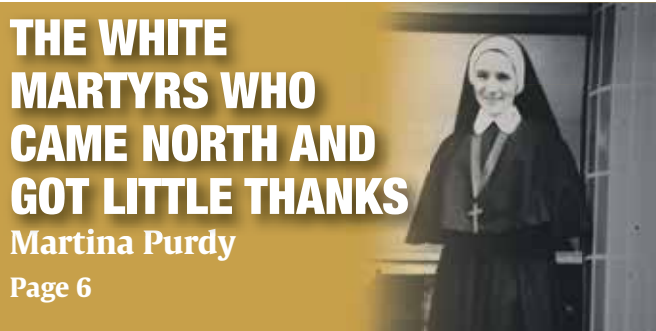


The Irish Catholic

IRISH NUNS BELIEVE THEY ARE SCAPEGOATED, SO MUCH SO THEY TOLD THE VATICAN
Full news analysis
Pages 4 & 18-22



THE WHITE MARTYRS WHO CAME NORTH AND GOT LITTLE THANKS
Martina Purdy
Page 6



RELENTLESS MINISTRY
Without change...
priests will die early
Pages 10-11



Thursday, January 16, 2025

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

@IrishCathNews

www.irishcatholic.com

Irish youth 'ready to evangelise' and strengthen the Church

Renata Milán Morales

Young Catholics from all over Europe gathered in Cologne, Germany for the first conference organised by FOCUS - Fellowship of Catholic University Students – held in Europe. A third of the overall attendance were young adults from Ireland. Bishop Tom Deenihan of Meath and Bishop Alan McGuckian of Down and Connor were also present, and more than five Catholic Irish people were invited as guest speakers.

This Irish presence highlighted the enthusiasm for faith and evangelisation within the Irish Church, said Fr Conor McDonough OP, "Usually, we think of the Irish Church as weak, but I was impressed by the faith and commitment of the young Irish people. They connected deeply with the history of the Church, particularly at the tomb of St Albert the Great, a patron saint for students and intellectuals. These young people are ready to evangelise their own time."

Rebekah Dilworth, member of the Holy Family Mission said, "The conference gives hope for the Church in Ireland. The number of Irish people who went shows the desire for not only growing in the faith but also to evangelise."

Are young Catholics in Ireland asking to 'keep the bar high' when it comes to their Faith? Fr Patrick Cahill, spiritual director of the Holy Family Mission based in Co. Tipperary, pointed out one of the reasons for this spiritual rebirth, "Traditionally in Ireland, the clergy and religious were seen as the missionaries, while everyone else was passive. FOCUS is changing that by teaching young people to rediscover their own missionary calling. It's beautiful to see students courageously inviting their friends to Bible studies and sharing their faith naturally."

Shannon Campbell, Director of the Catholic Chaplaincy at QUB said, "Keynote talks in particular

» Continued on Page 2

Receiving the light of Pope John Paul II



During Mass on January 11, the Parish of Lavey, Co. Derry commissioned the new Pope John II Awards to young people in the parish. At the end of evening Mass, they were given a special Pope John Paul II candle to use during the year.

LA Irish priests safe but damage 'apocalyptic'



Liam Kidney (left) and Monsignor Lloyd Torgerson are pictured at St Monica Church with the recovered tabernacle from Corpus Christi Church. Photo: Victor Alemán

Garry O'Sullivan

The Irish clergy community in LA is pretty small and tightknit and are rallying around those affected by the fires, says Fr Jarlaith Cunnane from Sligo, Pastor at St Cornelius' Church in Los Angeles speaking to *The Irish Catholic*. "Apocalyptic is the word that gets thrown around. In scriptures it refers to disaster and a new revelation of God, people can see the disaster and are now hoping for some meaning."

Fr Cunnane said Sacred Heart Church in Altadena had been saved due to a deacon and some parishioners that managed to hose down the fire that started on the church. However Corpus Christi Church in the Palisades was burnt to the ground but Irish priest Msgr Liam Kidney (originally from Cork) got a call from an LA Fire Department Captain to say they had rescued the tabernacle.

» Continued on Page 2

MAKING BABIES AND MELANIA TRUMP'S STYLE

Mary Kenny

PAGE 5



IRISH PEOPLE HAVE KNOWN FEAR AND EVEN TERROR

Nuala O'Loan

PAGE 15



HOW THE AMERICAN CHURCH SHOULD ADJUST TO PRESIDENT TRUMP

David Quinn

PAGE 23



Who will pass on the flame of faith?



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

Phone 01 687 4028 or email info@irishcatholic.ie

The Irish Catholic



Irish youth 'ready to evangelise' and strengthen Church

» **Continued from Page 1**
equipped students to participate in lifelong mission, wherever they're at... We brought 37 students from QUB to Cologne for the conference, and feedback among them has been incredible, and we have no doubt that it will bear great fruit back in Belfast. SEEK Europe truly was sign of great hope for our continent; what better way to ring in this special Jubilee Year."

When *The Irish Catholic* asked Fr Patrick Cahill what had inspired young Irish Catholics to travel to Cologne, he observed that, "In Ireland, we've never really done this. For us, the clergy, the religious, they were always the missionaries and everyone else was passive, whereas now people like FOCUS missionaries want to teach the young people they minister to... rediscover their own missionary calling, which is beautiful. And it was beautiful to see it at work."

He also pointed out the challenges facing the Church in Ireland, "What we are living through is an absolute crisis

of faith - a lived relationship with Jesus Christ, embraced as an adult. We need to address that. The vocation crisis, for instance, isn't just about a lack of priests - it's rooted in a lack of faith. Young men don't consider priesthood because they don't know Christ. How can He call them if they don't know Him?"

The conference answered this question inspiring young Catholics like Grace Master-son, a young Catholic teacher who attended the conference, to share her faith, "my biggest takeaway was the fact that every Catholic is called to be a missionary - if we want to be authentic Catholics, we cannot keep the faith to ourselves."

"I was proud of the Irish Church and its young people. They're rediscovering their faith... and embracing their missionary calling," said Fr Conor McDonough OP.

This gathering highlighted an inspiring moment within the Irish Church - one where young people are rediscovering their faith and embracing their missionary calling.

See more on page 31.

LA Irish priests safe but damage 'apocalyptic'

» **Continued from Page 1**
"I did it because the whole community has been decimated - it looks like a nuclear bomb has gone off and nothing is standing," said Captain Nassour, a member of St Francis de Sales Church in Sherman Oaks, whose brother

belongs to Corpus Christi.

"My brother lost his home. I have close friends who lost everything but the shirts on their backs, and they belong to that church too. So, if I could save just one thing, let it be this, so they have something to believe in," he told the *Angelus*

Go to AA meetings instead of Dry January says Pioneer priest

Brandon Scott

The Dry January phenomenon that has emerged in recent years which sees people abstain from alcohol throughout the month of January would be better supplemented with more lasting initiatives, like attendance at local AA meetings, as fellowship with others in recovery shouldn't just be limited to one month of the year.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Spiritual Director for the Pioneers Fr Robert McCabe said that "instead of just taking up Dry January, I have been recommending that people could try to attend an open AA meeting in their region. This would provide them with some of the lived experience of those in their own age group who depend on the AA fellowship and the Serenity prayer every day of their lives - not just in January."

Those struggling to cope



Front: Róisín Smylie, Patrick and Kathleen McCarney, Patricia Rice. Back: Joe Graham, Fr Francis Bradley, Francis Doole, Fr Robert McCabe at the celebration to mark the conclusion of the 125th Anniversary of the Pioneer Association in Belfast.

with temptation at this time of the year and looking for long-lasting solutions can take inspiration from the life and resilience of Venerable Matt Talbot, especially in the centenary year of his death, like the Pioneers do on a daily basis.

"Matt Talbot's life speaks to Pioneers about the fruitful sac-

rifice of prayer, good example and the value of wearing the emblem of the Sacred Heart", he said. "His life story invites Pioneers to wear their Pioneer pin as 'pilgrims of hope' during this Jubilee Year 2025.

"In doing so, we maintain our prayerful outreach to all who are living under a

shadow of addiction and to those who are starting out again on a journey of sobriety. Matt - like many other holy men and women in the Pioneer Association - made place in his heart for God to write a new story in his life.

"Pioneers have primarily a prayerful and contemplative response to addiction. They 'Pin their hearts on the love of God' by wearing their emblem, praying twice daily and by abstaining from alcohol. Others are aware of the value of making reparation in their own lives and the lives and relationships of others - reparation, a term which Pope Francis has beautifully reframed in his recent encyclical 'Dilexit nos'.

"Some who have taken the pledge in recent years include fathers who have wanted to live in total availability to their new baby and their spouse in the first year of the baby's life."

diocesan magazine.

Fr Cunnane said that there is a great outpouring of community spirit but that people's homes are gone and it will take years to rebuild. "People are in shelters- what's the plan longer term for people with no houses?" he said. He added that

many people such as housekeepers and gardeners worked full-time in some of the big houses of the rich and famous and are now out of work, affecting them and their families.

A Mass for survivors was held at St Monica Church on January 12. The rescued tab-

ernacle from Corpus Christi Church was on display.

At that Mass, the tabernacle stood on a table by the altar. Fr Kidney recounted Captain Nassour calling him to ask, "I have found this big gold box. What would you like me to do with it?"

The Corpus Christi parishioners burst into applause.

Nassour was unable to attend because he was fighting fires.

Additional reporting from The Angelus. For ways to help please visit <http://angelus-news.com/howtohelp>

Wellbeing in Catholic schools is forming in 'image and likeness of God'

Staff reporter

Speaking in the aftermath of the 'Wellbeing and the Catholic School' document published by the Council for Education in partnership with the Council for Catechetics, the National Director for Catechetics said that the document offers an opportunity for Catholic schools to "recognise what's distinctive about Catholic educa-

tion" by seeing wellbeing in Catholic schools as forming students "in the image and likeness of God".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Dr Alex O'Hara said that the document reaffirms the Catholic understanding of wellbeing in schools.

"The key thing about the document is that we're emphasising the wellbeing in Catholic schools, we're talking about the holistic education

of the whole person in the image and likeness of God," he said.

"The Catholic understanding of wellbeing is much broader. It encompasses the community and the importance of community. We're giving guidance on how you might structure the 400 hours of wellbeing that students have to do at junior cycle and ensuring that the mandatory two hours of religious education in pri-

mary and in post-primary a week are not further eroded.

"We're really emphasising that this is an opportunity for Catholic educators to actually recognise what's distinctive about Catholic education."

The document also touches on some of the more sensitive issues that have emerged among young people, namely anxiety and suicide, and how to respond to them.

"It also acknowledges the challenges, particularly for young people in terms of anxiety and it's responding to that," he said.

"It's worth remembering that significant research in Ireland and other countries has demonstrated that religious belief and practise are positively associated with good mental health and reduced depression and other aspects of wellbeing."

Managing Editor: Garry O'Sullivan, garry@irishcatholic.ie

Deputy Editor: Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie

Multimedia Journalists:

Renata Steffens, renata@irishcatholic.ie

Brandon Scott, brandon@irishcatholic.ie

Renata Milan, renatamilan@irishcatholic.ie

Newsroom: news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

Books Editor: Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

Advertising: advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874027

Accounts: accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874095

Magnificat: magnificat@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874024

General inquiries: info@irishcatholic.ie

Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €199. Airmail €320. Six months €105.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic,

Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,

Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Dublin.

Place an Advert

Phone 01 687 4027 or advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Capuchin Day Centre
for the Homeless People
29 Bow Street, Dublin 7




Every day The Capuchin Day Care Centre provides
1000 hot meals for people who are homeless and each
week 1400 Food Parcels for those on the poverty threshold.

Help Fr. Kevin Kiernan to continue
providing this caring service.

Fr. Kevin or Monica 01 8720770
www.capuchindaycentre.ie

Support our Catholic Journalism and help us evangelise

For less than a cup of coffee a week, you could support our journalism and faith development campaign while strengthening one of the last independent Catholic newspapers in Ireland and the UK.

When you become a 'Friend' of *The Irish Catholic* we give you exclusive access to our premium newsletters and podcasts interviewing a wide range of interesting Catholic leaders plus discounts on books and on upcoming events.

Email garry@irishcatholic.ie to sign up today, or call 01-6874028. We greatly appreciate your support. Thank you.

'Annoyed' TD intends to meet Franciscan Provincial as Clonmel friary row escalates

Brandon Scott

An ongoing row over the closure of the Franciscan Friary in Clonmel shows little sign of a resolution as TD for Tipperary South Mattie McGrath says he's going to Dublin to confront the Provincial of the Franciscan Order whom he claims has ignored his correspondence.

Recent developments have seen aggrieved members of a prayer group who use the facility stage a 'sit-in' in the church; the Franciscans issue a statement requesting that "individuals illegally occupying the church" vacate the building, and now an "annoyed" local TD saying the provincial won't meet him.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, TD Mattie McGrath confirmed that he wrote to the Provincial of the Franciscans Fr Aidan McGrath to discuss the matter and the concerns of the locals, but this he says has been to no avail.

"I've written to Fr Aidan McGrath three times and I'm very annoyed that he hadn't even the good grace to acknowledge my correspondence," he said. "It's very shameful to refuse to engage."

"I want to say that the rela-

tionship between the friars and the public was an excellent one and mutually beneficial. The number of people who attend the Mass on Tuesday is huge.

"I intend to go to Dublin to meet with Fr McGrath if I can," he said. "Issuing a public statement didn't help the matter. With the sit-in, health and safety was mentioned as an issue but there's no health and safety threat whatsoever. We should have an amicable solution and negotiation rather than a bland PR statement that was pretty callous and disappointing coming from the Franciscans. It's a real pity that the relationship has deteriorated."

Patrick O'Gorman, a member of Abbey House of Prayer Group that has staged a "sit-in" in the church, challenged some of the claims in the Franciscan's statement.

"The Franciscans gave a statement which we believe was a very unfair statement because they've twisted the facts in that statement."

"They did tell us it was closing as a committee but we were bound by confidentiality and that they would make the announcement themselves on December 20."

"Now they're bringing into



Mattie McGrath

the public domain something that was confidential, which is very unfair" he said.

Mr O'Gorman who said they had also written to Fr Aidan McGrath and received no reply said the church's future can be safeguarded and that solutions were put forward to help ensure this but those solutions haven't been taken up. "All we want is for them to come to the table and talk about this and they're refusing to do it. It's a crying shame what they're doing."

i The Franciscans through Young Communications sent a copy of their original press statement when asked for comment by this paper. See press release at franciscans.ie/latest-news/former-friary-church-in-clonmel/.

Pope sends 4 blessed Sacred Heart statues for All Ireland Crusade

Renata Milán Morales

Excitement grows as four Sacred Heart statues blessed by Pope Francis will make their way to Ireland in the next weeks as part of the 'All Ireland Sacred Heart Crusade of Love and Hope'.

On January 8 these 4 statues were blessed by the Pope with the witness of four Irish priests: Rev. Shane Sullivan, Rev. Fr John Mockler, Rev. Fr Shane Gallagher and Dom Basil Mary McCabe OSB

"These statues will soon begin their pilgrimage journey

to the four provinces in Ireland," explained Fr John Mockler. Within each province, the pilgrim Sacred Heart Statue will visit "as many parish clusters as possible, with a celebration of the Sacred Heart and a hope that Sacred Heart devotion will be revitalised and act as a reminder and proclamation of the Sacred Heart promises."

What are the benefits of this initiative or what are its benefits for us people of Ireland in this Jubilee year? "The answer lies in the 12 great promises made by the Sacred Heart 350 years ago to St Mar-

garet Mary in Paray-le-Monial," Fr John Mockler told this paper. Already we see the great need for such a crusade... The healing and consolation of the Sacred Heart as a safe refuge to return to is now so needed... As St Augustine notes "Our hearts are restless Oh Lord until they rest in Thee," the priest added.

The Sacred Heart Crusade in Ireland will conclude in a celebration at Ireland's International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine in Knock, on June 22, 2025, where Archbishop Eamon Martin will renew the consecration of Ireland to the Sacred Heart, which was first made over 150 years ago.

i For this Jubilee year, pilgrim statues of the Sacred Heart blessed by the Pope will travel throughout Ireland to revitalise the faith for the 350th anniversary of this devotion. To help launch and raise awareness Eurovision winner Dana (honoured as Dame by the Pope last year) is hosting a concert entitled 'Cross & The Cloak' which will be held on Sunday, February 2 in The Abbeyleix Manor Hotel, Co. Laois. Tickets are available on from Eventbrite, or for more details phone Antoinette at 0860803047.



(L/R) Rev. Shane Sullivan, Rev. Fr John Mockler, Rev. Fr Shane Gallagher and Dom Basil Mary McCabe with Pope Francis and the blessed pilgrim statues destined for Ireland to begin The 2025 Jubilee Sacred Heart Crusade of Love and Hope. Photo credit: Vatican Media.



MARIAN PILGRIMAGES

RENEW OUR SPIRIT OF LOVE, FORGIVENESS AND PEACE

GROUP PILGRIMAGE SPECIALISTS

JUBILEE 2025 ITALY PILGRIMAGES

ST PIO MINI BREAK - €675pps

3 nights | 11th - 14th April 2025

3 nights San Giovanni

A short group Pilgrimage to the home of Saint Pio with visits to Pietrelcina and Piana Romana.

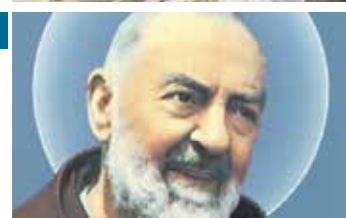


PIO EASTER PILGRIMAGE - €885pps

4 nights | 17th - 21st April 2025

Easter Pilgrimage in San Giovanni Rotondo

Spend Holy Thursday to Easter Monday at the home of Saint Pio.



JUBILEE YEAR PILGRIMAGE ROME - €975pps

4 nights | 26th - 30th April 2025

4 nights Rome

Take part in the official Jubilee Programme and obtain plenary indulgence from the Church.



MEDJUGORJE 2025

DIRECT FLIGHTS TO MOSTAR NOW FROM CITY OF DERRY



7 NIGHTS

from €785pps

Arrive in Medjugorje in Half the Time

We continue our charter flights into Mostar halving travel time to Medjugorje.

Departures will be throughout May to October

April & May 7 nights June 7 nights July 7 nights

from €785 from €805 from €745

August 7 nights Sept 7 nights Oct 7 nights

from €825 from €815 from €805

Bookings before Feb 1st 2025 will avail of the €50 discount included in the above prices.

Deposits of only €200 per person are required to book with balances due 8 weeks before departure.

LOURDES 2025

4 Nights

from €695

5 Nights

from €895

7 Nights

from €959



WWW.MARIAN.IE

(01) 878 8159 | (028) 95680005

38-39 Pearse Street, Dublin 2



Nuns told Vatican they feel like Ireland's 'scapegoats'

Report backs up ACP protest at unfair media portrayals

Brandon Scott and Garry O'Sullivan

The submission of Irish female religious to the Synod in Rome which concluded in October backs up the recent protest by the ACP for an end to unfair portrayals of nuns in the Irish media.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Tim Hazelwood PP of Killeagh & Inch in Cork, said that religious sisters have become the "fall-guy" for all of the ills in society during a particular period in history. "All of us have worked in parishes where sisters have worked and know the reality and we're upset at the way they're being portrayed," he said. "They are the fall-guy for the Church, society, and everybody."

Irish sisters themselves said the same thing in their submission to Rome in 2022 referring to themselves as "scapegoats". Under the headline 'Scapegoating and feelings of isolation: Media and public perceptions' the nuns say: "Today, religious life is given a lot of bad press, with a particular focus on the past, and as women religious many of us feel hurt and challenged in a very deep way. Most

media reporting seems happy to use women religious as scapegoats for Church and society." They added: "There is a sense of being silenced, but silence is seen as condoning the accusations [referring to the abuse reports] and giving the impression that "we're all guilty." The report adds: "What can be done? It is difficult for women religious to respond, as we believe any religious who speaks up would be shut down."

"If responsible historians were asked in the media about the reality of the contribution that religious sisters made, they'll get a balanced view, but they're never invited to speak on programmes. It's always sensationalism we hear and one side of the equation," added Fr Hazelwood.

Another member of the ACP's leadership team, Fr Roy Donovan PP of Caherconlish & Inch St Laurence in Limerick, said that the lack of balance in the narrative is ensuring only one image of the legacy of nuns in the country dominates.

"The story that has gone out which is of the harsh nun and the nun that did all the damage in the various mother and baby homes has become



A nun pictured in front of St Peter's. Photo: OSV News/Yara Nardi, Reuters.

the dominant image," he said. "So that has become the whole story of all the nuns in Ireland really.

"We feel that's very biased and unfair to the thousands of religious women and the work that they have done in all of the different places. I have worked in a number of Dublin parishes, I couldn't have done the work I did there without being part of a team working with religious.

"A lot of us in ACP would feel horrified by what has happened to the nuns – the way they've been denigrated. We feel it's very unfair that

this lesser story about those that did damage has become the main and the only story.

"But you can understand that because some of the sisters feel that if they speak out they'll get hit with this lesser story and it takes over."

i See full coverage of the portrayal of religious sisters from page 18.

i Read the religious sisters' report to the Synod in 2022 entitled 'Experience and Dreams as Religious Women in the Catholic Church in Ireland', on pages 21&22.

Fusion of Gaeilge and faith would 'enkindle love for the Irish language'

Renata Milán Morales

Modern languages could take over the Irish language in schools' curriculum, the Irish population have learnt recently. Officials have also contacted dozens of secondary schools over high numbers of students exempt from Irish. On top of this The European Commission has stated that among those age 18-24 who know a foreign language, Irish people are most likely in the EU to rank their knowledge level as 'basic', which could reinforce

the fear of educators of the status of the Irish language being "diluted".

Fr Brian O'Fearraigh, a *Gaeilgeoir* priest, told *The Irish Catholic* that there is absolutely nothing to be lost, in encouraging schools and pupils to pay more attention to the Irish language, "but on the contrary, in promoting and facilitating such a fusion of language and faith, everything is to be gained, in enkindling a love for the Irish language among pupils."

The Irish language, although being... under threat in modern day

society, is very much a "living and breathing language" in Gaeltacht communities and parishes, according to Fr O'Fearraigh. He added that "the Irish language is deeply interwoven in the fullness of our Catholic faith, that is expressed so beautifully in our

treasury of Irish prayers, blessings and meaningful sayings in the Irish language, *Dia Dhuit* 'God be with you' *Dia sa teach*, 'God in the house.' *Le cúnamh Dé*, 'With God's help.' *Bail ó Dhia ar an obair*, 'With the help of God'."

President promotes Jesuit Theologian to Young Scientists

Garry O'Sullivan

President Michael D. Higgins in his speech at the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition promoted the thinking of Jesuit scientist and theologian/mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as an example of the potential interplay of science and ethics.

"Science offers great possibilities that have a pivotal role to play and, at its best, in responding to the great humanitarian challenges of our time, and has the potential to make an essential contribution to understanding, sustaining and making our world more fulfilling for us all in peaceful co-existence with nature and each other.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin saw this as being achievable but through little less than a species evolution in human consciousness" the President stated.

He later added: "We are all paying the price for the absence of that



evolved consciousness, of which Teilhard de Chardin wrote, that would lead to an international politics that enabled the sharing of such scientific and technological discovery. This would require that governments, citizens and corporations work together, co-operate with real meaning and purpose, with the aim of ensuring that the fruits of science contribute solutions to the great global, social, economic and ecological challenges that we all face on our burning planet."

i See Mark Patrick Hederman on page 15 and BT Scientists on page 12-14

NEWS IN BRIEF

New appointments for Cloyne took effect last week

Bishop of Cloyne William Crean announced new diocesan appointments to the Diocese of Cloyne due to the death of a priest. Fr Robin Morrissey PP Castletownroche has died unexpectedly on September 9, 2024 leaving the parish without a parish priest. The bishop appointed V. Rev. Peter O'Farrell PP of Milford to be PP of Castletownroche/Ballyhooley.

V. Rev. Francis Manning PP of Newmarket has been appointed Administrator of Milford Parish. He will be assisted by V. Rev. Anthony Wickham PP of Newtownshandrum and V. Rev. Denis Stritch PP of Meelin.

These appointments took effect from January 11, 2025. These new arrangements mean that collectively, the three priests will now have nine church communities under their care.

Road deaths 'entirely preventable', Bishop Monahan

Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan led a 'Blessing of the Roads' ceremony following Mass on January 12 at the Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul, Ennis, Co. Clare. In the spirit of the Year of Hope, the community prayed for the protection of all road-users and called for a renewed vigilance and care for road safety.

According to the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC), Ireland was the second safest European Union Member State in 2018 in terms of road mortality.

In 2024, 243 deaths occurred on the Island's roads, which "is a national tragedy", the bishop said. "[These deaths are] a failure in both public policy and in our own personal driving behaviour."

For Bishop Monahan, it is important families take responsibility for road deaths by discussing road safety at home. "This loss of human life is entirely preventable. There is an urgent need for a collective effort to reduce these preventable deaths."

New album purchases donated to the Dominicans

David Virgin's new album titled *Notre Dame* was released on January 3 through Triune Records Ireland (TRI). Produced by David Virgin, Rohan Healy and Al Quiff, it was recorded, mixed and mastered at Big Bucks Studios Dublin. The records were inspired by the Golden Age poets and Saints of Ireland.

All the purchases on Bandcamp (digital album is €8) will be donated to the Irish Dominican Priory at St Savior, Dublin for the upkeep of the Priory and the education of the Student Brothers.

Sr Clare on the big screen



Locals in Derry watching the opening of the cause for Sr Clare's beatification in the Brunswick Moviebowl theatre in the city. Picture: Brunswick Moviebowl.

A Catholic novelist and making babies for Denmark

When David Lodge died at the beginning of this month, he was hailed, in the obituaries, as the leading English Catholic novelist since Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh.

Mr Lodge, who was 89, had indeed written a famously hilarious novel about a young Catholic married couple, in 1965, struggling with the "Safe Period" of fertility control, and constantly in a tizz about it.

