

# The Irish Catholic

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# 'Find flame of Faith' MMA fighter tells young people

### Chai Brady

A professional Louth-based MMA fighter has called on Irish youth not to be "sheep" and turn to drugs, but that true happiness is found in Christ.

Ciaran Clarke (28) from Drogheda told *The Irish Catholic* that in Ireland there is "such a void in people's lives" due to materialism and lack of discipline.

While Mr Clarke said he does not feel a "worthy" role model, he will use his position "to help people realise the flame in their heart and find their Faith, or even maybe people who had it before and lost it".

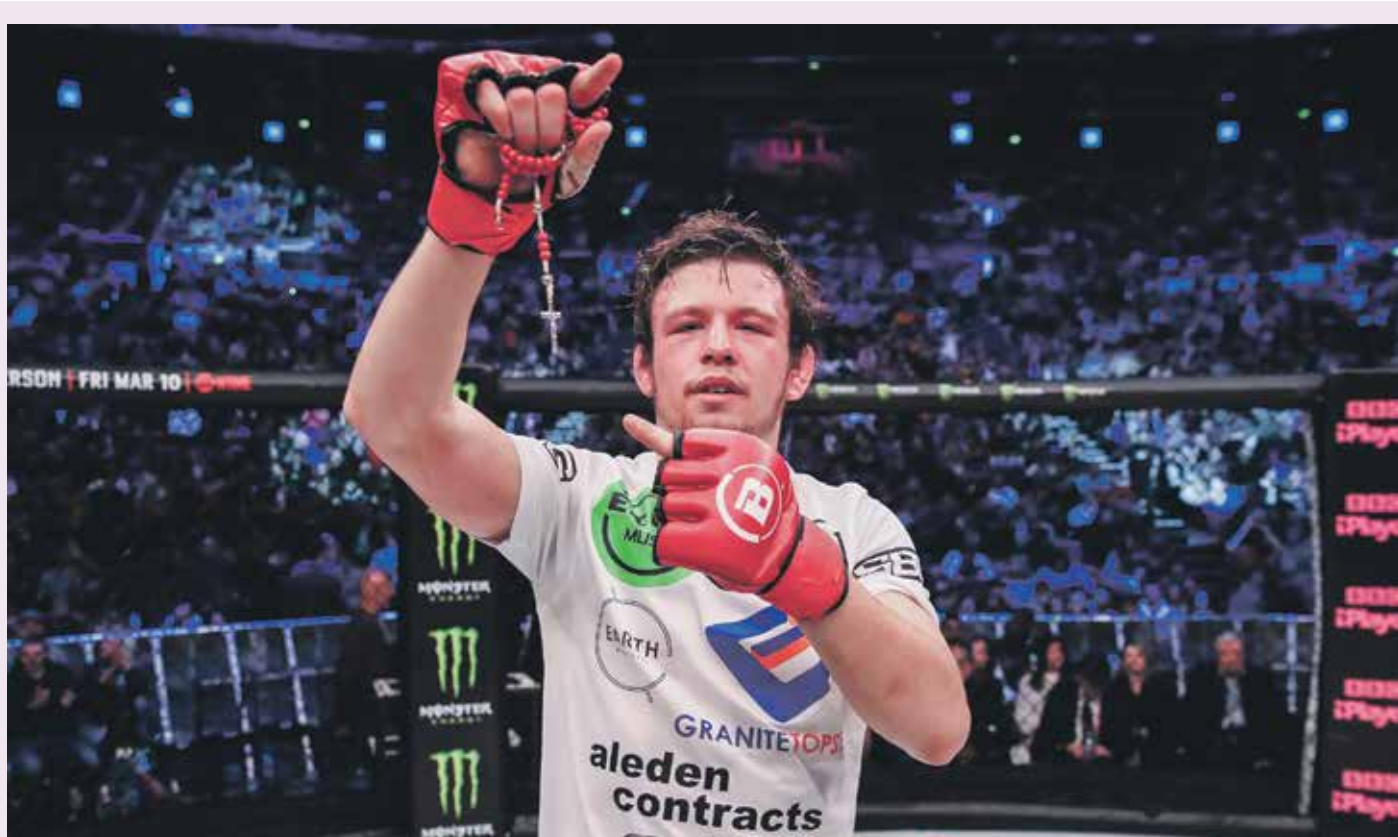
He said: "For me a strong person is a person who is able to deny themselves and has control, they lead a disciplined life, they're saying no to things that are not good for them and live a healthy lifestyle, they have positive relations with people and let go of grudges.

"They are the people that should be looked up to not people who have massive egos – ego is very bad for the soul and at the end of the day it means nothing in the end."

In a person's search for happiness, they need only go as far as the Beatitudes, according to Mr Clarke, saying, "All you have to do is look at the way Christ lived his life, and that is it".

In early December the MMA professional spoke at a 'Light the Fire' event in St Peter's parish, Drogheda, in Our Lady of Lourdes church. The theme was 'Faith, Love and Hope'. He felt acutely the need to be a good role model for young people.

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Ciaran Clarke proffers his rosary beads after a bout.

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## 'Find flame of Faith' MMA fighter tells young people

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"I'd never want to be shoving it [Faith] down their throats, because that's not the right thing to do. For me it's not about what I say, it's my actions, how I live my life – that's being a Catholic. I can praise God, I can say whatever I want, but it's how I live my life. I suppose that's the biggest influence you can have on people, the biggest thing that they look to," he said.

The responsibility of being a role model for young people while spreading the Good News "comes with a lot of pressure", he admitted, but said "it's something I take responsibility for".

Regarding advice he would give to Irish youth, he said: "Don't be a sheep, be your own person, be your own man or woman growing up. They are the people I look up to: The people who

are able to be disciplined, say no to things, or go to work 9-5 every morning instead of the people that give in to their impulses or their temptations," Mr Clarke said.

"There's always the easiest route, maybe young people turning to drugs, maybe they become angry with what is happening in their lives and they point fingers, for me I was very lucky I kept my faith and I talked to God and a big thing I had was patience. You might even find the silver lining in the problem."

He added: "When bad things happen – as humans we can let each other down it's not our fault – one thing is for sure, God will never let us down and that is something I have experienced myself and I want other people to experience."

See pages 10-11

# Humbly trusting that Christ is with the Church

The year 2023 is not a year on which I will look back with undiluted pleasure. At this time of year, our thoughts naturally turn to those who are no longer with us. At a lot of our dinner tables this year, there will be an empty chair where there was unbridled joy and laughter just a year ago.

Sickness and the shadow of death comes to all of our doors. My own brother Damian died in September aged just 49 leaving a young family.

We miss him desperately, and had hoped it would be otherwise – but God's ways are not our ways.

And despite all the philosophy and theology that has been written about the problem of suffering, if we're honest, bad things happening to good people remains largely a mystery to us.

Of course, we know that God does not visit misery on people – who would want to know such a God, never mind serve him?

## Grappling

Yet, in the midst of grappling to understand sadness and loss, we see the gentle hand of God and have the grace to be grateful for all the good times and all the good things that we enjoyed, and continue to enjoy.

Psychologists and well-being gurus today charge a fortune for repackaging timeless wisdom. And one of the things that they will tell you is the key to a happy life is to cultivate a posture of gratitude.

St Paul knew this in his First Letter to the Thessalonians when he wrote: "Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God."

Is there a lesson here for our ecclesial life?

Over the past 18 years as I have written for this

**“The very essence of the dictatorship of relativism, as Benedict XVI described a post-truth culture even before the term had been popularised, is that is relativises what is absolute (God) and absolutises what is relative (me, myself and I)”**



**Editor's Comment**  
**Michael Kelly**

**“Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God”**

newspaper, these have been tumultuous times for the Church – both locally here in Ireland and internationally.

We have seen the seemingly impenetrable 'Irish Church' laid low by a combination of the exposure of its own crimes and the onslaught of rampant secularism.

In many parts of the western world, the Church is in what – at least at this point – looks like near-terminal decline. What will become of us, we sometimes fret?

**“History sadly teaches us that when we tear things down, often what emerged is unparalleled evil”**

Synodality has become the leitmotif of the Pontificate of Francis, and many of us who have worked for a way of being the Church that is more honest and transparent delight in the prospects of co-responsibility and a genuine commitment to understanding the universal call to holiness at the heart of Baptism.

At the same time, synodality has caused division and a lack of good discernment has led shrill voices with little or no authentic formation to dominate discussions, as if the Church is a

parliamentary assembly and it's just a case of 'getting the numbers to get it over the line' to change dogma.

## Rudderless

Sometimes campaigners for reform in the Church seem rudderless. They propose the Marxist-like idea that we should tear down the structures and ways of being the Church that we have, and something new and beautiful will emerge.

History sadly teaches us that when we tear things down, often what emerged is unparalleled evil.

The very essence of the dictatorship of relativism, as Benedict XVI described a post-truth culture even before the term had been popularised, is that is relativises what is absolute (God) and absolutises what is relative (me, myself and I).

If anyone thinks that setting truth aside and trying to turn the Church into little more than a weekly social gathering for vaguely like-minded people is the answer to falling congregations, then they're incapable of learning the lessons of all mainline Protestant denominations.

Only missionary disciples with a commitment to truth (Ultimately He who is Truth), will attract others to an authentic experience.

**“You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God”**

And, in the midst of all of this we hear the gentle but firm voice of God asking us the same question down the ages: "What about you, do you want to go away too?"

Amid the temptation to lose heart or lose confidence in the humans we share the Church with, we need to embrace the Faith of St Peter and answer boldly: "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God".

*Lord, I have staked my soul, I have staked the lives of my kin  
On the truth of Thy dreadful word. Do not remember my failures,  
But remember this my faith – Patrick Pearse.*

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# Govt 'not well disposed' to MIC-UL alignment plans

**Ruadhán Jones**

The Government is "not well disposed" to plans for a closer structural alignment between Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and University of Limerick

(UL), *The Irish Catholic* can reveal.

Minister for Further Education Simon Harris and other senior officials from his department shot down the model the two colleges proposed, after a year of

negotiations by teams from the institutions.

The revelation came in correspondence sent to MIC staff on December 19 by President Eugene Wall and seen by this paper.

He and UL President

Kerstin Mey, along with the chairperson of the colleges' dialogue group Prof. Tom Collins, met with Minister Harris and senior officials from the department on November 27, where the proposed model was put

forward.

Prof. Wall told staff that the model was a 'hybrid' one "whereby closer alignment is achieved between the two institutions but does not involve merger or incorporation".

However, department officials pushed back against the proposal, pointing out that there is no legislation or "statutory scaffolding" for MIC and UL's model.

The department are "reluctant" to create the necessary statutory provisions to "enable us to arrive at our preferred position", said Prof. Wall, as "it would be a lengthy process, at best".

"So, while not well disposed to our proposals, they did, however, express a readiness to continue the conversation and a further meeting is planned

between the presidents and the officials for early in the New Year," MIC's president added.

UL-MIC are committed to engaging in "ongoing dialogue with a view to developing models of structured collaboration that will contribute to the enhancement of higher education both in the region and nationally", said Prof. Wall, in a statement agreed upon by the two institutions.

Staff at the college fear that there is "no obvious end in sight" for the negotiations, *The Irish Catholic* revealed on December 14, when sources said plans to announce a proposed model for structural alignment between the two colleges had been postponed "out of the blue".

## Much more to be done for NI peacebuilding – archbishops

**Chai Brady**

"Patience and a willingness to listen" are needed more than 25 years after the Good Friday agreement in the North in order to build a shared future, the Catholic and Church of Ireland archbishops have said in a joint message.

Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh and Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh John McDowell issued their Christmas message from St Patrick's Catholic Cathedral in Armagh last week.

They said: "During 2023, we

marked 25 years since the historic Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was signed and delivered. This year people from different parts of the community have been reflecting on this significant anniversary, often with mixed emotions.

"The signing of the agreement was not the end of the journey to peace on this island but marked simply the first faltering steps down a very long road to a new, brighter, and shared future."

The archbishops continued saying that further progress along that road can be made "if we show patience and a willingness to listen to one another

when we differ and also recognise the need for greater understanding and reconciliation".

"The transformation that our peace process has helped to achieve on this island is talked about the world over and is often held up as an example of peacebuilding. Yet there is still much work to be done," they said. Regarding wars in the Holy Land, Ukraine, Sudan and other areas in which there is conflict, the archbishops said our world "has been overshadowed by the darkness of war" and "we keep all those who are suffering in our thoughts and prayers".

## Cork's bishops warn of 'violent extremism' in Ireland

**Staff reporter**

Ireland is seeing growing "violent extremism" against migrants the Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin and his Church of Ireland counterpart Bishop Paul Colton warned in their Christmas message.

Reflecting on "horrifying" wars around the globe and the effects on innocent civilians, the bishops said the invasion of Ukraine "has had effects closer to home for us too".

"Refugees from that war travel across Europe looking for a safe refuge, with some arriv-

ing in Ireland," the bishops said in their message.

"Across Europe the challenge of welcoming refugees has seen politics swing from centrist parties to the extremes. In Ireland, the recent Dublin riots reflected a trend towards violent extremism," they warned.

"In the face of all these challenges, Christians might be tempted to give up. But we never do. We pray for deeper faith and meaning in those who search for it, for harmony and peace for all, even when it seems to be slow in coming," the bishops said.

### Celebrating the crib in Cork



Fionn (7), Shay (5) and Cuan O'Leary (9) from Rochestown at the launch of Cork's iconic Share Crib on St Patrick Street. True Christmas spirit will be felt on the streets of Cork city over the next two weeks, as almost 2,000 students from 22 schools across the city and county don the familiar yellow jackets and rally the troops for the annual Share (Students Harness Aid for the Relief of the Elderly) fundraising effort.

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# Trócaire welcomes COP28 resolutions but highlights climate shortcomings

**Jason Osborne**

COP28 was a “historic moment in climate negotiations” with its commitment to end the “fossil fuel era,” but the Church in Ireland’s overseas aid agency Trócaire acknowledged that more needs to be done.

Trócaire CEO, Caoimhe de Barra said that the promised transition away from fossil fuels is “neither fast, fair nor funded”.

“These were the litmus tests of success,” Ms de Barra said.

“This does not mean the

COP is not worthwhile; we need more multilateralism, not less. But it is imperative that more countries join the high ambition ‘group’, alongside Ireland and highly vulnerable countries, and to make every day count from now until the next COP.

“The rocks this COP could have foundered on, and are still a real threat, are the enormous power and influence of the fossil fuel industry and the lack of willingness of developed countries to pay their fair share in climate finance. The responsibility to do the heavy lifting to protect this

planet is on those that have historically emitted most, and who have the most resources, rather than the world’s most vulnerable, who have contributed little to this problem,” Ms de Barra said, adding that “this is not charity, this is justice”.

Trócaire also criticised COP28’s climate finance shortcomings, with Trócaire’s Head of Policy, Siobhan Curran saying, “As long as richer countries do not provide their fair share of climate finance, it is the poorest and most marginalised communities in the

Global South that will continue to pay the price for the climate crisis.”

This climate finance shortcoming was “exemplified” by the pledges of just over 700 million dollars to the new loss and damage fund, which is “far below the required billions” according to Trócaire.

“This fund, crucial for communities facing the costs of dealing with climate change-induced events, saw a win for developing countries on the first day of COP28. Despite this, the gap remains significant,” Trócaire said.

# Rare nativity painting goes on display in Belfast

**Staff reporter**

A rare painting dating back over 500 years by a celebrated Italian artist, *The Nativity* by Baldassare Peruzzi, has gone on public display in Belfast.

One of only a handful of Peruzzi’s paintings known to be in existence, the work had been in a private collection in Britain for decades before being put up for sale.

Due to its rarity, an export bar had been placed on the painting to prevent it from leaving Britain and to give museums an opportunity to raise money for the painting’s asking price.

The Ulster Museum had just six months to raise the capital needed and was supported by several funders, including £70,000 grant from the Department of Communities.

Senior Curator of Art, Anne Stewart described the timing of the acquisition and display of the painting as something of a “Christmas miracle”.

Ms Stewart said, “most of Peruzzi’s work was in fresco and much has been lost.

“His oil paintings are extremely rare and so it’s something of a Christmas miracle that we are able to welcome visitors to the Ulster Museum to enjoy this exciting new acquisition.”

# President Higgins echoes Pope’s warning over global ‘indifference’

**Ruadhán Jones**

President Michael D. Higgins has echoed Pope Francis warning against the “globalisation of indifference” in his message for Christmas 2023.

In his message, the President reflected on growing global tensions due to wars in the Holy Land and Ukraine, as well as the dangers of the climate crisis.

“We think in particular of all of the children in Gaza and Israel, places

known to many as a Holy Land, and that has been darkened by the taking of so many lives, and too many young lives in particular, in recent months,” said President Higgins.

The various humanitarian crises, affecting mil-

lions of vulnerable people, “are still awaiting an adequate global response on too many issues,” he added.

Referencing the Pope, President Higgins noted that “Pope Francis is among those who have warned of

the ‘globalisation of indifference’ and reminded us of the importance of the protection of the environment.

“In his message *Laudate Deum* he seeks a recovery of symmetry between economics, ecology and

ethics,” said the Irish President.

“He invites us not only to reconnect with nature, but also to achieve more sustainable, enriching and just lives together on our precious, shared, vulnerable planet that is in peril.”

## Voices raised in praise...



Schools from Armagh parish who participated in a diocesan schools’ singing programme show off their talents during Mass celebrated by Archbishop Eamon Martin.

# Diets, clear outs and nights out in Paris

I find it instructive – and sometimes even entertaining – to look over my diary for the past year and ponder on what I’ve learned and experienced.

Firstly, I give thanks for having lived another year of life. To reach old age is a blessing for which we must be truly thankful – and not grumble (too much) about the aches and pains which must necessarily accompany the years.

## Spiritual

I relished a health programme on *Netflix* called *The Blue Zone*, which suggested that if you want to live to 100, actively,



## Mary Kenny

then stay active, socialise, say grace before meals, and have a spiritual dimension to life.

“Father is bonkers – but we like him!”

I noted in January that I’d been 60 years in journalism, scribbling away since 1963. And yet, I still feel there is so much I can still learn and improve.

I also learned, as I cleared out a Dublin flat, that you cannot hang on to possessions. You’ll have to part with them all when you finally depart anyway. Give away what you can. (But it’s not always easy for clutterbugs.)

## Sermon

I heard an eccentric sermon, when a priest said, from the pulpit – “the two most important things in life are a good spiritual director, and an excellent wine merchant.”

“The two most important things in life are a good spiritual director, and an excellent wine merchant”

## Royalty and Catholicism



Imelda Staunton stars as Queen Elizabeth with Jonathan Pryce as Prince Philip in season six of *The Crown*.

There’s some fascinating conversation in the latest – and last – series of *The Crown* in which the late Queen Elizabeth discusses the role of the monarchy with her then Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Mr Blair (played with uncanny accuracy by Bertie Carvel) wants to “modernise” the monarchy, and some comparisons are drawn between this project – and “modernising” the Catholic church.

He regards monarchy as

a feudal relic which should be made “relevant” to our time, made more rational and accountable. But his wife, Cherie, played by Lydia Leonard – although no fan of kings and queens herself – reminds him that when the “mystique” of the Catholic Church was diminished, the numbers in church declined.

Elizabeth – plausibly acted by Imelda Staunton – then carries out an examination of some of the more archaic royal traditions, from protector of swans to

keeper of tableware. She subsequently tells Tony that she has concluded that these traditions are valuable because they represent history, and continuity. Monarchy isn’t “rational” or “democratic” – it’s about being distinctive, and different. Like Catholicism, some might have added.

Episode 6, named ‘Ruritania’, is actually a serious discourse about whether one really can modernise something ancient; and indeed whether one should.

A lady in the pew next to me remarked: “Father is bonkers – but we like him!”

I sat next to another oldster of my own vintage at an eye clinic, and she told me chattily that she had four children “and they are all very good to me”. One son has had two wives. The first wife was “lovely – so kind”. But the second wife? “Put it this way – she’s like Meghan.” (Alluding to the Duchess of Sussex.) “Enough said.” Then she added: “But I try to stay on good terms with all.” Wise course!

“He helped the French Resistance not because he cared for politics, but because his friends were in danger”

My hot-water boiler, which had been threatened with extinction in 2022, made it through to another

year. Another source of gratitude.

## Beckett

Read a biography of Samuel Beckett by Deirdre Bair. She does not paint a flattering picture: he idled, sponged on his family, refused to get a job, was a slob, a drunk and disliked his mother.

Like most great writers, he was selfish. But, though he scoffed at religion, he purchased rosary beads at Notre Dame for an Irish friend. And he helped the French Resistance not because he cared for politics, but because his friends were in danger.

In summertime, I met up with an old pal, Rowena Harker, who was an air stewardess in the 1960s and 70s with an overseas airline. Girls had to be tall, not over 27-years-old, and definitely not married.

“But we had the greatest fun!” Cary Grant asked her out, but she found him mean.

Took my 13-and-a-half-year-old grand-daughter to Paris for a short trip – and actually lost her one dark and rainy night in the Latin Quarter. Grew panic-stricken as I imagined some slave

trafficker picking up this pretty young teenager – but within ten minutes, she had found me. Because her trusty mobile phone can locate anyone! (Phew.)

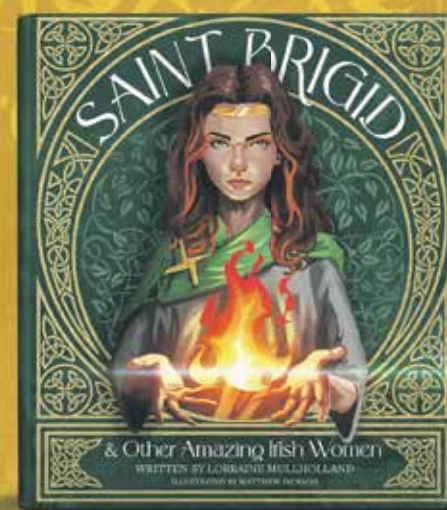
“The main thing is to calm the fears of those moving towards death”

Continued in the doomed and hopeless endeavour of trying to diet and shift the weight. This, too, has been going on for 60 years. The secret, or not so secret, chocolate habit doesn’t help.

