

The Irish Catholic

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Holy relic pilfered at Ploughing Stradbally Church robbed in broad daylight

Exclusive

Chai Brady

A Dublin priest has called on whoever took a much-loved relic during the Ploughing Championships to give it back so it may "give consolation to a wider scope of people".

Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap. of Priorswood parish in Dublin borrowed the relic of Italian teenager and saint-to-be Carlo Acutis from another parish, aiming to offer blessings during the three-day event.

However, on the first day, Tuesday, between 10-10.30am it disappeared from a table at the Vocations Ireland stall where Fr Shortall was based. While he engaged security and Midlands Radio who were broadcasting at the Ploughing, due to the tens of thousands of people in attendance, he says it was "like finding a needle in a haystack".

The priest has since taken to social media to try and reach whoever now has the relic.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Shortall said: "We were assisting Vocations Ireland at their stall, and different religious orders were part of the expo. I was there with the relic of Padre Pio and I also had the relic of Carlo Acutis.

"There was free stuff there, medals, pictures, friendship bracelets for the young people, and people were coming up and asking for a blessing with the relics. Early on the first day I left both relics down on a little table and I imagine someone inadvertently picked up the relic of Carlo Acutis, it's only a small box with a clear plastic cover, and took it away thinking 'it's beautiful and I'll take that,'" he said.

Fr Shortall believes it was mistakenly taken and that "Somebody somewhere around the country must have a first class relic of Carlo Acutis that inadvertently was taken, perhaps thinking it was on offer, so possibly some household has it and we would love to have it back... so that locals and others can venerate this saint-to-be, Carlo Acutis,

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A little bit of faith at the Ploughing



Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap giving blessings at the Ploughing. Photo: Vocations Ireland

ST BERNADETTE BRINGS IRELAND MUCH-NEEDED HEALING

Fr Billy Swan

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BEAR GRYLLS GOES WILD WITH 'THE CHOSEN'

Renata Milán Morales

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SYNODALITY? STIFLE THAT YAWN!

Steven Millies

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Holy relic pilfered at Ploughing

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who we believe is going to be canonised around springtime next year – with the help of God – in Rome by Pope Francis”.

Blessed Carlo Acutis will likely be proclaimed a saint during the 2025 Jubilee, which will make him the Church's first ever millennial saint. Born to Italian parents in London 1991, Blessed Acutis, nicknamed 'God's influencer', was a web designer who died from leukaemia at the age of 15 in Monza, Italy. He was known for his devotion to Eucharistic miracles and Marian apparitions, which he catalogued on a website he designed.

Over the weekend demand to venerate the relic of Blessed Acutis's heart caused a parish in Manchester to use a ticketing website to book prayer timeslots as thousands of people, including many young families, made the pilgrimage.

Regarding the relic taken during the Ploughing, Fr Shortall added: "Perhaps the relic has given somebody consolation, and maybe now that is done, we can have it back to give consolation to a wider scope of people."

Meanwhile, the day after the relic went missing and just down the road from the Plough-

ing Championships the church in Stradbally was robbed in the middle of the day according to the parish priest.

Fr David Vard told *The Irish Catholic*: "The candle shrines were all broken in to and all the money taken, they were all destroyed so we will have to get new ones." He said it happened at about 2.30pm on Wednesday, September 18 when the church was empty.

Fortunately Fr Vard does not believe there was much money, as they were emptied on Monday after the weekend Mass. Fr Vard expressed his disappointment at the robbery and the impact it has on church security, saying that "I think at the moment it's kind of rare to have churches open during the day, I know in Dublin a lot of churches close relatively early. I'd love to keep the church open in Stradbally but if this keeps happening, I don't know what to do because this isn't the first time it has happened".

The incident was caught on the church's CCTV and the guards were called. In a statement to this paper An Garda acknowledged a "report of an incident of theft" at that time and date in Stradbally and that "investigations are ongoing at this time".

Jews concerned about 'inhospitable Ireland' - Ambassador

Staff reporter

The Israeli Ambassador to Ireland Dana Erlich has told this paper that she wants to share her frustration with the Irish media and political circles in Ireland.

"During the past months many accusations have been levelled against Israel, which have crossed the line into vilification, incitement and libels. There are even arguments against Israel's right of self-defence. These accusations have promoted an inhospitable environment for the Jewish and Israeli communities in Ireland, causing many among them to express significant concerns."

She added: "There is no understanding or empathy for the daily attacks and threat Israelis are under, the thousands of missiles that are fired indiscriminately towards civilians, the trauma that we are all experiencing, and the concerns for our future."

Sadly, these issues receive little attention in Irish media and political circles and have evoked almost no vocal criticism or condemnation in Ireland."

Politicians welcome hate speech axe but concerns remain

Brandon Scott

Two politicians have voiced their "relief" in the aftermath of Minister for Justice Helen McEntee's decision to drop the controversial 'hate speech' section of the proposed Criminal Justice Bill, but have warned that the issue may not yet have been kicked to touch as it's likely the decision was made "to avoid backlash and divisive debates before the upcoming election" and may well be revisited at some point in the future.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Independent Senator Rónán Mullen, a long-time vocal critic of the Bill, said that he was "happy that they've pulled in their horns at least to the extent of saying that they're

not going to try and advance the hate speech part of the legislation" but that he also "wants to see what they're going to do because I would still have some concerns".

"This Bill is based on protected categories and if there's hatred against one or all of them, then you're into the zone of criminal offence.

"If the Government continues with that strange definition for gender that they had in and the basis for hatred in the hate legislation, that is still problematic because that would set in precedent that this is a definition of gender that's from an NGO, that's full of ideology and denies the basic realities of the gender of male and female. It would be more than nonsense to put that into law

in any shape or form - harmful nonsense.

"The fact that they're just dropping it without trying to amend it suggests that they're taking the easy route out to avoid election controversy, certainly. The Minister for Justice says that they're going to try and bring it back so people will need to continue their advocacy and their campaigning on this."

Councillor Emer Tóibín, whose party Aontú was the only party to vote against the Bill in the Dáil and who will be contesting against Minister McEntee in the upcoming election for the Meath East constituency, said that she's relieved because the proposals represented a "veiled attack on democracy".

"There is a broad feeling of relief that this government has finally come to its senses and no doubt it is a win for free speech," she said. "This bill has sparked much debate over the last two years, with some proponents shockingly advocating for stronger measures. Aontú, on the other hand, was the only political party in Dáil Éireann opposed to the bill and its potential adverse impact on free speech and open discourse. The government's aim was excessively censorious and a veiled attack on democracy.

"The Government simply had to shelve it in a bid for self-preservation to avoid the backlash and ongoing divisive debates during the campaign period ahead."

Italian parliamentarians make pilgrimage to Knock Shrine

Brandon Scott

Knock Shrine hosted a group of Italian parliamentarians who visited Ireland's International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine, as part of a three day pilgrimage to Ireland last Sunday.

Spiritual director for the pilgrimage was Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pro-Prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation. The pilgrimage group arrived in Dublin on Friday, September 20 where they visited St Patrick's Cathedral and Christchurch Cathedral. During their two-day visit to Dublin, they attended Mass at the Pro Cathedral and St John's Lane, Thomas Street.

On Sunday, the entourage of 80 pilgrims made their way to Knock, the goal of their pilgrimage in Ireland, where they were welcomed by Fr Richard Gibbons, Rec-

tor of Knock Shrine. They enjoyed a guided tour of the grounds at Knock Shrine and heard more about the fascinating story of Knock from Grace Mulqueen, Curator at Knock Museum. Archbishop Fisichella celebrated Mass for the group in the Apparition Chapel.

Commenting on the occasion, Fr Richard Gibbons said: "It was a great honour to welcome Archbishop Fisichella to Knock Shrine once again. He previously visited Knock Shrine as guest speaker at the National Novena in 2019, when we celebrated the 140th anniversary of the Apparition.

"In his previous role as President of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation, the Archbishop was instrumental in the elevation of Knock Shrine to the status of International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine in March



The visiting group of Italian parliamentarians with Archbishop Rino Fisichella and Rector of Knock Shrine, Fr Richard Gibbons at Knock Shrine. Photo: Knock Shrine.

2021. Indeed, the group were delighted to see the original Papal decree during their visit to Knock Museum.

"Many of them also commented on the connection between Italy and Knock, as the Apparition Mosaic in Knock Basilica and the Carrara mar-

ble statues in the Apparition Chapel, as well as the Pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Knock, were made in Italy".

The group departed Knock Shrine for Westport later in the evening and returned to Dublin early on Monday morning for their flight back to Italy.

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Vatican recognition of Medjugorje's fruits, 'a step forward'

Renata Milán Morales

Pope Francis has recently approved a Catholic spiritual devotion centred in Medjugorje. However, the Vatican's doctrinal office clarified that the Pope was not affirming the authenticity of the messages from the claimed apparitions of Our Lady. Instead, it stated that the Pontiff recognised the "positive fruits" for Catholics who engage in the spiritual experience associated with the town.

Niall Glynn, managing director of Marian Pilgrimages, commented, "I think it's a good move. It's not much different from what was said in 2019, but it's good to now have it as

a place of devotion." He added, "Medjugorje isn't just about the visionaries, but everything that Medjugorje offers. Also, our pilgrims are very understanding, and they understand that the Vatican can't rule on the apparitions until they stop happening. We understand. People are finding that Medjugorje is a lot bigger than that in the sense of just the apparitions or just the visionaries itself."

He added, "It's a very positive step by the Vatican to acknowledge the fruits of Medjugorje, which our pilgrims have experienced for the past 30 years. It's wonderful for them to finally see some recognition that Medjugorje is a place of prayer

and spiritual growth."

The Vatican issued its statement regarding Medjugorje in accordance with new guidelines that had been recently approved by Pope Francis, focused on evaluating potential supernatural occurrences. These updated regulations, which replace the original norms that were established in 1978, stipulate that bishops are required to seek consultation with the Vatican whenever they are faced with reports of supernatural phenomena. According to these new regulations, the procedure will grant "faster decisions while respecting popular devotion" when assessing claims of supernatural phenomena.

Bear Grylls goes wild with 'The Chosen'



Bear Grylls is pictured with Dallas Jenkins and the cast of *The Chosen*

Renata Milán Morales

Bear Grylls, renowned adventurer, writer, and television presenter, is well-known for taking every opportunity to share his faith. Having published the devotional 'Soul Fuel' and former guest of the faith formation course 'Alpha', Mr Grylls, alongside the creators of *The Chosen* - '5&2 Studios' - takes view-

ers on a journey through the global hit series, offering a fresh perspective on the cast members while exploring their personal stories and diving deeper into their own perspectives on the series and the characters they portray.

"This show allows viewers to discover what the real people behind the phenomenal *The Chosen* series are actually like. The wild opens people up in a way nothing

else does, and it challenges us to dig deep and find our true selves. This adventure series pushes *The Chosen* actors like never before whilst also discovering their own personal stories of life and faith. That's the magic of this new series, bringing new insight and revelation to some of TV's most loved and watched characters," said Bear Grylls talking about the new series.

Filipino community flourishes like flowers



Brothers Cedric and Charles Vinzons place a flower together during the Filipino community's celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Peñafrancia in St Joseph's Church, Berkeley Road, Dublin 7 on September 22. Photo: Jonel Ravacio [See page 8](#)



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‘Most residents are tolerant to migrant candidates’ says Cllr

Renata Steffens

In the recent report ‘Strength in Diversity II’ released last week, The Immigrant Council of Ireland showed how one in three candidates coming from a migrant background experienced racism frequently during their campaign for the local elections in 2024.

Fianna Fáil’s Cllr John-Kingsley Onwumereh told *The Irish Catholic* he experienced racism mainly on social media. However, the councillor had a positive outcome from his experience with the local elections, as many of the people he met were welcoming regardless of his nationality.

He said: “I also need to mention something that I’m happy about, that as much as we have a few individuals who display this unacceptable racist

behaviour, I know the majority of residents are very nice and very tolerant and welcoming and actually very appreciative of the role local councillors play irrespective of their ethnic background...irrespective of their religious background.”

Living in Ireland for over 20 years, Mr Onwumereh was elected for the first time in 2019 for the Mulhuddart-Blanchardstown Local Electoral Area on the Fingal County Council and re-elected in 2024. He is a knight of St Columbanus, the Chairperson of the African Chaplaincy, Archdiocese of Dublin and Deputy Mayor of Fingal.

The Councillor mentioned that during the last Council meeting of the Fingal County Council they “took a stand on anti-racism,” and that the County Council would not

tolerate racism. It “is really heartwarming to see that the majority of residents and [the] majority of institutions and agencies within Ireland in general...are very supportive of everyone, regardless of their ethnic background or religious beliefs.”

For Mr Onwumereh, having diversity in government roles is important, as different people bring different experiences and views to their jobs, which “goes a long way in helping to ensure that everybody is properly represented.” “Inclusivity is really key when it comes to governance,” he said.

Many migrants are not aware they have the right to vote in local elections as long as they are living legally in the State. Mr Onwumereh believes that migrants should make sure they know all services eligible



Cllr John-Kingsley Onwumereh

to them and that “political education should evolve in such a way that people who are living

in the State also understand that [they are] eligible to participate in local elections.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Derry welcomes new school Diocesan Advisor

The Diocese of Derry appointed Mr Finbar Madden to the role of Diocesan Advisor for Post Primary School. In this role, Mr Madden will support religious education (RE), and faith formation of the students in schools across the diocese. He will also facilitate close partnership between school, home and parish.

A Diocesan Advisor supports students’ faith by visiting and engaging with schools and partners in education, organising and leading in-services for RE teachers, evaluating RE in schools, gathering and evaluating resource materials, etc.

Mr Madden will take up the role as a member of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre Team at the end of September.

On a post on the diocese’s Facebook page, they say Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown welcomed Mr Madden to his new role and said: “Finbar brings a wealth of experience from his time in Catholic Education, both as a teacher and as former principal of Saint Columban’s College in Derry. I wish him every blessing in his role.”

Golden Jubilee celebration in Co. Wexford

A beloved Wexford priest celebrated his golden jubilee in the heart of the Cloughbawn/Poulpeasty Parish. V Rev Bernard Cushen PP was joined by family, friends, fellow clergy, parishioners and Bishop of Ferns Ger Nash in the Church of Christ the King, Poulpeasty on September 20. The celebration led by Bishop Nash was followed by refreshments served in the Poulpeasty Hall.

Fr Cushen addressed the wellwishers saying: “I am extremely glad to see so many relatives, friends, and parishioners here. I am grateful for your support, friendship, and hospitality over the years.

“Thank you to everyone who has made this night one to remember. I am eternally thankful for your kindness. May you all receive abundant blessings from the God of all goodness and mercy.”

Columban Sisters’ centenary celebrated this month

Renata Steffens

This month the Missionary Sisters of St Columban, also known as the Columban Sisters are celebrating one hundred years since their foundation. The milestone anniversary will be celebrated with Mass at Wicklow Parish on Septem-

ber 29 at 3pm and a reception afterwards.

The Sisters’ history started in 1917 when Fr John Blowick talked about the urgent need for women collaborators in the mission in China. From that moment, the Sisters’ history saw some years of preparation with conversations to discuss the nature of the new mission-

ary group and some more years to teach the new nuns.

Novices studied in Cahiracon, Co. Clare and their history coincided alongside the establishment of the Irish Free State. “The Civil War raged in the background, often disrupting the flow of letters, supplies and personnel to the Motherhouse,” a document telling the Sisters’

history explained.

Their first profession happened on September 29, 1924, and the congregation was officially incorporated into the Church. In 1957 the Columban Sisters moved to Magheramore, Co. Wicklow where they are located presently.

The Hanyang Mission (1926-1951) was the first mission the

sisters took part in abroad, but throughout the past century, they worked in many countries worldwide. Assisting the local community with education, healthcare, social services and pastoral care, amongst other projects.

[Read more about the Columban Sisters on page 9.](#)

Former Minister challenges ‘cancel culture’ in address at pro-life dinner

Brandon Scott

The former Minister for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton, lambasted what she sees as a conformism that “has taken an unnatural hold on Irish society” in her keynote address at the annual pro-life dinner in the Aviva Stadium.

Ms Creighton, the guest

speaker, used her keynote address to highlight the “tendency of those in positions of power today to control public discourse and shut down dissenting voices”, saying that many of the same people who talk about the “tyranny” and “subversion” of “old Ireland” are themselves promoters of a society that has become “a self-censoring receptacle of bland conformist ideas”.

“Conformism has taken an unnatural hold on contemporary Ireland”

“I don’t believe in banning thoughts, debates or arguments”

“The influence of the Church in Ireland has been replaced by a new orthodoxy of restricted speech”

“The people who are trying to drive rational debate from public life are often the people with #BeKind in their profile”

Showcasing McAuley’s mission of mercy



Students and teachers from Mercy College Coolock dropped in to Mercy International Centre (MIA) on Baggot Street in Dublin on Culture Night to view the new permanent exhibition ‘Catherine McAuley and the Mission of Mercy’, and to enjoy a house tour and organ recital. They are pictured with Sr Margaret Daly RSM, Head of Heritage and Spirituality at MIA and Sr Patricia O’Donovan RSM, CEO of MIA. Photo: Brenda Drumm

Manners and morals - Not law - should address hate...

It's certainly a welcome development that Justice Minister Helen McEntee is to drop her proposed "hate speech" legislation. It would have led to all kinds of prying actions by the State into our private lives and opinions.

It would have been a harness on freedom of speech, and perhaps ideas. And since Catholic values are so unfashionable among the ruling elite today, Catholic opinions



Mary Kenny

would have been the target of repression under the guise of banning "hatred".

Principle

And yet the principle of deploring hated and "hate speech" is a perfectly decent one. It's unkind and can be

damaging to express "hatred" for any individual, and unjust to hold hatred for any group.

But the censure of expressions of hatred belongs in the category of manners and morals, not in the realm of law. And now that the State has backed off from the field,

maybe the Church, as well as educators and families should step into the breach and discuss the harm that uncontrolled hatred of persons or groups can wreak.

Robust

We can hold robust opinions about politics, ethics, concepts, ideas, philosophies. We can detest the work of one thinker or another. We can loathe a politician's action, or abhor the outcome of any given regime. We can say we deplore Donald Trump as a political figure, or loathe the values of Kamala Harris. But there's a difference between playing the ball and playing the man (or woman). The personal hatred that is so often emitted in discourse today can be destructive and ugly.

There is a public conversation to be had about the ethics and morality of "hatred", yes.

Manners once ordained

that even if you loathed the sight of an individual you nevertheless maintained a veneer of treating them civilly. The French call this the "formule de politesse" - the formula of politeness that keeps society from falling apart.

But manners took a trouncing with a generation that rejected "bourgeois hypocrisy". "Authenticity" replaced those politeness formulae.

And then along came the internet in which manners so often took a back seat. From some quarters, hatred was unleashed.

We know, from the study of history, how personalised hatred can foment prejudice and prompt persecution. So, yes, let it be condemned and disapproved of - through the medium of morality and the courteous use of restraint, not through the blunderbuss of the law.

“Manners once ordained that even if you loathed the sight of an individual you nevertheless maintained a veneer of treating them civilly. The French call this the “formule de politesse” - the formula of politeness that keeps society from falling apart”

The artistic eye of women

There's been a lovely exhibition of women impressionist painters showing at Dublin's National Gallery (ending on October 6).

Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt (who was Amer-

ican-born) Eva Gonzalès and Marie Bracquemond were all outstanding artists painting in France at the time of the first great exhibition of Impressionists in Paris in 1874.

The female Impressionists were perhaps gentler

and more tender in their approach to their subjects than their male counterparts. And it's noticeable how they brought children into their paintings more than male painters did. Children are portrayed doing all the normal things that young children do - Berthe Morisot often used her own daughter, Julie, as a model.

Mary Cassatt was unmarried and childless but had a delicate eye for

babies, and the way their mothers comforted them. Eva Gonzalès approached portraiture of the young as a serious study in character - although she very sadly died in childbirth aged 33, so her work was limited (her baby survived and was raised by her sister.)

These women artists contributed, I think, to a perception of valuing babies and children as unique individuals, portrayed through the artist's eye.

The annual dinner for pro-life education held at the President's suite at the Aviva Stadium on September 20 was a very successful affair of nearly 600 people, (as reported in pages 16-17). There seemed to be so many attractive, glamorous young people in evening wear, and high spirits - as well as those of us of a mature vintage.

I've observed before that pro-life soirées often have an atmosphere of, literally, *joie-de-vie*: the purpose is hugely serious, but the attitude is one of celebrating life. The atmosphere was so genial and gregarious, with Wendy Grace doing MC, and Lucinda Creighton speaking.

I was an invitee of the

boundlessly energetic Senator Rónán Mullen, and I happened to sit next to Maureen Kenny, a remarkable lady aged 93. We're not related - Maureen is the widow of Ivor Kenny, a journalist I much admired, and connected to the Kennys of Galway, one of the most renowned bookshops and book suppliers globally.

Maureen is in the full of her health, and still does everything for herself, including baking her own bread. Despite suffering a tragic family loss recently, she goes on embracing life.

What was her first memory, back in her 1930s childhood? "Easter eggs". That didn't mean chocolate sweeties then - but the hens on her parents' farm producing eggs at Eastertide.



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Give wholesome sexual education to youths, not contraceptives

Brandon Scott

In the wake of Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly announcing his intention to make contraceptives legal for 16-year-olds, although the legal age of consent in Ireland is 17, a member of a group that encourages young people to form healthy relationships in the Faith has said that young people “deserve better” than Government concession to the issue and that education must be offered to young people to “remind them of their dignity and understand their worth” in relationships.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Harry Fitzgerald, a member of

Pure in Heart Ireland, said that the Government’s defeatist approach will lead to more damage and further affect the wider culture.

“They’re seeing it as something that’s an inevitability, really, rather than something that can be educated around or approached from a rational basis,” he said. “I think practising virtue and actually educating young people on better options is obviously the better way to go. We can see the damage that the contraceptive mentality is doing to our culture. Young people deserve better, to be honest.”

Speaking about the mission of Pure in Heart, which seeks to promote rela-

tionships that are dignity-centred, Mr Fitzgerald said that proper factual, science-based education is the only way to combat the harmful sexual attitudes that young people are increasingly being exposed to.