Adam and Barbara already have three young children, live in London rented accommodation (not unusual at the time) and are short of money and space. Adam, an academic, is terrified of fathering a fourth child, and becomes obsessed with whether his wife's menstrual period has arrived; feverishly, he sees thermometers everywhere (to test whether ovulation has occurred, thus naturally avoiding a pregnancy).

He hopes that Vatican II, begun in 1963, will make the Catholic ruling on birth control more "humane and liberal". He envies non-Catholic couples who can merrily go about contracepting without disturbing their consciences (although it turns out they may have their own marital problems too.)

Loyalty

There's a good deal of parody, pastiche and over-the-top comic passages in this classic and entertaining novel. Adam's Tipperary-born parish priest, Father Fintan, who

I met a lady last week who has been in treatment for a very serious cancer. But she was calm and smiling, and said she was much buoyed up by a "Prayer WhatsApp" group supporting her. Her circle of friends and family thus daily send her their prayers, and it really makes a difference to her.

Technology can be amazing – and used for the good.



Mary Kenny

“These Catholic married couples who struggled with Natural Family Planning really did want to be loyal to the church’s teaching, and they genuinely did value marriage”

denounces contraception fiercely from the pulpit, is described “the Priest Most Likely To Prevent The Conversion of England”; and there are some very funny farcical scenes involving embarrassments, fantasy and crazy coincidence, in the tradition of the genre.

“This was, indeed, the attitude of most married couples in those days: some babies were surely “unplanned” - but parents made the best of it”

But there's also a central point, which Lodge himself makes in an afterward: these Catholic married couples who struggled with Natural Family Planning really did want to be loyal to the Church's teaching, and they genuinely did value marriage. (He draws on personal experience, though the narrative isn't exactly autobiographical.) Moreover, at the end of the day, even Adam, fretting about the chances of his wife being pregnant again admits that if it happens “they'd make the best of it”.

This was, indeed, the attitude of most married

There's been so much bad news around for the beginning of 2025 that a friend remarked to me – “Well, at least we can be entertained by Donald Trump's Inauguration!”

Leaving aside the politics, it should be a great fashion parade next week,

couples in those days: some babies were surely “unplanned” - but parents made the best of it. Indeed, I know middle-aged adults happily living today – well-balanced and doted on by their parents – who were “mistakes” from a miscalculated “safe period” conception.

Analysis

David Lodge wrote a subsequent novel called “How Far Can You Go?” in which Catholic couples discuss the perils of relativism, and how, once you unravel the structure of a moral framework, perhaps the whole system may fall apart? This follow-up was published in 1980 and won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award.

But maybe this question of “how far can you go?” was asked too prematurely; more time needed to elapse before examining the result. If a novelist were to revisit this scenario in the 2020s, he would indeed have a rich source of material.

He (or she) would observe, in the field of sex and pregnancy, IVF babies, surrogate babies, egg donation, sperm donation – and contraception itself erased by the focus on abortion, elevated as the exercise of autonomous choice.

The comic novelist today could riff on the widespread decline of marriage, the rise in singledom in all the developed countries, and the numbers of children in

with so many Trumpian women – wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, grand-daughters - turning out in best bib and tucker.

Everyone likes a Cinderella story, and Melania Trump fills the bill here. When The Donald was first elected in 2016, she was snubbed by the high-



Melania will bring style to the inauguration, pictured here on a state visit to India. Photo: Shutterstock

care because of fractured family problems.

“Greenlanders in the 1960s – disapproving of their fertility – is now begging couples to ‘make a baby for Denmark’”

He could introduce farce and parody into the panic now manifest in most developed societies about the calamitous fall in births, necessitating mass immigration to provide a workforce, and a looming crisis in pensions.

He could amuse himself that Denmark, which foisted “involuntary contraception” on Greenlanders in the 1960s – disapproving of their fertility – is now begging couples to “make a baby for Denmark”, since they are running out of Danes.

Yes, it can be wryly amusing indeed the way – even literary - history turns out.

end couture designers because of her husband's controversial politics. But now they're queuing up to clothe her.

Whatever the politics, there's nothing wrong with a bit of style - a distraction in a sometimes sombre world.

PILGRIMAGE & COAST



SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO & ALBA ADRIATICA

27 MAY 2025 | 7 NIGHTS | FROM DUBLIN | €1375 pps

FATIMA & LISBON COAST | FROM DUBLIN

26 JUNE, 4 SEPT, 2 OCT 2025 | 7 NIGHTS | €1045 pps

ROME, ALBA ADRIATICA & SAN GIOVANNI

4 OCTOBER 2025 | 7 NIGHTS | FROM DUBLIN | €1395 pps

TO BOOK VISIT JOEWALSHTOURS.IE

info@joewalshstours.ie | 01 241 0800 | 89 Harcourt St, D02 WY88



Tours are operated by Petriava Limited t/a Joe Walsh Tours who are licensed by the Irish Aviation Authority TA 0804 TO 273.

The white martyrs who came north and got little thanks



Martina Purdy

Her name was Luca, but her family called her Pearl, and she was one of eight children born into the Henry family in Charlestown, Co. Mayo. Her parents came from a line of teachers whose legacy could be traced to 1844 and the “hedge schools” where the poorest in society got an informal education.

In post-war Ireland, Luca observed her father and mother toil for the good of others, spending hours filling in forms so that illiterate neighbours could claim state benefits.

She also came to know the power of education as a force for social change. “Not as sudden as a massacre,” remarked author Mark Twain. “... but more deadly in the long run!”

Luca was top of her class at Trinity, and even won a place at the Sorbonne in Paris. But instead of marrying, this pearl of great price became Sr Luca, after entering the St Louis Order in Monaghan as a young girl in the 1950s. “What a waste!” a male contemporary later remarked, because, under that veil, Luca Henry was a dark-haired beauty. “She had the world at her feet but she gave it all up.”

I thought of Luca - who passed away just over a year ago - and many like her, while reading the latest statement from the Association of Catholic Priests Ireland which has condemned the scapegoating of religious women.

Unjust

The association said these women took up the work that the state was either unwilling or unable to do, and are too often depicted in the media as “harsh-faced nuns” in habits. “It is false, and unjust,” said the association.

The association is a rather rebellious liberal lot,

“Holiness is indeed attractive, and the weekend media coverage of Sr Clare Crockett being made a Servant of God was a light in the darkness. This Derry girl, killed, aged 33, in an earthquake in Ecuador, deserves the title, Servant of God”

but on this occasion, I found myself applauding.

Many of these elderly nuns, said these priests, were now “too frail or frightened” to try to set the record straight, fearing they would be “showered with abuse” from many, many quarters.

“We know them and the hurt they experience by this portrayal. The reality is that most have lived quiet, hard-working lives with a minimum of financial reward.”

The ACP went on: “Many people were lifted out of poverty and lived successful lives because of the education provided by the religious women.”

Indeed tens of thousands of young women in West Belfast were empowered by the schools run by religious sisters such as Sr Luca.

“Sr Luca was kind, and understanding, but she was also tough. ‘With Luca,’ said one admirer, ‘the children always came first’”

When the St Louis Order founded St Genevieve’s Secondary School in working class West Belfast in 1966, Sr Luca and the other religious put their wages back into the school. They had come at the invitation of the Diocese of Down and Connor, which was desperate to have a girl’s secondary school in this deprived area. Soon the Troubles had broken out, but Sr Luca persevered, like many southern Irish women religious, who had effectively moved into a war zone. “They called us the white martyrs,” chuckled one such sister with a country lilt who had come to visit my convent on the Falls Road. “Steel magnolias!” I thought to myself.

Sr Luca was kind, and understanding, but she was also tough. “With Luca,”

said one admirer, “the children always came first”.

As principal in the 1980s, she spearheaded a campaign for a new building for St Genevieve’s which along with other religious run schools in West Belfast - such as St Dominic’s, St Rose’s and St Louise’s - has lifted generations of young women towards further education and professional life. Indeed one of St Genevieve’s graduates, Cathy Austin, a lay woman, is now acting principal.

Of course there are no statues, street plaques or gable walls dedicated to Luca or any other women religious in the city. “Eaten bread, soon forgotten”, a fellow reporter used to mutter when faced with ingratitude.

The Association of Catholic priests has accused some media of judging the past harshly, ignoring the context, while trying to outdo each other in “condemnation”. “Hindsight alters perspective,” it said.

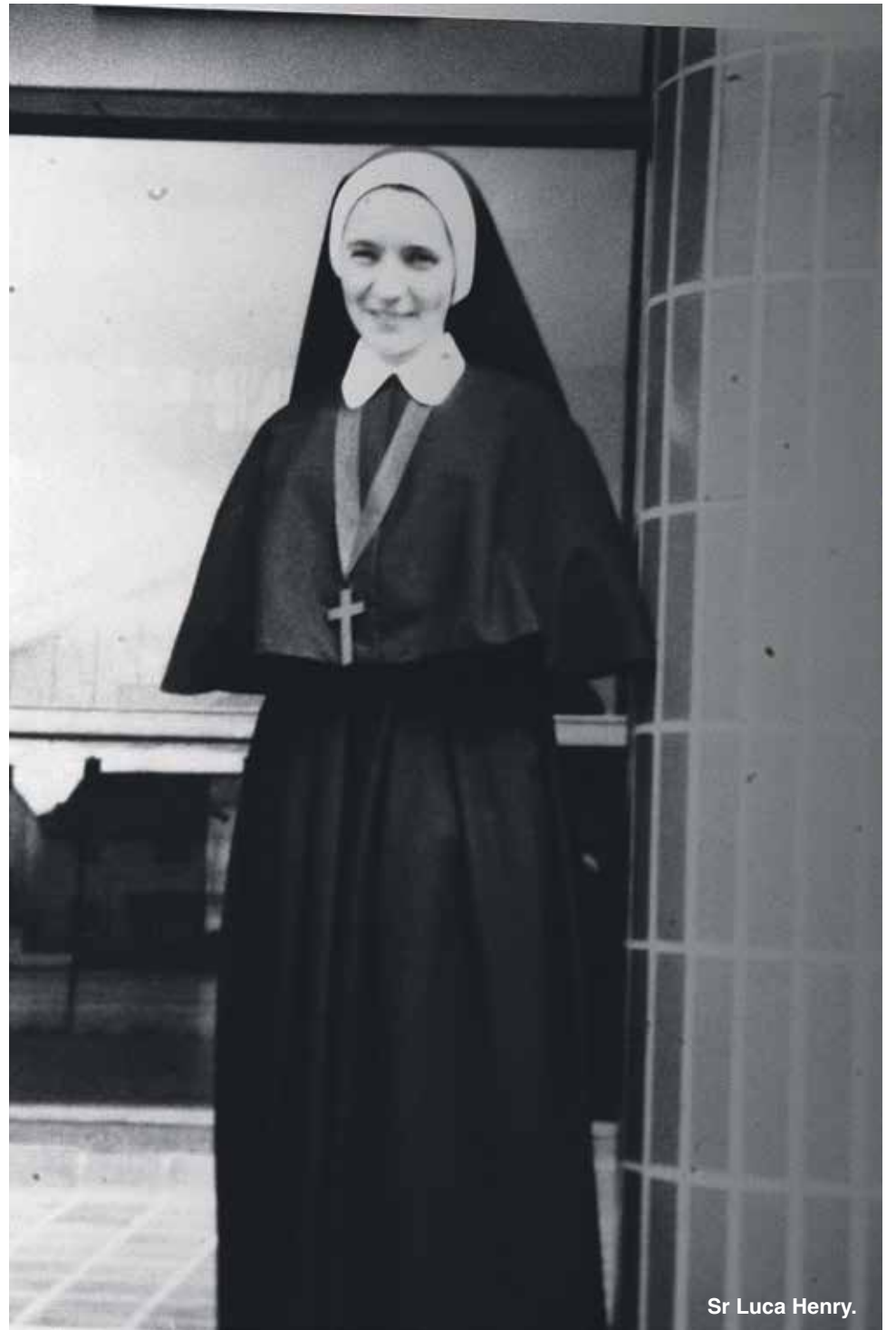
Many religious, it also claimed, now regret that their orders ever took on industrial schools, orphanages and mother and baby homes, providing services to single pregnant women “who no one wanted to help” - including their own families.

Culture

When I was a child at Catholic school in Toronto, in the early 1970s, the old culture, where children were “seen and not heard”, was disappearing fast. But I do remember the ruler being used and, and how a little girl in my class who had her curly red hair pulled, quite viciously, by a teacher, who was a lay woman.

No one, including the ACP, is asking for cover-ups, just, in the words of these priests: fairness, balance and perspective.

Columnist Mary Kenny recently noted how Hollywood has dramatically shifted in its portrayal of nuns, from angelic to demonic. Indeed I recall, about seven years ago, several odd incidents in Bel-



Sr Luca Henry.

fast, when my sister and I were strolling along in our brown habits: a group of little girls coming our way suddenly screamed and ran away in mock terror. It was later explained to me that there was a new horror film out about nuns.

“Many times in my life, I have encountered nuns with a vinegar face, and this is not friendly”

Even Pope Francis, however well-meaning, can be insulting and patronising to women religious. In off-the-cuff remarks reported

just days ago, the Pontiff told a group of missionary sisters to steer clear of gossip, and not to look sour. “Many times in my life, I have encountered nuns with a vinegar face, and this is not friendly,” he said. “This is not something that helps attract people.”

Holiness

Holiness is indeed attractive, and the weekend media coverage of Sr Clare Crockett being made a Servant of God was a light in the darkness. This Derry girl, killed, aged 33, in an earthquake in Ecuador, deserves the title, Servant of God. She was undoubtedly an exceptional young woman, who gave all for God, but she is not alone when it

comes to exceptional religious women.

I lived for five years with some heroic sisters who quietly served for decades, among them Sr Magdalene Bishop, a convert from London and Sr Marie-Dolores O’Brien, from Ferns Wexford, who died not long after Sr Luca.

They are the last in that generation of religious women who fell in love with Jesus, took the Gospel to heart, and poured themselves out with great faith, hope and love, over many decades. They were not hard-faced nuns in habit, but steel magnolias, tough and kind women, white martyrs who ‘spent themselves for Christ’ and left more than footprints of faith.

‘We are a people who have known what it is to live with fear and even terror’



Nuala O'Loan

Last Sunday the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus marked the end of the Christmas period. Jesus moved from his private life - the carpenter son of Mary and Joseph - into his brief public life: the three short years of his ministry. We are told, “while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove and a voice came from heaven, You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.” That love, that favour, did not spare Jesus great pain, though he was the Son of God.

Our faith brings us perennial new beginnings which are redolent with hope, yet each new beginning comes in a world in which there is so much pain and suffering. Some of it affects us directly, some does not.

I have been slightly involved recently in matters arising from the internal conflict in Iran and the war in Israel and Gaza.

Terror

The people of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been subjected to a regime of terror, torture and mass executions since 1979, enforced by the murderous Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), proscribed as a terrorist grouping by many countries including Canada, Sweden and the US. Last year politicians in both Ireland and the UK called for the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organisation, to no avail. Meanwhile in the last four months alone 700 people have been executed, among them 34 women and seven children. The National Council of Resistance in Iran, led by Maryam Rajavi works bravely across



Berlin Germany, May 18, 2024: Event protesting the execution of young people in Iran and supporting the people and the Iranian uprising. Photo: Shutterstock

the world, despite the endless threats and attacks by the IRGC, trying to bring freedom to Iran and its people. One day Iran will be free but her people need support from the rest of the world to achieve that.

The suffering in Israel as a consequence of events following the attacks by Hamas in October 2023, in which some 1200 people were killed, thousands were injured and 254 were taken hostage by Hamas, continues. Hamas continues to attack Israel. Israel is determined to eradicate Hamas. The conflict has spread. Some 45,000 people are reported to have died in Gaza since October 7. The terrible destruction is shown nightly on our televisions.

“Since October 7, 80 members of their two families have been killed in Gaza”

I encountered one affected family just before Christmas. Their experi-

ence has brought the situation in Gaza very much alive to me. Dr Omar Alshaqqaqi and his wife Dalal live in Belfast with their two children. Dr Alshaqqaqi works at the Cancer Centre in Belfast City Hospital.

October 7

Since October 7, 80 members of their two families have been killed in Gaza. On December 4 Dalal, who had been unable to speak for many months to her mother and sister who were in a displaced persons camp in Gaza, was able to do so. As they concluded their conversation, so that Dalal could go and collect her children from school in Belfast, she heard a bomb explode. When she returned they learned that her mother and 34 year old brother had been killed and that her three sisters and two of her three brothers had been seriously injured. They are now in Gaza and unable to get hospital treatment for their injuries; there is no anaesthesia, no medication and no pain relief. The border with Egypt remains closed and they have no way of getting out of Gaza. It is essential that the Egypt-

tian border is opened again to let them and so many like them out to a safe third country, a process which could be managed by the UN, so that the burden does not fall on Egypt alone.

As everywhere else, whilst there is pain, there is also great individual courage and goodness in Gaza. We know that some 450 Catholics and Orthodox Christians are living in the compound of the last Catholic Church in Gaza, the Church of the Holy Family, looked after by religious sisters and the parish priest Fr. Gabriel Romanelli. The people do what they can to help their Muslim neighbours. The sisters and priest could have left early on, but chose to stay on with their people.

“What those sisters and that priest are doing for those helpless people in Gaza is what Jesus has done for the whole human race by becoming one of us”

Our parish priest, Fr Michael reflected on the courage of those who could leave but chose to stay, in the context of coming of Jesus, and his baptism, saying “this is what human solidarity is all about. It is a commitment to be there for other people

in their hour of need. It is being on the side of people when they need us most. It's about going the extra mile and sacrificing ourselves for others. What those sisters and that priest are doing for those helpless people in Gaza is what Jesus has done for the whole human race by becoming one of us. He has taken our side - he has made a commitment to be here for us in an act of human solidarity that has cost him everything.”

Sacrificing

This sacrificing ourselves for others is not something we talk about very much. Yet sacrificing ourselves is actually giving of ourselves and we all know just how true it is that in giving, on so many occasions, we receive so much more than we can ever give. So what can you do? What can I do? It will depend on our individual circumstances and if we listen carefully to the Spirit we will come to discern what each of us can and should do.

Governments must be encouraged by us to act in these perilous situations, to sanction and proscribe organisations, to work for peace even when it seems hopeless.

Terror on a scale such as that in Iran, Israel or Gaza is hard to imagine, yet the individual effects of conflict can be understood in Ireland, north and south, for we are a people who have known

what it is to live with fear and even terror.

“For some that pain continues today. It continues for all the families of those whose loved ones vanished as a consequence of what happened to them in Northern Ireland”

I read recently of 65 men who were murdered and disappeared during the War of Independence in Ireland - their bodies have never been recovered. For their families, like the families of the disappeared during the NI troubles, each day must have brought its wrenching pain as they struggled to find out whether their loved ones were alive or dead. For some that pain continues today. It continues for all the families of those whose loved ones vanished as a consequence of what happened to them in Northern Ireland. That pain continues too, for so many people like Dr Omar and Dalal and their children.

Let us be generous in giving of our time in deeds and prayer, living like Jesus, carrying in our hearts and souls the individual suffering being experienced not only here in our parishes but also in these distant places, and trying to bring comfort where we can.

“Terror on a scale such as that in Iran, Israel or Gaza is hard to imagine, yet the individual effects of conflict can be understood in Ireland, north and south, for we are a people who have known what it is to live with fear and even terror”

Sadness and loss as Veritas closes 'iconic' Abbey St shop



Chai Brady

Staff and customers expressed sadness and loss on the last day Veritas bookshop on Abbey St opened last week, after almost 100 years in operation in Dublin City centre.

Evelyn Gaynor, former head of retail in Veritas Ireland, told *The Irish Catholic* on the shop's last day on January 10 that it's "an end of an era really, for both staff and customers".

"We've had some regular customers for years, we know them all on a first name basis and they know us. It wasn't just a place to shop it was a place to call in as well when you had any trouble – they come and have a chat with us, anybody that had bereavements as well they would pop in, and we would try to help them. I was here myself with my own mam when I made my communion and confirmation, it's iconic," Ms Gaynor said.

The shop was opened in 1928 and also served as Veritas' head office.

Sentiments

Customer Mary Maguire from Drimnagh in Dublin visited the Abbey Street shop on its last day with her daughter and granddaughter, she described the closure as "very sad" as it is always her first stop when she comes to town.

"The books are so brilliant – you would never get the same collection of books again in another shop. Someone might take a few of the books on but to have everything under the same roof is brilliant. I was introduced to Veritas by a friend when I was 14. I don't know what I'm going to do now," Ms Maguire said.

Another customer Cecily O'Hara from Glasnevin said she has 10 grandchildren and that "I go here most years to get their communion beads,

"You would never get the same collection of books again in another shop. Someone might take a few of the books on but to have everything under the same roof is brilliant"

"I've been coming here for 25 years at least. It's a refuge, it's a great place to come, it can't be replaced. It has the character"

their prayer books and their cards. I will certainly miss it".

Charles Aketch Nyando who lives in Santry and has been in Ireland for 35 years said he wants to spread the Faith to his children and that Veritas was a great resource.

"Veritas closing down is a big loss not only to me but to the family, and the generations to come. People thing online is the way forward, but people like to meet in Veritas where they can talk about different aspects of life on a day-to-day basis... I have met so many priests over the years in Veritas, some are gone, some are still alive, it is just sad in a way. This is where you will meet the old people who will bring you back to Faith..." Mr Nyando said.

"I was pretty lost, I had nowhere to go. Veritas gave me a job and helped me, so it's like a second home for me to be honest. It's pretty sad. I'm losing a job as well"

Jesuit priest Fr Donal Neary SJ, editor of Messenger Publications and who is based in the nearby Gardiner Street parish, also visited the shop on its last day and told this paper: "It's sad day, I've been coming here since I was in school 65 years ago.

"We used to get books in Veritas for prizes for religious essays. They were always very decent to us. Then I've been in touch with Veritas all over the years, coming into the shop, I've also wrote a few books for them. It's terrible it's going, we'll miss it very much," Fr Neary said.

He thanked the staff, adding it was "a very hospitable place to come into. I'm very

sorry it's going I don't know what is going to take its place".

Kakil Krishna (24) from Bangalore in India has been working in Veritas for the last year, but says he will now have to find another job.

He said: "I came to Dublin last November and I was pretty lost, I had nowhere to go. Veritas gave me a job and helped me, so it's like a second home for me to be honest. It's pretty sad. I'm losing a job as well."

Missing

Elizabeth Kelly from Maynooth, Co. Kildare, and Robert Lambert who is living in Wicklow visited the shop together. Both expressed their concern about where they might get the same products Veritas provides in future.

Mr Lambert said: "I've been coming here for 25 years at least. It's a refuge, it's a great place to come, it can't be replaced. It has the character."

Ms Kelly said: "I'd just like to say how sorry I am that such a wonderful facility in the city is gone, and what's to replace it? Where do you go? I would not go online. You come in here, the staff know what they're talking about, know what you're looking for, will order it if they haven't got it in stock. It's a dreadful loss to the city."

Michael Kelly from Kildare said: "It's such a pity, it has served so long in Dublin, for many, many years. It's inter-generational, everyone has a clear memory of it. It's always such an enjoyable experience, such lovely staff, you never knew which kind of titles you would come across. You could find out a friend is in trouble, and you come across a prayer that suits their particular circumstances. It's a sad day for sure, but I suppose it's a sign of the times, but bigger and better things are coming."

Pat McCormack from Tipperary told the paper he is "very sad" to see the Veritas shop closing adding that the market must not be there any longer for it, adding "it will probably go online but I personally would not be an online shopper of anything. It's always lovely to go into a bookshop".



The iconic Veritas bookshop on Abbey Street which closed on January 10, 2025.



Bláithín (2) held by her mother Cailín – who are based in Terenure – with her mother Mary Maguire from Drimnagh in Dublin. Photos: Chai Brady



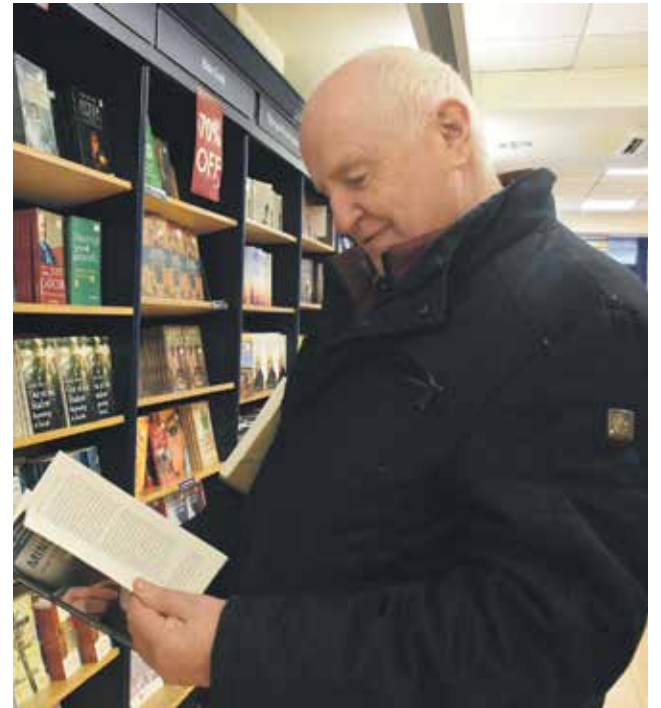
Veritas staff Neeraj CK, who's based in Castlenock, and Kakil Krishna on their last day working in the Abbey Street shop.



Cecily O'Hara from Glasnevin in Dublin.



Melinda Zsiros, now living in Dublin but originally from Hungary.