Read a moving article by a Marie Curie counsellor, Dr Sarah Wells, who has sat with over 2,000 people as they died. Most people, she says, have peaceful deaths and it’s a natural process. The main thing is to calm the fears of those moving towards death. Surely we should have more words of wisdom like this when advocates of assisted suicide speak?

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# Govt 'extremely weak' in tackling porn consumption by children

## Ruadhán Jones

The Government's plans to tackle the consumption of pornography by children are "extremely weak", politicians have said, as public consultation has been launched on a new online safety code.

The code promises to use "robust age verification technology to make sure that children are not exposed to inappropriate content, such as pornography", according

to the Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland's new body for regulating broadcasters.

However, the code will only apply to video service providers based in Ireland, leaving the Government's plans "extremely weak" according to Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín.

"It's a tiny corner of the whole internet that they are looking to police for young children," he said.

Children as young as eight are being exposed to hardcore

pornography, he said, adding that there "is mounting evidence that there is a direct link between the consumption of this material and sexual assault and sexual violence in later years".

With debate ongoing around the country regarding domestic abuse and sexual violence, "it is quite incredible that the Government is still dragging its feet in this", Deputy Tóibín added.

"If people are asked to provide consultation on this, I

recommend people seek a direct ban on children consuming hardcore material online."

Aontú brought forward a bill seeking to force companies to protect children from being exposed to pornography. Mr Tóibín pointed to the example of France, which has already taken direct action, saying we must ensure "children cannot consume that sort of material".

Independent Senator Sharon Keogan called on the Government to protect children,

saying the proliferation of young people consuming pornography should be highlighted.

"More and more children are becoming exposed to it at a very, very young age," said Senator Keogan.

"A lot of parents aren't aware of it and aware of the dangers of the internet in general."

The draft code and the consultation document can be found on [www.cnam.ie/news/](http://www.cnam.ie/news/). The consultation will be open for responses until Friday, January 19, 2024.

# Argentine bishops pushing cause for Irish saint

## Staff reporter

The Argentinian bishops' conference is pushing the cause for canonisation of Irishman Alfonso 'Alfie' Lambe, with historical documents set to be deliv-

ered to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.

The cause for Servant of God Alfie Lambe, who died in Buenos Aires in 1959 aged just 27, saw a "significant delay" due to Covid-19 the president of the committee for his cause

Nazareno Gonzalez told *The Irish Catholic*.

The expert historian of the Offaly-born Lambe is preparing the *positio* – a formal brief arguing for canonisation – to be presented to cardinals responsible for the beatification

process.

The historian for Alfie Lambe's cause is in Rome advancing her work, Ms Gonzalez said.

"In Buenos Aires, where the remains of the Servant of God rest, we continue to propagate his life and work

and to collect the graces and possible miracles that are needed for Alfie to be declared Blessed," said Ms Gonzalez.

Alfie Lambe travelled to South America in 1953 aged just 21 to work to establish the Legion of Mary in

Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina, where he died.

By his missionary zeal and gentle nature, he quickly became popular across the continent and the cause for his canonisation was initiated in 1978.

# Irish nun receives Oireachtas award




Sr Catherine Lillis receives the 7th Oireachtas Human Dignity Award at Leinster House from Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl (right) with Senator Rónán Mullen who proposed Sr Lillis for the award. Photo: John McElroy.

## Staff reporter

A 94-year-old Columban Nun who worked with child victims of drugs in Dublin, directed a medical clinic in Myanmar and helped set up a rehabilitation hospital in Egypt for paralysed soldiers was honoured at a ceremony in Leinster House.

Sr Catherine Lillis, founder and currently a director of Tabor House addiction treatment centre in Navan, received the 7th Oireachtas Human Dignity Award from Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl at the request of the Oireachtas Life and Dignity group. She was put forward by Independent Senator Rónán Mullen.

Previous recipients of the Human Dignity Award were Sr Consilio Fitzgerald of Cuan Mhuire, Barney Curley, founder of Direct Aid For Africa, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow founder of Mary's Meals, Gina Heraty of Our Little Brothers and Sisters Orphanage in Haiti, Ronan Scully of Self-Help Africa and Bro. Kevin Crowley of the Capuchin Day Centre.



# WHO WILL PASS ON THE FLAME OF FAITH?

## The Irish Catholic

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## Rory Fitzgerald

### The View



# A new worldview in Ireland

As each New Year dawns, we marvel at the passage of time. We take stock of our lives, and how far we've come, and how far we have yet to travel. Time inevitably brings change. Yet few of us, as individuals, have changed nearly as much as this Irish nation in which we live.

Ireland has undergone remarkable economic, social and ideological changes in recent decades. Even those of us still in our 40s remember growing up in an Ireland which seems not so much another country, as another world – long since disappeared.

As a child, coming to first understand the world in the 1980s, I realised with some dismay, shame and frustration that I was growing up in one of the poorest countries in Europe. Ireland was visibly grimy and broken, from the potholed roads to the derelict buildings in its towns and cities. Not only that, but 1980s Ireland was afflicted by a bitter conflict, and the daily news told tales of the latest “tit for tat” killings.

As a child, that expression, ‘tit for tat’, made the troubles sound like some sort of darkly evil childhood game, played out between two rival gangs. Our teachers frankly told us we would have to emigrate to find decent jobs. I was advised to learn German, so that I might work in the economic powerhouse of Europe, instead of poor, backward old Ireland. Few imagined the remarkable economic growth that was to come.

### Shabby

Yet even shabby 1980s Ireland was a gleaming metropolis compared to 1950s Ireland. My father grew up in a rural village which had no electricity, and where few houses had running water – even as nuclear power stations were constructed across Europe. At the dawn of the nuclear age, the peripheries of Ireland were quietly lost in another century, for better and worse. The positives were that children then had immense freedom to roam on roads where few cars drove. Communities were close and warm. Ireland was sparsely populated, and housing was cheap and plentiful, if not of great quality.

Ireland is now one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The reasonably well-off majority have grown



accustomed to fine homes, foreign holidays, new cars and all the trappings of a modern consumer society. Of course, the other great change has been in Ireland's fundamental belief system. A once profoundly traditional, Christian and overwhelmingly Catholic nation now prides itself on its embrace of all the latest fashionable attitudes and trends. The economic change which Ireland underwent is remarkable, but this cultural change is perhaps far more significant.

**“The Irish people, long isolated, enthusiastically melted themselves into this wider Western anglophone culture”**

The social and political force most active in reinventing Ireland was unquestionably the media. This includes of course the Irish media, which actively sought to foster social change. Yet until 1978, Ireland had just one television station. Only perhaps a decade later the televisual media of the entire English-speaking world suddenly poured into Irish people's minds, from Australian soap operas, to the BBC news, to saucy Channel 4 reality shows, to American television. That was when we ceased to truly be an island nation.

The Irish people, long isolated, enthusiastically melted themselves into this wider Western anglophone culture, and most adopted its

attitudes and values too. The arrival of the internet in the 1990s completed this cultural interconnection, and Ireland as it once was, soon ceased to be.

The period 2015-2020 marked the political coronation of a new worldview in Ireland, and the demise of the old Ireland. This took place with two referenda, those on same-sex marriage and abortion. In the wake of these, the Irish media saw itself as the victorious and unchallenged arbiter of reality, and of right and wrong. It confidently set the bounds of morality and pursues heretics to the new ideology with fervent vigour. It essentially became Ireland's new priesthood around this time.

### Referenda

Ireland's main political parties uncritically accepted the Irish media's interpretation of these referenda – namely that they were proof that the Irish people had suddenly become super-liberal. The media wove a new meta-narrative for the Irish people, which held that the Irish are inherently liberal, tolerant people who would never question their new enlightened belief system. A central tenet of this new ideology was that, since the Irish had emigrated in the past, the modern Irish people would unquestioningly extend a generous welcome to anyone who arrives here, and would warmly welcome the benefits of mass immigration as a whole. The only slight problem with this new narrative is

that it is not true.

**“We are just five years on from the abortion referendum, which was approved by 66% and was said to herald the dawn of a new liberal Ireland”**

Recent opinion polling from *The Business Post* suggests that 74 to 75% of the Irish people think that Ireland has now taken in too many refugees. Other polling suggests wider popular concerns with immigration and prejudices against specific ethnic groups. Riots recently consumed the centre of Dublin after children were stabbed outside a primary school, reportedly by someone of Algerian descent. One of the most popular Irish hashtags on X (formerly Twitter) in recent years has been #Irelandisfull. It seems that many Irish people are, for whatever reason, not especially devoted adherents of the new thinking on such matters.

Yet, whatever you think about the immigration debate itself, the more fascinating thing to me is how a key tenet of Ireland's shiny new ideology was so swiftly and overwhelmingly rejected by the Irish people. We are just five years on from the abortion referendum, which was approved by 66% and was said to herald the dawn of a new liberal Ireland. Every single major media outlet and all the main political parties refuse to acknowledge any downsides

or limits to immigration. Yet, already, 75% of the Irish people openly disagree with the entire political and media class on that key issue. After just five short years, and despite a lot of sermonising, and demonising, Ireland's new priesthood has already lost ideological control of its congregation.

Perhaps a total of 15% of the republic's population are not Irish citizens, but of course many of those have brought a lot to the nation and fit in very well indeed. I personally prefer today's more multi-ethnic Ireland to the mono-ethnic state I grew up in, but clearly not everyone is altogether comfortable with these changes.

Yet perhaps it's a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same. The last major migration into Ireland occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries, when mainly English and Scottish settlers came in large numbers. That was, of course, in the context of land confiscation by the crown, and the wars of religion that followed the reformation. Discrimination against the indigenous Irish followed, on the basis of both race and religion. Yet the plain fact is that this migration was not a resounding success, even 400 years later, as the daily ‘tit for tat’ killings of the 1980s amply demonstrated. Perhaps the native Irish were never quite as welcoming, or as inclusive, as many now like to imagine.

### Conflict

Nor is there any guarantee that some forms of conflict will not follow the current large-scale migration. I would like to think that we might avoid it, and that people could forge a new sense of Irishness, and understand their shared humanity, and rise above differences of religion, ethnicity or skin colour. Yet the tragic evidence of humanity is that people often do not.

Ireland is now becoming multicultural in two ways. Firstly, its indigenous population, and those descended from the 16th-century migration from Britain, have recently become internally ideologically and culturally fragmented. They have become broadly divided by belief into atheists or secular people, liberal Christians and traditional Christians. This is a big cultural change, and it has already created conflicts over schooling and

key constitutional and legal changes. Overall, it means that the Irish people now have fewer shared fundamental values. Into this already divided society, come people from all over the world, some of whom are Christian, while others are secular, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu. Some are from Africa, others from China. Ireland is fortunate to have an attractive culture, and most newcomers embrace it warmly. The future Ireland will certainly be far more diverse in every sense. Just how diverse will depend on how Ireland's economy fares, and what its immigration policies are in the years ahead. A bad recession could well cause the return of outward migration once again.

**“Will our future tribes be online ones, where geographically dispersed people gather around shared ideas or interests?”**

Yet perhaps the greatest cultural change Ireland will undergo in the decades ahead, will again be caused by technology, and the ever-greater absorption of our lives into the virtual, online world. Many of us already work online and many people largely now socialise online, and play games online. As people's consciousness largely disappears from the real world, and becomes almost completely merged with the online world, will our geographic location on this rainy Atlantic island really be of any real cultural consequence any more at all? Will our future tribes be online ones, where geographically dispersed people gather around shared ideas or interests? Or will we find new ways to achieve greater unity and mutual compassion through humankind's growing digital interconnection?

As 2024 creeps into view, the only certainty the future holds is uncertainly. We know that there are further extraordinary changes to come, we don't know exactly what. Our resolution should be to do what we can to try to these coming changes, changes for the better.



**“Today the visibility of faith has for all intents and purposes vanished” – Archbishop Dermot Farrell**

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**The Irish Catholic**

# My faith is everything – MMA fighter



MMA fighter Ciaran Clarke displays his rosary beads after a bout.



All things end but God's love and authority are forever, Ciaran Clarke tells Chai Brady

**T**he dedication and discipline involved in MMA (mixed martial arts) is similar to the high standards to which Catholics are called, according to professional fighter Ciaran Clarke.

The physically demanding full-contact sport incorporates the use of a variety of martial art styles in each bout. In the last decade MMA has boomed in popularity, with controversial and

divisive international figure Conor McGregor spurring on interest in Ireland.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the 28-year-old Drogheda native Mr Clarke said that while he has a love for MMA, "My faith is everything".

"Everything in this life ends no matter what it is, having a car, there will be a breakdown, MMA is my career and I love it but there is going to come a time when I'm not going to be able to do it or I'll have to stop. So there's a lot of things in this life that end. We all go through our little battles and trials – they end as well," he said.

"We know there is no end, and I want to make the best decisions here for myself and have a relationship with God so that when the time does come for me that I've made the right decisions, and please God I'm going to the right place."

In early December Mr Clarke spoke at a 'Light the Fire' event in St Peter's parish, Drogheda, in Our Lady of Lourdes church. The theme was 'Faith, Love and Hope'.

It was a first for the fighter, despite having some public speaking experience. He felt acutely the need to be a good role model for young people.

"I've never talked about my faith specifically to a crowd in a church, it was quite nerve wracking. I wanted to get it right. Not that there was anything to get right, I just felt a responsibility – I know a lot of people I have listened to have hit home with me – so I wanted to hit home with the people there," he said.

"I just said a prayer to the Holy Spirit and said 'look, this isn't my night, it's God's night, let Jesus speak through me'. To be honest when I got up there, just like any of my fights, it took care of itself. It went really well and it got a good reception."

## Influence

Role models have been important in Mr Clarke's career, starting off with his first coach, who was in his early 20s. "He had a little gym on the go that he had training in, it [MMA] wasn't a big thing back then. I really looked up to him and admired his

dedication to the sport and his lifestyle, how he carried himself. That's what I really looked up to," he recalled.

**“Even as I got older, into my teen years, I never felt I'd stop going to Mass. I was taught well enough by my nanny and my mother”**

"As my nanny always says, 'Show me your friends and I'll tell you know what I think of you'. Those were the people I was looking up to, instead of other people around the street that were getting up to no good. That's who I surrounded myself with, people that I want to be like. Now it would be my peers, the likes of my training partners, how they carry themselves, and my coach, how he lives his life, just things like that."

Asked about the origins of his deep faith, Mr Clarke

said from a young age he was taken to Mass every Sunday, adding he was "never forced".

"Even as I got older, into my teen years, I never felt I'd stop going to Mass. I was taught well enough by my nanny and my mother. That was the start of it. Every night, saying prayers," he said.

"We were just praying for other people, being thankful. Then obviously when someone is sick in the family you would be praying for them – the bare minimum I would say.

"As I got older, I built my own relationship and started to delve into it as an adult. We can all say that our faith isn't as strong sometimes, but it is always there, if that makes sense. As a teenager, as you can imagine, it's not particularly strong. You're still going to Mass and praying but it's not until you mature that you really start to figure out why."

## Mischief

It was because of his upbringing that he did not get involved in any serious "mischief" as a teenager

– although he had his fair share. The moral compass endowed by his mother and grandmother always pushed him away from significant trouble.

He said: "Like every youngfella I liked growing up in Drogheda. It was before the phones and the internet, we were lucky you'd still call over to your friends and stuff.

**“We realised that the two of us were very blessed in the sense that we never got mixed up in certain things. We would say that's divine intervention”**

"When we were growing up, myself and my brother – we're only two years apart – the two of us would have conversations, we were reared the same, we would have good faith.

"We would be getting up to mischief, harmless stuff,



**“Being a Catholic is a disciplined life and we try our best to say no to things, for the greater good, and that is what it is like being a fighter, doing the things you don’t want to do and making sacrifices”**

but when, say, other people would have done certain things, or get outside just mischief, we wouldn’t. We now know it was our subconscious telling us ‘No, this isn’t right’, or ‘We shouldn’t do this.’”

He continued saying: “We’re not saints or angels, we did do certain things, but we knew it was not what God would want of us – and we realised that the two of us were very blessed in the sense that we never got mixed up in certain things. We would say that’s divine intervention.

“We always have these conversations, and we realise now it was because of our rearing and the Faith, it was always that voice in the back of our head saying ‘this is not right’. We really feel blessed. We were no saints but again we always had that conscience.”

#### Father

Mr Clarke said he was reared by his mother, who had him quite young, and his grandmother. Growing up he does not remember a time his mother and father were together – although now he has a “great relationship” with his father.

But why did Mr Clarke decide to jump into the martial arts world? The major motivator was the absence of being brought up by a father, which ended up playing a key role in his decision.

“Growing up in Drogheda as you can imagine as a youngfella you get into some altercations,” said Mr Clarke.

“I never had the bigger brother or the dad to turn to. I never had any of that,

and as a child at the time – it wasn’t that I was bullied or anything I always stood up for myself – but I didn’t like having that helpless feeling. In a childish way, I laugh at it to this day, back then in my own little mind I had the ‘man of the house’ role.

“I just didn’t want to be helpless in situations. I wanted to be able to defend myself even as I got older, say if I had a girlfriend, if I was walking down the road going home or whatever, things like that. That’s what got me into martial arts,” he explained.

From Mr Clarke’s experience, not having a father in the house growing up is “massive” but he was lucky to have a great family around him.

**“I hand all of that over to the Lord to be honest. It gives me peace of mind, he has led me through life with so many things”**

“Not having that figure in the home, it really does affect you. Maybe it affected me in a positive way, the reason being it is why I got into martial arts. On the other end it does bring anxiety and stuff as well,” he said.

“Having positive role models in your life is a big, big thing, that’s maybe why I was a bit nervous doing the talk, because it

was mentioned to me that there was going to be a lot of young people. It’s a big responsibility, because you don’t know who’s watching you, or who you are influencing. I know myself, the people I would look up to didn’t know either,” he added.

But when Mr Clarke started MMA he “fell in love with it”, particularly how challenging it is and its individuality – very different from the team sports such as football and the GAA he would have done in his school years.

He said: “If I missed a point or a goal I didn’t have the weight of the team on my shoulders, and if I do win myself, I did it, I didn’t have anybody else to turn to. Sometimes that goes against you, but I just love all of it.

“I had all these talented people to look up to and aspire to be. Being a Catholic and being a fighter, which is my profession now, it’s very similar,” he stated.

#### Disciplined

“Being a Catholic is a disciplined life and we try our best to say no to things, for the greater good, and that is what it is like being a fighter, doing the things you don’t want to do and making sacrifices... My brother is the exact same, he felt the same way but he didn’t take it up as a profession, he’s a plumber now.”

Regarding the future, Mr Clarke is very aware that aged 28 he has another few years as a professional MMA fighter.

He said: “I have learned from the sport, there are no guarantees. I just want to see how far I can take it and keep challenging myself. Years ago, when I first started, I maybe had a bit of a chip on my shoulder to prove myself. Of course, that still motivates me now, but I hand all of that over to the Lord to be honest. It gives me peace of mind,



Drogheda-based Ciaran Clarke in action.



he has led me through life with so many things, with my career and stuff – I don’t have too much anxiety with him. I accept a lot of things.”

Nowadays he gets asked if he prays to win, a query he answers with a definitive ‘no’.

“I don’t pray to win, I

pray for humility when I win, and if I lose, to have the grace and conviction to get through it and find the silver lining. So far it works out for me. I don’t like thinking into the future too much. I just hand it over and focus on myself, that’s all I can do,” he insists.

Looking towards the New Year, for 2024 Mr Clarke would like to deepen his faith by being a more regular attendee at Adoration hours and Confession. But really, what he wants is to “get closer to God, and just try to be a better person in that sense”.

# A Jesuit brother needed by NASA for his meteorite mastery



Bro. Bob Macke SJ is playing a pivotal role in one of NASA's most recent groundbreaking successes, writes Jason Osborne

The word 'cosmos' comes from a Greek root meaning 'order'. With so many in this present age accustomed to linking the enormity of space with 'chance' or chaos, it may come as a surprise to find a Jesuit brother who puts God front and centre right at the heart of one of humanity's most advanced scientific undertakings.

Bro. Bob Macke SJ is working alongside some of the world's foremost scientists as part of NASA's Osiris-Rex mission. 'Osiris-Rex' means 'Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification and Security – Regolith Explorer'. A bit of a mouthful? The mission

description should clear things up:

"Osiris-Rex is the first US mission to collect a sample from an asteroid. It returned to Earth on September 24, 2023, to drop off material from asteroid Bennu. The spacecraft didn't land, but continued on to a new mission, OSIRIS-APEX, to explore asteroid Apophis. Meanwhile, scientists hope the Bennu sample Osiris-Rex dropped into the Utah desert will offer clues to whether asteroids colliding with Earth billions of years ago brought water and other key ingredients for life here."

That makes the whole affair sound quite matter-of-fact, but the reality is that it was a mission years in the making and unfolding, the product of unparalleled scientific and technological expertise, that was in no way a guaranteed success. Launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida in 2016, the spacecraft travelled to a near-Earth asteroid named Bennu (formerly 1999 RQ36) and collected a sample of rocks and dust from the surface in 2020.

The term near-Earth is a tricky one. On a cosmic scale, Bennu is indeed 'near-Earth', but it might come as a surprise to find out that Osiris-Rex still had to travel 200 million miles, or 320 million kilometres in order to rendezvous with its target asteroid.

## Epic

So how does a Jesuit brother come to find himself at the heart of such an epic project? Well, the very first step along that path was an early love of science, Bro. Macke tells me.