“In Pure in Heart we talk to young people from the age of 13/14 and up to Leaving Certificate age and then into college, to try and educate them into the fullness of knowledge of human relationships, to remind them of their dignity and help them understand their value and worth, what is okay and not okay and a sense of what will hurt them and how it will hurt them,” he said. “It’s a complicated road as we all know but

education is key and the earlier that takes place, the better.

“Children are being sexualised at an earlier and earlier age all the time and we’re dealing with almost pre-pubescent children who are where people in college would have been 20 or 30 years ago in the sense of their sexual exposure and knowledge of things that is so clearly beyond their conception and ability to process at that age. So I think it’s never too young to have the conversation with your children but it’s also really important for schools to jump on this early enough, that’s science-based and not the gender theory that we see in SPHE now.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bishop Gavin celebrates Mercy Day Mass in Cork

During the Mass celebration for Mercy Day at Mercy University Hospital in Cork, Bishop Fintan Gavin said: “The values of a hospital are the values of the people who work in the hospital.”

“We are called to be as the Gospel reminds us ‘a light for our world’, in other words, people should know our actions and experience our values not just by our words but by our deeds,” Bishop Gavin said.

“Together we celebrate all that Mercy University Hospital community is, or as Catherine McAuley [founder of the Mercy Order] put it: ‘who we are together’”, Bishop Fintan added. “This finds expression in what you do each day in living those core values with one another and for the patients so that we can shine Christ’s light and hope into all around us.”

Mercy Day is celebrated each year in September to commemorate the anniversary of the first ‘House of Mercy’ in 1827 in Dublin. The oldest part of the Mercy University Hospital in Cork was originally the Mansion House for the Mayor of Cork, and in 1857 it became the Mercy University Hospital.

State cannot force its values on ethos schools

Staff reporter

Catholic patrons of primary schools are fully in favour of the reconfiguration of schools to better reflect the pluralist nature of society but this is being blocked by a discriminatory provision which forces (only) Catholic schools to take children whose families may not subscribe to the Catholic ethos, according to Alan Hynes,

chief executive of the Catholic Education Partnership

“The provision of Section 11 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, the effect of which is that Catholic schools (alone among faith schools) may not prioritise admission for children from families committed to the ethos of the school. This discriminatory provision has now become a block on divestment of Catholic schools to non-Catholic

patronage, with communities being unwilling to consent to reconfiguration of patronage if there is no guarantee that children from Catholic families may be prioritised in admission to the remaining Catholic-owned and run schools. This provision cuts straight across the constitutional and international human rights obligations of the Irish State.”

Mr Hynes says this is not the only challenge: “At present, the

draft primary schools’ curriculum is threaded through with references to “values” without once identifying the source of those values. It is not clear what is intended here but the solution is clear – those values should be rooted in the particular ethos of the school, be that one of faith or otherwise.

Anything else is a breach of trust with parents, who apply to schools on the basis of admission policies, which, since the commencement of section nine of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, has mandated schools to include a clear statement of their ethos. Parents have a fundamental right to choose a school that will “ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity

with their own convictions” (ICESCR, Art 13.3). Any state seeking to smuggle in values not in keeping with the stated ethos of a school would be acting contrary to its human rights obligations.”

Mr Hynes went on to add: “Thankfully, the Act of 2018 requires the Minister for Education to carry out a review of the operation of Section 11 in 2025. It is hoped that a proper appraisal of the human rights framework will form a significant part of that review and that the Government will move to bring the State’s legislative approach to education back into line with its constitutional and human rights obligations.” Mr Hynes was writing in *The Irish Times*.

The sacred bond between Hungary and Ireland



From left to right: Bishop Michael Duignan of Clonfert and Galway, Bishop András Veres of Győr, Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland HE Luis Mariano Montemayor, HE Gergely Bánhegyi, Ambassador of Hungary to Ireland and Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin Paul Dempsey pictured with a painted replica of the sacred Weeping Virgin Mother of Győr on September 22, after Holy Mass. Photo: Embassy of Hungary

Renata Milán Morales

Ireland has welcomed the gifting of a painted replica of the sacred *Weeping Virgin Mother of Győr*, presented by His Excellency Bishop András Veres of Győr, Hungary, on a recent visit to the island. This gesture reaffirms the deep historical and spiritual bond between the Dioceses of Galway, Clonfert, and Győr - a connection that spans over 350 years.

The painting, also known as the *Irish Weeping Madonna* in Hungary, originated in the Diocese of Clonfert. In 1650, during the Cromwellian War, this image was solemnly proclaimed ‘Our Lady as Queen and Patroness of Ireland’ by the Irish bishops. One year later, Bishop Walter Lynch was exiled and took the painting with him for safe keeping. He found refuge in the city of Győr. He died in 1663 before he could return

to Ireland, leaving the painting in the care of the Cathedral of Győr.

On 1697, on the feast day of St Patrick and after the penal laws were decreed in Ireland banning Catholic bishops and priests from the country, in Győr, the image of the Virgin Mary allegedly shed tears of blood for three hours.

See more in next week’s *The Irish Catholic* issue

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Oliver and her family can see
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Photo: Chris Gagnon/Concern.

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CONCERN worldwide

Filipinos animate the Faith in Ireland



Brandon Scott

The annual Peñafrancia celebration took place in St Joseph's, Berkeley Road, last Sunday in the church, with hundreds of devotees processing in the north inner city before Mass was celebrated by the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Dublin, Paul Dempsey.

Our Lady of Peñafrancia in Ireland, is an organisation to promote devotion to the Blessed Mother and to continue a 300 year tradition which is native to the Bicol Region of the Philippines.

Paramount to the organisation is the yearly celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Peñafrancia held every third week of September.

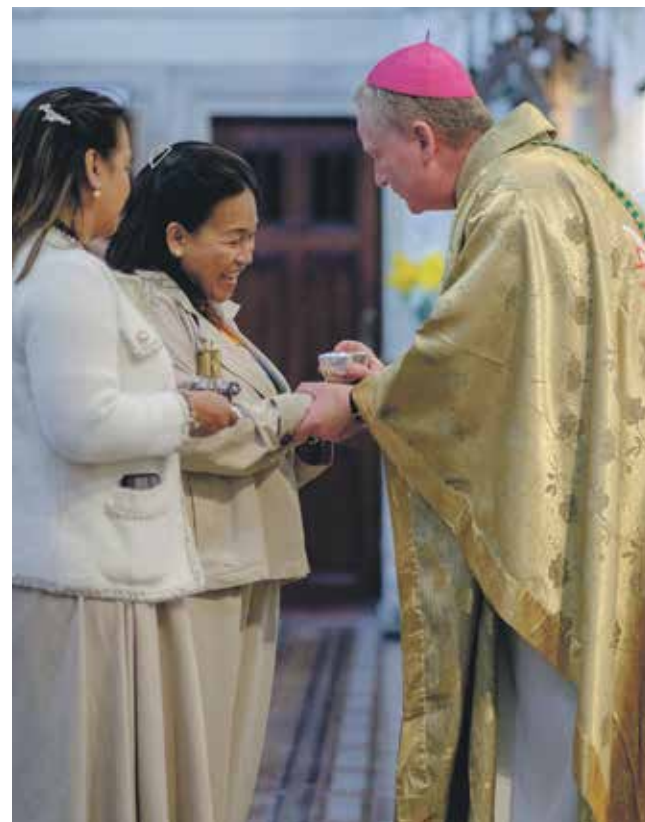
Our Lady of Peñafrancia is the patroness of the Bicol Region and she is documented to have performed many miracles and protected the province and the Bicolanos for more than 300 years. Bicolanos affectionately call her INA.

In Ireland, the devotion started 14 years ago and continues to grow not only among Bicolanos but to many other Filipinos and few other nationalities.

This year's theme celebration was 'Se Siempre La Reina!', meaning, Be always the Queen!" The celebration this year was especially important as it marked the centenary of the Canonical Coronation of the image of Our Lady of Peñafrancia as Queen and Patroness of Bicolandia.



Photos: Jonel Ravacio



Columban Sisters celebrate 100th anniversary



Renata Steffens

The Missionary Sisters of St Columban are marking their 100th anniversary celebrating Mass at 3pm followed by a reception at Wicklow Parish Church, on September 29. The congregation has today 116 members in nine countries where they work with a spirit of compassion and solidarity.

Talking about the celebration of the centenary, Sr Anne Ryan, the community and area leader in Magheramore, Co. Wicklow told *The Irish Catholic*: "Overall, we would be extremely grateful for the life that we've had and the people that we have come to know.

"We have been able to gather and to work for the gospel in different, very different places, with very poor communities very often and it is always amazing for all of us no matter how difficult or how challenging." Sr Ryan added that throughout all these years, the overall feeling amongst the nuns in missions abroad is a willingness to continue, "we never want to retire," she said.

Sr Ryan was in Hong Kong from 1979 to 2005, which might seem like a long time to be working abroad, offering all your time to people

in need, but the sister mentioned that some other nuns in the Order have been on mission for over 40 years.

The Columban Sisters website says "the life of missionary service" asks for "availability and adaptivity". Throughout their one hundred years of history, the Columban Sisters have accomplished great results with their mission around the globe. Embracing the different vocations and skills each sister has and adapting to the needs of each community, their missionary services achieved results in several areas.

“Since the congregation’s inception, cross-cultural mission work has been a defining aspect of the Columban Sisters’ identity”

Amongst some of the areas the Sisters have worked worldwide in the past century is education: they have established and overseen numerous schools, educational programs, served as principals and engaged in educational ministries, which helped to break poverty cycles and promote social and gender equality.

Their mission also improved healthcare by being involved in hospitals, clinics and healthcare initiatives. Their efforts improved countless lives over the past

century.

Their social service work addressed marginalised groups, created programmes focused on the most vulnerable, assisted victims of human trafficking and prostitution, and helped refugees and migrants.

Acting on pastoral care, the Sisters worked in parishes offering spiritual support and guidance and spreading their values by evangelising in compassionate actions.

The Columban Sisters also "promote understanding and cooperation among different cultural and religious groups. They engage in intercultural and interfaith dialogue, fostering peace and mutual respect. Since the congregation's inception, cross-cultural mission work has been a defining aspect of the Columban Sisters' identity," the congregation explained in a statement.

Beginnings

The Columban Sisters were officially founded on September 29, 1924, over seven years since the first mention of the need for women collaborators in mission in China, when the community was incorporated into the Church.

The nuns' story started with Fr John Blowick, co-founder of the Columban Fathers, in December 1917. Fr Blowick spoke about the urgent need for women collaborators in the mission in China and received a prompt response from many interested women. Amongst those women was Lady Frances Moloney, founder of the

Columban Sisters.

In the following three years, many conversations happened to discuss the nature of the new missionary group, and by December 1920 they were granted permission to found a Missionary Religious Congregation of Sisters.

“Civil War raged in the background, often disrupting the flow of letters, supplies and personnel to the Motherhouse”

In a document describing the Order's history, the institution comments on how the Columban Sisters have a historical connection to the foundation of the Irish State. The establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 coincided with the establishment of the religious order.

"As its first novices prepared for religious life in Cahiracon [Co. Clare], the Civil War raged in the background, often disrupting the flow of letters, supplies and personnel to the Motherhouse," the document reads.

With the First Professions on September 29, 1924, the young community was officially incorporated into the Church. The inaugural mission of the Columban Sisters happened two years later.

“The Sisters’ facilities treated illnesses and injuries of the local population and helped in challenging moments such as the Chinese Civil War, Sino-Japanese War and the aftermath of the Yangtze floods”

First Mission

The Hanyang Mission (1926-1951), marked an important event in the Order's history. They established and operated hospitals and clinics, addressing urgent medical needs in Hanyang, a district of the city of Wuhan. The Sisters' facilities treated illnesses and injuries of the local population and helped in challenging moments such as the Chinese Civil War, Sino-Japanese War and the aftermath of the Yangtze floods.

Throughout the past one

hundred years, the Columban Sisters led mission in many countries: the USA, Philippines, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Chile, Pakistan, Peru and Myanmar.

"The political and societal situation of some countries where Sisters are missioned is very precarious due to conflict, violence and oppression. The majority of Irish Sisters are now residing in Ireland. Sisters in Ireland are involved in various ministries and services to both Columban Sisters and local communities," Sr Ryan concluded.



Mission in Myanmar



Mission in Pakistan



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The chaplaincy drawing young people closer to Christ



Brandon Scott

The unseasonably gorgeous weather we've been enjoying of late signifies only one thing: The season of learning has once again returned. The transition from second to third level can often be the most unnerving; A larger student population, gargantuan campuses and choice, an embarrassment of choice.

The question of choice is no more apparent than in the very important choosing of which clubs and societies students carefully consider joining for the forthcoming academic year, or for some, the duration of their time at the institution.

The obvious few in high-demand usually encompass sport, film, politics and groups aligned with the gamut of identities and allegiances that seemingly matter so much to young people nowadays. Among that list of trendy clubs and societies, clubs concerned with religion or faith-matters would presumably be on the peripheries of popularity.

Countering

Countering this with emphasis is the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast, whose wide array of initiatives and focus on wholesome relationships in the Faith have resulted in a seismic increase in students registering to take part in Chaplaincy-related services for the forthcoming year, with over 71% of those identifying as Catholic in Queen's committing to involvement in some form, representing a 60.9% rise when compared to last year's figures.

Two members who are central to the operations of the Chaplaincy are Chaplain, Fr Dominic McGrattan and Director, Shannon Campbell. Both have amassed years of experience dedicated to campus ministry and are "encouraged" to see their efforts being recognised by young students who are gravitating to the Chap-



Queen's University Belfast Catholic Chaplaincy director Shannon Campbell and chaplain Fr Dominic McGrattan outside the Lanyon Building. Photo: QUB Catholic Chaplaincy.

laincy in increasing numbers.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* about the impressive figures, Fr McGrattan detailed that the Chaplaincy has noticed a continuous growth over the last five years but particularly in the last two and that this is largely down to the vast selection of initiatives the Chaplaincy offers to the inquisitive students entering the doors of the university for the first time.

“105 of our core Chaplaincy members, by core I mean those who are checking in with us on a regular basis would be attending those Bible studies weekly”

“The number registered at Queen's that have expressed their wish to receive Chaplaincy services would be in and around 7,500 out of a total student population of 25,000,” he said. “That's an encouraging statistic and it's experienced a year-on-year growth, probably over the past 5 years but considerably over the last two.

“We have a number of

groups and societies providing input and contributing to our programme. Chief among them would be the small-group Bible studies that we offer to students. 105 of our core Chaplaincy members, by core I mean those who are checking in with us on a regular basis would be attending those Bible studies weekly and they're introducing them to scripture, doctrine, encouraging them in Christian living and giving them opportunities to form wholesome friendships.

Active

“Beside that then, and these can often act as good entry points, we have a very active council of the Knights of Columbanus which effectively functions as our men's group. We have a women's group called 'Blessed', which is the female complement to the Knights. We have a very active choir which animates our liturgies but also contributes to the cultural life of the university. Of course the year is punctuated then with guest speakers, social events and charitable outreach. It's fairly lively.”

Fr McGrattan notes that Catholicism has become something that is mostly unexplored in the lives of young people and this makes it something

“fresher” when encountered, especially when they personally mightn't have had any negative experiences with the Church in their lifetime.

“This generation is not as culturally aware of Catholicism, they experience it as something that's new and fresh and something they're keen to know more about”

“Students are naturally curious and I think that this generation coming through are not encumbered by the conventions or even the baggage of earlier generations”, Fr McGrattan said. “They're curious to find out more. The important thing about our offering is that it's invitational and we find year-on-year an increase of students responding to that invitation with enthusiasm and generosity. Our experience here has been of an upward trajectory.

“I think that because this generation is not as culturally aware of Catholicism, they experience it as something that's new and fresh and something they're keen to know more about, become more involved in and to find more wholesome friendship circles that are supportive and that's what they experience here.”

Director of the Chaplaincy, Shannon Campbell, first joined the Chaplaincy when she wasn't

even practising the Faith and this has spurred her commitment to welcome all into the Chaplaincy family, regardless of where they currently are on their own personal faith journey, as she is aware that faith can blossom in the most unexpected of circumstances.

“The first time I ever stepped foot into the Chaplaincy I wasn't actually Catholic so I really learned the Faith at the Chaplaincy. One of the big things we say to students and try to emphasise is that this Chaplaincy is theirs, it's what they've inherited from their grandparents or great-grandparents who paid for it and ultimately contributed to it in many ways,” Ms Campbell said.

Journey

“This is regardless of anything else or where people might be at on their faith journey, they're still a part of this family and therefore we are here for you. So we make that effort to break the ice at an early stage because coming to university can be daunting in itself, especially when you don't know anybody.”

Social life in university can be, according to Ms Campbell, “fleeting and temporary”, and a large proportion of students may only experiment with certain communities, movements and trends for a brief period during their university days without these aspects really leaving a formative imprint on their overall character and development. This is contrary to the life-affirming permanence of the Faith, which Ms Campbell believes offers something more “meaningful” and “lasting”

when it is offered to budding adults searching for something more profound.

“Everything in university, or at least in the social side of the university context, is fleeting and temporary,” Ms Campbell said. “There is a realisation from students that there is something more meaningful here than what is being offered elsewhere in the Student's Union, in the city centre and in other places on campus ... there is something lasting here. Something that will give students meaning and their lives meaning. That is always going to be there and it's not fleeting.

“Students in the Covid generation haven't had it easy over the years and there are more and more pressures being thrust upon them from so many different directions and I think perhaps Church or at the very least groups associated with the Church community is a place where they can feel safe, at home and truly be themselves.”

“The number one thing for me was friendship and community and the witness that those friends gave to the Faith”

Although Ms Campbell credits her embrace of the Catholic Faith to the Chaplaincy, what was most instrumental in her own journey wasn't the talks or the guest lecturers facilitated by the Chaplaincy, although she enjoyed them, but strong emphasis on community and friendship that underpinned the student's witness to the Faith.

“I am learning more and more every day,” Ms Campbell said. “Although I learned my Faith in the Chaplaincy and yes, guest lecturers, talks and Mass and all of those wonderful things were a really big influential part of why I did become Catholic in the end.

“But I would say that the number one thing for me was friendship and community and the witness that those friends gave to the Faith. They had a way about them that made me think that I wanted to be like that and have what they had and the joy they had. At no point did I ever feel like they were trying to convert or evangelise me I was just totally in awe of their Christ-centred joy and the witness that they were giving on campus. So community and relationships can be really transformative for a student.”

“There is a realisation from students that there is something more meaningful here than what is being offered elsewhere in the Student's Union, in the city centre and in other places on campus ... there is something lasting here”

Surrogacy's flaws continue to be buried



Breda O'Brien

Surrogacy in Ireland was legalised in June with virtually no critical media scrutiny. Even when the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) Third Annual Report on Human Trafficking strongly criticised part of the legislation, serious and concerning issues remain quietly buried.

IHREC Commissioner, Ms Noeline Blackwell, explained on a recent Morning Ireland programme that the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive has been extended to cover those trafficked into the EU for purposes of surrogacy.

The IHREC Report is gravely concerned that no account has been taken of Irish obligations to uphold the amended EU Anti-Trafficking Directive about international surrogacy. IHREC wrote twice to the Minister for Health without a reply.

The IHREC also states: 'We remain concerned that the insertion of Part 8 - International Surrogacy - [in the Assisted Human Reproduction legislation] would extend the legislation to a practice [surrogacy] not permitted by any other EU State, in an area marred with increasing human trafficking. The Commission is concerned that this new law 'may thwart other countries' efforts to protect their citizens from trafficking and reproductive exploitation.'

Trafficking

Trafficking for purposes of surrogacy is already happening. In August last year, eight staff members of the Mediterranean Fertility Clinic in Crete were arrested.

According to the Progress Educational Trust, the clinic

staff 'are facing charges including human trafficking, violations of assisted reproduction legislation, forgery, falsification of medical data, and fraud.'

Over 160 women from countries like Georgia and Albania were allegedly forced to be egg donors and surrogates and were housed together in prison-like conditions. Intending parents were charged over €100,000 and the surrogate mothers were only given a pittance.

The new Irish Assisted Human Reproduction legislation was originally meant to cover only domestic surrogacy and to confine it to altruistic surrogacy. An entirely new section was tacked on, Part 8, to deal with international surrogacy mere months before the Bill was passed.

“It is extraordinary that Ireland would take the unprecedented step of not only permitting domestic surrogacy but authorising international surrogacies as well”

This Irish Assisted Human Reproduction legislation includes forming a new body, the Assisted Human Reproduction Regulatory Authority (AHRRA) which will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the new law. So now, the AHRRA will also be responsible for pre-authorising international surrogacy arrangements outside Ireland as well. In other words, people will apply to an Irish body for the right to use surrogates in other countries.

It is extraordinary that Ireland would take the unprecedented step of not only permitting domestic surrogacy but authorising international surrogacies as well. As the IHREC report states: 'It is apparent from the Joint Committee and Committee Stage

debates in the Dáil that there is a clear understanding that Irish law is not capable of regulating what occurs in other countries.'

However, even altruistic surrogacy is controversial because the Act provides for 'reasonable expenses' which in other jurisdictions, amount to attractive sums for poor women.

For example, Greece, which theoretically only allows altruistic surrogacy has a limit of €10,000, which is not a small sum for a poor woman, but this limit is routinely flouted and 'reasonable expenses' for altruistic surrogates are often double that amount.

This profound concern, much less concern about authorising international surrogacy, has not even been addressed in most Irish media, which concentrate mainly on publishing stories of happy families created through surrogacy. Yet international surrogacy has been rife with exploitation.

For example, in 2020, the Princeton Journal of *Public and International Affairs* reported surrogates in Ukraine were experiencing 'forced abortion, authoritarian and abusive living conditions in required surrogate housing, a lack of adequate medical care, and no reparations for long-term health issues due to surrogacy'. Similar abuses in India and Nepal led to bans on commercial surrogacy there.

Abandoned

Baby Gammy in Thailand was initially abandoned because of Down Syndrome. In another case, one young, single, male, Japanese billionaire commissioned 13 babies in just a year in Thailand. After several years, he was granted custody of them all.

In adoption, there is an international agreement called the Hague Convention, regulating and monitoring inter-country adoption.

Surrogacy advocates often resent comparisons with adoption, stating that biological parenthood among the fertile is not subjected to the same controls, so it amounts to discrimination to scrutinise infertile parents forced to use surrogacy.

