prayer, fasting – which includes not just

giving things up but also taking on extra practices – and then almsgiving, looking after our brothers and sisters in their need”.

“The fasting then also allows us not to just give up things or to feel a lack but there’s also a solidarity with those who are under a forced lack”

“Those three together, they are three pillars of the Christian life rather than just three pillars of Lent, it’s important for us to recognise that we’re only really living the Christian commitment to inner conversion if all three of those are present in our life and we also need to explore then what the fasting means.”

Pancakes

Lent has moved on from a very strict fast, when it wasn’t just meat that people gave up but also dairy and alcohol for example. Pancake Tuesday stems from this. Also known as Shrove Tuesday, occurring the day before Ash Wednesday, it was the last opportunity to use up eggs and fats before embarking on the Lenten fast and pancakes are the perfect way of using up these ingredients.

“We call it Shrove Tuesday and Shrovetide because we’re looking towards a cleansing. To be shriven means to cleanse, not just our souls but to cleanse the house that would bring temptation in during Lent,” says Bro. Hendrick.

“The fasting then also allows us not to just give up things or to feel a lack but there’s also a solidarity with those who are under a forced lack. Those who don’t have enough so we begin to feel their condition and that in turn raises a greater charity and compassion toward others and that pours itself out in almsgiving.

“I think it’s important to recognise that almsgiving is not just about money, we give the alms of our time and of our presence and of our listening and of our accompaniment of others. The greatest alms you can offer to anybody is love and understanding.”

He adds that another element of fasting could be a fast from “needless chatter”, giving family, friends and neighbours “the benefit of silence and space from us in as much as we can give them that space”.

40 days

Prayer is also an important part of Lent but that doesn’t mean just adding a few more prayers or devotions during the 40 days according to Bro. Hendrick, who says it is more of a “deepening of the spirit of prayer, a deepening awareness of the presence of God in our lives and in the lives of others and making time to listen for God, to listen for his word”.

He mentions images in scripture, apart from Jesus in the desert himself: the prophet Joel, which is used on Ash Wednesday each year to recall the Faithful to conversion; the time spent by Elijah in the desert where he was recalled to a new understanding of his vocation and to hear the word of God speaking to him; the story of the prophet Jonah,



Bro Richard Hendrick OFM Cap.

where Christians are assured that repentance always results in mercy and in the compassion of God.

“When we think about those messages the scripture is giving to us, it’s an understanding of human beings particularly today in a very busy and distracted life – with the best will in the world – God can move from the centre of our life and the centre of our existence to the periphery, so this is a way of recalling ourselves to a reordering of being that allows God to dwell in our hearts and speak through our hearts then to the presence of God in ourselves and in our world and in others,” Bro. Hendrick says.

“I think for some people Lent will have changed them forever because of the time and the reflection”

For Sr Sheila Kelleher of the Presentation Sisters in Cork, entering Lent with the challenges of the pandemic and a lockdown could be beneficial as many people have had more of an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their lives.

“I think we have a very different type of society today and I think if Lent was properly explained as a positive rather than a negative it might have more of an impact and might bring about a better outcome,” Sr Kelleher tells this paper.

“I have heard people say that despite the difficulty of lockdown it has benefited them in the sense that they have realised now that the race they were part of, the rat race, is really not what life is about and that it’s passing them by, for that reason I think people are in a better place

this year to buy-in to Lent because Covid has slowed them down.”

Sr Kelleher says that she doesn’t see Lent as a time to give things up, but as a time to build relationships and “be a better person”.

“I would be more fired up by that kind of thinking rather than saying I must give this up, give that up and that never really appealed too much, not that I was very good for giving up things,” she laughs. “Very often it’s about how I can get a better relationship with myself, with God and with the people around me. I believe relationships are crucial.”

She adds: “I think for some people Lent will have changed them forever because of the time and the reflection. For other people it has been very, very difficult because if you’re working from home, the house has turned into an office, children are being taught from home, the kitchens I’ve seen in some houses have been turned into classrooms, that’s not easy and those parents get very little time to reflect because life is maybe as busy or busier, but I think overall Lent will mean something very different to most people this year.”

Sacred space

There are a few things people can do to make the Lenten period more rewarding according to Bro. Hendrick, who recommends creating a sacred space in the home, much like the tradition of having a May altar, a Lenten space or Lenten altar could be made by simply placing a candle, crucifix or icon in a space to allow a point of focus.

“We are sacramental, not just in the sense of the seven sacraments but we believe that all of reality and everything that is beautiful comes from God and so to have a little sacred place to remind us of the sacramentality of our time and of our space,” Bro. Hendrick explains.

“The second thing is to encourage

a little bit of spiritual reading every day even if it’s only a few lines from scripture or looking at the Gospel of the day as we go along. You can easily find that by Googling or going online and just maybe sitting with the Word for a few minutes each day and to remember it’s not just about reading, it’s about resting in silence with the Word as well, to increase our traditional meditation on the passion of the Lord and maybe to think about his isolation and his loneliness, his aloneness in the midst of the passion, in the sense that he himself has gone through seclusion and isolation and knows what it is to feel alone, it’s important for us to recognise that there is no human feeling or human experience that Christ doesn’t enter into through his people.”

“It’s Jesus own promise to us that nothing will come against us that will ever separate us from his love”

Despite the pain and even death that people have been going through and affected by with regard to Covid, Bro. Hendrick says we can look at it as God’s way of increasing quality of presence. One of the things that the lockdown has taught us “is the importance of the presence of others, whether that’s the friends and family that we’re currently missing or even the people we’re sharing lockdown life with”.

“Maybe also to recognise we’re called to reach out as brothers and sisters to one another as best we can, whether that’s virtually or in real life and maybe to look at the quality of our relationships over the last num-

ber of months, how has it been for us?”

“How could we allow this to be a period of conversion, of heart, with regard to how we treat our families, our communities, our children, our spouses, our partners whatever it might be, but those who are closest to us, how can we extend patience and compassion to them and also then how can we increase our presence to God. God is always presence to us, but how can we work on tuning in to the presence of the Lord particularly at times when we may not be able to be present to him sacramentally, we should always remember the Christians saints speak of the sacrament of the present moment, that whatever we are going through God is with us in that moment and we can tune ourselves to his presence through the practices associated with Lent.”

He adds that as Easter approaches, it’s important people recognise that no matter the manner of celebration, or the lack of public celebration, Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever and “we believe that he is the Lord of history and this is one of many times that the Christian people have gone through periods of plague and pandemic and disaster and worldwide stress but we’ve passed through them all and we’ll pass through them again and it’s important for us to remember that we keep our feet grounded firmly on the rock of Christ and of his Church”.

“It’s Jesus own promise to us that nothing will come against us that will ever separate us from his love. I think there are practical small, little things we can do within our own homes and lives to honour the sacred, to honour the presence of God but also to remember in the bigger, overall picture, we believe in a Christ who has already won the victory for all of us.”

The Wonder of Philosophy

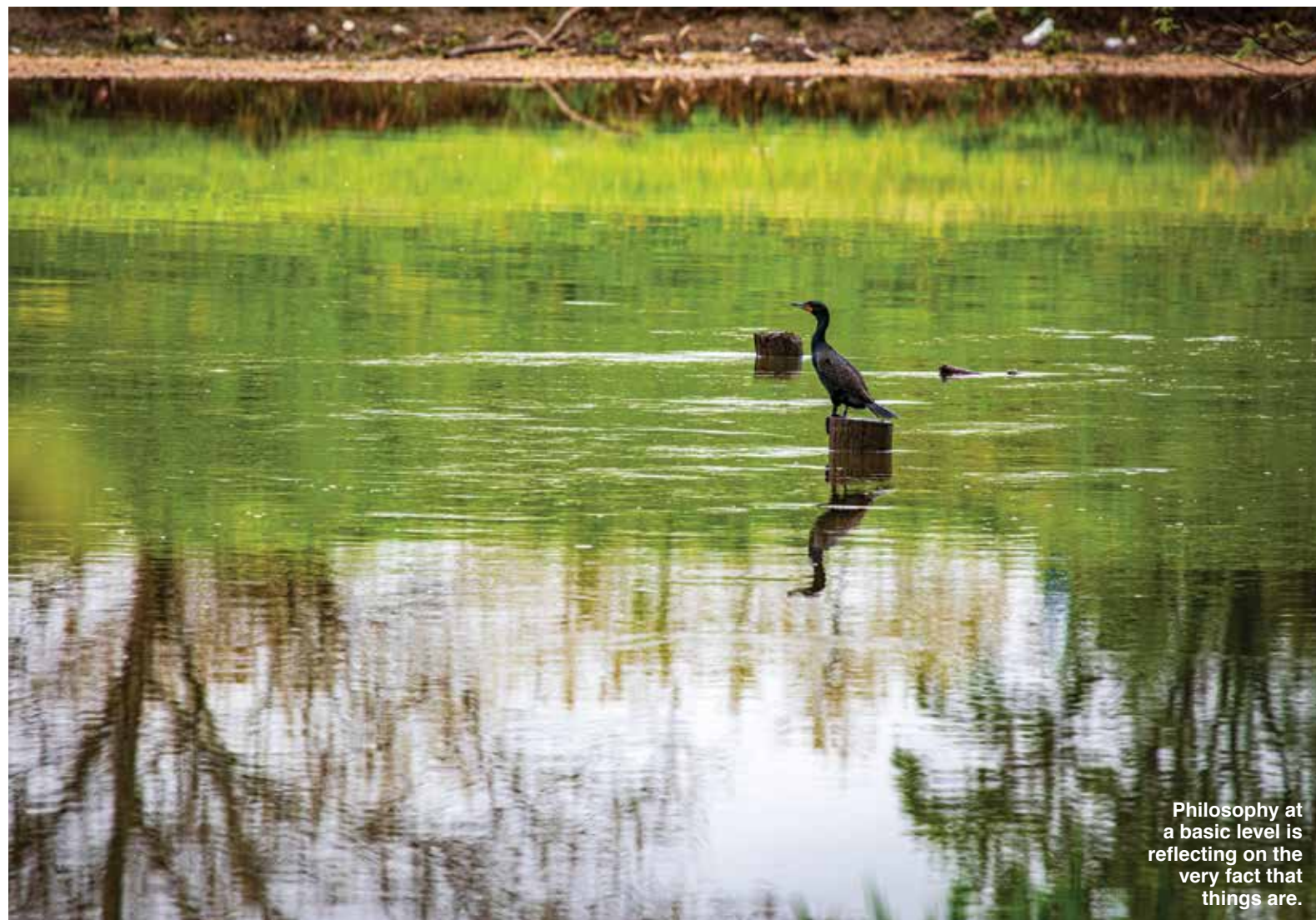


One of the deepest things being lost today is the sense of wonder before the mystery of existence and reality as a whole, writes **Philip Gonzales**

For both Plato and Aristotle philosophy begins in wonder. But, with Plato, I also think that philosophy should never seek to dispel wonder. Wonder, then, should be the very dwelling place of philosophy, its home and permanent habitat. Wonder must be the beginning and end of philosophy. But what is wonder and what does it have to do with our humanity or with the majority of people who have never studied philosophy? And, further, what does it have to do with our current technologically advanced, disenchanted and secularised world? My answer is that wonder has everything to do with the questions just posed. For the former question, this is the case because to be human is to be a philosophical and wondering animal and to live, ask and confront metaphysical questions. For the latter question, this is the case because it is my belief that one of the deepest things being lost today is the sense of wonder before the mystery of existence and reality as a whole. To lose wonder before the mystery of existence and reality is, in turn, to lose what it means to be human in the first place.

Philosophical questions

Aristotle tells us in his great work the *Metaphysics* that before philosophical questions can arise certain basic conditions of life must be met. Only then in a society in which leisure is possible can one begin to think about the profound mysteries right before our very eyes. Think, for example, of a nomadic tribe of hunters and gathers that are under threat every day by death, caught-up in the pressing worries of whether or not



Philosophy at a basic level is reflecting on the very fact that things are.

they will even find food. Clearly, here any leisure is impossible as is the possibility of thinking about the astonishing fact that things are. However, in ancient Greece such conditions of leisure and security were met and this is one reason why ancient Greece is the birthplace of Western philosophy.

“Before what were the pre-Socratics overwhelmed by wonder? Answer: that things are at all, that there is existence”

Philosophy arose, not just with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, but in the Sixth and Fifth Century BC with the pre-Socratic philosophers. I mention the pre-Socratic philosophers because when one reads the fragments that we have from them, and the simplicity in which they wrote, it is easy to see how philosophy began. It is thus the proper way to treat the most basic philosophical experience of wonder. Before what were the pre-Socratics overwhelmed by wonder? Answer: that things are at all, that there is existence. Things are! There is the sun in its unspeak-

ably glorious and life-giving radiance; there is the starry heavens in its shimmering sublimity; there is water in all its life-sustaining forms from the nourishing rain, to the solemn winding of rivers, to the mystic reality of the sea and its ever-mysterious call; there is fire burning upon the hearth with its life-saving heat, the centre of the very life of the family; there is the flowing movement of the air through which we breathe thus making our flesh a living flesh; there is the majesty, yet humility, of the earth from which the clay of our flesh sprung and in whose furrowed fertility seeds are planted in the cosmic covenant of planting and harvesting, the ripening of the fruits of the earth and our labour. One could go on and on... These are not just romantic sentiments but the very heart of philosophical wonder from which philosophy springs and is ever-filled. This is the mystery of the extraordinary in the ordinary within the very world in which we dwell. Things are, things exist, and they call to us in the language of their beauty, as St Augustine would say, and it is good to be, to be here. This is the wonder from which philosophy lives, where what is most basic and quotidian becomes a dreamscape or a reverie of the real.

Here no fantasy is needed because the real is the fanciful and mysterious as it was for us when we played as children before we became disenchanted with the real.

Mystery

The wonder of philosophy before the mystery of being concerns the most basic experience of what it means to be human and thus to dwell within, and alongside, the four elements of earth, water, air and fire, as the pre-Socratics would say. How much is this fundamental experience being lost today in our world of money, disenchantment and technological mastery of reality is a question for another time. But what needs to be noted is that a life that can no longer be struck by these realities of the mystery of being and existence is a human life that is being dried-up and withering at its very roots. To live in wonder is to live a human life before, and within, the very mysteries in which our dwelling is enveloped, if we would only open again our five senses to the elements of being.

It was no historical accident that Christian thought took this pagan wisdom of wonderment and baptised it. It is an easy jump from the mystery of being, and a dwelling within the four elements, to a Chris-

tian sacramental vision of reality. Without the fertile furrows of the ground of philosophical, that is, human wonderment before the mystery of being the sacraments and our Christian faith ring hallow. So I end with the *Deer's Cry* or the *Lorica of St Patrick*, a prayer that lived within a Christian wonder before being's abiding mystery:

*I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendour of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.*

Dr Philip John Paul Gonzales is a lecturer in philosophy at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. This article is part of a new regular column where philosophers from Maynooth Drs Gaven Kerr and Philip Gonzales offer accessible introductory thoughts on perennial themes in the history of philosophy and the Catholic tradition.

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Mary Immaculate College leads global initiative for Catholic educators



A new million-euro initiative hopes to 'imagine a future' for Catholic education in Ireland, Fr Eamonn Conway tells Ruadhán Jones

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) recently announced it is leading an "exciting" new global project on Catholic education after receiving €950,000 in funding. Their aim is to make a "decisive contribution to the repositioning of Catholic education in Ireland" and globally, Fr Eamonn Conway, head of Theology and Religious studies at MIC, tells *The Irish Catholic*.

New generation

The Global Researchers in Catholic Education project (GRACE) enables a new generation of Catholic educators at MIC to connect with top-level experts in Catholic education in the USA, Australia and the UK, Fr Conway explains. Fr Conway, along with Drs Dan O'Connell and Eugene Duffy, will lead the project, which is already underway.

Fr Conway says that the idea for the project originated following a meeting with a professor in Notre Dame University Australia.

"We felt that there were a lot of issues common to University of Notre Dame Australia and indeed to Catholic education in the Australian context and the Irish Context," Fr Conway continues. "You know, repositioning Catholic Education in the public square, the distinctiveness of Catholic education – we felt

that we could work together on and develop a network to support young and emerging scholars across our two contexts, making available literature, research and so on."

This was in 2017 and by 2019, two more colleges agreed to take part in the initiative – the University of St Mary's, London, and Boston College. Following a meeting between representatives from all the colleges in 2019, the colleges agreed they needed to set up an international "community of practice".

"We felt we needed to create a community of practice because we didn't want it to be just a group of academics talking to other academics, but that it would involve all the kinds of people involved in Catholic education," Fr Conway says. "So parents of course, but also chaplains, teachers, those involved in the leadership and management of schools, trustees – right across the people who are involved and invite them into scholarship and reflection."

"So we wanted to create a unique 'community of practice' that would be an invitation space for people across these various aspects of Catholic education that wouldn't ordinarily meet, from the US to Australia to Ireland, and indeed the UK as well," Fr Conway adds.