Jesuit Bro. Bob Macke and Jesuit Fr Gabriele Gionti, an astronomer, prepare to give journalists a tour of the Vatican Observatory at the papal villa at Castel Gandolfo, Italy in 2018. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

"I have always been fascinated with learning about this incredible universe that we live in. Before I became a Jesuit, I studied physics at MIT and started graduate studies at Washington University in St Louis. At Washington U, I studied presolar grains, which are micron-sized grains of dust that formed in stars and other astrophysical environments, and somehow survived the formation of our solar system intact, still retaining information about the environments where they formed," Bro. Macke says.

**“My work has given me a bit of a reputation as the expert on meteorite density and porosity”**

"By studying them in the laboratory, we can constrain our models of the stars and other objects where they formed. These dust grains are found in certain kinds of primitive meteorites, and so I began to learn about meteorites at that time.

"Long story short, I left graduate studies to discern my vocation as a Jesuit brother. I entered the Society of Jesus a couple years later. Later one summer, Brother Guy Consolmagno (then-curator of meteorites) invited me to visit him in Rome to study the meteorites of the Vatican collection. Little did I know that he was looking for his eventual successor. This led eventually to finishing my PhD at the University of Central Florida and my joining the staff of the Observatory in 2013. I became curator of meteorites a year later."

It's easy to see how expertise in meteorites might come in handy for a mission like Osiris-Rex, but

to give a more precise picture of what that work consists of, Bro. Macke tells me exactly what his area of expertise is: "I study the physical properties of meteorites, in particular density and porosity (the amount of void space inside the rock), though lately I have also been working with thermal properties. In my research, I have systematically studied these properties in meteorites from numerous collections around the world, creating a database that other researchers have found valuable for their own models of asteroid structure, formation, and behaviour."

## Fascinating

There are many scientists working in this fascinating field, so how did Bro. Macke find himself picked out of the crowd to assist such a high-stakes mission? His expertise in measuring these "precious" space rocks was what set him apart.

"My work has given me a bit of a reputation as the expert on meteorite density and porosity. When the sample analysis plan for the specimens from Bennu was being developed, one of the working group leads contacted me for advice about measuring the density and porosity of these precious space rocks. It was not long before he asked me to join the sample analysis team in order to develop and run an instrument for measuring densities," Bro. Macke says.

"This device, called an ideal-gas pycnometer, performs the measurements without altering or destroying the specimen, which is important, but they wanted to go further; it had to keep the specimens in their pristine state, just as they were when collected, which meant making a device suitable for a sealed clean room glove box at NASA Johnson

Space Center."

The device could only be made from a short list of approved materials, Bro. Macke says, and had to mount to a porthole on the side of the box which "complicated the design considerably," to say the least. It was "quite a relief" when they mounted it to the glove box and everything matched up perfectly and worked as it was designed to.

"Soon I will be conducting the measurements myself in Houston, and my data will provide valuable insight as to the nature of these rocks before they go off to be studied in more detail by a large team of other researchers worldwide," Bro. Macke says.

**“It may provide some insight as to whether the building blocks of life formed on Earth or whether they might have been delivered to Earth by asteroids”**

As mentioned in the mission description above, scientists had high hopes that the sample collected from Bennu would offer clues as to whether asteroids colliding with the infant Earth billions of years ago brought water and other "key ingredients" for the life that, obviously, developed here.

The news was warmly welcomed then when NASA announced October 11 that initial studies of the 4.5-billion-year-old sample revealed evidence of a high-carbon content and water "which together could indicate the building blocks of life on Earth



Jesuit Brother Bob Macke looks at a telescope while giving a tour of the Vatican Observatory to journalists at the papal villa at Castel Gandolfo, Italy, September 28, 2018. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

may be found in the rock,” as the press release accompanying the announcement stated.

While Bro. Macke can't comment on scientific results beyond what has been publicly revealed to this point, he did clarify what exactly the goals for the mission were, and what thoughts the presence of carbon and water stimulated in the many minds of the scientific community.

“Among the important goals of the Osiris-Rex mission we want to understand better both how Earth got its water and how the building blocks of life originated. This particular type of asteroid, which is very carbon-rich, may have provided raw materials for the building blocks of life. We look forward to detailed studies of amino acids and other complex carbon molecules in these samples. It may provide some insight as to whether the building blocks of life formed on Earth or whether they might have been delivered to Earth by asteroids,” he says.

“In addition, it is hypothesised that the water in Earth's oceans may have been delivered by asteroid impacts in the very early history of the solar system. This water is not stored in liquid form; instead it is trapped in the chemical structure of what are called hydrated minerals. These minerals are abundant in the Bennu specimens, and by studying them we can get a better sense of just how much water an asteroid contains.”

### Contradict

Many of faith might be troubled by reports that the building blocks of life came from elsewhere. Does that not seem to contradict what Genesis tells us about the origins of life on earth? However, commenting on the successful return of the Bennu sample back in September, one of Bro. Macke's colleagues, Bro. Guy Consolmagno told *The Irish Catholic* that because God is truth itself, people of faith ought never be afraid of



The Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security, Regolith Explorer (OSIRIS-REx) spacecraft unfurled its robotic arm in October 2020, and in a first for the agency, briefly touched an asteroid to collect dust and pebbles from the surface for delivery to Earth in 2023. Photo: NASA/Goddard/University of Arizona

the truth, whether that be scientific, supernatural or otherwise.

“God is truth; so if you really want to get close to God you need to find the truth that's actually there, not the ‘truth’ we hope for or the ‘truth’ we are afraid of.

“So there's no particular result, for example regarding the origins

of life, that would be ‘better’ or ‘worse’ for religion. Rather, no matter what we find, we'll find God regardless in the joy of discovery and the elegance of the way that the Creator actually made this wonderful universe,” the papal astronomer told this newspaper in September.

It's a view Bro. Macke comfortably espouses too, having had much time to reflect on the relationship between science and faith. “By studying the wonders of God's creation,” he tells me, “we can better appreciate the God who created it”.

“In 1935, Pope Pius XI gave the Vatican Observatory its motto: *“Deum Creatorem Venite Adoremus”* (“Come let us adore God the Creator”). This sums up our motivation at the Observatory. By studying the wonders of God's Creation, we can better appreciate the God who created it. In short, for us, doing science is a form of worship,” he says.

**“When I saw some stones on the mylar flap of the TAGSAM head with my own eyes, I reminded myself that I was looking at pristine pieces of an asteroid that a human-built spacecraft went out into space to collect and bring back to the Earth”**

“I bring that perspective into all the scientific work that I do, and this research is no different. This does not change the actual scientific work itself, merely the context.”

And what scientific work this has been. Humanity's first ever asteroid sample collected in space. I asked Bro. Macke how he felt on the day the sample was safely and success-

fully returned. How did it feel to take part in something humans had never done before?

“The day of the landing, I attended a watch party at the former Osiris-Rex headquarters in Tucson, Arizona, where we could watch a live feed of the landing and recovery operations. I was very excited to see the parachute deploy, and later to see the capsule nested safely nose-down in the soft soil. I was anxiously looking forward to seeing what treasures were trapped inside,” he says.

“This mission collected by far the largest quantity of asteroid material to date, and would provide an opportunity for an incredible amount of scientific exploration about this particular kind of asteroid, which may provide valuable insights for the early history of water and building blocks of life on the Earth. I was fortunate enough to be at NASA in Houston during the early operations in which the canister was opened to reveal the collection unit (called the TAGSAM head) and learn with much relief that the rocks it contained stayed largely intact through the rather violent process of atmospheric entry.

“When I saw some stones on the mylar flap of the TAGSAM head with my own eyes, I reminded myself that I was looking at pristine pieces of an asteroid that a human-built spacecraft went out into space to collect and bring back to the Earth. I felt a lot of pride at the accomplishment, though I had little to do with it.”

Asked about whether he has any guesses as to what further analysis of these unprecedented samples might reveal, Bro. Macke says that if they knew, then it wouldn't be worth studying them.

### Valuable

“The most valuable revelations are precisely those things that we did not anticipate. I do not know what the specimens might reveal, but I look forward to finding out.”

For the next two years, the scientists assigned to the mission will continue characterising the samples they've collected and continue conducting analysis to see what else can be discovered. NASA plans to preserve at least 70% of the sample at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, for further research by scientists worldwide, including future generations of scientists who'll have access to better, more accurate technologies.

The science programme that follows is an international effort that will see more than 200 scientists around the world exploring the sample's properties, including researchers from many other US institutions, as well as other countries' space agencies, such as JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency), CSA (Canadian Space Agency), and many other scientists from around the world. Further samples will be going on display in various locations around the US for the public's consideration.



The sample return capsule from NASA's Osiris-Rex mission is seen shortly after touching down in the desert, Sunday, September 24, at the US Department of Defence's Utah Test and Training Range. Photo: NASA/Keegan Barber

# ‘JRR Tolkien’s Catholic faith was hard won’



Faith didn't come easy for the world-renowned author, Dr Holly Ordway tells Ruadhán Jones

**D**id you know that JRR Tolkien translated the Bible? Well, not all of it, but he did translate the Book of Jonah for *The Jerusalem Bible*, which many of us will have heard or read without knowing the connection with the world's best-known Catholic author.

This little fact, divulged in a comprehensive new spiritual biography is a reminder of just how central the Faith was to Tolkien. His Catholic Faith was “funda-

mental” to his life, according to Dr Holly Ordway, author of *Tolkien's Faith*, which was published in September by Word on Fire press.

“Various people commented it was very natural, it wasn't forced, it wasn't showy, it wasn't ostentatious, but it was very much a part of who he was,” she tells *The Irish Catholic*.

## Impression

However, she adds, we can have a false impression of JRR Tolkien, author of the Catholic epic *The Lord of the Rings*, that his faith came easily. We tend to see him as a settled, donnish, elderly man, happy and secure in faith and life.

But it's a mistake to “project backwards” that image of Tolkien, as the truth is quite the opposite, says Dr Ordway. “Between the various low ebbs in his faith and the very real suffering he experienced, I think the basic picture is of a very hard-won faith where he had very many reasons to walk away from his faith, but he didn't.

By gaining a deeper understanding of Tolkien's faith, how it ebbed and grew, where it came from, we can see more clearly the way in which it influenced his great work of Catholic fiction, Dr Ordway states.

Tolkien's life, particularly his young life, was marked by death



and suffering. An orphan by the age of 12, he also suffered through WWI in the trenches that cost so many men their lives – and many others, their faith.

**“We see evidence of him in his letters talking about the importance of the will in persevering and not only being guided by emotions”**

He “had a very bad stretch as an adult after the First World War... We don't have the exact details of it, but it was a stretch in which he said ‘I almost ceased to practise my religion’. He's very serious about this, he's very matter of fact. He's not being hyperbolic as he is sometimes,” explains Dr Ordway.

However, the evidence Dr Ordway has unearthed in her well-researched biography is that his experiences “leads him, I believe, to have a deeper faith in his later years”.

“Because we see evidence of

him in his letters talking about the importance of the will in persevering and not only being guided by emotions. It seems to me this is a lesson he learned personally from this barren stretch when he didn't give up his faith, but he went through a very low ebb in the practice of it.”

Tolkien wasn't a ‘cradle Catholic’ – he was born into a Protestant family and it was only after his mother Mabel converted that he and his brother entered the Faith. His mother was ostracised by her family for crossing the Tiber, and when she died there were fears that Tolkien's extended family would take him in and away from the Catholic faith.

## Relationship

But Mabel Tolkien had by then formed a close relationship with the Oratorian community in Birmingham. Knowing she was ailing, she made Fr Francis Morgan Tolkien's protector. When she died, Tolkien and his brother became what he jokingly referred to as “junior inmates” of the oratory house. His experience living in the oratory was “deeply” influential for Tolkien's faith life.

“He praised it very warmly in

later years and its particularly interesting how he praised it, he called it a home in the highest,” says Dr Ordway. “He had nothing but praise for Fr Francis in terms of his mentoring and his role as a second father.

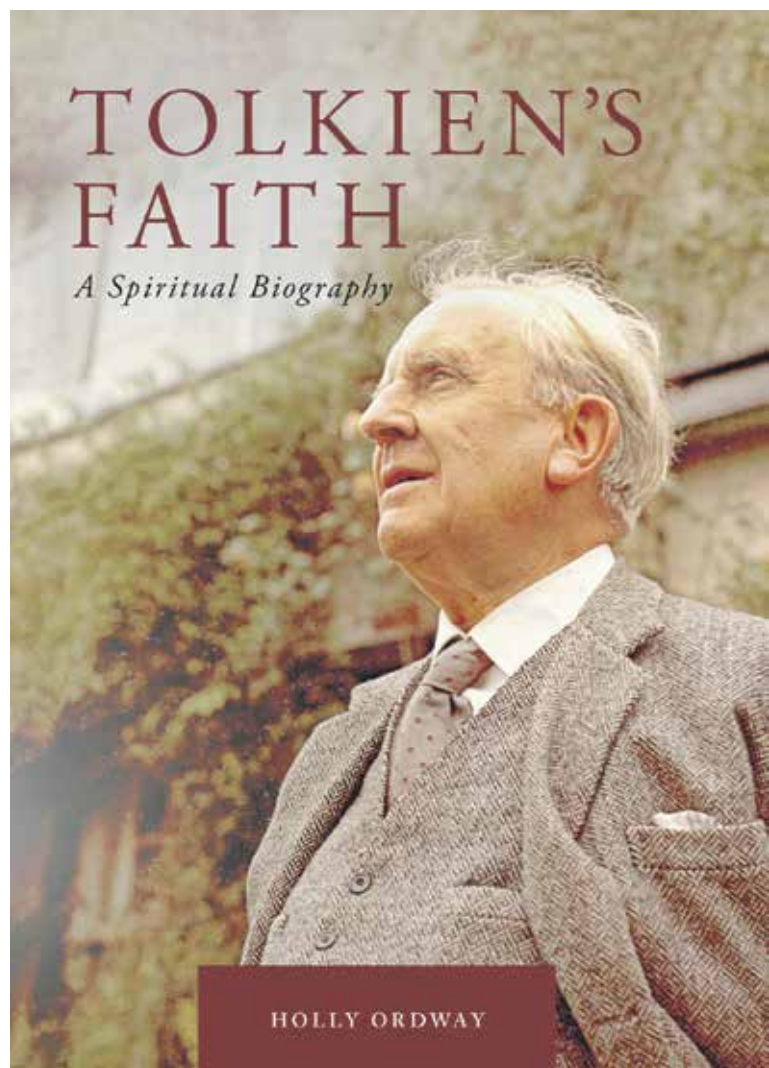
“And I think that says a lot given that it was at the lowest point in his young life that he came under Fr Francis' care. It would be almost expected that he would have a certain bitterness about the oratory house, but he doesn't.”

Through the Birmingham Oratory, the 20th Century's most famous English Catholic is connected with arguably the best-known English convert of the 19th Century – St John Henry Newman. St Newman founded the oratory and taught personally many of the priests Tolkien knew, including Fr Francis.

“Newman is one of the colossal intellectual figures of his time. The oratory as a whole was and still is a very cultured place, with a great emphasis on the intellectual life, on scholarship; many of the fathers were writing books, they were very learned men,” says Dr Ordway.

“I think this really helped encourage Tolkien in many ways, intellectually, spiritually. One of the elements of this in terms of his developing a strong faith is that these are Catholics who would have taught him why does he believe what he believes.

“He read the Scriptures very early and in their original languages. Reading the Scriptures was an important part of his formation as a Catholic, which is



**“It was at the lowest point in his young life that he came under Fr Francis' care. It would be almost expected that he would have a certain bitterness about the oratory house, but he doesn't”**

## “For instance take his Marian devotion, if you look at the way he approached this devotion in his life and his spiritual life as a whole, you’ll see that humility is the key devotion”

not necessarily the case for every Catholic especially in that era. I think that his formation in the oratory helped him know what he believed and why he believed it. That enabled him to work through a lot of these issues in a very productive way,” she says.

To understand how Tolkien’s faith, and also his imagination, were formed, we must examine the various influences that came down to him through the Birmingham Oratory. Pre-eminent among these is the “huge influence” of St Philip Neri, founder of the Oratorians.

### “There are various anecdotes in Humphrey Carpenter’s biography, including how he once chased a neighbour down a road dressed as an Anglo-Saxon warrior”

For Dr Ordway, Tolkien’s devotion to St Philip explained a mysterious aspect of his personality – his, to say the least, quirky sense of humour. St Philip placed an emphasis on cheerfulness, joy and light-heartedness as good and natural parts of the spiritual and emotional life.

For Tolkien, “particularly since he was orphaned and had a lot of dark things to work through, I think the emphasis on joy provided a very necessary counterbalance that helped him integrate that and stay grounded”, says the American professor.

“As an adult, as a don at Oxford, as a seriously raised scholar, he often behaves in ways that are quite silly,” she continues. “There are various anecdotes in Humphrey Carpenter’s biography, including how he once chased a neighbour down a road dressed as an Anglo-Saxon warrior. One has to wonder what were the circumstances of that.

“He dressed up as a polar bear for a children’s party. He had a party trick of falling down the stairs with his arms and legs all flowing everywhere and arriving at the bottom of the stairs unhurt.”

This is all “a bit odd” for a serious Oxford professor, until you take into account the teachings of St Philip that “he must not take himself too serious lest he become too proud”.

We know, thanks to Dr Ordway’s extensive research, that Tolkien took his devotion to St Philip seriously and held it quite personally. Indeed, he took Philip as his Confirmation name and kept up this connection into later life.

Another gift of his Oratorian

upbringing was an especial devotion to the Eucharist, a characteristic of Oratorian spirituality. The congregation was responsible for introducing to England the practice of the ‘40 Hours Devotion’, 40 hours of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

This became a central devotion of Tolkien’s life: “He once had a vision or a spiritual insight during adoration at one of the 40 hours,” says Dr Ordway. “He talks about this in one of his letters.

“Here again, it’s useful to consider historical context because I didn’t know until I researched this book, that in Tolkien’s lifetime, the 40 hours devotion was new. It was not a typically English devotion at all.

“It was relatively new and had been brought to England by the Oratorian fathers starting with Newman. You can see a direct connection there with his Eucharistic spirituality, which would have been fostered as a boy.”

### Magnum Opus

Most people come to know Tolkien through his magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings*, and a good many of those readers don’t realise the degree to which it is a Catholic work of fiction.

“He describes it as a fundamentally religious and Catholic work,” says the American professor, herself a Catholic convert. “He knew his way around words, he was choosing that word very deliberately. At its foundations, at its root, in its essence – that’s where it is religious and Catholic.”

By coming to a deeper understanding of his faith, we can see more clearly in what ways this is the case, she says, and not just in obvious, one-to-one connections.

“For instance take his Marian devotion, if you look at the way he approached this devotion in his life and his spiritual life as a whole, you’ll see that humility is the key devotion,” Dr Ordway continues.

“It’s in the Magnificat, and if you trace the way he talks about the hobbits, they are the most humble characters in the book. He talks about *The Lord of the Rings* being Hobbitocentric and being about the sanctification of the humble. We can see that the hobbits are very Marian figures in a very subtle way.

“They’re not Marian in being characters who are Mary in the story in some way. But they embody that humility that’s an essential part of Marian spirituality and also Philippine spirituality.”

The possibilities are, seemingly, endless when exploring Tolkien’s masterpiece with the eyes of Faith. We become aware of the outworking of specifically Christian virtues, such as the importance of mercy and pity.

“We see it for instance in the

providential events of Mount Doom when Frodo fails at the quest,” says Dr Ordway. “He is broken by the ring, but providentially the quest is fulfilled because Gollum there to seize the ring. Why is Gollum there? Because previously Frodo and Sam and Bilbo have all exercised mercy in not killing him even though in worldly terms it would have been a sensible move.

### “All of the elements of the spiritual life, all of the themes that touch on his faith, all the allusions, they are invisible if you don’t have access to his faith”

“They exercise pity and mercy and therefore in divine providence, he is able to fulfil the quest. And Tolkien talks about this in his letters in specifically theological terms.”

For many Catholics who are fans of JRR Tolkien, *Tolkien’s Faith* is the book you have been waiting for. Coming to more than 500 pages, with a large appendix and bibliography, it provides vital insight into the faith life of the world-famous author and linguist.