But biological parenthood does not involve numerous outside parties, including States, and a multi-million euro fertility industry. It is absolutely reasonable to subject this process to scrutiny.

However, unlike adoption, no international agreement exists regarding surrogacy. It is



A nurse and newborns are seen in the Hotel Venice in Kyiv, Ukraine, May 14, 2020, which is owned by BioTexCom, a surrogacy agency. Surrogacy is among more than a dozen issues covered by a new Vatican document on human dignity. Photo: OSV News/Gleb Garanich, Reuters

unlikely to exist given that most countries, including the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Brazil prohibit commercial surrogacy, and other countries, including France, Germany,

Italy, and Spain prohibit both commercial and altruistic surrogacy.

Astonishingly, Ireland has enshrined in law that it will give a stamp of approval to interna-

tional surrogacy arrangements in places where we have no way of knowing whether mothers or babies will be treated as anything except commodities. Yet there is no outcry. Why?

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“Biological parenthood does not involve numerous outside parties, including States, and a multi-million euro fertility industry. It is absolutely reasonable to subject this process to scrutiny”

St Kilian comes back home after 1,300 years



Renata Steffens

When one is asked to think of an Irish saint, there is a high chance they would think of St Patrick or St Brigid, however, there is another saint who deserves as much devotion. St Kilian left Mullagh in Co. Cavan in the 7th Century to spread Christianity in mainland Europe.

The saint was born in Mullagh around the year 640. Early details of Kilian's life are often conflicting depending on the source. But all agree he received his religious education at the monastery in Rosscarberry, Co. Cork founded by St Fachtna in the 4th Century.

Later, St Kilian founded his own monastery near Kenmare, Co. Kerry, where he trained other monks. Being a missionary at heart, Kilian decided to leave Ireland and spread the Word in Europe.

Kilian joined by eleven or twelve monks, the numbers vary depending on the source, left the Kilmakilloge harbour on their way to Rome. There, they met Pope Conon and were redirected to the province of Franconia, part of what is Bavaria today.

The original group separated to bring their missionary work to more places, and Kilian (a bishop) stayed in the town of Würzburg with two of his companions, the priest Kolonat and the deacon Totnan. At the time, most people there, including the Duke Gosbert, were pagans. Kilian was the person responsible in the duke's conversion to christianity, and following the ruler, his people also became Christians.

The three Irish missionaries were in Würzburg for only three years when rumours of the duke's affair with his brother's wife, Geilana, reached Kilian's ears, who quickly denounced the scandal, as that goes against Christian law. Because of that, Geilana hired two assassins to kill the missionaries when the duke was away. It is believed the three Irishmen were praying when the assassins arrived. Their heads were cut off and their bodies were secretly buried. The saints' bodies were only found years later.

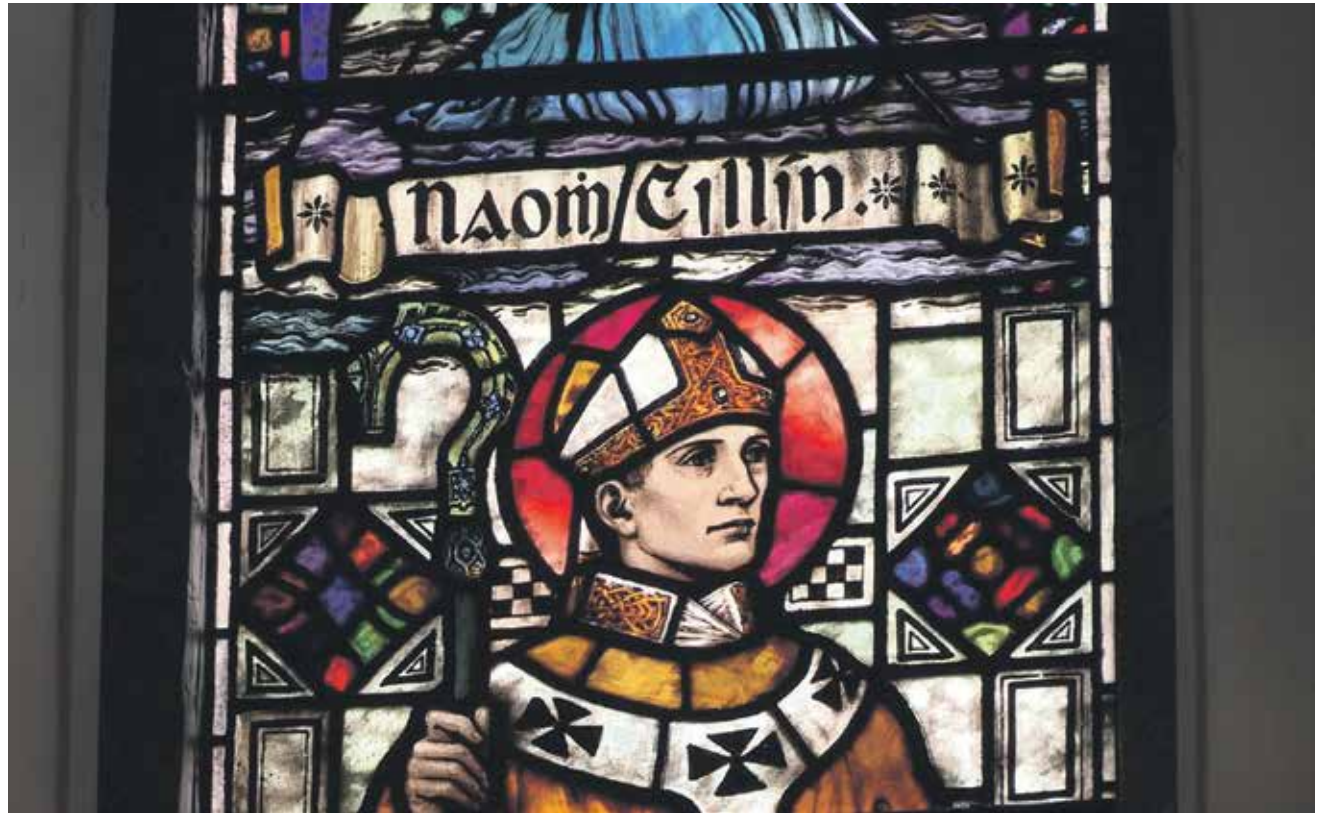
“The diocese is ‘hoping to bring the joy of celebrating our faith without focusing upon the actual fact of his death’”

When St Boniface and Burchard of Wessex arrived to Würzburg on a missionary expedition they saw the influence of St Kilian and his monks on the area. The saint and his companions were being venerated for many cures of illnesses. In 752 Burchard transferred their relics into the cathedral and dedicated it to St Kilian.

It was only in the 9th century that St Kilian's death was recorded in Ireland. The Irish saints were entered in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, which is the earliest Irish compilation list of Roman Catholic saints.

St Kilian and his companions had been revered throughout that part of Europe since the first moment their relics were enshrined. St Kilian had not yet come back to Ireland since he left in the 7th Century.

In the past 37 years many pilgrims visited Mullagh from Germany. The first official pilgrimage happened in 1987, starting the strong bond



St Kilian pictured on window at St Mary's Church, Cross, Co. Cavan

between St Kilian's place of birth and the place of his death.

This October, for the first time ever St Kilian's relics will come back home. The theme for this visit's celebration is 'Community of Hope, Pilgrimage of Joy', and Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes said the diocese is "hoping to bring the joy of celebrating our faith without focusing upon the actual fact of his death. We want to celebrate him and celebrate his martyrdom."

The visit will happen from Wednesday, October 2 to Sunday, October 6. The relics will arrive in the country on Wednesday and visit St Patrick's College in Maynooth, and arrive in Kilian's home county the next day.

Celebration

The first celebration will be at St Kilian's Well in Mullagh, nearby to where it's believed his monastery was. Over the weekend, some activities will be "involving children from the neighbouring parishes and the schools, and they're involving in a dramatic reenactment of the story of St Killian," explained Bishop Hayes.

Another important moment happening during the weekend is the release of a new hymn in honour of St Kilian. It "is going to be sung for the first time by our very own parish choir", explained Fr Paul Prior, parish priest of Mullagh. The hymn called *St Kilian Prayer* was composed by Fr Liam Lawton, based

on a prayer "that we have in the parish, which was written by a former native of this parish called Prof. Ronan Drury, who was the professor of homiletics in St Patrick's College Maynooth."

Bishop Hayes expects that this weekend of hope, joy and prayer will help the community to appreciate and learn from the faith and mission displayed in St Kilian's history. The bishop said during a press conference last February that he hopes "the people of Kilmore Diocese will gather to venerate, pray with the relics of St Kilian and companions."

“Mr O'Reilly believes the visit will increase awareness of the saint's story throughout the diocese and the State”

"It will be an opportunity to reflect upon our Christian faith. We live in a time of questioning of our faith, which is the opportunity to reflect on the relevance of our faith in this technological post-modern age."

Shane P. O'Reilly, chair for the Relics Visit Committee, said the relics visiting home after over 1300 years is "a massive...impact. It's an absolutely

fantastic thing." Mr O'Reilly believes the visit will increase awareness of the saint's story throughout the diocese and the State.

Impact

Fr Paul Prior told *The Irish Catholic* that "outside the Parish of Mullagh, he [St Kilian] is not hugely known." The priest lamented: "Even within our diocese, people are aware of him but might not be familiar with the story."

Madeleine Uí Mhéalóid, a volunteer with the St Kilian's Heritage Centre said the saint "is much more revered in Germany." She explained that in Ireland, his importance has only been recognised in the recent years. The reason St Kilian is venerated in Germany, and his name is so cherished there is because "they look on St Kilian and they look on Mullagh as the source of their religion," Ms Uí Mhéalóid explained.

Agreeing with Fr Prior, Ms Uí Mhéalóid said "the devotion is not throughout the State. It's more locally." She hopes the visit will increase awareness of the impact of St Kilian in spreading Christianity in Europe. "We're very proud of them [St Kilian and his companions] here in Mullagh," she concluded.

Bishop Hayes said the reason why the saint is not well-known over the Diocese, is because "Mullagh is situated on the east side of our diocese, and our diocese stretches over

to just South of Bundoran in Co. Donegal. So he wouldn't be as well-known over in North Leitrim or South Fermanagh, or that area."

“The spirit of the man who left here to listen, to hear God's words, to follow His call and to go to the heartlands of Europe where he celebrated so much”

Fr Prior explained the visit, the saint's "homecoming" is something the Mullagh community has been waiting for a long time. The return, he said, is much more than merely his relics, but his spirit. "The spirit of the man who left here to listen, to hear God's words, to follow His call and to go to the heartlands of Europe where he celebrated so much." This visit will also have an impact on the living faith of the community, the priest believes.

Eoin Doyle, Chief Executive of Cavan County Council also agrees "Killian was well known in Mullagh...and in Cavan, [but] his broader legacy is underappreciated around the country, and we would hope through the publicity that we can gen-



St Mary's Church, Cross, Co. Cavan

Community of Hope, Pilgrimage of Joy

**A Kilmore diocesan celebration
The Parish of Mullagh & Cross
welcomes St Kilian home**

October 2 – 6, 2024

Wednesday, October 2

6.00pm Evening Prayer in the presence of the sacred relics of Ss Kilian, Totnan and Kolonat. The College Chapel, St Patrick's College Maynooth, Co Kildare

Thursday, October 3

8.00pm The people of the parish of Mullagh receive the sacred relics of St Kilian at St Kilian's Well and welcome pilgrims from the diocese of Wurzburg

Procession of relics to St Kilian's Church, Mullagh for a liturgy of the official welcome of the relics and the commencement of an all-night vigil of the townlands of St Kilian's home parish.

Friday, October 4

7.00am Mass at Dawn St Kilian's Church, Mullagh

10.30am The children of Mullagh tell the story of St Kilian. A day's activity for national school children from the St Kilian Pastoral Area.

10.00am The Legacy of St Kilian today. Pilgrim Path starts at St Kilian's Well. An activity for secondary schools.

8.00pm An evening concert and official launch of the new hymn for St Kilian. St Kilian's Church.

Saturday, October 5

***Cherishing our ancestors
Commemorating St. Kilian's homecoming
to his native parish***

10.45am Community procession. The sacred relics of St Kilian and his companions will be processed from Edwin Carolan Park to St Kilian's Church by the clubs, groups and organisations of the parish.

12.00 noon Commemorative Mass. Mass hosted by the parish of Mullagh for invited guests and pilgrims from the diocese of Wurzburg in St Kilian's Church Mullagh. This Mass will be livestreamed to a number of locations in the parish to enable everybody's participation.

1.30pm Lunch and hospitality.

3.30pm Veneration of St Kilian's relic in St Mary's Church, Cross. The reliquary will make its way to Cavan via Virginia, Lavey, & Killygarry.

5.30pm The sacred relics of Ss Kilian and his companions are officially welcomed by the people of Cavan Town and the Diocese of Kilmore at the Cathedral of Ss Patrick & Felim Cavan.

7.30pm Set Sail with St Kilian. A diocesan celebration of Mass to commemorate the visit of St Kilian's relics to the diocese of Kilmore. The cathedral will remain open for the veneration of the sacred relics until 10.00pm.

Sunday, October 6

10.00am Mass of Thanksgiving at the conclusion of the visit of the sacred relics of Ss Kilian, Totnan and Kolonat and the safe return of pilgrims to Wurzburg.

erate for the return of the relics that we would increase awareness of the legacy of St Kilian."

Legacy

Mullagh had been receiving German and mainland-Europeans since the 1980s, so in 2014 Mr O'Reilly went to Germany and had a conversation with the local diocese. He went to Würzburg every year since.

"It was me that made the initial inquiries to bring the relics home," he explained. Würzburg Diocese has a committee responsible to decide everything related to the relics, Mr O'Reilly told this paper.

The Diocese of Kilmore and Cavan County Council have a close relationship with the Diocese of Würzburg and local authorities. Mr Doyle explained that the formal connection between the County Council and the Diocese of Würzburg focused on the legacy of St Kilian has existed for around ten years.

The chief executive explained that the friendship between Co. Cavan and Würzburg has been built since St Kilian left "to spread the Good News", and that this friendship is based on three pillars.

The first one is based on the civic connections between the local authorities of Co. Cavan and Würzburg, "recognising a shared historical figure which is of great importance to both."

The second pillar is community. Mr Doyle said "there is a genuine connection between the people of Mullagh, Co. Cavan...and the people of Würzburg." He mentioned that a local electoral representative native from Ballyhaise, Colette Duggan, is behind the connections between Würzburg and Mullagh.

The third pillar is faith. It is the recognition and faithful connection between the dioceses led by Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes and Bishop of Würzburg Franz Jung, and their shared local heritage.

In Bavaria, the annual festival 'Kiliani' happens every July to celebrate St Kilian and his influence on German history. In Cavan, they also have an annual celebration to honour the Irish saint, it usually happens around the bank holiday in May.

Fr Prior mentioned the Ireland the relics are coming back to is a very different place to the time when Kilian left. "It is no longer just a rural community, but a rural community with a heart that's opened itself to other people, it is a community that's "quite diverse."

St Kilian can possibly be considered one of the first Irish migrants. Fr Prior said the saint might "inspire the migrants to trust in the journey, to trust in God," trust that God is with us, "protecting us, God [is] guiding us."

Commenting if St Kilian could be considered an unofficial Patron of Migrants, Bishop Hayes said: "People who leave their home, they need an anchor. They need a rock...and I think Killian represents that."

“Pope Francis himself called people to be missionaries, not only clergy but every single person of faith”

Bishop Hayes mentioned that in the saint's time, 1,300 years ago, people did not have the same sense of migration we have today, but "now we know the whole world, and we know there's lots of migration happening very often due to war, persecution and poverty."

There are reasons why people are moving, leaving certainty behind and searching for better opportunities elsewhere. Not necessarily only immigrants but all migrants,

even Irish people leaving the State for better opportunities overseas.

Independent of the reason for moving, Bishop Hayes believes this migration is also an "opportunity for different peoples to meet...and to have an influence upon each other... To bring their faith as well and without imposing it on anyone else, bring the example of their faith in coping with their difficulties... To bring that example of faith and endurance and

resilience to others."

Pope Francis himself called people to be missionaries, not only clergy but every single person of faith. Bishop Hayes said: "in acknowledging the life of a saint we see it as an example of God's love and mercy for us. A relic reveals God's love for us and helps us to worship God."

"Pope Francis himself in praying with relics in Lima, Peru, said that they're a sign of God's love and mercy in the world. I would hope...that people will be impacted upon the fact that an Irishman...left these shores to be missionary and that would instil in people the importance of being missionaries themselves and indeed being missionaries in our own country."



**St Kilian Church,
Mullagh, Co. Cavan**

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A future where young people are exposed to the power of the Good News can be part of your legacy, help spread the light of the Gospel to future generations across Ireland by remembering *The Irish Catholic* in your Will.



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Vocations Ireland bring Faith and fun to the Ploughing

Renata Milán Morales

Religious communities have been a key presence among retailers, farmers, and businesses participating in the retail section of the National Ploughing Championships for many years. It is held annually over the course of three days and typically draws an audience of around 250,000 people. These attendees come from all corners of Ireland and beyond, from a wide range of ages, faith traditions, and some with no religious affiliation at all.

It might seem surprising that members of Vocations Ireland were present at the largest ploughing

event in Europe. This major event took place in Ratheniska, Co. Laois, from September 17 to 19.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us that “wherever there is life, fervour, and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise.” At the National Ploughing Championships, ‘Vocations Ireland’ witnessed exactly that: life, fervour, and a sincere desire to be Christ-like.

Anne-Marie Whelan, the Evangelisation and Vocations Officer for the Sisters of Bon Secours Ireland, shared with *The Irish Catholic* that, “Our goal in attending is to promote vocations, offer a listening ear, and engage with people of all ages. While the task of promoting vocations may

seem daunting to some, those who represented their congregations this year had no difficulty sharing their stories, hoping to inspire interest in religious life.”

On Wednesday, the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor, visited the vocations stand, accompanied by Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin. Bishop Nulty even joined in a game of Jenga with the Carmelite friars and some young visitors.

Anne-Marie Whelan said, “The ‘Faith and Fun’ we brought to The Hub was clearly appreciated, by the smiles, laughter, and positive feedback from those we met. Some of the encouraging comments were,

‘We are so glad to see you’, ‘Thank you to the religious for their years of service to society. We seem to have forgotten the good work they’ve done’, ‘We are so happy to see you among all the business stands’, and ‘It’s wonderful to have a visible religious presence here’. Many people expressed sadness that religious congregations have left their regions and are deeply missed.”

Commenting on the event, Anne-Marie Whelan shared with this paper, “From the very first day, when people helped us carry tables and boxes to set up our stand, to the final day when someone kindly brought us coffee, we were

warmly welcomed by everyone we encountered,” Mrs Whelan added, “Over the course of the three days, members from various congregations distributed prayer cards, shared gifts, provided information about religious life, and engaged with young visitors through games. We also offered a space for prayer requests, which will be passed on to our contemplative communities for their prayers. Additionally, our Capuchin friends provided blessings using a relic of Carlo Acutis and Padre Pio’s mitten.”

i To find out more about the work of Vocations Ireland go to www.vocationsireland.com or follow their accounts on social media.



Stand visitors pictured with Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin. Photo: Julie Kavanagh



Members of Vocations Ireland with Margaret Cartwright, Director of ‘Vocations Ireland’ at their stand at the Ploughing. Photo: Vocations Ireland



Brothers Jander and Joao, Carmelite Friars, setting the challenge of Jenga at the Ploughing. Photo: Vocations Ireland



Members of ‘Vocations Ireland’ with Bishop Denis Nulty and His Excellency Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor at the ‘Vocations Ireland’ stand. Photo: Vocations Ireland



Vinny Tran SDB, Colman O'Driscoll SDB, Br Anthony Kurian OFM Cap, Anne-Marie Whelan of Sisters of Bon Secours, Sr Josephine James of Presentation Sisters



Sr Mary Usifoh and Sr Mercy, OLA Sisters, at the 'Vocations Ireland' stand at the Ploughing



'Aid to the Church in Need Ireland' had a stand at the National Ploughing Championships. Photo: ACN



'Aid to the Church in Need' receives a visit from Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Luis Montemayor and Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin. Photo: ACN

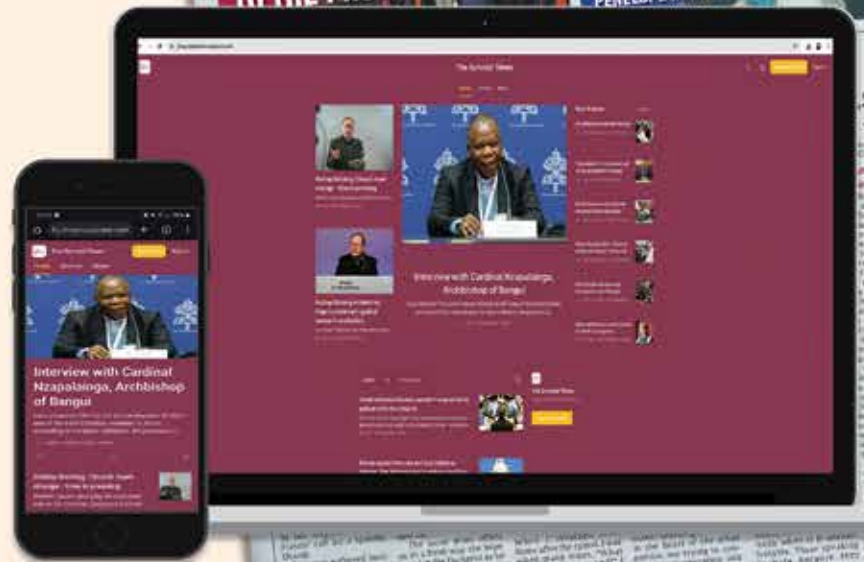
THE SYNODAL TIMES

Support the emergence of a Synodal Church

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

Continuing our mission to raise awareness on synodality, The Synodal Times will be back after the summer with exclusive interviews and in-depth discussions of all things Synod. After covering the second Synod of the Bishops on Synodality in Rome in October, we will shift focus on the Irish Church and its preparation for the Synodal Assemblies in 2026.

Your support is essential for us to continue our work



Hundreds descend on RDS to stand for life

Chai Brady

More than 600 people attended the annual Ceiliúradh Cois Life dinner last weekend in Dublin's Aviva Stadium.