Fr Conway hopes that, in the future, they will be able to include

colleges from the global south, to give a complete picture of Catholic education across the globe. Ultimately, the aim of the project is to pool the resources of experts and practitioners in order to create "a whole new generation of Catholic educators" and "thought leaders".

"We've been pretty fortunate to get the funding from the All Hallows trust and the Presentation Sisters in Ireland to provide scholarships – they're unique in the whole area of the humanities really, €20,000 a year for four years to do a PhD," Fr Eamonn says. "That is to encourage a whole new generation of Catholic thought leaders. Many are teachers who will be able to – because of the funding – step out of the classroom to do their PhD's."

“Ms Considine had a very happy experience of religion through her parents and is ‘worried’ that the next generation won’t experience that”

"For my generation, what we have to contribute, is the networks we have built up, so we can call on the various scholars in the universities and contexts who can offer support in that whole area of the research undertaken by these students. To hand on what we have to a new generation," Fr Conway finishes.

Claire Considine, one of the recipients of the scholarships, says she is "absolutely thrilled" about the project and looking forward to getting started.

"For my masters, I had been looking at the whole area of well-being

and spirituality," Ms Considine explains. "It's really good to be able to develop that more in terms of looking at Catholic schools. Its looking at the importance of spirituality in terms of students wellbeing. There's an awful lot of emphasis on the physical and emotional wellbeing, but it's been neglected spiritually."

"I'm looking at that particularly with senior students, fourth, fifth and sixth years. Looking at it through the lens of religion – how we can bring wellbeing into their religious syllabus and make it inclusive for all which I'm really excited about," Ms Considine adds.

Experience of religion

Ms Considine had a very happy experience of religion through her parents and is "worried" that the next generation won't experience that.

"My background from home is that my mam and dad were a traditional religious family," she says. "We said the rosary every night, it was always very important that we go to Mass, that we be kind, good people. I had a really happy childhood, and happy because of our Church at home and our religious community. That's what influenced me, the religion that my mam passed on to me and I'm worried that an awful lot of students won't experience that now. I want to angle it in a way that it will appeal to them."

The experience and knowledge the research makes available will enable experts, practitioners and researchers like Ms Considine to "make a decisive contribution to the repositioning of Catholic education in Ireland", Fr Conway says.

"The project will be employing a post-doctoral researcher who will do a detailed study with regard to the realities of Catholic education

in our schools or colleges," Fr Conway explains. "We hope to gather data regarding what is actually happening on the ground in Catholic schools, how effective are Catholic schools in terms of communicating faith and evangelising, in doing something that is genuinely distinctive and reflects something of the Christian position on the human person. We want a root and branch investigation on that."

“The project is well named, GRACE, because it has been an experience of grace for us”

"And then to imagine a future for Catholic education in Ireland, to present a vision for that and hopefully this will contribute to the whole policies around divestment and so on, which at the moment are not working off solid research. That's an outcome we'd hope for at national level," he adds.

"We thought this time last year that we would be fortunate to get the funding to cover the costs of young scholars to attend our conference, which is what we were looking at initially. The project is well named, Grace, because it has been an experience of grace for us. We think that unwittingly we have tapped into a wellspring of support, a wellspring of commitment to re-evaluating and appreciating again the unique contribution that Catholic education can make in this country and to bring forth its distinctiveness in a way that perhaps hasn't been fully realised to date," Fr Conway concludes.

Walking with Ireland's victims of torture



Direct provision compounds the suffering of asylum seekers who were torture victims, writes **Chai Brady**

Torture has always been an horrific reality for humanity and to this day atrocities are being committed against people for nothing other than their faith, political belief, ethnicity and sexuality in many parts of the world. Some of the victims seek protection in Ireland, but the residual trauma follows.

In the late 1990s there was an exponential increase in the number of people seeking asylum in Ireland and the Spiritan congregation decided to help them integrate into society. It quickly became clear that some of those that had fled their home countries were dealing with severe emotional trauma and needed help beyond their capabilities.

Still operating from North Circular Road in Dublin to this day, Spirasi was founded to offer professional support and has helped thousands of asylum seekers in direct provision and refugees.

“Spirasi believe that at least 30% of asylum seekers are probably torture victims but ‘this could be much higher’”

The Executive Director of Spirasi, Rory Halpin, tells this paper that originally the Spiritans, with education being very much part of their ethos, started offering English language classes to asylum seekers but that it became obvious some were traumatised and had been victims of torture.

Shift

“That provided a shift in what was being offered and people said ‘well we need to respond to this’ so fairly quickly after that – that was in 1999 – I’d say by 2000–2001, the first doctors were brought in to provide initial assessment to torture victims. By signing up to the UN Convention against Torture Ireland had agreed to provide some rehabilitation to victims of torture and that strand of funding was coming through the HSE to Spirasi,” Mr Halpin says.

“Since then, it has developed to provide those initial assessments and then the first therapists came on board. Psychotherapy became very much central to what we provided, psychosocial officers,



People attend an event marking the UN Day in Support of Victims of Torture in 2018.

psychosocial support. That developed in tandem with the English language, that was kept on, we still provide English language classes to asylum seekers and refugees.”

During the course of the last two decades Spirasi has seen more than 5,500 victims of torture, with their multidisciplinary approach aiming to help people along the road towards rehabilitation. The charity sees 10% of all asylum seekers who come to Ireland. Due to the pandemic the number of asylum seekers has dropped sharply compared to 2019. From January to November last year 1,406 people sought asylum in Ireland compared to about 5,000 in 2019.

One of the reasons people can receive refugee status is if they have been a victim of torture in their country of origin. Spirasi conducts legal medical reports for the protection process and victims who are referred to them can use the reports to secure refugee status.

Torture comes in many forms, with Mr Halpin saying, “you name it, people have suffered it”, whether it be psychological or physical.

“You can imagine between beating, electrocution, sexual violence is a big one for both males and females, you know very degrading stuff. Whatever you can imagine it has been done to people and that’s the horrible thing about it. We would see a lot of that,” he explains.

Remit

“Our remit is torture, but it’s not torture in general, it’s very specific.

The UN definition states it has to be intentional, it has to inflict severe pain – that can be either psychological or physical – and then the third, and this is the key piece, it has to be sanctioned by the Government. So that the particular Government in the country of origin will carry this out through the soldiers, through police, through secret police whatever.

“Since then, it has developed to provide those initial assessments and then the first therapists came on board”

“For example, you might say people who are in dreadful, dreadful domestic situations, where a husband is beating his wife or being very abusive; horrible, horrible situations, but unfortunately we cannot take people unless there is a Government sanction involved in some shape or form. There are situations where people might go to the police and the police turn a blind eye for whatever reason and we can look at that again but that narrows our remit substantially.”

Despite the narrow remit, Spirasi believe that at least 30% of asylum seekers are probably torture victims but “this could be much higher”, according to Mr Halpin, who says some research points to it being as high as 50%.

However, people who experience the trauma of war – lived through



President Higgins and Rory Halpin pictured at an event in Áras an Uachtaráin in 2019 celebrating 20 years of Spirasi.

a direct war situation – would also be considered to have been through torture.

“Because the trauma is so severe and so great for those who have experienced the direct effects of war, seeing people die in front of them, family members and so on, that can be very traumatic so we would make that exception as well for people we see,” Mr Halpin says.

Trials

To truly understand the trials of someone who has been tortured and forced to flee their home, Mr Halpin says we must look at what they call the “triple trauma paradigm”.

“So, you’ve got whatever the person has suffered in their country

of origin, then you have the journey, so we’re very aware certainly in the last couple of years of people coming across the Mediterranean in boats and so on, the horrible situation they’re being subjected to, then what we as a State were inflicting on people through the direct provision system which often exacerbated the mental health issues that people had,” he says.

“The uncertainty, the lack of power would have all contributed or compounded that original torture experience for many people, that’s what people have to deal with.”

The Government has committed to end the direct provision system which Mr Halpin has very much welcomed. However, a White Paper on bringing the controversial system to an end was due to be completed and submitted to cabinet by late December but this has been delayed until February 2021. An Expert Advisory Group said in October last year that the direct provision system should end by 2023 and be replaced by a

“Originally the Spiritans, with education being very much part of their ethos, started offering English language classes to asylum seekers”



Three Spirasi clients.

three-stage system of State-owned centres – which would end the involvement of private companies.

The effect of the direct provision centres on people, specifically those who have experienced torture, is harrowing. “If you look at what remains after the torture, people do invariably suffer from PTSD which involves things like flashbacks, insomnia, nightmares, depression, anxiety and very often the techniques used by the torturer are to deprive people of liberty, deprive them of choice,” Mr Halpin says.

“The lack of power would have all contributed or compounded that original torture experience for many people, that’s what people have to deal with”

“Uncertainty is a huge element in it, they don’t know what’s going to happen next, obviously it’s not to the same extent – a kind of milder form – but nonetheless it exacerbates those symptoms within people and makes it very difficult for them to recover, to be rehabilitated – so it’s about finding stability, that’s the key thing, finding safety.

“They are all key elements in allowing a person to begin that process of healing, of rehabilitation, if that’s not there, which it isn’t because they don’t know what’s going to happen next – they could ultimately be deported back to their country of origin and so on – all that adds to that sense of insecurity.”

Asylum

Spirasi would mainly see asylum seekers who are in the direct provision system but about 5-10% are people who have got their refugee status or even Irish citizenship as sometimes “that’s the time the effects of the original torture begin to emerge, they’ve kind of put stuff to the back of their minds and now that they have a sense of stability it

emerges for them”, Mr Halpin says.

When viewing data from IPO (International Protection Office) over the past two decades the stand-out countries of origin of asylum seekers are Nigeria, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In total, 24 countries have featured in the top five or six countries of origin in annual reports over 18 years. Many have been obvious conflict areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Sudan.

Speaking of the countries of origin the victims of torture come from, Mr Halpin says: “It depends on what’s happening in the particular country people come from, it’s usually because of some kind of outbreak of a war situation or a particular group is being persecuted so it sort of mirrors what’s going on in the world. We probably would see people from Zimbabwe, DRC, Afghanistan, Iraq and South Africa the most – they’re probably the five. A lot of people would have been fleeing from places like Zimbabwe, arriving in South Africa and then experiencing xenophobia there and then come to Ireland.”

Mr Halpin says it is “extraordinary” the number of countries that have signed up to the UN Convention against torture but “significant world players flout it” and that influences smaller countries. Torture is not “a million miles away from us” Mr Halpin continued, “up in the North and relatively recently in our own history there were atrocities carried out by

the British government, I’m not trying to politicise this, but it does happen in situations closer to home. If you look at the definition of torture, there are government sanctioned ways of dealing with people which certainly amount to torture”.

“The effect of the direct provision centres on people, specifically those who have experienced torture, is harrowing”

Asked why people are tortured, Mr Halpin says: “Where people have a well-founded fear of persecution for reason of their race, their creed, their nationality, their political opinion, their social group, for all those reasons people are persecuted and certainly I spoke about Zimbabwe there, because of Robert Mugabe’s regime and the ZANU-PF [president’s political party] and so on there was some terrible atrocities carried out there by the government on anybody who didn’t vote for ZANU-PF.

“They were hounded and persecuted and tortured, so that’s how it happens and it happens all the time and people are extraordinarily brave in these situations where they stand up for what they believe or have a different opinion or whatever it is in a particular country.”



English language classes in Spirasi.

“It depends on what’s happening in the particular country people come from, it’s usually because of some kind of outbreak of a war situation”

Spirasi are also seeing a lot of LGBT people particularly from the Middle East and some African countries who have been persecuted because of their sexual orientation.

“There’s lots of reasons why people can be tortured and unfortunately it’s not the last resort in a lot of these countries. Particularly the LGBT communities coming in, either it’s actually against the law to be of a different sexual orientation or at least to practice anyway and then also it’s the way they’re treated by society.

“If they try to go to their local police station and say ‘I was beaten up because I’m gay’, or whatever, obviously they’re not heard at all and they may be taken into prison as a result of that. In some situations, it’s very institutionalised.”

Persecution

Religious persecution is another reason people flee their countries, with some having been victims of torture because of their creed. Spirasi says many of the people they have helped who have experienced religious persecution and torture come from Islamic countries, with certain sects within Islam also being targeted.

Mr Halpin says: “We would see people who are Christians for example in largely Muslim countries that would experience it, we would have seen clients in those situations because of their Christian faith. We would also see Muslims as well not being able to express a particular form of Islam.”

This can occur because of the divide between Sunni and Shia, two branches of Islam. “Certainly, religion does play a big part and people are persecuted because of it,” he says, making specific reference to Pakistan, particularly if the individual is a more moderate Muslim.

“Sharia law is very predominant in that part of the world, if you’re not in that, the more moderate Muslims would perhaps have experienced persecution because they’re not following that very strict, rigid, form of Muslim practice,” Mr Halpin says.

However most torture is due to political and social conflicts and more recently due to sexual orientation he explains.

Challenges

One of the challenges Spirasi is facing is that they’re overwhelmed with the numbers of people seeking to avail of their services and there are long waiting lists which has “a huge effect on clients who are waiting for initial assessments or medical reports or whatever it is”.

Mr Halpin says: “Given that we would be seeing on average just over 300 initial assessments every year, that’s of new people coming into the organisation, and a further 100 looking for medical legal reports, our absolute capacity

is about 400 new people coming in, that’s as well as the people we continue to see on an ongoing basis.”

While some people may just need a medical report and Spirasi may not see them again, for other people who are referred in for an initial assessment they are seen by a doctor, a therapist and a psychosocial officer and then there’s a care plan put together for that person. They might then receive further therapy and psychosocial support.

“So that person could be with us for a year, or two years and for some people it’s longer and because of the nature of the trauma and the depth of the trauma, people very often are dealing with the results of that trauma for the rest of their life,” Mr Halpin says.

“I don’t know what the longest anybody has ever been with us but I’d say it could be two or three years and we have that facility which is great because very often the work is long-term, the therapists will say that you can’t just give people 10 sessions and say good luck now, you can’t do that and we’re grateful that we can and we have the funding that allows us to do that.”

Outcomes

The outcomes of Spirasi’s work depend “very much on the person, their own capacities, their own resilience, their own sense of who they are and their own background”, Mr Halpin says.

“Religious persecution is another reason people flee their countries, with some having been victims of torture because of their creed”

Direct provision can have a negative effect on person’s ability to cope and “they might have had to stay in direct provision for a long time and that can be very difficult for people”. But overall the charity is “very hopeful as to what is possible”.

“The model of what we try to put in place, providing this first stage of safety, that word safety is so important, and then once people have a sense of safety, which is very difficult when you’re living in direct provision, then they can begin to process the trauma which is the second stage and then thirdly they would move to some sort of integration within themselves, accepting, acknowledging and so on, but also the physical social integration into the new country where they’re trying to set up their new lives. I suppose for us all of that is possible, we’ve seen it and people are extraordinarily resilient,” Mr Halpin adds.



Worthy watching for the Lenten season

This is a scene of Jesus, played by Jonathan Roumie, at a wedding in episode five of *The Chosen*. Photo: CNS



Ruadhán Jones recommends films and TV sure to help you enter fully into the season of Lent

It was around this time last year that a new show was making waves in Christian circles. *The Chosen's* first season premiered April 2019, and was streamed for free on YouTube over Easter 2020, when it became a lockdown hit. It is a new venture in adapting the life of Christ to film, being the first 'Jesus show', a multi-series take on the Gospels.

The Chosen uses the tropes and techniques of a modern narrative TV series, delving into the lives of a number of characters rather than focusing on one. So, for example, you have St Peter as 'the fixer', a can-do character who always has a plan. Then you have Matthew, the man of numbers, played as though he is mildly on the spectrum.

The characters have narrative arcs familiar to a modern audience, which are then interrelated with the beginning of Christ's ministry. It's a canny way of bringing Christ to a new generation, in a medium they are familiar with. Though a

crowd-funded project, its popularity is such that season two was fully financed by the end of 2020 and its premiere is eagerly awaited.

Difficult adaptations

It's not the first adaptation, however, as cinema and television have a long history of attempting to capture Christ on film. This is despite the fact that films about Christ face a number of challenges, the most obvious being that everyone knows the story. If you want to adapt it, you have to seriously consider what you can add and what you have to say that justifies yet another telling of the Gospel narratives.

“From the birth of cinema, filmmakers were drawn to adapt the Gospel stories”

As a result, when adapting the life of Christ, artists have a necessary degree of latitude to explore his character. Otherwise, what is the purpose? By applying his or her imagination to the story, a great artist may reveal a truth unknown, or provide an explanation to a modern audience of a truth long known.

But in doing so, there's always the chance that the director will go too far. This is most obviously the case with Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which is both an artistic failure and a moral one. But even films which are accurate may fail to appeal to everyone. *The Passion of the Christ* by Catholic director Mel Gibson is a deeply divisive film for its style, the level of violence and its depiction of Jewish characters, although it draws heavily from the Bible and Catholic tradition regarding Christ's passion.