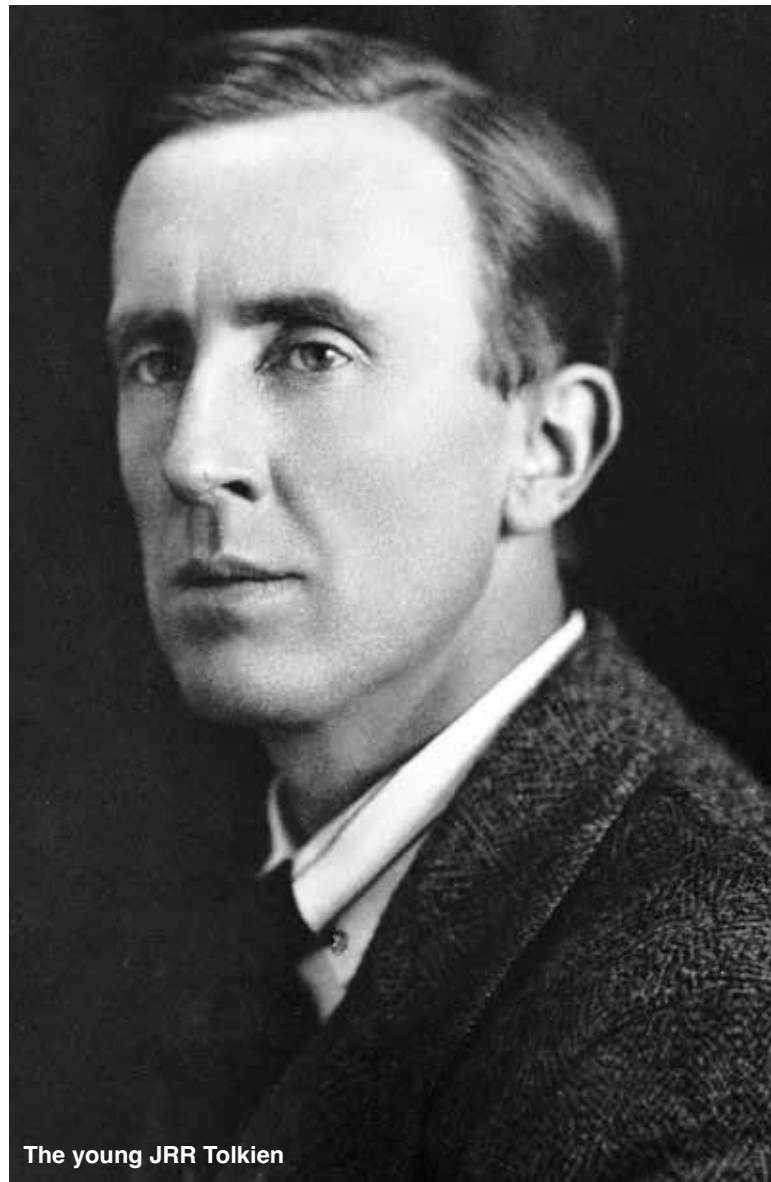
But its not just for Catholics: “I’m aiming the book at any reader of Tolkien who wants to understand this important aspect of his faith and that very explicitly includes people who have no knowledge of Christianity, let alone Catholicism,” states Dr Ordway.

“Because there are loads of people who are not Christians, or maybe Christians but not Catholics – all of the elements of the spiritual life, all of the themes that touch on his faith, all the allusions, they are invisible if you don’t have access to his faith. I want to make that visible.”

Ultimately, if we want to understand Tolkien, we have to “put him in his context” as an “English Catholic of the 20th century grounded in Birmingham and Oxford”.

“I’m trying to be a guide because even if you don’t need a guide to the Catholic elements, you probably need a guide to the English element – that’s the point of the supporting material, to help people engage with Tolkien on his own terms.”

Dr Holly Ordway’s *Tolkien’s Faith: A Spiritual Biography* published by Word on Fire Publishing is available for purchase online.



The young JRR Tolkien



Dr Holly Ordway, Cardinal Francis George Professor of Faith and Culture, Word on Fire Institute.

# A Catholic guide through anxiety this Christmas season



Catholic counsellor Catherine DiNuzzo wants to change the way we view mental wellness, writes **Jason Osborne**

**A**s Catholics, we know that, at Christmas, we're heralding the inauguration of a peace that the world cannot give. Throughout Advent we await the coming of the Messiah, and then on that glorious day, he comes among us in the gentlest of forms; a vulnerable, newborn baby.

**“What’s wrong with me? I’m anxious, I’m going to see my family, this should be good”**

Our minds filled with this divine happening around this time of year, it might seem outrageous- if not outright heretical – to find our blood pressure rising and our stress levels soaring as anxiety makes itself felt in this festive season. How can it be that amidst the merriment and the fun, and the anticipation of God-with-us, that it can feel as though the walls are closing in around us? Actually, according to licensed professional counsellor Catherine DiNuzzo of Sacred Heart Mental Wellness, it's very common – especially after the festive peak.

“I think it [Christmas] absolutely is anxiety-



The Christmas season can be a time of stress and anxiety for many.

inducing,” Ms DiNuzzo begins.

“However the crisis, and this is important for people to understand, is normally after the holidays because of the fight, flight or flee [instinct].”

## Overwhelming

“In the holidays we're fighting, we're like 'I've got to do this and I've got to do this and I'm going to put anxiety and throw it down and I'm not going to worry about that relative and I've got to go, I've got to go, I've got to go, I got to go'. And really, when I see it, it's after the holidays when that lull comes and then all of that anxiety that I have shoved into a box so that I can make it through the holidays starts to bubble up and then it starts to become overwhelming.”

How is a person to deal with all of this and get back onto an even keel? Ms DiNuzzo being a Catholic counsellor takes a lead from the Catholic worldview: recognise that you're not bad, and that anxiety isn't bad. In fact, it's a natural response to what are often stressful

situation.

“You're not bad. It's not bad. When we have these feelings our first step is often, 'What's wrong with me? I'm anxious, I'm going to see my family, this should be good, what's wrong with me, why am I not good'? There's a lot of reasons why visiting family can be complicated and [you have to] give yourself grace that these are hard and that you will navigate it, you always have, you've gone to family dinners before, you're going to get through this one too,” Ms DiNuzzo says.

## Bullying yourself

“My tip is don't be a bully to yourself. Everyone agrees you shouldn't be a bully but we say things to ourselves over the holidays that we would never say to anyone else and so that's a big tip, to realise when those feelings come that you're not bad and that don't bully yourself for feeling this way.

“The other one I would

do is I talk about how to create a net, a support net, so you don't have to do this all by yourself. And look at your support, the people in your life and see sometimes I need someone just to play, who likes to go see a funny film and they'll go watch something and I don't have to be stressed and then someone is fun to go get a tea with and I have another friend who is really good at listening and so you know, realising you have a support system around you and maybe not one person can do everything but a lot of times one person can do something and realising, 'Ok, I have a support system around me how can I best not carry this all by myself?’”

Treating yourself well and taking solace in community are strategies anyone can adopt, but they gel nicely with a Catholic worldview. After all, God created us good and created us for communion with himself and with

one another, too. All of Ms DiNuzzo's advice could be comfortably taken by anyone, but Catholics will find her approach especially welcome. Nowhere is this clearer than in her new book, *The Catholic Guide through Anxiety*. She tells me about her background and how the book came to be.

**“There's a weakness, there's something bad, what's wrong with me?”**

Ms DiNuzzo is a licensed professional counsellor in the USA with 15 years of private practice experience. She also runs a website called Sacred Heart Mental Wellness, “which has the mission of changing mental health to how we see the gym,” she explains.

“You know, when someone says, 'Oh, I'm going to go to the gym' you don't go 'What's

wrong? Why did you go to the gym?' Instead, you're like 'That's great, you're working out'. So the whole idea is to empower and educate and to really see mental health as a wellness, let's give positive strategies and techniques and understanding so we can navigate life easier.”

The notion that you “don't go to the gym when you're having a heart attack, you want to avoid a heart attack,” underpins Ms DiNuzzo's approach to her practice, “so I'll have my resources come from that lens” – such as her new book.

## Mental health

Talk about mental health can often be over-encumbered with trite phrases and assumptions that Catholics can't readily agree with – such as the idea that our mind and body are separate realities, and that the moral life or how we choose to spend our days might not necessarily have an impact on our mental wellness. As such, Ms DiNuzzo's book will come as a relief, it being “short, simple and

**“I talk about how to create a net, a support net, so you don't have to do this all by yourself”**





Catherine DiNuzzo

informative," coming from the perspective that "God made our bodies good".

**“What most people say about the book is it’s the first time I felt heard, or someone understood me”**

Most people, when they think of poor mental health, think that they must be going crazy, Ms DiNuzzo says.

“There’s a weakness, there’s something bad, what’s wrong with me? So the book goes and says, ‘No, let me tell you exactly

what your body is doing and why that is good so you can understand how God made you good and then let me show you some strategies that will help you with anxiety when you understand what your body is doing’.”

#### Understanding

“So it takes account of the Faith because our Church already has a lot of these things already in it. It takes how God made us good and it intertwines that. What most people say about the book is it’s the first time I felt heard, or someone understood me. It’s also very powerful for parents whose youth are struggling

**“I would say that we are just hitting the stride of the problems that are coming... it is just beginning”**

because someone with anxiety will always say ‘I don’t know, no one understands, I talk to people and they don’t get it,’ and so finally parents are coming to me saying I can actually talk to my kid about their anxiety because I now understand what’s happening in their body and why these tools can help them,” she explains.

**“We kind of live in this world now wondering when is the whole world going to change again, where is all the comfort I once knew”**

Ms DiNuzzo emphasises that a proper, healthy approach to mental wellness is only growing in importance, as mental suffering has snowballed since at least the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I would say that we are just hitting the stride of the problems that are coming...it is just beginning,” Ms DiNuzzo warns.

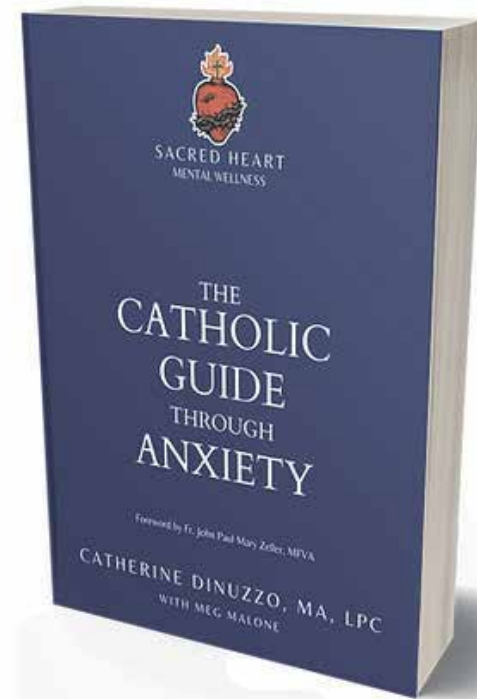
“I actually started Sacred Heart Mental Wellness in the middle of

the pandemic because as a family worker I realised there was not enough of us to go around. If you want to see a counsellor today you normally wait four or five/six months to get in to see someone and by then we’re already in crisis mode.

“So I was like we’re not going to be able to offer enough resources for people who need it so we have to get out books and videos and classes and really also train frontline workers, you know, the ones who are the teachers, the priests, the youth ministers, to have more first aid, like mental health first aid because the need is so great.

#### Change

“And if you think about the pandemic, I know a lot of people want to think that it’s over but what it told our brains was, in one day the whole world can change. And so we kind of live in this world now wondering when is the whole world going to change again, where is all the comfort I once knew? I talk about this in my book, about how our poor youth were in the middle of it and they were told, ‘It’s going to be ok, we’ll figure it out, you’re going to be ok, and I think they were sitting there going, ‘Oh no, I don’t know what to do’.



The Catholic Guide Through Anxiety

And now we’re seeing that come to the surface – we can only say ‘Ok, we’re going to be ok,’ for so long and so our bodies are like ‘No, I’m actually not ok.’”

**“I get you, you are good, you are loved. Here’s some strategies to help you with this”**

It’s with this troubling landscape in view that Ms DiNuzzo sends her book out into the wild. Already a welcome addition to many homes and parishes, Ms DiNuzzo hopes that it will give parents, young people,

or whoever might read it, the knowledge that they’re good, they’re loved, and that there are strategies to overcome the difficulties they or their friends are currently facing.

“There’s two main purposes that I wrote it for. One was for the person with anxiety who feels like no one gets them. Those who think, ‘I am isolated, I’m alone, no one understand what I’m going through, what’s wrong with me’. This book will tell you there’s nothing, you are amazing, God made you good – I want to fight that desperation.

“I wanted a book where it was someone who’s feeling super low and every negative thought and the bullying is really bad that they pick it up and someone is like, ‘I get you, you are good, you are loved. Here’s some strategies to help you with this’.

“That was one [motivation], and then I also wrote it for all the parents who come to me and say: ‘My husband, my wife, my child is struggling and every time I say something to them, I say the wrong thing, I am not helping and I love them and I want to help. Help me help them.’ And so I write it so that when they read it they’re able to say, ‘Ok, this is how I can love my kid who’s struggling,’ and so my hope in the end was that they didn’t feel so alone. I wanted people to not feel so alone in their mental health.”



# Year in photos



**GEORGIA:** Law enforcement officers take cover during a protest in Tbilisi, Georgia, March 9, against a draft law on 'foreign agents', which critics said represents an authoritarian shift and could hurt Georgia's bid to join the European Union. OSV News/Irakli Gedenidze, Reuters



**USA:** Sr Francis Dominici Piscatella, a member of the Sisters of St Dominic of Amityville, New York, looks at a birthday cake while celebrating her 110th birthday at the Dominicans' motherhouse in Amityville on April 20. Also pictured is Sr Piscatella's primary caregiver, Dominican Sr Francis Daniel Kammer (83). The two nuns share a condominium apartment on Long Island. Photo: OSV News



**ROME:** A delegation from Brazil performs a demonstration of *Capoeira* at the end of Pope Francis' weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. Photo: CNS



**ROME:** Pope Francis greets young adults from Uganda at the end of his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican on May 3. Photo: CNS



**INDIA:** Residents carrying their belongings on a rickshaw as they waded through a street flooded by the rising water level of the Yamuna River after heavy monsoon rains in New Delhi on July 12. Photo: OSV News/Adnan Abidi, Reuters



**FRANCE:** A girl is pictured in traditional clothing during an outdoor Mass on the feast of the Assumption of Mary in Perros-Guirec, France, August 15. Photo: OSV News/Benoit Tessier, Reuters



**BRAZIL:** A priest blesses a dog outside a church during a blessing of the animals prayer service in Rio de Janeiro October 4, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, patron of animals. Photo: OSV News/Pilar Olivares, Reuters

# HOMELESS

## SUPPLEMENT 2024

On 25 January 2024 *The Irish Catholic* newspaper will publish a special issue highlighting the ongoing Irish Homeless crisis.

### The faces behind the figures

Our editorial team will be presenting readers with up-to-date homeless statistics and discussing the implications for individuals and families and of the crisis for those without homes this winter.

### Looking forward

We anticipate publishing only one such supplement during 2024. This is undoubtedly the issue to showcase your organisation's work across the sector and highlight where you will be focusing your efforts during the year.

We are inviting all members of the Dublin Homeless Network and all interested groups nationwide to participate in the supplement, to give voice to the many perspectives and challenges facing those who both work in and rely on the homeless services.

Please call us on the contact details below to participate in this special edition.

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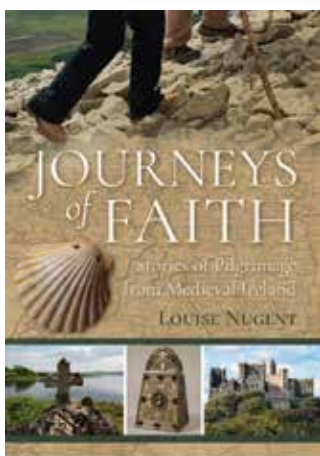
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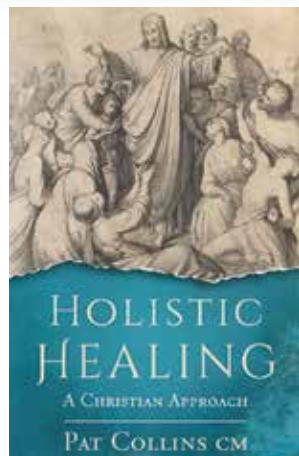
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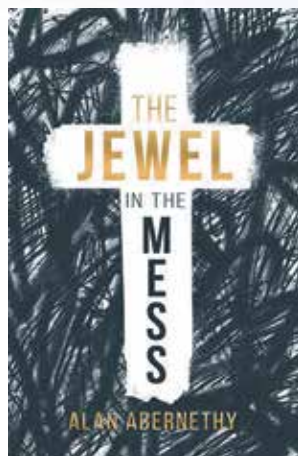
**Journeys of Faith**  
Louise Nugent

A complete guide to the world of pilgrimage in medieval Ireland with photos and maps.



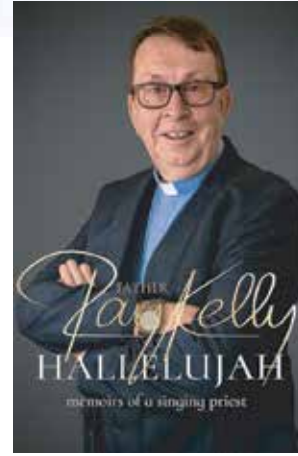
**Holistic Healing**  
Pat Collins CM

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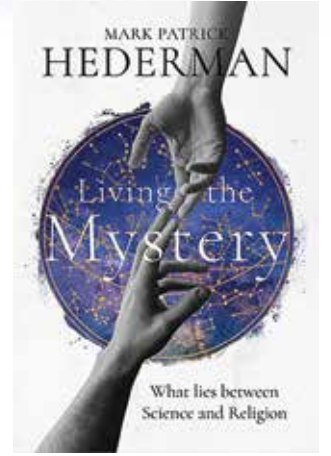
**The Jewel in the Mess**  
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**Hallelujah**  
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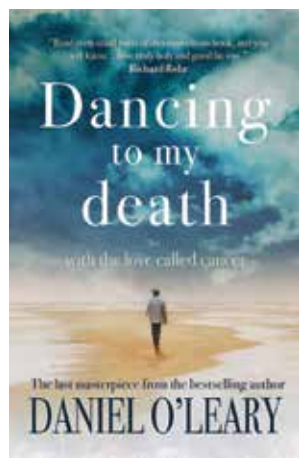
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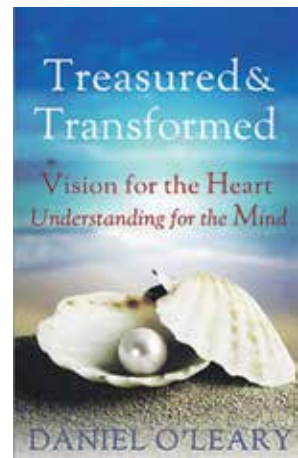
**Already Within**  
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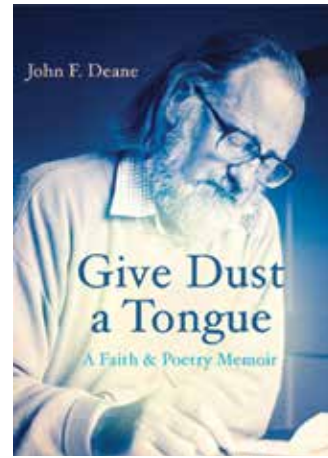
**Dancing to my Death**  
Daniel O'Leary

Priest, teacher and bestselling author Daniel O'Leary journals his thoughts and feelings during his cancer journey in this courageous book.



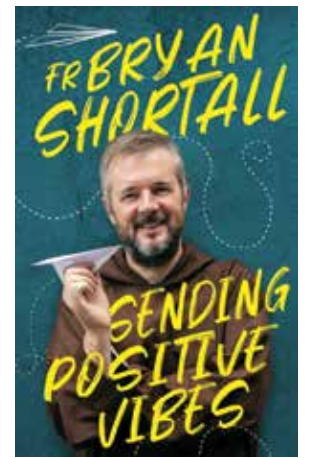
**Treasured & Transformed**  
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In this book Daniel O'Leary has written a collection of reflections, thoughts and advice on how we can live more fulfilling spiritual lives.



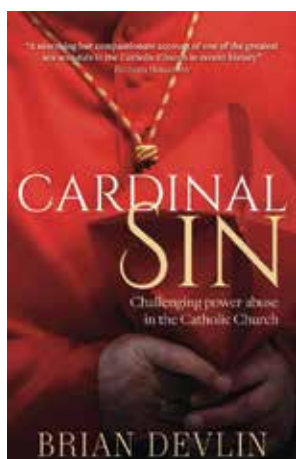
**Give Dust a Tongue**  
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A memoir that views the spiritual developments of internationally acclaimed poet John F. Deane from his upbringing on Achill island, his time with the Spiritans, to his marriage and widowhood.



**Sending Positive Vibes**  
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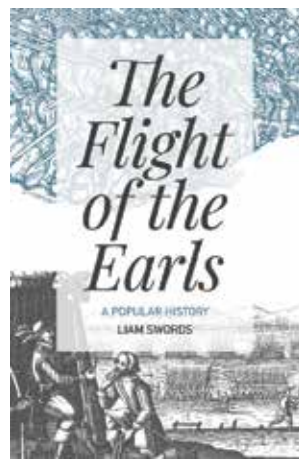
**Cardinal Sin**  
Brian Devlin

A critical work, a whistleblower asks the Catholic Church hard questions and provides ways the Church can heal and regain the trust of its faithful.



**Early Irish Saints**  
John J. Ó'Riordáin

These short essays on well-loved saints present a very readable mix of historical fact and folklore.