The proceeds from the fundraising event, organised by the Pro Life Campaign, funds

programmes for young people in the pro-life movement, like the Future Leaders Programme and Students for Life, as well as projects that assist pregnant and new mothers in need.

The former Minister for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton, was the guest speaker at this year's event.

At the dinner, Eilís Mulroy, CEO of the Pro Life Campaign thanked Ms Creighton and her husband, former senator Paul Bradford, for the stance they took in 2013 in opposing Enda Kenny's abortion legislation in the Oireachtas. Referring to that difficult time for the pro-life cause, Ms Mulroy talked about the witness

and example they showed at the time, saying: "It takes a special kind of courage for what you did and I want you to know we haven't forgotten it or the sacrifices you made."

Meanwhile, Senator Rónán Mullen encouraged attendees to lend their support to candidates in the upcoming general election who have a strong

pro-life record. He mentioned the successes in the recent local elections but stressed more seats could have been won had a few extra canvassers or leafletters stepped forward in particular constituencies. He said it proves the importance of everyone playing their part, whether big or small.

Last Friday's dinner was the eighth Ceiliúradh Cois Life to take place since it launched. Previous years' guest speakers also include: Baroness Nuala O'Loan, Lord Alton of Liverpool (David Alton), Professor William Binchy, Elma Walsh of #Livelife Foundation and football manager Mickey Harte.



Ceiliúradh Cois Life, the annual fundraising dinner of the Pro Life Campaign took place on September 20 in the Aviva Stadium in Dublin. Attended by 600 people the guest speaker was former Minister of State Lucinda Creighton. Some happy faces are pictured on Friday night. Photos: John McElroy



Stephen Browne from Kildare, Andrea Morrin, Navan, and Tadhg Fitzsimons, Navan.



Frs Francis Cotter OFM, Pat Lynch OFM, Aidan McGrath OFM, Roch Dudek OFM, Albin Kolarski OFM, John Harty OFM and Pat Power OFM.



Senator Sharon Keogan, Wendy Grace, Paula Mullen, Cllr Emer Tóibín and Cllr Amanda Smith.



Oisín O'Coisneachain, Ava Ridge, Emily Mc Dermott, Zofia Bajor, Bishop Kevin Doran and Sr Philomena.



Eva Conroy, Emma Crippen and Ireland Johnson.



Lana Lukjanova and Dominika Wojtkowiak.



Eimear and Philip Lawlor with Croia (8 months).



Lucinda Creighton and Michael Kelly.



Celia Bridges and Emily Tama.



Lucinda Creighton, Mary Kenny, Prof. Patricia Casey and Finola Bruton.



Senator Ronan Mullen, Wendy Grace, Lucinda Creighton, Eilis Mulroy and Paul Bradford.



Miriam Clune and Laura Perrins.



John and Ann-Marie Tiernan.



Harry Fitzgerald and May Gonzalez.



Philomena Tierney, Mary Anne Aherne and Sylvia Nwokolo.



Treasa McGrath, Miriam Dowling and Annette O'Donnell.

Out&About

Limerick's torchlight procession



LIMERICK: Recently, the Diocese of Limerick celebrated the Eucharist, Ceremony of Healing and the Torchlight Procession led by Bishop Leahy in Our Lady of Lourdes Church.



LIMERICK: Celebration of Eucharist, Ceremony of Healing and the Torchlight Procession led by Bishop Leahy that happened in Our Lady of Lourdes Church.



MONAGHAN: Pupils of the Year 6 of Our Lady's Secondary School Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan took part in a retreat to Lough Derg with theme 'Let Your Light Shine'.

IN SHORT

Irish student awarded scientific prize in Poland

An Irish student won second place in a scientific contest in Poland earlier this month. Seán O'Sullivan, a student from Coláiste Chiaráin in Croom, Co. Limerick came second at the EU Contest for Young Scientists (EUCYS) in Katowice.

With the project entitled 'VerifyMe: A new approach to authorship attribution in the post-ChatGPT era', Mr O'Sullivan competed against 250 students from all across Europe and guests from the US. Together with the prestige of the ranking, he took home €5,000.

Mr O'Sullivan is collecting a number of awards with his project. His win on the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition (BTYSTE) qualified him to the EUCYS, he was also awarded the 2025 Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair Prize, which includes a research trip

to Ohio, US.

With the line between human- and AI-generated text being so blurred nowadays, Mr O'Sullivan's project analysed the challenges of author verification in the context of the significant improvements in large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT.

Irish priest ministering in Cape Town died after Sunday Mass

A beloved Irish priest living in South Africa since the 1970s died after saying Sunday Mass. On September 15, Fr Sean Cahill was celebrating Mass in the Church of the Immaculate Conception in the parish of Parow of the Archdiocese of Cape Town, where he was assistant priest, and died later that day.

Fr Cahill was born in Fairview, Dublin on July 7, 1938. He started his novitiate year in 1957 in the Capuchin Postulancy in Rochestown, Co.

Cork and was temporarily professed in the Kilkenny Friary in 1958. The priest was perpetually professed in Ards Friary, Co. Donegal in 1961, and ordained at Ards Friary in 1965.

He studied in Rome in the 1960s, came back to Ireland and became Assistant Master of Novices in Kilkenny and later Director of Theology Students and Lecturer in Moral Theology in Ards Friary.

The priest volunteered for the Vice Province of South Africa and arrived in Cape Town on October 5, 1973. Fr Cahill has worked and lived in various locations in South Africa in the past 51 years. He worked as PP in many parishes, and led a number of retreats and formations. He was a member of the South African Capuchin Council and served as Vice Provincial on two occasions.

Diocese of Meath's annual pilgrimage to Lourdes

Recently, the Diocese of Meath completed

their annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. Bishop Tom Deenihan accompanied over 400 pilgrims from all over the diocese on the pilgrimage which started with Mass at the grotto at Massabielle celebrated by the Bishop.

Coordinated by Fr Joe Gallagher, the pilgrimage was supported by a number of volunteers and members of hospitality who assisted and cared for the pilgrims joyfully.

The Youth Programme was also an important part of the pilgrimage, accompanying students from St Patrick's Classical School, Navan and Eureka Secondary School, Kells along with their teachers and volunteers.

When not assisting pilgrims and participating in the diocesan pilgrimage programme, the 'Meath Youth' guided pilgrims in a Holy Hour, prayed the High Stations, and hiked to Bartres where they visited the sheep fold and venerated the relic of St Bernadette. Their programme concluded with a Service of Thanksgiving in the City of the Poor before returning home.

Edited by Renata Steffens
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



CORK: Bishop Fintan Gavin celebrated the 'Doon Station' in the Watergrasshill & Glenville Parish. The celebration happened at the home of Mossie and Breda Buckley. Their family and neighbours joined to welcome the bishop and pray.



MONAGHAN: Students of Our Lady's Secondary School Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan during their retreat in Lough Derg with theme 'Let Your Light Shine'.



CORK: Family and neighbour at the home of Mossie and Breda Buckley in the Watergrasshill & Glenville Parish for the 'Doon Station' with Bishop Fintan Gavin.



LAOIS: Visitors at the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin's stand during the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Portlaoise.



LAOIS: Charlie Flanagan, Chair Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs & Defence met Bishop Denis Nulty in the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin's stand during the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Portlaoise.



LAOIS: The Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin received people in Stand 221 during the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Portlaoise. Visitor could write their intentions to pray for peace in a wounded world.

CORK

Carrigaline Parish, Prayer Circle for vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life in the Diocese of Cork and Ross. First Sunday of each month 5pm - 6pm in the Church of Our Lady and St John Carrigaline. All welcome.

Medjugorje prayer meeting every Wednesday at 8pm in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Third Order chapel, Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay.

DERRY

Termonbacca Carmelite Monastery's annual Triduum of Masses for the feast of St Thérèse of Lisieux will start this Sunday. September 29: Healing Mass; September 30: Blessing of Children and October 1: Blessing of Roses. Mass, triduum and blessing with the relics begins at 7.30pm. All welcome to come and pray.

DOWN

Confession at St Patrick's Church happens on Mondays from 6.45pm to 7.30pm, on Fridays from 3pm to 4pm, and on Saturdays from 12noon to 1pm.

DUBLIN

If you are a Catholic man over the age of 18 and are considering exploring priesthood, come to the 'Vocations Discernment Day' in UCD on October 12 from 11am to 5pm. For more information and to register access vocations.ie/exploring.

KILDARE

Parish Cell Community in Leixlip Parish are hosting the 'Parish Cells National Seminar' on September 27 to 28. This seminar is open to all and is a good way for people to explore the Parish Cell System of Evangelisation and to hear the impact of parish cells on individuals and parishes. Further information is available on parishcellsireland.ie

LOUTH

12th Annual Triduum in Honour of St Thérèse of Lisieux of Kilkenny Parish will happen at Church of Immaculate Conception. With theme 'Whispers of Grace: St Thérèse's quiet influence in a secular world', a prayer service will happen on September 29 at 7.30pm with guest speaker: Martina Purdy; Holy Mass on September 30 at 7.30pm with

guest speaker: Helen Stewart; and Holy Mass at 7.30, with confessions available at 6pm on October 1, with guest speaker is: Sr Briega O'Hare OSC.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place on Sunday October 13 in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock at 6pm.

MONAGHAN

Mary Mother of Mercy, Inniskeen's Eucharistic Adoration happens each week on Tuesdays from 7pm-9pm, Wednesday from 10.30am-9pm and Thursday from 7pm-9pm. All welcome to join in adoration.

TIPPERARY

Youth 2000 one-day 'Munster Day Retreat' for people aged 16-35 happens on October 5 in Mary Immaculate College Thurles Campus. Registration is at 8.45am, the event starts at 9.30am and ends at 6pm. All welcome. Donations only. To register and more information access youth2000.ie.

TYRONE

Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group meetings take place in the pastoral centre on Thursday evenings with Rosary at 7.30pm and prayer meeting at 8pm. All welcome to come and pray.

The Transitus of St Francis will be celebrated on Thursday, October 3 in St Brigid's Brocagh (Clonoe Parish, Coalisland) at 7.30pm led by Fr John McCallion. All welcome to join us in this beautiful memory of the passing of St Francis to his homeland in heaven.

WATERFORD

Charismatic Day of Prayer happens on Sunday, September 29 in the Edmund Rice Chapel. from 10.30am to 5.30pm. The speaker is Fr Pat Collins and Mass celebrated by Bishop Phonsie Cullinan. Contact Word of God Outreach at 086 859 0394.

WESTMEATH

Legion of Mary's Our Lady Mother of Perpetual Succour Praesidium happens on Mondays at 6pm at the parish meeting room on St Mary Catholic Church, Athlone. More information contact 087 782 9434 or concilium@legion-of-mary.ie

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

Synodality? Stifle that yawn! We can ‘church’ in a new way in our own parishes



Steven P. Millies

The global Catholic Church seems to be approaching the second session of the Synod on Synodality with a great, collective yawn. It seems that almost none of us expects anything really to come of the gathering.

The intake of breath that formed the yawn began when Pope Francis appeared on the US television program 60 Minutes in May. Asked about the possibility of restoring women to the diaconate, the Pope gave a strong impression that the “no” on that question raised during the first session of the Synod is final.

But we really began to let that yawn out in July when the *Instrumentum Laboris*, a document that will function like an agenda, appeared. The document emphasises how the Synod can transform Church structures, avoiding further discussion about controversial issues. And, the yawn sang to a noisy, arm-stretching conclusion when Cardinal Mario Grech, the general secretary of the Synod, confirmed on September 16 that the final session will avoid voting on controversial issues. “The synod is a time of prayer; it is not a convention,” he said.

Purpose

At a glance, the yawn seems justified. Hopes have been raised for the last three years that the Synod on Synodality might crack the ice and help LGBTQ+ people find greater acceptance in the Church or create new opportunities for women to minister and to lead. After all of this build-up, what is the point of another “meeting about meetings?”

But here, I want to say, we need to pause. We need to rein in our cynicism and we need to take a longer view of things. We need to see the Synod for what it actually is.

Pope Francis has said, “The synod is not a parliament, where in order to reach consensus we start to negotiate, making deals and compromises. The lone method in the synod is to listen to the Holy Spirit.” What we want to notice is that the Pope did not say



Priests work in an English-language small group April 30, 2024, with facilitator Sr Maria Cimperman, a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as part of a meeting of parish priests from around the world gathered at Sacrofano, outside of Rome, to share their experiences and contribute to the ongoing synod on synodality. Photo: CNS/Courtesy of the Synod of Bishops.

that about the Synod on Synodality. He said it in 2015 during the Synod on the Family. It is a description of synodality that he always has held to, and the point that he makes is important.

“If there is no Holy Spirit, there is no Synod. If the Holy Spirit is not present, there is no synodality. Or rather, there is no Church”

Of course a synod is a meeting, a place where discussions are held and decisions are made. But being a Church together demands more from us than a legislative meeting where a binding decision might pass by only a few votes. The Church always moves together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the authority, not the people who gather.

Pope Francis said it again in 2019, addressing bishops of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church:

the Synod is not a Parliament! Things must be said, discussed as normal but it is not a Parliament. The Synod is not about reaching agreement as in politics: I give you this, in exchange for that. No. The Synod is not about making a sociological sur-

vey as some would suppose: “Let’s see, we’ll ask a group of lay people to make an inquiry, to find out if we should change this, this and this...”. You certainly need to know what your lay people are thinking, but it is not an inquiry; it is different. If there is no Holy Spirit, there is no Synod. If the Holy Spirit is not present, there is no synodality. Or rather, there is no Church.

When we lengthen our gaze toward the past and hear what Pope Francis has been telling us about synodality since long before we knew there would be a Synod on Synodality, the development of these two sessions in 2023 and 2024 begins to make more sense. That lengthened gaze also can help us begin to see a future that is taking shape.

Synod

In its first session, the Synod gathered the voices of the whole world. Listening to the People of God from every corner of the globe, the Synod that met in the hall in Rome surfaced the questions that face the Church, urgent concerns that arise from the community of the baptised. But if we are listening to Pope Francis, we know it is a mistake to expect a second session would legislate any changes to Church doctrine or discipline. Something else is happening.

The Bernardin Centre at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where I am the director, offered a public program last November where four people who were present at the first session described their experiences.

I keep thinking about something that surfaced there. The secretariat for the Synod hopes and expects that local churches will take up new directions under the invitation of the Spirit on an experimental (ad experimentum) basis: “this isn’t yet allowed, but please go and do it and then reflect on it, and let us know how it’s gone.”

“The chief effect would be to make real what the second session of the Synod does promise to take up, to examine the structures of the Church, its leadership and its decision making”

That idea holds real excitement. It suggests that the Synod will call on our local churches to try out new things. This will reflect no change in Church teaching at all. Yet, it will change our experiences of the Church. Perhaps it will mean allowing women to preach from the altar. It might take the shape of new min-

istries that welcome and include LGBTQ+ as many in the listening phase ask for. It could mean all sorts of things. And, it will have important effects.

The chief effect would be to make real what the second session of the Synod does promise to take up, to examine the structures of the Church, its leadership and its decision making. It would open that decision making to all of us.

Approach

My Catholic Theological Union colleague Stephen B. Bevans, SVD has an important new book—*Community of Missionary Disciples: The Continuing Creation of the Church*. Bevans has written a work of ecclesiology that places mission at the centre of the Church, and locates the Church’s mission in the life of every baptised person. The book also is a guide for seeing the Church through the lens of synodality. It begins with a long epigraph, a poem by Godfrey Rust: ‘Church Is a Verb.’ That subtle reframing is critical to how Bevans sees the Church, and it is the guide to how we need to approach the second session of the Synod and what will follow.

Less important than any changes that might be legislated by the Synod is the idea that we might begin to change permanently how we all ‘church’ together. That is the necessary first step before any changes to doctrine or discipline even can be contemplated. To fully absorb synodality and begin ‘churching’ differently is a shift of emphasis that will lead to a different church. The experiments and experiences we undertake in our own communities can become sources of reflection across the global church. And this, in turn, will mean that the Roman Catholic Church will be more open to the leadership and the membership of every baptised person than it is today. Synodality will help us ‘church’ in a new way. That new way will open the door to the real needs of the People of God.

The whole Francis papacy has been a comprehensive vision that all points toward this ‘churching’ in a new way. The second session of the Synod may represent its final stage of development toward a new sort of Church that only can be different. Hopefully, if we walk with that development, it also will be renewed.

① Steven P. Millies, Ph.D. Professor of Public Theology. Director, The Bernardin Centre. smillies@ctu.edu

When I first heard ‘Synodality’ – it sounded like a bad medical condition



Martina Purdy

When I first heard the term ‘Synodality’, it sounded like a bad medical condition. Why, I wondered, do Church leaders use terms like “Synod on Synodality” – and still hope to excite the laity about mission? It was always going to be a hard sell. What does it mean?

The term ‘synod’ is rooted in two Greek words, meaning ‘the way together’. So the aim is for the whole Church to embark on a new path of growth, where the clergy and the laity work in partnership, so each one can fulfil their baptism call to mission: spreading the good news of God’s saving love for all.

Already, this Synod has broken new ground. This is no bishops only initiative. There are delegates from the laity, male and female, with formal voting rights. Also, billion Catholics were invited to give their views – though the uptake was significantly less.

I participated in two early listening sessions (one was not that pleasant as all I remember was an angry rant from a man demanding women priests while the other focused on

what we did well as a Church and nearly everyone said funerals).

Focus

Pope Francis, who launched the Synod in 2021, with a focus on prayer, listening and mission, has made the synodal way his prayer intention this October. The closing session begins in Rome October 2, the Feast of the Angels, and runs until October 27.

A few years on, I am not sure the average Catholic, practising or not, has grown in wisdom or enthusiasm about Synod 2021-23, which met last October in Rome and was extended to 2024.

There is already a danger of disillusionment.

In July, the online newspaper *Crux* made much of the fact that the Vatican quickly removed an online poll on ‘synodality’. The poll invited a ‘yes or no’ response to the question: “Do you believe that synodality, as a path of conversion and reform, can enhance the mission and participation of all the baptised?”

“Lived experience’ is one thing - but what happens when it doesn’t conform to Divine Revelation?”

The responses, as is often the case on social media, were largely negative. According to



Parish priests from around the world meet at Sacrofano, outside of Rome, April 29, 2024, and listen to the introductory talks at the beginning of a four-day meeting to share their experiences and contribute to the ongoing synod on synodality. Photo: CNS/Courtesy of the Synod of Bishops

Info Vaticana, the ‘no’ option on X, previously Twitter, sat steadily between 85-90 percent for the entire 24 hours the poll was up.

As October is the month of the rosary, it is an ideal way to intercede for all taking part in the closing session, especially our Holy Father, and the two Irish bishops, Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick and the newly installed bishop of Down and Connor, Alan McGuckian.

The Synod has involved words and phrases such as ‘change’, ‘co-responsibility’, ‘listening to each other and the Spirit’ and “lived experience”.

That is great but again, what does it mean in practice?

‘Lived experience’ is one thing - but what happens when it doesn’t conform to Divine Revelation? How do we convince people that our lived experience improves when it

conforms to Divine Revelation?

How do we discern when it is the Holy Spirit speaking and not our own *worldly* thinking?

Expectations

Have we managed expectations about what can be changed? What happens if some people don’t feel they have been heard – or don’t like the answer and action that follows?

Some of the answers coming back from the laity here in Ireland and elsewhere, after the initial listening and consultation, included demands for women’s ordination, married priests and a change in attitudes to divorced and remarried Catholics and the LGBTQ+ community.

These hot-button issues featured in the official working document in October 2023, and were among the most emotional and contested points

of discussion. But there was no consensus, and only vague references were made to these topics in the final summarising documents.

It was all quickly overshadowed last December by a confusing row over blessings for same-sex couples. Did this erode confidence in the Synod?

“Is the church’s primary mission to save the planet or save souls? Spread social justice or salvation?”

When the *instrumentum laboris* for the upcoming October session was published earlier this summer, the most controversial issues were practically absent.

We can all agree that our Church is in crisis and needs change, especially here in Ireland, where people are turning away from the faith.

But what kind of change?

And what kind of crisis is it?

A sex abuse crisis, a faith crisis, a vocations crisis? Fr James Mallon, a Canadian priest, who in his book *Divine Renovation* spoke of an *identity crisis*: the Church has simply forgotten what it is for. To make disciples. This is the great commission given to us by Christ at the end of Matthew’s gospel when Jesus instructed the church: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising in the name of the Father and the Son and

the Holy Spirit...” This is our mission.

Some critics have raised concerns that there is no clear understanding among Synod delegates about what is meant by mission.

For example, is the Church’s primary mission to save the planet or save souls? Spread social justice or salvation?

Respect

Yes, of course, we must respect the planet and feed the hungry. But we must always keep our gaze on Heaven – otherwise there is a danger the church is reduced to an NGO (non-governmental organisation). Jesus, who feeds the poor, made clear the primacy of the living bread from Heaven.

Are we Catholics comfortable talking about Jesus and what he has done for us? Or do we prefer to debate problems in the environment?

Are we social justice warriors first and disciples second?

The Papal Encyclical *Laudato si’* on God’s creation has its place – but the Pope first wrote *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel).

Amid the challenges, there is authentic new life springing up, if only we have eyes to see it, to see what works.

So let us not just listen, but see.

It could be argued that we as a church are in fact suffering from a bad medical condition. Thankfully we have in Jesus, the Divine Physician, who makes the deaf hear and the blind see.

Bishop on controversial topics at World Synod: Nobody gets a muzzle

The Catholic reform project World Synod continues in Rome in October. The Bishop of Augsburg, Bertram Meier, has now commented on the handling of controversial issues in this context – and in a different way than a year ago.

Augsburg (KNA) With a view to the Catholic World Synod, Bishop Bertram Meier of Augsburg has tempered expectations regarding controversial issues. “The synod assembly a year ago was also a kind of collection of material. A large store of topics emerged from it. One result of this is the final document, which was adopted with an overwhelming majority,” Meier told the “Katholische Sonntagszeitung für das Bistum Augsburg”. The synod participant added: “It would be overtaxing the synod

if we wanted to work through all the issues and problem areas raised in four weeks. So I have to dampen expectations around the so-called controversial topics.”