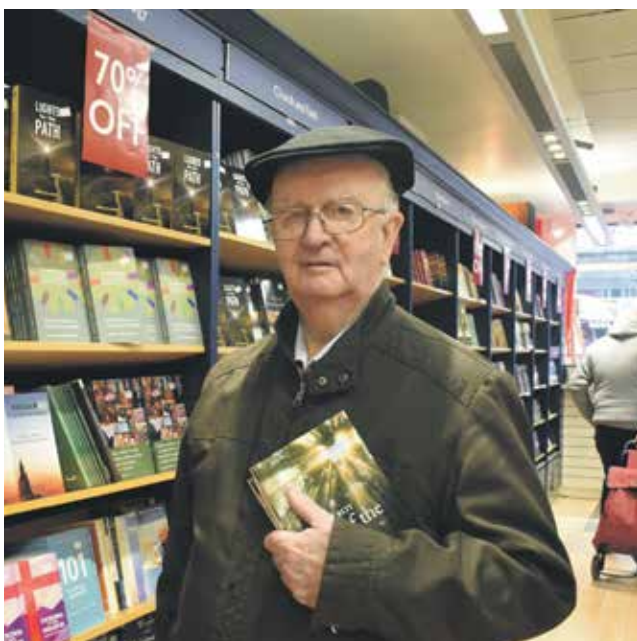
Pat McCormack from Tipperary.



Elizabeth Kelly from Maynooth, Co. Kildare, and Robert Lambert who is living in Wicklow.



Mary and Liam Lally from Clontarf, Dublin.



Fr Donal Neary SJ, editor of Messenger Publications, who is based in Gardiner St parish, Dublin.



Charles Aketch Nyando, originally from Tanzania, who is now based Santry in Dublin.



Michael Kelly from Kildare.

Relentless Ministry

In a new series written by **Priests**, we will explore what most priests describe as “Relentless Ministry” and the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today



The Irish Catholic

If you would like to contribute to this series, contact in confidence editor@irishcatholic.ie

Great expectations and endless demands

“I suspect that if there is no real radical change in the immediate future, then the priests left will find themselves on a quicker path to the eternal world”



The current St Patrick's Church as seen through the window of the Old Abbey in Wicklow town. The Abbey was established around 1265 AD by the Conventual Franciscans and remained until they were expelled in 1552. After that it was used as a prison and court house but has been a ruin since about 1640.



Fr Aquinas Duffy

We have just begun a new Jubilee Year. We are reminded that we are called to be “Pilgrims of Hope”. I have always seen myself as a pilgrim. I have been privileged to have served in so many appointments in the Archdiocese of Dublin. I have also learned so much on the journey through the people that I have encountered. I have given myself to serve the Lord in the places that I have been sent to minister in. I am always hopeful for the future because that future is in God's Hands. Our hope springs from our faith and trust in the Lord who accompanies us on the journey.

I met a man over Christmas who was telling me that he would soon be 65. He is already retired but commented that once you get to this age, you start to think more about your

own mortality. I was reminded that I will soon be this age myself but am not retired yet. And yet in my way of life, people seem to expect priests to continue being in active ministry until the Lord calls them to the next world. One hears comments like “Isn't he wonderful at the age of 90 to be still actively involved in the parish.”

“At times, the demands can seem endless with no real break within a twelve month period. Given the current pastoral plan of the Church in Ireland, these demands will increase and multiply”

And people often have an expectation that priests, advanced in years, should continue to keep everything going as it was in the past. There is a belief that there will always be a priest available for baptisms, weddings,

funerals, Sunday Masses in all the churches, daily Mass in a number of churches and nursing homes, Confirmations and First Holy Communions. There is also an expectation that the priest attends everything including parish meetings and various gatherings of one kind or another. But that expectation is not possible to sustain. As I reach my sixty fifth year, I am aware that my energy levels are not what they used to be. At times, the demands can seem endless with no real break within a twelve month period. Given the current pastoral plan of the Church in Ireland, these demands will increase and multiply.

Reality

The reality is that there will be very few priests in Ireland in the future. No one has easy answers as to how the Church is going to adapt to that reality. Currently, the plan seems to be to try and use available priests to cover all the existing parishes. As the number of priests declines, priests will have to cover a bigger number of parishes. I am currently looking after three parishes with seven churches in it. Fortunately, I do have two other priests with me, one over 75 and the other 72. In the not-too-distant future, there will be just one or two priests to cover a whole county. When that day arrives, the Sunday Eucharist may be celebrated in only one or two of the big towns in the county. People will have to travel. A day may come when the Sunday Eucharist may be only celebrated in the cities of the country. Indeed, under the current plan, there may well come a day when Mass one Sunday will be in Dublin and in Cork, Limerick, Galway and Belfast on the alternative Sundays. Clearly, the Church needs to find new ways so that the Eucharist can continue to be celebrated. But of course, the Lord will continue to be present when people gather in his name and when people listen to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit too will be alive and active in the communities who want to share the message of the Lord.

I once had a priest from one of the African countries assisting in the parish. I asked him for his observations about the Church in Ireland. He told me that in his country a typical parish had 20 churches in it covering a large area. Each

parish had a Sunday Eucharist every few months. He commented that they had enough priests at present to cover those parishes. The catechists gather the people on the Sundays when no priest was present. The catechists also conducted the funerals and baptisms. In Ireland, he said, each church seems to be a parish rather than a parish of churches. It's worth reflecting on.

Thankfully, parishioners are starting to be involved in leading Eucharistic services and involved in funeral ministry and other ministries. But perhaps the time has come for the Church to authorise lay people to also officiate at weddings, to administer the sacrament of Baptism, to conduct Funeral services. I suspect that if there is no real radical change in the immediate future, then

the priests left will find themselves on a quicker path to the eternal world. Perhaps, their absence will force change to come about. Change is always difficult as we tend to want the stability of what we are used to. There is a painful and difficult journey ahead for the Church in Ireland. It's hard to let go of the current structure of the Church. The Lord has led us to where we are for a reason. And out of the journey will be born something new and beautiful.

Ultimately the journey is in God's hands, but God may have a different plan than the one we think or want. But it is to God that we entrust the Journey.

i Fr Aquinas Duffy is Parish Priest for Wicklow, Kilbride & Bardarrig, and Ashford & Glenealy



YOUR LAST GIFT MEANS WE ARE ALWAYS FIRST THERE

GOAL

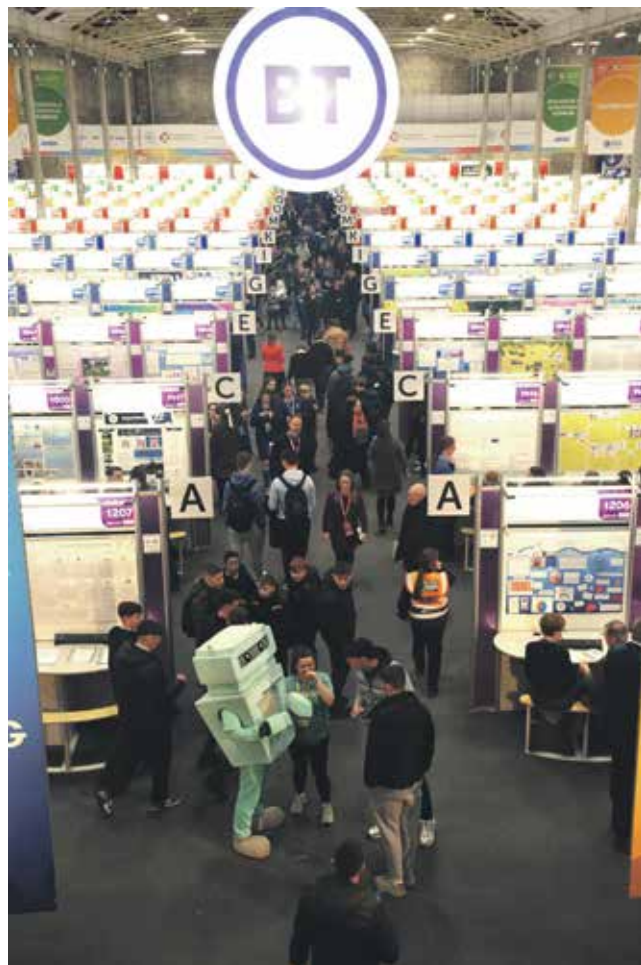


A GIFT IN YOUR WILL TO GOAL MEANS WE CAN BE FIRST THERE WHEN CONFLICT AND CRISIS HAPPEN

goal.ie/GiftInWill

email: cpollard@goal.ie or Phone: 01-2809779

Catholic school whizzes from across Ireland delight at the BT Young Scientist



The BT Young Scientist and Technology Competition 2025 in the RDS, Dublin, which ran from January 8-11. Photos: Chai Brady



Tánaiste Micheál Martin, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, speaks at a press conference last Thursday in the RDS during the BT Young Scientist exhibition.



Katie Kirrane (15) of Mount St Michael in Mayo who investigated the development and effectiveness of 'EyeFocus', a mobile app to treat myopia and enhance eye health through evidence based interventions and user engagement.



Caoimhe Barry (16), Kate Nolan (16) and Medb Culhane (15), project focused on the mental and physical effects of acne on the teenage body and the most effective ways of treating it. They are based in Presentation Secondary School Listowel, Co. Kerry.



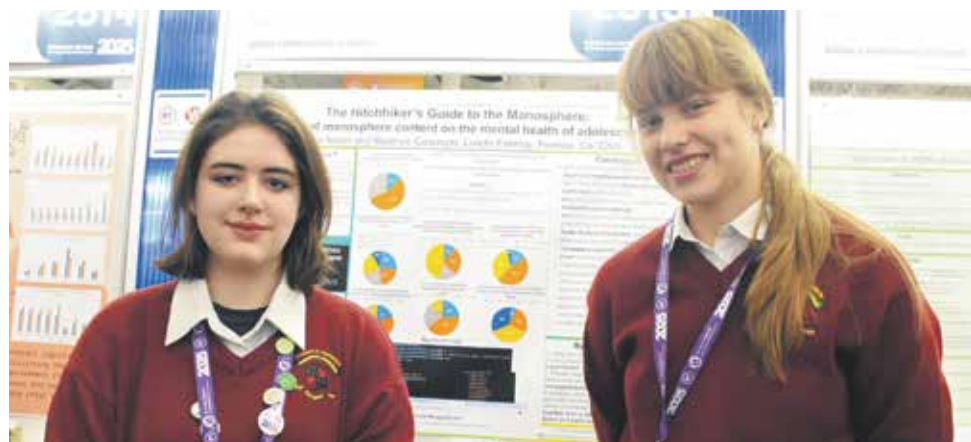
Jake Donaghy (13), Niall Hackett (12) and Danil Krunglevicius (12) from St Patrick's College in Tyrone are the innovators behind the 'Venturi Shield', a device that increases the volume and concentration of oxygen within the body whilst playing sport.



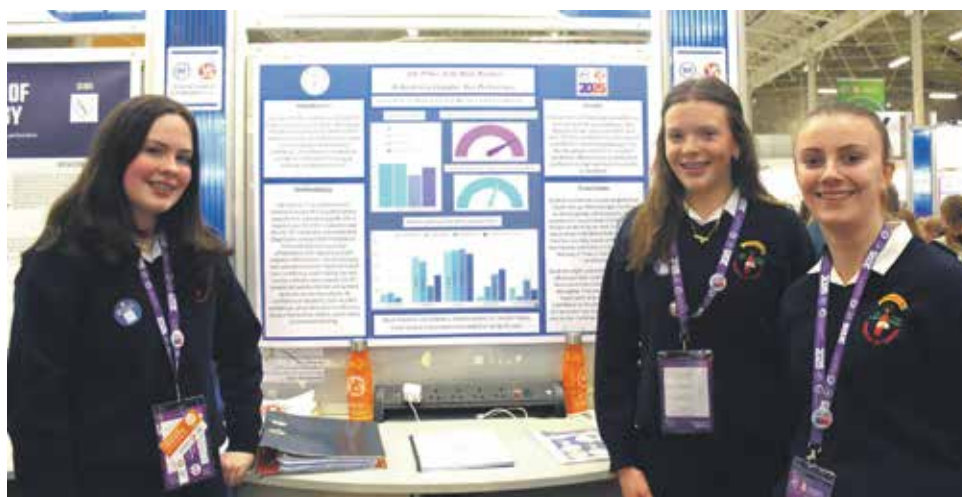
Entitled 'Solivitor Ambulando', Anna Zheng (14), Síofra Fitzmaurice (14) and Elizabeth McGovern (14) of Loreto College The Green in Dublin, investigated the relationship between walking and performance in a nonverbal problem-solving test.



Lexie Melrose (18) and Rebecca Lewis (17) from St Mary's College, Co. Derry, investigated ways to recycle lithium, other materials and the products of the reactions of reclaiming the lithium hydrogen and heat energy from used vapes.



'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Manosphere - the Effects of Manosphere Content on the Mental Health of Adolescent Boys' was the project title of Amélie Nolan (15) and Beatrice Cesonyte (16) from Loreto Secondary School, Co. Cork. They state: "The manosphere is a collection of online anti-female communities negatively influencing adolescent boys. Our project demonstrates this impact and delivers solutions to address it."



Claire Mulcahy (16), Clodagh McCarthy (15) and Sheana Hayes O' Mahony (16) from St Mary's High School in Cork looked into whether students can be influenced by third parties to alter their self-confidence and consequently alter their performance results in cognitive tests.



“Sheep Strength’: Using wool to reinforce concrete’ was the focus of Aoife Fadian (15) and Jessica O’Connor (16) from Ursuline College Sligo’s project. They tested the feasibility of mixing different types of sheep wool with concrete as a more sustainable strengthening agent instead of polypropylene.



Michaela Kelly’s (15) project entitled ‘Is the teabag method a more sustainable way of water testing?’ investigates whether teabags are a more sustainable method for obtaining the trophic level of lakes. She is based in Co. Clare studying in Mary Immaculate Secondary School.



Shay Kelly (16), Liam O’Donovan (16) and Karolis Gridziuska (not pictured), from Árd scoil Uí Urmoltaigh in Cork investigated utilising and repurposing household waste into mushroom based materials.



Áine McGovern (15) and Alicja Czop (15) of St Bricin’s College, Co. Cavan investigated the efficiency of jelly-enclosed versus freely-suspended microbial fuel cells using artificial urine and faeces for sustainable energy generation.



Rory McCarthy (17), Adam Baker (18) and Vincent Daly (17) of Mount St Michael school in Cork investigated Ireland’s large agricultural community with a project entitled ‘Fingerprinting water and determining its age to help improve the quality of our rivers’. They looked into the overuse of slurry and fertiliser which causes runoff to enter streams and impacts over 1,000 streams.



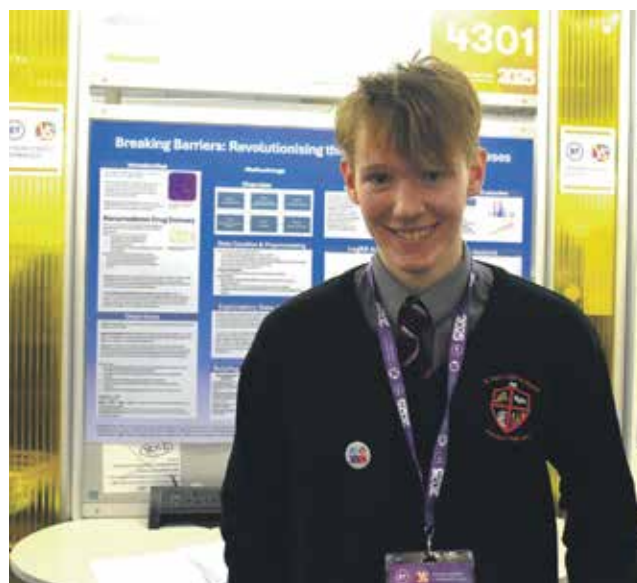
Doireann Walsh (16), Ciara Mulcahy (16) and Zita Régert (not pictured), with a project entitled ‘Visualise It! An interactive teaching tool’, aimed to develop an interactive app that helps students learn human anatomy effectively through 3D models enhancing student engagement and retention. They’re from Scoil Pól in Co. Limerick.



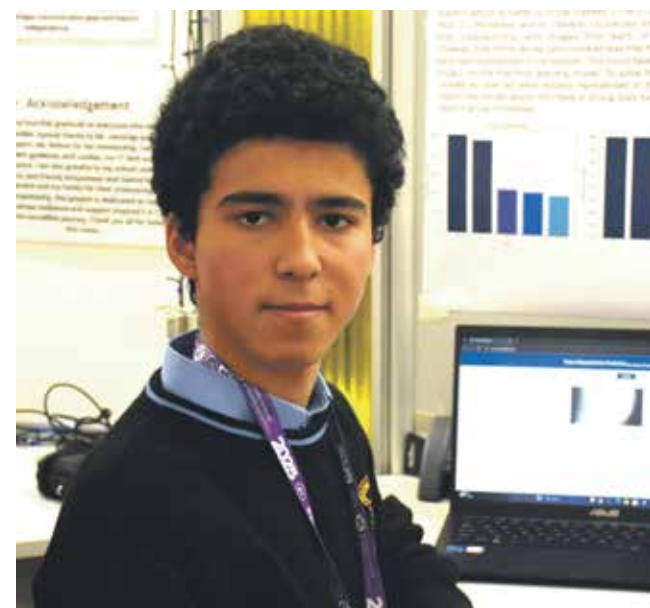
Kirsty Weldon (16) of St Marys College Arklow in Wicklow's project was called 'Wrist Wellness: Pressure Alert System'. The aim was to create a hand-worn device to measure the pressure put on the hand and wrist to assist with rehabilitation from injury.



Calvin Smith (16), Jack Callan (16) and Liam Summers (16) from Inver College in Monaghan aimed to help beginners learn chess.



From St Mary's CBS school in Co. Laois Joshua Corbett (16) applied machine learning to predict and optimise nanoparticle permeation through the blood-brain barrier for improved drug delivery in central nervous system disorders.



Hazem Ahmed (15) of Coláiste Phádraig CBS in Dublin developed a machine learning model which aids in the diagnosis of osteoarthritis.



With their project called 'Chicken Talk', Alfie McGrath (16), André Mulcahy Viegas (15) and Alex Loughnane (16) – St Brendan's Community School in Offaly – examined the effect of different chicken feeds on hens and their egg output and quality.



Max Grogan (15) and Finn O'Donail (16), St Andrews College Dublin, created an intruder detection system powered by machine learning, to protect the data of medical appointment computing system software in an 'AI-controlled world'.

What is the significance of Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin?



Mark Patrick Hederman explores the life and legacy of the Jesuit scientist/theologian

In a nutshell I would describe him as 'a mystic in a mouse trap.'

I would rank him with Gerard Manley Hopkins [also a Jesuit] as a poet who has left us with several beautiful thought-provoking images: treatises on the Eucharist, on the evolutionary process, on contemplation, on the Mass and on prayer. I find his writings inspiring and helpful, not as dogmatic truths but as prayerful meditations and striking poems, taking T.S.Eliot's definition of poetry as 'raids on the inarticulate' or evocative 'stabs at the truth.'

I do not take him too seriously either as a scientist or as a theologian where his theses have been found wanting by experts in both of these areas. When I find current spiritual writers using him as an authority in their offerings, as the medieval writers might have quoted Aristotle or the Pseudo-Dionysus, I tend to close such books and move on to less bombastic and more humble screeds.

Context

Above all, I think we have to situate Teilhard in his socio-historical context. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (May 1 1881 – April 10 1955). You could say he lived at an awkward time and in a personally privileged set of circumstances. He came from a large well-off Catholic family in France, which makes a great difference to one's educational prospects and self-esteem. His was a minorly aristocratic milieu in a country where Catholicism had established itself as the ruling ethos.

His mother was a great-grandniece of Voltaire. He inherited the double surname from his father, who was descended on the Teilhard side from an ancient family of

magistrates ennobled under Louis XVIII.

He was educated by the Jesuits and entered their society as a teenager. He was a gifted scientist who was trained as a palaeontologist with the usual dedication, expertise and flair we associate with training of candidates to that order. Being a priest meant that he studied theology and lived the life of an ordained minister which allowed him to combine two areas of specialisation, theology and science, unusual at the time.

“Most Catholics, along with the general public, were outraged at the suggestion that we were directly descended from apes”

Early in his life in the 1920s or so, he made a total commitment to the evolutionary process, described by Darwin, as the core of his spirituality, at a time when other religious thinkers felt evolutionary thinking challenged the structure of conventional Christian faith. Both Darwin and Freud were suspect in most schools of Christian spirituality and theological investigation. We only have to think of the Scopes Trial in the USA, also known as the Scopes Monkey Trial, which was the 1925 prosecution of science teacher John Scopes for teaching evolution in a Tennessee public school, which a recent bill had made illegal.

Most Catholics, along with the general public, were outraged at the suggestion that we were directly descended from apes.

Teilhard developed an evolutionary vision of our planetary future, currently developing from a sphere of life, or biosphere towards a sphere of mind, or noosphere. As a visionary, Teilhard was not only on the brink of formulating what later became the internet, but he also anticipated current academic efforts to understand globalisation, as well as human, cultural and technological evolution.

In 1941, Teilhard submitted to Rome his most important work, *Le Phénomène Humain*. By 1947,

Rome forbade him to write or teach on philosophical subjects.

Such prohibition was no small part of his later sensational publicity. As in Ireland, where authors like Edna O'Brien and John McGahern probably owed some of their phenomenal book sales to the notoriety of being condemned under our censorship act [in the all-female secondary school attended by my sister in the 1950s the girls in her class derived their private reading list from books banned by the Catholic Church – each girl was required, by order of her peer group contemporaries to bring back to school after the summer holidays at least one such banned book to complete the illicit library which was housed under the floorboards of one of the dormitories].

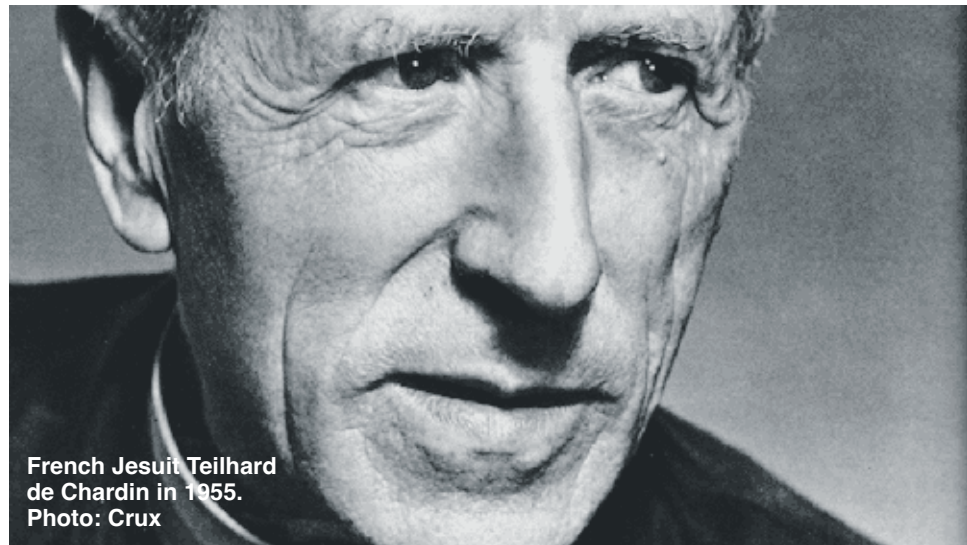
Condemned

In 1962 the CDF condemned several of Teilhard's works based on their alleged ambiguities and doctrinal errors. Most of this was an attempt to protect the account of the origins of the human race as given in the Book of Genesis in the Bible. As with many fundamentalists today, the word of God as printed in the Bible was that 'scientific' account of how the creator had actually fashioned the universe.

Meanwhile, Teilhard was permitted to head for China where he worked on various paleontological discoveries which kept him away from controversy.

Allen Grim [of the Yale Forum on Religion] has said: "I think you have to distinguish between the hundreds of papers that Teilhard wrote in a purely scientific vein, about which there is no controversy. In fact, the papers made him one of the top two or three geologists of the Asian continent. So this man knew what science was. What he's doing in *The Phenomenon* and most of the popular essays that have made him controversial is working pretty much alone to try to synthesise what he's learned about through scientific discovery - more than with scientific method - what scientific discoveries tell us about the nature of ultimate reality."

It is almost as if having discovered the jawbone of an ass out in the desert, the poet and the mystic in Teilhard began to fashion a complete anatomy of the human race and

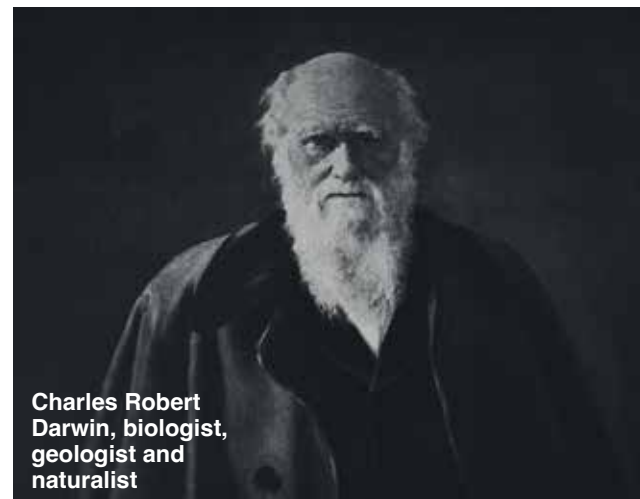


French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin in 1955. Photo: Crux

then to attach this to the magnificent vision of an Omega point towards which we were all evolving and which would be the ultimate figure of Jesus Christ in his risen form where all would be recapitulated. These writings were controversial to some scientists because Teilhard combined theology and metaphysics with science, and they were even more controversial to some religious leaders for the same reason. But the vision is so beautiful that many have been captivated. For, as Nietzsche has said, "if life were a dream, well then I'd as soon choose that one!" Later examination of mostly his letters suggest that Teilhard had a less than sympathetic view of many of the rest of us, the great unwashed who comprise the majority of those on the evolutionary journey towards the Omega point of the future. In fact there would seem to be required some considerable 'ethnic cleansing' before we can become sufficiently purified to gain entry to the golden circle of that ultimate Omega.