“The characters have narrative arcs familiar to a modern audience, which are then interrelated with the beginning of Christ's ministry”

As a result, which is the best film about Christ is not solely a canonical issue – it is also an artistic one. As a result, it's a delight when a film is an artistic and moral success and the films suggested here are, hopefully, both. Due to their Christian themes and artistic excellence, they can help us enter fully into the season of Lent and Easter.

The earliest adaption

From the birth of cinema, filmmakers were drawn to adapt the Gospel stories. One of the very earliest feature-length films was a 1905 film from the French company, Pathé, called *The Life and Passion of Jesus*

Christ. Running to 45 minutes, it is a quite remarkable achievement for what was then an art form barely 10 years old. Even more remarkable is that the prints passed down to us today are colourised – the filmmakers painstakingly painted each strip of film, frame by frame, to create the effect of colour and to highlight happenings on the screen.

The film is composed of a series of short tableaux which are preceded by a title, such as the Annunciation, but no other explanations. We are simply expected to know the story and there is no narrative as we would usually expect it. The images are related, but they stand

alone as icons in their own right. The filmmakers drew inspiration from the Church's strong history in the visual arts, and each shot is composed with as much care as a painting.

Silence

You may be put off by the lack of any sound, but you will be surprised how quickly the shots draw you in. As film was in its infancy, you can see very clearly the effects of stagecraft on the scenery and the acting – but the absence of a naturalism or style we are used to isn't a major defect. The film creates a figurative style like an icon, leading you to consider the transcendence of Christ, even in such a physical medium as film.

“When adapting the life of Christ, artists have a necessary degree of latitude to explore his character”

As it is quite short, and available on YouTube, the film could be an excellent way to welcome the Lenten season. It is particularly suitable for young children, who often enjoy silent films far more than adults. The colours and quick pace of the action should also suit their temperaments.

In addition, it provides an opportunity for engaging catechesis – the film was often used as a tool by missionaries to explain the



Director Mel Gibson, centre, is seen on the set of *Hacksaw Ridge*. Gibson's 2004 feature *The Passion of the Christ* polarises audiences to this day. Photo: CNS.



Jim Caviezel as Luke and James Faulkner as Paul are seen in the film *Paul, Apostle of Christ* from 2018. Caviezel, a practicing Catholic, played Christ in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Photo: CNS

mysteries of the Church, in line with a tradition at the time where films would be accompanied by commentary on the action and themes. It has the potential to be inspirational viewing for children and adults alike.

Nazarin

In 1985, the Catholic Church released a list of 45 films in honour of the centenary of cinema's birth. The list is well worth exploring. It is divided into three sections – art, values and religion – and contains a number of surprise entries. Perhaps the most unlikely, on the surface, is the inclusion of a film by Spanish *enfant terrible* Luis Buñuel.

“Few films manage to balance the demands of telling an engaging story with being historically accurate as well as *The Miracle Maker*”

Buñuel was one of the many Spaniards who received a stern education at the hands of the Jesuits and by the time he was a filmmaker, he had effectively become anti-Catholic. Despite this, the Church and God were subjects he often returned to. In 1959, he directed *Nazarin*, a film intended to be a critique of organised religion, but recognised by the Vatican as depicting a truly Catholic figure.

While not strictly a film about Christ, it is about a Christ figure. The film is about a Spanish priest in Mexico who gives up the cloth after being accused of an entanglement with a prostitute who has committed a murder. Padre Naziro heads on a pilgrimage across Mexico, begging for food and seeking work where he can. Wherever he ends up, he seeks to convey the message of Christ and to live as the Gospels teach us.

A compassionate man and devout Catholic, his efforts are always well intentioned. But all he meets is resistance, and often his best efforts go unrecognised. In one memorable scene, he attempts to reconcile a woman dying of plague to her death, to lead her to God – but she rejects him, calling instead for her husband.

Ultimately, he ends the film alone and dejected.

Despite being intended as a repudiation of organised religion, the film gets to the heart of the Catholic Faith. The work that we do may not be recognised at the time, yet still we must strive in hope and faith in God's love. While the film ends with Padre Naziro experiencing a dark night of the soul, you get the sense it is merely an interlude before Christ draws him out again and he moves on from his failure. Padre Naziro is a failure by the standards of the world, but his actions are, metaphorically speaking, canonised by the Church in their recognition of the film's excellence. *Nazarin* is quite difficult to watch at times, unflinching in its portrayal of the death of innocence – yet it is restrained too, and ultimately its intent is not to shock, but to get to the truth. Challenging and rigorous in its scepticism, it is not a film to be entered into lightly – yet it is one which rewards reflection and a thorough examination.

Jesus of Nazareth

Having discussed two films which are perhaps a little obscure, let me finish with two classics which are likely to be well known by all – and if not, they should be. The first of these is the 1977 TV mini-series by Italian director Franco Zeffirelli, *Jesus of Nazareth*. With a star-studded cast and an impressive commitment to historical accuracy, it is perhaps the most influential of all efforts to adapt Christ's life.

Jesus of Nazareth bridges the gap between the biblical epics of the 50s, such as *The Ten Commandments*, and the efforts of the modern era to depict Jesus. One of the ways it does that is in its quite innovative use of historical detail to build up the Jewish world into which Christ is born. It situates his life, and those of his parents and disciples, in the context of first cen-

tury Judaism, depicting a lively faith and culture.

The attention to period detail and the use of authentic settings and locations adds layers of depth. We witness Christ preaching to his followers in mud huts and on hills, on desert sands and on the shores of a great lake. By placing Christ's words in their historical context, it brings them to life in our own.

“*Jesus of Nazareth* bridges the gap between the biblical epics of the 50s, such as *The Ten Commandments*, and the efforts of the modern era to depict Jesus”

Another reason it works is how entrenched Zeffirelli is in the history of Italian art. He owes a debt to the Italian masters, particularly Renaissance painters. There are so many crowd scenes in this film, all carefully staged and colour coordinated. Equally, the lighting isn't like the stark shadows that characterise a lot of modern films. Zeffirelli's show is largely shadowless, playing instead with colour and light.

This really works to bring out the mystical aspect of Christ, who is played by the relative unknown Robert Powell. He gives an ethereal, unblinking performance which is very good, if verging on hamming. The combination of Zeffirelli's simple, direct faith and his link with a largely faithful artistic tradition combine ideally to convey Christ's divine nature. It is a Christian classic and a very worthy Lenten, or Easter, watch, suitable for all the family.

The Miracle Maker

And this leads to the last suggestion. Few films manage to balance the



Franco Zeffirelli, director of *Jesus of Nazareth*, on the set of *Romeo and Juliet* with Olivia Hussey, who played the Virgin Mary in Zeffirelli's *life of Christ*, 1967. Photo: Emilio Larri.

demands of telling an engaging story with being historically accurate as well as *The Miracle Maker*, an animated film from 1999. An English-Welsh-Russian co-production, the creators take a unique approach which pays off perfectly, shooting the film using a combination of puppets and hand-drawn and computerised animation.

The film is remarkably concise, subtly conveying the ministry and life of Christ in just shy of ninety minutes. Script writer Murray Watts plays a fine balancing act in repurposing, reorganising and summarising the main events of the Gospels, while deftly avoiding revisionism and Sunday-school preaching.

He cleverly frames the film from the perspective of a young Jewish girl, Tamar, who we later discover to be the girl Christ raises from the dead. This is an example of Watt's ability to make use of stories we know in a manner we don't expect, lending an extra layer of emotion to Christ's miracle. It also adds a child-like wonder to the works of Christ and provides children with a cypher through which Christ becomes real for them.

Puppets

But can Christ be convincing as a puppet? The answer is yes. As performed by English actor Ralph Fiennes, Jesus is charismatic and inspiring, yet also friendly and personable. You can imagine him as being the leader of a great Church, but also the personal Christ who will put his arm around your shoulder. It humanises him, without

reducing him to a mere character in a plot.

In part this is down to the stop-motion animation, which frees the filmmakers from the constraints of material reality in representing Christ. Christ is decidedly real, but also has a figurative power. When combined with hand-drawn animation, the directors are able to represent spiritual and interior conflicts in a convincing way. The sequence depicting Christ's temptation in the desert is outstanding, highlighting how the devil preys on human failings through a distortion of reality. It is authentic and captivating to watch and, at times, the animation is beautiful.

“In 1985, the Catholic Church released a list of 45 films in honour of the centenary of cinema's birth”

The final great success of the film is its ability to contextualise and teach without the theology bogging it down. It brings to life Christ's parable of the man who builds his house on sand, or the slapstick vision of a man with a log in his eye. In the story of the Good Samaritan, characters enact the prejudices of their time, conveying why it is so remarkable that a Samaritan helps a Jew.

And at the last supper, when Christ offers his own body to be eaten and his blood to be drunk, even the disciples respond with shock. That is the wonder of adaptation – it can bring to life even the most familiar scenes so that we understand them anew. If you are looking for a family film to watch this Easter, then look no further than *The Miracle Maker*.

“Films about Christ face a number of challenges, the most obvious being that everyone knows the story”



Out&About

Meet and greet at the Holy See



ROME: Pope Francis greets Derek Hannon, Ambassador of Ireland to the Holy See following the Pope's traditional address to diplomats at the Vatican. The Pontiff is flanked by Msgr Joseph Murphy, a native of Co. Cork and head of the protocol office of the Vatican's Secretariat of State.



CORK: New novices in St Mary's Dominican Priory, serve food to their brethren and help to clean up after lunch.

INSHORT

Church in the EU welcome European initiatives on human rights and environment

The International Family of Catholic Social Justice Organisations (CIDSE), Pax Christi International and Justice & Peace Europe, with the support of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), welcome the initiative of the European Commission to prepare new EU legislation on supply chains.

The proposed legislation would legally require companies to protect internationally recognised human rights and the environment in the development,

production and distribution of commodities. The Catholic organisations have submitted a joint contribution to an EU public consultation in view of the future legislation.

With this landmark move Europe would become the first region in the world to enact such legislation, holding companies liable for human rights violations and environmental harm throughout their supply chains.

"Being faced with an unprecedented global crisis, we now need more than ever mandatory supply chain due diligence to stop corporate abuse and guarantee global solidarity," stated H. Em. Cardinal Jean-

Claude Hollerich SJ, President of COMECE, expressing support for an ambitious European due diligence legislation.

Church launches new series of videos on the Theology of Safeguarding

Nine videos have been commissioned from theologians, scripture scholars and ethicists who live and work in Ireland, Italy and the United States. In October 2021, the National Board will host its National Conference on the theme 'Towards a Theology of Safeguarding' at which time the questions posed by the video contributors will be addressed.

The first video presentation was by Fr Hans Zollner SJ, founding President of the Centre for Child Protection and Professor at the Institute of Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He is member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and consultant to the Congregation for Clergy. He is honorary professor at Durham University, UK.

In February the presentation will be delivered by Sr Nuala Kenny, followed by Dr Ethna Regan in March. You can find out more about the speakers, the conference and theology of safeguarding on the website of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

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Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



PHILIPPINES: Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines Archbishop Charles Brown paid a visit to Manila Mayor Isko Moreno Domagoso on Monday, February 8.



◀ **TIPPER-ARY:** Bro. Laurence lights a candle for Candlemas, the Presentation of the Infant Jesus, at Mount St Joseph's Cistercian Abbey, Roscrea.

▼ **TIPPER-ARY:** Over 90 years young, Fr Laurence of Mount St Joseph's Cistercian Abbey, Roscrea, ensures the grounds are kept tidy.



KERRY: Sarah Carty, Tralee, with her St Brigid's Cross for the saint's feast day. Photo: John Cleary.



LAOIS: With schools closed, Hannah delivers a St Brigid's cross to her school, Killeshin National School, to mark the saint's feast.

Events

● In the current Covid-19 crisis, it is clear that most (and perhaps all) Church events, other than some Masses, are suspended. Consequently, we are withholding the popular Events Listing column until normal activities can resume in our parishes. However, please do email us if you know of any parish event planned and we will publish details.



World Report

IN BRIEF

'Church shouldn't stay silent,' says Russian Catholic official

● The secretary-general of the Russian bishops' conference defended his Church's right to speak out during police repression, as the country's Catholic archbishop demanded "substantial, concrete answers" to societal problems that are the subject of current massive protests.

"Young people have gone out in freezing temperatures and tried to express their convictions, and many have suffered in consequence – moral issues are involved here and our Church shouldn't stay silent," said Jesuit Father Stephan Lipke, conference secretary-general.

"Some warn this might endanger the life of our parishes. But what's the good of parishes if they're just centres of confusion and do nothing to shape people's consciences?" he asked *Catholic News Service* February 10.

Salvadoran bishops urge peace, not violence, before elections

● El Salvador's bishops called on citizens to show the best Salvadoran society is known for – faith, hard work and solidarity – not the rancour and violence on display during the last days of one of the most contentious political campaign periods in the country's recent history.

"We are people who have earned the respect of those who admire us for the virtues that enhance us,

such as the sense of family, love of work, strength in the face of adversity, great capacity for solidarity and our deep faith in God," said Bishop Constantino Barrera Morales of Sonsonate, reading part of a statement the Salvadoran bishops' conference published February 9. "But the Salvadoran family is currently going through a deep crisis," Bishop Barrera added.

As slavery continues, cardinal highlights St Josephine Bakhita

● An English cardinal reflected last week on the life of St Josephine Bakhita – who endured brutal slavery before entering religious life – and urged prayers and recognition for the many people worldwide who are enslaved.

In particular, he said, the poverty and uncertainty wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic have intensified the conditions in which slavery and human trafficking thrives.

"The organised criminal networks, which profit ruthlessly through the sale of our brothers and sisters as slaves and no more than commodities to be exploited, are taking full advantage of this chaos: over 40 million trapped today in modern slavery. It is pitiable: a terrible wound in the flesh of humanity, indeed in the body of Christ," Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster preached at a Mass on February 8, St Bakhita's feast day.

Pope and bishops express grief over Indian glacier disaster

● Pope Francis and Indian bishops have expressed grief over a massive glacier burst that killed at least 32 people in northern India.

The tragedy in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on February 7 also left more than 170 missing.

"I express my closeness to the victims of the calamity that happened in India where part of a glacier separated itself, provoking violent flooding that devastated two power plants," Pope Francis said in a tweet on February 10.

Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), said on February 9 that the CBCI expresses its grief and offers its condolences to the family members of all those who have died or are missing as a result of the Uttarakhand glacier calamity.

African bishops warn second-largest continent has few vaccines

In parts of Africa, mass vaccination against Covid-19 is so far off that it is not even mentioned, warned bishops across the African continent.

The malnourished people in the Nuba Mountains, South Sudan are "moving skeletons," and their compromised immune systems expose them "to all kinds of diseases, not just Covid-19," Bishop Macram Max Gassis, retired bishop of El Obeid, Sudan, said in a February 4 interview.

The retired bishop is responsible for remote hospitals, which he has been unable to visit for almost a year.

By February 8, 48 African countries had not approved a vaccine. Confirmed Covid-19 deaths on the continent are close to 100,000, with more than 3.6 million cases overall.

Equipment

Bishop Gassis told *Catholic News Service* while "there is very little testing equipment" in the Nuba Mountains or South Sudan, "it is a fallacy that there is no coronavirus" in the region.

"Most people get one meal a day if they can find it, which leaves them weak, and so how much is the disease going around? It's a tragic situation," he said.

While vaccinations are not yet being administered in Kenya, the bishop said his "hopes are set on Easter".

"The richer countries should not forget the poor countries as they rush to vaccinate all their people," Bishop Gassis said, noting that "if they



Workers load South Africa's first Covid-19 vaccine doses as they arrive at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg February 1. Photo: CNS.

do this at the expense of poor countries, they cannot be content that they are safe".

Bishop Sitembele Sipuka of Mthatha, South Africa, second vice president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, said churches in Africa need to join together in calling for equitable international distribution of vaccines, then use their local structures to ensure that rollout is done properly.

"Hoarding of vaccines by richer countries has led to a lamentable situation," said Bishop Sipuka, who is also president of the Southern

African Catholic Bishops' Conference. With "cooperation and solidarity", the Church can play an oversight role in ensuring that vaccines reach poorer countries in Africa, he told CNS.

The Vatican's coronavirus commission and the Pontifical Academy for Life issued a joint statement in late December calling for a coordinated international effort to ensure the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines worldwide.

Civil society, including churches, "will need to keep watch" that the inoculations are done fairly and transpar-

ently, Bishop Sipuka said, noting that "we must guard against corruption".

Bishop Anthony Fallah Borwah of Gbarnga, Liberia, said February 3 that there were no signs yet of the vaccination reaching the West African nation.

"We are fortunate in that we had not had it (Covid-19) too badly here," Bishop Borwah said, noting that "with our inability to afford swift and widespread vaccination, we can't afford to have the levels of infection other countries have".

Jesuit targeted by Argentine military junta dies in Budapest

Fr Franz Jalics, a Hungarian Jesuit whose 1976 detainment by Argentina's military dictatorship raised questions about Pope Francis' role during his country's Dirty War, has died at age 93.