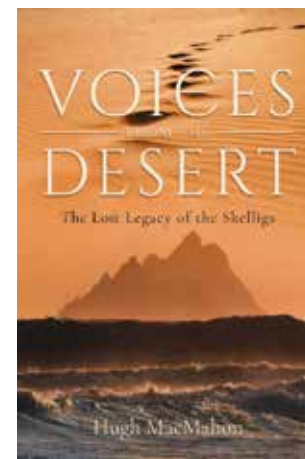
**The Flight of the Earls**  
Liam Swords

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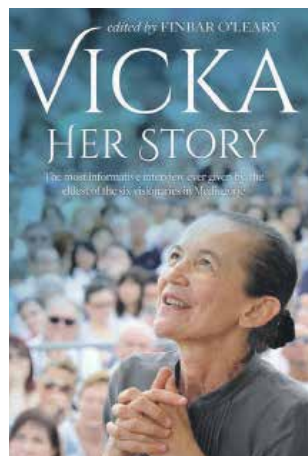
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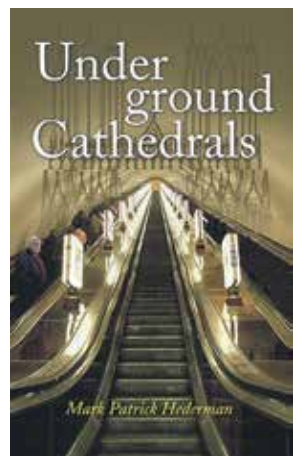
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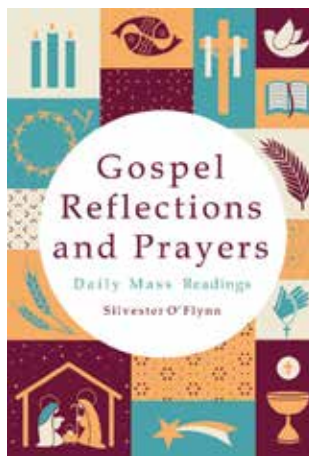
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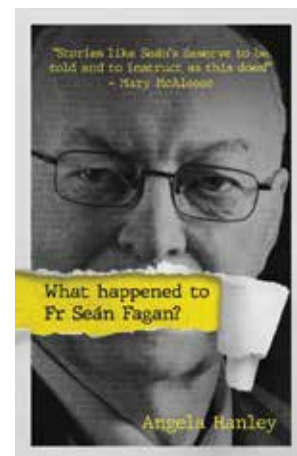
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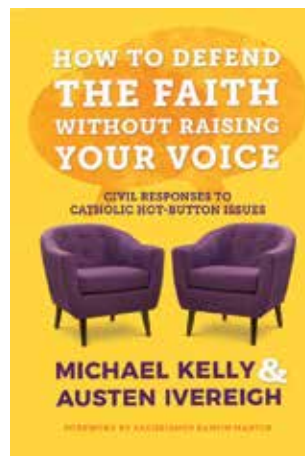
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# 2023 Review of the Year

## JANUARY

In January, *The Irish Catholic* commemorated the late Pope Benedict XVI who was laid to rest in a simple funeral procession presided over by Pope Francis at the Vatican. Francis expressed admiration for his predecessor as “such a noble, such a gentle person”. The late pope was remembered as an outstanding figure in the global Church for the second half of the 20th Century.

In the Dáil, there were a number of verbal attacks targeting churches and parishioners. The violence led many Catholics in Ireland to feel the need to “hide their faith” remarked Leader of Aontú Peadar Tóibín.

Fr Yusuf Bamai described feeling “heartbroken” by the news that his fellow friend and missionary Fr Isaac Achi was murdered in his residence in Nigeria. Fr Bamai described his friend as “hardworking” and “brave”, expressing further concern for his other priestly brothers in Nigeria who were also often targets of senseless violence.

In the interest of a pluralist Ireland, Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll urged politicians to discontinue efforts to secularise faith-based schools. He insisted that a well-rounded religious education allowed for a “greater empathy and appreciation” for people of various cultures in Ireland who have made their home here as faith is “central to who they are”.



**Co. Cavan priest ‘heartbroken’ after missionary friend murdered in Nigeria**



**Religious education ‘never more important’ – new bishop**

**For Benedict, friendship with God was key**

**Dail attacks on Church are leading to violence – TDs warn**



## FEBRUARY

*The Irish Catholic* listened to members of religious orders recount feelings of “hurt” and “dismay” regarding an initiative designed to promote vocations that seemed to diminish vocations to religious life and focus only on that of diocesan priesthood. Fr Seamus McEntee, a member of the bishops’ Council for Vocations, said diocesan priesthood had been the core of the vocations crisis and needed this additional support. It was also believed that bishops were eager to capitalise on the 2008-2009 ‘Year of Vocation’ during which there was a slight increase in the number of men entering the seminary.

Priests in Dublin’s inner city including Fr Kieran McDermott, administrator of St Mary’s Pro Cathedral, condemned the drug dealing and vandalism that plagued their local communities. Fr McDermott expressed his desire for a “panic button” as a resource when confronted with unprecedented violence. The Church must reach out to those who are lost on this misleading path to offer guidance.

The future of religious life for women in Ireland was deemed “very uncertain” as the number of religious women halved within the past 20 years. Dublin Diocese witnessed the largest decline with Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilnefora closely trailing. Many women work quietly in religious fields while many gradually retire, with few to take their places.

Leading academics Profs Patrick Connolly, Eugene Duffy and Eamonn Conway warned *The Irish Catholic* that Catholic education is at risk if the divestment of Catholic schools in the Republic should continue. It was thought to be in the best interest of the Church to negotiate a settlement “to safeguard the future of Catholic education or else see its patronage “eroded” by legislation and curriculum changes.

**Call to end schools handover until safeguards guaranteed**

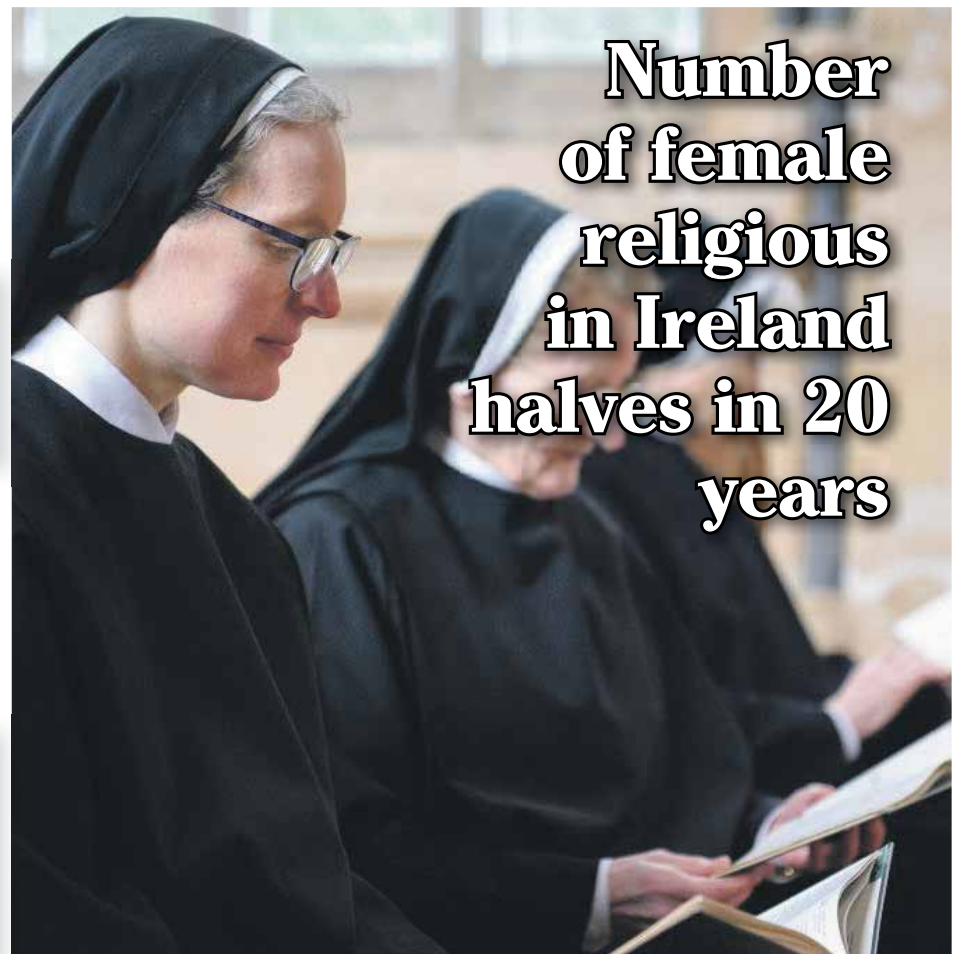


**Parishes warn of Dublin city’s ‘menacing’ decline**



**Religious ‘dismayed’ as bishops go it alone to promote priestly vocations**

**Number of female religious in Ireland halves in 20 years**



# 2023 Review of the Year

## Govt demands the immediate release of Nicaraguan bishop



Just 9% of Mass-goers joined synod process

**Dioceses succeed in making multi-million euro Covid claim**

Survivors of abuse in non-Catholic schools feel marginalised by inquiry



**Communities resist pressure to dump religious ethos from schools**

## MARCH

**T**ánaiste Micheál Martin urged for the “immediate and unconditional” release of Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez following his 26-year prison sentence on charges related to treason and undermining national integrity. Mr Martin called the imprisonment “unacceptable” and an infringement upon human rights. Laois-Offaly independent TD Carol Nolan praised Martin’s response, having told *The Irish Catholic* that Martin’s “unequivocal” language was crucial in the face of similar incidents.

As many parishes suffered immensely amid the Covid-19 Pandemic, a source revealed to *The Irish Catholic* that each of Ireland’s 26 dioceses were predicted to make related insurance claims to “at least ensure there wasn’t an entire loss”. Claims were anticipated to reach as much as seven million euro.

*The Irish Catholic* questioned the Department of Education regarding their inquiries of abuse focusing on those within Catholic schools, after reports of abuse survivors from non-Catholic school reported feeling “marginalised” and “silenced”. A spokesperson claimed the goal was to prioritise schools run by the religious as these were the most recent sources of allegations. A further scoping inquiry, however, would more broadly encompass abuse within the school system.

The highly publicised issue of school divestment in Ireland continued in March as the push to convert Catholic schools to secular ones seemed to stand still. The decision was at the discretion of the school communities who confer among themselves in a series of meetings described to be “democratic” and “rigorous”.

New research revealed that fewer than 10% of Irish Catholics who regularly attended Mass had also participated in the synod process despite its highly publicised presence among Catholic parishes throughout the country. Young Catholics (35 and younger) seemed to be even further disengaged as a modest 6% of their group had involved themselves in the process.

## President Joe Biden’s Mayo visit highlights ‘wrecked’ rural parishes

Irish parishes urged to support embattled Holy Land Christians



**Call to address ‘emptiness’ leading to epidemic of drug addiction**

Euthanasia committee promises fair hearing for concerned voices

## APRIL

**I**n March, Christians in the Holy Land of Jerusalem celebrated the holiest week of the year amid a series of senseless attacks on Christian holy sites following the return of prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s hardline nationalist-religious government. As the Israeli government stood by with a seemingly “eroded” capacity to maintain neutrality, Church leaders expressed legitimate concerns for the marginalisation of Israeli Catholics.

Fr Kieran Holmes in Ballina parish reflected on the ongoing neglect of western Ireland ahead of President Joe Biden’s visit to St Muredach’s Cathedral in Mayo. President Biden’s highly anticipated visit was considered by some an opportunity to showcase the West to the world while others believed it to merely be an intimate celebration of his Ballina roots.

Evidence of “cocaine-fuelled violence” remained a prevalent issue among parishes across the country as people turn to drugs as a means of escapism. To examine the harmful effects of these substances, the citizens’ assembly on drugs assembled to discuss a plan of action regarding the dubbed epidemic.

As the Oireachtas Joint Committee on assisted suicide held its first meeting, Kerry TD Michael Healy-Rae assured *The Irish Catholic* that discussion was to be carried out in “an extremely fair fashion” and those opposed to the introduction of euthanasia would be granted the committee’s undivided attention.







**Call for urgent action on new climate report to stop ‘devastation’**

**MAY**

**S**r Mary Neville (89) of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary told *The Irish Catholic* that her students possess the power to showcase Christ’s love to the world despite the gradual loss of faith displayed by many people in Ireland. Her comment came after some of her former students travelled across the world from Cameroon to give their proper thanks for the education provided to them by Sr Neville and the Holy Rosary missionaries.

The loss of thousands of jobs in Ireland’s tourism sector due to a lack of hotel accommodations frightened many small coastal communities that almost entirely depend on tourism, parishes warned. Fr John Joe Duffy CC Creeslough, Co. Donegal told *The Irish Catholic* that there is a serious risk of a “greater exodus of people leaving the country” as the decline of the tourism industry threatened to diminish the livelihoods of these coastal regions.

Staff at the country’s largest Catholic university Mary Immaculate College was uninformed of discourse regarding “one of the most important strategic developments” that could result in the college becoming aligned with the secular University of Limerick (UL). With staff “in the dark”, fears mounted that the alliance could diminish the Catholic identity of the institution, although a merger was ruled out by college authorities.

When he described political opponents as “slow learners” the Taoiseach implied individuals with learning disabilities were “incapable of making informed political decisions”, said Dr Liam Waldron of Co. Mayo. He urged An Taoiseach to revoke his statement as it amounts to a slur for people with learning disabilities and was entirely “unacceptable”.

**Evangelised African women can ‘change the tide’ for faith in Ireland**

**Tourism job losses ‘frightening’ for coastal communities, parishes warn**

**Taoiseach urged to retract ‘slow learners’ comment**



**Staff ‘in the dark’ over historic developments at Catholic college**

**JUNE**

**A** Queen’s University Belfast study revealed up to 51% of people feel that the younger generation are “under too much influence from paramilitary groups”. Politicians were also held accountable for the role that they played in taking advantage of communities and making cuts that serve as a detriment to many people.

All crucifixes and holy images were removed from display from St Vincent’s University hospital after a transfer from the Religious Sisters of Charity (RSC) to a new holding company. Staff and patients expressed their disappointment as the artefacts served as inspiration to them. The Blessed Sacrament was also removed from the hospital’s central chapel to much additional disappointment.

One of Ireland’s leading authorities on ageing said that people who actively participate in religious activities are less likely to develop symptoms of depression. Staying active within the Church was said to be a suitable way to prevent loneliness.

Bishop Connell warned that the Church in Ireland is in grave need of widespread structural reform and hoped to encourage young parishioners to get involved. Ireland is also experiencing a vocational crisis and needs young men willing to pursue lives in the priesthood.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell announced plans to move the seat of the Dublin’s archbishop from St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral in the north inner-city to St Andrew’s Westland Row on the opposite side of River Liffey. The proposal would make St Andrew’s Dublin’s first Catholic cathedral since the Reformation.



**Warning political vacuum leaves young people ‘cannon fodder’ for paramilitaries**

**Whole parish system in need of reform – Bishop Connell**

**Former Dublin Mayor ‘shocked’ at new plan to move cathedral**

**‘Upset’ after all Catholic images removed from St Vincent’s Church**



# 2023 Review of the Year

## State failing vulnerable children as Ireland not 'learning from the past'



## Bishops to debate future of controversial art by priest accused of abusing women – Fr Rupnik's Irish College mosaics may be axed

## Warning bishops' controversial addiction strategy risks minimising abuse of drugs

## Call for World Youth Day pilgrims to bring back 'fire of Faith' to parishes



## JULY

**A** former drug addict-turned-counsellor, who was chosen to share with Pope Francis the devastating effects of addiction on his life, has warned that Church leaders are wrong to back the decriminalisation of drugs.

The bishops' support for decriminalising a person found to possess illegal drugs for personal use has been criticised as "minimising drug use" by Damian Richardson.

Hundreds of young Irish Catholics attending World Youth Day in Portugal were urged to return home as missionaries and rebuild youth ministry. Approximately 1,500 young people from Ireland were to be involved in official pilgrimages to World Youth Day in Lisbon, August 2-6 while many others are expected to travel independently.

The man tasked with transforming the Church's approach to child protection has warned that Irish society will continue to fail vulnerable children unless we learn lessons from past mishandling of abuse. Ian Elliott was speaking after a senior judge warned that the State is not taking seriously the needs of children in care. Another report revealed that children in State care are allegedly being routinely removed from care homes and taken to hotels to be abused by gangs of men.

Irish bishops are set to discuss the future of art-work in Rome's Pontifical Irish College by a controversial priest-artist accused of abusing several adult women. The Jesuit Order confirmed that Fr Marko Rupnik has been expelled from the society, for "disobedience" and his future in the priesthood remains in doubt amidst the serious allegations.

## Heroic Irish priest who defied racists poised for step closer to sainthood



## Knock reports marked increase in pilgrims as bumper novena closes

## Irish youth urged to invite friends back to Church

## Ireland urged to 'dream big' to host World Youth Day



## Look to the faith of your ancestors to re-build Irish Church, cardinal urges

## AUGUST

**A**n Irish-born priest who risked his life to defy white supremacists in the United States and set-up a community where vulnerable children were educated together regardless of skin colour, could soon take a step closer to sainthood. Ballymoe-born Fr Edward J. Flanagan, who died in 1948, established the renowned Boys Town educational facility as an alternative to prison for children from challenging backgrounds.

The nearly 2,000 Irish pilgrims who were present at World Youth Day in Lisbon with Pope Francis have been urged to use the experience to invite their friends back to the Church. Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran told *The Irish Catholic* that the main message of inclusion resonated with the young pilgrims.

Ireland hosting a major international Catholic event like World Youth Day could be a key moment in renewing and reforming the Church here, bishops said. A dozen Irish bishops had just returned from the global youth event in Lisbon, the largest delegation of Irish prelates at the event in many years.

Ireland's national Eucharistic and Marian Shrine reported an increase in pilgrims and visitors last summer, after a sluggish post-pandemic restart last year and two years when on-off Covid-19 restrictions devastated numbers. Tens of thousands of pilgrims flocked to Knock in Co. Mayo for the traditional novena, with rector Fr Richard Gibbons describing numbers this year as "excellent".

A leading Irish-American cardinal urged Catholics in Ireland to look to the strength of their ancestors in difficult times for the Faith, to renew and rebuild the Church here amidst current challenges. Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, was speaking after celebrating Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh.



**'Significant concern' as hundreds gather for sex education discussion**

**SEPTEMBER**

**I**srael has an obligation to tackle the harassment of the tiny Christian minority in Jerusalem, Tánaiste Micheál Martin has warned Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Mr Martin also called on the Palestinian Authority to ensure that the rights of Christians are protected in the West Bank. The Minister for Foreign Affairs called on Mr Netanyahu to "preserve the status quo of the holy sites" in Jerusalem.

An Ethiopian sister awarded by Trócaire for her devotion to the poor insisted she would rather die than abandon the people of Tigray, a region wracked by ongoing bloody conflict. Sr Medhin Tesfay DC, the regional coordinator for the Daughters of Charity in Tigray, Ethiopia told *The Irish Catholic* during a visit to Ireland that her congregation "never abandoned the people".

Church leaders said they are hopeful that more and more parishioners will step up and preside at funerals to ease the burden on overworked priests, with two dioceses already commissioning laypeople to take charge where there is no priest. More than 70 new lay leaders in Clogher and Down and Connor dioceses were undertaking training to preside over funerals in the two dioceses.

The historic synod gathering in Rome, seen as the most significant Church gathering this century, was identified by Irish participants as a "big moment" for the Church in Ireland to galvanise the Faithful to communicate "the richness of our tradition". However, the Synod of Bishops on Synodality which began on October 4, will not bear fruit unless it is felt in the "daily life" of Irish parishes, they added.

**Sister vows to die before abandoning poor of Tigray - Ireland should be 'very proud' of its missionaries says Ethiopian religious**

**Tackle anti-Christian harassment in Jerusalem, Tánaiste tells Israeli PM**



**Parishioners to take on leading funeral rites**



**Historic synod gathering 'big moment' for Church in Ireland to galvanise Faithful**

**OCTOBER**

**Y**outh ministry, Faith-filled families and happy priests are helping fuel priestly vocations for Ireland's dioceses according to vocation directors, with 15 new seminarians entering formation in 2023, *The Irish Catholic* revealed. Numbers were up from nine seminarians in 2022 and more than doubled from 2021 when there were six new students. Twelve men are also expected to enter a preparatory pre-seminary year, called a propaedeutic year, up from 10 in 2022.

Irish pilgrims in the Holy Land as war broke out October 7 said they were praying for peace, in the hope that escalating violence will not continue. A group of 52 pilgrims led by Marian Pilgrimages and *The Irish Catholic* arrived in Jerusalem on Wednesday, just three days before terrorists in Gaza launched a combined rocket and incursion attack on southern Israel.

It is "totally unacceptable" and "wrong" that a new tax meant to tackle land hoarding was being applied to religious orders vowed to poverty, politicians have said, while religious leaders warned it could "seriously impact" their way of life. The tax could force orders to fork out thousands of euro, after draft maps from local councils included a number of convents and monasteries.

As representatives of the global Church in the Synod in Rome entered an intensive phase of debate on contentious issues such as women priests and same-sex blessings, participants heard pleas to avoid taking divisive stances. As delegates commenced work on their hotly-anticipated final document, Dominican theologian Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP said the synod cannot fall into the bitter divisions of the wider society.

**'Totally wrong' new tax on religious orders condemned**

**Irish pilgrims caught in Holy Land war pray for peace**



**Faith-filled families and Catholic groups fuelling vocations rise**

**Avoid politics of division to renew the Church, synod urged**



Italy's 'most handsome man' set to pursue priesthood

Call for new Irish to help reinvigorate the Church

'Deeply selfish' for Church in Ireland to rely on priests from mission territories

NOVEMBER

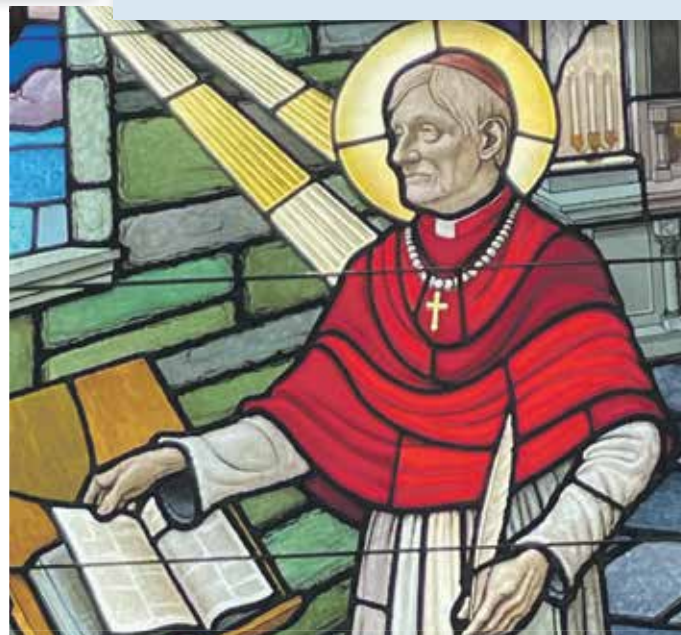
Newer Catholic communities who have made their homes in Ireland in recent years can help Irish Catholics rediscover their own faith, chaplains to these communities have said. It comes as the latest data from the census shows that one in four newcomers from India, the fastest growing migrant community in Ireland, are Catholic.