“It's author can be excused of dishonesty only on the grounds that before deceiving others he has taken great pains to deceive himself”

Teilhard de Chardin tried heroically to introduce teleology into the universe with his Omega Point, but his vision has passed neither theological nor scientific muster... P.B. Medawar writes of Teilhard's *Phenomenon of Man*. "It's author can be excused of dishonesty only on the grounds



Charles Robert Darwin, biologist, geologist and naturalist

that before deceiving others he has taken great pains to deceive himself."

It is interesting to note that Teilhard worked for a while on the controversial Piltdown Man. This was a fraud in which bone fragments were represented as the fossilised remains of a previously unknown early human. Although there were doubts about its authenticity virtually from its announcement in 1912, the remains were still broadly accepted for many years, and the falsity of the hoax was only definitively demonstrated in 1953.

Fraudulent

An extensive scientific review in 2016 established that an amateur archaeologist Charles Dawson was responsible for the fraudulent evidence. In 1912, Dawson claimed that he had discovered the "missing link" between early apes and human beings. These finds included a jawbone, more skull fragments, a set of teeth, and primitive tools. Woodward reconstructed the skull fragments and hypothesised that they belonged to a human ancestor from 500,000 years ago. The dis-

covery was announced at a Geological Society meeting and was given the Latin name *Eoanthropus dawsoni* ("Dawson's dawn-man"). The questionable significance of the assemblage remained the subject of considerable controversy until it was conclusively exposed in 1953 as a forgery. It was found to have consisted of the altered mandible and some teeth of an orangutan deliberately combined with the cranium of a fully developed, though small-brained, modern human. The Piltdown hoax is prominent for two reasons: the attention it generated around the subject of human evolution, and the length of time – 41 years – that elapsed from its alleged initial discovery to its definitive exposure as a composite forgery.

The Piltdown hoax stands as a cautionary tale which can similarly apply to the comprehensive theories of Teilhard de Chardin, who is even accused by some of aiding and abetting Dawson in his attempt to establish at least one missing link for the total Meccano set they were both trying, in their own well-meaning way to put on the market.

Out&About

Armagh vocations gathering



ARMAGH: Archbishop Eamon Martin joined seminarians, deacons in formation and the vocations and formation team for Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral of Armagh on January 4.



BELGIUM: Members of The Catholic Chaplaincy at QUB joined the English Speaking Community of Leuven in Sint Kwinten Church on January 5 for Mass. They met recently ordained Fr Vincent of the Archdiocese of New York who also studied in Belfast.



ARMAGH: (L/R) Fr Patrick Desmond OP, Fintan Burns (co-author) with Very Rev Emlyn McGinn PP Forkhill at the Church of St Oliver Plunkett at the launch of *The Bible in a Week with the Blessed Virgin Mary*. The book proposes new mysteries of the Rosary, reflecting the Old Testament background to the New Testament and is available at choicepublishing.ie

IN SHORT

Belfast church opens doors to homeless during freezing weather

A church in Belfast has opened its doors to homeless persons during the freezing weather. St Mary's Church accommodated 29 people on January 8 after the activation of The Serious Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), which means emergency accommodation is provided to people when temperatures are at zero degrees or less in the UK.

The Welcome Organisation, a charity from Belfast who provides support to people affected by homelessness, was among groups and charities overseeing the actions taken to secure emergency temporary shelter was being provided.

The Welcome Organisation lost their former charity centre at Townsend Street in Belfast during an attack in July 2024. Ellie Hipsley, the organisation's outreach worker, told *The Irish News* they were "becoming increasingly concerned about what would happen when SWEP was implemented," but "thankfully, when we reached out, St Mary's Church were

among those who responded. They allow us to bring people out of the freezing cold and into shelter."

The Parish Priest Fr Timothy Barlett told *The Irish News* the church hall was already being used as emergency shelter, but with the extreme weather increasing the number of people in need of accommodation, they sheltered people in the church.

The priest said he was approached by the charity before Christmas and the parish was more than happy to help. "In many ways, we do the easy part, in opening the doors and providing heat and hot drinks. But it's the Welcome Organisation and other groups such as the People's Kitchen that do the hard job on the streets, and I wish to offer my gratitude and express admiration on behalf of the parish community for the amazing work these teams do."

Kerry school pays tribute to late former principal Sr Canisius Collins

Tributes were paid last week to late Sr Canisius Collins,

who was principal of the Presentation Secondary School in Milltown, Co. Kerry for 18 years before her retirement in 2005.

On a statement posted on social media, the school said Sr Collins loved visiting the school after her retirement and to meet students, "many of whose parents and family members she would have taught."

The sister attended the school's Presentation Day 2024, which had the newly ordained former student Fr Sean Murphy celebrating Mass. "During the service Fr Sean noted the significant role Sr Canisius played in nurturing and strengthening his vocation to the priesthood."

The school remembers Sr Collins fondly by "her dedication and commitment to the students and families of Presentation Milltown from the day she entered the school to long after her retirement."

"As a school community we thank God for guiding Sr Canisius through her vocation from a young energetic woman entering the Presentation Order to the wise and insightful mentor that we will miss and mourn."

Edited by Renata Steffens
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DUBLIN: Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Dublin Paul Dempsey with members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem during the 58th World Day of Peace Mass in St Brigid's Church, Killester. Photo: John McElroy.



DUBLIN: Rathmines Parish Young Adult group gathered on January 9 for an 'speed apologetics' event, when they learned how to speak about their faith in the modern world.



DUBLIN: Eoin McCormack, leader of the Rathmines Parish Young Adult group and The Irish Catholic's contributor speaking during the recent 'speed apologetics' event, when he talked on how to speak about faith in the modern world.



MONAGHAN: The East Timor Community in Clones gathered for an End of The Year Mass celebration in Clones Parish Church. The community in Clones has 150 committed and active parishioners.

CLARE

The West Clare mini marathon for walkers and runners takes place on February 2. Make a difference in the life of cancer patients and their families. Register at westclarecancercentre.ie.

CORK

'Come and Discover Alpha' day in the Visitor Centre of the Cathedral of St Mary and St Anne takes place on January 18 from 10am to 4pm. Come for Alpha Taster Session, shared reflection and more. Come as a group of at least four people. Admission is free but booking is required at corkandross.org/registration. Lunch provided.

DERRY

Derry Youth online Programme takes place on Monday, January 27 at 7pm live on Instagram. Derry Youth will be joined by guest speakers and a task will be given for you to complete for the theme of the month.

DONEGAL

'Buncrana Parent and Toddlers' takes place every Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 12noon in St Mary's Hall. €4 per family with refreshments for children and adults.

DUBLIN

Padre Pio Prayer Group Mass takes place every third Wednesday of the month in Priorswood Parish at 7.30pm.

GALWAY

The Sycamore is an informal and relaxed programme about the Christian faith and its relevance. A seven-session introduction programme will be held in Tuam Parish Centre for one hour each week from 7pm. It starts on January 23 and is free. Each session contains one short video followed by a group discussion with snacks and refreshments.

KERRY

Find like-minded people to help you grow your faith with the Youth2000 Tralee every Thursday at St John's Church (side

chapel) at 8pm. Meetings will resume again on January 16. Come for adoration, rosary, chat and fellowship. For ages 18-35. For more info contact Denver at 089 406 1597.

KILDARE

St Brigid's Camino Walk organised by Monasterevin Parish takes place on February 3 at 11am, starting at St Brigid's Shrine at Mountrice. The walk will be led by Bishop Denis Nulty and will make a journey via Umeras, finishing at Sts Peter and Paul Church with a service of light at 12.30pm.

MAYO

'Life in the Spirit Seminar', which starts on January 19 at 3pm in Ballintubber Abbey. The event is 2 hours long and takes place on Sundays for seven weeks. On February 16 is the 'Baptism in Spirit' and the last week of the seminar is on March 2. For more info contact Angela at 089 246 2524.

OFFALY

Mucklagh Social Lunch takes place on January 20 at 12.30pm in Mucklagh Community Centre. Lunch, dessert, tea/coffee and live music! Admission is €10 and booking is preferred as spaces are limited. Book at adminmcc@mucklagh.ie or 085 231 3304.

SLIGO

Eucharistic Healing Service led by Deacon Frank McGuinness and Louise McGuinness takes place every second Monday of each month from 7.30pm to 9pm at the Star of the Sea retreat centre, public chapel, Mullaghmore.

WATERFORD

Adoration of The Blessed Sacrament takes place every Wednesday from 11am to 2pm at St Joseph and St Benildus Church. All are welcome to spend some quiet time with the Lord.

Tramore Parish's Youth Adoration for 13- to 25-year-olds happens in the Holy Cross Church on January 16 from 7pm to 8pm! Confessions available.

Nuns are a staple on the Hollywood screen – even as they disappear from real life. What’s behind our timeless obsession?

Marcus Harmes and
Meredith Harmes

Nuns are a staple of pop culture. Think of *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Sister Act* (1992), *The Nun's Story* (1959), *The Bells of St Mary's* (1945), *Heaven Knows Mr. Allison* (1957) and *Black Narcissus* (1947).

Last year brought us *The Nun II* (following 2018's *The Nun*), *The New Boy*, *Deliver Us* and *Sister Death*. This year, we've had *Immaculate* and *The First Omen*. Most of this current crop are horror films or dark dramas – a long way from the wholesomeness of the postulant (or trainee-nun) Maria in *The Sound of Music*, the upbeat singing of *Sister Act*, or the knockabout comedy of *Nuns on the Run* (1990).

But away from the silver screen, we are seeing the disappearance of nuns.

Nuns are vanishing in two ways. Many no longer wear a habit, opting instead for conservative everyday clothing, a shift prompted by the modernising Second Vatican Council. Nuns now pass unrecognised in the community, rather than being marked out by a habit.

The other way is that there are simply not many nuns left, especially in the western world in countries such as the United States, and most of those who remain are in their 80s.

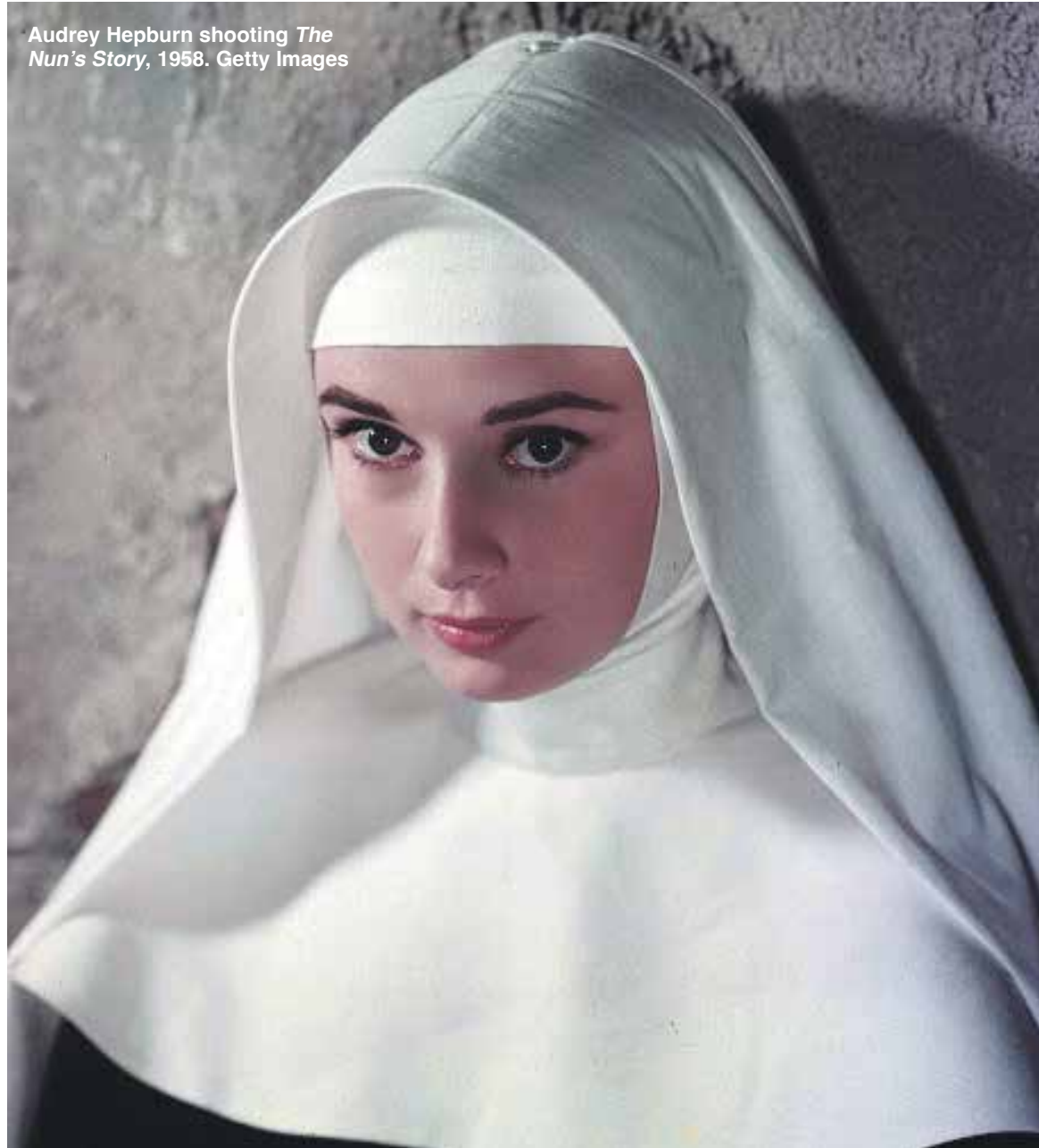
So why are we so perennially fascinated by nuns on film?

A dying vocation

In 2020, there were about 650,000 women in Catholic religious orders around the world – down 100,000 from just ten years earlier.

It was famously said of the Irish that every family had at least one nun in it: in Ireland, there were more than 13,000

Audrey Hepburn shooting *The Nun's Story*, 1958. Getty Images



nuns in the 1960s. There are now fewer than 4,000, and they have an average age of over 80.

Since 1965, the number of nuns in the United States has fallen by 65%. In Australia there were over 14,000 nuns in 1966, but now only 3,500.

But you would not notice that decline in cinema.

The meeting of nuns and horror

In *Immaculate*, Sydney Sweeney battled depravity and defilement in an isolated convent. In *Consecration*, a young doctor finds murder and conspiracy in (once again) an isolated convent.

Nuns in horror films are not anything new.

Nuns have been characters in horror cinema since 1922 when the famous silent movie *Haxen* appeared.

The roots are even deeper and 17th and 18th century literature. Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun* (1689) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) linked

nuns with murder, bigamy, kidnap and satanism, among other themes.

Horror classics (and some not so classic) such as *The Devils* (1971), *The Omen* (1976, and remade in 2006), *Silent Night*,

Deadly Night (1984) and *The Killer Nun* (1979) have kept nuns and horror together.

Why are nuns still so darkly fascinating, even though real nuns are now small groups of elderly women? And why are so many filmmakers turning to horror to tell stories about nuns?

One reason is the age-old fascination with the inner world and inner lives of nuns. While few religious sisters wear the dark habit, in cinema the habit is indispensable.

With their bodies encased in dark habits, and their lives enveloped in enclosed convents, voyeurism and horror find a natural meeting place in nuns.

“The world has learned more about events that took place inside convents after survivors came forward and investigative journalists uncovered a range of scandals”

The creative desire to look inside the cloistered world of nuns is not always sensationalist. The acclaimed Australian miniseries *Brides of Christ* (1991) was a sensitive account of the inner spiritual and institutional lives of nuns. But recent films like *Consecration* and *Immaculate* show filmmakers are fascinated by nuns as a source of exploitation, showing them as violated and sexual objects.

Narratives around nuns have shifted.

In the 1960s and 1970s,

“There are simply not many nuns left, especially in the western world in countries such as the United States”

“With their bodies encased in dark habits, and their lives enveloped in enclosed convents, voyeurism and horror find a natural meeting place in nuns”

“Nuns in full habits and gothic convents in film are not like the plain clothed nuns of reality, who are more likely to be found in a community centre than a creepy old convent”

especially, nuns in popular culture were sunny and wholesome (such as Maria in *The Sound of Music* or Sister Bertrille in the 1960s sitcom *The Flying Nun*), or a reassuring presence (like the singing nun in 1974's *Airport 1975*).

In years since, the world has learned more about events that took place inside convents after survivors came forward and investigative journalists uncovered a range of scandals in America, Ireland, Australia and elsewhere.

Dramatics

These events were then dramatised in films such as *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) and *Philomena* (2013), which mark a decisive turn away from wholesome and happy nuns to

convents as places of abuse and neglect, especially of babies and young women.

“These dark fantasies are deeply embedded in our cultural imagination and have endured despite drastic real world changes in the Church”

This darker turn in nun films is based on the true horror of abuse, not the supernatural horrors of *Consecration* and *Immaculate*.

But both types of horror – the reality of abuse and the fantasy of the supernatural – are at odds with what nuns should be: holy, spiritual and pure.

This contrast is irresistible to filmmakers and results in striking themes and visuals.

Some orders of nuns are becoming extinct – but for now they live on in our popular culture.

But what we see is disconnected from reality. Nuns in full habits and gothic convents in film are not like the plain clothed nuns of reality, who are more likely to be found in a community centre than a creepy old convent.

But these dark fantasies are deeply embedded in our cultural imagination and have endured despite drastic real world changes in the Church. The number of nuns continues to dwindle. It is quite possible that, in the future, the only nuns we will ever see are these cinematic sisters.

i Written by Marcus Harmes Professor in Pathways Education, University of Southern Queensland and Meredith Harmes, Tutor in pathways and legal history, University of Southern Queensland. This article was first published in *theconversation.com* in August 2024 and is republished here creative commons licence.



A 'harsh faced nun' from a movie. Photo: Shutterstock

Portrayals of nuns in recent films

Aubrey Malone

Like many readers of this paper I grew up in an era where the depiction of nuns on screen was generally positive. I'm talking about films like *Heaven Knows, Mr Allison* (1957), *The Bells of Saint Marys* (1945), *Black Narcissus* (1947) and so on.

I once wrote in these pages of an interview I conducted with Audrey Hepburn where she told me her most challenging role was in *The Nun's Story* in 1959. Her character leaves her order at the end of the film. This was unusual for the time. As Bob Dylan said, the times they were a-changing.

In the sixties different laws applied. We had comedies like *The Singing Nun* (1961). In *The Sound of Music* (1965) Julie Andrews, like Audrey Hepburn a few years before, also left her order.

Shift

The mood, however, was still upbeat. It took later decades for what are now called “nunsploration” movies to come onstream.

One of the first signs of a ‘revisionist’ approach to nuns that I noticed was in the 1985 feature, *Agnes of God*, featuring a theme of mental illness. In more recent times we've had

a more ominous strain, what with films like *The Bad Nun* in 2018 and other offerings like *The Nun* (2013) and the gory, zombie-laden *Nunhead* (2023). *Prey for the Devil* (2022) featured an exorcism theme. *Deliver Us* (2023) had a twisted ‘immaculate conception’ one.

“People were once afraid to speak out against the Church. Now they're afraid to speak out in favour of it”

Films mirror the way people think. We often hear about how clerical abuses were covered up in the past and how the authorities colluded in this. Perhaps a culture of conformity exists in all eras. My generation could have been accused of having an “ostrich” mentality when it came to such abuses but in recent decades we seem to have gone to the other extreme.

People were once afraid to speak out against the Church. Now they're afraid to speak out

in favour of it.

The fall-out from this is that nuns who've given their lives to helping others now see themselves and their orders being misrepresented on screen in a manner that seems to brook no resistance. It's taken as ‘read’ that the events being displayed on celluloid are ‘gospel’, even when we're dealing with genres that are blatantly satirical or irreverent in an obnoxious manner.

Comedies involving men disguised as nuns, like the 1990 Robbie Coltrane frolic *Nuns on the Run*, or the highly successful Whoopi Goldberg film *Sister Act* and its sequel, were innocuous. Contemporary comedies involving nuns, on the contrary, tend to be darker affairs. Alongside black comedies we're preferred apocryphal rituals, skewed exorcisms, sacrilegious excesses.

The film industry doesn't apologise for this. It's almost deemed to be a ‘fair’ reaction to a past that can't be forgiven or forgotten. The debt of history, in other words, is being repaid with interest.

Strain

In such a scenario, little empathy is shown for philanthropic nuns who've lived their lives in the service of their communities. Now elderly, they're called upon to suffer the

slings and arrows of outrageous footage with impunity.

I recently wrote here about the frosty depiction of the nuns in the Cillian Murphy film *Small Things Like These*, most particularly the rather creepy Mother Superior played by Emily Watson. Few people batted an eyelid at this. It was almost as if it was expected – the ‘new normal’.

“There are oases in this liturgical desert but it's a long time since Susan Sarandon won an Oscar for her portrayal of Sr Helen Prejean in ‘Dead Man Walking’”

It isn't just nuns who are being targeted in this regard. The strain also applies to priests, and to the Church in general. But a plethora of films involving nuns in recent times

have lent credence to the feeling that they're being particularly singled out, especially in horror movies, movies about demonic possession, and even pregnancy.

There's no need to go into the particular plotlines of films like *Dark Nuns* (2025), *The First Omen* (2024) or *The Nun* (2018) and its two sequels. There's also *Saint Agatha* (2018), which had murky convent goings-on, *Sister Death* (2023), a supernatural horror feature from 2017, *The Little Hours*, featuring emotionally unstable nuns, *Little Sister*, and many others, like *Warrior Nun*, currently showing on Netflix.

There are oases in this liturgical desert but it's a long time since Susan Sarandon won an Oscar for her portrayal of Sr Helen Prejean in *Dead Man Walking*. In more recent times we've had Pawel Pawlikowski's very powerful *Ida*. This Polish feature had sexual content which would probably not have been permissible in a previous era but it was generally favourable to the Church.

Novitiate had a strict Reverend Mother but a sensitive and moving portrayal of a postulant. There was also *Therese of Lisieux*, *Cabrini*, and *Immaculate*.

These seem to be the exceptions to prove the rule.

The Vatican under Francis: Promoting women to leadership positions



Renata Steffens

Last week, Pope Francis appointed an Italian nun as the first woman to head a major Vatican office. Sr Simona Brambilla is the first female prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Vatican department responsible for all the Catholic Church's religious orders.

Sr Brambilla is now responsible for the 600,000 nuns worldwide and 129,000 priests who belong to religious orders. This is not the first time the nun has been appointed to a high position in the Vatican, in 2023 she was appointed as Secretary of the same Dicastery.

Appointed

She was only the second woman in history to be appointed Secretary of a Vatican Dicastery, following Sr Alessandra Smerilli, who in 2021 became the Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. In the same year, Sr Nathalie Becquart

became the undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

According to the *Vatican News*, since the beginning of Pope Francis' pontificate in 2013 the presence of women in the Vatican has increased. Data show that between 2013 and 2023, in both the Holy See and Vatican City the percentage of women rose from 19.2% to 23.4%.

“In 2020, Francesca Di Giovanni became the first woman to hold a high-ranking post in the Vatican's Secretariat of State”

One of the two female appointments the Pope made for leadership positions in the Vatican City State, Barbara Jatta became in 2017 the Director of the Directorate of Museums and Cultural Heritage, which has staff of some 780 people, nearing 1,000 if including collaborators. Ms Jatta was the Deputy Director of the Vatican Museums from 2016 before being named 'Director'.

In 2019, Cristiane Murray, who had been working for the Vatican Radio since 1995, was appointed Deputy Director of the Holy See Press Office. And in



Pope Francis greets Sr Simona Brambilla during a June 5, 2017 audience with the men's and women's branches of the religious missionary congregation. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano.

2020, Francesca Di Giovanni became the first woman to hold a high-ranking post in the Vatican's Secretariat of State with the role of Under-Secretary for the Multilateral Sector of the Section for Relations with States and International Organisations.

Lay experts

In 2020, the Pontiff appointed six women as 'lay experts' for the 15-member Vatican Council for the Economy, which until that moment was all male. The women are: Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof, Eva Castillo Sanz, Leslie Jane Ferrar,

Marija Kolak, María Concepción Osákar Garaicoechea and Ruth Maria Kelly.

“Pope Francis appointed María Lía Zervino and Simona Brambilla as part of the 17 members of the XVI Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod”

In 2022, Pope Francis named three women as members of the Vatican's

Dicastery for Bishops. That was the first time in history women were members of the Vatican department responsible for the world's episcopal appointments.

María Lía Zervino was the President General of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) from 2018 to 2023. Sr Raffaella Petrini, who in 2022 became the first woman to serve as Secretary General of the Governorate, a role that was usually held by a bishop. And Sr Yvonne Reungoat, one of the first women to be appointed as a member of the Congregation for Insti-

tutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in 2019.

In August 2024, Sr Inês Paulo Albino was appointed Secretary-general of the Pontifical Society for Missionary Childhood and in December, Pope Francis appointed María Lía Zervino and Simona Brambilla as part of the 17 members of the XVI Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod.

Positions

There are currently several women working in high positions in the Vatican. Some of them are Gabriella Gambino and Lina Ghisoni who are Undersecretaries at the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, and Sr Carmen Ros Nortés of the Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation who serves as Undersecretary at the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Emilce Cuda is the Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Nataša Govekar heads the theological-pastoral department of the Dicastery for Communication (our parent organisation) and Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof is Deputy Coordinator of the Council for the Economy.

The growth in the number of women composing the workforce in the Vatican is a direct result of the Pope's commitment to gender equality and women's inclusion in decision-making roles.

The Church's inconsistency toward women

The Vatican has seen a growth in the number of women in high roles in the Vatican since Pope Francis started his pontificate in 2013. However, some people believe there is still a degree of misogyny in the Church, resulting from recent comments the Pontiff made regarding nuns.

On January 4, 2025, Pope Francis addressed the participants in the General Chapter of the Union of St Catherine of Siena of school missionaries, saying that nuns should not keep what he called a 'vinegar face'. He said: "Many times in my life I have encountered nuns with a vinegar face, and this is not friendly, this is not something that helps to attract people." The Pope continues by saying that "vinegar is ugly, and nuns with a vinegar face, let's not say! In short: holiness, preparation and friendliness. I ask this of you."