The bishop assured: “Nevertheless, these topics are not lost or even forgotten. And nobody will be muzzled.” Pope Francis is keen to ensure that the diverse and sometimes complicated issues continue to be addressed. “But this is not happening at a gallop. Thoroughness comes before speed. That’s why the Pope has set up ten study groups to address the issues and deliver results in due course. So it remains exciting.”

Global reform project

The Catholic World Synod is scheduled to take place in

Rome from 2 to 27 October. The global reform project, which has been running since 2021, aims to create a new culture of consultation and decision-making in the Catholic Church. 368 men and women from all continents are taking part in the World Synod. Bishop Meier is one of a dozen participants from Germany.

Around a year ago, Meier said that he believed that the 2024 World Synod would deal in depth with controversial issues. According to Meier in October 2023, the “hot potatoes” negotiated in Germany, such as celibacy, ordination of women and homosexuality, had also been repeatedly raised in the synod hall over the past four weeks. Detailed discussions had yet to take place.

Reporting KNA



People attend the German Catholic Church’s fifth synodal assembly in Frankfurt March 9, 2023. Photo: OSV News/Heiko Becker, Reuters.

Fourth week of St Bernadette's relics tour

Renata Milán Morales

“Today in the presence of the relics of St Bernadette let us pray for a portion of her faith, her self-effacing good humour, her humility that somehow never faltered, and that unfailing patience and perseverance with people who misjudged her,” said Bishop Coll of Ossory during his homily for the reception of the relics of St Bernadette on September 21.

Since the relics arrived in Ireland, Catholic churches have been filled with believers. Those who had previously chosen to live their faith outside the church have found their way back, drawn by the visit of the French saint's relics.

Recently, thousands of believers have made pilgrimages to the dioceses of Waterford and Lismore, Cashel and Emly, Ossory, and Ferns. On September 17, Bishop Alphonse Cullinan welcomed the relics of St Bernadette to the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity in Waterford City.

From the moment they landed at Knock Airport, the Irish faithful have been uplifted with hope and faith and inspired to work towards their own sanctity. In his homily on September 21, Bishop Coll of Ossory emphasised that “St Bernadette was not canonised because she saw visions of Mary, but because she persevered in living the virtues of faith, hope, and love.”

In the Diocese of Cashel and Emly, a series of events took place during the relics' visit, including veneration, private prayer, rosary, and a Mass with Anointing of the Sick, concluding with the Angelus.

In all these dioceses, the visit of St Bernadette's relics has inspired a revival of faith, with many rediscovering the spiritual richness of their Catholic heritage. This renewed sense of hope shows not only a devotion to St Bernadette herself, but also a rebirth of the virtues she embodied: faith, humility, and perseverance.



Mass celebrated in the presence of St Bernadette's relics. Photo: Diocese of Ossory



Bishop Coll leading faithful in prayer for the formal conclusion of the visit of the relics of St Bernadette to the diocese. Photo: Diocese of Ossory



Faithful gathered to celebrate Mass in the presence of St Bernadette's relics. Photo: Diocese of Waterford and Lismore



Bishop Cullinan incensing St Bernadette's relic. Photo: Diocese of Waterford and Lismore



Bishop Cullinan leading the rosary prayer during St Bernadette's relics visit to Waterford and Lismore diocese. Photo: Diocese of Waterford and Lismore

Professor accuses Catholic university in Belgium of 'covering up' papal visit

Crux

A professor at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium has claimed the university is intentionally downplaying a looming visit by Pope Francis, driven by anger over sexual abuse scandals as well as "shame" about Catholic identity and a "business and marketing logic" which views being identified with the institutional Church as potentially detrimental to enrolment.

Pope Francis is scheduled to visit the university on September 27 to help celebrate its 600th anniversary, as part of a broader three-day trip to Luxembourg and Belgium.

Yet Bart Maddens, a professor of political science at the university, charged in a recent piece for the Flemish magazine *Doorbreek* that the papal visit is being "covered up", noting that there's no mention of it on the home page of the university web site, even under the "events" tab, nor is there any reference on a page dedicated to the anniversary celebrations.

Moreover, Professor Maddens writes, the Pope's meeting with faculty and staff is described as "by invitation only", in what he interprets as a deliberate effort to keep the event small-scale, even if a live-stream also will be provided.

Controversy

Recalling that the last time a Pope visited Leuven was St John Paul II in 1985, Professor Maddens writes that the scant attention to Pope Francis' presence may be because "the militant left-wing students of that time now call the shots at the university"

"It will not help," he adds, "that almost two-thirds of KU Leuven staff members vote for left-wing parties, whose positions on ethical issues are diametrically opposed to those of the Pope".

Also in the background may be popular outrage over sexual abuse scandals in Flanders, which were the subject of a widely viewed 2023 documentary called

"The pope's meeting with faculty and staff is described as 'by invitation only', in what he interprets as a deliberate effort to keep the event small-scale"



Pope John Paul II prays the rosary at Notre Dame du Chant d'Oiseau Church in Brussels, Belgium. His 1985 trip to Belgium was described as "an intellectually high-level exchange of crucial ideas and controversial issues of Faith". Photo: CNS via Catholic Press Photo.

"Godforsaken". Pope Francis is scheduled to meet with 15 victims of abuse while in Belgium, although even that gesture has generated controversy, with some objecting that none of the victims featured in the documentary are currently among those expected to meet with the pontiff.

"There were demonstrations against the Pope's presence, as well as anti-papal graffiti scrawled on public buildings and churches"

Professor Maddens notes that John Paul II's May 1985 visit to the university, by way of contrast, featured an appearance before a crowd of roughly 22,000 people in a local soccer stadium, with turnout actually exceeding the stadium's capacity.

It's not, Professor Mad-

dens wrote, that John Paul II was particularly beloved in Belgium. Under Cardinal Leo Suenens, one of the architects of the Second Vatican Council, a strongly liberal ethos had taken hold in the Belgian church, and for many progressive students at Leuven in the mid-1980s, Professor Maddens writes, the Polish Pope was "the devil incarnate".

In the run-up to the trip, he says, there were demonstrations against the Pope's presence, as well as anti-papal graffiti scrawled on public buildings and churches. The headquarters of a Catholic student association, which was known for its conservative, pro-Flemish nationalism views, was set ablaze.

Challenge

Despite all that, Professor Maddens writes, the university didn't seek to minimise the visit, but rather extolled it as an example of its commitment to a robust confrontation of ideas. The rector at the time, Pieter De Somer, who died just a month later, used the visit as a platform to defend academic freedom under the heading of a "right to err".

A student representative even directly challenged John Paul II in a public address: "We are also looking for a morality that liberates people and that removes relationships from



The campus at KU Leuven.

"There is the business and marketing logic that dominates the university today, the fear that the association with the institution of the church is damaging to the image, and therefore to the number of enrolments"

the sphere of commandments and prohibitions", she said. "The certainty with which our church posits certain ethical rules of conduct alienates it from the youth."

"The visit to Leuven in 1985 was a 'remarkable event', calling it 'an intellectually high-level exchange of ideas on crucial and controversial issues of faith'"

John Paul, Professor Maddens writes, didn't shrink from the occasion, replying: "Theology belongs by definition within the deposit of faith as transmitted, preserved and explained by ecclesiastical teaching authority, both in terms of

dogma and Christian and ethical implications".

All in all, Professor Maddens says, the visit to Leuven in 1985 was a "remarkable event", calling it "an intellectually high-level exchange of ideas on crucial and controversial issues of faith, and not in the privacy of an auditorium or a graduation hall, but in front of an audience of 22,000 people".

Contrast

To explain the contrast with Pope Francis's impending visit, Professor Maddens writes, "there is the obsession with diversity, which turns into a shame about one's own Catholic identity. But above all, there is the business and marketing logic that dominates the university today, the fear that the association with the institution of the church is damaging to the image, and therefore to the number of enrolments".

He calls it a "strange paradox" that "to see how a university can be both una-

shamedly Catholic and critically and modern, we have to go back forty years in time".

Founded in 1425, the Catholic University of Leuven is the oldest Catholic university in the "Low Countries" of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. In 1968, tensions between Dutch and French-speaking Belgians led to a split into two universities, with the Catholic University of Leuven serving the Dutch-speaking population and its sister institution, the Université Catholique de Louvain, which Pope Francis will also visit, serving the French.

Although at one point only baptised Catholics could be admitted, today the university is essentially independent. A representative of the Belgian church sits on its Board of Governors and the university submits an annual report to the bishops, but their roles are as observers, with academic and financial administration being autonomous.

World Report

IN BRIEF

Judo athlete banned for five months after sign of cross

● An Olympic judo athlete has been banned from competition in part because he made the sign of the cross at this year's Olympic Games.

Serbian judo world champion Nemanja Majdov was hit with a five-month ban by the International Judo Foundation (IJF) after having made the ancient Christian sign while competing in the Paris games in July.

In a statement posted to its website last Wednesday, the IJF criticised what it said were "numerous false claims and erroneous information that are currently circulating in the public domain" regarding the ban.

While the IJF admitted that Mr Majdov was banned in part because he violated the league's rules on having made a "clear religious sign" on the field of play, the conference said he broke several other league directives as well.

Specifically, Mr Majdov "refused to bow to his opponent at the end of the contest", and he also "removed [his] judogi in the field of play". A judogi is the official uniform of the martial art.

Bishop's agent kidnapped and beaten in Brazil

● An official of the Brazilian bishop's conference who works on land disputes recently escaped after being kidnapped and beaten and has been enrolled in a government protection program for human rights advocates.

The incident took place September 18 in Pernambuco state in northeastern Brazil, in an area with the state's highest number of land disputes, which typically pit small-scale farmers or indigenous groups against wealthy ranchers and major agrobusiness interests.

Edina Maria da Silva, an agent of the bishops' Land Pastoral Commission (CPT)

said she was on a bus from a college in the city of Palmares, to her home in the city of Tamandaré. As she got off the vehicle, she said, a hooded man approached her and two other passengers, showed his gun, and asked for their phones, which the three victims gave him.

The man then told the other two victims to go away and took Edina with him. They walked for several miles, during which time Ms da Silva said her captor repeatedly beat her. They eventually arrived at an unknown location, when the man told Ms da Silva that he was hired to kill her.

UK bishops: Public Order Act unfairly affects people of faith

● The Catholic bishops of England and Wales have condemned legislation relating to prayer outside abortion clinics, claiming that the proposal represents a step backward for civic and religious freedom.

Bishop John Sherrington, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster and spokesperson for the bishops' conference on issues relating to life, said in a September 18 statement that the Public Order Act "constitutes discrimination and disproportionately affects people of faith".

"Religious freedom is the foundational freedom of any free and democratic society, essential for the flourishing and realisation of dignity of every human person. Religious freedom includes the right to manifest one's private beliefs in public through witness, prayer, and charitable outreach, including outside abortion facilities," Bishop Sherrington said.

Next International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Sydney in 2028

● The 53rd International Eucharistic Congress in Quito, Ecuador, wrapped up on Sunday with the announcement that Sydney will host the next International Eucharistic Congress in 2028.

The announcement was made by Cardinal Baltazar Porras, archbishop emeritus of Caracas, Venezuela, and pontifical legate to this year's International Eucharistic Congress.

As part of the closing Mass in Quito, presided over by Porras, the prelate declared: "In the name and by mandate of Pope Francis, he announces to you that the 54th International Eucharistic Congress will take place in the city of Sydney" in 2028.

Sydney was the site of the 29th International Eucharistic Congress in 1928.

Lebanese cardinal decries attacks he calls 'devoid of humanity'

Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Bechara Rai expressed "profound sorrow" over the "devastating toll" of Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon, the country's state news agency *NNA* reported September 22.

In his Sunday homily September 22, he said the "unprecedented" attacks are "devoid of humanity".

NNA reported that Israeli aircraft carried out a total of 111 airstrikes on southern Lebanon in one hour the morning of September 21, with the Israeli army saying it hit about 180 Hezbollah targets. *CNN* reported that the number of airstrikes "is among the highest recorded since Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel last year" in support of Hamas amid the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza.

Hezbollah launched more than 100 rockets early September 22 across a wider and deeper area of northern Israel. A Hezbollah leader declared an "open-ended battle" was underway as both sides appeared to be spiralling toward all-out war following months of escalating tensions. The Associated Press reported September 22.

NNA reported that Cardinal Rai called on the United Nations Security Council to intervene and "put an end to the ongoing conflict".

"In war, everyone is a loser; the only winners are arms dealers," the patriarch said.

The death toll from a "targeted attack" by the Israeli military on a Beirut suburb September 20 rose to 37, including seven women and three chil-



Smoke billows over southern Lebanon following Israeli airstrikes, amid ongoing cross-border hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, as seen from Tyre, southern Lebanon September 23, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Aziz Taher, Reuters.

dren, Lebanon's health minister said on September 21. This comes as the US also urged Americans in Lebanon to leave the country.

During his homily, Cardinal Rai expressed "deep concern" about Lebanon's shifting political landscape, noting that the nation has moved from a state of "unique pluralism" to one characterised by "singularity and division", according to the *NNA* news agency. He warned that this troubling trend can only be reversed when the Lebanese people embrace a "new path forward", one that fosters

hope and lays the groundwork for "a new historical narrative".

He urged Lebanese politicians to establish "a stable and independent Lebanese state, capable of overcoming internal divisions and healing the scars of war".

He stated that this goal "can only be achieved through the election of a president who will restore legislative powers to Parliament and uphold the constitutional authority of the Council of Ministers", *NNA* reported September 22.

Following his Sunday Angelus, Pope Francis reiterated his

"tireless call for prayers for peace, Vatican News said.

"Brothers and sisters, let us continue to pray for peace. Unfortunately, tensions are very high on the war fronts," he said, appealing to all people of goodwill not to forget the suffering in "so many countries at war". "May the voices of the peoples asking for peace be heard," he prayed.

"No one wants the conflict to escalate," said Maronite Archbishop Charbel Abdallah of Tyre, the major city in the south of Lebanon.

Catholic leaders urge support after devastating floods in Africa

Catholic leaders across West and Central Africa are calling for assistance following unprecedented and deadly floods that have swept through the regions.

The catastrophic flooding in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Mali, Ghana, and Liberia has triggered severe humanitarian crises, affecting an estimated

four million people, most of whom are children.

As of September 17, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said that at least 341 people had died due to the floods that have also affected nearly 1.5 million people.

Bishop Dominique Tinoudji of the Diocese of Pala in Chad has urged the population not to

despair, reminding them that "God is still on the throne".

In a September 8 Mass dedicated to the flood victims, the bishop noted that "the situation we face might lead us to question God's presence, His protection, and His help; but even in the face of such a severe trial, we must not give up hope".

The bishop called Christians

to action, urging them to make sure the new shelters now called home by the millions displaced by the floods do not constitute a source of fresh problems for the people.

"We must safeguard hygiene to prevent disease and protect the vulnerable from the cold and malaria-carrying mosquitoes," Bishop Tinoudji said.

Facing hunger crisis, Malawi bishops demand comprehensive response

As hunger grows in Malawi and across the southern African region, a leading Catholic priest in the country is calling for "long-term recovery initiatives" which he says are "essential for building resilient communities which also need support to alleviate the current food crisis".

The World Food Program says up to 4.2 million Malawians are currently experiencing acute food insecurity, and that figure is expected to rise to 5.7 million between October and March. The situation has been blamed on climate disasters, lost harvests, currency devaluation and high

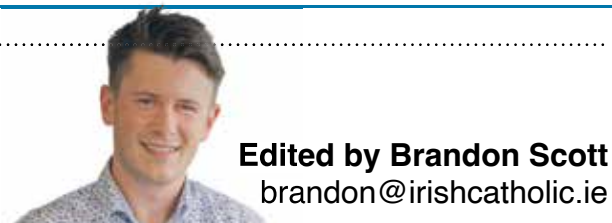
inflation rates.

Across Southern Africa, over 24 million people face hunger, malnutrition, and water scarcity, according to Oxfam.

"Malawi stands at a critical juncture as the country faces an escalating hunger crisis that demands immediate and

concerted action," said the Catholic bishops of the country in a September 18 statement.

"Over the past 12 months, the situation has deteriorated significantly, leaving millions of Malawians struggling to meet their basic food and nutritional needs," they said.



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Blessing for babies



Bishop Steven J Lopes of the Ordinariate of the Chair of St Peter (centre), Fr Eric Bergman (right) and board members of Providence Pregnancy Centre gather for the official blessing of Providence Pregnancy Centre's maternity home, Casa De Maria, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Photo: OSV News/courtesy of Mary Photography.

St Januarius' blood liquefies in Naples on his feast day

The blood of St Januarius liquefied on last Thursday before a Mass in Naples, Italy, where the archbishop said that the blood of the fourth-century martyr is a powerful reminder that "love is stronger than death".

Archbishop Domenico Battaglia of Naples held up an ampoule containing the relic of the saint's blood in the Naples cathedral on his feast day, revealing the liquefaction to shouts and cheers from the people who had waited in the cathedral since early in the morning.

"Every drop of this blood speaks to us of the love of God," Archbishop Battaglia said in his homily. "This blood is a sign of the blood

of Christ, of his passion."

The archbishop recalled that September 19 marks the anniversary of St Januarius' martyrdom more than 1,700 years ago in which the saint chose death in "fidelity to the Gospel" to show that the love of God is "stronger than death, violence, or any power".

Hundreds of people gathered in Naples' Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary for the feast of St Januarius, known as San Gennaro in Italian. The saint was a Catholic bishop believed to have been martyred during the Christian persecution of Emperor Diocletian.

In Neapolitan lore, the failure of the blood to li-

quefy signals war, famine, disease, or other disasters. The reputed miracle usually occurs up to three times a year: September 19, the saint's feast day; the first Saturday of May, the day his remains were transferred to Naples; and December 16, the anniversary of the 1631 eruption of the nearby Mount Vesuvius.

In his homily, the archbishop of Naples cautioned against reducing the veneration of the city's saint to mere superstition.

"We do not have to worry if the blood of this relic does not liquefy, but we do have to worry if it is the blood of the downtrodden, the marginalised, and the poor that

flows through our streets," he said.

Prince Carlo of the House of Bourbon and Prince Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy were present in the Naples cathedral and exchanged an embrace at the news of the relic's liquefaction, according to Italian media.

The Mass was the culmination of two days of celebrations for the southern Italian city's patron saint.

St Januarius "reminds each of us today that the Gospel of Jesus provides the compass we need to live, to live fully, facing head-on and with courage the challenges that each age brings", Archbishop Battaglia said.

English priest avoids jail time after stealing money from collection plates

A Catholic priest in England's capital has avoided prison time after being convicted of stealing around £200 (over €238) from his parish.

Italian-born Fr Fortunato Pantisano, 44, was sentenced on Monday after

being convicted earlier this month of taking the money from the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in the Fulham district on January 7.

He was sentenced to 20 weeks in jail, but this was suspended for two

years. He was found guilty on the first of the month.

District Judge Daniel Sternberg said it was unlikely Fr Pantisano would be able to practice as a priest after his conviction.

Vatican to work with Italian authorities to identify source of leaks

● The Vatican is cooperating with Italian prosecutors on an investigation into the leaking of financial information related to the Vatican's major finance trial that ended last year.

Italian media report that two men are being investigated for having gained unauthorised access hundreds of times to a database of suspicious financial activity shared with Italy by banks, which includes potentially compromising information on Italian politicians and defendants in the Vatican trial.

The database is used by anti-mafia prosecutors and judges in cases of money laundering and terrorism financing.

A brief note to journalists from the Holy See Press Office on Tuesday said Vatican prosecutor Alessandro Diddi and the commander of the Vatican gendarmes, Gianluca Gauzzi, met September 17 with the public prosecutor and deputy public prosecutor of Perugia, Italy.

The public prosecutor of Perugia has jurisdiction over the investigation of crimes committed by magistrates and public prosecutors in Rome.

Pope Francis says the Catholic Church is 'more alive' outside of Europe

● Pope Francis on Wednesday said the Catholic Church is "more alive" outside of Europe as he reflected back on his recent apostolic journey to Southeast Asia.

"A first reflection that comes spontaneously after this trip is that in thinking about the Church we are still too Eurocentric, or, as they say, 'Western,' the Pope said in St Peter's Square on September 18.

"But in reality, the Church is much bigger, much bigger than Rome and Europe...

and may I say much more alive in these countries," he added.

In his first general audience since returning from the longest international trip of his pontificate, the pope expressed gratitude to God for his experiences in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor, and Singapore September 2-13.

"I thank the Lord who allowed me to do as an elderly Pope what I would have liked to do as a young Jesuit," Francis said.

Exiled bishop chosen to participate in Synod

● Exiled Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez is slated to be among the participants in the second and last session of the Synod of Synodality, set to take place at the Vatican next month from October 2-27.

The name of the bishop of Matagalpa, who was deported to Rome on January 14 by the Daniel Ortega regime, appears on the list of synod participants chosen directly by Pope Francis.

Álvarez's participation in the synod will mark a major change from the low profile he has kept since arriving in the Eternal City earlier this year.

Up until now, the bishop, known for his unwavering defence of human rights and harsh criticism of the Nicaraguan dictatorship, has had few public appearances.

Cardinal says Vatican study group bringing Synodality to Papal Nuncios

● Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay in India, has been appointed coordinator of the study group that will evaluate the functioning and role of Apostolic Nuncios, the papal Representatives in the Church worldwide, usually serving as the ambassador to the country.

The study group will make suggestions to improve their functioning, so that they become more missionary and synodal. Involved in the study will be officials of the Secretariat of State, the Dicastery for Bishops, and the Dicastery for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

After the October 2023 Session of the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis had identified several items that needed specialised study.

"During the synod we noticed that there were so many topics being spoken about, but they were important topics," Gracias told Crux.

Gracias said there are really ten study groups, and the study on Nuncios is just one of them.

Letter from Rome

Vatican offers cautious green light to Medjugorje devotion



Elise Ann Allen

While offering an overall positive judgment on the Marian apparitions and devotions associated with the Medjugorje phenomenon in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Vatican nevertheless said in a new document released Thursday that some issues still need to be clarified.

The Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) presented the document, titled 'The Queen of Peace', in a news conference.

In the foreword for the nearly 20-page document, approved by Pope Francis August 28, the DDF said, "The time has come to conclude a long and complex history that has surrounded the spiritual phenomena of Medjugorje".

A synthesis stated that the approval for devotion to Medjugorje was given due to "the abundant spiritual fruits received at the sanctuary of the Queen of Peace, without making a declaration on the alleged supernatural character of Marian apparitions".