Inviting priests from the Church in developing parts of the world to maintain the status quo in Irish parishes and to cope with the vocations crisis is "selfish" a liturgical expert has warned. Spiritan priest Prof. Tom Whelan also warned that pastoral plans that have no greater vision than replacing Sunday Mass with ceremonies with the distribution of Holy Communion risk clericalising laypeople.

Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, say that they feel "crushed" by soaring unemployment caused by the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and the disappearance of pilgrims. Speaking to The Irish Catholic they also expressed fears, saying many Christian families are planning to leave the Holy Land as soon as they are able.

The founder of University College Dublin could soon be one of only a select few figures to be declared a 'Doctor of the Church' with momentum growing in Ireland and abroad to grant Cardinal John Henry Newman the rare ecclesiastical honour.

The riots that convulsed Dublin's inner-city at the end of November are a symptom of a wider "social discontent" particularly over inadequate housing and the inability to access even basic things, priests in the heart of the capital warned.



Ireland joins in calls to make Newman 'Doctor of the Church'

'This is our last chance' - Christians plan to flee Holy Land as war deepens



Inner city priests plead for solutions to social unease

Warning of parish 'class divide' if lay ministry not funded properly



DECEMBER

There is a growing danger of a "class divide" emerging between parishes if there isn't proper financial investment in lay ministries, the country's first ever parish manager warned at the start of December. Lay leaders also said that it would be "impossible" to encourage co-responsibility and encourage laypeople to take on more responsibility if there isn't proper pay and job security in the future.

Parishioners across Ireland were urged to use the festive period to encourage friends and neighbours who have been away from the sacraments, to come to Christmas Mass and experience anew the sense of community. It came as many parishes struggled with people who got out of the habit during the Covid-19 pandemic when public Mass was forbidden.

Meanwhile, the number of Irish journalists declaring no religious affiliation is four times higher than the general population, a study showed. Some 55% of Irish journalists said they have no affiliation to a particular religion, considerably higher than the 14% among Irish people more generally, a Dublin City University study found.



Call for spirit of mission to urge people back for Christmas Mass

# Your Faith

## Questions of Faith

Jesus became man so I could become God?

Page 32

The Irish Catholic, December 28, 2023



# Poverty incarnate: The inspiration behind St Francis' Nativity crèche

Young people reenact the Nativity of Christ during a ceremony unveiling the Vatican crèche in St Peter's Square in 2013. Photos: OSV News/CNS.

Every year, the Vatican unveils a Nativity scene from a different diocese, often using materials or artistic styles from the particular region or country where the diocese is located.

Some Nativity scenes have garnered praise for their depictions of Christ's birth, such as the 'Sand Nativity' in 2018, a massive 52-foot wide bas-relief sculpture made with over 700 tonnes of sand imported from Jesolo, an Italian seaside resort town roughly 40 miles north of Venice.

Others, like the 2020 Nativity scene, which featured not-so-traditional sculptures of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus – as well as a knight that



**The origins of the Nativity scene are shrouded in the deepest spirituality, writes Junno Arocho Esteves**

some compared to Darth Vader and what seemed to be an astronaut – drew more divided reactions from the Faithful and the world.

As different as they seem, they have a very traditional background – and a famous saint that started them in 1223 – St Francis of Assisi.

The first crèche was created centuries ago in the central

Italian village of Greccio. In 2023 the crèche celebrates its 800th birthday.

### Witness

Italian Franciscan Fr Simone Castaldi, secretary of the Franciscan Province of St Bonaventure in Rome, said the commemorations "are a wonderful opportunity to place the

witness of Francis of Assisi back at the centre of Christian spirituality".

"Francis is a simple figure with an incredible story of deep and embodied spirituality," Fr Castaldi told OSV News November 14. "Everyone talks about St Francis but few people know the profound experience, which moves mainly from his love for the Incarnation."

The story of how the first Nativity scene came to be can be found in the hagiography written in 1229 by Franciscan Bro. Tommaso of Celano, who was commissioned by Pope Gregory IX to write about St Francis' life.

For St Francis, Bro. Tommaso recounted, "the humility of the

Incarnation and the charity of the Passion so occupied his memory that he would scarce ponder over anything else".

According to the Franciscan brother's account, St Francis, before making his way to Greccio to celebrate Christmas, sent word to Giovanni Velita, a friend and mayor of the town, and instructed him to prepare a recreation of the Nativity.

### Bethlehem

"Make haste to go before and diligently prepare what I tell thee," St Francis said, according to Bro. Tommaso. "For I would make a memorial of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes his infant hardships; how he lay in

a manger on the hay, with the ox and the ass standing by.”

For Polish Franciscan Fr Emil Kumka, an expert on early and medieval Church history, as well as Franciscan history and hagiography, at Rome's Pontifical Theology Faculty of St Bonaventure, also known as the Seraphicum, the aforementioned passages in Bro. Tommaso's account are the key to understanding St Francis' inspiration for creating the Nativity scene.

“The humility of God, who wanted not only to become man by natural birth, but first and foremost his choice of poverty and lowering to our human level, provoked in St Francis the desire to relive this moment,” Fr Kumka told *OSV News*.

“The conditions in Greccio had to be the same as in Bethlehem, namely extreme poverty, which fully demonstrates the divine *kenosis*,” he added, referring to St Paul's words in which explains that Christ “emptied himself” in taking on human form.

**“Everything must be traced back to Francis' desire to see, and thus live, the poverty chosen by Jesus in the incarnation”**

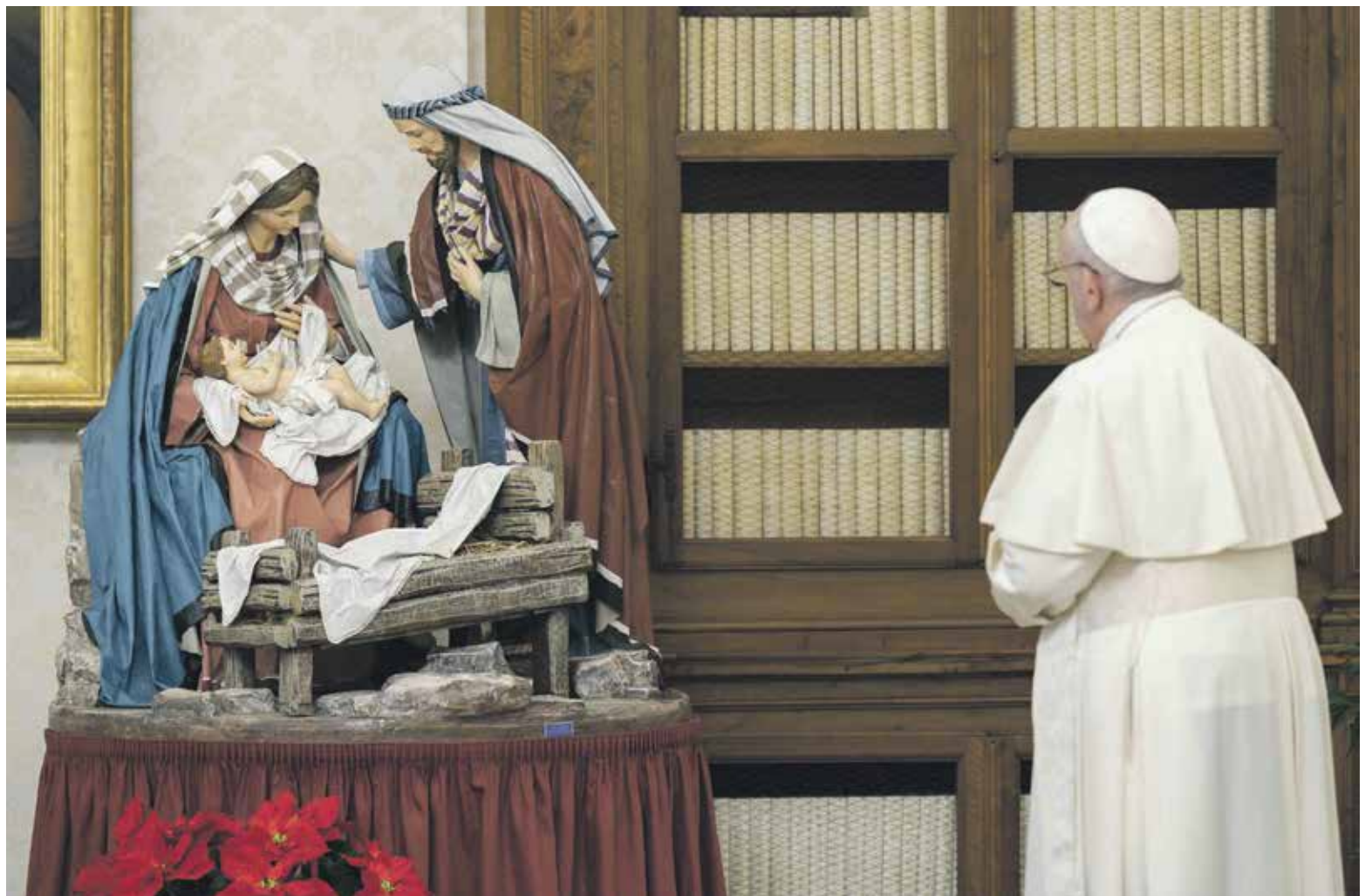
Fr Castaldi told *OSV News* that while St Francis is “a saint that everyone knows,” it often happens that “almost no one really understands him,” especially when it comes to understanding his motivations for creating the Nativity scene.

“It is true that on that Christmas night 1223, Francis depicted a scene of the Nativity for the first time in history,” he said. “But we cannot fail to consider that what Francis does is something much more profound than just making the first crèche.”

To explain this, Fr Castaldi noted a specific passage from Bro. Tommaso's account that described what St Francis would do when he pronounced the words, “Child of Bethlehem”.

In his hagiography, Bro. Tommaso said that when naming Christ, St Francis, “aglow with exceeding love, would call him the ‘Child of Bethlehem,’ and uttering the word ‘Bethlehem,’ in the manner of a sheep bleating, he filled his mouth with the sound, but even more his whole self with the sweet affection.”

“Moreover,” the account continues, “in naming ‘the Child of Bethlehem’ or ‘Jesus,’ he would, as it were, lick his lips, relishing with a happy palate, and swallowing the sweetness of



Pope Francis pauses in prayer before a Nativity scene in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican in 2021.

that word”.

Fr Castaldi said the description was “one of the most beautiful passages from the night of Greccio; one of the most human passages and one that I believe best describes Francis”.

St Francis' devotion to the Incarnation and his love for Christ, he explained, was “a passion that became physicality and a bodily sense”.

“Everything must be traced back to Francis' desire to see, and thus live, the poverty chosen by Jesus in the incarnation,” Fr Castaldi said.

### Joy

In his account, Bro. Tommaso also described the joy felt by St Francis, as well as by those in the small Italian village who witnessed that Christmas celebration so long ago.

“There simplicity was honoured, poverty exalted, humility commended; and of Greccio there was made as it were a new Bethlehem,” he wrote. “The night was lit up as the day, and was delightful to men and beasts. The people came, and at the new mystery rejoiced with new rejoicings.”

Fr Kumka said that St Francis' creation of the Nativity scene was “not spectacle, not religious theatre, nor sentimentalism; that is, everything that the Nativity crèche often represents to people today”.



The figure of one of the Three Kings is seen as the Nativity scene and Christmas tree decorate St Peter's Square after a lighting ceremony at the Vatican in 2022.

Instead, he explained, the Christmas Mass celebrated with a physical representation of the Son of God lying in a humble manger, joined together two important points of devotion in St Francis' own spiritual life: the Eucharist and the Incarnation.

Both, Fr Kumka told *OSV News*, “referred back to the same basic choice: that of a God who humbled himself for the salvation of humankind”.

“The Eucharist perpetuates Christ's presence in history and demands, at the same time, that – like Christ – we know

how to dispossess ourselves of everything,” he said. “The Christmas liturgy of Greccio does not remain fixed on what happened in Bethlehem, but follows Jesus all the way to Golgotha and recognises him as the one who is risen and glorified, and who today again stoops down and gives himself to us in holy Communion.”

### Sentiments

Fr Castaldi echoed similar sentiments and emphasised that in the simplicity and humility of the manger, St Francis wanted to

“show a way of being in the world: that of the peace that comes from being in the minority, from occupying the last place”.

“This is the revolution that he will bring into history by breaking the feudal pyramidal hierarchy and replacing it with the circle of brotherhood, in which everyone is on the same level,” Fr Castaldi told *OSV News*.

“In the night of Bethlehem, Francis saw how God made the first move: He chose to occupy the last place.”

**i** Junno Arocho Esteves writes for *OSV News from Rome*.

**“There simplicity was honoured, poverty exalted, humility commended; and of Greccio there was made as it were a new Bethlehem”**

# As the writer writes, the saint... saints!



David Mills

It's usually fathers who ask me, and usually – about two-thirds of the time – daughters they're asking for. Their children want to become writers or journalists, and they ask me to tell them how to do that. (No one has ever asked me to talk to his child about becoming an editor.) So, the more their kids had written, and the more concretely

they talked about writing and wanted to talk shop, the more I encouraged them. If they talked only about being a writer, I gently pointed them toward some other work.

Some years ago, I ran a fellowship program for new college graduates to work at a magazine and learn the craft. It was a great gig and we got lots of applications. I needed some way to sort out the ones who needed a closer look. The rule I chose was that if you wanted to do something, you would have done it. Not always true, but usually true. And you would want to talk about it in the practical, detailed, talking-shop way the people who do it for a living talk about it. And – bonus points for this – you want to do it even if you don't succeed.

**“Do you care enough about the details of the way Catholics live the Catholic life? To put it another way, do you love to talk shop about it? How geeky about it can you get?”**

This has a spiritual parallel.

## We love to dream

It seems a common human failing that we often want to be something much more than we want to do the work that would make us the thing we want to be. We dream of ourselves as a particular kind of person, but we don't dream of ourselves doing the work that would make us that person. I see this in myself.

Over my decades of writing and editing, I've met a lot of people who want to be a writer but don't really want to write. They see themselves signing their books, and talking with admiring readers and opening messages from editors eager to publish their next title.

They don't see themselves working day after day for months and months, slogging through all the tedious research, having to completely rewrite a large section when they found out they were wrong, missing many of life's pleasures because they must meet their deadline, proofreading the manuscript over and over till they hate it.

They don't see themselves doing the work as it's actually done by real writers. And they really don't see themselves wondering why their book didn't sell and why even their friends didn't read it. They don't even imagine failure.

## The tests

Here's the spiritual parallel: You say you want to be saints. But have you lived in a way to make you holier? Do you see the work or only imagine yourself having done the work? Do you feel driven to do it, even when it's hard? When it seems it won't get you anywhere?

Do you care enough about the details of the way Catholics live the Catholic life? To put it another way, do you love to talk shop about it? How geeky about it can you get?

Does a good article about prayer excite you as much as a good article about politics or football or cooking? Does a story about a saint please you as much as a true crime story about a serial killer?

Our answers reveal how invested we really are in becoming saints.

## Liking the look of ourselves

Again, I write of temptations and failings I know. I know how easy it is to decide that reading another book or writing another article is more important than praying, or that I should keep writing while I'm inspired and put off Confession until next week.

We can see ourselves as a holy man or woman, and like the look of ourselves with a halo, but be less interested in praying more, fasting more, turning the other

cheek, walking the second mile, giving what we have to the poor, or in general taking up our cross.

**“Hunting heresies and striking down error – however defined – can feel like it should bring us as close to God as prayer”**

We can also find substitutes for actual holiness. The world provides a whole bunch. Like, doctrinal orthodoxy or progressivism, political correctness (right or left); like living by the rules (but not always all of them), and defining our degree of holiness by the extent to which we're not like certain other people.

A reputation for “standing up for the truth!” or “defending the Church!” can seem almost as good as having ‘St’ before our names. Hunting heresies and striking down error – however defined – can feel like it should bring us as close to God as prayer. We're doing this – we tell ourselves – for him.

Even if we are, all that won't make us saints. If we really want to be saints, we do the work that (under God) will make us saints. Holy is as holy does.

*David Mills is a US-based writer for OSV News.*



# Venerable Madeleine Delbrêl: A missionary and a mystic



Archbishop José Gomez

The 20th Century was one of history's most violent and war-torn, marked by atheistic, anti-human revolutions and ideologies that continue today.

But in that century, God also raised up some of the Church's greatest saints and blessed, a beautiful array of fascinating characters like Mother Teresa, John Paul II, Padre Pio, Charles de Foucauld, Josemaría Escrivá, Maximilian Kolbe, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Miguel Pro, Gianna Molla, José Sánchez del Río, Irmã Dulce Pontes, Chiara Badano and more.

## Witnesses

These saints were witnesses to hope in dark times, shining the light of Christ and showing us the path to find holiness and love in times marked by evil and great suffering.

There were other heroic and holy figures, too, not canonised

**“By praying I believed that God found me and that he is a living reality, and that we can love him in the same way that we can love a person”**



An image of Venerable Madeleine Delbrêl, who was born in southwest France in 1904. Photo: OSV News/Luca Paolini

but no less important and inspiring.

Venerable Madeleine Delbrêl was born in southwest France in 1904. She was a creative, passionate soul; she played piano and wrote poetry, she loved to dance.

Early on, she lost her faith in God. “By the time I was 15,” she would later write, “I was a strict atheist, and the world grew for me more absurd by the day”. At 17 she wrote a manifesto that she titled, *God is dead ... long live death*.

Talking to students many years later, in 1960, she recalled: “At the time, I would have given the whole world to know why I was in it.”

That was not the end of her story, God was not done with her. Some Christians befriended her and encouraged her to pray and read the Gospels.

“By reading and reflecting I found God,” she would later say. “But by praying I believed that God found me and that he is a living reality, and that we can love him in the same way that we can love a person.”

Seeking guidance she came to a priest, Fr Jacques Lorenzo, then a local pastor in Paris.

For more than a year in spiritual direction, he opened the scriptures to her. It changed her life: “He made the Gospel explode for me ... not only [as] the book of the living Lord, but also the Lord's book to live by.”

With Fr Lorenzo's encouragement, she trained as a nurse and social worker. At age 29 in 1933, along with three other laywomen, Madeleine founded a contemplative community in Ivry, a communist-run city in the suburbs outside Paris. The women took vows of celibacy and lived a life of manual labour and prayer among the poor, offering hospitality and works of mercy.

Madeleine lived in Ivry for more than 30 years, until her death in 1964. She said she went there because, “in Ivry, men were unbelieving and poor”.

For her this Marxist city became a modern mission territory, and she carried out her mission, not by preaching, but by her presence, love and friendship. Sharing in the ordinary lives of her neighbours, living her faith with joy, fraternity and deep concern for those around her, she allowed the joy and love of God to break into a darkened world.

Madeleine believed that the Church's mission depends on each one of us, no matter who we are or what our state in life.

## Salvation

“Mission means doing the very work of Christ wherever we happen to be,” she said. “We will not be the Church, and salvation will not reach the ends of the earth, unless we help save the people in the very situations in which we live.”

A mystic as well as a missionary, she had a profound sense that in the Gospels we truly encounter the Word made flesh: “The words of the Gospel are miraculous. If they don't transform us, it's because we don't ask them to.”

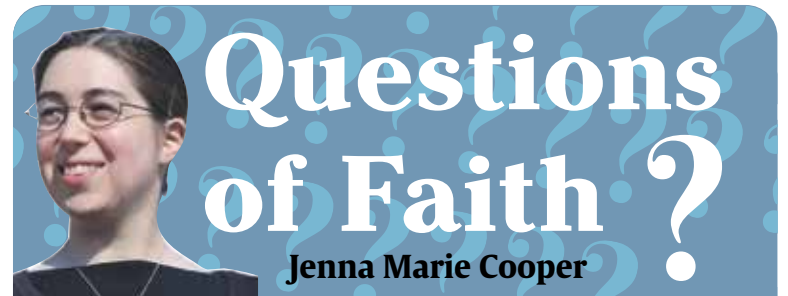
Madeleine's mysticism did not take her out of the world. Instead, it plunged her deeper into the world's pain, poverty, and injustice.

“Jesus wants to live it in me,” she once wrote. “He's with me among the people I encounter today ... All of them will be people he's come looking for – those he's come to save ... Through the brothers and sisters who are close to us, whom he will make us to serve, love and save, waves of his love will go out to the end of the world and the end of time.”

This is an important, timely, and beautiful book for modern apostles.

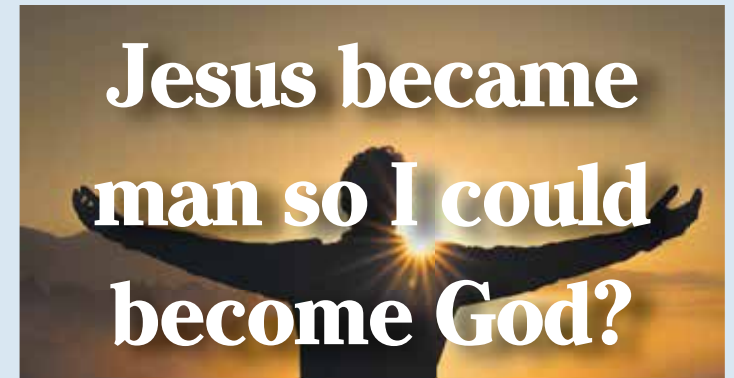
I pray that through her words and spirit, Delbrêl will help all of us in the Church to discover, as she did, that our ordinary daily lives are “our place of holiness”.