The priest died on February 13 in Budapest. Jalics found himself reluctantly at the centre of a controversy in March 2013 when Jorge Bergoglio, his former Jesuit superior in Argentina, became Pope Francis.

The new Pope was accused of not having helped the Hungarian and other Jesuits that were targeted by the Argentine military dic-

tatorship. Jalics and another priest, Orlando Yorio, preached in shantytowns and were arrested in March 1976 by an extreme right-wing paramilitary group. They were taken to a detention centre known for its cruelty, the Navy Petty-Officers School (ESMA), and tortured before being released five months later. But in 2003 an Argentine journalist, Horacio Verbitsky, accused Bergoglio of having "abandoned" his two Jesuit confreres.

The Vatican firmly rejected the accusations when they resurfaced in the days

immediately following Bergoglio being elected as Bishop of Rome. And in the weeks and months afterwards, numerous witnesses came forth with testimonials about the "silent diplomacy" Bergoglio undertook to secure the priests' release and protect leftist students hounded by the regime. The newly elected Pope Francis said he had gone through "a period of great inner crisis" at the time of the junta and admitted that he had made mistakes while he was at the head of the Argentine province of the Society of Jesus.

Supreme Court rebukes California's strict lockdown rules for churches

California's strict coronavirus rules banning indoor worship were blocked and revised by a US Supreme Court injunction late February 5 night, drawing praise from figures like Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. He emphasised the importance

of in-person religious gatherings and stressed that the Catholic Church is following "reasonable measures" to limit the epidemic.

"This is a very significant step forward for basic rights. This decision makes clear we can now return to worshipping

safely indoors without risk of harassment from government officials," Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco said February 6.

Almost all of the state of California is in the Tier 1 ranking of viral spread, and this tier bars in-person worship

indoors, the *New York Times* reports.

The Supreme Court's unsigned order said that the total ban on indoor worship is unconstitutional. At most, the state may limit indoor capacity to 25% of normal. It left the ban on singing intact.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones
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Seeking healing from Our Lady



Pilgrims process at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in France in honour her feast day, February 11. Photo: CNS

Catholic missionary priest nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

A Catholic missionary priest in Madagascar known for serving the poor living on a landfill has been nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

Madagascar

Fr Pedro Opeka, 72, is a Vincentian priest from Argentina who has worked with the poor in Madagascar for more than three decades. He founded the Akamasoa humanitarian association in 1989 as a "solidarity movement to help the poorest of the poor" living on the site of a garbage dump.

Janez Janša, the Prime Minister of Slovenia, has announced that he

nominated Fr Opeka for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize for his dedication to "helping people living in appalling living conditions".

The Akamasoa association (meaning "good friend") has provided former homeless people and families with 4,000 brick houses and has helped to educate 13,000 children and young people.

Pope Francis visited Fr Opeka's "City of Friendship" built atop a rubbish dump on the outskirts of the capital city of Antananarivo during his apostolic visit to Madagascar in September 2019.

Pedro Pablo Opeka was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1948. At

the age of 18, he entered the seminary of the Congregation for the Mission of St Vincent de Paul in San Miguel, Argentina.

In 1975, he was ordained a priest at the Basilica of Lujan, and in 1976 he returned to Madagascar, where he has remained to this day.

Upon seeing the desperate poverty in the capital city of Antananarivo, especially at the landfills where people live in cardboard boxes and children compete with pigs for food, he decided to do something for the poor.

With help from abroad and the work of the people

of Madagascar, he founded villages, schools, food banks, small businesses, and even a hospital to serve the poor through the Akamasoa association.

Pandemic

During the coronavirus pandemic, Fr Opeka has been working to help families who have fallen even deeper into poverty as a consequence of coronavirus measures.

"The situation is difficult for families, for the poor who have many children. We do not have rice. We do not have water. We need water and soap," Fr Opeka told *Vatican Radio* in April 2020.

Vatican releases programme for papal trip to Iraq

● Pope Francis said his upcoming trip to Iraq would be an important sign of his concern for the region's Christians, but also an important opportunity to build fraternity through interreligious dialogue.

"In our time, interreligious dialogue is an important component of the encounter between peoples and cultures. When it is viewed not in terms of compromising our own identity but as an occasion of mutual understanding and enrichment, dialogue can become an opportunity for religious leaders and the followers of different confessions, and can support the responsible efforts of political leaders to promote the common good," the Pope told ambassadors to the Holy See February 8.

A few hours later, the Vatican released the initial schedule for the Pope's trip to Iraq March 5-8.

Pope Francis plans to meet March 6 with Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, leader of the country's Shiite Muslim majority and then to hold an interreligious meeting with Christians, Muslims and Yazidis on the plain of Ur, widely recognised as the homeland of the patriarch Abraham.

Throughout the trip the Pope will pay homage to the victims of war and persecution in the country.

Pope to diplomats: Pandemic can spark needed change for better world

● The Covid-19 pandemic can either be a catalyst for change for the better or it will weaken a world already burdened by global crises, Pope Francis said.

The pandemic not only had a "significant effect" on people's way of living, it also "shed light on the risks and consequences inherent in a way of life dominated by selfishness and a culture of waste", the Pope said February 8 during his annual meeting with diplomats accredited to the Holy See.

The Covid-19 pandemic, he said, "set before us a choice: either to continue

on the road we have followed until now, or to set out on a new path".

In a nearly hourlong speech to members of the diplomatic corps, the Pope listed a series of crises "that were provoked or brought to light by the pandemic" as a way to reflect on the opportunities the global community has to build "a more humane, just, supportive and peaceful world".

The health crisis sparked by Covid-19, he said, forced the world to confront two "unavoidable dimensions of human existence" – suffering and death.

Pandemic shows need for new model of care for elderly, academy says

● A new attitude and approach toward the elderly are needed in today's world, especially in the places and ways they are cared for when they become more fragile, said the Pontifical Academy for Life.

To make sure the needs of older people are met and their gifts appreciated, renewed attention and new solutions must be given to assisted living facilities, architectural barriers, friendships and social support networks, in-home caregivers, families and younger family members and opportunities in parishes, the academy said in a new document.

Released February 9, the 11-page "note" is titled, "Old Age: Our Future. The Elderly After the Pandemic", and was made available in six languages at academyforlife.va.

It offers a reflection on the importance of the elderly and the challenges the older generation faces and will face, given the World Health Organization's estimate that by 2050, the world will have 2 billion people over the age of 60, that is, one out of every five people in the world. The academy also appealed to every facet of society, including families, health care providers, city administrators and local parishes to be more attentive to and inclusive of older people.

Church leaders criticise Scottish hate crime bill

An unprecedented alliance of Catholic and Evangelical church leaders are urging the Scottish Government to drop part of its proposed Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill to allow time for "detailed consideration of crucial provisions".

The bill, which would potentially criminalise any criticism of Transgender ideology has been criticised by the Catholic Church, the Free Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Alliance.

In a February 12 letter to the Cabinet

Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf, the Church leaders call for greater protections for freedom of expression and say: "We believe that people should be completely free to disagree with our faith in any way, including mocking and ridiculing us. We are convinced that our faith is true and has a sufficient evidential basis to withstand any criticism, we therefore welcome open debate."

By contrast, concerns are raised that any disagreement with or criticism of

Transgender identity could fall foul of the new law, if passed in its current form. The Church leaders point out, that "Transgender identity has been subject of extensive and emotional public discussion. Such free discussion and criticism of views is vital as society wrestles with these ideas".

They warn however, that they "cannot accept that any position or opinion at variance with the proposition that sex (or gender) is fluid and changeable should not be heard".

Letter from Rome

Abuse case at Vatican pre-seminary captures risk reward of transparency



John L. Allen Jr

AVatican tribunal last Wednesday heard testimony from the accused party in an unusual sexual abuse case, one involving a charge that one minor abused another during their time at a pre-seminary on Vatican grounds that provides altar boys for liturgies in St Peter's Basilica and that's produced roughly 200 priestly vocations over three-quarters of a century.

Fr Gabrielle Martinelli, who's now 28, was ordained to the priesthood in 2017, and who's now in service as chaplain in a health care facility for the elderly, is accused of having sexually abused a slightly younger pre-seminarian, identified only as "L.G.," between 2007 and 2012, at a time when both were still minors. (Fr Martinelli entered the pre-seminary in 2005 and remained there until 2013.)

Also charged in the case is Fr Enrico Radice, who was the rector of the facility at the time the alleged abuse occurred, and who's accused of hampering the investigation – what, in American parlance, would be known as "obstruction of justice".

Abuse

The abuse allegedly happened at the Pre-Seminary of St Pius X, which, as the name implies, is a residence for young men, usually of middle school and high school age, considering a vocation to the priesthood somewhere down the line. This particular facility was established in 1956 under Pope Pius XII at the urging of Fr Giovanni Folci, who had himself attended a pre-seminary at the age of 10 and whose passion for forming young men stemmed in part from his experience as a military chaplain and German prisoner of war during the First World War.

Also charged in the case is Fr Enrico Radice, who was the rector of the facility at the time the alleged abuse occurred"

According to a 2019 Vatican statement, the investigation of the allegations against Frs Martinelli and Radice dates to 2017 when a celebrated Italian journalist named Gianluigi Nuzzi, of *Vatileaks* fame, reported on a Polish alumnus of the pre-seminary who claimed to have witnessed abuses



This October 14, 2020 file photo shows the Vatican City State criminal court during the opening of the trial of Fr Gabriele Martinelli and Msgr Enrico Radice. Fr Martinelli, accused of repeatedly sexually abusing a younger student at the Vatican's St. Pius X Pre-Seminary, testified February 10 that the accusations against him were "unfounded." Photo: CNS.

“No matter what happens, this trial is a high-risk, high-reward proposition for the Vatican and Pope Francis”

taking place. At the same time, the Diocese of Como where Fr Martinelli resides released its own statement saying it had learned of the charges in 2013 from a letter, conducted its own investigation and found the allegations to be unfounded.

In 2019, however, Pope Francis ordered a criminal trial to proceed anyway, after the alleged victim wrote the pontiff directly, and last Wednesday's session of the Vatican tribunal was the fourth hearing in the case. The session was entirely devoted to hearing from Fr Martinelli, who firmly denied the allegations.

To hear Fr Martinelli tell the story, the accusations against him are rooted in internal divisions in the pre-seminary, which pit Fr Radice against the Vice Rector at the time, Fr Ambrogio Marinoni, along with the spiritual director, Fr Marco Granoli, who died last year. Both sides, according to Fr Martinelli, had a following among the students, and the rivalry created "divisions and jealousies".

Internal battles

In part, the internal battles had to do with the liturgy. His accuser, Fr Martinelli said, as well as the Polish ex-seminarian quoted in Mr Nuz-

zi's report, belonged to a faction of younger seminarians who prefer the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, known as the "Tridentine rite", over the post-Vatican II Mass in the vernacular languages. According to Fr Martinelli, so strong were L. G.'s feelings on the matter that he once refused to serve a bishop's Mass because he intended to use the post-conciliar rite.

Another bone of contention, according to Fr Martinelli, was a plan for reform of the pre-seminary that would have opened it also to students of university age, thereby broadening its reach. Traditionalists in the pre-seminary supported the plan, Fr Martinelli said, which was eventually blocked by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, the Pope's Vicar for the Vatican City State.

"They struck at me, but their real target is the pre-seminary," Fr Martinelli told the court.

At the level of detail, Fr Martinelli said that rooms in the pre-seminary have doors made of wood and glass, so that the rector could look in, for example, and see if someone was talking on a cell phone after lights-out. The doors were never locked and seminarians did not have keys, he said, suggesting there was no oppor-

tunity for the alleged abuse to have occurred unobserved.

Fr Martinelli also tried to debunk a claim by L.G. that he'd been assaulted in a bathroom under the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica, arguing that the bathroom is too small, and, in any event, on weekdays (when the event is supposed to have occurred) only one pre-seminarian served the Mass.

Asked by the presiding judge of the tribunal, layman and ex-Italian magistrate Giuseppe Pignatone, why he hadn't filed a complaint for defamation of character if the charges are false, Fr Martinelli said he'd been instructed by his bishop in Como as well as the diocese's Vicar General to wait, and also not to discuss the case with anyone other than his parents and his superiors.

Hearings

Last Wednesday the court set dates for three future hearings, including testimony from the accuser on March 17-18 as well as a visit to the pre-seminary by court members.

No matter what happens, this trial is a high-risk, high-reward proposition for the Vatican and Pope Francis.

The risk is that it may conclude abuse happened right under the Pope's nose (in this case, Pope Benedict XVI), at a time when supposed reforms to combat such abuse in the Church were already well underway. It's also already confirmed that nasty

ideological battles over Vatican II are still being waged more than 50 years after it closed, often among current and aspiring priests who weren't even alive while Vatican II actually was in session.

The Vatican is usually loath to air its dirty laundry in public, but here the decision seems to be to let it all hang out.

“Pope Francis ordered a criminal trial to proceed anyway, after the alleged victim wrote the pontiff directly”

The reward, of course, is that Francis and the Vatican will get tremendous credit for transparency should this trial, at the end, be perceived as thorough and fair, and the verdict as reasonable under the circumstances.

In other words, it's a pay now and claim your purchase later sort of deal, with the value of the purchase depending heavily on the integrity of the process. For that reason, the next three hearings in the case will be closely watched – including, one assumes, by the pontiff himself, who won't be in the room, but who nevertheless has almost as much riding on the result as the accused and the accusers themselves.

John L. Allen Jr is Editor of *CruXNow.com*

Nun says her Vatican appointment means ‘clericalist mindset is changing’

Xaviere Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart attends a news conference at the Vatican in this October 9, 2018, file photo. Last May Sister Becquart was one of six consultants appointed by Pope Francis to the general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Five of those appointed were women, and it was the first time women had served in that role. Photo: CNS



Inés San Martín

A French nun who could potentially be the first woman to cast a vote in the Synod of Bishops said February 10 that her appointment is evidence the “clericalist mindset is changing” as more and more women assume high-level decision-making responsibilities in the Catholic hierarchy.

Sister Nathalie Becquart told journalists that Pope Francis has been underlining the importance of including women in the decision-making processes, helping move the Church from a clericalist attitude towards a more synodal one.

“How can we somehow end with a clerical Church, where there have been abuses, of power and other kinds of abuses,” she asked, during a conference transmitted live from Rome via Zoom. “By being like Christ, by being at the service of others and accompanying others.”

Synod

The Synod of Bishops is a product of the Second Vatican Council, and since the late 1960s it has been

meeting in Rome semi-regularly to discuss a wide array of topics. It serves as an advisory body to the Pope, with no actual decision-making power.

No woman has ever voted in one of these meetings, though they have regularly taken part as observers, advisers, auditors and experts. Sr Becquart, appointed by Pope Francis as undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, could become the first woman to cast a vote. Though there’s no written rule that says the undersecretary does vote, it has been the tradition thus far.

“The Argentine pontiff has had an uneven record when it comes to women having greater say in Church governance”

Furthermore, Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, told the Vatican’s in-house media that “a door has been opened” for her to vote in the upcoming synod, to be held in 2022, on the issue of synodality.

“We will then see what other steps could be taken in the future,” he said regarding the role

of women in decision-making positions within the Church.

But Sr Becquart does not see her appointment as being about power, but rather, service: “Now that I have been appointed, the question is, how can I be of service? How can I use this authority for the service of the Church?”

Question

The French religious dodged the question of this being a “historic” moment in the life of the Church, saying that it’s not up to her to determine just how relevant it is: “The Holy Spirit is the one who is continually innovating. It is not for me to say whether my appointment is something historic. The big news is Jesus Christ, not me. I simply live it as a service.”

“Certainly, I believe that the Pope shows with these things that he is close to the People of God and, above all, that he listens to them,” she added, acknowledging that she believes her appointment to have been a “brave signal and prophetic decision” by Pope Francis.

The Argentine pontiff has had an uneven record when it comes to women having greater say in Church governance.

On the one hand, he’s made appointments such as that of Sr

Becquart, and there are several women serving as undersecretaries, including Sister Carmen Ros Nortes, at the Congregation for Religious, and Linda Ghisoni and Gabriella Gambino, at the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

On the other hand, he’s often made off-handed comments about women that many have found insensitive, including once calling female theologians the “strawberry in the cake”.

Francis has repeatedly ruled out ordaining women to the priesthood, but earlier this year allowed women to be officially appointed as lectors and acolytes – ministries reserved for men, but bestowed on seminarians before ordination – and he’s set up two commissions to look at women deacons in the Church.

The French woman called the Pope’s decision an “encouragement to all the religious”, and noted that she’s received congratulatory notes from people from all walks of lives after her appointment was announced.

Appointment

“I have welcomed the joy of so many Christian women upon learning of my appointment, but also of cardinals, bishops, priests, and also of Muslims, Jews”, and other people whom she said she’s

encountered through her life as a religious.

Sr Becquart took part both in the 2018 Synod on Youth and the 2019 Synod on the Amazon region.

“The Church has learned from the Synod of the Amazon the importance of empowering women,” she said. The question of ‘new ministries’ was often raised in the synod floors, and she said the Church has to be open for women to be in these new ministries and “not necessarily the ordained ones”.