"Many positive fruits have been noted in the midst of a spiritual experience, while negative and dangerous effects have not spread among the People of God," the synthesis said.

Judgment

However, the DDF insisted that the approval of devotion does not constitute "a judgment about the moral life of the alleged visionaries" and that any spiritual gifts received by a person "do not necessarily require those involved to have moral perfection".

The DDF also urged a certain caution, saying, "Although we find many positive elements that help to heed the call of the Gospel, when we consider the overall set of messages tied to this spiritual experience, some people believe that certain messages contain contradic-



Andrea Tornielli, editorial director at the Dicastery for Communication speaks at a news conference at the Vatican September 19, 2024, on the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's approval of pilgrimages and other spiritual practices related to the alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Photo: CNS/Justin McLellan

tions or are connected with the desires or interests of the alleged visionaries or others".

“Positive fruits associated with ‘the Medjugorje phenomenon’, the document said, can most prominently be seen in ‘a healthy practice of a life of faith, in accordance with the tradition of the Church’”

"It cannot be ruled out that this may have happened in the case of a few messages," the document said, saying it is possible that "some error of a natural order" might be present, "not due to bad intentions, but to the subjective perception of the phenomenon".

The Vatican's ultimate ruling, the document said, was based largely on "the existence of clearly verified fruits, together with an analysis of the alleged Marian messages".

Positive fruits associated with "the Medjugorje phenomenon", the document said, can most prominently be seen in "a healthy practice of a life of faith, in accord-

ance with the tradition of the Church".

Other fruits include "abundant conversions", as well as reconciliation between spouses and "the renewal of marriage and family life", as well as reports of numerous healings.

The DDF also acknowledged the message of peace associated with Medjugorje, saying it's the fruit of charity, which implies "a love for those who are not Catholic", which the DDF said is an important message given the historic divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Invitation

Calls to conversion and the frequent invitation to put God at the centre of the spiritual life are also positive signs, the document said.

In terms of issues in need of clarification, the document said a few of the messages deviate from the overall positive content.

"To prevent this treasure of Medjugorje from being compromised, it is necessary to clarify possible points of confusion that can lead some small groups to distort the valuable proposition of this spiritual experience," the document said.

If some messages are read only partially, the spiritual message can erroneously be linked to "confused human

experiences, theologically inaccurate expressions, or interests that are not entirely legitimate", it said.

Messages which appear to contain instructions for local pastors, giving the impression that Mary "wants to substitute herself for the ordinary parish structures meant for participation", ought to be taken with caution, the document said.

It also warned against passages in which Mary insists that everyone must listen to and accept her messages, as well as apparent messages in which Mary "gives orders about dates, places, and practicalities and when she makes decisions about ordinary matters".

“The positive assessment that most of the messages of Medjugorje are edifying does not imply a declaration that they have a direct supernatural origin”

Some messages are problematic due to their use of terms such as "my plan" and "my project" by Mary, the document said, saying these

phrases can "create some confusion" over the role of Christ.

In terms of public worship, the DDF in its document stated that while there is no requirement to believe in the Marian phenomena at Medjugorje, the *Nihil obstat* indicates that "the faithful can receive a positive encouragement for their Christian life through this spiritual proposal and it authorises public acts of devotion".

The DDF reiterated that "the positive assessment that most of the messages of Medjugorje are edifying does not imply a declaration that they have a direct supernatural origin", a designation that it no longer gives.

In terms of questions regarding the authenticity of certain facts or aspects of the spiritual experience associated with Medjugorje, the DDF said local ecclesial authorities are invited to "appreciate the pastoral value of this spiritual proposal, and even to promote its spread."

Each diocesan bishop, the document said, has the freedom to make their own prudential decisions regarding groups or individuals "who, by misusing this spiritual phenomenon, act in a mistaken way".

The DDF also urged pilgrims who visit Medjugorje "to be strongly advised that pilgrimages are not made to meet with alleged visionaries but to have an encounter with Mary, the Queen of Peace".

The Medjugorje ruling was determined according to a new set of norms issued by the DDF in May for evaluating the authenticity of Marian apparitions and other spiritual phenomena.

Approval

Thursday's announcement of formal Vatican approval for the Medjugorje apparitions brings to a close one of the Catholic Church's most long-standing recent debates.

The alleged Medjugorje apparitions began in June 1981, and they are often divided into two categories: the 'originals', which took place during the period of June 24-July 3 of that year,

when the Virgin is believed to have appeared daily to six young people aged between 10 and 17 at the time, and subsequent apparitions some of the original seers claimed to have, at times daily, since 1989.

While the original set of alleged apparitions all took place in the same place, seers who claim to still receive messages from the Virgin Mary have said they see Mary at random times and places.

“Francis has previously voiced his own personal scepticism regarding the alleged ongoing apparitions”

In 2010 Pope Benedict XVI formed a commission to study the alleged apparitions, which was headed by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, who at the time was retired as the Pope's Vicar of Rome. He had also served as president of the powerful Italian bishops' conference.

The commission submitted its report, called the 'Ruini report', to Francis in 2014.

Francis has previously voiced his own personal scepticism regarding the alleged ongoing apparitions, telling journalists on his way back to Rome May 13, 2017, after a two-day visit to Fatima, Portugal, that the original apparitions need to be distinguished from the ongoing appearances.

Francis in 2017 named Polish Archbishop Henryk Hoser to study the pastoral care given to the town's residents and visiting pilgrims, with the Vatican emphasising that his role had nothing to do with determining the authenticity of the apparitions.

In May 2018, Hoser was sent as 'Apostolic Visitor' for an undetermined time to the Saint James parish in Medjugorje, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, run by the Franciscan friars.

A year later, in May 2019, the Vatican authorised pilgrimages to the site, but expressed no opinion on the authenticity of the alleged apparitions.

Letters

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

Every attempt is seized on to attack the Church

Dear Editor, Apparently, we will soon exercise our democratic right to vote in a general election. *The Sunday Independent* poll tells us that two-thirds of the population back a Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael coalition for another term. These parties have a majority in the present Government.

This is surprising when you consider their back record. Some hospitals have been classed as third world. In Limerick, people are afraid of becoming ill and having to go to UHL. This is not the fault of the exhausted doctors and nurses. Our graduating doctors and nurses are emigrating in droves, because of poor pay and conditions,

and they know they have no chance of renting or buying a property. Housing and immigration; another disaster.

Parents need to be aware of and question the agenda of these SPHE books. A new subject 'Social Personal and Health Education', is being introduced, a secular version of former catechism subject. It teaches little children that the 'gender' you identify with can be totally unrelated to your biological sex. A textbook being introduced for Junior Cycle pupils had to be withdrawn to delete an offending section mocking the typical Irish family, because of public outrage.

The National Council for

curriculum and assessment has issued its speculations for a new SPHE programme for Senior Cycle Secondary pupils, defining gender as a 'social construct', which means, whether you are male or female, it has nothing to do with your biological sex. Parents need to be alerted to this agenda being taught to their children.

Many people still support the civil war parties but present-day candidates are very different to the wonderful men and women gone before them. Two recent referendums were heavily defeated thanks to Michael McDowell and Peadar Tóibín of Aontú, explaining the consequences of supporting the

far reaching agenda.

The media and this Government appear to be anti-Christian – every attempt is seized on to attack the Catholic Church – in particular the liberal agenda and the laws passed. Legalising abortion, gay marriages are contrary to Catholic ethos.

When Christianity goes, anarchy strife and civil unrest follows as society crumbles. This is already happening, more murders, assaults, drugs, etc. There is less respect for women, inside and outside the home. Many are afraid to venture out, especially at night.

Yours etc.,

Christina Nuala Doran
Raheen, Co. Limerick

Crystal clear about US 'lesser evil'

Dear Editor, As a voter in the upcoming US election, I was engaged by David Quinn's article 'The dilemma facing Catholics in the American presidential election' [*The Irish Catholic* – September 19, 2024]. To say that there is a "dilemma", that "Catholics are reduced to voting for the lesser of two evils" doesn't do justice to the simplicity and clarity of the choice faced by electors.

As the article says, Catholic teaching encourages generosity in the overall management of the immigration issue; however it also proposes reasonable limits so that the host country is not overburdened, to avoid social instability, etc.

Abortion on the other hand is a clear-cut issue, being the greatest mass-killing in human history. The current US death toll is around 65 million, similar to the population of the UK (68 million). The mind bog-



gles at the enormity of it all.

The Catholic perspective is made clear in the voting guidance issued by the US Bishops. They declare prophetically: "The threat of abortion remains our preeminent [first] priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters and destroys more than a million lives per year in our country alone." Add to that the trauma experienced by many parents after they realise the enormity of their mistake.

I believe it is crystal clear what the lesser of the evils is.

Yours etc.,

Fr Morty O'Shea, SOLT
Inver, Co Donegal

If we want to tackle abortion...

Dear Editor, David Quinn's good article on the SPHE curriculum emphasises the fact that it takes relationships as fluid with the need to protect oneself against hurt, rather than talking about love and committed relationships [*The Irish Catholic* – September 12, 2024]. The subject presents contraception as an infallible way to "protect" oneself against both infections and pregnancy. Data shows a different picture, that the students

need to know: that STIs are not a joke and that pregnancy can happen no matter what... and then, what? When a pregnancy is a cause of joy in a committed for life couple, why play the dice with the girl or woman and her possible unborn child? In fact, if we want to tackle abortion, it is time to talk openly about contraception.

Yours etc.,

Conchita Legorburo Serra
Dalkey, Co. Dublin

Change is before the Archbishop's eyes so why can't he see it?

Safeguarding Sunday has become a regular feature on the calendar of the Archdiocese of Dublin.

The idea is to ensure that parishes and communities are acutely aware that the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults was not a single moment or piece of work that was undertaken in reaction to sickening abuse reports, but the permanent work of the Church.

The aim is to promote the highest standards, and to remind everyone involved in the Church that safeguarding is a standard practice for us all, that it is part of the culture of our Church here in Ireland.

In recent decades, thousands and thousands of parishioners have volunteered to undertake stringent safeguarding training and are now part of a wide network of volunteers ensuring that parishes and Church activities are safe. In every Church setting in Ireland, almost the first thing that one sees on entering is the safeguarding policy with contact details for those who should be notified if there is a concern. Almost every parish bulletin and website in the country has similar details.

To say that the old culture has changed in the Catholic Church in Ireland would be an understatement. Supervised by the independent National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI), the handling of allegations or concerns of abuse today would be unrecognisable even 20 years ago.

Above all, the victims and survivors who came forward to speak of their experiences deserve immense credit for this. If they had not held the Church's feet to the fire, the culture may not have changed. Those parishioners and priests and religious who stepped forward to take on this mammoth task also deserve great credit.

They have truly been part of a cultural revolution in Irish Catholicism away from denial and cover-up to acceptance and accountability. It truly was an exercise in synodality and co-responsibility before these were everyday concepts in the universal Church.

It is disappointing therefore, for these people, that in his homily for Safeguarding Sunday Archbishop Dermot Farrell chose not to mention the huge cultural shift, or to pay tribute to the sterling work that has been, and is being, done.

It is understandable, per-

haps, that in the light of the recent Scoping Inquiry he may feel that the time is not right. Yet, any fair assessment of where the Church is at now will acknowledge that the culture revealed in that inquiry is a different one from today, thanks to herculean efforts by laity and priests.

While Archbishop Farrell clearly wants to demonstrate that he 'gets' the abuse crisis, the headlines generated by his homily such as 'No Church reform until abuse crisis addressed' gives the wrong impression that nothing has been done to address the crisis.

At one stage, the archbishop describes reactions to the inquiry: "while some are filled with anger, others close their ears, or dismiss it, or explain it away, or blame the extensive coverage on hostility towards the Church, there is a thread of denial and disengagement in many of these responses".

This was certainly the case for a very long time, but, in the experience of this newspaper, that has not been the case for a very long time. Who is he referring to?

The archbishop's contention that there can be no reform in the Church until abuse is "fully addressed" is almost exactly what the Irish Synodal Delegation told the Continental Assembly in Prague in February 2023.

Where does that leave the Archdiocese's own ambitious 'Building Hope' reform programme?

The truth is, the work of addressing the abuse crisis goes hand-in-hand with reform. The Gospel cannot be held in stasis while the episcopal and religious leaderships try and extricate their institutions from a moral, legal and financial quagmire. Outreach to victims and survivors goes on, and yes the quiet work of building faith, hope and love goes on, 'for those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.'

It would be a pity if Catholics got the wrong impression from the archbishop's unrounded remarks, as it is disheartening indeed to the thousands of ordinary Catholics who have worked for the very culture change that is before our eyes. Instead of just a homily from the Pro-Cathedral, where there is no dialogue, maybe the Archbishop would host listening sessions in parishes, openly engaging with the church and all its people. Maybe a Diocesan Pastoral Council will open up that discussion.

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.

‘Faith and Light’ pilgrimage to Lough Derg

Renata Milán Morales

Faith and Light communities from the Northern Region, including Carrickmacross, Clones, Enniskillen, Lisnaskea/Newtown-

butler, and Tydavnet, travelled to Lough Derg to celebrate their annual pilgrimage on Sunday, September 12. Upon arrival, participants were warmly welcomed with tea and scones before enjoying an uplifting session of music and dancing led by Joe McManus.

Mass was celebrated by Fr Cathal Deery, with Fr Brendan Gallagher assisting, and altar servers from the various communities.

Patricia O’Connor, Regional Coordinator for ‘Faith and Light’ in the Northern Region, shared with

this paper that “each community took part in the Mass, contributing to the readings, Prayers of the Faithful, Final Blessing, as well as singing and action songs.”

The day was a special occasion for the communities to unite in prayer, sharing, singing, and cel-

ebration. “We are so grateful to Fr La and all the staff at Lough Derg for their continued support,” added Ms O’Connor.

‘Faith and Light’ organisers are now looking ahead to their National Pilgrimage to Lourdes, planned for next Easter.



Drew Lynch playing the organ in the Basilica. Photos: Patricia O’Connor



Fr Brendan Gallagher, Drew and his mother Valerie Lynch (Clones community)



Fr Cathal Deery celebrating Mass accompanied by Fr Brendan Gallagher and altar servers.



Nora celebrates her birthday on the day



Mary Treanor (Tydavnet community) and Peter Callan (Carrickmacross community) enjoying the music



Neil and his mum Kathleen from Enniskillen Community



Marie and Joan from Clones community enjoying the day



Tydavnet community travelling on the boat to Lough Derg



‘Faith and Light’ communities from the Northern Region pictured with priests and Fr La, prior of Lough Derg

Your Faith

Being rich,
but in a hurry

Fr Rolheiser

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The Irish Catholic, September 26, 2024



God has a plan for Ireland



A group of pilgrims during 'Walk The Cross' 2024

It was November 2019, when Robert Nugent called 500 men to Derry. Like many others, I simply responded to the call, showing up that day without fully realising what lay ahead. The gathering was a powerful moment for Catholics to unite, to share our faith, our joy in the Lord, and the love of Christ - especially in His true presence in the Blessed Sacrament, in His body, blood, soul, and divinity.

I didn't know what was going to happen that day. As I sat in adoration with the other men, I found myself positioned at the front left of the altar. In the quiet of prayer, while adoring Jesus, I had an extraordinary experience. Jesus flashed an



I believe the faith in Ireland is not dead. It's like a bird in hibernation, waiting to awaken, says Anto Crossey

image before me, like a movie playing out in front of my eyes. He showed me walking down a country lane, carrying a large flag of Our Lady of Medjugorje. I was excited and curious. "Jesus, what are You showing me?" I asked, continuing in prayer.

We had Holy Mass that day, but by the end, I knew Jesus had shown me something important - that Ireland needed to

be marked with the cross, the footprint of the faithful. That night, we stayed in Derry, and though I didn't know Robert well, the next morning I felt bound to share the vision with him. Sitting at the breakfast table, I turned to Robert and said, "Jesus showed me something so clearly for Ireland yesterday in adoration. He wants this country marked with the

cross, with the footprints of the faithful." Robert looked at me, uncertain, as we barely knew each other, but I felt he needed to hear this. It was a call.

Confirmations

I left Derry that day, but what followed was a series of confirmations from Jesus that what He had shown me was true. Over time, He confirmed the message to me in miraculous ways, repeatedly. The most powerful moment of confirmation came one Tuesday morning at 1 am. I woke up suddenly and said, "You really want this done. You really want this done for Ireland." I reached out to Brian and Karen, friends who shared my deep belief in what I was

being shown. They listened and were completely inspired by the Holy Spirit. They believed every word.

For the next nine months, we prepared for what was to come. Brian and Karen travelled around Ireland, visiting different prayer groups, sharing the story of what Jesus was asking for Ireland. Momentum began to build. However, Robert, who was still discerning the message, remained hesitant. About six weeks before the walk was to take place, Robert was still unsure. He hadn't fully committed, and his discernment was ongoing.

Then one Saturday morning, I attended Holy Mass, and after Mass, I went into adoration. In

“I faced significant spiritual attacks, and I wasn’t eager to endure the same again. When Jesus showed me the path forward, I asked, ‘Are You having a laugh? You’ve seen what I’ve been through!’ But I told Him I would do it for Him”

prayer, I felt Jesus’ presence so strongly that I began to cry. “I love You, Jesus,” I whispered, grateful for His presence. I returned home afterward and stood at my kitchen sink. In my heart, I asked, “Jesus, can Robert not see?” I paused, and asked again, “Can he not see?” A third time, I repeated, “Jesus, can Robert not see that this is the cross You want marked on the island of Ireland?”

At that moment, Jesus responded clearly, three times: “Call Robert Nugent and tell him this is the cross they want marked on the island of Ireland.”

I turned away from the sink, grabbed my phone, and called Robert, even though we usually communicated through voice messages. Surprisingly, Robert answered immediately. He sounded frightened. “Why are you calling me?” he asked. “I’m in Knock. I just came out of confession and was kneeling when the Lord told me, ‘Don’t pray here. Go to the adoration chapel.’” Robert went to the chapel, lay prostrate before the Lord, and heard Jesus ask him, “Can’t you see?”

It was at that exact moment that I had been asking Jesus the same question at my kitchen sink. Robert told me, “The Lord said you would call me when I left adoration.” It was exactly 12pm when he left the chapel, and I called him. “I believe you now,” he said. “I’m on board.”

“The very priest the Holy Spirit had told me to call had spoken to my friend - who knew nothing about the situation - and told them to tell me to prepare for ‘Walk the Cross II.’ It was another powerful confirmation from the Holy Spirit”

Receiving a word from the Lord isn’t easy. We live in a sceptical and cynical world, where many are closed off to the Spirit of God and what He truly desires. But I thanked the Lord for confirming the message to Robert, to Brian, and to Karen, all of whom were committed in faith. Jesus continued to confirm the message in miraculous ways: the ‘Walk the Cross’ was truly from Heaven, an instruction given by Jesus Himself.

This year, the Holy Spirit encouraged me to call a priest. Initially, I set it aside, not fully ignoring it, but hesitant after the challenges of the previous year. A few days later, while at Knock,

a friend approached me with a message. The very priest the Holy Spirit had told me to call had spoken to my friend - who knew nothing about the situation - and told them to tell me to prepare for ‘Walk the Cross II.’ It was another powerful confirmation from the Holy Spirit.

As I meditated on this, I asked the Lord, “If You really want this in Dublin this year, you’re going to have to confirm it for me.” Over the next week, He did. While I was in Lourdes, a woman from Antrim contacted me. She shared that she had participated in the previous ‘Walk the Cross’ pilgrimage, and it had ignited a fire in her heart. “It’s done something to me spiritually,” she said, and as she spoke, I began to praise God.

When she asked about this year’s walk, I confessed my reluctance, explaining how much the previous walk had taken out of me. I admitted to feeling ‘hammered’ by the experience. “The Holy Spirit wants it, and He’s confirmed that for me,” I added. In the silence of my heart, I said to Jesus, “My cross is heavy.” Immediately, the woman replied, “Your cross is heavy, but Jesus sent me to help you carry it.”

Reignited

That conversation reignited the spark I needed. By the power of the Holy Spirit, and with the encouragement of my friend, I knew we had to move forward. That’s how the procession in Dublin was set in motion. We regrouped, organised the event, and prepared for the Eucharistic procession through the streets of Dublin, trusting in Christ’s guidance. The planning process wasn’t without challenges. Just four days before the event, there were restrictions on the route we wanted to take. But God intervened, and the restrictions were lifted. Brian, with his humility and persistence, spoke to the Garda, who initially told us that O’Connell Street was outside their district. However, one officer promised to ensure the procession would be allowed through O’Connell St, and she kept her word.

On the day of the procession, we started at St Peter’s Church, proceeding through O’Connell St and Henry St, and finally ending at Church St. Over 1,000 people joined us. It was unbelievable. As we prepared to begin, a light descended from the sky, casting a beam of light on the church where the procession started. It felt like Jesus was saying, “This is My stamp of approval. Thank you for your obedience, for your commitment, for your Faith.”

There is something spiritually significant happening, some-



Anto Crossey

thing beyond my understanding. I remain faithful to the Lord, attending Mass, adoration, and confession, praising Him and keeping my heart open as a vessel for His glory. This walk is for God’s glory, for our country, for our children, for the Church, and for the unborn. It’s a reparation for sins against the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Jesus and Mary. The blasphemies committed against their hearts weigh heavy, but Jesus has a plan for Ireland.

“I felt Jesus standing tall, a thousand feet above us, with His crown and robe draped down. His remnant soldiers - His prayerful faithful - were walking behind Him. He was declaring, ‘This is My army.’”

I believe the faith in Ireland is not dead. It’s like a bird in hibernation, waiting to awaken. When it does, it will be hungry - hungry for truth, for God. The people of Ireland will come out of their spiritual slumber and seek out the faithful to learn more about their Faith. There will be a massive revival.

During the walk in Dublin, I felt Jesus standing tall, a thousand feet above us, with His crown and robe draped down. His remnant soldiers - His prayerful faithful - were walking behind Him. He was declaring, “This is My army.”

Both Robert and I have faced attacks. On the same day this year, we both ended up in the hospital. I nearly died from blood poisoning. After the walk last year, I faced significant spiritual attacks, and I wasn’t eager to endure the same again. When Jesus showed



From left to right: Anto Crossey, Karen and Brian

me the path forward, I asked, “Are You having a laugh? You’ve seen what I’ve been through!” But I told Him I would do it for Him.