The pontiff also addressed gossip amongst nuns. "In order to

contemplate to hand down to others, speaking well and friendliness are necessary, and there is a great enemy of this, which is gossip," he said. "Please, distance yourself from gossip. Gossip kills, gossip poisons. Please, no gossip among you, none. And to ask this of a woman is heroic, but come on, let's go forward, and no gossip."

Commentary on the inconsistent and conflicting views of the Catholic Church toward women have been pointed out long before these 'vinegar face' comments. In November 2024, *We Are Church Ireland* published an article titled 'Women are a problem for the Catholic Church, an institution with ingrained misogyny - Soline Humbert', where they commented on the Synod and the possibility of women entering the priesthood. "Women are half of the Church but end up being a category, an issue, a problem in a patriarchal institution with ingrained misog-

yny", the article reads.

The first time the Pontiff spoke in public about the issue of 'women priests' was during an interview returning from a visit to Brazil in 2013. "The Church has spoken and says 'no' ... that door is closed," he said at the time.

In 2022, the Pope urged nuns to 'fight' back against sexism in the Church and mistreatment by priests in his prayer intentions for the month of February. "What would the Church be without religious sisters and consecrated laywomen? The Church cannot be understood without them," the Pontiff said.

He talked about the consecrated women religious who, through their ministry, spread the "beauty of God's love and compassion". He encouraged them "to fight when, in some cases, they are treated unfairly, even within the Church," he urged, "when they serve so much that they are reduced to servitude - at times, by men of the Church."

In 2019, speaking to some 850 superior generals at a meeting during the plenary of the International Union of Superiors General which represents more than 450,000 sisters in more than 100 countries, the Pontiff said, "You did not become a religious in order to become the maid of a priest". He encouraged the superior generals to send sisters on duties that truly serve the Church and those in need, as at the end of the day, they are the ones deciding where the sister will go to.

Another polemic comment about nuns attributed to the Pope was regarding social media use. In a document posted by the Vatican's office for religious life in 2016 (titled *Cor Orans*), cloistered nuns were told to not overindulge in 'social communications.'

"In all the variety in which it is presented today, aims at safeguarding recollection and silence: in fact, it is possible to empty con-

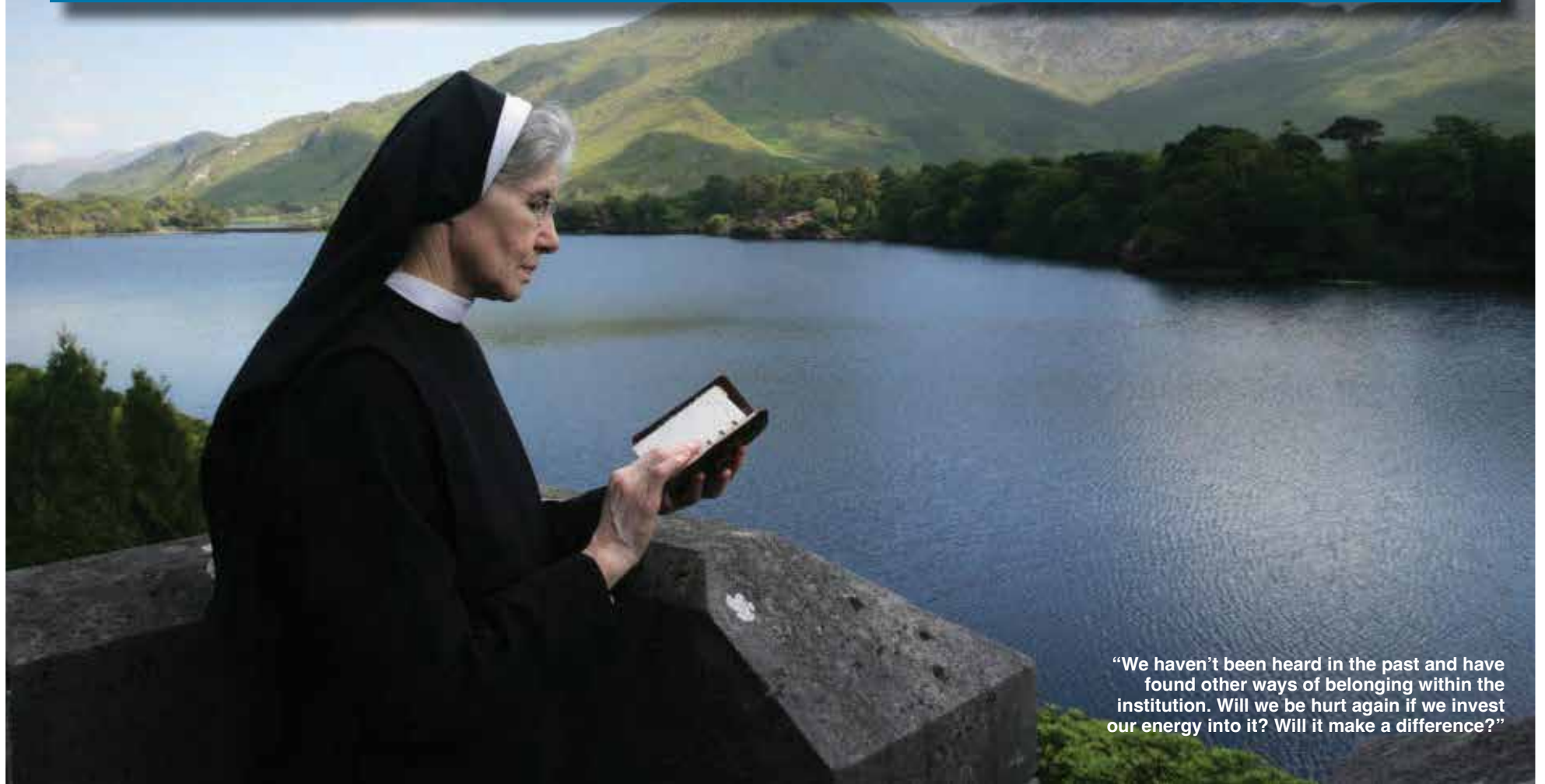
templative silence when the cloister is filled with noises, news, and words," the document reads.

"The use of the means of communication for reasons of information, formation or work, can be allowed in the monastery, with prudent discernment, for common utility, according to the provisions of the Conventual Chapter contained in the community plan of life."

And continues: "The nuns procure necessary information on the Church and the world, not with a multiplicity of news, but knowing how to grasp the essential in the light of God, to bring it to prayer in harmony with the heart of Christ."

However, even with the controversial comments, it is undeniable that women are being heard and getting more and more opportunities in the Vatican. The work of nuns and laywomen is being acknowledged and the Vatican is open to recognising it by promoting them to higher positions roles.

Irish women religious, in their Synod submission, came across as passionate, hurt, and angry at their marginalisation, not just in society, but more importantly, within the Church



“We haven’t been heard in the past and have found other ways of belonging within the institution. Will we be hurt again if we invest our energy into it? Will it make a difference?”

In their document ‘Experience and Dreams as Religious Women in the Catholic Church in Ireland’ which was included in the submission of the Church in Ireland to the Synod in Rome, Irish women religious come across as passionate, hurt, angry at their marginalisation, but hopeful that some good will come of the Synodal Process. It is a cri de coeur from women religious who state that “we keep the impossible dream for a more inclusive Church. Many others have walked away but we stay, often only barely holding on with our fingertips”. The document has been lightly edited for space.

General feelings and hopes

• Religious life is a charismatic, prophetic, radical way of following Christ. Despite our declining numbers and high age profile, religious women in Ireland today continue to provide very valuable, meaningful, courageous, and relevant ministries to the poor

and marginalised, both in Ireland and overseas.

• We are very aware of the hurt, pain, oppression, and sadness which was experienced by some of the women and children who were entrusted to our care in the past. For our failure to give the care and compassion which they so needed and deserved we are deeply sorry. We hope that we have learnt from the failures of our past.

• Hurt, marginalisation and resignation have been expressed by religious women in the institutional Church, referring both to the past, and to today. There is a deep sense that we have been pruned ‘to non-existence’ by the Church in Ireland.

Religious women feel faithful, resilient, hopeful,

courageous, and committed - we keep the impossible dream for a more inclusive Church. Many others have walked away but we stay, often only barely holding on with our fingertips.

There is a deep desire to grow into new ways of working together as one Church where all people are valued equally, and every contribution matters and makes a difference.

Views about the Synod: An opportunity, but almost afraid to hope

• We hope this synod will lead to a new way of being Church where men and women work together as equal partners committed to

healing, peace, unity, and new life.

“We bridge the gap between doctrine and life by grounding our experiences of God in real life situations”

• We hope this synod will help the institutional Church to “let go and respect change”; to embrace an inclusive language and inclusive roles within the institutional structures.

• BUT: is it worth investing energy into? Are we afraid to have hope? Would we be heard? Is it just too complex? We haven’t been heard in the past and have found other

ways of belonging within the institution. Will we be hurt again if we invest our energy into it? Will it make a difference? Will a woman’s voice be allowed to come in? What will it take for inclusiveness?

• The ‘language of synodality’ must be void of clerical imposition. There needs to be a ‘culture of relationship’, not something forced, to ensure that change will happen and will last.

The unique and invaluable gift of women to the Irish Catholic Church today

• The many gifts of women in the Church today include creativity, contemplation, warmth, compassion, vision, nurture, intuition, respon-

siveness, adaptability.

• Because of an experience of exclusion in the Church women bring a spirit of radical hospitality, a commitment to the inclusion of all and a vision of a Church where everyone can find home.

• Women are adaptable and in service, quick to realise what is needed and to take appropriate action in response to that need.

• Religious are not bogged down with dogma; they have a different perspective and often move ahead in many social, environmental and justice issues.

• We bridge the gap between doctrine and life by grounding our experiences of God in real life situations.

• As religious women, our way of decision making is very inclusive and involves a high level of participation. This is in contrast to the very hierarchical method which is typical of the hierarchy and parish clergy and which is reflected in how lay people and religious are currently involved in the life of a parish. This needs to be addressed.

“We hope this synod will help the institutional Church to ‘let go and respect change’”



Another piece of our Catholic history extinguished: The Carmelites in Loughrea depart the town after 300 years of presence. The order is one of many who have been forced to leave communities in the last number of years due to aging members and a lack of vocations.

Experiences of inclusion and of exclusion in the Church in Ireland as a religious sister

1. Longing to belong

●Recognising that we are one church there is a desire to belong to the wider community of the Church and a longing to create a space big enough for all to participate. It's difficult to be part of the institutional Church that occurs as outdated, outmoded, lacks authentic dialogue, pays lip service to inclusion, and appears far removed from where women and Religious are.

2. Exclusion at the parish level:

●Many clergy are closed to creativity and can be resistant to/refuse change. This limits those within the parish structures such as the parish council, parish planning group, liturgy group, diocesan planning group, etc., who have unique gifts to offer to support the parish, in particular women religious.

●Clergy are not trained or accustomed to working together as a team.

●A deep sense of isolation and dissolution as parish liturgy and rituals are no longer nourishing.

●With an aging clergy and religious conservatism among newly ordained seminarians, some religious ask is it better to let that Church die out?

3. Exclusion at the sacramental level, including the inclusion of a new layer in the hierarchy:

●When the role of 'deacon' was added, this was limited to 'married men' and excluded women. Women religious are uniquely qualified and experienced to conduct this role, yet another layer was added to exclude them. Whether women religious would be open to this role or not is irrelevant in the absence of a choice.

4. Exclusive language:

●The exclusive language continuously used in the Church and especially in liturgical celebrations, for example, for us 'men' and for our salvation.

5. Scapegoating and feelings of isolation: Media and public perception

●Today, religious life in Ireland is given a lot of bad press, with a particular focus on the past, and as women religious many of us feel hurt and challenged in a very deep way. Most media reporting seems happy to use women religious as scapegoats for Church and society.

●The release of the Ryan report in 2009 was very difficult, primarily for the survivors, and for everybody else affected by it including women religious. The experiences around the recent reports on mother and baby homes have been similarly painful. Despite the reports demonstrating that Irish society as a whole

“The institutional Church has enjoyed ‘the glory of the schools and education’ that the Sisters provided”

was responsible, the focus of culpability has remained almost exclusively on women religious.

“There is need for inclusion of the unique ‘gifts’ of women religious, alongside those of the clergy”

● The invisibility today of women religious in Ireland: There is a sense of being silenced, but silence is seen as condoning the accusations and giving an impression that “we’re all guilty”. We are partly to blame for our own invisibility as we appear to have gone underground. What can be done? It is difficult for women religious to respond, as we believe “any religious who speaks up would be shut down”.

● The institutional Church has enjoyed ‘the glory of the schools and education’ that the sisters provided. Yet when new ways had to be found due to declining numbers, the hierarchy has tended to withdraw, disassociate or rely on “delay tactics”, refusing to respond to

or dialogue with religious orders to look at change and move on with the times.

We dream of a prophetic Church, an inclusive Church, a community of love, the kingdom of God. A Church that embodies faith, hope and love, visible in the here and now. How can we create this Church together?

●Listening to the voices of all the people of God: The fundamental part is listening – “everything must be on the table” with an emphasis on sincere listening, respect, and inclusivity.

●The first step is the dialogue, engaging intentionally with a living conversation where the people of God will come together.

●Dialogue will be at multiple levels, including local (priests, deacons, sisters, lay people).

●There is need for inclusion of the unique ‘gifts’ of women religious, alongside

those of the clergy, and to incorporate these into an inclusive Church.

●As women religious in Ireland, we are no longer in leadership roles in the Church: i.e. through schools and hospitals. We are in the background, and... we also realise that this is a healthy reminder that our identity was linked too much to what we did.

●As returned missionaries, there was much we did not know or had not experienced within the Church in Ireland. We felt a great sense of fear on our return, our newness.

●Sexuality within the Catholic Church / the Church's understanding of sexuality and the link primarily to procreation; more contemporary understandings and what this means could be healthily engaged with, a sense of the faithful.

●Our future is working with others: As religious and indeed as Church in Ireland, we are an aging community and those involved in the Church are aging. This will lead to something better.

●There is absence of community ownership of our faith in Ireland. A Catholic community based on the Gospel with a relationship in the risen Lord and all that

flows from and into that is paramount, rather than doctrine.

●It is necessary to identify ourselves as Church, not as the institution, and to reflect on the question, who are the hosts of the future in our world and align our energy to these people.

“As returned missionaries, there was much we did not know or had not experienced within the Church in Ireland

●We will be more vocal to issues that are relevant in our world. Injustices here as we see it. We will support the agenda of climate crisis. We will use our resources, our wisdom to mobilise and raise crucial awareness.

●We need to keep hope alive in our call - God is working through us at this time. If we look to nature, we see a tree that has died yet one shoot comes out of nowhere and continues life. The seed falling into the ground to die is a silent thing but, given time, something new emerges.

Nuns in the Media



Brendan O'Regan

The recent statement from the Association of Catholic Priests on how dedicated nuns are portrayed, often negatively, in the media gave me cause to reflect on the topic, and it's a bit of a patchwork.

The most obvious example is the demonisation of nuns because of their role in the Magdalen Laundries and similar institutions. You wouldn't think it from the coverage, but such institutions weren't solely Catholic or Irish. Of course, there were harsh institutions and horrible nuns (as there are horrible journalists), but this vilification must be painful for the many nuns who were kind and dedicated their whole lives to the care of others. Nuns tend not to head for the outrage factory and take to the media to defend themselves. I can see the

motivation of this approach (Jesus allowed himself to be crucified after all), though when there's a defence or explanation to be made, I'd like to hear it.

“These programmes don't do nuance very well, and stereotype nun-villains, including in horror films, are more to the programme makers' liking”

There seems to be an interminable supply of damning documentaries like RTE's *Ireland's Dirty Laundries*, and there are darkly prejudiced elements in movies like *The Magdalen Sisters*. These programmes don't do nuance very well, and stereotype nun-villains, including in horror films, are more to the programme makers' liking than having complex multi-dimensional characters. One of the more recent examples in this vein was the *Woman in the Wall* drama series. It was way over the top, though normally I really like the lead

actress Ruth Wilson – she was brilliant in the fact-based drama series *Mrs Wilson* and ironically in that show her character joined a convent, a life decision that was treated positively. *Son of a Critch* is a comedy series set in Canada in the 1980s running currently on RTE 1. There's a bossy reverend mother, more like a nun from the 50s, but at least she's a quirky character – e.g. anti-British but with a sneaking admiration for their royal family. Closer to home there's Sr Michael from *Derry Girls*, hardly a stereotype, with her cynical and worldly attitude, nor is she, I suspect and hope representative of modern nuns!

Demonised

Fictional nuns aren't always demonised, but positive portrayals are less common in recent times. Sr Marie-Louise, the chaplain in the

prison drama series *Time* is a likeable, sympathetic and complex character, though with a secret romantic relationship in her past. There is the jolly old sleuthing nun in the current *Sister Boniface Mysteries*, a spin-off from the very popular *Father Brown* series. We lost the wonderful Maggie Smith in 2024, but she played a fairly stereotypical and grouchy mother-superior in the *Sister Act* films, regularly on replay on Film 4. Now, there was some nuance and understanding in that portrayal as her character strived to keep the religious community going in a deprived neighbourhood. In *The Nun's Story* from the 1950's Sr Luke (Audrey Hepburn) is a three-dimensional character in a serious film, but they don't make them like that anymore. *The Sound of Music* was shown yet again this Christmas. The nuns

were presented as both spiritual, understanding and wily, though that was made in the 1960s. One of the deepest, most mature and most powerful modern portrayals was in the film *Doubt*, where Sr Aloysius (Meryl Streep) and Sr James (Amy Adams) played nuns concerned about the possibly abusive activities of a local priest.

“I've seen plenty of positive programmes about people like Sr Stan and Sr Consilio and the impressive contribution they have made to our society”

Nuns involved in missionary or social work get positive coverage. Sr Clare

Crocket, the young nun from Derry who died in the Ecuador earthquake, featured in the inspirational documentary *All or Nothing*. Her path to canonisation was reported positively on last Sunday night's *Nine O'Clock News* on RTE. I've seen plenty of positive programmes about people like Sr Stan and Sr Consilio and the impressive contribution they have made to our society. I remember a relatively recent edition of *The Meaning of Life* with Sr Colette of the Poor Clares in Galway.

Documentary

The Last Nuns in Ireland, despite its flaws, was a warm documentary about the work of Irish nuns. James Creedon's documentary *75 Years in Japan* was a moving tribute to Sister Jeannie Paschal O'Sullivan, who had served as a missionary in Japan for most of her life. Only last week there was largely positive coverage of the appointment of Sister Simona Brambilla to a top position in a Vatican Dicastery.

So, there's a mixture of vilification and admiration, but we know which one hurts.

“Nuns tend not to head for the outrage factory and take to the media to defend themselves. I can see the motivation of this approach (Jesus allowed himself to be crucified after all), though when there's a defence or explanation to be made, I'd like to hear it”

The rise and fall of factcheckers



Dualta Roughneen

Pope Francis, on January 9 speaking to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, raised the issue of fake news. “We see increasingly polarised societies, marked by a general sense of fear and distrust of others and of the future, which is aggravated by the continuous creation and spread of fake news. This phenomenon generates false images of reality and a climate of suspicion that foments hate, undermines people’s sense of security, and compromises civil coexistence and the stability of entire nations.”

This came only a few days after Mark Zuckerberg – the owner and creator of Facebook – announced to much wailing and gnashing of teeth that Facebook (Meta) was going to phase out use of ‘fact-checkers’ to be replaced by ‘community notes’, an approach to online clarification of information that seems to have been borrowed from X (formerly Twitter).

US President Joe Biden denounced the decision as ‘really shameful’. “I think it’s really shameful,” Mr Biden told reporters at the White House when asked about the announcement. “Telling the truth matters,” he said, adding that the move was “completely contrary to everything America’s about.”

Aghast

Fact-checking organisations were equally aghast at the move. The International Fact-Checking Network has warned: “If Meta decides to stop the program worldwide, it is almost certain to result in real-world harm in many places.” This assertion could be true but is obviously difficult to subject to fact-checking. What is factual is that members of this network are dependent on the survival of the fact-checking industry for their own business.

Within the response to Zuckerberg’s announcement are two relevant areas. Many (I believe correctly) view this as an appeasement of the incoming Trump administration. It stretches credibility that the timing of the announcement is anything else. But that is not to say that Zuckerberg’s reasoning is not without merit.

Fact-checking has always



– if nothing else – bemused me. It offers ‘fact-checkers’ a position of non-partisan, near omnipotent arbiters in the cultural/social/political debates that are usually less about clear facts but arguments and positions that get worked through in the rag and bone shop of the heart. Many claims are neither resolvable nor a debate around facts per se. Journalism in itself is a fact-checking exercise where the credibility of a news source was dependent on rigour and accuracy.

“A survey of 150 participants by the Harvard Misinformation Review finds that ‘experts’ leaned strongly toward the left of the political spectrum”

Social media has challenged the dominant position of journalism in establishing the ‘truth’ that reaches the public domain. The deluge of

“Misinformation and disinformation – if you can differentiate the two – are a problem on social media but they are a symptom rather than the cause. Social media allows for innumerable ‘facts’ to be shared, creating an information system that is impossible for every individual to filter through”

noise and information (disinformation/misinformation/fake-news) that the public is subjected to – and partaking in creating – creates a new paradigm of truth determination. Community notes provide a partial means of self-correction within the ecosystem but are not a panacea.

Fact-checkers themselves tend to be neither partisan nor omnipotent. A survey of 150 participants by the Harvard Misinformation Review finds that ‘experts’ leaned strongly toward the left of the political spectrum: “very right-wing (0), fairly right-wing (0), slightly right-of-centre (7), centre (15), slightly left-of-centre (43), fairly left-wing (62), very left-wing (21)”.

Biases

The assumption that fact-checking leads to the ‘truth’ assumes that fact-checkers are aware of and able to park their biases when they are interpreting the factual accuracy of information that is being shared online. Ironically, it is people with the same leanings who trumpet

the need for individuals to check their biases in order to live their lives as better people. Implicit in this is that acknowledging biases is for other people rather than the enlightened.

President Biden’s claim that ‘Telling the truth matters’ is factually correct. All reasonable people would agree. But taking a fact-checking approach to this statement would raise the issue that ‘fact-checking’ and ‘truth-telling’ are not the same thing nor does that latter lead to the former.

“The claim “90% of babies with Down Syndrome aborted” was deemed false by a prominent fact-checking group, The rationale”

In Ireland ‘fact-checking’ and responding to asserted ‘dis/misinformation’ has been used – even weaponised – repeatedly to establish points of fact in the cultural

and political sphere. During the 2016 abortion referendum, the No side was subject to significant scrutiny in its claims, many of which rejected (not refuted) in a manner that could best be described as Jesuitical. One example: the claim “90% of babies with Down Syndrome aborted” was deemed false by a prominent fact-checking group, The rationale.

There were 1,232 pre-birth Down Syndrome diagnoses in 2013. 75% (925) ended in termination; 6.7% (82) ended in live birth; 1.6% (20) ended in foetal death; the outcome was unknown in 16.6% of cases (205). Of the cases whose outcome was known, 90% ended in termination ... the fact that the 90% figure refers only to known outcomes – where there is a prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome, rather than all outcomes, the claim is FALSE. The leaflet did not contain the context that 90% is the figure in the case where a prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome has been made.

Impact

Given the scale of the vote to repeal the 8th amendment, it is unlikely fact checking made a definitive difference in the result but the cumulative impact of repeated downplaying the No side concerns and points of issue is bound to have an impact that is impossible to quantify.

More recently, fact-checking was deployed in the

debate around the SPHE curriculum where claims made by whistleblowers were ‘debunked’ based solely on responses from the government about what would happen in the future and the content of the claims subject to little rigour before being dismissed.

Fact-checking – ignored or reviled by some and treated as ‘gospel’ by others – lacks a fundamental requirement of good journalism. It is essentially a paper based exercise where pre-existing information is used to formulate decisions, which can – and often are – cherry picked – without a substantive investigation into the issues themselves. At best it relies on other journalists and an assumption of factual accuracy at some point in an analysis. It is not truth determining in itself but reliant on someone else’s ‘truth’ at some point in the ‘check’.

“Social media also creates virtual self-selecting communities where people are subject predominantly to views that align with their own”

Misinformation and disinformation – if you can differentiate the two – are a problem on social media but they are a symptom rather than the cause. Social media allows for innumerable ‘facts’ to be shared, creating an information system that is impossible for every individual to filter through.

Social media also creates virtual self-selecting communities where people are subject predominantly to views that align with their own and often not subject to counter arguments that allow for an ‘opinion of facts’ to be formed. Fact-checking, rather than addressing this challenge, tends to add to it. It generates more heat than shedding light.

These virtual communities are increasingly replacing real communities where people meet and discuss in the physical world, where you cannot self-select whose views you hear and whose you don’t. The nature of civic discourse has become so fraught and polarised – uncivic – that the more and more people are choosing to shelter in self-selecting communities and avoiding or refusing to share their views amongst flesh-and-bone communities for fear of ostracisation in real-life situations reflective of how cancel-culture operates in the virtual space.

How the American Church should adjust to President Trump



David Quinn

The inauguration of Donald Trump for a second time as US president takes place on Monday. Polling shows that a big majority of Irish people are opposed to him, which is probably a product of a number of factors, one being that, for historical reasons, we lean heavily towards the Democratic party, and the second being that we are exposed almost exclusively to anti-Trump opinions.

The first reason, our liking for the Democratic party, is mainly connected to the fact that the Democrats for a long-time were the most pro-Catholic of the two big American parties, and courted the Irish vote. Cities were big Irish populations, like Boston and Chicago, were (and are) Democrat strongholds. And of course, there was the Kennedy family.

The Republicans were the party of the 'WASPs', that is, 'White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants'. But this way of seeing American politics is now very out-of-date.

When we consider the Trump victory in November, we can see that lots of Catholics voted for him. Indeed, he won a majority of the Catholic vote at 53%. Lots of them were Latinos, and lots of others were Irish-Americans. In his last administration, Trump had a lot of people with Irish names.