“The French woman called the Pope’s decision an ‘encouragement to all the religious’

Sr Becquart also said that she hoped her appointment to the Synod of Bishops will inspire more women be appointed to councils in dioceses, parishes and the Church’s ecclesial movements.

She added that with her appointment, what is being underlined by Francis is “collegiality”, meaning not only bishops working together and collaborating with the Pope, but all members of the Church doing so, both men and women.

The religious sisters said this collegiality, “that has now been engraved in the structure of the synod” is the result of the fact that “at the roots, we are all Christians, all alike”.

“How can we somehow end with a clerical Church, where there have been abuses, of power and other kinds of abuses”

Letters

Letter of the week

Write to politicians urging public Mass re-opening

Dear Editor, Bishop Tom Deenihan is to be commended for his fine words on the need to get back to public Mass as soon as possible [IC 11/02/2021]. We have been without the nourishment of the Eucharist for so long and it is disappointing that whenever politicians speak of "opening up society" they so rarely talk about the need to allow Catholics to go to Mass.

Every day we are bombarded on the radio with advertisements from the Gov-

ernment urging us to mind our mental health during the pandemic. Attending Mass minds my mental health, but I'm not allowed to do that. Along with hundreds of thousands of other people in this country alone the Mass is a huge consolation to us as well as giving us the emotional, spiritual and mental wellbeing we need to continue on this difficult journey.

I fully accept that when the numbers are high there might be a need

to restrict certain aspects of public life, but our churches are so safe and we have shown time and again that it is possible to gather in a socially distanced way to ensure that everyone is safe and well.

I would appeal to fellow Catholics to write to their politicians urging them to get the churches re-opened for Mass as soon as possible.

Mary Woods
Athlone, Co. Westmeath

'Stunning' Angelus images made lasting impression

Dear Editor, I agree with the views of Herbert Eyre [IC 04/02/2021] regarding the accompaniment of the Angelus. In 1981, when we first received RTÉ on our television, it was the stunning images that accompanied the Angelus that made a lasting impression. The Old Masters, especially from the Netherlands Renaissance of the 15th-16th Centuries codified the importance of what this minute of prayer is.

The sad reality of the dumbing down of prayer with secular images fails to speak to the soul that requires sustenance. Like the ending of Tim Thurston's 'Gloria' on Lyric FM, overtly Catholic representation that demonstrates that we have a soul that seeks nourishment, has no place in our new secular utopia. However, as people of hope, let us do just that and who knows what can happen!

Yours etc.,
Fr John McCallion
Clonoe, Co. Tyrone



The complexities of Poland's wartime history

Dear Editor, With reference to Book Reviews 'Ireland's Poles, a new community in our ancient nation' [IC 28/01/2021], I would like to give some clarification as the information about the 1944 liberation of the Polish town of Lublin is somewhat misleading. Lublin was liberated from the Nazis by the Soviet Red Army. The complexity of Polish wartime history may not be known to your readers.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin granted 'amnesty' to Polish

prisoners of war deported to Soviet camps. This made conditions for the creation of Polish military units in the USSR. Two Polish armed forces in the east were formed separately and at different times. In late 1941 the Polish army was created under General W. Anders. This army – later known as the Polish 2nd Corps – was loyal to the Polish government-in-exile. In 1942, Anders' army evacuated to Iran, and from Iran to Palestine, to join the British army in Egypt and to fight with the western

Allies. They later took part in the Italian campaign, including the Battle of Monte Cassino.

Many Poles didn't manage to join Anders' army and remained in the Soviet Union. In 1943, the Polish Division was formed under General Z. Berling – the only senior Polish officer who accepted wartime service under Soviet command. This division was later a part of the Polish People's Army; it fought on the eastern front all the way to the Battle of Berlin. It operated under

Soviet command, in opposition to the Polish government-in-exile. However, some soldiers from Berling's army managed to get to Italy from Germany, to reach Anders' army. This is how Jan Kaminski (about whom Fr J. Anthony Gaughan writes in his review) found himself in Italy, and with the Anders' 2nd Corps. In 1946 he went to Britain.

Yours etc.,
Hanna Dowling, Irish Polish Society Secretary
Kilmacud, Dublin

Taking account of all aspects of mother and baby homes

Dear Editor, Thanks to Jason Osborne for highlighting the voices of women who say they had largely positive experiences in mother and baby homes [IC 11/02/2021]. I don't in any way dispute the details of the terrible stories women have told of their experience in the institutions. Nor do I accept that anything is ever one-dimensional. Getting these voices on the record, people who have had an experience different from the dominant media norm, is an important service to understanding the phenomenon in a way that takes account of all of the aspects.

Yours etc.,
Jean Campbell
Galway City

We have lost the value of human life

Dear Editor, the Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell has his work cut out for him in tackling knife crime in the capital [IC 11/02/2021]. There is an epidemic of violent disorder in large parts of Dublin and with so many young people now carrying knives, the consequences of any row or altercation can soon prove to be fatal.

I was pleased to see Dr Farrell pointing to the spiritual side of this problem. He is right, we have lost the value of human life and the sense that every life has value. In the absence of these principles, how cheap life becomes. God help us.

Yours etc.,
Ruth Costello,
Artane, Dublin

We mistreat children today in a more fatal way

Dear Editor, it strikes me that no-one is pointing out the obvious contradiction in those who cheered on abortion expressing outrage that women and their children were mistreated by Church and State in the past. We do the same today: rather than support women in crisis pregnancies, we offer them abortion. The issue is – again – unwanted babies. We just do something more permanent (and fatal) nowadays.

Yours etc.,
Colm Walshe,
Belfast, Co. Antrim

facebook community

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

Another Easter Mass ban 'difficult to justify' – bishop

Head and stone wall are the only words that come to mind when approaching the Government on this issue. – **Padraig Cosgrave**

This lockdown is bordering on a criminal act on our citizens by a Government that is proving its total stupidity on a daily basis. – **Pat Barry**

Thanks once again to Fr Kevin McNamara of Moyvane for his pastoral leadership in speaking up on Radio Kerry for the bereaved and the extremely tight restrictions on Requiem Mass attendances in large churches. – **Alan Whelan**

I hope all churches and places of worship will be open for Holy Week and Easter. If I have been vaccinated against Covid-19 surely I can attend Mass and receive the Blessed Sacrament during our most important season. Our priests are our heroes but we need to receive the Holy Eucharist. – **Deirdre Quinn**

Religious still helping those society might prefer not to see

One of the few certain things I've learned from life is that mobs are very rarely right and even then only briefly. – **Charles Glenn**

What would have happened if there were no mother and baby homes. Just pause for thought. – **Rita Teehan**

Of course there are but it rarely hits the media, because they are humble and do not look for glory publicly, so it is not seen, however it is good in fact to have some publicised from time to time, as otherwise a biased, prejudiced and limited view could be portrayed. – **Lisa Folley**

The past issues are just being used by atheists and lapsed Catholics as an excuse to attack the Church. If they had cared about the abuse of children they would not have voted for abortion. – **Gerry Donnelly**

People in need regularly turn to a parish house or a convent for help. There's a reason for that. – **Brian Gallacher**

So many religious have and do wonderful work here and overseas – still proud of them! – **Frank Browne**

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

Controversy on Ormeau Road

Dear Editor, Chai Brady's report on the controversy around the memorial on the Ormeau Road [IC 11/02/2021], reminds me of one sober fact about that loyalist atrocity: The only person ever detailed by the security forces in relation to the massacre of five Catholics in 1992 was one of the survivors who was arrested laying flowers at a prayer vigil for the deceased and their families.

Yours etc.,
John McKee
Craigavon, Co. Armagh

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.

Around the world



▲ **USA:** People gather in the Chinatown area of New York City for the 22nd New York City Lunar New Year celebration February 12, 2021, amid the coronavirus pandemic. Photos: CNS.

◀ **VATICAN:** The crowd in St Peter's Square attends the Angelus led by Pope Francis from the window of his studio overlooking the square at the Vatican February 14.



COLOMBIA: Residents form a human chain that stretches for nearly 12 miles to protest growing drug violence in Buenaventura, February 10.



ISRAEL: Nuns and others wait in line to receive a Covid-19 vaccination at a recently opened centre in Tel Aviv, February 9.



GERMANY: A German Red Cross volunteer distributes clothing for homeless people in Berlin, February 11.



FRANCE: Students receive food during a distribution in Paris organised by Linkee, a solidarity solution to food wastage, February 11.

There was no pain from which Jesus was spared

Recently I received a letter from a woman whose life, in effect, had imploded. Within the course of a few months, her husband divorced her, she lost her job, was forced to move from the house she had lived in for many years, was locked down in her new place by Covid restrictions, and was diagnosed with a cancer which might be untreatable. It was all too much. At a point, she broke down in anger and resignation. She turned to Jesus and with bitterness, said: "If you're there, and I doubt it, what do you know about any of this? You were never this alone!" I suspect that we all have moments like this. What did Jesus know of any of this?

A divine consciousness

Well, if we can believe the Gospels, Jesus did know all of this, not because he had a divine consciousness, but because like the woman in the story he knew right from the beginning what it meant to be the one standing alone, outside the normal human circle.

This is evident right from his birth. The Gospels tell us that Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stable because there was no room for them at the inn. That heartless innkeeper! The poor man has had to endure centuries of censure. However, that thought misses the



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

point of the story and misconstrues its meaning. The moral of this story is not that some heartless cruelty took place or that the world was too preoccupied with itself to take notice of Jesus' birth, though this latter implication is true. Rather the real point is that Jesus, the Christ, was born an outsider, as one of the poor, as someone who, right from the beginning, was not given a place in the mainstream. As Gil Bailie puts it, Jesus was unanimity-minus-one. How could it be otherwise?

Given who Jesus was, given that his central message was good news for the poor, and given that he entered into human life precisely to experience all it contains, including

its pains and humiliations, he could hardly have been born in a palace, enjoyed every kind of support, and been the center of love and attention. To be in real solidarity with the poor, as Merton once put it, he had to be born "outside the city"; and whether that was the case historically or not, it is a rich, far-reaching metaphor. Right from the beginning, Jesus knew both the pain and the shame of one who is excluded, who has no place in the mainstream.

When we look closely at the Gospels, we see that there was no human pain, emotional or physical, from which Jesus was spared. It is safe to say, I submit, that no one, irrespective of his or her pain, can

“Emotionally, he literally ‘sweated blood’, and physically, in his crucifixion, he endured the most extreme and humiliating pain possible for a human being to undergo”

say to Jesus: "You didn't have to undergo what I had to undergo!" He underwent it all.

“An old, classic definition of prayer tells us this: Prayer is lifting mind and heart to God”

During his ministry, he faced constant rejection, ridicule, and threat, sometimes having to hide away like a criminal on the run. He was also a celibate, one who slept alone, one deprived of normal human intimacy, one with no family of his own. Then in his passion and death, he experienced the extremes of both emotional and physical pain. Emotionally, he literally "sweated blood", and physically, in his crucifixion, he endured the most extreme and humiliating pain possible for a human being to undergo.

As we know, crucifixion was designed by the Romans with more than only capital punishment in mind. It was designed as well to inflict the maximum amount of pain and humiliation possible for a person to endure. That was one of the reasons they sometimes gave

morphine to the one being crucified, not to ease his pain, but to keep him from passing out and escaping the pain. Crucifixion was also designed to utterly humiliate the one being put to death. Hence, they stripped the person naked, so that his genitals were exposed and that in his dying convulsions the loosening of his bowels would be his final shame. As well, some scholars speculate that during the night leading up to his death on Good Friday, he may also have been sexually abused by the soldiers. Truly there was not a pain or humiliation he did not endure.

Prayer

An old, classic definition of prayer tells us this: Prayer is lifting mind and heart to God. Well, there will be low points in our lives when our circumstances will force us to lift our minds and hearts to God in a way that seems antithetical to prayer. Sometimes we will be brought to a breaking point where in brokenness, anger, shame, and in the despairing thought that nobody, including God, cares and that we are all alone in this, consciously or otherwise, we will confront Jesus with the words: And what do you know about that! And Jesus will hear those words as a prayer, as a sincere sigh of the heart, rather than as some kind of irreverence.

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Family & Lifestyle

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Entering into silence this Lent



Lent may pose a challenge for us this year – what more is there to give up? We're already devoid of so much, it may seem that giving up more is the last thing that God could be asking of us. However, as Jesus told the rich young man in Matthew's Gospel, everything has to be given up in order to gain heaven – it's not enough to go most of the way.

What I'm proposing, both for myself and for others this Lent, is to give up on noise and distraction; in other words, to enter into silence, insofar as our respective situations and settings allow us. In doing so, we're not only 'giving things up', which



Spiritual renewal is available right under our noses this Lent, writes Jason Osborne

we so often limit Lent to. We're giving ourselves the chance to take up greater freedom than ever before, by developing discipline, concentration and most importantly, a deeper prayer life.

Universal appeal

Before discussing the premium the Church has always placed

on silence, it's worth noting the increased appeal silence has come to hold in our oh-so-noisy world. Books on the benefits of silence and stillness have boomed in many genres, whether they be light, 'self-help' books, or deeper, more philosophical treatments of the topic.

Research has also achieved a greater insight into the

topic, with many findings and discoveries seeping into the public awareness, such as:

- Noise pollution's detrimental effect on our health, with a number of reports linking exposure to noise pollution to higher blood pressure, heart disease, and tinnitus.
- Exposure to continuous noise affects our stress levels by raising adrenaline.
- Exposure to silence has been observed to lower blood pressure and increase blood flow to the brain.
- Exposure to silence before bed, and the minimisation of distraction, is linked to a better night's sleep.

These are just a selection of the findings that have migrated into the realm of common sense, and there are many more. The popularity of the practice of 'mindfulness' is also traceable to an increased understanding of the importance of silence and stillness.

Stillness

Silence is often linked with stillness, especially in the Church's tradition. However, in today's world, this knowledge has resulted from a better understanding of the detrimental effects of excessive distraction,

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Family News



AND EVENTS

CORONAVIRUS: BAT SCIENTISTS FIND NEW EVIDENCE

The BBC reported that coronaviruses related to Sars-CoV-2 may be circulating in bats across many parts of Asia. Scientists have discovered a virus that is a close match to the virus that causes Covid-19 in bats at a sanctuary in Thailand. They predict that similar coronaviruses may be present in bats across many Asian regions. The recent discovery extends the area in which similar viruses have been found to a distance of 4,800km. It also gives clues as to how Covid-19 might have emerged. The researchers say that sampling was limited, but that they were confident that coronaviruses with a "high degree of genetic relatedness" to Sars-CoV-2 are widely present in bats across many Asian nations. The area includes Japan, China and Thailand, the researchers said in a report published in *Nature Communications*. Past studies suggested that Sars-CoV-2 emerged in an animal, the most likely candidate being a bat, before spreading to humans.