Despite the mockery and ridicule, Jesus said to me, “Rejoice, Anto.” This walk is truly given by Jesus for Ireland for a very specific reason. Ireland is anointed, covered by the mantle of the Blessed Mother, sealed with the precious blood of Christ, and the blood of the martyrs who carried the torch of Faith for us.

Ireland once evangelised the world, and it will happen again. There’s a hunger, a spiritual famine, but Jesus is guiding our hearts. Though the Catholic Church is under attack, it is not dead. The media may portray it that way, but it remains the fullness of Faith.

The story of Walk the Cross is miraculous. It is a gift from Heaven, given to inspire the faithful to step out for Jesus. To not be afraid to profess your Faith.

Magnificent eye-catcher between the dome of Heaven and St Peter's tomb



Sabine Kleyboldt
(KNA)

It took Bernini nine years to create his first work of art in St Peter's Basilica. It will have taken a good nine months to free the bronze canopy from the dust of the centuries. Then visitors will be rubbing their eyes.

The excitement is growing: the huge grey cuboid in the crossing of St Peter's Basilica still looks more like a stray flying object or a work by packaging artist Christo. But by Christmas at the latest, the mighty bronze baldachin by Baroque master Gian Lorenzo Bernini should be unveiled in its full splendour; a mere snap of the fingers compared to the nine years it took to create it 400 years ago.

The restoration of the almost 30 metre high and 63 tonne canopy, which crowns the main altar, is one of the major projects for the Holy Year 2025, which Pope Francis intends to open on Christmas Eve. The baroque opus made of bronze, marble, wood and gold has amazed many millions of people since its completion in 1633. The symbolic power of the monument, as tall as a ten-storey building, could hardly be greater: it connects the tomb of the Apostle Peter deep in the Vatican Grottoes with the 117 metre high main dome of the most important church in the world.

Admiration

But in addition to their admiration, the 60,000 or so visitors a day also leave dirt, hair and skin particles in St Peter's Basilica. Together with dust and oil, all of this has etched itself onto the exceptional work of art and left it tarnished, from the marble plinths to the globe and cross high up on the onion-shaped spire. For the Holy Year, for

“What's new is that visitors will then be able to see the two colours for the first time: the gleam of gold and black on the columns and statues.’ Very important: ‘The restorers are not adding anything. We will see the canopy as it was designed by the Baroque artist Bernini.’”

which more than 32 million guests are expected in Rome, the magnificent work is to shine in its original splendour. The estimated costs of 700,000 euros are being covered by the Knights of Columbus, a conservative US association of Catholics.

Since the spring, scientists from universities and the Vatican Museums have been analysing, photographing, filming and mapping every putti, tassel and statue on the canopy. No one has come this close since the last restoration in 1758. Behind the slightly transparent tarpaulins around the scaffolding, teams of up to 15 restorers and experts are more to be guessed at than seen. The colour of the cladding was chosen because it blends discreetly into the surroundings of the papal basilica, explains Pietro Zander, head of the Vatican's cathedral construction workshop - as far as a monstrosity that catches the visitor's eye as soon as they enter the 186-metre-long nave can be discreet.

“The four almost life-size angels at the corners of the roof are frozen in dramatic gestures; golden olive and laurel branches climb up the spiral columns”

The construction of the metal scaffolding is also challenging: it encloses the delicate work of art without touching it. In total, almost a kilometre of power cables and water pipes were laid on the floors. The experts are slowly working their way down from the top, equipped with scalpels, iron brushes, micro drills and vibration engravers.

Although the surface is huge - 150 square metres alone are covered in gold - the work is progressing well. Zander is optimistic that it will be completed in time for 24 December. “What's new is that visitors will then be able to see the two colours for the



Vatican Media/Romano Siciliani/KNA

first time: the gleam of gold and black on the columns and statues.” Very important: “The restorers are not adding anything. We will see the canopy as it was designed by the Baroque artist Bernini.”

Magnificent

In keeping with the style of the time, he did not skimp on magnificent details: the four almost life-size angels at the corners of the roof are frozen in dramatic gestures; golden olive and laurel branches climb up the spiral columns. The marble plinths show the papal crown and the keys of St Peter on the outside, symbolising the papacy. Numerous bees, heraldic animals of the noble Barberini family, are a reminder of the - not uncontroversial - family of the patron, Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644).

“Quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barberini” (What the barbarians couldn't do, the Barberini could) is a Roman proverb that alludes to a well-known legend: According to this legend, Urban VIII had tonnes of bronze transported from the roof of the Pantheon to St Peter's Basilica for his pet project. But Pietro Zander refers to archive documents: “We know that bronze came from the Pantheon for the canopy, but it originally came from the cathedral building workshop in St Peter's and was returned to the Pope.” In fact, six copper ribs were removed from the dome of St Peter's Basilica and melted down for the artwork. In any case, there is no truth to the legend of the busy Barberini bees.



Papal crown and the keys of St Peter on the marble plinths



A Eucharistic word: Reception



Michael R. Heinlein

I've noticed a pattern lately. Whenever my 7-year-old son presents himself for Holy Communion to a minister unknown to him, he is routinely denied the sacrament. I find this fascinating.

He does all the right things. He bows. He makes the sign of the cross. He waits patiently to say "Amen" before opening his mouth to receive the Sacred Host. He looks up, bright-eyed, alert and focused on who he's about to consume. But still he is denied.

I've found myself distracted by the whole episode far too much than it's worth. My heart pours out for the little guy who clearly isn't sure what the problem is and is probably developing a little bit of a complex about the whole situation.

The first time or two it happened, I thought maybe the problem was just his stature. I thought maybe he wasn't showing the proper gestures, or didn't seem focused or prepared. But as time has gone on, I've found myself thinking there might be something else going on, and I've been reflecting on what this by now all-too-familiar scene manifests about us and our pastoral practices.

Distribution

Over the years, I've witnessed, during the distribution of Communion, far too many occasions where members of the faithful have wandered off with a Host in their hands. I once saw a father break off a piece of the Eucharistic host and communicate his toddler. At the same time, we

have public figures receiving Holy Communion week in and week out despite a perseverance in manifest, grave sin. With all this happening, why is it that kids are such a concern that we need a priest to pause the distribution of Holy Communion in his line just to end a standoff between an extraordinary minister and a young boy just wanting to receive Our Lord's precious body in another?

Yes, the Holy Eucharist is a treasure beyond compare, deserving our safeguarding and protection. We should and must be vigilant to ensure the Eucharist is not abused or desecrated.

But Jesus also says "let the children come to me," no? Why would a boy who makes all the right gestures ahead of receiving the Eucharist, with a vouching parent standing behind him - nodding a big 'yes' nod - not instinctively be given the benefit of the doubt? Does he pose the threat to Eucharistic sacrilege?

“Do we come up with a universal gesture-like arms crossed around the chest - like my 5-year-old daughter does - to indicate a blessing?”

Because our family travels a good bit, I have discovered that the problem doesn't centre around one parish or one diocese. Instead, it's become clear to me that it's something quite common. But where is it engrained? Is this part of the training given to those distributing Holy Communion? Or is it making manifest something that's lacking?

I don't have the answers. But I do have this humble column. So, take this as a *cri de coeur* for those distributing Holy Communion at Mass,

one especially for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion - and those who train them - who in my experience are more likely to say 'no' to my son.

Safeguard the Eucharist, yes. When in doubt, verify licit reception of the sacrament, of course. But please don't stand there ignoring a little one who presents himself to receive Jesus. Please don't try to propose a blessing if you are unsure why he isn't moving. Perhaps ask kindly, "Do you receive the Eucharist?" if you aren't sure. Do we come up with a universal gesture-like arms crossed around the chest - like my 5-year-old daughter does - to indicate a blessing? We've got to find a better solution than, amid uncertainty, turning away one of the little ones by default.

Inspires

But back to my son for a moment. In the face of these encounters, he inspires me. He stands his ground and doesn't move. He doesn't get bossy or demanding. He waits patiently and attentively. He takes it all in stride, showing a stiff upper lip. He laughs it off, meeting it with his characteristic happy-go-lucky attitude. "I just want to receive Jesus," he says, when I praise his attitude.

I just pray our well-meaning Church doesn't send him the wrong message. I pray we don't somehow damage his spirit. As we continue down the road of Eucharistic Revival, might we also think of the little ones? Of those who we should be welcoming, encouraging and, yes, challenging? I can't help but think that we're taking a step backward in our efforts when a little guy is left standing bewildered at the altar rail.

Michael R. Heinlein is author of Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, OMI and a promised member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.



Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



Are fairies and leprechauns demonic? And what happened to Barabbas?

Q: Listening to a Catholic radio station one day, they mentioned that leprechauns and fairies were demonic. This shocked me. St Patrick's Day celebrations always include leprechauns. Fairies are loved by little girls and big girls alike. I made a small fairy garden for me and my granddaughters. We also have many other fairy items. Are we now supposed to get rid of these?

A: No, I don't think it's a problem for Catholics to use leprechaun or fairy imagery in a clearly imaginative or make-believe way.

The Church does not have any current official teaching on fairies or leprechauns. However, in traditional folklore, fairies and leprechauns were not the sweet and playful creatures that they tend to be in our modern depictions, and they have an association with pre-Christian European paganism. So, while the Church does not formally teach that today's fantasy fairies are demonic, I suspect that fairies' roots in pagan folklore are what prompted these comments on the radio.

It hopefully goes without saying that Catholics should not practice paganism or adopt any directly pagan practices. But there is a historic tradition of Catholic missionaries 'baptising' some of the more benign forms of pagan imagery and culture in order to make Christianity more accessible to the peoples who were being evangelised. One somewhat legendary example of this is the Celtic cross; there is a story that St Patrick combined the Christian cross with a pagan symbol for the sun in order to communicate the importance of the cross in Christian life.

And at times the Church has tolerated pagan imagery in non-religious contexts. For instance, our English-language days of the week are mostly derived from the names of Norse pagan gods. But this does not prevent the Church from using terms such as 'Holy Thursday' or 'Good Friday'.

If a person is interested in fairies or leprechauns because they seriously believe in these creatures and wish to attempt literal magic or otherwise become involved with pagan or 'New Age' practices,

then this would be spirituality dangerous and incompatible with Catholicism. But I don't think this concern would apply to the vast majority of mainstream fairy or leprechaun imagery we see today.

As a parallel, we can enjoy fantasy stories, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, that have wizard characters in them without it becoming a slippery slope for our seeking to attempt wizardry ourselves. In a similar vein, I think it's fine to do things like create a 'fairy garden' for the fun of creating an arts and crafts project.

Q: Does the Church have a teaching on the ultimate fate or eternal destination of Barabbas, the one let go instead of Jesus?

A: No, the Church does not have any formal teaching on what happened to Barabbas.

For background, Barabbas is mentioned in all four Gospels, with Luke's Gospels specifying that "Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion that had taken place in the city and for murder" (Lk 23:19). Various legends tell us opposite things about the fate of Barabbas. Some stories say he converted and eventually became a disciple of the risen Christ. Others say he was killed in another insurrection attempt soon afterward.

Still, Scripture does not provide us with any further details on the rest of Barabbas' earthly life outside of his brief role in Christ's Passion, and we do not have any kind of consistent venerable tradition to help fill in these gaps.

In terms of Barabbas' ultimate destiny, keep in mind that the Church generally avoids commenting on where any particular person's soul went after death. The one exception - which does not apply to Barabbas - is canonised saints who, through a careful process of discernment, are determined to be already in Heaven and able to intercede for us. And note that the Church does not have 'reverse canonisation,' i.e., souls are never proclaimed to be in hell.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.

Being rich, but in a hurry



Several years ago, I went with another priest to visit a mutual friend. Our friend, a successful businessman, was living on the top floor of a very expensive apartment overlooking the river valley in the city of Edmonton. At one point during our visit, he took us out on his balcony to show us the view. It was spectacular. You could see for miles, the entire river valley and much of the city.

We were in awe and told him so. Thanking us for the compliments, he shared that, sadly, he seldom came out on the balcony to drink in the view. Here are some of his words: "You know, I should give this place to some poor family who could enjoy it. I could live in a basement apartment since I never have time to enjoy this. I can't remember when I last came out here to watch a sunset or a sunrise. I'm always too busy, too pressured, too preoccupied. This place is wasted on me. About the only time I come out here is when I have visitors and want to show them the view."

Jesus once said something that might be paraphrased this way: "What does it profit you if you gain the whole world and are forever too much in a hurry and too pressured to enjoy it."

Gaining

When Jesus talks about gaining the whole world and suffering the loss of your own soul, he isn't first of all referring to having a bad moral life, dying in sin, and going to hell. That's



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

the more radical warning in his message. We can lose our soul in other ways, even while we are good, dedicated, moral people. The man whose story I just shared is indeed a very good, dedicated, moral, and kind man. But he is, by his own humble admission, struggling to be a soulful person, to be more inside the richness of his own life because when you live under constant pressure and are perennially forced to hurry, it isn't easy to get up in the morning and say: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it." We are more likely to say: "Lord, just get me through this day!"

As well, when Jesus tells us that it's difficult for a rich person to enter

the Kingdom of Heaven, he isn't just referring to material riches, money, and affluence, though these are contained in the warning. The problem can also be a rich agenda, a job or a passion that so consumes us that we rarely take the time (or even think of taking the time) to enjoy the beauty of a sunset or the fact that we are healthy and have the privilege of having a rich agenda.

Struggles

Full disclosure, this is one of my struggles. During all my years in ministry, I have always been blessed with a rich agenda, important work, work that I love. But, when I'm honest, I need to admit that during these years I have been

too hurried and over pressured to watch many sunsets (unless, like my friend, I was pointing out their beauty to a visitor).

“I'm no Thomas Merton, but I take consolation in the fact that he, a monk in a monastery, was often too busy and pressured to find solitude”

I have tried to break out of this by conscripting myself to regular times of quiet prayer, regular walks, retreats, and several weeks of vacation each year. That has helped, no doubt, but I'm still too much of an addict, pressured and hurried almost all the time, longing for space for quiet, for prayer, for sunsets, for a hike in a park, for a glass of wine or scotch, for a con-

templative cigar. And I recognise an irony here: I'm hurrying and tiring myself out in order to carve out some time to relax!

I'm no Thomas Merton, but I take consolation in the fact that he, a monk in a monastery, was often too busy and pressured to find solitude. In search of that, he spent the last few years of his life in hermitage, away from the main monastery except for Eucharist and the Office of the Church each day. Then, when he found solitude, he was surprised at how different it was from the way he had imagined it. Here's how he describes it in his diary:

Solitude

Today I am in solitude because at this moment "it is enough to be, in an ordinary human mode, with one's hunger and sleep, one's cold and warmth, rising and going to bed. Putting on blankets and taking them off, making coffee and then drinking it. Defrosting the refrigerator, reading, meditating, working, praying. I live as my ancestors lived on this Earth, until eventually I die. Amen. There is no need to make an assertion about my life, especially so about it as mine ... I must learn to live so as to forget program and artifice."

And to check out the sunset from my balcony!

When we are rich, busy, pressured, and preoccupied, it's hard to taste one's own coffee.

“I live as my ancestors lived on this Earth, until eventually I die. Amen. There is no need to make an assertion about my life, especially so about it as mine... I must learn to live so as to forget program and artifice”

Anyone who is not against us is for us



Christ Among the Doctors,
Anton Kern (1709-1747)

Nm 11:25-29
Ps 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14
Jas 5:1-6
Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



In our divided and divisive times, this weekend's Gospel should give all of us pause. It poses some hard questions about how we judge others - and asks us to look more closely at how we judge - or fail to judge - ourselves.

Should we be mistrustful or suspicious toward people who aren't like us? Should we be defensive and territorial? Doesn't the good work of God carry a copyright? Maybe not. After John described how Jesus' apostles tried to prevent someone from driving out demons in Christ's name - because, as he put it, "he does not follow us" - Jesus disagreed. He proposed another approach.

"Do not prevent him," he replied. "There is no one who performs a mighty deed in

my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

Heated

With that, Christ not only turned down the temperature in what was undoubtedly a heated exchange among competing exorcists, but also offered an invaluable lesson in tolerance and understanding: "Whoever is not against us is for us." In effect, he was saying: Anyone seeking to do good in the name of Jesus should not be prevented or interrupted. Who knows how God might work?

The catechism offers this insight: "Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him," which can include both the physical world

and other people (CCC 31).

Put another way, God often writes straight in crooked lines. You can never predict how he might seek to work in the world, or what instruments he might use.

“Seeking to pigeonhole the other can lead us to pay less attention to ourselves and our own shortcomings”

More pointedly, Jesus in this episode went on to sug-

gest that the difficulty isn't necessarily other people. In fact, he said, we should look more closely in the mirror. Maybe the real problem is closer than you realise.

Causing

Consider what might be causing you to sin. Is your hand a problem? Cut it off. Your foot? Cut it off. Your eye? Pluck it out. Again and again, Jesus challenged his followers not to spend so much time concerned with the missteps of others, but to look more closely at their own weaknesses, faults, limitations, sins.

You think other people are the issue? Think again.

There are powerful and

provocative lessons here for our own time, when so much of our culture (especially, these days, our politics) is reduced to tribal factions, disputes and squabbling sides. So many of us are often quick to label others, to be simplistic or paint people in broad strokes. We believe half-truths and misinformation, or only listen to those who tell us what we want to hear.

But one of the important lessons of this Gospel is that seeking to pigeonhole the other can lead us to pay less attention to ourselves and our own shortcomings. That has to stop. We need to begin by working on our own conversion.

Do we spend too much time judging people outside our own tribe and finding fault simply because they aren't a part of our group?

Weaknesses

What are our own deficiencies and weaknesses that need to be removed, vanquished, amputated?

How can we better build up the Kingdom of God, beginning with our own choices, actions and habits?

Among other things, Christ's teachings here stand as a vivid lesson in humility, by making clear to the apostles (and us) that those of us who think we have all the answers are usually wrong - and by asserting that the important work of conversion begins close to home. Changing the world begins with changing ourselves.

i Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog *The Deacon's Bench*.

“Christ's teachings here stand as a vivid lesson in humility, by making clear to the apostles (and us) that those of us who think we have all the answers are usually wrong --and by asserting that the important work of conversion begins close to home”

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



The search for balance amid 'safe zones' and 'church storms'

Life in modern times can be fractious, fractured, frustrating... and that's only the fs! Seeking calm in such an environment can be a very attractive proposition.

Last Monday morning on **Oliver Callan** (RTÉ Radio 1) the host had a timely conversation with Capuchin Brother Richard Hendricks, priest and poet, about the ideas in his new book 'Calming the Storms'. He stressed the importance of mindfulness - being aware in the present moment rather than always looking back to the past or fussing about the future. Though relevant to anyone, being a valuable human experience, he set it very much in a Christian context, the ultimate goal being an awareness of the divine presence. A mindful compassion was very much at the centre of it, and the practicality of the approach was very much evident in the caring work of the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin's inner city, where every day the brothers serve 400 breakfasts and a thousand dinners, work that Callan obviously admired as 'vital work now'. We learned a lot about the history, traditions, outlook and work of the Capuchins as



Claire McCollum

well as the founding ideas of St Francis and his sense of 'cosmic fraternity'. I suspect one result will be a renewed interest in the order.

His explanations were very clear - an education for both the listener and the presenter who seemed genuinely positive, respectful and curious. The distinctions between the processes of mindfulness, meditation and contemplation were useful and accessible, while his reflections on posture were practical, convincing and

supported by the science - e.g. the traditional prayer posture has been shown to lower blood pressure.

I'd suspect visiting beautiful places is likely to have a similar effect and Cornwall must surely rank high on the beauty scale. It was the location for **Songs of Praise** (BBC One, Sunday) which Claire McCollum presented from an attractive beach area on the south coast, an area she described as a place of 'extraordinary natural beauty'. The main location was the Church of St Winwaloe, nicknamed the 'Church of Storms'. Many of the songs from that church had sea-related themes - e.g. the opening hymn 'I the Lord of Sea and Sky', and the less familiar 'Will Your Anchor Hold?' with its challenging metaphor. We heard from local historian and bellringer Priscilla Oates who spoke of the 'thin line between earth and God', Rev Pat Robson explained the 'Celtic Quiet Places' initiative, while local Christian artist Melanie Chadwick explained how she found sketching therapeutic in times of trouble. I liked the prayers of blessing recited at the end by these participants.

Earlier that day **Sunday**

Morning Live (BBC One), recently back on the schedule, had a thorough discussion on the 'buffer zones' of 150 metres around abortion clinics soon to be introduced in England and Scotland - a debate with its own resonance over here. The question was: 'Do abortion protest bans go too far?' Alastair Donald of the Academy of Ideas declared himself pro-choice but was very concerned about these bans from a freedom of speech point of view. Journalist Georgia Gilholy opposed the ban on free speech, pro-life and practical grounds. She feared the new law sought to outlaw 'unfashionable opinions' - intimidation and harassment were already covered under existing legislation, but this measure could outlaw silent prayer near clinics, while also banning offers of help to women planning an abortion. She pointed out that in a recent survey over half of women having abortions were doing under financial pressure, fearing the costs of childcare. Rabbi Jonathan Romain regarded such offers of financial help as 'bribery'! He found a 'religious flaw' in the silent prayer fear - the effectiveness of prayer wasn't limited to a 150-metre radius.

PICK OF THE WEEK

SUNDAY WITH BRIAN D'ARCY

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday, September 29, 1.05pm

Brian D'Arcy delves into his wide experience of all sorts of music to bring you some tracks just right for a Sunday afternoon along with some reflections which will make you think or laugh or cry.

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday, September 29, 1.15pm

Ahead of National Poetry Day, Aled Jones explores the art of putting faith into words through the poetry of the Bible, favourite hymns and the work of Christian spoken word artist, Storm Cecile.

THE UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

EWTN Sunday, September 29, 6am

A documentary chronicling the life and work of the 'World Villages for Children' founder, Fr Aloysius Schwartz, who despite being diagnosed with ALS, dedicated every moment of his life to serving the poor.

Comedian and writer Kate Smurthwaite, who said she'd had an abortion, didn't want women harassed when they were, in her euphemism, 'seeking medical treatment' (for what illness or injury?). She thought pro-life protests would be more appropriate outside the Department of Health or the premises of the pharmacy companies involved. She said she was against faith schools but wouldn't protest outside

such schools.