Therefore, the Republicans are no longer the WASP party. For their part, the Democrats can no longer claim to be the most Catholic party. This has not been the case for a long time, but that memo has not reached Ireland yet. Joe Biden is a practising (but extremely pro-choice) Catholic, and is proud of his Irish roots. But he belongs to his party's past, not its future. Kamala Harris is closer to what the Democrats look like now. Some version of Harris will win elections for them in the future, because America is a 50/50 country, politically speaking, but the Democrat party that we like to think still exists, is more or less, no more.

Working-class

Trump won the November election largely on the strength of a multi-racial, working-class coalition which included 45% of the Hispanic or Latino vote, the biggest ever for a Republican presidential candidate. With Trump constantly being accused on the Irish airwaves of racism, this may surprise a lot of us. How could a



Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego exchanges high-fives with young members of the parish of St. Frumentius, his titular church in Rome, before formally taking possession of the church and celebrating Mass there April 23, 2023. On Jan. 6, 2025, the Vatican announced Pope Francis appointed Cardinal McElroy as the next archbishop of Washington, succeeding Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory, 77, whose resignation was accepted the same day by the pope. Photo:OSV News/Chris Warde-Jones, Catholic News Service

“If Trump carries out his threat to step up deportation of illegal immigrants, Cardinal McElroy is likely to be a thorn in his side because he has previously criticised Trump over the issue”

man who is supposedly a racist, win so many Latino votes? The answer is that those voters don't think he is a racist and voted for him mainly based on economic factors. The cost of living has gone up a lot in America, and although the American economy is doing well overall, many voters feel like they are being left behind. They are paying a lot more for basics like food and fuel these days.

“A lot of these voters also turned away from the Democrats because that party has become too obsessed with so-called 'identity' issues like race, sex and sexuality”

A lot of Latinos also believe too many people are now entering the country. This may also surprise some of us. How could Latinos want to decrease immigration when that is how they entered the country? But you don't have to look too far to find an answer. You can easily be an immigrant yourself and believe that the numbers coming in now

are simply too high, and that too many are entering illegally, which is circumventing the legal process you went through.

A lot of these voters also turned away from the Democrats because that party has become too obsessed with so-called 'identity' issues like race, sex and sexuality and party leaders talked too little about basic bread and butter issues.

Jobs

Trump won by saying he would reduce the cost of living, end unfair trade practices, reduce immigration levels, bring manufacturing jobs back to American and end the obsession with identity issues. He will be much less aggressively pro-abortion than the Democrats as well. Whether he can keep his promises is another matter, but these are what he has been elected to do.

Americans are well aware of Trump's many character flaws but seem to have decided they would rather a flawed man with good policies in the White House than a better man (like Biden) with bad or failed policies (as they see it).

Where does all this leave the Catholic Church? Well, I think it should be clear that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are

a natural fit for Catholic voters. The Democrats are very aggressively pro-abortion and have attacked or sought to curb freedom of religion in various ways, for example, by trying to force Catholic employers to cover 'medications' like the 'Morning-After-Pill' (which can act as an abortifacient) in their insurance plans.

“Trump has attracted lots of low-income voters because the Democrats now seem to be far more on the side of the rich, and the big corporations than was once the case”

In the days before the party went all-in on abortion it was much more natural for a Catholic to gravitate towards the Democrats because traditionally the party was a lot more on the side of the poor than the Republicans.

But in a way few can have expected, Trump has attracted lots of low-income voters because the Democrats now seem to be far more on the side of the rich, and the big corporations than was once the case. They seem far more elitist than they were.

Some Catholics are still attracted to the Democrats because of the question of immigration. Trump is threatening to deport huge numbers of illegal migrants (Biden deported more illegal migrants than you might imagine, by the way), and a lot of American bishops balk at this.

It cannot be an accident that

Pope Francis has announced that Cardinal Robert McElroy is to be the new archbishop of Washington DC, right under Trump's nose.

If Trump carries out his threat to step up deportation of illegal immigrants, Cardinal McElroy is likely to be a thorn in his side because he has previously criticised Trump over the issue.

Signatories

In December, he was one of the signatories of a statement from the Catholic bishops of California on the matter (he is being transferred from San Diego) which warned against mass deportations while at the same time, and this needs to be stressed, acknowledging that America's immigration system is in disarray and needs to be brought back under control for the sake of ordinary Americans. So he knows there are two sides to this particular coin.

The leaders of the Catholic Church should not, and very rarely do, come down in favour of one party or the other. You have to go back to the hey-day of the Christian Democratic parties for that. Instead, they will have to assess the policies of any given party, in America, Ireland and elsewhere, on a case-by-case basis, endorsing (say) the pro-life policies of one party, while backing the immigration policies of another.

There will be tensions between the Catholic Church in America and Trump, in his second term as president. But there were tensions with Biden as well. And this is as it should be. The Church should not be in the pocket of any particular party.

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

Ten pastoral reforms submitted to the synodal discussions by the Wijngaards Institute



John Wijngaards

In tribute to John Wijngaards, who died last week, we republish this piece, still timely, written by him in January, 2023. Rest in Peace.

As an 87 year-old Catholic priest and theologian I have worked for the Church for most of my life. Experience has taught me that old Mother Church needs to adopt at least ten urgent changes. I describe these in my life story: *Ten Commandments for Church Reform. Memoirs of a Catholic Priest* (Acadian House 2022).

Reforms affecting Church personnel

When I started studying theology in London, I came across the wonderful books by Teilhard de Chardin. I loved the way he interwove evolution with our belief in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. I was aghast at the way the Church forbade him to teach and tried to suppress his books. He combined his archeological expertise of evolution with a profound mystical theology.

Later, as a student at the Biblical Institute in Rome, I experienced how two of our top professors, Max Zerwick and Stanislaus Lyonnet, were dismissed from their jobs. This was done a few days before the Second Vatican Council opened. Its purpose was obviously to discredit the findings of modern bible studies in the eyes of the thousands of bishops who were converging on Rome.

So a first reform that is needed: Allow theologians and other scholars unrestricted freedom of research without fear of the consequences.

Another serious defect in Church administration I found concerns the appointment of Church leaders. Our previous traditionalist Popes placed arch-conservatives in

top Vatican positions.

The Second Vatican Council prescribed liturgical adaptation in each country. I witnessed with my own eyes how the integration of local culture flourished in India. Eucharistic texts were translated into local languages, with the words of consecration being sung using hallowed forms of *vedic* chanting. All went well – until Cardinal James Knox in the Curia interfered trying to demolish/obliterate it.

I saw how in one country after the other old-school clerics were appointed bishops to block the local implementation of reforms decreed by the Second Vatican Council. A leaked document, the *Secret Examination of Episcopal Candidates*, revealed that ‘orthodoxy’, that is: the uncritical acceptance of all recent papal statements, was a key requirement. This gave rise to me demanding three urgent reforms: Recognise that a pastoral leader’s first priority is caring for people, not upholding ecclesiastical institutions; select perceptive administrators in the Roman Curia, not narrow-minded bureaucrats and appoint open-minded pastoral bishops, not hard-line traditionalists.

Reforms in the approach to sexuality

In 1968, while I was teaching in St John’s Major Seminary for Andhra Pradesh in India, a colleague of mine, Fr Eddie Bennett, was away on a lecture tour. He taught morality and Church law. He asked me to look after his correspondence during his absence.

One day a heavy envelope came in for him. It had been sent by the papal nunciature in New Delhi. Intrigued I opened the packet and found a copy of a new encyclical: *Humanae Vitae*. Moral theologians all over India received it to give them advance information before the media would get hold of it. A covering document gave strict instructions to defend the Pope’s teaching against



Pope Francis gives his homily during Mass for the World Day of the Poor in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican.

any possible opposition.

When I read the document I understood the Vatican’s concern. Against the advice of the majority of the Vatican’s own pontifical commission and international scholarship, *Humanae Vitae* forbade the use of any artificial family planning. It spelled disaster for many families in India, especially the poor who in their ramshackle huts dotted around India’s 600,000 villages would struggle to feed their six to eight children.

“Grant parents freedom to plan their families responsibly and allow priests to benefit from the support of a loving spouse”

My thorough research in the following years established that the official Church’s negative view of sex is based on St Augustine’s views, views he inherited from the Manicheans. This also led to other consequences. It has caused most

Catholics even to this day to feel guilty about their sexuality. It underlies the opposition to priests being married.

I formulated three urgent reforms on these findings: Abandon the misguided repression of sex, based on the assumption that any act not geared to procreation is sinful; grant parents freedom to plan their families responsibly and allow priests to benefit from the support of a loving spouse.

Reform concerning women During my ministry in India I was asked to become moderator to/of the *Conference of Religious in Andhra Pradesh*. This brought together 14 religious congregations with 1800 members. I saw with my own eyes the wonderful work the sisters were doing in schools, hospitals and development projects. But I also discovered how inadequate their spiritual formation could be. The novices of one diocesan congregation enjoyed only two spiritual talks a week and that from their untrained Italian parish priest. They were totally ignorant of Sacred Scripture, theology, church history, you name it!

To remedy the situation

I managed to get noviciates staffed with theologically trained sisters, many of these were sent to Rome to obtain full academic qualifications. I also founded *Jeevan Jyothi* institute in which sisters could follow a year’s theological formation as part of their juniorate training programme. And while this was going on, a thought kept haunting me: If sisters could be scholars in literature or economics, principals of huge colleges, surgeons in hospitals, why couldn’t they play more significant roles in Church ministry?

“I found that women were excluded by theologians like Thomas Aquinas because ‘they’ are born as misfits by an accident of nature”

The question came to a head when, in 1975, I was asked to prepare a talk on women’s ministries in an all-India seminar on the ministries. I asked myself: Why can women not be priests? Theological research on this filled me with horror. I found that women were excluded by theologians like Thomas Aquinas because “they are born as misfits by an acci-

dent of nature”, “they are inferior by nature”, “they are not created in God’s image as men are”, “they are subject to men”, “they were not at the Last Supper when Christ said *Do this in memory of me*” and “they are not perfect human beings and so cannot represent Christ”. I presented my findings at the seminar and recommended that the Indian Bishops’ Conference request the Pope to thoroughly re-investigate the matter. This urgent reform ranks high on the list: Give women full access to holy orders.

When Rome declared that the exclusion of women was ‘definitive’ and that those who hold women can be ordained priests, are ‘no longer in full communion with the Catholic Church’, I publicly resigned from my active priestly ministry – but not from my being a priest.

Reforms regarding the way the Church is run

One of the root problems of present Church governance in this. Decisions are made at the top and imposed on lower levels. According to official practice, the laity are herded as ignorant sheep. Their intellectual judgement, their conscience, their deep ‘sense of faith’ are ignored. This whole top-down system of thought and practice should be abolished. Hence: Respect the God-given dignity of every member of the community – treating grownups as adults and update Church doctrine and practice after listening to the advice of independent competent scholars, pastoral councils and experienced pastors.

Reforming the way the Church is governed can only be achieved by a thorough overhaul. That is why the *Wijngaards Institute* has also submitted to the synodal discussions a complete proposed new constitution for the Church. This should underlie Church law. It incorporates authority and responsibility as to how the Church is run for every member of the people of God.

i Dr John Wijngaards is a Catholic scripture scholar and founded the *Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research* in 1983.

“Reforming the way the Church is governed can only be achieved by a thorough overhaul”



World Report

IN BRIEF

Priest hit with object during demonstration in Dominican Republic

● Footage of a priest who was wounded on his face during a protest in the Dominican Republic went viral in the Caribbean nation and other Latin American countries.

Activists now hope that the outrage sparked by the attack on Fr Yonny Durán in the city of Cotuí will draw popular support to the cause of the rural communities he's assisting in their resistance to a mining project.

On January 8, before dawn, members of five communities in Cotuí – in the Diocese of La Vega – were gathered to block the attempt of the Canadian mining company Barrick Gold of crossing the zone to study for the construction of a new dam.

Numerous army troops were deployed to stop the demonstrators and ensure the company's machines would get into the area. As the protestors wouldn't agree to open the way for the company, police reacted with violence, with nine people ending up injured, Fr Durán among them.

African archbishop says Synod supports small Christian communities

● A leading African prelate has said that dwindling numbers in western Churches can be reversed if they adopt the small Christian communities approach practiced by the Church in Africa.

Archbishop Andrew Nkea Fuanya of Bamenda, in Cameroon's North West region, was speaking in Buea on the sidelines of the 48th Annual Seminar of members of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) organised under the theme "Living Synodality in our Local Church."

Archbishop Nkea, who

was one of the 16 members of the Ordinary Council of the Synod and a leading African voice at the synod on synodality, told Crux that the African Church has continued to grow because of its reliance on small Christian communities.

"We have the family unit, we have the small Christian community, we have the mission station, we have the parish, we have the deanery, and then we have the diocese. And these various aspects, small units of evangelisation, have caught fire in the whole of Africa," Archbishop Nkea said.

India's Syro-Malabar Church reshuffles leadership amid liturgical row

● The Syro-Malabar Church announced a significant leadership change last Saturday as Archbishop Joseph Pamplany was appointed vicar of the major archbishop for the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

The appointment, confirmed by Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil on January 11, follows the first session of the XXXIII Synod of Bishops held at Mount St Thomas in Kakkannad from January 6–11.

The appointment follows Pope Francis' repeated interventions in the liturgical dispute. He has directly intervened several times in the controversy, which centres on a debate about which direction the priest should face when celebrating the liturgy.

Nigerian archbishop says no one should die because they are hungry

● No one needs to die due to being hungry, says Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.

He was speaking at Mass last Sunday, referring to the deaths of at least ten people following a stampede on December 21 at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in the Maitama district of Abuja. More than a thousand people were evacuated from the church. The event was organised by an international Catholic charity, the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Across Nigeria, around 70 people died in similar events giving food to the nation's hungry population.

"In the course of your magnanimous gesture to provide food and other basic needs to the poor and hungry, as you have always done successfully for decades, in line with the Catholic tradition of performing corporal works of mercy, your inspiration to serve the poor and vulnerable comes from St Vincent de Paul, who initiated your society in 1833, dedicated to caring for the poor and needy admirably," Archbishop Abuja said on last Sunday.

Argentine businessman moves closer to beatification

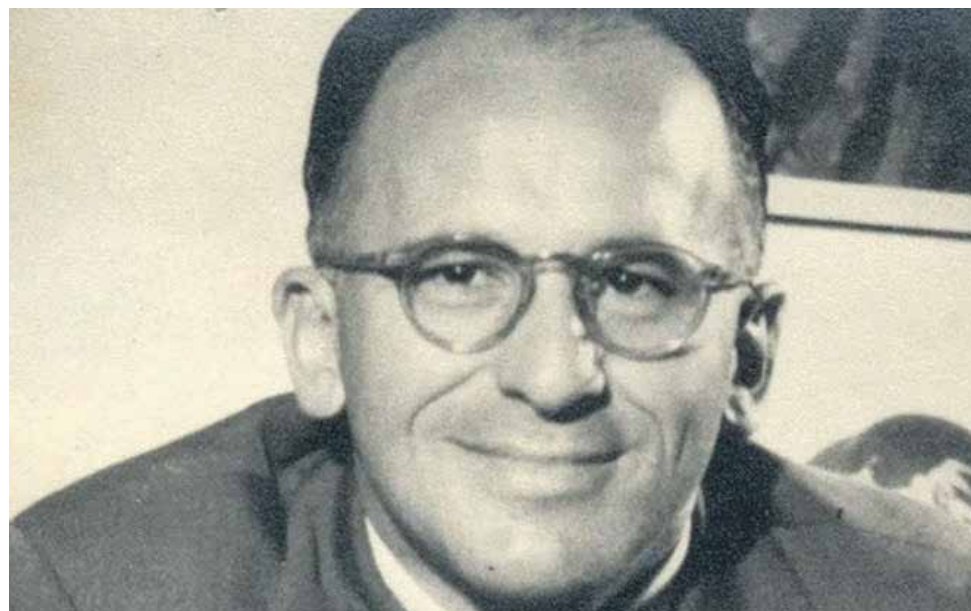
The cause for canonisation of Argentine businessman Enrique Shaw took another step forward this week as the alleged miracle attributed to his intercession passed the medical stage and will now be evaluated by a commission of theologians of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.

The vice postulator of the cause and the military bishop of Argentina, Santiago Olivera, informed the Argentine news agency AICA of the development.

The prelate explained from Rome that the miracle "has passed the medical consultation, but we must be very cautious because the process continues with the commission of theologians and then with the bishops and cardinals".

"Once this happens, if everything goes well, Cardinal [Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints] will present to the Holy Father the permission to announce the decree of his beatification," Bishop Olivera added.

Although there are still several steps to take, the vice postulator indicated last Thursday that "today was a very important day. It passed the medical phase regarding what was presented about



Servant of God Enrique Shaw. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

the healing".

"We continue to pray," he said and encouraged the faithful "to wait and be very respectful of the following stages".

Enrique Shaw Tornquist was a layman, businessman, husband, and father. He was born on February 26, 1921, in Paris. Shortly after, his family moved to Argentina.

He belonged to the Naval Military School, where he carried out an apostolate with great dedication.

In 1943 he married Cecilia

Bunge, with whom he had nine children. In 1945 he asked to be discharged from the Argentine Navy for the purpose of becoming a worker and carrying out an apostolate among the working class.

He promoted the creation of the Christian Association of Business Leaders and died on August 27, 1962, at the age of 41 from cancer.

In 1997, the preliminary stage for the opening of the canonisation process began, and 10 years later the formal

opening of the cause was presented.

The diocesan phase was concluded in 2013, and in 2014 the documentation was sent to Rome.

In 2020, documents were submitted in Rome for the diocesan investigation into the alleged miracle attributed to the intercession of Shaw.

On April 24, 2021, Pope Francis approved the decree that recognises Shaw's heroic virtues, declaring him "venerable".

Kidnapped Nigerian nuns released unconditionally, congregation says

Two Nigerian women religious who were kidnapped January 7 as they returned home from a meeting in Ogboji, a town in Anambra state in Nigeria, were freed January 13 with no conditions, their congregation said.

Sr Vincentia Maria Nwankwo and Sr Grace Mariette Okoli, who were returning from a vocational associations' meeting and were taken along Ufuma

Road, are members of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mother of Christ of Onitsha, in southern Nigeria.

"We are happy to announce that our dear Sisters ... have been released without any conditions and are in good health," the congregation said in a statement, expressing gratitude "to God and all of you for your prayers

and support during these difficult and uncertain days".

The two nuns both head Catholic schools: Sr Vincentia Maria is the principal of Archbishop Charles Heerey Memorial Model Secondary School in Ufuma, and Sr Grace Mariette is the principal of Immaculate Girls Model Secondary School in Nnewi.

President Biden awards Pope Francis the Presidential Medal of Freedom

US President Joe Biden spoke with Pope Francis last Saturday and named him a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom with distinction, the White House said in a statement.

As the nation's highest honour, the medal is "presented to individuals who

have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public, or private endeavours," the statement said.

This is the first time Biden has awarded the medal "with distinction",

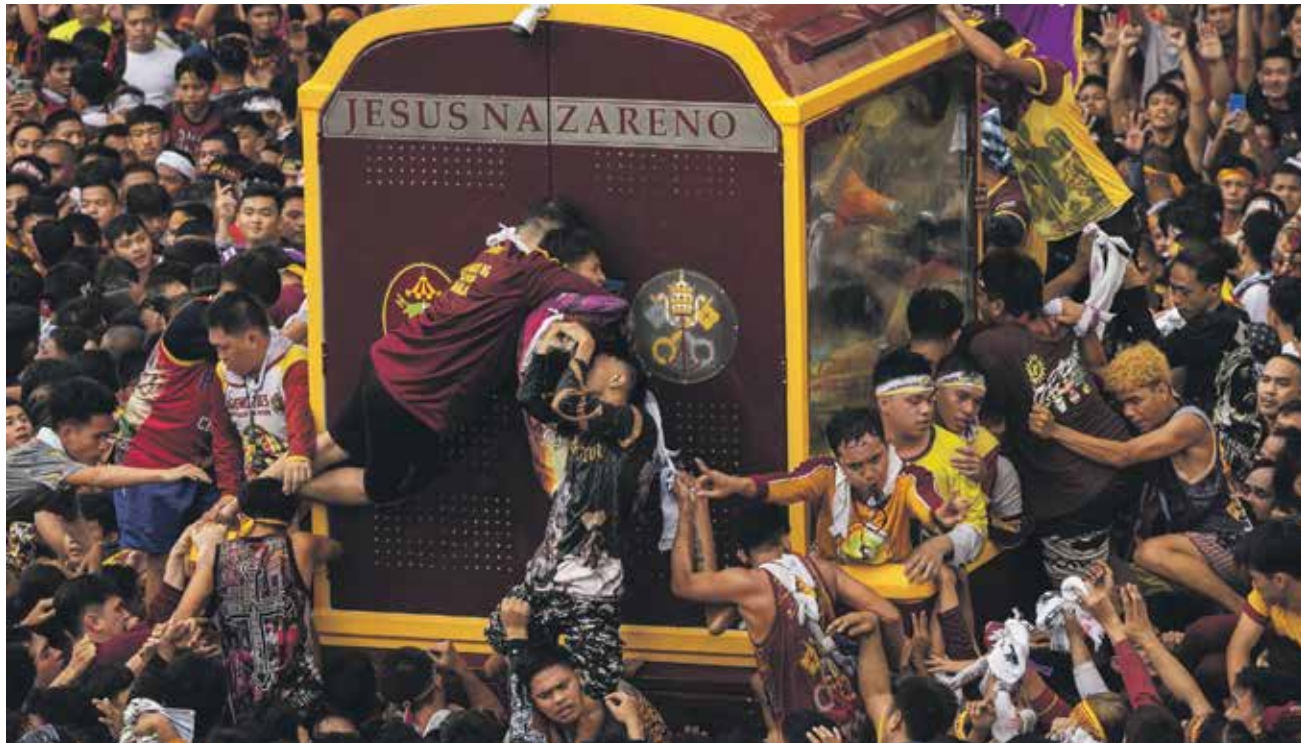
according to the statement.

"The first pope from the Southern Hemisphere, Pope Francis is unlike any who came before," the statement continued. "Above all, he is the People's Pope – a light of faith, hope, and love that shines brightly across the world."



Edited by Brandon Scott
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

A little bit of carnage for Christ



Filipino Catholics jostle to touch the carriage carrying the statue of the Black Nazarene during the annual procession on its feast day in Manila January 9, 2025. The wooden statue, carved in Mexico and brought to the Philippine capital early in the 17th Century, is cherished by Catholics, who believe that touching it can lead to a miracle. Photo: OSV News/Eloisa Lopez, Reuters

Black Nazarene procession attracts millions in the Philippines

The Black Nazarene procession in Manila, Philippines, which annually attracts one of the world's largest crowds for a religious devotion, attracted hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic pilgrims on January 9.

Taking place each year in January, the procession, known locally as "Traslacion", sees devotees carry across Manila a replica of a famous life-size statue of Jesus carrying a black wooden cross. The Philippines and East Timor are the only countries in Asia that are majority Catholic, with over 80% of the population of the Philippines belonging to the Church.

The procession's organisers estimated that about 220,000 people attended

Mass before the start of the procession, Rappler reported, and at least 800,000 people were gathered at the church Thursday evening, according to the Philippine Star. Hundreds of thousands more joined the procession as it went by.

As in past years, many of the devotees were barefoot and some even jumped onto the float and clutched at the cross carried by the famous statue. Rappler interviewed a 26-year-old British tourist at the procession, Adan Jeffrey, who said he was raised Catholic but now identifies as an atheist.

"I've never seen anything like it ... the devotion that they have to wait that amount of time to kiss the

statue is pretty phenomenal," Mr Jeffrey said.

"I've never had a passion toward anything like these people have toward religion. So it's amazing to see really, it's an eye-opener."

The Black Nazarene tradition was severely disrupted for several years by the COVID-19 pandemic; in 2020, 2021, and 2022 the procession was essentially cancelled entirely. In 2023, an estimated 103,277 faithful participated, far fewer than in past years.

Last year's procession, in January 2024, marked a return to the procession's typical size and fervour after three years of drastic downsizing. Also that year, the statue was placed in a glass case for the first

time, and participants were banned from getting onto the float as they have in previous years, though many ignored the directive, UCA News, a Catholic Asian news site, reported at the time.

The image of Jesus used in the procession is believed to have been brought from Mexico to Filipino shores in 1606 by missionaries of the Order of Augustinian Recollects. The life-size statue of Jesus is today enshrined in the famous minor basilica popularly known as the Quiapo Church, located in the Archdiocese of Manila. First enshrined at St John the Baptist Church in Luneta, the image was transferred to Quiapo in 1868.

'Families who have lost everything': LA Archdiocese responds to deadly wildfires

Archdiocesan officials and local Church leaders in Los Angeles are working to shelter and assist victims of the ongoing wildfires there as the blaze consumes entire neighbourhoods and lays waste to significant portions of the suburban area.

The fires began on Tuesday, January 7, and quickly spread via dry conditions and hurricane-force Santa Ana winds blowing in from the east. As of last week multiple

fires were raging unchecked across thousands of acres as firefighters worked to get the blazes under control.

One of the fires has destroyed Corpus Christi Catholic Church and has forced the closure of 65 Catholic schools, according to archdiocesan officials. Numerous other churches in the area have also been destroyed.

Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez in

a social media post urged the faithful to "keep praying for all those suffering" in the wildfires.

"My heart goes out to our neighbours who have lost their homes and livelihoods," the prelate said. "Let's pray for them and let's pray for our firefighters and first responders. May God keep all of our brothers and sisters safe and bring [an] end to these fires!"



Vatican claims over 500,000 pilgrims have crossed holy door in St Peter's

● Last Tuesday the Vatican claimed that after just two weeks since Pope Francis inaugurated the Jubilee of Hope on Christmas Eve, over half a million pilgrims have already come to participate in the event.

According to a January 7 press release from the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation, which is overseeing the organization of the jubilee, since Pope Francis opened the Holy Door in St Peter's on December 24, some 545,532 pilgrims from all over the world have already crossed through it.