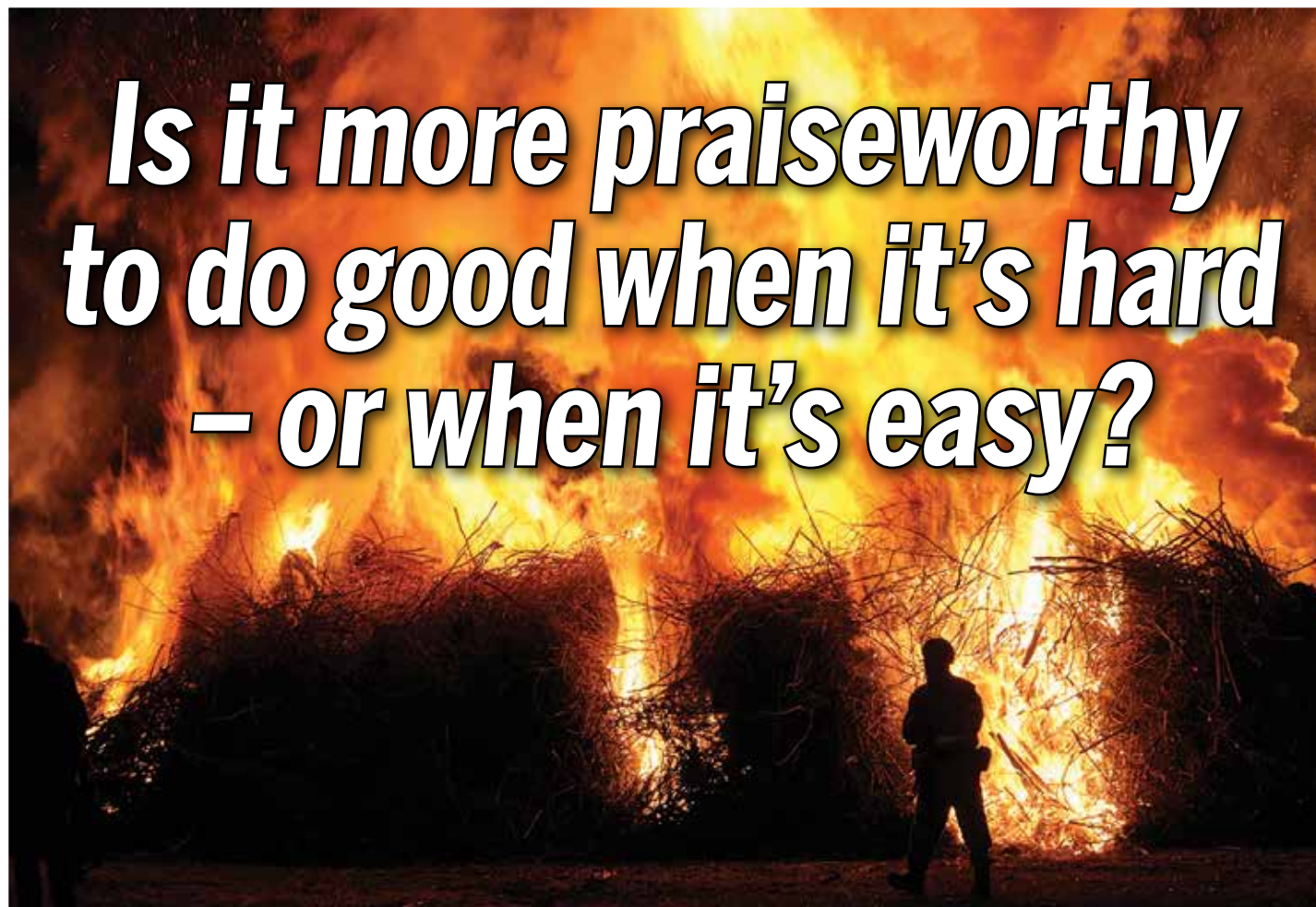
BITCOIN USES 'MORE ELECTRICITY THAN ARGENTINA'

Analysis by Cambridge University hints that the cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, uses more electricity annually than the entirety of Argentina. Cambridge researchers say it consumes around 121.36 terawatt-hours a year, and is unlikely to fall unless the value of the currency drops. The currency's value recently hit a record high of \$48,000 (€39,570) after electric car company, Tesla, announced that it had bought about \$1.5 billion Bitcoin and planned to accept it as a payment in the future. "Mining" the currency uses a lot of power, and involves heavy computer calculations to verify transactions. The rising price offers more incentive to Bitcoin "miners" to use more and more machines. As the price increases, so too does energy consumption, according to Michel Rauchs, researcher at The Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance. He co-created the online tool that generates these estimates. "It is really by design that Bitcoin consumes that much electricity," Mr Rauchs told BBC's *Tech Tent* podcast. "This is not something that will change in the future unless the Bitcoin price is going to significantly go down."

'HANGING' GLACIER BROKE OFF TO TRIGGER INDIA FLOOD

A flash flood in India's northern state of Uttarakhand killed at least 32 people and trapped workers in underground tunnels. It also ignited much speculation about what caused the deluge. A team of scientists investigating the incident believe a piece of a Himalayan glacier fell into water and triggered the huge flood in Uttarakhand state. Five scientists flew over the glacier in a helicopter, taking pictures, and looked at satellite photographs and collected data from the devastated area. The origin of the incident, they say, was a glacier on a remote and inaccessible 5,600m peak called Raunthi. The scientists believe that a part of this glacier was wrapped around and hanging on a slope, held up by a mass of rock. This part weakened over a period of time due to freezing and melting. This chunk of ice and rock broke off February 7, and hurtled down a steep mountain slope, they say.

Is it more praiseworthy to do good when it's hard – or when it's easy?



Imagine two firefighters. Lynda regularly puts herself in danger, entering burning buildings to perform difficult rescues that others are too afraid to. Lynda isn't reckless: she's extremely competent and only tries rescues that she thinks have a good chance of success. But she is fearless, or close to it: fear for her is a fairly mild feeling, and she doesn't let it stop her doing her job. Lynda takes this same fearlessness into the rest of her life: she doesn't get paralysed by nerves in social situations, and she eagerly seizes opportunities that others find intimidating. To her, this is easy: she relishes being the sort of person she is and is happy about the good things her fearlessness enables her to do.

“He does his best to emulate Lynda's behaviour in the rest of his life too, and his actions are generally courageous ones”

To outward appearances, her colleague Edgar is just as fearless – he puts himself into situations just as dangerous, often serving as Lynda's backup. But unlike Lynda, Edgar finds this horribly difficult. Each and every burning house he goes into terrifies him, and he has to push down fear every time in order to do his job. But he's successful: he's just as competent a firefighter as Lynda. He is determined to use that skill for the good of others, even though doing so puts him through the wringer. He does his best to emulate Lynda's behaviour in the rest of his life too, and his actions are generally courageous ones. But again, he always has to fight – with



Everyday philosophy Ben Conroy

difficulty – past anxiety and fear: he knows that taking brave actions are objectively good and that giving into his fear would make his life worse, but he finds it much more unpleasant than Lynda does.

Who is more admirable? Which of them is braver? The answer to this divides philosophers.

On the one side is Immanuel Kant. Kant believed that acting from moral duty alone is the purest and highest motive. If you do something good because you enjoy it, you deserve less credit. On the other side lies Aristotle: his view was that someone who does good with difficulty is not fully virtuous, though they're on the right track. It's better to love the good that you do, to freely and easily perform good actions, than it is to struggle every time.

Praiseworthy

Each of these positions has intuitive plausibility. More difficult feats do seem more praiseworthy. But we also think that there's something admirable about ease in virtue too: a person who easily and genuinely speaks kindly to others is more admirable than a person who says their kind words through gritted teeth.

At the risk of trying to square a circle: perhaps there's something to both Aristotle's view and Kant's. There are, after all, different kinds of admiration. When I see the Grand Canyon, I am impressed

and awed, but I'm not inclined to give the rocks credit for being beautiful. So perhaps Lynda's courage is more impressive and worthy of admiration in the way the Grand Canyon is, but Edgar should get more moral credit. That difference is important, but it doesn't capture the whole of it though. We don't want



to imitate the Grand Canyon or take it as a role model, but Lynda is, plausibly, more worthy of imitation than Edgar. If we could choose a version of courage to try to aim for it would be hers: the state that Lynda is in seems like a better state to be in.

Limits

At this point, the limits of my thought experiment begin to show themselves. What it leaves out is the story of how

Edgar and Lynda got to be like this. It could be that Edgar and Lynda were naturally predisposed to be the way they are now from childhood. In that case, we might say that Edgar is more worthy of praise even though Lynda is in a better state: he's had to work harder to improve from his baseline. But it might be that Lynda and Edgar started off equally fearful. Lynda has simply been practising doing brave things for longer, and eventually came to love being courageous and find it easy. Here she would be more admirable in both ways. It also matters whether Edgar's anxiety is more like a character trait that can be changed through habit-forming, or more like a psychological condition which is mostly out of his control.

“That in our lives we rarely know the full stories of those around us should, if nothing else, inspire us to be charitable in our judgments”

Regardless, the way Lynda is now is objectively better, but the credit we give to each for their current level of courage depends on how they reached the place they are now. How much credit we give them depends on the extent to which we know their story. That in our lives we rarely know the full stories of those around us should, if nothing else, inspire us to be charitable in our judgments.

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being distracted as never before with smartphones, social media, and instant access to most films, TV and more.

I don't know how many times I've opened my laptop to accomplish some task, only to be waylaid by YouTube, Twitter or Facebook. I also know I'm not the only one, with friends and peers suffering from the same plight. Whether it be Netflix or video games, the scope for instant escapism from the task at hand has never been greater.

An awareness of the necessity of stillness arises not so much from an awareness of the need to slow down physically, but rather from an awareness of the need to slow down mentally and spiritually. Opening new windows on a laptop or phone every few minutes or seconds, swapping rapidly between videos and articles on different topics, and cycling the news endlessly (particularly when the news is as grim as it is), has unrivalled potential to set our minds racing, which is especially noticeable before bed.

Noise

C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* outlined a conversation between two demons, which went, "We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth". It is here that we hit upon the real harm and damage done by noise and ceaseless distraction – it has spiritual effects. Lost in the cacophony, we find it near impossible to hear God's voice and follow his direction.

Of course, the spiritual effects of noise are the most severe, and it is those that we are most trying to mitigate in making an effort to grow in silence during Lent. Lent being modelled upon Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, we seek to emulate him in his asceticism and prayer, in the hope that we'll stride forth empowered, as he did.

The Church and silence

The Church has always upheld silence as one of the primary settings for encountering God, and this is set down first and foremost in Scripture. The prophet Elijah hears God in

"a still, small voice" upon Mount Horeb, following gusts of wind, an earthquake and fire. Moses went up on the mountain alone to enter into dialogue with God, just as Jesus would travel into the wilderness, first during the 40 days, then at various times throughout his public ministry.

“There is nothing so much like God in all the universe as silence”

Cardinal Robert Sarah comments on this in his book *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*. He says, "No prophet ever encountered God without withdrawing into solitude and silence. Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist encountered God in the great silence of the desert. Today, too, monks seek God in solitude and silence. I am speaking, not just about a geographical solitude or movement, but about an interior state. It is not enough to be quiet, either. It is necessary to become silence."

Why would we want to become silence? Because, as Meister Eckhart is widely quoted as saying, "There is nothing so much like God in all the universe as silence". If we want to become like him this Lent, we have to be silent.



Trust

Silence is above all about trust and humility. Much of the reason we're so busy, active and distracted is because we don't really trust God to take care of everything if he's left to his own devices. To slow down, to cease your restless efforts, without becoming lazy, is to cast your life into God's hands. As Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God".

If we wish to see God's action in our lives, we have to make space for him. This is a lesson Moses and the Israelites learned the hard way as they fled Egypt and Pharaoh's forces. Panicked as they were about the pursuit, God tells them in Exodus 14:14, "The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still".

Practicalities

So how do we trust God more, just as the prophets did, and as so many continue to do around the world today? By stepping back and trusting that our lives, and the world, won't fall apart if we're not constantly 'plugged in'. A couple of Lenten resolutions that might result in better health, both physical and spiritual, include:

- Giving up social media, Netflix, and/or TV.
- Only checking the news on a weekly basis.
- Taking up 'slower' activities, like reading, painting, walking, etc.
- Practicing a daily holy hour.
- Incorporating silence into your day, whether by leaving your earphones behind, or by engaging in silent, contemplative prayer.
- Turning off electronics after a certain time of the night.

These practical steps, when aligned with a deep prayer life, should lead us closer to God over the 40 days of Lent. Of course, our ability to take up or drop activities and practices depends on our personal situations, but any effort in God's direction is always rewarded.

Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

Lent has begun and yet it all feels somehow out of kilter. I usually look forward to Lent, to the sense of pause, of a change in rhythm, a re-tuning of life. This year I have felt differently. I mentioned this to a friend recently and her comment was, "Sure haven't we been living Lent for the past year!"

Her words rang true. Over the past year we have lived with a level of deprivation and self-restraint which carries strong echoes of Lenten penances. We miss the opportunity to meet with friends and family. We long to reach out to each other with hugs and kisses. A simple cup of coffee in a café with a friend feels like the stuff of dreams. But we have accepted these restrictions, lived within this confinement – not always happily, frequently with a sense of frustration and exasperation. It has not been and will not be easy.

So now, as we enter into Lent, how are you doing? When I look around, when I listen to friends or when I examine my own deeper feelings I realise that there is a great tiredness around. People are struggling more with this lockdown than any of the others. How then do we engage with Lent when life already feels stripped back, basic, functional?

I caught a little of a beautiful film the other day, called *Risen*, the story of a Roman Tribune sent to find out what had happened to the body of Jesus and who had stolen it away from the tomb. It is the story of his discovery of the followers of Jesus, his increasing involvement with them, his encounter with the risen Christ. Afterwards I found myself thinking of how the followers of Jesus were portrayed. What struck me was the tender care between them, the emotional exhaustion, the fragility and yet the strength of hope, the joy in hearing that two of their companions have met the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

It made me think back to times of being on retreat during Holy Week – the intensity of Holy Thursday and Good Friday, the strange, quiet, gentle waiting of Holy Saturday. And so I find myself feeling that in some way this Lent we are being invited into an extended Holy Saturday. We have indeed been living the

paschal mystery in so many ways over the past year – as that ever-present, just below the surface frisson of anxiety reminds us. The washing of feet has taken form in the care provided in our hospitals and homes throughout the year where people ill with Covid have been tended to with heroic gentleness. The cross



has been made real in the loss of all those who have died, from Covid and from countless other causes and in the grief – complicated by social distancing and Government restrictions – of their families and friends.

So maybe this Lent is an invitation into that liminal, in-between space of Holy Saturday, a time to wait, to pray, to be present and to cultivate hope. Just as we believe that Easter joy follows the tragedy of the cross so we know that we are moving towards a liberation from this pandemic. We do not know when life will be restored to us, when we will call down casually to a neighbour and stay for a cup of tea, when we will know again the deep joy of greeting a loved one with a good hug but we believe that those days are coming. We too will have our Easter dawn.

In the meantime this Lent, let us be gentle with ourselves and with each other. Let us make time for God, sit in peace, walk in the awakening Spring, read the Gospel of the day and ponder. We are all tired, so let's try to fast from negativity, from the sharp word, the easily taken offence. We have been reminded that we are suffering this pandemic as a global family. Let us allow the Trócaire Lenten Campaign to challenge us, to nourish our empathy and sense of solidarity, to spur us to action. Lent this year is a time for tenderness. Let us love one another.

Spreading God's word on the airwaves

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

In the year that Pope St John Paul II came to Ireland, Fr Seamus Kelly MSC (Missionary of the Sacred Heart) took a plane in a different direction. Two years to the day that he was ordained to the priesthood – 17 December 1979 – Fr Kelly travelled to spread the word in Venezuela, where he established a thriving ministry through the media and retreats.

Before Fr Kelly determined to be a priest, he thought he wanted to be a veterinarian. He attended secondary school at the Sacred Heart College, Carrignavar, Co. Cork. Here, he felt himself drawn in a different direction.

“After finishing in his studies in Ireland, Fr Kelly spent a year in Rugby, England, working at an MSC school”

“I was sick and you visited me, I was homeless and you helped me’ (Mt 25:31-43) – that parable convinced me that I should help other people in their needs,” Fr Kelly tells *The Irish Catholic*. “A priest gave a talk – it was a Sacred Heart college in Carrignavar – and I thought I’d try it. So I went to the seminary, and thank God I got through it and was ordained in 1977.”

After finishing in his studies in Ireland, Fr Kelly spent a year in



Fr Seamus Kelly MSC.

Rugby, England, working at an MSC school. Then, he spent a further year studying Spanish in Spain before finally setting out on what was to become his life's mission.

Priesthood

“It was in December 1979, the same day of my ordination to the priesthood, 17 December 79, that I arrived in Venezuela,” says Fr Kelly. “I was there until 2016 and I enjoyed the time. We all worked in the parishes and then I worked in vocations, going into schools to get young men to join us. It was a very enriching time for myself.

“After that I started giving a lot of retreats throughout Latin America. I went to different countries where I was asked to preach. I started a radio station, called Lumen (2000), it was a

station that was there before us. It wasn't working so we took it on board and got it working and it continues to this day, thank God.”

“Back in Ireland, Fr Seamus is active on Instagram and is constantly trying to improve his grasp of social media”

Fr Seamus modest description of his work doesn't do it the full justice. For more than 15 years, he ran weekly programs on satellite TV, as well as running a radio station that ran 24 hours a day. It covered the west of the country

with a potential listenership of six million people. Back in Ireland, Fr Seamus is active on Instagram and is constantly trying to improve his grasp of social media.

A true knowledge

“I think it's very important,” he says. “I mean, you look at media today, especially now with Covid-19, it's a way that we can reach out with people. They're all involved today with this medium. The radio station, I was a co-ordinator for it. It was an uplifting ministry and the media today, we have to use it. You're involved with *The Irish Catholic*, I think that's very important as well, give people a true knowledge of what's happening in the world around us. The radio station helped me in getting involved in my ministry.”

Fr Seamus returned to Ireland in 2016, finding it, as many missionaries do, much changed. He works as a chaplain to a home for the elderly and helps out in his MSC parish in Cork. He believes that Ireland is similar to Venezuela when he first arrived.

“Ireland's a very different situation today than when I was growing up,” Fr Seamus says. “I suppose it's getting a bit like in South America where we were. People would turn up for marriages and weddings, there's not as much fervour as there was before. But still there's good, there are a lot of people with great faith here in Ireland and I must say I find it good. When I'm here, I help out with the parish on Western Road in Cork at weekends – I find that very good as well.”

Though he has been back in Ireland for four years, Fr Seamus' heart remains with the people of Venezuela.

“I found it strange to be back in Ireland, but I'm hoping to get back to Venezuela again in the near future,” he says. “My heart is there, I would love to go back to Venezuela to the poor and the people I knew. Hopefully please

God, we'll see how things go. We're a missionary group there, we do the work that we can, our priests are still involved but it's a situation that is difficult today. The whole thing has changed because of poverty and the political situation in the country. It has completely changed everything.