Chaired by presenter Sean Fletcher, the debate was comprehensive and well balanced with hard questions asked of both sides. I have never seen anything like it on Irish media, in relation to our 'safe zones' legislation.

Ironically and sadly, Irish hospitals and clinics used to be 'safe zones' for unborn babies.

Music

Pat O'Kelly



A season without precedents

In welcoming the audience to the opening of the 2024/25 season at the National Concert Hall, Chairperson Maura McGrath and CEO Robert Read pointed out that the season would be "one of the most ambitious to date comprising more than sixty concerts and other events, showcasing some of the world's most exciting and dynamic musicians and ensembles."

The executives continued, "This is a particularly special season as it realises our long-held ambition to create and present one combined season featuring the National Symphony Orchestra's own programmes and the International Concert Series."

Certainly the opening event on September 7th - a return visit by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra - provided an auspicious start under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle, the

orchestra's recently appointed principal conductor. The NSO's own series began a week later with Estonian Mihhail Gerts at the helm.

The Bavarians made Bruckner's 4th (*Romantic*) Symphony the focus of their programme while the NSO settled for Mahler's 1st Symphony as its focal point. Both concerts had much in their favour that I found very agreeable.

Never satisfied with his compositions and often taking alleged advice from friends and others, Bruckner had a habit of revising his scores. The finale of the 4th Symphony is a case in point and as conductor Rattle reminded us "there is of course no single correct version of the finale, although I find his 1881 revision very satisfying." And this is what we heard at the NCH. I scribbled on my programme booklet - 'magisterial, dignified, spellbinding'

It was good to have the NSO back at the NCH. Interesting, too, in that besides Gustav Mahler's 1st Symphony the concert included six songs by his wife Alma and which I was hearing for the first time. The soloist was the highly regarded Dame Sarah Connolly.

However, I was reminded of the late Terry O'Connor, long time director of the Rathmines and Rathgar Musical Society, and her admonition, "the words, darlings, the words." While I followed the texts assiduously very few of Dame Sarah's words were clear. Maybe those seated in the stalls had better fortune.

Late September turns our attention to the annual New Ross piano festival under artistic director Finghin Collins. The 2024 event opened last evening and continues until Sunday next September 29th. Collins has assembled

another eclectic mix of artists not least the renowned English pianists Paul Lewis and Steven Osborne.

Others include winner of the 2022 Dublin International Piano Competition (DIPC), Korean Yukine Kuroki and winner of the 2009 Leeds International Piano Competition, Sofya Gulyak.

There are also recitals by Michael McHale - he calls his 'The Lighter Night' - and the young Eoin Fleming, winner of the Brennan Prize at the 2018 DIPC. The Spanish group Trio Rodin embrace music by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Bernstein and Piazzolla while artistic director Collins presents what he calls a 'romantic programme' that includes Clara Schumann's Variations on a theme by Robert Schumann (her husband).

Events take place in the acoustically excellent St Mary's Church of New Ross.



Finghin Collins

BookReviews

Peter Costello



A capital wracked by the toils of political struggle



A priest of the Pro-Cathedral in the city centre, carrying a Red Cross flag, leads children and other civilians to a place of safety in the early days of the Civil War in Dublin.

Dublin: The Irish Revolution 1912-23,
by Brian Hughes
(Four Courts Press, €24.95)

Joe Carroll

This book is the latest in a series where historians were invited to update “a seminal period” in Irish history on a local basis. So far 15 counties have been covered availing of the new archival material. This latest one on Dublin by history lecturer, Brian Hughes, of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, is obviously the most challenging.

Much of his material is already familiar from the large output in recent years of historical work on the “Irish Revolution” where Dublin was the focal point of the final struggle. The challenge was to portray how the tumultuous national events were impacting on the capital and the surrounding countryside and the author has done extensive research into material and archives not available to previous historians or seen as too localised.

Thus at the time of the royal visit of 1911, Dublin, he notes, had 1800 non-British Europeans, 14 Chinese, 12 Egyptians, 36 South Americans and a Samoan, according to the latest census. Crime was very low, the Dublin trams carried 58 million passengers a year, the tenements were the most densely populated of Britain and Ireland with the record in Henrietta St.

The Great War

With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, social life was to change drastically as young men from the Protestant and Catholic middle classes and from the slums joined the battalions of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and a new category of Dubliner appeared, the “separation women” who depended on their husbands’ allowances. Refugees from Belgium were mostly welcomed but the Killarney and Ballybrack refugee committees made clear they would “not take Jews or agricultural labourers.”

Dublin mourned as the deaths mounted. The Fusiliers took heavy losses at Gallipoli, the poet Katherine Tynan who had two sons enlisted wrote of a sense of bitterness that “lives had been thrown away and their heroism unrecognised...Dublin was full of mourning.”

The 1916 Rising changed Dublin utterly. Class divisions showed themselves in the disgust of the middle classes, Catholic and Protestant, for the looting by “the slum people” as John Dillon of the Irish Parliamentary Party termed them as he observed them from his house in North Great Georges St. He feared that they would break into the public houses.

But the Spring Show went ahead in Ballsbridge the day after the Rising. Just as the Liffey Swim, the Phoenix Park races and the Dublin Horse Show went ahead soon after the outbreak of the Civil War with the shelling of the Four Courts six years later.

“When 10,000 Catholic refugees fled to Dublin from the pogroms in Belfast in early 1922 the Provisional Government took little notice and it was the anti-Treaty Republicans who provided shelter”

While the IRA in 1920-21 were ambushing the Auxiliaries in the centre of the city and civilians were killed and injured by shrapnel in Grafton St and Camden St (nicknamed “the Dardanelles”) life went on with cinemas and ballrooms thriving. The IRA headquarters clamped down on ambushes in north Co. Dublin for a period lest they provoke martial law. Howth and Sutton were deemed more suitable as “a place of quiet retreat for IRA personnel”, a senior officer told the Bureau of Military History years later.

When 10,000 Catholic refugees fled to Dublin from the pogroms in Belfast in early 1922 the Provisional Government took little notice and it was the anti-Treaty Republicans who provided shelter mainly in Protestant buildings such as the Masonic headquarters in Molesworth St and the Kildare St Club.

The author has an eye for such incongruous situations while filling out the picture of the socio-political and military narrative of those turbulent years in the history of Dublin. His attention to the quiet heroism of the women in Cumann na mBan is welcome.

Desmond Egan’s universal voice



“No. 6, 1951” by Mark Rothko, (c) Mark Rothko Estate, courtesy Christopher Rothko. medium

Laptop,
by Desmond Egan
(The Goldsmith Press, €
20.00 / £16.00)

William Adamson

Desmond Egan once wrote that poetry is essentially a dialogue, an insight into the universal through the particular experience, and in

his latest collection, *Laptop*, this thought is taken to a level of intensity rarely found in poetry today.

The book itself is beautifully presented with a cover illustration of a painting by Mark Rothko and in the initial eponymous poem of the collection, the writer sets out his objectives, equating the laptop with the artist’s

palette, its keys (“there are bruises on these buttons / blacker than dried blood”), the brushstrokes

.... trying
like Rothko to address
life and love and it all
with music playing

The collection is divided into four sections dealing with the poet’s very personal medi-

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.

“I did not have the makings of an atheist because I lived in a state of constant wonder, as if before a curtain which I knew had to rise someday”

tations on life and faith, taking in imagery which is at once both familiar and at the same time transcending, indeed almost kinaesthetic in its ability to evoke in the reader a sense of both a physical and spiritual presence through figurative language, creating intense descriptions of actions and objects, condensing, as in the poem *Pouring*, the sacred into the everyday:

... he pours his visitor
tea with
such shaking vehemence
it's as if
nothing nothing else
mattered as much
nothing in the world just
then
as if the meaning of
everything
were there right there
God in that battered teapot

And not only in commonplace items, the poems of the first two sections also abound with images from the natural world: birds, flowers, hedgerows, animals and insects pervade, testimony of the divine in all we see. In the poem *No Proof Needed*, the poet dwells on the intrinsic beauty of “a forgotten forgotten-not”:

It is the world's unclaimed
beauty
God's spare change.

Unsurprisingly, given Egan's attachment to the poet Gerard Hopkins, there are intentional resonances, re-soundings, of the Jesuit poet's verse and his ideas on the energy (“instress”) which gives an object its unique qualities (“inscape”). Section I ends with a poem (*Summer Ends Now*) acknowledging Hopkins directly and which segues into the first poem of Section II (*Hunting for Hopkins*), itself an epiphany of self-realisation.

Section III's *Memoires* comprises eighteen stanzas which are vignettes of a life lived (the “echo road”), sometimes nostalgic, sometimes melancholy, sometimes humorously ironic (“one final treat / bought bread”), all finely observed with a keen sense of self. The section ends with the elegiac line:

above the fields in blue
space
one small ship

is hardly moving
slowly so very slowly
on down the vague estuary
away and
away

Section IV, *Inferences*, is a series of six distinct, but thematically linked stanzas. The title is well chosen and indicates, as all good titles should, the thematic direction the poem will take. “Infer” from the Latin literally means to bring or carry into, and in modern terminology would be synonymous with drawing a conclusion. In Hopkins's imagery we might see it as the bringing in of the harvest. These stanzas address God directly and this is the most metaphysical section of the book, intensely personal and reflective:

and the poetry of a life
can last
and we can catch its music
belief like that of Thomas
purified by doubt can hold

The Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke in his collection *Book of Hours* (*Das Stunden-Buch*) writes: “God speaks to each of us as he makes us, / then walks with us silently out of the night.” (“Gott spricht zu jedem nur, eh er ihn macht, / dann geht erschweigend mit ihm aus der Nacht.”), and it is this intense sense of a personal, unique relationship with God that we find in these poems.

Egan also prefaces each section with quotations from other writers. At the start of Section II he has chosen a quotation from Czeslaw Milos: “I did not have the makings of an atheist because I lived in a state of constant wonder, as if before a curtain which I knew had to rise someday.”

It is this state of constant wonder the reader is invited to share. But there is no proselytising here, simply the desire to sing openly and honestly a song of the self.

We would do well to listen. Desmond Egan's voice is one that stands out as a major achievement not only in Irish poetry, but universally.

i Dr William Adamson teaches at Bamberg University and was formerly Head of the English Department, Ulm University, Germany

When cultures and religions clashed in ancient Mexico



Aztec culture was a fully developed civilisation

The Aztec Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Stories and Legends, by Camilla Townsend (Thames & Hudson, £14.99 / €17.99)

Peter Costello

I have long been fascinated by the great civilisations of the ancient Americas, the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru, whose fall was brought about by the savage incursions of the Spanish *conquistadores*.

The conquest of Mexico especially is a moment in history that everyone should be aware of when talking about the role of religion in the world. That greed for gold more often than not drove the ambitions of our ancestors in ways we cannot overlook is an unavoidable truth.

Introduction

My introduction to this subject came about through a reading of a novel Montezuma's *Daughter* (1891) by H. Rider Haggard. This highlighted for its English readers the deviousness of the Spaniards and the depravity of the Aztecs, especially concerning the horror of their penchant for mass human sacrifice,

I now learn from this book that much of what appeared in both the novel and several of the books I read since was in many ways quite misleading. In this respect Dr Camilla Townsend's book is wonderfully informative about new perspectives on the whole subject of Mexican

ancient history.

This begins with the simple fact that the people we call today Aztecs did not call themselves that; the term is a later scholarly invention. Indeed much that we thought we knew about these people came from such people as Bernal Diaz and the learned friars who follow in the train Cortez.

The Aztecs, she says, seemed to be completely controlled by their religion. Those hecatombs of human sacrifice were seen as a great part of it. She rebuts this.

“Aztec religion, the surviving evidence indicates, was actually comprised of a variety of rich and compelling traditions”

“Readers may be surprised to learn that although there is a kernel of truth buried in this narrative, it is distorted almost beyond recognition. The story is largely what the invading Spaniards wished to believe themselves - and wished the world to believe - about the people they had conquered and were continuing to treat harshly. Aztec religion, the surviving evidence indicates, was actually comprised of a variety of rich and compelling traditions. Human sacrifice did have a place with the whole, but not in the way that it is generally portrayed.”

(Perhaps no more so than the killings involved in the *auto-da-fé* system in Spanish culture, or indeed in Mexican, where the last such was held in 1850.)

So this book starts again so to speak, being based entirely on indigenous sources, largely in the native Nahuatl language leaving aside everything of Spanish origin. The result is wonderfully enlightening.

Myths

The term “myths” she admits is a difficulty. For many students of religion and folklore it is a term for foundational religious stories, but to many others it means a narrative which is untrue. This, however, is a misunderstanding: myths are not lies; they are truths of a higher order.

This book, as the subtitle indicates, deals with ancient stories and legends. Irish readers will in this realm feel much at home. She outlines the ideas the Aztecs had of their divine universe. Here again she has a penetrating observation.

“According to this interpretation - and contrary to what westerners have often wanted to believe - the Aztecs were not really polytheistic. Rather they were pantheistic. Divinity was everywhere revealing itself to humans in the guise of virtually infinite divine beings, who were all aspects of the same force.”

She follows these broad observations while conducting a rapid survey of the beginnings of human beginnings as the Aztecs saw it - bound up in their settlement myths of

a descent from some place in the far north. She advances then into the legends of history, for the Aztec were obsessive recorders of their own past. Interwoven with this is a chapter she calls “Talking to the Divine”.

“The Mexicans of modern times may well be Catholics, but they also observe aside from the feasts of the church, the celebrations of their own ancient cultures”

This is a prelude to her account of how Christianity was introduced and began to pervade society, but not to the extent that it expelled the old ideas. (Is there a parallel here with what happened when St Patrick came to Ireland?)

The Mexicans of modern times may well be Catholics, but they also observe aside from the feasts of the church, the celebrations of their own ancient cultures.

Here she introduces a character with whom many Irish people will feel great sympathy - given the nature of our own history. Eduardo de la Cruz is an anthropologist who is dedicating his professional life “to rehabilitating Nahuatl language, culture and stories.” (Echoes here again of Ireland during the Celtic Revival.)

Though the intended audience of this book seems to be American college students taking general courses in philosophy and religion, it has much to offer the ordinary reader interested in understanding the nature of religion in the modern Americas south of the USA.

“The Aztecs were not really polytheistic. Rather they were pantheistic. Divinity was everywhere revealing itself to humans in the guise of virtually infinite divine beings, who were all aspects of the same force”

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Crossword

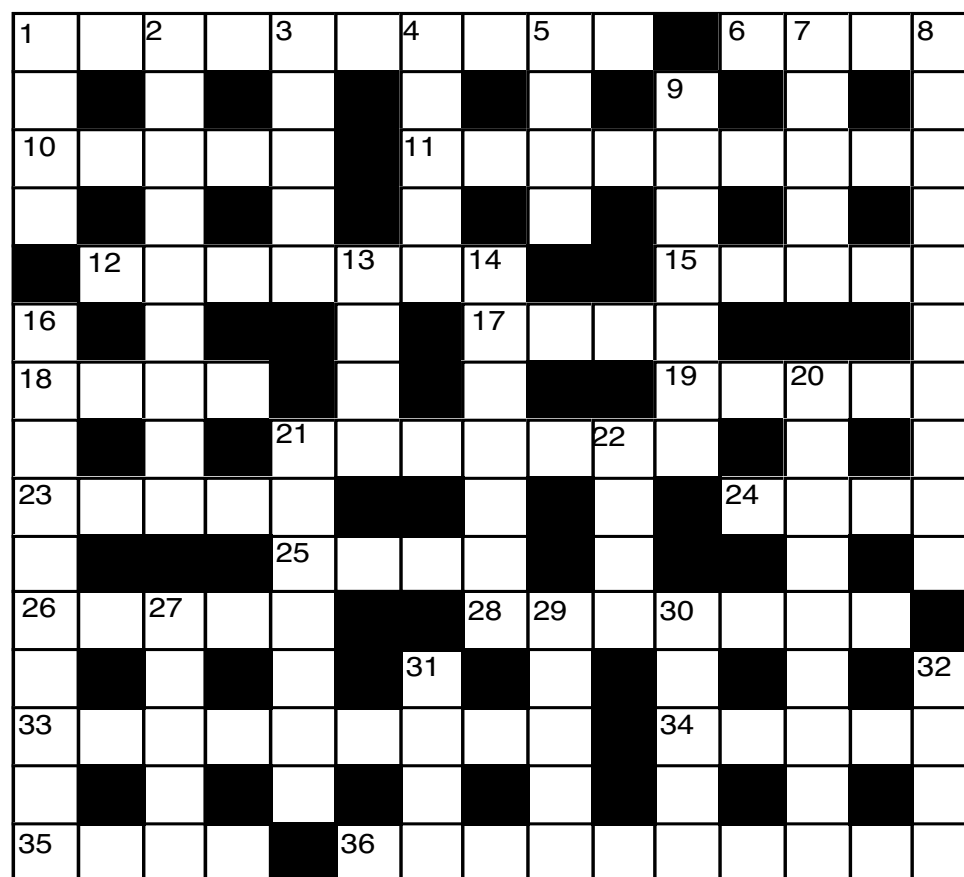
Gordius 682

Across

- 1 Variety of coal (10)
- 6 The site of the Taj Mahal (4)
- 10 Protection worn in the kitchen (5)
- 11 Raised tomb (9)
- 12 Entrails of poultry (7)
- 15 Material made from flax (5)
- 17 Exaggerated publicity (4)
- 18 Precipitation (4)
- 19 Weeps (5)
- 21 Weight within a boat which stabilises it (7)
- 23 Greek monster (5)
- 24 Skin complaint characterised by pimples (4)
- 25 American ten-cent coin (4)
- 26 Relented, abated (5)
- 28 Go berserk (7)
- 33 Engineered sheet wood (9)
- 34 Pay increase (5)
- 35 Requirement (4)
- 36 It rises from the Vatican in confirmation of a new pope (5,5)

Down

- 1 Husband of Jezebel or captain obsessed with Moby Dick (4)
- 2 In great fear (9)
- 3 Concerning the kidneys (5)



- 4 Heavenly body with a fiery tail (5)
- 5 Excursion (4)
- 7 You putt on this part of the golf course (5)
- 8 Organise and run (10)
- 9 A reading before the Epistle (7)
- 13 Napoleon was imprisoned here (4)

- 14 Protection from the elements (7)
- 16 Senior churchman, an aide to the bishop (10)
- 20 Under an assumed identity for privacy (9)
- 21 Money owed that will not be recovered (3,4)
- 22 Line of stitching on a garment (4)

- 27 Backbone (5)
- 29 An examination of one's business records by accountants or tax officers (5)
- 30 Capital on the Seine (5)
- 31 Launder, perform ablutions (4)
- 32 Arid (4)

SOLUTIONS, SEPTEMBER 19

GORDIUS No. 681

Across

- 1 Dig 3 Tourist trap 8 Urgent 9 Pantheon 10 Lilac 11 Emend 13 March 15 Unguent 16 Haricot 20 Salad 21 Holst 23 Pesto 24. First aid 25 Bamboo 26 Wensleydale 27 Way

Down

- 1 Double Dutch 2 Giggling 3 Tunic 4 Ripcord 5 Title 6 Reeked 7 Pen 12 Deuteronomy 13 Minus 14 Heard 17 Crossbow 18 Flooded 19 Florin 22 Total 23 Peace 24 Few

Sudoku Corner ⁵⁵²

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy ⁵⁵¹

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

Last week's Hard ⁵⁵¹

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

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

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



Hope St Bernadette brings Ireland much-needed healing

As I write these words, two events coincide – the first, the re-opening of old wounds following the publication of the ‘Scoping Report’ into historical abuse in religious-run schools and the visit to Ireland of the relics of St Bernadette of Lourdes. Is this a coincidence and what does one have to do with the other? Without getting into too much detail of the abuse report and the other reports before that, what is essential for us to remember is that behind every report and statistic is a wounded human being with a story to tell. And it is plainly obvious that for all people affected by abuse and hurt, there is great need for healing.



St Bernadette

The visit of the relics of St Bernadette brings home to us that this gift of healing is available to us through Christ and his Church through the power of faith, prayer and the sacraments. As a place of pilgrimage, Lourdes has always been associated with the sick and prayers for healing that thousands of pilgrims bring for themselves and their families. With the visit of the relics, this spirit of Lourdes will be available to thousands more in these days in their own dioceses. As we

venerate these relics, the words of St Bernadette herself remind us that the real power of healing does not come directly from her, her relics or Lourdes water but from God: “One must have faith and pray; the water will have no virtue without faith.”

It is faith that is the channel through which the power of healing flows as we see time and time again in the Gospels. Jesus connects faith in him with the power that heals people and makes

them whole again. Especially at the beginning of his public ministry, the Lord shows himself to be the master healer as he targets those who were sick in body and soul and as he welcomes the thousands who were brought to him. This healing ministry was an essential part of his mission as ‘Saviour’ – the one who delivers us from illness and death. Therefore, Jesus is the divine doctor who has been sent to heal, restore and make well again. He has come

to restore all things in himself and to do for us what we can’t do for ourselves.

This is the work of healing so badly needed today. The healing spirit of Christ heals old wounds and hurts. We might still remember those hurts but they lose their power to control us, leaving us at peace. Christ’s healing unites us body and soul so there is a unity and a harmony among the different parts of who we are. Christ’s healing heals the split in our wills that St Paul describes in Romans 7 where we want to do one thing but end up doing another. His Spirit heals the divisions between us, overcomes tension and builds communion between people. Christ’s work of healing unites nations into a universal family where friendship is built and unity is prized. Finally, his work of healing extends to all creation and to the earth that ‘has a fever’ in the words of Pope Francis and that requires prayer and action to recover.

Healing

To conclude, I am always struck by the numbers of those who attend healing services in our parishes whether they be monthly, annu-

ally or part of a mission for example. Is it simply a case of people desperately looking for something they need? That might be partly true, but I believe there is something deeper in progress. The people who seek healing are expressing what they know to be true and what is true for all of us – that we constantly stand before God in need of restoration and wholeness. As a nation, it is this healing and wholeness for the wounded that we pray for during this visit of the relics of St Bernadette. I need healing, we need healing, our Church needs healing and the earth needs healing too. Our hope is that through the intercession of St Bernadette, God’s spirit of healing will be poured out in abundance at a time when we need it most.



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