**i** Sophia Institute Press has just reissued the spiritual classic, *The Joy of Believing*, by Madeleine Delbrêl, who was declared a ‘Venerable’ by Pope Francis in 2018. The following is adapted from Archbishop Gomez's introduction to this work, which was first published in 1968.



## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



**Q: I'm reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church and have a question about CCC 460. Can you please fully explain the lines: “For the son of God became man so that we might become God” and “... might make men gods”. I am to become GOD? That doesn't seem right.**

A: No, Catholics do not believe we literally “become” God in the sense of becoming beings with the capacity to create universes out of nothing, by means of pure will; or that we become radically all-powerful or all-knowing; or that we ourselves become worthy of the worship due to God alone. There is and can only ever be one God. And even in the heavenly life of the world to come, we retain our human nature. We can't even change our nature to become angels, as is sometimes popularly supposed.

So, how should we understand this line in the Catechism? There is helpful clarity by looking at the opening of the very paragraph you cite. CCC 460 begins by telling us that “The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’”. That is, because we are united to Jesus and become like him through Baptism, we ‘partake’ – i.e., share in – Jesus' own life as the son of God. Sharing in this divine nature means, among other things, that we are able to enjoy eternal life and that we become God's children by adoption.

It might also be helpful to note some overall context. Paragraph 460 is situated in the middle of a discussion on the mystery of Jesus' Incarnation – that is, how the “Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14), or how Jesus remained fully God while being born in our human nature. The specific passage in question here was not actually written by the drafters of the Catechism, but is rather a quote from a Church Father, St Athanasius, from his book *On the Incarnation of the Word*.

This idea that Jesus, the Word of God, took on our human nature

in order that humanity might be enabled to have some share in his divine nature is a theme that actually runs throughout our faith tradition. Even during the Mass, when the priest mixes a drop of water into the wine which is soon to be consecrated, he prays quietly to himself: “By the mystery of this water in wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

**Q: The priest who helped with my conversion said that when we arrive before Mass we should be respectful to the people around us – to pray and sit quietly until Mass begins. Has the process changed or are we still asked to be quiet? In my church people speak very loud before Mass and the priest is the biggest offender.**

A: Courtesy and common sense strongly suggest keeping a reverent, silent atmosphere in church.

Our church buildings are meant to be sacred spaces where people can come to be in the presence of God in an especially focused way. Before Mass the Faithful are encouraged to recollect themselves in preparation for Mass. After the dismissal people often stay, to extend their time of thanksgiving after receiving the Eucharist.

If we find ourselves occasionally bothered or distracted by other people's talking in church, sometimes the best thing to do is to recall the ‘little way’ of St Therese of Lisieux and use the noise as an opportunity to grow in patience and charity. For instance, we might try to assume that the ‘offending’ priest was aiming to cheer up a lonely parishioner who is going through a challenging time.

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



# Fear of God as wisdom



**W**hy don't we preach hellfire anymore? That's a question asked frequently today by a lot of sincere religious people who worry that too many parishes and too many priests and ministers have gone soft on sin and are over-generous in speaking about God's mercy. The belief here is that more people would come to church and more people would obey the commandments, particularly the sixth one, if we preached the raw truth about mortal sin, God's wrath, and the danger of going to hell when we die. The truth will set you free, these folks assert, and the truth is that there is real sin and that there are real and eternal consequences for sin. The gate to heaven is narrow and the road to hell is wide. So why aren't we preaching more about the dangers of hellfire?

## Mortal sin

What's valid in this kind of reasoning is that preaching about mortal sin and hellfire can be effective. Threats work. I grew up subjected to this kind of preaching and readily admit that it had a real effect on my behaviour. But that effect was ambivalent: On the positive side it left me scared enough before God and life itself to never stray very far morally or religiously. On the negative side, it also left me religiously and emotionally crippled in some deep ways. Simply stated, it's hard to be



## Fr Rolheiser

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

intimate friends with a God who frightens you and it's not good religiously or otherwise to be overly timid and afraid before life's great energies. Fear of divine punishment and fear of hellfire, admittedly, can be effective as a motivator.

### “Preaching divine threat dishonours the God in whom we believe”

So why not preach fear? Because it's wrong, pure and simple. Brainwashing and physical intimidation are also effective, but fear is not the proper fuel for love. You don't enter a love relationship because you feel afraid or threatened. You enter a love relationship because you feel drawn there by love.

More importantly, preaching divine threat dishonours the God in whom we believe. The

God whom Jesus incarnates and reveals is not a God who puts sincere, good-hearted people into hell against their will, on the basis of some human or moral lapse which in our moral or religious categories we deem to be a mortal sin. For example, I still hear this threat being preached sometimes in our churches: If you miss going to church on Sunday it's a mortal sin and should you do that and die without confessing it you will go to hell.

### Repentance

What kind of God would underwrite this kind of a belief? What kind of God would not give sincere people a second-chance, a third one, and seventy-seven times seven more chances if they remain sincere? What kind of God would say to a person in hell: “Sorry, but you knew the rules! You're repentant now,

but it's too late. You had your chance!

A healthy theology of God demands that we stop teaching that hell can be a nasty surprise waiting for an essentially good person. The God we believe in as Christians is infinite understanding, infinite compassion, and infinite forgiveness. God's love surpasses our own and if we, in our better moments, can see the goodness of a human heart despite its lapses and weaknesses, how much more so will God do this. We've nothing to fear from God.

### “God is not a judgmental tyrant but a loving, creative, joy-filled energy and person”

Or, have we? Doesn't scripture tell us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”? How does that square with not being afraid of God?

There are different kinds of fear, some healthy and others not. When scripture tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the kind fear it is talking about is not contingent

upon feeling threatened or feeling anxious about being punished. That's the kind of fear we feel before tyrants and bullies. There is however a healthy fear that's innate within the dynamics of love itself. This kind of fear is essentially proper reverence, that is, when we genuinely love someone we will fear being selfish, boorish, and disrespectful in that relationship. We will fear violating the sacred space within which intimacy occurs. Metaphorically we will sense we're standing on holy ground and that we'd best have our shoes off before that sacred fire.

Scripture also tells us that when God appears in our lives, generally the first words we will hear are: “Don't be afraid!” That's because God is not a judgmental tyrant but a loving, creative, joy-filled energy and person. As Bloy reminds us, “joy is the most infallible indication of God's presence”.

The famous psychiatrist, Fritz Perls, was once asked by a young fundamentalist: “Have you been saved?” His answer: “Saved? Hell no! I'm still trying to figure out how to be spent!” We honour God not by living in fear lest we offend him, but in spending the wonderful energy that God gives us to help life flourish. God is not a law to be obeyed, but a joyous energy within which to generatively spend ourselves.

## “The God we believe in as Christians is infinite understanding, infinite compassion, and infinite forgiveness”

# The Holy Family is an icon of love



Is 61:1-2a, 10-11  
Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54  
1 Thes 5:16-24  
Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

## The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



In paragraph 30 of his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis wrote, “Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth”.

As we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, God’s word invites reflection on the joys, responsibilities and challenges of family life in the light of Christian faith and discipleship.

The Book of Sirach describes the duty of gratitude to parents for the gift of life. Within families, gratitude becomes a source of

harmony and peace. For, “respect for parents fills the home with light and warmth,” as the Catechism teaches (2219). Sacrifices – great and small – that a child makes to honour and care for parents is offered as a praiseworthy path. Moreover, there is a special gratitude for the gift of faith due to parents and grandparents whose example and witness to lived faith endures from one generation to the next.

The author of Sirach reminds us that God is the source of the authority of

parents. As Sirach notes, “God who sets a father in honour over his children and confirms a mother’s authority over her sons”. God strengthens parents with wisdom to care for and raise their children, and guides children in the way of honour and respect for aging parents.

### Gift

Abraham and Sarah are presented as models of faith in God who received the gift of Isaac in their old age. Beyond their child-bearing years, Abraham and Sarah put their faith in God’s word. Not knowing where they were to go or how their needs would be provided for, these models of faith trusted the power of God’s word and were blessed with the gift of life in Isaac.

Abraham and Sarah are models of faith to imitate as we strive to be missionary disciples of Jesus. Putting our faith in God’s word will bring new life to our hearts, minds and families.



The same entrusting faith in God led Mary and Joseph to present the child Jesus in the temple, as described in the Gospel. In the sacred space of the temple holy men like Simeon, and holy women like Anna the prophetess, recognised the presence of the Son of God and expressed their faith in

God with prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Their witness to faith inspires us to contemplate the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth as we pray in faith, “speak to me, Lord”.  
Question: How can the Holy Family of Nazareth be an icon of faith, hope, and love in the midst of the joys, responsibilities

and challenges of family life?

**i** Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

**“God who sets a father in honour over his children and confirms a mother’s authority over her sons”**

# Film

Aubrey Malone



# 2023 at the movies...

I refused to become a Barbenheimer during the year. When I was growing up there was a perfectly respectable practice of showing 'small' pictures and 'big' ones, despite the threat of the infamous 'Paramount decree' of 1948.

This year, however, some genius decided that the most incongruous double bill of all time would enthrall. A lot of people - the emperor's new clothes principle proving to be alive and well - seemed to agree. Mass hypnosis? For the viewing time involved you could nearly have flown to America.

## Barbie and Oppenheimer

Barbie taught us that a woman could be anything she liked - as long as she looked as good as Margot Robbie. Ms Robbie was much better in *Babylon*, a film which, to paraphrase Jack Warner, started on an earthquake and worked up to a climax.

*Oppenheimer* reminded us of something we already knew: that Cillian Murphy is one of Ireland's finest actors. The fact that he has eyes like

an extraterrestrial somehow seemed appropriate for the man who invented the atomic bomb.

Michael Fassbender is another great Irish (well, sort of) actor. He found a movie to show him at his worst best, if you know what I mean, in *The Killer*.

**“Can you save the world on a zimmer frame? Who could have predicted *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* way back in 1977 when *Star Wars* changed all our worlds?”**

The actor's strike crippled the industry for much of the year. Films like *Spiderman: Across the Spider-Verse* and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3* proved that picayune spectacles will always sell tickets. So will *Mission Impossible* movies - viz. *Dead Reckoning Part One* - or any derivative trope with Harrison Ford. Hollywood's legendary action hero

is still nailing it as an octogenarian.

Can you save the world on a zimmer frame? Who could have predicted *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* way back in 1977 when *Star Wars* changed all our worlds?

Speaking of those of a 'certain age,' if we thought Martin Scorsese was done making films about crime in the US, *Killers of the Flower Moon* disabused us of that notion with his Osage Nation masterpiece.

Another veteran director, Steven Spielberg also moved the needle. He mined the motherlode of his youth to rich effect in *The Fabelmans*. Paul Schrader shone with *Master Gardener*.

Two veterans in front of the camera, Maggie Smith and Kathy Bates, charmed us in Thaddeus O'Sullivan's nostalgic piece, *The Miracle Club*.

Tom Hanks went grumpy in *A Man Called Otto*. Joaquin Phoenix pulled out all the stops for *Beau is Afraid*, afterwards making a u-turn for Ridley Scott's revisionist behemoth, *Napoleon*.

## Rom-coms

Rom-coms proliferated - *Love at First Sight*, *Rye*

*Lane*, *Love is in the Air*, *A Beautiful Life*. We got quirkiness in *Luther*, *The Good Mother*, *Wonka*, *The Little Mermaid*. In *EO* a donkey acted as the Greek chorus for society's ills. *Fools*, for he also had his hour.

Cate Blanchett excelled even by her own high standards in Todd Field's convoluted *Tár*. Tilda Swinton evinced similar traction in *The Eternal Daughter*. In *The Whale*, Brendan Fraser showed sides of him I didn't even know he had - in all senses. *Creed III* continued to celebrate the cerebral seam of the post-*Rocky* franchise.

**“Todd Haynes' *May December* put one in mind of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* with its intense examination of identity**

Cord Jefferson's feature debut, *American Fiction*, dovetailed comedy with a coruscating attack on

**“Two moving Irish films were *My Sailor, My Love* and *Lakelands*. Equally impressive foreign ones - for similar reasons - were Celine Song's *Past Lives* and its 'sister' movie *Return to Seoul*”**

everything from fame and romance to the idea of selling oneself out.

*Maestro* was a great big hamburger of a movie, a fascinating biopic of conductor-composer Leonard Bernstein and his fraught relationship with Felicia Montealegre. It drew top notch performances from Bradley Cooper and Carey Mulligan in a freeform structure that captivated.

## Drama

*Anatomy of a Fall* was a ponderous courtroom drama that asked more questions than it answered but was still riveting, thanks in no small part to an awe-inspiring performance by Sandra Huller. Another courtroom drama, *Saint Omer*, was equally oblique and equally fascinating in its exploration of the theme of abandonment.

*Air* was a 'retro' offering about basketball star Michael Jordan's collaboration with Nike in the 80s. Ben Affleck, one of its star-studded cast, continued to establish his credentials as a talented director. Todd Haynes' *May December* put one in mind of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* with its intense examination of identity.

*Inside* was basically a one-man show. Willem Dafoe kept it rolling along as an art thief trying to stay sane as he lays trapped in a penthouse after a heist comes unstuck. It was a hard watch but worth it. So was *Godland*, a study of a 19th Century Danish priest trying to find his feet in a remote part of Iceland.

Wes Anderson continued making an art form of goofiness in *Asteroid City*. The great Cristian Mungiu tackled the theme of immigration

in *RMN*, as did Ken Loach in *Old Oak*. Like most of Mr Loach's movies this one sailed close to the wind of didacticism but you didn't really mind because of its poignance. *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* failed to negotiate such a nuance.

Two moving Irish films were *My Sailor, My Love* and *Lakelands*. Equally impressive foreign ones - for similar reasons - were Celine Song's *Past Lives* and its 'sister' movie *Return to Seoul*.

*Cat Person* spent two hours telling us that if a guy looks creepy, don't go out with him. Hello, do most girls not learn that at their mother's knee? The film ran out of gas like another chiller, *Locked In*.

**“The most shocking death of the year was that of *Friends*' Matthew Perry”**

We witnessed the passing of two iconic sex symbols, Gina Lollobrigida and Raquel Welch. Welch became famous for looking like she was just after leaving a Bel Air beauty salon in *One Million Years B.C.* (I didn't know they had them then). Her career trailed off afterwards due to movie choices that played on her curves. One critic famously described her as “a moron with less on”.

The most shocking death of the year was that of *Friends*' Matthew Perry. It brought back memories of the equally tragic demises of Whitney Houston and our own Dolores O'Riordan. Whitney was eulogised yet again in *I Wanna Dance with Somebody*. Isn't it time to let the diva rest in peace?



Laura Linney and Maggie Smith in a scene from *The Miracle Club*. Photo: Sony Classics

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The dark days of 1877 in the Golden Vale

A classic of Irish journalism: William O'Brien's 'Christmas on the Galtees' from the grim winter of 1877

Felix M Larkin

In the days after Christmas 1877, the *Freeman's Journal* published a series of five articles that are generally acknowledged as the earliest piece of investigative journalism in Ireland.

Entitled 'Christmas on the Galtees', they were written by William O'Brien, then only in his mid-20s, but already the *Freeman's* star reporter. He was later an Irish Party MP at Westminster and a prominent agrarian leader in the Land War in the 1880s.

The articles were described by O'Brien as "the investigation of a historic agrarian struggle on an estate around the Galtee mountains". The estate in question was "a poor mountainous estate" in Co. Tipperary that had been acquired by a wealthy English manufacturer, Nathaniel Buckley.

He raised the rents – in most instances, by a factor of two or three – and resistance to this impossible burden escalated to the point where a bailiff was



A winter scene in the Galtee Mountains today

killed, and the estate agent and a policeman wounded, in a gun attack.

### Plight

The plight of the tenants on the estate was first highlighted in letters from a prominent local Fenian, John Sarsfield Casey,

published in the *Freeman* and in *The Cork Examiner*. This resulted in a libel suit against Casey. When the suit failed and Casey was vindicated, the *Freeman* decided to pursue the matter further.

O'Brien was dispatched to Tipperary with, in his own

words, instructions "to see for myself; to avoid heated and exaggerated language; and to tell the plain truth, whatever it might be, without fear or favour".

The first of his articles was dated Christmas Eve, and appeared in the *Freeman* on December 27. The remaining articles were published at intervals between December 29 and January 5. All five articles were gathered together in a pamphlet soon afterwards.

The *Freeman* was owned at this time by Edmund Dwyer Gray, and the Buckley estate was located in the constituency for which Gray had recently been elected MP. The candidate he defeated was the same John Sarsfield Casey who had drawn attention to conditions on the estate.

**“A mess of Indian meal was in the pot for dinner. The family, of course, slept in one room”**

In his *Recollections*, O'Brien recalls that Gray personally gave him the commission to write the 'Christmas on the Galtees' articles. In doing so, Gray was clearly taking steps to avoid being outflanked in his political backyard.

What makes O'Brien's articles extraordinary is the quality of the analysis that



Fenian John Sarsfield Casey, 'The Galtee Boy'.

underpinned his exposition of the wretched circumstances of the tenants – "the shameful scenes which passed under my own eyes", to quote O'Brien – and its focus on the experience of individual tenants. In this regard, O'Brien writes:

The inquiry was original in this sense, that it was, so far as I know, the first time when, in place of general statements, there was substituted a house-to-house visitation, telling in

detail the story of every family – their crops, their stock, their debts, their struggle for life – from documents examined on the premises, and in words taken down in shorthand from the peasants' own lips.

### Approach

A good example of O'Brien's approach is his account of visiting the farm of Johanna Fitzgerald, one of the tenants on the estate. O'Brien remarks upon



Journalist William O'Brien in his 20s.

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.

## “What makes O’Brien’s articles extraordinary is the quality of the analysis that underpinned his exposition of the wretched circumstances of the tenants”

“her bare feet and course petticoat”, and he tells us that her “husband has gone to England as a labourer to earn bread for her four children”. He continues:

**“The rain streaming through the thatch, the out-offices tumbling to ruin; the whole furniture miserable and scanty beyond description”**

“A mess of Indian meal was in the pot for dinner. The family, of course, slept in one room [...]. Mrs Fitzgerald said she had not heard from her husband these five weeks, and a shilling was all the money she had in the world.

“Her rent was raised from £2 10s 4d to £4 4s. Her stock of potatoes was out this month past, ‘except a handful of seed’, and from this to August yellow stirabout must be bought on credit. [...] Two geese and some hens made a total of her livestock.”

This woman’s husband was a great-uncle of the late Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald.

Of another tenant, the Widow Condon, O’Brien says that she “had eight children feeding on dry Indian meal stirabout when I entered her cabin, and the floor was pounded into a gelid mass of filth quite six inches in depth; the rain streaming through the thatch, the out-offices tumbling to ruin; the whole furniture miserable and scanty beyond description”.

He adds: “Within this desolate rookery, Widow Condon spent her Christmas night, having begged a meal of bread and tea from her neighbours as her Christmas dinner – not the poorest scrap of meat even then.”

In the second article in the series, part of which was dated Christmas Day, O’Brien recalls that “not a sprig of holly was to be seen in any house I visited”.

He observes: “It would be almost a levity to speak of the ordinary Christmas adjuncts of merry making. [...] As I drove past the base of the hill after nightfall, when no cheerful twinkle lighted the cabin windows, and when a snowstorm breaking over the Galtees overspread it like a shroud, there seemed to be few spots in

Christendom that had less business with a happy Christmas.”

O’Brien visited a total of 226 holdings during his sojourn in Co. Tipperary. His precise and vivid reporting of the results of his investigations makes the ‘Christmas on the Galtees’ articles a perfect specimen of the new genre of journalism – the so-called new journalism – just emerging in Britain and associated with the legendary WT. Stead.

The articles also display the passionate advocacy that was so much a part of the new journalism. The final one thus concludes with an appeal to public opinion, which, with its implicit assumption that the articles would galvanise public opinion, is characteristic of the new journalism:

One wave of that English opinion, before which Cabinets have fallen and nationalities been raised up – one generous impulse, such as was at the call of undeserved human misery in Bulgaria – would either end this unhappy strife or sweep away for ever the law that allows it.

WT. Stead, as editor of the Darlington *Northern Echo*, had played a central role in publicising atrocities in Bulgaria in 1876. By linking his exposé of conditions on the Buckley estate with that controversy, O’Brien was very deliberately identifying himself with the new journalism.\*

O’Brien notes in his *Recollections* that the publication of his articles was “not without perils for the proprietor of a great newspaper” – specifically, the risk of a libel action.

### Courage

Edmund Dwyer Gray showed great courage in publishing the articles in the *Freeman*. He was also extraordinarily prescient in bringing the land question to public attention at this early stage; the articles appeared almost 20 months before the founding of the Land League by Michael Davitt.

Moreover, they set the tone – a crusading tone – for the later press coverage of the Land War. Courting public opinion through the press would be an integral part of the strategy adopted first by the Land League and later, in 1886, in the Plan of Campaign.

Indeed, the Plan’s manifesto stated that “the fullest publicity should be given to evictions” – and accounts and pictures of evictions and other outrages

were used quite explicitly for propaganda purposes both at home and abroad. O’Brien’s ‘Christmas on the Galtees’ articles blazed a trail in this regard.

**“Who can be surprised if, in the cabins among the Galtee Mountains, there was sometimes a weary suspicion that the only effective force of public opinion lay in the crack of Ryan’s blunderbuss?”**

But did the articles have any effect? O’Brien concedes in his *Recollections* that they did not. He states that “no relief came to the Galtee estate, or to any other, until, a couple of years later, the Land League Revolution shook the earth”.