Fr Seamus feels very strongly about the plight of the people in Venezuela, where the disastrous presidency of Hugo Chavez up to 2012 has affected the country badly.

“It's a very upset and unstable society, the majority of people are living in poverty, 4 and half million people have left the country”

“It changed a little bit at the beginning, when I first arrived,” he continues. “It was a very prosperous country when I arrived, a very rich country. But then politically, it was taken over by Hugo Chavez, he got in on a promise of helping the poor. But he became a communist ideologue and there was a lot of destroying, trying to get rid of the old structures. He was involved very much with Cuba. He really left the country in a different state today. It's a very upset and unstable society, the majority of people are living in poverty, 4 and half million people have left the country. It's a very difficult political situation today.

“I still keep in contact, I try and help in any way I can. As missionaries, we're involved in two parishes, three in Caracas, one in Maracaibo, we have a formation house for our students. Hopefully I will be able to get back again to the work I was doing,” Fr Seamus finishes.

Lockdown relationship starting to feel like Groundhog Day

This third lockdown has been particularly challenging for our relationship, not only does every day feel like Groundhog Day but our relationship is beginning to feel like that too.

So you're at the stage now like so many other couples where perhaps doing the weekly date night at home just isn't cutting it any more. It's now coming up to a year that we have been in and out of lockdown, you've been away from friends, family, hobbies and touchpoints that help you to remember who you are as a couple and individuals. There isn't going to be a magic wand, the focus for now needs to be on protecting your marriage and trying to stay positive while accepting the difficulties you face.

We know how we should physically look after ourselves, wear a mask, wash your hands and keep your distance, but there are another three things that are important in looking after our relationship. I can't help but think of the advice that Pope Francis talks about in the importance of saying 'Please', 'Thank you', and 'I'm sorry'. Can you remember the last time you said any of these words to your spouse?

We have to accept and talk about our feelings, it's normal and ok to feel isolated (even though you're together) anxious, stressed, burned out, talking about it will help. What's more

important is exploring which things will help you cope better. For you it could be getting a walk every day, for your husband it could be a weekly catch up with friends on Zoom. If you don't know each other's coping mechanisms it will be hard to help one another through this. Accepting it is hard is part of it, the other important tool is separately and together practice gratitude for all the good things in your relationship and your life.

It's important you have time for quality time together and also for time apart. A nice way to break out of groundhog day for going on a trip down memory lane, pull out some old photo albums, watch some old holiday videos

and when you do have your at home date night, why not dress up? You can also use it as time to set new priorities for your relationship and your family.

And don't forget the importance of time for yourself, there shouldn't be an expectation just because you're at home together that you need to spend all your free time together.

You could try doing an online Alpha Marriage course, or the Family Enrichment marriage course or following the CANA@home marriage series. You can use this time to set new priorities for your relationship. It's a good time to revisit something like doing the Love Languages test online, which helps you understand each other's needs, how they are different and how to best meet them. With all the extra time at home what better than to invest it in your marriage.



Wendy Grace

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Finding fresh perspectives on issues of faith

When it comes to the Church and religious matters it's hard to find a perspective that's different, new, unpredictable, fresh or unique.

I got all of that on **The Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio One, Friday) when Michael Comyn interviewed Vincent Doyle who supports the children of priests through his initiative Coping International. His book *Our Fathers* explores the matter further. This was no Church-bashing exercise, but seemed a more thoughtful, nuanced approach from within the Church. Mr Doyle studied theology in Maynooth and Mater Dei, having always found himself drawn to the Church and the Faith. It was only during his studies that he found out that he was the son of a priest – this 'aha moment' explained a lot for him.

Pastoral

His main concern was the pastoral care and support for children in this situation. He found an open door and a positive welcome when he approached the Church authorities on the issue, a sense that the Church was going to get this right. In particular he valued the welcome he got from Archbishops Diarmuid Martin and Charles Browne, then Papal Nuncio.

He questioned the default practice of priests being sus-



Waking the Dead provided no end of clichés about Catholicism

ended from ministry when the existence of such children came to light – this could be disadvantageous to the child – e.g. having a now unemployed father who had lost the position that was his life's commitment. This practice also drove the silence around the issue. Now he found it was more of an option for the priest to re-commit to chastity and acknowledge the child.

He said people expected him to call in his book for the abolition of celibacy. But he thought if improvements and solutions were dependent on that, then "the children would starve". It was however an issue that couldn't be avoided. It wasn't just a lack of good

priests, he said, but "a lack of good fathers who are priests". Teasing that idea would have been interesting but the interview ended too quickly.

Also with an interesting perspective was Sr Patricia Murray, Executive Secretary of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG). Speaking of the role of women in the Church she saw a distinction between ordained ministry and decision-making. She had seen a lot of changes in the papacy of Pope Francis, with many more women being appointed to key roles in the Church. Mr Comyn raised the issue of women priests, which, he suggested, was the "final phase in

the search for equality" but Sr Murray had a different view – equality wasn't about everyone doing the same thing but about parity of esteem for different ministries.

Vaccines

Meanwhile, back in Covid-19 territory, Fr Vincent Twomey SVD, moral theologian, reviewed the moral aspects of the vaccines in an interview on **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Wednesday) Fr Twomey made the case that it was a moral duty, "under certain conditions" to take the vaccine in order to protect others who were vulnerable and for the common good of society. In his case it was the

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday February 21, 11am

Fr Paul Thornton with a congregation and musicians from Brakenstown parish, Swords, Co. Dublin, marks the start of Lent with a Mass celebrating the work of Trócaire.

GREAT BRITAIN IN FOCUS

EWTN Wednesday February 24, 11am

A new magazine programme featuring guests and discussions relevant to current events in the Church, contemporary culture, and life as a Catholic in the modern world.

CHILDREN OF THE TROUBLES

RTÉ One Wednesday February 24, 10.35pm

Joe Duffy explores the lives and tragic deaths of the children who were killed during 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

older people in his immediate community. On the other hand, he was not in favour of the State making it mandatory on its citizens though he allowed for certain employments to insist on it for the employees if they were working with vulnerable people, without sacking anyone over it. A temporary removal from employment might be necessary, but with Government support kicking in.

On the concerns of pro-life people over how vaccines were derived or tested, he sought to reassure, pointing to the Vatican's approval of taking these vaccines. It was a useful and different contribution to the debate, but what bugged me was Mr Kenny's reference to "what is termed the pro-life movement" – a qualifying reference I've never heard him apply to other movements – e.g. Black Lives Matters. In fact

the only other example I can think of is the media's almost universal use of the term 'so-called ISIS'. Back in the 1980s I remember the late Brendan Shortall calling him out live on air for his reference to the 'so-called Pro-Life Amendment Campaign'. Leopards and spots occur to me.

Finally, it was striking how many prejudices and stereotypes relating to Catholicism were in the mix in the British cop series **Waking the Dead**, (Drama channel, Tuesday). This melodramatic potboiler featured an Opus Dei assassin, a pro-choice seductress of bankers who was also a member, a sly dig at a 'good Catholic girl' and an old favourite, Catholic guilt.

✉ boregan@hotmail.com,
[@boreganmedia](https://twitter.com/boreganmedia)

Music

Pat O'Kelly



Cara contributed to the artistic life of the city she dearly loved

While I knew she had been ill, news of Cork-born soprano Cara O'Sullivan's death on January 26 – aged 59 – came as a shock. Cara possessed a wonderfully vibrant voice to match her vivacious personality and had a natural artistry in a wide-ranging repertoire from the baroque through the classical and romantic to the contemporary.

Her inherent ability to communicate with any audience had her equally at home in opera house and concert hall as well as leading the rousing choruses of the sporting anthem *Stand Up and Fight*, particularly at Munster rugby matches. Musically, there was 'no side' to Cara O'Sullivan.



The late Cara O'Sullivan who died on January 26.

She studied at the Cork School of Music in the late 1970s along with co-Corkonian soprano Mary Hegarty. They later appeared together

at Garsington Opera in Mozart's *Il Seraglio* with Cara in the role of defiant Konstanze, which includes one of the composer's most demanding arias, and Mary as her impetuous English maid, Blonde.

Mozart

Cara excelled in other Mozart roles not least the sinister queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* and aristocratic Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, which she sang at Glyndebourne in 1995 and with Welsh National Opera the following year. She repeated the queen for the DGOS in 1996 and Donna Anna for Opera Ireland in 2009.

Having taken time out for a period in the 1980s to

rear her daughter, Cara then came under the guidance of the ubiquitous Veronica Dunne and through the latter's influence was tutored by diva Dame Joan Sutherland.

Once back on track Cara became RTÉ's 'Musician of the Future' in 1990, was Ireland's entry in the Cardiff 'Singer of the World' in 1993 and took first prize in the Stanislaw Moniuszko International Vocal Competition in Warsaw in 1995.

She toured with Glyndebourne Opera as well making regular appearances with Welsh National and other opera companies that took her as far afield as Cincinnati and Sydney Opera House. Ever versatile, Cara O'Sullivan was awarded her first class

honours MA from the Cork School of Music in 2006.

Cancer

Occasional battles with cancer disrupted Cara's career from time to time and, very sadly, early-onset dementia brought her public appearances to an end in 2018. The following year she was honoured with the inaugural Cork Cultural Award for her outstanding contributions to the artistic life of the city she dearly loved. May her soul rest in peace.

Continuing to trawl through the Dublin Operatic Society's archives I was amused to find **NO ENCORES** in bold block capitals in the

programme for the opening production in 1928. However, audience appreciation was unbridled as Welsh tenor Ben Williams "brought the house down" in *Mignon* in 1937.

The same year DOS presented two seasons at the Gaiety Theatre with *La traviata*, *Mignon* and *Madama Butterfly* in one and *La bohème*, *Carmen* and *The Daughter of the Regiment* in the other. Making her debut as Philine in *Mignon*, Dublin soprano May Devitt "impressed everyone...with her coloratura showpiece *I am Titania* admirable for its light-heartedness, beauty of tone and vocal display". More on DOS anon.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Murder answered by murder

A Zealous Priest: The Murder of Fr Michael Griffin 1920

by Pat O'Looney
(Islemeen, Loughrea, Co Galway; €15.00 from Charlie Byrne's Books in Galway and other outlets)

J. Anthony Gaughan

This biography of Fr Michael Griffin includes a microscopic account of the circumstances surrounding his tragic death. It is written by Pat O'Looney a local historian, well known for his activities with local heritage societies in the Loughrea area.

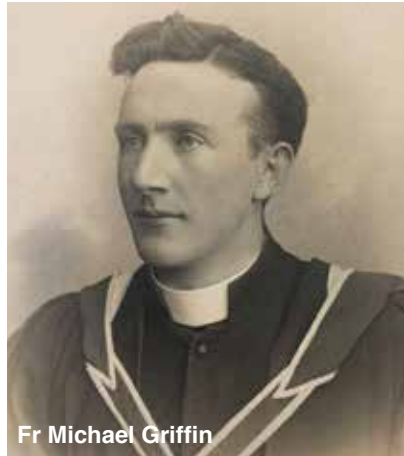
Michael Griffin was born at Gurteen, near Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, on September 18, 1892. He was educated at St Joseph's College, Ballinasloe, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, and was ordained on April 29, 1917. He served as a curate in Ennistymon, Co. Clare, from 1917 to 1918. Then he was transferred to a similar appointment in the parish of Rahoon on the outskirts of Galway city.

Like many of his contemporaries in Maynooth he had strong nationalist views, was a supporter of Home Rule and Sinn Féin and was profoundly influenced by the Easter Rising and its aftermath. His nationalism was evident in his avid support for the Gaelic League, his determination to speak Irish fluently and as frequently as possible and numerous *feiseanna* he helped to organise.

Autumn

In the autumn and winter of 1920 the War of Independence was at its most intense with the IRA and the crown forces matching atrocities. In October the IRA in Galway succeeded in identifying Patrick Joyce as the person providing the authorities with frequent and detailed information about them and their movements. By a curious coincidence he was the principal of Barna national school for which Fr Griffin had pastoral responsibility.

With the permission of IRA HQ, the local IRA court-martialled Mr Joyce and 'executed' him. As was their practice they made a priest – not Fr Griffin – available to him before his death. Mr Joyce's body was buried secretly and



Fr Michael Griffin

was not recovered by his family until 1998.

Mr Joyce

It became generally known that Mr Joyce had the assistance of a priest before his death. When this reached the ears of the auxiliaries and black and tans in the area they were infuriated that priests were co-operating with the IRA in this manner.

It is probable that Fr John O'Meehan, an active supporter of the IRA and known as such, was to be the target for vengeance on the fateful night of November 14, 1920. He shared the same residence as Fr Michael but was not there on that night.

Thus after a busy Sunday, Fr Michael was awakened at midnight to "attend to a sick-call". He was taken to Lenaboy Castle, the billet occupied by the auxiliaries, and shot. On the following night his body was taken to a bog near Barna and was buried in a shallow grave. It would seem that this location was chosen by the auxiliaries to make a public statement that Fr Griffin's murder was a reprisal for that of Patrick Joyce who they believed had been buried in that locality. After almost a week spent searching for the priest, his body was discovered.

The outpouring of grief at the fate of Fr Michael was remarkable even for those awful times. Like the other crimes committed by undisciplined members of the crown forces it hastened the end of British rule.

The saving insights of Catholic social teaching for an imperfect world

Counsels of Imperfection: Thinking Through Catholic Social Teaching

Edward Hadas
(Catholic University of America Press, \$34.05/£36.50 paperback)

Frank Litton

This is not a propitious moment for Catholic social teaching (CST) in Ireland. Not only is there no serious conversation on the condition of our society and the future of our politics; if there were the Church would hardly be a welcomed interlocutor.

It is hard to gauge the influence of Catholic social teaching on politics and policy-making. The exigencies of capitalism managed in a liberal democratic order have largely determined the trajectory of our history.

Impact

The impact of the Church was minor and largely supportive of the dynamics. We could perhaps point to the 'social partnership' of the 1980s and 1990s that is credited with making way for the Celtic Tiger.

Certainly, this exercise in 'neo-corporatism' had echoes of the corporatism favoured by the Church in the inter-war years. Its immediate inspiration, however was the 'Nordic model' popular with small European states. Our version did have a unique feature: representatives of the unemployed, the marginalised and excluded joined the unions and employers in search of the common good.

Anti-capitalist

Overall, the anti-capitalist element in CST was muted and

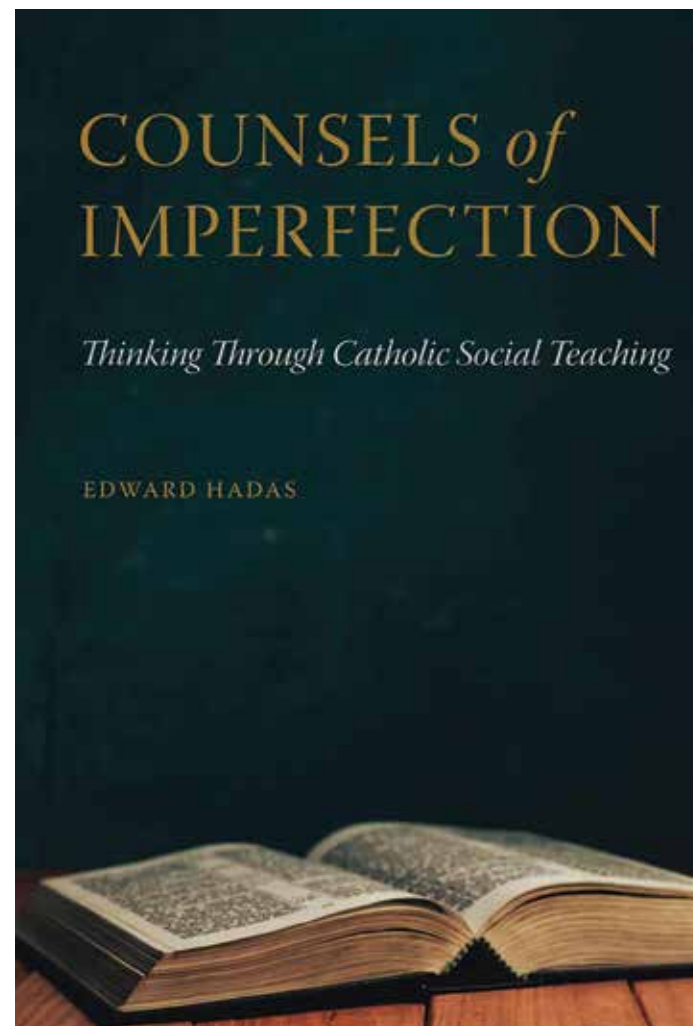


the decision to open the economy to the forces of international capital and rely on foreign direct investment (FDI) for our economic prosperity went unchallenged. It is hardly surprising that we endorse the neoliberal mindset with its individualism even if we sometimes grumble at its policies.