"Hundreds of groups of faithful have already made their pilgrimage, starting from the new Piazza Pia, with the jubilee cross above their heads, and moving in prayer along the Via della Conciliazione, until reaching the basilica," the press release said, referring to the special pilgrim-path along the main street leading up to St Peter's Basilica.

Pope: 'fake news' foments hate

● In his annual speech to diplomats, Pope Francis condemned what he said was a universal growth in "fake news", among other things saying such deliberate distortions foment a climate of hate that leads to acts such as assassination attempts in 2024 against Prime Minister Robert Fico of Slovakia and President-elect Donald Trump of the United States.

In his January 9 speech,

the pope lamented "the continuous creation and spread of fake news," which he said, "distorts facts but also perceptions."

"This phenomenon generates false images of reality, a climate of suspicion that foments hate, undermines people's sense of security and compromises civil coexistence and the stability of entire nations," he said.

Pope accepts resignation of bishop, supporter of pre-Vatican II rite

● Pope Francis accepted last Tuesday the early resignation of French Bishop Dominique Rey of Fréjus-Toulon following years of Vatican scrutiny over the ordination of clerics using pre-Vatican II liturgical books and other concerns.

Bishop François Touvet, appointed coadjutor bishop of the same diocese in November 2023, now automatically succeeds Bishop Rey.

In a January 7 press release, Bishop Rey, who has led the diocese since 2000, said he was recently informed by the nuncio, the Pope's ambassador in France, that Pope Francis wanted him to submit his resignation after he had encouraged him not to resign in December 2023.

Jewish leaders ask Pope to stop 'making incendiary comments'

● The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (COP), a major US Jewish organisation, recently called on Pope Francis, who has frequently called for peace and decried the targeting of civilians, to "refrain from making incendiary comments" about the war between Israel and Hamas.

Leaders of the group said in a letter dated December 30 that they are concerned about recent comments Pope Francis has made "regarding Israel's defensive war against Hamas."

"We appreciate and share your concern for the suffering of innocent civilians and desire to spread peace and compassion around the world. However, statements you have made ... only serve to distort Israel's legitimate military campaign and fuel antisemitism and unjust targeting of the Jewish state," the leaders wrote, referring to comments he made during his Christmas address to the Roman Curia on December 21.



Letters

Letter of the week

Ask God to protect Christians and all people in Syria

Dear Editor, I had a short review in Books of the Year in *The Irish Catholic* of *Up from the Ashes* [*The Irish Catholic* – December 12, 2024].

I just want to draw attention to how certain minorities in Syria are fearful for their security and very lives under their new rulers, the HTS.

Before 2011, Syria was a very beautiful, historic country with lots of tourists. Syria had a secular constitution which respected different religions. All of this changed

with the arrival of fanatical Jihadists in 2011 who came from various parts of the world to impose strict Islamic rules on the country. There followed a horrific, terrible war which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. We saw the personification of evil and barbarism in ISIS.

The Jihadists have returned now and overthrown Assad. They claim to be more moderate now. The new leaders of Syria, the HTS, have promised safety and security to the different

religious factions in Syria and we hope and pray that this promise will be honoured, but various Jihadist factions from other countries have arrived and they are threatening the Alawite community and other minorities. A number of minorities have been murdered or injured. The Alawite people are ordinary poor people who are trying to feed their children just like other people in Syria. They too suffered from the terrible US and EU sanctions imposed on the country when Assad was

in charge. The unfortunate Alawite community are terrified by the violent threats coming from foreign violent Jihadists who have come into Syria. It's important to highlight this injustice and danger in the media and we must all pray that all poor people in Syria will be safe and at peace. We ask God also to protect Christians and all people in Syria.

Yours etc.,
Anthony Redmond.
Drimnagh, Dublin, 12.

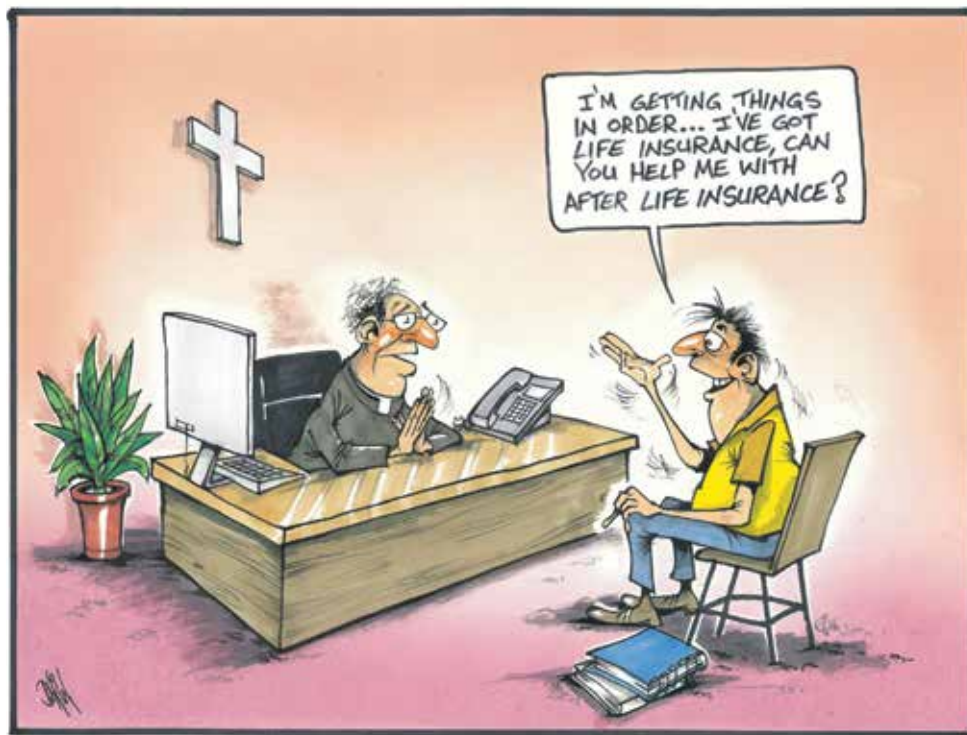
To talk of 'flower potting' is awful

Dear Editor, I do not often feel that I should raise an issue about something which someone else has written. I believe passionately in freedom of speech.

Yet I was very perturbed by the 'Notes in Haste – An Irish Pastor Writes' article last week [*The Irish Catholic* – January 9, 2025]. I found the tone of them unpleasant and in many ways rather dismissive of that which should be sacred. In particular I was angered by the contribution on weddings – a wedding is a unique occasion for each couple. That they have faith and choose to pledge their love for each other before God and their Church community is a wonderful thing when so many couples no longer believe in God, or if they do are content to celebrate their marriage in a secular environment. To talk of "flower potting" is awful. The references to readings, to stipends for "flower potting" and most of all the penultimate sentence, "Weddings are taxing in every way, whether one is running the show or sitting pretty – but at least there are not too many to endure now" must have caused pain to many.

I do not think this contribution or the sentiments and attitudes which seem to underlie it will help to bring people to faith. What I think it may do, is cause people to ask: "Why are we paying this man to do something he does not appear to want to do, and which does not seem to involve faith, hope or love?"

Yours etc.,
Baroness Nuala O'Loan
DBE MRIA
House of Lords, London



Christmas turnout and cultural Christianity

Dear Editor, It is important to keep attitudes such as hope, optimism, pessimism and realism in a careful balance. Include naivety in the mix too.

I found myself reflecting on the optimistic view of the large Christmas Mass attendances in the recent edition of *The Irish Catholic* [*The Irish Catholic* – January 9, 2025]. 'Packed churches for Christmas, priests report' was the page one headline. There was no reflection on the proportion of the "packed churches" who might be true believers in Jesus, be in the 'state of grace' or attend the following Sunday.

Was this Christmas turnout any different to the cul-

tural Christianity evident in our celebration of St Patrick: parades, shamrocks, green costumes, Irish dancing and trad music, drinking, etc.?

Another headline on page eight declared 'We ran out of hosts at Midnight Mass'. Was any guidance provided about the worthy reception of Holy Communion? The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches "we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment... [and]

examine our conscience... Anyone conscious of a grave sin (like deliberately missing Mass on Sunday or Holy Day) must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion." (#1385).

In my local New York parish, the priest gave clear guidance at Communion time about receiving worthily.

Yours etc.,
A.P. Breen
Bronx, New York, USA

Letters to the Editor

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

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication

Lay participation in the recent synod

Dear Editor, The suggestion that the laity somehow participated in the magisterium of the Pope in the recent Synod, is absurd.

The magisterium of the Church is exercised first of all by the Pope and secondly by the College of Bishops, with the Pope at their head. They are known as the *ecclesia docens*, or the 'teaching Church'. The rest of us – priests, deacons, religious and laity belong to the *eccle-*

sia discens, or the 'learning Church'.

The approval given by the Pope to the final document of the Synod is more in the way of a *nihil obstat*, i.e. the document is free from error in matters of faith and morals and is a reasonable record of what was said at the Synod. I hope this helps to clarify things.

Yours etc.,
Fr Noel McKeown OP
Newry

An audacious confidence to proclaim the Faith

Dear Editor, Fr Swan's invitation [*The Irish Catholic* – January 9, 2025] to yet another talk about priesthood is a wearisome prospect! Ever since the concept of the synodal process, the Church seems unable to even understand her mission and what the priesthood does.

Why does the Traditional Mass continue, despite recent restrictions, to have a growth in attendees and in vocations to the priesthood and religious life?

I believe that the vast majority are not *sedevacantist* loons but that the holiness of beauty speaks deeply.

They know what they are about and have the audacious confidence to proclaim that and damn the consequences; and maybe it is time to ask what we must learn to enable such confidence to flourish for the good of souls?

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

Pilgrimages are indeed a cornerstone of Catholic life...

Dear Editor, In relation to Matt Brady's Letter of the Week ('Pilgrimage is a symbol of life itself') in *The Irish Catholic* of January 9, pilgrimage is indeed a cornerstone of Catholic life. However, it is possible to undertake a pilgrimage without travelling by air – less convenient and more time consuming, perhaps, but still possible.

In my opinion, although the late Jimmy Carter (1924-2024) had solar panels installed on the roof of the White House in 1979 (to be removed by his successor!), he did the planet a disservice by deregulating air travel, one of the consequences of which is being experienced by rich millionaires and billionaires in Los Angeles and elsewhere

in California today.

If one has to fly, one can compensate for one's carbon footprint by, e.g., planting 1,000 trees in Kenya. Pilgrimage can be undertaken by land and sea. In this Holy (Jubilee) Year of Hope, my fellow pilgrims and I are following in the footsteps of Saint Oliver Plunkett (1625-1681) from Loughcrew to Downside, via Drogheda, Rome, Ghent and Tyburn. We will be staying overnight in Benedictine monasteries in France, Italy and Belgium. Pilgrimages are indeed a cornerstone of Catholic life and long may they continue to be so.

Yours etc.,
Fr Oliver Skelly
Coole, Co. Westmeath.

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

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, January 16, 2025

A view
from the
Quays

Fr Alan Hilliard

Page 34



A family's journey of Faith

Fr James Carlin's grave, Grace Carlin's great uncle in Loughinisland, Co. Down.

When a relative asked me to write about my family's Catholic background, it felt like an adventure into the unknown. I've always been curious about our past, and this seemed like the perfect excuse to dig into the stories that shaped us. What I found was a tapestry of faith, family, and history that goes back centuries - to 588 AD, with Bishop Carlaen of Armagh. It's surreal to think about how much history exists behind a surname like Carlin.

The roots of Faith

The Carlin surname is deeply entwined with the Catholic Church in Ireland, particularly in counties like Derry, Meath, and Down. These areas, historically strongholds of the Faith, faced immense persecution during the Penal Laws (1695-1829). It's strange to think about how my ancestors, people I have never met, gathered secretly for Mass in hidden places like Sevaghan's Altar Field in Loughinisland, Co. Down, risking everything to keep their faith alive.

One story that stands out is the tragic fate of Reverend Bernard O'Kerolan, who was hanged in 1706 for administering Sacraments. Knowing that someone with a variation of our family name chose martyrdom over renouncing his faith inspires me to study Theology at University. It makes the sacrifices of those who came before so important



If my ancestors endured persecution and brought the Gospel to faraway places, what am I doing with the faith they've handed down?
says Grace Carlin

to me, and it explains why faith runs so deeply in my family.

Entering the Dominicans

The Dominican connection in our family began in the 13th century with Bishop Giolla-an-Choimde O'Cairellan, a Dominican friar who ruled the See of Derry. The Dominicans, known as the Order of Preachers, came to Ireland in 1224, inspiring many to join their mission of truth, prayer, and community. Bishop O'Cairellan's leadership not only strengthened the Church but also set a precedent for many Carlins to follow.

More recently, Sister Frances Maureen Carlin, a Dominican nun from New York, became a beacon of modern faith. She was elected Prioress during the turbulent post-Vatican II years and led her Sisters into a renewed future. Her work in Puerto Rico, teaching rural communities, and establishing the Siena Women's Centre to empower women, reflects the values that seem embedded in our family's DNA: resilience, service, and hope. Virtues that I aspire to live out as a Dominican pupil.

Migration and new beginnings

Like many Irish families, the Carlins didn't stay in Ireland. The 19th century saw waves of emigration, driven by famine and political strife. One branch of our family ended up in Brooklyn, New York. Patrick Carlin, my distant relative, famously declared, "I'm going to America where I won't have to take my hat off to any man," and set sail in 1851.

In Brooklyn, Patrick's family helped build St Augustine's Church, a testament to how faith remained central, even far from home. Generations later, the Carlin name became associated with education and missionary work, from Puerto Rico to Guatemala.

In the early years of the 20th century, 400 years after the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the valley of Mexico, descendants of St Juan Diego and his compatriots founded what today are four of the largest parishes in the Diocese of Austin, Texas. Mexican Catholics helped establish St Helen in Georgetown, St William in Round Rock, St Margaret Mary in Cedar

Park in southern Williamson County, and St Elizabeth of Hungary in Pflugerville in northern Travis County. At the time, they were small rural communities, but now they are part of the thriving Austin Metroplex.

While not a clergyman, Francisco Carlin (1876-1959) played a crucial role in spreading the Catholic Faith in Round Rock, Texas. He came to Round Rock in 1900 from San Diego de Alejandria in the State of Jalisco, Mexico. Sadly, little is known about his Carlin ancestors beyond his great grandfather, Juan Carlin who was born in San Diego de Alejandria, Jalisco, México in 1800. According to David L Carlin, Hispanics came to Round Rock and McNeil at the beginning of the 20th century to work principally in the limestone quarries. Francisco went to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Austin, Texas and requested that a Priest be sent to Round Rock once a month to say Mass, offering his home as a meeting place. The first Mass in Round Rock was celebrated in his home in 1916 by Fr Walter O'Donnell, a Holy Cross Priest. The liturgy was celebrated at the Carlin family home until 1939 when St William Catholic Church was opened.

For me, Francisco's story is a reminder that faith isn't just about belief. It's about action. His life challenges me to consider how I can make a difference in my community, just as he did in his. Even though we're separated by time and geography, I feel connected to his courage and commitment

to building something lasting for others.

Faith in modern times

Fast forward to the present, and the Dominican legacy continues with Fr Matthew Carlin in Scotland. Ordained in 2016, he's one of the youngest parish priests in Scotland. His story resonates with me because he describes his family as a source of faith and inspiration. Isn't that what family is supposed to be?

For me, discovering these stories has made faith feel alive. It's no longer something abstract but a living thread connecting me to generations of Carlins who faced trials, celebrated triumphs, and always carried their faith with them. It's humbling to think of them and their sacrifices as I sit here in a warm room, writing on a laptop.

What this journey taught me

It's strange how researching the past can change how you see the present. I find myself asking: If my ancestors could endure persecution, build churches, and bring the Gospel to faraway places, what am I doing with the faith they've handed down?

I hope this story inspires others to uncover their own family's faith history. If nothing else, it's a reminder that behind every name lies a story worth telling.

i Grace Bernadette Carlin is a Lower Sixth pupil at Dominican College Fortwilliam, Belfast where she is studying A Level French, History, and Religion Studies.

The missionary spirit of Ireland looks brighter than ever



Renata Milán Morales

As 2025 began, a significant event in Cologne, Germany, was a proof of the commitment of young Catholics from across Europe and highlighted the growing faith among Irish youth. The SEEK conference, organised by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), brought together over 500 young Catholics for four days of spiritual renewal, fellowship, and missionary inspiration. Among them were over 150 students from Ireland. Several Irish priests and two Irish bishops were also in attendance. Most of the guest speakers were based in Ireland, including Fr Conor McDonough, Fr Chris Hayden, Katie Ascough, and Fr Patrick Cahill, among others.

Fr Conor McDonough OP, a Dominican priest based in Galway who attended as a speaker, was moved by the strength of the Irish attendees. "Usually, we think of the Irish Church as weak, but I was impressed by the faith and commitment of the young Irish people. They connected deeply with the history of the Church, particularly at the tomb of St Albert the Great, a patron saint for students and intellectuals. These young people are ready to evangelise their own time."

Proclamation

Shannon Campbell, Director of the Catholic Chaplaincy at QUB, described the conference as "a four-day proclamation of the hope and joy of the Gospel." She added, "SEEK invited young men and women to live out their faith through prayer, the sacraments, fellowship, and the teaching of the apostles."

Rebekah, another attendee, highlighted the extraordinary

Irish turnout. "Out of the approximately 500 attendees at SEEK, over a third travelled from Ireland, primarily from UCC, UCD, and QUB, but also from groups like Holy Family Mission, NET Ireland, and Home for the Harvest. It shows the hunger among young Irish Catholics not only to grow in their faith but to evangelise. Having the support of Irish bishops and priests who travelled with us reinforced this sense of mission."

Fr Patrick Cahill, spiritual director of the Holy Family Mission based in Co. Tipperary, agreed, "Traditionally in Ireland, the clergy and religious were seen as the missionaries, while everyone else was passive. FOCUS is changing that by teaching young people to rediscover their own missionary calling. It's beautiful to see students courageously inviting their friends to Bible studies and sharing their faith naturally."

The Cologne Cathedral, one of Europe's most iconic religious sites, hosted daily Masses celebrated by priests and bishops from across the continent. Students were particularly moved by the presence of the relics of the Three Wise Kings, just days before their feast day.

"The liturgies and Adoration on New Year's Eve were especially powerful. Being in Cologne reminded us of the deep roots of Christianity in Europe"

Michelle Shelly, General Manager at Pure in Heart Ireland, told this paper that, "It was incredible to see the large number of young Irish people who were willing to spend money travel abroad in winter... is a very encouraging sign for the Catholic Church in Ireland! It tells me that young people are eager to pursue truth and beauty!"

Rebekah, a member of



Fr Conor McDonough pictured with a group of students in Cologne.



Holy Family Mission stand at SEEK conference held in Cologne.

the Holy Family Mission, was inspired by the experience. "The liturgies and Adoration on New Year's Eve were especially powerful. Being in Cologne reminded us of the deep roots of Christianity in Europe. The relics of Albert the Great and the memorials to Edith Stein inspired us to embrace our faith boldly and authentically."

Amazing

Grace Masterson, a young Catholic teacher who attended the conference told this paper that the conference was "amazing! My biggest takeaway was the fact that every Catholic is called to be a mis-

sonary - if we want to be authentic Catholics, we cannot keep the faith to ourselves!"

"I think it's a great boost of faith for young people. To see the faith is not just a parochial phenomenon. To see that the Church is much broader than that"

Fr Barry White, an Irish priest based in Mullingar, explained that "We're all a part of this one universal faith. It was a great expression of unity in the midst of all the diversity and the different experiences of Church... I think it's a great boost of faith for young people. To see the faith is not just a parochial phenomenon. To see that the Church is much broader than that."

FOCUS, the organisation behind SEEK, operates with three core principles: divine intimacy, authentic friend-

ship, and missionary discipleship. These principles were evident throughout the conference, from the talks and workshops to the fellowship among attendees.

Embrace

Curtis Martin, the founder of FOCUS, gave a keynote talk on mission, encouraging students to embrace their call to evangelise.

Fr Patrick Cahill also noted how this approach is changing student ministry. "Ten or fifteen years ago, I would have worried about young Catholics drifting from their faith at university. Now, thanks to FOCUS and dedicated chaplains, this is the time they're most likely to go deeper. They're rediscovering prayer, the sacraments, and their purpose as children of God." He added that "It's not a concert or entertainment... It's about helping young people grow in their relationship with Christ and find the courage to live and share their faith."

The conference also included talks on creation, the fall, reconciliation, life

in Christ, and mission. Katie Ascough addressed the beauty of creation and our relationship with God, while Fr Patrick Cahill spoke about reconciliation, "I emphasised that God is not just a rule-giver but a healer who wants to bring us back to happiness and wholeness, even through the paradox of the cross," he explained.

The timing of SEEK, at the start of the Church's Jubilee Year, stressed its significance. Fr Barry described it as "a jubilee of youth," where students were given space to reflect, connect with other Catholics, and deepen their faith. "I think it was interesting to bring a youth conference, which is very much steeped in the Catholic tradition, to have it in a place like Cologne with the German Senate, a conference to Europe where secularisation is quickly spreading... It was positive to have an event like that. I think it was a very good boost of faith for our young people. And they're coming back to, to start Bible studies in their local parishes..."

This sense of unity was palpable throughout the conference. As Fr Barry observed, "SEEK reminds us that we're part of a universal Church. The faith isn't just an Irish phenomenon; it's something shared by millions across the world. That's an important message for young people to take home."

After the conference concluded, participants returned to their universities, parishes, and homes with a renewed sense of purpose. Shannon expressed her confidence in the event's impact, "Feedback from students has been incredible, and we have no doubt it will bear great fruit back in Belfast and beyond."

Fr Conor also left the conference with a deep sense of hope. "I was proud of the Irish Church and its young people. They're rediscovering their faith, connecting with the history of the Church, and embracing their missionary calling. Student ministry is in a much healthier state now than it has been in years."

For those who attended SEEK in Cologne, the experience was more than just a conference. It was an encounter with Christ and a powerful reminder that the Catholic Church in Europe, particularly in Ireland, is alive and filled with potential. As Rebekah put it, "The conference gives hope for the Church in Ireland! The number of Irish people who went shows the desire for not only growing in the faith but also to evangelise!"

"This sense of unity was palpable throughout the conference. As Fr Barry observed, 'SEEK reminds us that we're part of a universal Church. The faith isn't just an Irish phenomenon; it's something shared by millions across the world'"



Lies and the sin against the Spirit



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

There is nothing as psychologically and morally dangerous as lying, as denying the truth. Jesus warns us that we can commit a sin that is unforgivable which (in his words) is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

What is this sin? Why is it unforgivable? And how is it linked to not telling the truth?

This is the context where Jesus gives us this warning. He had just cast out a demon and some of the people who had witnessed this believed, as a hard religious doctrine, that only someone who came from God could cast out a demon.

But they hated Jesus, so seeing him cast out a demon was a very inconvenient truth, so inconvenient in fact that they chose to deny what they had just seen with their own eyes. And so, against everything they knew to be true, they affirmed instead that Jesus had cast out the demon by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They knew better. They knew that they were denying the truth.

Jesus' first response was to try to make them see their lie. He appeals to logic, arguing that if Beelzebub, the prince of demons, is casting out demons, then Satan's house is

divided against itself and will eventually fall. But they persist in their lie. It's then, in that specific context, that Jesus utters his warning about the danger of committing a sin that cannot be forgiven because it blasphemes the Holy Spirit.

In essence, what's in this warning?

Warping

The people whom Jesus addressed had denied a reality that they had just seen with their own eyes because it was too difficult for them to accept its truth. So, they denied its truth, fully aware that they were lying.

Well, the first lie we tell is not so dangerous because we still know we are lying. The danger is that if we persist in that lie and continue to deny (and lie) we can reach a point where we believe the lie, see it as truth, and see truth as falsehood.

Perversion is then seen as virtue, and the sin becomes unforgivable, not because forgiveness is withheld, but because we no longer believe we need forgiveness, nor in fact do we want it or remain open to receiving it.

“Hell is never a nasty surprise waiting for a basically honest, happy person”

Whenever we lie or in any way deny the truth, we begin to warp our conscience and if we persist in this, eventually we will (and this is not too strong a phrase) pervert our soul so that for us falsehood looks like truth, darkness looks like light, and hell looks like Heaven.

Hell is never a nasty surprise waiting for a basically honest, happy

person. Hell can only be the full flowering of a long, sustained dishonesty where we have denied reality for so long that we now see dishonesty as truth. There isn't anyone in hell who is repentant and wishing he or she had another chance to live and die in grace. If there is anyone in hell, that person, no matter his or her private misery, is feeling smug and looking with a certain disdain on the naivete of those who are honest, those in Heaven.

Living

And how is that a “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”?

In his letter to the Galatians, St Paul lays out two fundamental ways we can live our lives. We can live outside of God's spirit. We do that whenever we are living in infidelity, idolatry, hatred, factionalism, and dishonesty. And lying is what takes us there. Conversely, we live inside God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, whenever we are living in charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, gentleness, and chastity. And we live inside these whenever we are honest. Thus, whenever we lie, whenever we deny reality, whenever we deny truth, we are (in effect and in reality) stepping outside of God's spirit, blaspheming that spirit by disdaining it.

Satan is the prince of lies. That's why the biggest danger in our world is the amount of lies, disinformation, misinformation, and flat-out denial of reality that's present most everywhere today – whenever, it seems, we don't find the truth to our liking. There is nothing more destructive and dangerous to the health of our souls, the possibility of creating community among ourselves, the future of our planet, and our own sanity, than the flat-out denial of the truth of something that has happened.

When reality is denied: when a fact of history is rewritten to expunge a painful truth; when you are told that something you witnessed with your own eyes didn't happen; when someone says, the holocaust didn't happen; when someone says “there never was slavery in this country”; or when someone says “no kids died at Sandy Hook”, that doesn't just dishonor millions of people, it plays on the sanity of a whole culture.

When something has happened and is subsequently denied, that doesn't just make a mockery of truth, it plays havoc with our sanity, not least with the one who is telling the lie.