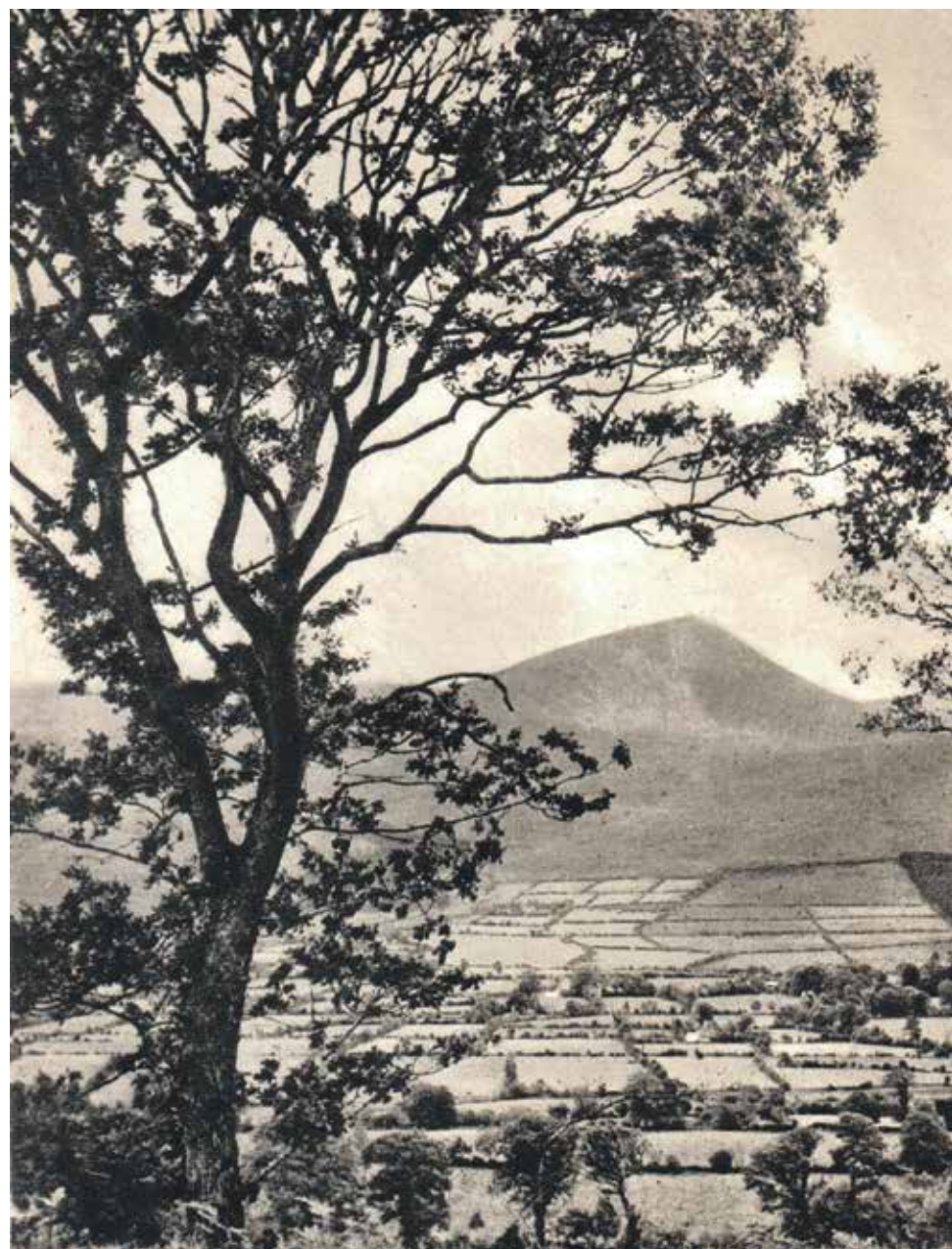
The failure of his groundbreaking journalistic effort leads him to ask this awkward, somewhat despondent question: “who can be surprised if, in the cabins among the Galtee Mountains, there was sometimes a weary suspicion that the only effective force of public opinion lay in the crack of Ryan’s blunderbuss?” Ryan was the name of the man who had killed the bailiff on the Buckley estate.

[\*Editor’s note – The Bulgarian atrocities took place in May and June 1876 and were widely reported by, among other, the Irish-American journalist JA. MacGahan. In the attack in upward of 100,000 Christian civilians were massacred by tribal auxiliary forces of the Ottoman, or Turkish army. The international outcry led to a war in 1877 between Russia and her Balkan allies with the Ottoman Empire which ended in the defeat of the Turks and initiated the long drawn out of the expulsion of the Ottoman from Europe and the eventual fall of the empire after the Great War.]

**i** This essay, from *Christmas and the Irish: A Miscellany*, is reprinted by permission of the editor Prof. Salvador Ryan of St Patrick’s Pontifical University and the publishers Wordwell. It was reviewed by J. Anthony Gaughan in our issue of December 14.



Edmund Dwyer Gray MP



The peak of Galteemore and the fields of the Galtees in the summer of 1930.

# Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4027 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)

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– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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# Leisure time

## Christmas Crossword No. 1

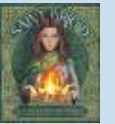
Marian Pilgrimages, Ireland's group pilgrimage specialists to shrines throughout the world for over 30 years, are delighted to offer readers of *The Irish Catholic* the opportunity to win a pilgrimage for two to Lourdes during 2024.

Along with Lourdes, Marian Pilgrimages also offer pilgrimages to Medjugorje, the Holy Land, Italy, Fatima and Camino de Santiago, all available to view on [www.marian.ie](http://www.marian.ie). For more information, please call them on 01 878 8159 or email [info@marian.ie](mailto:info@marian.ie).



## How to enter the competition

The competition consists of **TWO** crosswords. Crossword No.1 which was published last week and Crossword No.2 is published in this week's edition. All you have to do is answer all the crossword questions correctly on **BOTH** crosswords and your name will be entered in a draw for the pilgrimage. Remember, even if you don't manage to complete the crosswords correctly you will be entered in the draw to win one of the three runner-up prizes of a copy of **Saint Brigid & Other Amazing Irish Women** and a complimentary annual digital subscription to the newspaper. When you have completed the crosswords send **CROSSWORD No.1** and **CROSSWORD No.2** before **Friday, January 13, 2024** to: **LOURDES COMPETITION**, Marian Pilgrimages, 38 Pearse St, Dublin, D02 DD83.



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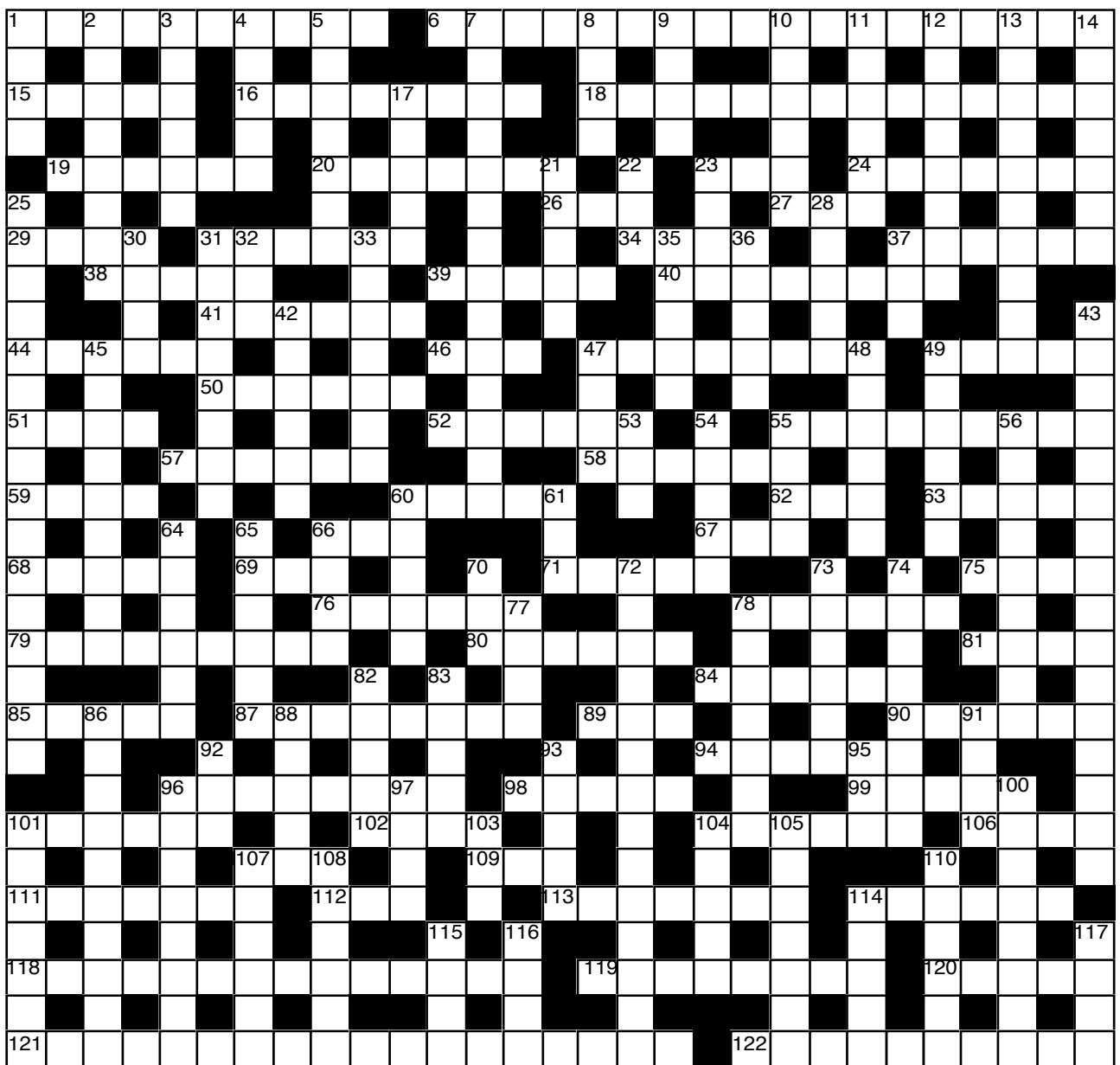
PHONE .....

### ACROSS

- 1 Part of physics that deals with liquids (10)
- 6 Popular Italian dish (9,9)
- 15 Marian shrine in Mayo (5)
- 16 The feeling that 'they're all out to get you' (8)
- 18 Novel by EM Forster set partly in Florence (1,4,4,1,4)
- 19, 60a, 90a & 114a Much loved song from Verdi's Nabucco (6,2,3,6,6)
- 20 & 104d Musical by Jerry Herman about a Hollywood director and an actress (4,3,5)
- 23 & 38a French phrase stamped on air mail letters (3,5)
- 24 Fan; one who looks up to another person (7)
- 26 Regret (3)
- 27 Archaic measure approximating to 45 inches (3)
- 29 Conceal (4)
- 31 American unit of currency (6)
- 34 It is called out to make a horse stop (4)
- 37 Sailors' sleeping-places (6)
- 38 See 23 across
- 39 Complete, entire (5)
- 40 Jesus' original twelve disciples (8)
- 41 Male relative (6)
- 44 & 98a A name for Our Lady, 'The Star of the Sea' in Latin (6,5)
- 46 Our Divine Creator (3)
- 47 Feature at the top of a megalithic burial structure (8)
- 49 Commence (5)
- 50 Three-legged stand (6)
- 51 Statue that is adored by heathens, found broken in the Lido (4)
- 52 Complete or terminate (6)
- 55 Famous Egyptian ruler (9)
- 57 Glass container, or nerve (6)
- 58 One whose sport involves a sliotar (6)
- 59 Requirement (4)
- 60 See 19 across
- 62 Poetic form of another word for frequently (3)
- 63 Brown shade associated with old photographs (5)
- 66 Firearm (3)
- 67 Hiatus (3)
- 68 Lasso (5)
- 69 Use it when rowing (3)
- 71 Latin dance from Cuba (5)
- 75 Stinging insect (4)
- 76 The second book of the Old Testament (6)
- 78 Item of neckwear (6)
- 79 Treason (9)
- 80 Excavating (6)
- 81 Make a digitised image of a printed document (4)
- 84 Faith, credence (6)
- 85 Banishment (5)
- 87 Special event or moment (8)
- 89 A preserve (3)
- 90 See 19 across
- 94 Fruit used like a vegetable (6)
- 96 Steer, work out a course (8)
- 98 See 44 across
- 99 This sport has codes called Union and League (5)
- 101 Paid attention to (6)
- 102 Not any (4)
- 104 One who has died for his or her faith (6)
- 106 Couch (4)
- 107 Edge, lip (3)
- 109 River that flows through Cork city (3)
- 111 Surname used as a pen-name by David Cornell, under which he wrote many spy novels featuring the character George Smiley (2,5)
- 112 Spherical symbol of

### DOWN

- 113 Long-lasting or hard-wearing (7)
- 114 See 19 across
- 118 Traditional pantomime (5,2,3,4)
- 119 Pumped up (8)
- 120 The longest river in France (5)
- 121 Chaucer's great masterpiece (3,10,5)
- 122 Their sport involves running and map-reading (10)
- 1 Walk across the countryside (4)
- 2 Town in Louth, the largest town in Ireland (8)
- 3 The capital of Turkey (6)
- 4 Illness involving a malfunctioning immune system (5)
- 5 Flavour or style of sweet (7)
- 7 Charitable type (14)
- 8 Cure (4)
- 9 Removed (4)
- 10 Warning to be cautious (6)
- 11 Deadly (6)
- 12 US awards in the music industry (8)
- 13 Leaving one's native land to live abroad (10)
- 14 Surname of Hilton, cofounder of Dublin's Gate Theatre (7)
- 17 More pleasant (5)
- 21 Whimsically humorous (5)
- 22 Morning moisture (3)
- 23 99 across player wearing 1 or 3 (4)
- 25 Member of the religious order founded by Edmund Rice (9,7)
- 28 The language of ancient Rome (5)
- 30 Wickedness (4)
- 31 Charitable gift (8)
- 32 Unitary number (3)
- 33 Magnificent, breathtaking (7)
- 35 Silent member of the Marx Brothers (5)
- 36 The main artery of the body (5)
- 37 Maker of honey (3)
- 42 The base of a column (6)
- 43 Line that follows the repeated line 'We wish you a merry Christmas' (3,1,5,3,4)
- 45 Absolve of blame (9)
- 47 Ready money (4)
- 48 Happenings (6)
- 49 Ring road (6)
- 53 Embrace (3)
- 54 Connacht county (5)
- 55 Harvest (4)
- 56 Type of choreographed performer, such as Fred Astaire or Shirley Temple (3,6)
- 60 Chopping this may bring tears to your eyes (5)
- 61 Deciduous tree (3)
- 64 From the French for 'left' a word meaning awkward or clumsy (6)
- 65 Maurice Ravel's most famous composition (6)
- 66 Horse of a particular colour (4)
- 70 Total (3)
- 72 Variety of fruit named for a Chinese dialect (8,6)
- 73 A harbour for yachts (6)
- 74 Thirty minutes (4,4)
- 77 Omen (4)
- 78 No cream is distributed in this Italian city associated with violinmaking (7)
- 82 The Land of the Rising Sun (5)
- 83 Make broader (5)
- 86 Impossible to fault (10)
- 88 Evening of traditional Irish music and dance (5)
- 91 Babies' dribblers (4)



- 92 Passing craze (4)
- 93 Identified (5)
- 95 Attempt a score in 99 across (3)
- 96 American State, capital Lincoln (8)
- 97 Mausoleum (4)
- 100 National Park in California, famed for its Giant Sequoias (8)
- 101 Large flatfish (7)
- 103 Pixie (3)
- 104 See 20 across
- 105 Go in again (7)
- 107 A means of curdling milk, used in cheese-making (6)
- 108 Female parent (6)
- 110 Pill (6)
- 114 Grass-like plant (5)
- 115 Poverty-stricken (4)
- 116 Prepare some writing for publication (4)
- 117 Officers' dining quarters (4)

## SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 14

### GORDIUS No. 641

- Across** - 1 Latin America 7 Rob 9 Dyed 10 Choice 11 Mass 14 Pepys 15 Idiom 16 Echo 18 Altos 21 Eager 22 Panto 23 Tunic 24 Apes 25 Odour 26 Scams 29 Euro 33 Siesta 34 Vine 36 Yam 37 Professional
- Down** - 1 Lay 2 Tidy 3 Neck 4 Moose 5 Rocky 6 Aria 8 Bishop of Rome 9 Deliberately 12 Dingle 13 Smart 14 Plain 17 Canyon 19 Ticks 20 Spoon 27 Chief 28 Moses 30 Ramp 31 Taxi 32 Oven 35 Nil

### CHILDREN'S No. 513

- Across** - 1 Brian Boru 7 Ahead 8 Cabin 9 Kangaroos 11 Sea 12 Tired 13 Keg 16 Ton 18 Hallows 20 High 21 Glasses
- Down** - 1 Blacksmith 2 Ice-skating 3 Nod 4 Orchard 5 Unblock 6 Wands 10 North 14 Gusts 15 Plus 17 Oil 18 Ail

Solutions to Sudoku No. 513 will be published in the edition of January 4.

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



# Our need of saving

**Every Christmas**, a concept at the heart of the season is the birth of Christ as Saviour. 'Christ the Saviour is born' we sing in the carol *Silent Night*; 'Saviour's Day' warbled Cliff Richard and on Christmas night. Luke's Gospel declares how the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds: "Today a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." But what does this mean? Do I need a saviour? Do we? Does the world?



**Saviour**  
Recognising the need for a saviour begins with each one of us. When we take an honest look at ourselves, we see there is much good, far more than bad. We have been made in the image of a good God and therefore the goodness of God has been planted in each of us. On the other hand, we know too well that there is something in us that needs mending. There is a weakness in our human condition that we can't overcome by

ourselves. In the 12-step programme that has helped countless people cope with addiction over many years, the second step states: "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The third step then proceeds to say: "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him." What these two steps mean is that for the person caught in the slavery of addiction, they came to

**“We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him”**

realise that they were in need of a saviour for they could not save themselves on their own. But is this not true for all of us?

**Doubt**  
If we have any doubt about this then all we have to do is look into our own lives and look at our world. Look at Israel, Gaza and Ukraine. Everywhere we see evidence of a world not at rights with itself, a world out of kilter and not at peace. For some, the need for a saviour is imagined.

'I am my own saviour, thank you very much. I don't need God and I don't need the Church.' But if Christ is only a good example for us, or a distant figure from the past, then we don't know him. Unless we come to know him as saviour, we do not know him at all. There are times when we have to admit that we can't do it alone and that we are not in control anymore. There is a time for saying: "This is beyond me." It could be a time of crisis, a sudden loss of a loved one, a broken relationship or an addiction. For us, our higher power is God the Father who loves us and who delights in saving us.

Christmas is a time to welcome

## Take the risk for Christ

'Take the Risk for Christ' is the name given to the current year of prayer and promotion of the diocesan priesthood. It ends in April 2024. May all of us increase our efforts to pray for vocations to the diocesan priesthood and to do something concrete to that end. As Confirmation season is over the horizon, one idea is for bishops, priests and catechists to focus on the vocational foundation of every Christian calling that comes from our Baptism. God calls. When we respond positively, we take the risk for Christ. Renewing the vocational nature of every Christian calling will renew the Church and lead to an increase in priestly and religious vocations.

Christ as our saviour. He is the only one who can do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Christ saves us from sin, inner emptiness, loneliness and sadness. He saves us for community, peace and joy. I need a saviour, you need a saviour and the world needs a saviour too. Thank God for sending us one.

## Happy New Year

'What's another year?' was the winning song at Eurovision 1980, sung by Ireland's Johnny Logan. Good question. As another year ends and a new one begins, it's time to both give thanks and look forward in hope. We give thanks for having made it through another year of life and pray that the witness we have given may bear fruit for an eternal harvest. Then, as we cross the threshold into a new year, we do so in hope as fellow pilgrims trusting in the presence of the Lord who promised to be with us always. Wishing all our readers a very happy New Year with every peace and blessing for 2024.



# YOUR NEW YEAR GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

Millions of children throughout the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition due to conflict, disease, displacement, and other factors. And the situation in Africa is only getting worse. Millions of women and children are struggling with inadequate diets which can lead to stunting and other health problems. Countless children are dying of malnutrition each day.

The Little Way Association is receiving requests from missionary priests and Sisters who urgently need funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. For a helpless child, prolonged hunger is a devastating, bewildering, intensely painful experience.

**Your New Year gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.**

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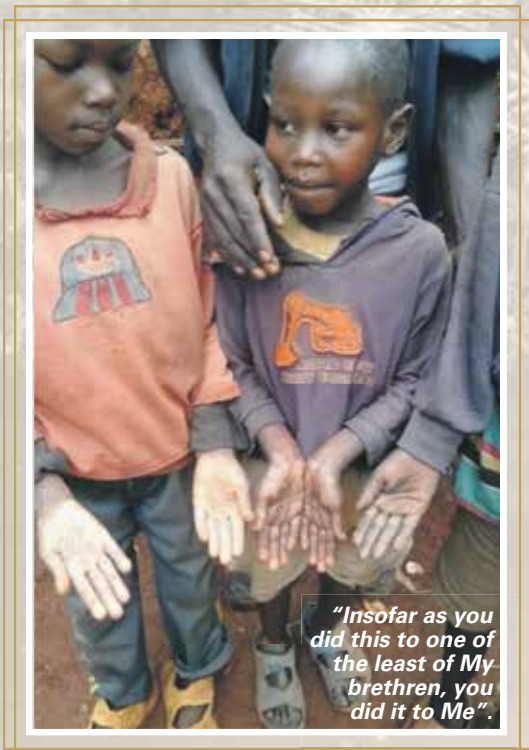
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**As 2024 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.**

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**Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.**



**We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.**

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain all the blessings and graces you need for 2024.

## Daily Mass for your intentions

You and your intentions are remembered in a special Mass offered in the Missions for all Little Way benefactors and friends.

It was St Therese's vocation to be **"love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church"**, and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since St Therese's death on 30th September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.