Such unreflective satisfaction is not found in other liberal democracies. The prospect of catastrophic climate change, the growing inequality of a capitalism untethered from the control of national states and a changing political landscape where traditional political parties lose members and supporters, displaced by populists, both left and right unsettles expectations. A lively debate is emerging on the limitations of the liberal order that brought Europe peace and prosperity after the Second World War.

“The exigencies of capitalism managed in a liberal democratic order have largely determined the trajectory of our history”

Edward Hadas, a research scholar at the Dominicans' Blackfriars Hall in Oxford, provides an excellent guide to what CST can contribute to this debate. Dr Hadas is clear: CST does not – as Marxism and neoliberalism do – promise to solve all the world's problems. We cannot escape the



The funeral of Fr Michael Griffin

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.



Author Edward Hadas

imperfections of this fallen world. We are, willy-nilly, complicit in them and they dim our vision. We can, however, learn to see them for what they are, taught by revelation and the Church's moral tradition.

The book opens with a chapter outlining the guiding ideas of CST and the context in which they emerged. Subsequent chapters discuss how these play out in practice, starting with a review of their biblical and philosophical bases. Dr Hadas is well informed on both. Thanks to his work as a journalist, he knows how the world works. This gives the book its particular strength. As he discusses economics, Church and state, war and peace and ecology we learn of the strengths and failures of the Church as a teacher who was often slow to catch up with the realities confronting her students.

Dr Hadas points to the many positives of the modern world and the liberal democratic order while noting the Church's reservations: democracy, human rights that acknowledge human dignity,

an economic order that brought comfort and prosperity to many and has reduced the afflictions of poverty across the world. There is light but there are also shadows. As these become more threatening, CST becomes more relevant even if it goes against the grain of neoliberal culture.

“The prospect of catastrophic climate change, the growing inequality of a capitalism untethered from the control of national states and a changing political landscape”

CST cannot be ‘a laying down of the law’; it is a conversation in which the world of faith encounters the business of making a living and finding peace, seeking a merging of horizons that brings the ‘Kingdom’ closer. Dr Hadas inspires us to join that conversation.

“This exercise in ‘neo-corporatism’ had echoes of the corporatism favoured by the Church in the inter-war years”

The dark shadow of the medieval Black Death

Recently a friend of mine asked me what the visitation of the Black Death to Ireland at the end of the 1340s was like. He was wondering how it compared to the present Covid-19 infection.

Actually, a very vivid record exists: it was first printed coincidentally in Dublin in 1849, when the country was trying to recover from another terrible scourge - the Great Famine.

It is to be found in a chronicle compiled in the southeast of Ireland. It was composed by a Franciscan who over the centuries speaks well for himself.

“And I, Brother John Clyn, of the Order of Friars Minor and of the convent of Kilkenny, wrote in this book those notable things which happened in my time, which I saw with my own eyes, or which I learned from people worthy of belief. And in case things which should be remembered perish with time and vanish from the memory of those who are to come after us, I, seeing so many evils and the whole world, as it were, placed within the grasp of the evil one, being myself as if among the dead, waiting for death to visit me, have put into writing truthfully all the things that I have heard. And, lest the writing should perish with the writer and the work fail with the labourer, I leave parchments to continue this work, if perchance any man survive and any of the race of Adam escape this pestilence and carry on the work which I have begun.”

Peroration

John Clyn added two words to his peroration: *magna karistia* - ‘great dearth’, then he joined his fellows; another hand briefly added at some later date, ‘Here it seems that the author died.’

[From Friar John Clyn, *Annals of Ireland*, ed. R. Butler (Dublin:



Doleful figure from Kilkenny friary that may have looked down on the passing of John Clyn



The ruins of the medieval Franciscan friary in Kilkenny. Photo: Ruhrfisch.

Irish Archaeological Society 1849), p. 37). A new edition, edited by Bernadette Williams, appeared in 2007.]

Surprisingly medieval historians were reluctant to deal with the Black Death as a whole, in a synthetic manner, preferring, as is often the case, more narrowly focused studies. Indeed a more recent writer, Philip Ziegler, was surprised to find in 1969 that no general study of the Black Death had been written since Cardinal Francis Aidan Gasquet wrote *The Great Pestilence* in 1893.

There is a small mystery about the date of the Black Death's arrival in Ireland. It had certainly reached Paris by the summer of 1348. But Chester, only in June 1349. The disease began to fade and by the early 1350s people felt it was gone - though there were later brief outbreaks. However, Friar Clyn down in Kilkenny insists that it had reached Ireland directly from France at an earlier date than in England. He was categorical: referring to 1348, he records: *“...in the months of September and October, bishops, prelates, priests, friars, noblemen and others, women as well as men, came in great numbers from every part of Ireland to the pilgrimage centre of That Molyngis [Teach Moline, now St Mullins, on the River Barrow]. So great were their numbers that on many days it was possible to see thousands of people flocking there; some through devotion but others (the majority indeed) through fear of the plague, which then was very prevalent. It began near Dublin at Howth and at Drogheda. These cities were almost entirely destroyed and emptied of inhabitants so that in Dublin alone, between the beginning of August and Christmas, fourteen thousand people died.”*

Yet in August 1349 Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh told the Pope during a visit to Avignon that the plague had destroyed two thirds of the English nation, but had not yet done any conspicuous harm to the Irish or the Scots.

Evidence

Mr Ziegler dolefully observes about Brother Clyn. “Even if no other evidence survived from Ireland, John Clyn's cry would show how painfully the country must have suffered. He was a lonely, frightened man, who had already witnessed the death-agonies of almost all the other members of his house and now sought to record their end for posterity before the oblivion of death swept over all Kilkenny and all the country - even all the world. Whether anyone would live to read his words he did not know, hardly dared even wonder, but that instinct which leads men to seek to communicate with their unknown successors, whoever they might be and whatever they might be doing, now drove him on to write his chronicle, a memorial to the terror and grief of those who were still alive.”

The answer to my friend seems to be that so far Covid-19 (at the moment of writing) has had 5,598 plus victims in the island of Ireland. So back in 1340s when the population might only have been somewhat more than a half million or so - the Black Death proportionally killed far more people here than Covid-19 will do.

In our current pain this may be hard to accept. Other parts of the world are far worse off. But in 2021 with Covid-19 we are luckier than we think we are.

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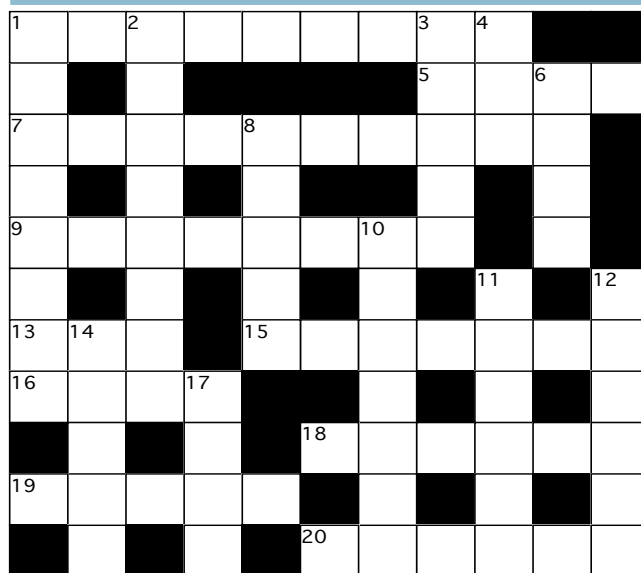
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Crossword Junior

Gordius 370



Across

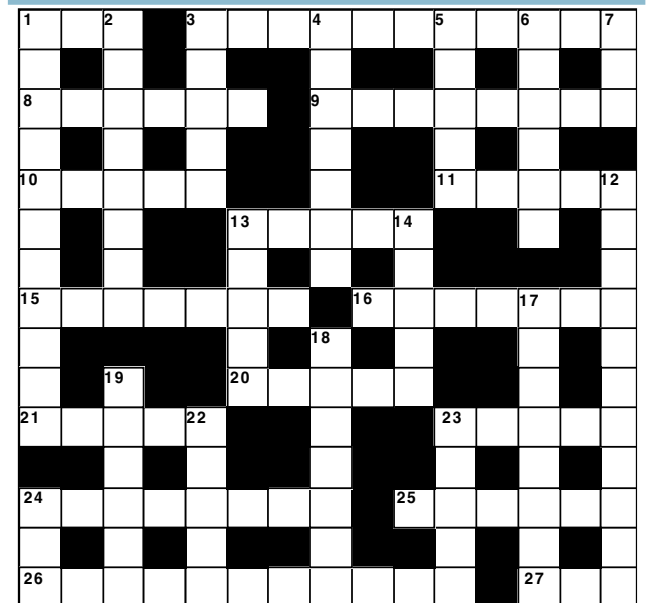
- Some people have a _____ dish for television. (9)
- Direction opposite to West. (4)
- Below. (10)
- Huge. (8)
- Beer. (3)
- Bold. (7)
- Bird's home. (4)
- The opposite of senior. (6)
- You might do this if you have a cold. (5)
- Shuts. (6)

Down

- Cooking pot. (8)
- Baby frogs. (8)
- Rips. (5)
- Have some food. (3)
- Liner. (4)
- Person from the capital of Italy. (5)
- Rare - not often seen. (7)
- Seats. (6)
- Island country in the Mediterranean. (6)
- Yellow citrus fruit. (5)
- Swimsuit. (4)

Crossword

Gordius 495



Across

- Equip with weapons (3)
- Would one need an enchanted compass to draw up this group of famous conjurers? (5,6)
- These might be in your mouth - or in your dog's! (6,5)
- Fated (8)
- What tusks are made of (5)
- Aged member of the community who is greatly respected (5)
- Earth tremor (5)
- Professionally virtuous (7)
- See 5 down
- See 8 across
- Injured by an insect or nettle (5)
- One of twelve in a courtroom (5)
- The lunar kind of Christian (8)
- Ram's horn one has for adaptation, being blown in the synagogue (6)
- Biscuit often shaped like a person or animal (11)
- A pioneer swallowing nitrogen can be explosive (1,1,1)

Down

- Do they deal with lots of sales? Sales of lots, actually! (11)
- Welsh town, the birthplace of Henry V (8)
- Cash (5)
- Such American automobile competitions can create a racy din (7)
- Not just now, but later, during the marathon (2,3,4,3)
- Do these seasonal visitors feed on maple leaves? (6,5)
- Terminate (3)
- Provide a different explanation as what has the terrier pent up (11)
- Two pints (5)
- The Age of Deep Ochre, partly (5)
- Modify with new parts and technology, making the trio fret, perhaps (8)
- Conference, professional get-together (7)
- Meat from a sheep (6)
- See 6 down
- Islamic crusade (5)
- Ship's diary (3)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 11

GORDIUS NO. 494

Across - 1 Sat 3 Recommended 8 Crease 9 Province 10 Aspen 11 Swoop 13 Steed 15 Samoyed 16 Prophet 20 Epoxy resin 21 Heron 23 Bling 24 Hydrogen 25 Plinth 26 The King and I 27 Cut

Down - 1 Such-and-such 2 The Epsom Derby 4 Opposed 5 Eaves 6 Convoy 7 Doe 12 Parting shot 13 Sieve 17 Hygienic 18 Hosanna 19 Cradle 22 Naomi 23 Balti 24 Hut

CHILDREN'S No. 369

Across - 1 Armchair 6 Each 7 Tattoo 9 Kildare 11 Straw 14 Admired 16 Visit 17 Dice 18 Sergeants

Down - 1 Aftershave 2 Mother 3 Hook 4 Read 5 Cheered 8 Oil 10 American 12 Waiter 13 Smudge 15 Uses

Sudoku Corner

370

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 369

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

Last week's Hard 369

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



Notebook

Fr. Conor McDonough

Tradition of Biblical dramas point to devout and creative laity

I HAD THE PRIVILEGE some years ago of participating in an academic conference in Athens, the city where so many elements of Western civilisation flourished for the first time: democracy, the writing of history, philosophy, and, perhaps most thrillingly, theatre.



In Athens, religious festivals were marked by great dramatic competitions, in which tragedies composed by the likes of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and comedies by Aristophanes and others, would be performed in open-air amphitheatres for citizens, arousing and educating in them the emotions of fear, pity, and joy. When the Romans conquered Greece, they borrowed this art form, and stages popped up all over the Roman world, including Roman Britain.

Casualties

Drama was, however, one of many casualties of the Germanic invasions that led the Roman Empire itself to crumble. For several centuries, it was a dead art form, but its resurrection took place, appropriately, in the context of Easter celebrations. In the 10th Century, monks and nuns celebrating the resurrection of Jesus began to re-enact the finding of the empty tomb, adding progressively more dialogue, props, and dramatic tension to the re-enactment.

In some cases, nuns representing the myrrh-bearing disciples of Jesus would wander around the church, seeking the body of their Lord, before being interrupted by the angel asking, "Whom are you seeking?" When he announced the news of the resurrection of Jesus, the whole choir would erupt with chanted Alleluias.

For several centuries these liturgical dramas, associated especially with Easter and Christmas, flourished within religious communities, but in the later Middle Ages, especially in England, these plays moved out onto the street, being organised and acted by laypeople. These plays were often performed on Corpus Christi, dramatising Bible stories, from the creation to the last judgment, including the best-known stories about Noah, Abraham and Isaac, Moses, and so on, with a spe-

cial focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Each scene would typically be performed on mobile wagons which would stop at different 'stations'. The audience gathered at each station would see each of plays performed in order, leading them through the story of their salvation. While the plays were edifying, there was also plenty of room for humour, usually through characters like Mrs Noah, Balaam and his ass, and St Joseph.

Evidence

Although there's no evidence for such plays being performed in Gaelic Ireland, Anglicised towns like Dublin and Kilkenny had thriving traditions of biblical drama. A 1498 list of Corpus Christi plays to be performed in Dublin survives to this day. Not only does it identify the plays to be performed on the feast – Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Exodus from Egypt, and so on as far

as Christ's death and resurrection – it also assigns responsibility for each play to a particular guild: the glovers put on the story of Adam and Eve (fitting, since they were used to stitching animal skins, just as Adam and Eve learned to do); the mariners and shipwrights joined forces to build Noah's Ark; the goldsmiths kitted out the Magi; the guild of fishermen acted out the twelve apostles; and the tailors made the fancy attire of Pilate and his wife. From elsewhere we know that each guild would do its best to outdo all the others in the quality of the costumes and the skill of the actors.

We sometimes imagine the laity in the Middle Ages to have played a passive role in the life of the Church, but the tradition of these biblical dramas points instead to a lay culture that was devout and creative, with a dose of healthy competition. Definitely an example worth pondering in our own time.

Crafting a city's devotional life

The craft guilds which put on some of these plays were not only an important part of Dublin's commercial and civic life, they were major players also in the devotional life of the city, being religious brotherhoods as much as trade associations. Apart from patronising biblical dramas, each guild would organise lavish celebrations on their patronal feast, and maintain the regular lighting of candles and celebration of Mass in the guild chapel. The guild of merchants, for example, had their chapel in Christchurch, the carpenters in St Thomas' Abbey (modern Thomas St), and the weavers in the Carmelite Church on Whitefriar Street, not far from where the Carmelites are located today.

Making Athenians laugh for millenia

● During a break in the conference I attended in Athens, I popped to a cafe for a break from all the theology. The waitress spotted that I was reading the ancient comedy *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes. She told me it was her favourite play, and began to recall its scenes, cracking up in laughter as she remembered the wonderful lines. I imagine the old comedian would be delighted to know that his jokes are still making Athenians laugh, nearly two-and-a-half millennia after his birth.



One of the Sisters of Charity and grateful patients at St Vincent Health Centre, north-eastern India.



YOUR GIFT CAN HELP BRING MEDICINE TO SOME OF INDIA'S POOREST PEOPLE

Children under the age of five are dying from malnutrition and vitamin deficiency

The pandemic is stretching the already-limited resources of missionaries working with the poor. The Sisters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul write to The Little Way Association from north-eastern India: "Covid means that people are completely depending on the St Vincent Health Centre which we established in 2015 in Darenchigre. Patients are suffering from anaemia, jaundice, typhoid, diarrhoea, malnutrition, calcium and iron deficiency, and many children below the age of five are dying. We are unable to provide better medical care and treatment due to the lack of finance and the other issues like lack of medical equipment and oxygen supply monitors in emergency situations."

"Please can you help us?"

The sisters work in one of India's poorest regions, where the people scrape a living from subsistence-agriculture. The health centre was intended just to provide first aid but people from 20 villages have come to use it as their principal medical facility. The sisters urgently ask for funds for vitamins, diagnostic equipment and treatment for those suffering from various dietary deficiencies. The sisters conclude their letter: "We earnestly ask you to participate in this humble effort to offer our medical support to the people in need. With a prayer that God will bless all your endeavours and bring to fruition all your charitable works."

Your donation to the Little Way Association's fund for the sick, hungry and deprived will go, without deduction, to help hard-pressed establishments such as the St Vincent Health Centre.



"Do not fear. If you are faithful in pleasing Jesus in little things, He will be obliged to help you in the greater things."

- St Therese

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends for the missions can benefit priests and people, and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass

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