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milán Morales

The Creator

Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves.

Human intelligence can find a response to the question of origins which can be known with certainty through his works, by the light of human reason, even if this knowledge is often obscured and disfigured by error. This is why faith comes to confirm and enlighten reason in the correct understanding of this truth.

Work of the Holy Trinity

The New Testament reveals that God created everything by the eternal Word, his beloved Son. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” The Church's faith confesses the creative action of the Holy Spirit, the “giver of life”, “the Creator Spirit”, the “source of every good”.

The Old Testament suggests, and the New Covenant reveals the creative action of the Son and the Spirit, inseparably one with that of the Father. Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity. Scripture and Tradition never cease to teach and celebrate this fun-

damental truth: “The world was made for the glory of God.”

The glory of God consists in the realisation of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created. The ultimate purpose of creation is that God “who is the creator of all things may at last become “all in all”, thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude.”

The mystery of Creation

God creates by wisdom and love. Because God creates through wisdom, his creation is ordered. Our human understanding, which shares in the light of the divine intellect, can understand what God tells us by means of his creation.

We call “divine providence” the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection. God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God's greatness and goodness.

To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of “subduing” the Earth and having dominion over it. God thus

enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbours.

The scandal of evil

If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does evil exist? There is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil.

But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it? With infinite power God could always create something better. But with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world “in a state of journeying” towards its ultimate perfection. God is in no way the cause of moral evil. He permits it because he respects the freedom of his creatures.

From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good. God has guided his creation to that definitive sabbath rest for which he created Heaven and Earth.

In Christ's hands, miracles abound

Is 62:1-5
Ps 96:1-2, 2-3, 7-8, 9-10
1 Cor 12:4-11
Jn 2:1-11

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



Who couldn't use a miracle right about now?

After weeks of parties and packages, planning and platters, the world returns to something vaguely normal. Our waistlines are bigger, and our to-do lists are smaller. Christmas is in the rear-view mirror. The trees have been tossed to the curb. The lights have burned out. The toys have become boring. The last bits of confetti have been swept up and the final bricks of fruitcake have been hidden away, God only knows where. Winter stretches before us, with dark nights and cold mornings and endless heart-shaped boxes lining the shelves at Walmart.

But then, this Sunday, we encounter something wondrous. Just when we need it, we get a miracle, the first recorded miracle of Jesus as he began his public ministry.

Transformation

What he did was not an act of healing or restoration - no lepers were cured, no blind received sight - but, rather, it was a gesture of quiet but unmistakable transformation. The ordinary became extraordinary. Water became into wine. Whether we realise it or not, Jesus offered a beautiful lesson that would hold true not just during his ministry, but for eternity.

Put simply: An encounter with the Lord can't help but bring about change. This

miracle, of course, is a beautiful companion (and, really, a symbol) of the setting, a wedding - an occasion where two people are changed, becoming one flesh; it's a sacred union that holds open the promise of new wonder, new joy, new life.

When we encounter this episode, it's also a beautiful chance to look more closely at just how it's told. The first lines of John's Gospel make clear what, or who, is important: "There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there."

Then comes this little afterthought, in case anyone was wondering: "Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding."

Really? It's a startling juxtaposition. The author clearly wants us to know who was present, and who takes precedence. We realise that Mary, the one whose "yes" was the catalyst for the joyous event we just celebrated, the Nativity, was also the motivating force behind her son's first miracle.

When you think about it, in some ways Cana echoed Bethlehem. Both involved God intervening to make the ordinary extraordinary; a manger became home for the Almighty; a humble and obscure family became Holy; water became wine.

And in Cana, as in Bethlehem, Mary's role made it hap-

pen. That's not all. One of the great gifts of this Gospel passage is that it leaves us with Mary's final recorded words in Scripture, her advice to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." Those five words tell them (and us) all we need to know: this is where discipleship begins. Listen to him. Then do it.

Tempting

It can be tempting to look at the miracle of Cana as a sentimental mystery - a surprising prelude to those loaves multiplying, the lame walking and the dead rising. But that misses the larger point. In Christ's hands, miracles abound. They happen at unexpected moments, in places we might not imagine.

And this event involves elements that we will see later, the night before his death: apostles gathered around a table, wine, and commanding words of faith and hope. "Do this in memory of me" carries a haunting echo of "Do whatever he tells you."

As we recover from Christmas and get back into the familiar grind of daily life, and the quiet continuation of Ordinary Time, maybe we need this moment in Cana. We need this connection to the miraculous and an opportunity to keep our hearts attentive to this simple, transcendent truth: Jesus changes everything. When we least expect it, wonders await. Miracles abound.

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

Wedding Feast at Cana, Lavinia Fontana



Saint of the week

By Renata Milan Morales



St Anthony the Great

St Anthony the Great: The father of all monks

St Anthony the Great or St Anthony the Abbot was born in a village on the left bank of the Nile, Egypt, in the 3rd Century AD. At the age of 20, moved by the Scripture verse "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21), renounced everything he had to live as a hermit. We know his life thanks to the biography written by his disciple Athanasius of Alexandria.

St Athanasius described the hermit as a model of Christian virtue, humble, highlighting his self-control, and love for God and for others. Though he belonged to a wealthy family, from

an early age he showed no interest in the luxury of worldly life. He preferred work and meditation to parties and banquets. For his importance among the Desert Fathers and to all later Christian monasticism, he is also known as the Father of all Monks.

St Anthony spent many years living in an ancient rock tomb, struggling against the temptations of the devil, who often appeared to him to show what he could have done if he had remained in the world. Sometimes the devil appeared as a ferocious beast, but Anthony responded with fasting and penance of any kind.

St Anthony of Egypt lived until 106 years of age. He is the most famous monk of ancient Christendom, a noble example of austerity and sacrifice. Most of his life was spent in solitude. But, as we find in tradition, saints care for people's souls and the monk led many people to himself for guidance and spiritual healing. Many people would travel to receive his guidance. "He was able to be of such use to all," St Athanasius wrote, "that many soldiers and men who had great possessions laid aside the burdens of life and became monks for the rest of their days. And it was as if a physician had been given by God to Egypt."

During his life as a monk he went to Alexandria to give aid and comfort to the Christians persecuted by Emperor Maximian, and then retired near to the Red Sea, but had to return to Alexandria shortly after to fight the Arian heresy, more and more widespread in the eastern regions of the empire.

St Anthony Abbot is usually represented in art next to a piglet. On his robe there is a tau, the T-shaped Egyptian cross. In the centuries, episodes from the life of St Anthony have inspired many artists.

St Anthony is celebrated on the day of his death, January 17.

A view from the Quays



If religious faith becomes too immersed in the culture it dwells in, we can't think of a way to move forward, says **Fr Alan Hilliard**

“He was amazed at their lack of faith.” What a sentence! It was said two thousand years ago but could be said today. Jesus did beautiful things, he did great things, but all as people could say was “who does he think he is – sure he's just but a carpenter.” Isn't it extraordinary that despite all these amazing things people could still find it within themselves to dismiss Jesus. What hope is there for us then? But people are the same in every age.

Faith doesn't die, and Christian faith never will. However, it does change its size, its shape and its structure. The one great example of this is St Benedict who was born in the 5th Century and died aged sixty-seven. He founded an order called the Benedictines who are still in existence today across the world – sixteen hundred years later. Now many of the monasteries are not that old, but the average life span of a monastery is 463 years. When I was researching these figures, I discovered that less than ten percent of monasteries listed in the United States are eighty-three years old and the oldest was 280 years old which was quite exceptional. So, there is a constant, which is the Benedictine spirituality, and then there are different expressions of it in the various monasteries. The size shape and structure continually change – some monasteries died out, but other ones formed.

Faith

The same happens to religious faith in many ways. There is one



Two old men in front of the Church of Adam and Eve in Dublin.

writer called Olivier Roy. He is an expert on the sociology of religion. He tells us that religious faith cannot exist on its own. This is my second point: faith always lives within a culture. Just as in the early Church Christianity had to find a way of dwelling within the Roman Empire – if religion doesn't do this and tries to exist in a pure form it becomes a fundamentalist cult. So, it's necessary for religious faith to dwell within a society and a culture that extends hospitality to it and makes it welcome.

“What is the significance of Christmas day? Without hesitation the boy from Tanmalangmaloo raised his hand and answers, ‘It's the day before the races, out at Tangmalangmaloo’”

Look at Ireland. Catholicism, with the emergence of the Irish Free State, found a welcome home in the state – religion and that state nearly become synonymous with that same faith. So much was the state at home with the Catholic Church and vice versa that they

were the best of pals, and with a few exceptions most were happy to get on with it. However, what he says is that, over time, the two become so entwined that the religious content disappeared, and people just want the cultural elements. Funerals, First Communion and Confirmation.

This has happened all over the world.

This phenomenon is captured beautifully by John O'Brien in one of his poems entitled *The Boy from Tangmalangmaloo*. The poem describes a visit by the Bishop to the local bush school where he set about examining the religious knowledge of the students, i.e. checking the strength of the religious marker. One of the questions he asked was, “what is the significance of Christmas day?” Without hesitation the boy from Tanmalangmaloo raised his hand and answers, “It's the day before the races, out at Tangmalangmaloo.”

Culture

At times, in history, the temptation for Priests and bishops was to promote the culture and not its content. That's why monasteries collapsed the vineyard became more important than prayer.

Faith does not die, it will continue. If religious faith becomes too immersed in the culture it dwells in, we can't think of a way to move forward. Yes, religious faith is not as present as it was but how much of it was cultural anyway. The challenge for us today is not to get distracted by the ways things were but to take a good hard look at the religious content of faith and in finding a new cultural home for it – a new and vibrant way of expressing what we really and truly believe. Focus on the core gifts like Eucharist, Scripture, and sharing a journey together is critical.

Religious faith must find its true self and not be compromised. That is why it must detach from culture. One theologian put it this way, “Should a cross hang on the walls of parliaments and government buildings? No, if its function is the same as the standards of the emperor Constantine or on the banners of the Crusaders. Yes, if it can remind politicians that truth is more important than power.”

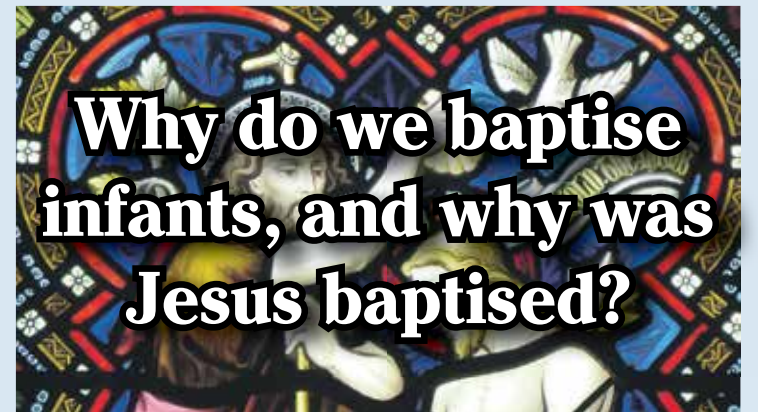
Parents must remain the main channels for the transmission of culture, pope says

Carol Glatz

Rather than supporting the growth of commercial technology and artificial intelligence, governments should be supporting families and educators in being the main channels of passing on culture and values, Pope Francis told ambassadors and other diplomats accredited to the Holy See.

“Here we see the importance of media literacy education, which aims to provide the essential tools needed to promote critical thinking skills, to equip young people with the necessary means for their personal growth and their active participation in the future of their societies,” he said in a written speech delivered January 9. “Scientific progress,

especially in the area of information and communications technology, has brought undoubted benefits for mankind,” he wrote. At the same time, “it often contributes to polarisation, a narrowing of intellectual perspectives, a simplification of reality, misuse, anxiety and, ironically, isolation, particularly as a result of the use of social media and online games,” the pope wrote. This technology, which is strongly aligned with commercial interests, is “generating a culture rooted in consumerism.” “Parents, close relatives and educators must remain the main channels for the transmission of culture, for the sake of which governments should limit themselves to providing support for them in their educational responsibilities,” especially in promoting media literacy, he wrote.



Q: Some Evangelical friends were recently quizzing me on the Catholic understanding of baptism. They were especially asking about Jesus' baptism, and whether this indicates Jesus had some sin or sins of which he needed to repent. They had the same question regarding infant baptism, as infants would seem to neither be able to understand the rite, nor have any sins to “wash away” in the first place.

A: Looking at the second part of your question first, I'm sure in your dialogues with your Evangelical friends you are already familiar with one of the main scriptural justifications for infant baptism in the book of Acts, which describe whole households being baptised, which presumably included infants and young children (See Acts 16:33).

Catholics also believe that sacraments function in a primarily objective way, in the sense that they are not dependent on the emotional state or perfect understanding of the one receiving them in order to ‘work’.

But to dig a little deeper, although of course infants are not capable of committing any sins themselves, there are still many benefits for a baptised infant. Like all of humanity (save Our Lord and His Blessed Mother) infants are bound by original sin – that is, the first sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which radically wounded humanity's fundamental relationship with its Creator.

As we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back toward God” (CCC 405). So, for infants, innocent of any personal sins, baptism still has the great benefit of freeing them from the ultimate consequence of original sin, meaning that a baptised infant becomes able to receive the inheritance of eternal life with God in Heaven. Baptism also eases some of the other consequences of original sin – such as the inclination to evil called ‘concupiscence’ – by giving the baptised the grace to resist temptation.

Perhaps more profoundly, the Church teaches that baptism unites us more closely to Christ and is a way of personally sharing in his Passion, Death and Resurrection. St Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection” (Rom 6:4-5). And in a marvellous way, through this closer configuration to Christ, we attain a relationship to God in Christ that goes beyond our original identity as mere creatures; that is, we become adopted sons and daughters of God (See CCC 537).

On a very practical level, through Catholic baptism infants become official members of the Catholic Church, which among other things qualifies them to receive the other sacraments. As the Code of Canon Law tells us: “By baptism one is incorporated into the Church of Christ and constituted a person in it, with the duties and the rights which, in accordance with each one's status, are proper to [Catholic] Christians” (Canon 96).

Turning to the baptism of Jesus, Jesus was of course sinless and did not need baptism in the same way that you or I do. But as the Catechism explains: “The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ Already he is anticipating the ‘baptism’ of his bloody death. Already he is coming to ‘fulfil all righteousness,’ that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins” (CCC 536).

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

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



The commitment to the Truth

Every now and then someone gets peeved at something that happens in church and resorts to the nearest secular confessional. They often tell what they perceive as the sins of others!

On **Liveline** (RTÉ Radio 1, Tuesday) someone complained that eulogies weren't allowed in the Diocese of Meath, and that the rules required that any photos of the deceased had to be on a small table but not on the coffin. Obviously, people's feelings were hurt and that has to be acknowledged. A statement from the Diocese explained that eulogies weren't 'in keeping with the solemnity of the Mass', and asked for anyone affected to contact the bishop's office. I hope the matter will be treated with pastoral care and I'd prefer if there was a spokesperson to explain or defend the rules rather than just a statement. If something is defensible, defend it. If it's not then scrap it! That doesn't mean that the defence or explanation has to be accepted or even understood fully by everybody, but it should be both rational and spiritual.

Some took the opportunity for swipes at the Church. At times presenter Joe Duffy stood up for the right of the Church to make 'the ultimate decision' on such matters. There was a wide discussion on what exactly the Church was – the people, the Vatican, the buildings? I didn't



Meta's CEO Mark Zuckerberg. Photo: OSV News/Nathan Howard.

hear a mention of the Body of Christ. There was puzzlement as to why the rules seemed to vary from diocese to diocese, though I'd say it's more a case of the implementation varying. I had always thought eulogies were not allowed, but that they often happened in practice. It can be a fine line between homily and eulogy – Joe Duffy quoted a priest to that effect in relation to the funeral of former Taoiseach John Bruton. He also asked if the eulogy could be abused (he instanced crime gang funerals). I certainly have experienced some cringewor-

thy examples. Some later callers supported the stance of the church. One woman said she wanted no eulogy, just to keep it 'simple and straightforward when He calls me home'.

The next day, before the **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Wednesday) the upcoming items were flagged in a rather problematic way. One item was to be about a woman getting a top job in the Vatican with a 'BUT ...' added. It felt a bit mean-spirited. In the second promo the host added a bit more – 'BUT ... she's got to share it with a man'. He also

suggested that Facebook was abandoning its 'commitment to truth' (hyperbolics!) by getting rid of fact-checkers for the USA. They played a clip from Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, explaining that there was going to be more free expression and that there had been too much political bias and too many errors from the fact checkers (irony alert!). I was reminded of lines from the Carole King song 'It's too late baby now it's too late'. I was inclined to agree with guest Ciara O'Brien of *The Irish Times* that Zuckerberg was just cosying up to the

PICK OF THE WEEK

THE SIMPSONS

Channel 4 Saturday (night) January 18, 4:40am

Bart Sells His Soul
Bart sells his soul to his friend Milhouse and feels the emptiness. (S7 Ep4/25)

THE MEANING OF LIFE

RTE One Sunday January 19, 10:30pm

Joe Duffy meets Kilkenny-born Paralympic Champion, medical doctor and world-renowned tenor Ronan Tynan

MARCH FOR LIFE

EWTN Friday January 24, 2:30pm

Live and complete coverage of the most important pro-life event of the year: the annual March for Life in Washington DC.

Trump administration. The host put it pithily – 'I don't think he's a Trump supporter, but he wants to stop being a Trump enemy'.

Ciara O'Brien suggested that 'facts are not biased', but that was disingenuous – a lot depends on what facts you check out and what facts you leave out. You'd need fact checkers to fact-check the fact checkers.

On the Vatican story, and Sister Simona Brambilla sharing her role as Prefect of the Dicastery for Religious with a cardinal, Elise Ann Allen on the **Cruz** website clarified the matter. The Sister was still in charge, but because there were some questions in canon law about decisions having to be signed by an ordained priest, a cardinal was added

to fulfil that function.

I doubt if it was intentional that the Baptism-themed **Simpsons** (Channel 4, Sunday) coincided with the feast day of the Baptism of Jesus. The hyper-religious Flanders family was horrified that the Simpsons' children hadn't been baptised and immediately drives them to the river. Just before the water hits Bart, Homer dives in and takes the water instead. Bart is impressed – 'You took a baptismal for me!' Homer briefly says something very spiritual about St Augustine of Hippo before reverting to his usual self. Some might find it disrespectful, but at least it makes a point about sneaky baptisms!

Film

Aubrey Malone



Olympic horror turned into expedient news story

September 5 began like any other day in Munich 1972. The Olympic Games were taking place there. Everyone was excited. Mark Spitz had just won his seventh gold medal in eight days.

Then terror struck. Or to be more precise, terrorism. Eleven Jewish athletes were taken hostage by five members of a commando wing of the PLO called Black September. They told the police one would be shot every hour unless 200 Palestinian prisoners were released from Israeli custody.

Tim Fehlbaum's *September 5* (15) isn't the first film to be made about this incident. We've already had "21 Hours at Munich" (1976), *One Day in Septem-*

ber (1999) and Steven Spielberg's *Munich* in 2005.

Here the emphasis is different. It isn't on the incident itself but on a claustrophobic room in *ABC Sports*, the TV network transmitting it.

No matter how horrendous an event may be, a news channel has a programme to make. The people working here, no matter how traumatised they feel, have to keep at least a semblance of calm as they deliver updates to the public.

But what if they don't feel traumatised at all? What if they see such a tragedy as an opportunity to gain leverage over an opposing network by having their 'scoop' in first?

"This is great stuff!" one of the team chirps to another



A scene from the film *September 5* (2025)

in this film as a horde of people run terrified along a road. "You got it, Kubrick!" says a second.

At this point we're in *Network* territory. Who can forget the ruthlessness of Faye

Dunaway in Sidney Lumet's landmark work apropos the super-importance of "ratings" at the expense of suffering? Peter Sarsgaard's dead eyes match her here.

We know how this story

ends. That's why Fehlbaum needs to give us a different emphasis. His fly-on-the-wall approach (which never ventures near the terrorists or their prisoners) captivates with tense facial expressions, procedural priorities, satiric humour.

Over 900 million people watched these events on TV. That's 300 million more than saw Neil Armstrong step on the moon three years before. What does that say about people's appetite for bad news over good? Is it the case that "Good news is no news" for sensationalists?

In the end, *ABC Sports*' lust for exclusivity rebounded on them. They went for broke with a revelation that proved to be

untrue. The champagne should have been put on ice until all the facts were in.

The Munich police also came unstuck in their handling of the events. One was reminded of the dark days of World War II when a different set of Jews suffered at the hands of a certain German despot with a tooth-paste moustache.

Would *ABC Sports* do better today? Hindsight is always 20/20. When one is in the eye of the storm, different laws apply.

Policemen consider whether to negotiate or shoot to kill. Cameramen ponder whether to shoot upper right or lower left.

Different strokes for different folks.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Edinburgh, past and present, the glories and the ugly shadows

Edinburgh: A New History, by Alistair Moffat (Birlinn, £14.99 / €18.00)
Edinburgh: The autobiography, edited by Alan Taylor (Birlinn, £20.00 / €24.00)

Peter Costello

I am always astonished when Dubliners extol the graces of Georgian Dublin, thinking to myself that they can never have seen Edinburgh to make such a statement. Undoubtedly the New Town of Edinburgh is the premier Georgian city in these islands, but that is the least of the city's virtues.

In Victorian days people often called Dublin the "second city of the Empire". This was merely bluster, for clearly the city of John Knox, Mary Queen of Scots, David Hume and Adam Smith really filled that role for several recent centuries. Yet it is a city of which Irish people - bar the occasional trip to see the rugby at Murrayfield - know little of and care less. This is a great shame.

Of late Edinburgh has been celebrating its 900th year as a city, and these two very different books have been published in Edinburgh to mark the event.

Alistair Moffat is the former director of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, only one among his many accomplishments, among them some six books dealing with various aspects of Highland and Scottish history.

Adroitly

The present history is a short text, barely two hundred pages long. But the material is handled so adroitly and so confidently, that one hardly notices, for it nevertheless provides an essential history of Scotland's capital, rather like a bowl of strong Scotch broth. He has to admit at the very beginning that though the city may be formally nine hundred years old, the place has been a human settlement of some kind for seven thousand years.

But he avoids burying readers in prehistory, and his fifty short chapters concentrate on what people will really want to know, on what makes the Edinburgh of today what it is.

To outsiders it can be a bit of a mystery. Years ago, on a brief stay in the city, where I was contributing to a BBC Scotland documentary about Arthur

Conan Doyle, we visited the National Gallery of Scotland. There we were perplexed by an exhibition devoted to "44 Scotland Street".

One of the curators attempted to enlighten us about the delights of Alexander McCall Smith's saga, then running as a perennial serial in *The Scotsman*. That was long ago. Today there is hardly anyone who reads English at all who does not know and enjoy the doings of the denizens at that address and their friends and associates.

This book is dedicated to McCall Smith, which is appropriate. But it also contains far, far more. But the focus of these pages is on the city, and those who created its special characters, and they, as often as not, are not the great and good, but the striking, exceptional individuals who have given Edinburgh its character.

Great events are not ignored. In a mere two pages he gives the readers all they will really need to know about "The Great Disruption", the schism in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland that saw the emergence of the "Wee Frees" - the adherents of the Free Church of Scotland in the 1840s.

He deals too, in the same essential manner, with John Knox and Queen Mary; their angry exchanges belong to history. But religious prejudice has a long life in Edinburgh, even the sophisticated city of the Festival Fringe. On one visit to the city my wife and I heard Mass in St Andrew's Church, in the west end, to which we were directed by the receptionist at our hotel.

“Moffat deals succinctly with the long lasting anti-Catholic prejudices of some in the city, the Protestant Action Society, councillors from which gained 31% of the vote in the 1930s”

This turned out to be a chapel that had to be built on part of a private garden, as the City authorities would not grant permission for it



The changing moods of Edinburgh large

to be built elsewhere. The chapel was a plain edifice of red brick and stained wood; but the parishioners were most welcoming, even to two strangers from Ireland.

The history of the chapel and the prejudices that surrounded it seemed out of the ordinary. But in the three pages of a chapter entitled 'Ugly Edinburgh', Moffat deals succinctly with the long lasting anti-Catholic prejudices of some in the city, the Protestant Action Society, councillors from which gained 31% of the vote in the 1930s.

Reaction

This was a reaction to holding of a Eucharistic Congress the city in 1935, when there were ugly riots, and those attending the Congress were stoned in Canaan Lane. The movement's founder, John McCormack, was re-elected until 1963, and used to drive around the city in a van painted with the slogan 'No Popery'.

The same group clashed too with the British Union of Fascists, as Mosley's party supported an end to partition in Ireland: politics makes for strange bedfellows at times. "Back in 1923," Moffat notes too, "a pamphlet entitled *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality* was widely circulated". The Irish were, it was claimed, "drunken, promiscuous, uncivilised and carried



The whimsical Sir Alexander McCall Smith

deadly diseases" - typhus was then called 'Irish Fever'.

Casual visitors may not be aware of any of this when they ramble among those souvenir shops on the Royal Mile and buy their tins of Haggis.

In almost the final chapter Moffat notes that in 1957 the Church of Scotland had 1,320,000 members - 27% of the total population of Scotland. By 2022 the membership numbers had collapsed to 283,600, the vast majority of whom never attended any kirk.

But such stuff now seems like a dead letter. Moffat ends on quite a different note, with a tribute from McCall Smith, to the city of fiction, romantic Edinburgh,

the city of Miss Jean Brodie and Ian Rankin, "the most beautiful city in the world".

Anthology

The last title in the list of books that Moffat gives for "Further Reading" is Alan Taylor's *Edinburgh: The Autobiography*. This is a massive anthology running to nearly 350 pages, in which every character of the city worth knowing about, finds a place with a representative extract. As a companion volume to Moffat, it is immensely enjoyable. In it the city speaks for itself.

But be advised. There is nothing here about long established satires on Scotland of Sandy the ubiquitous penny-pinching Scotsman,

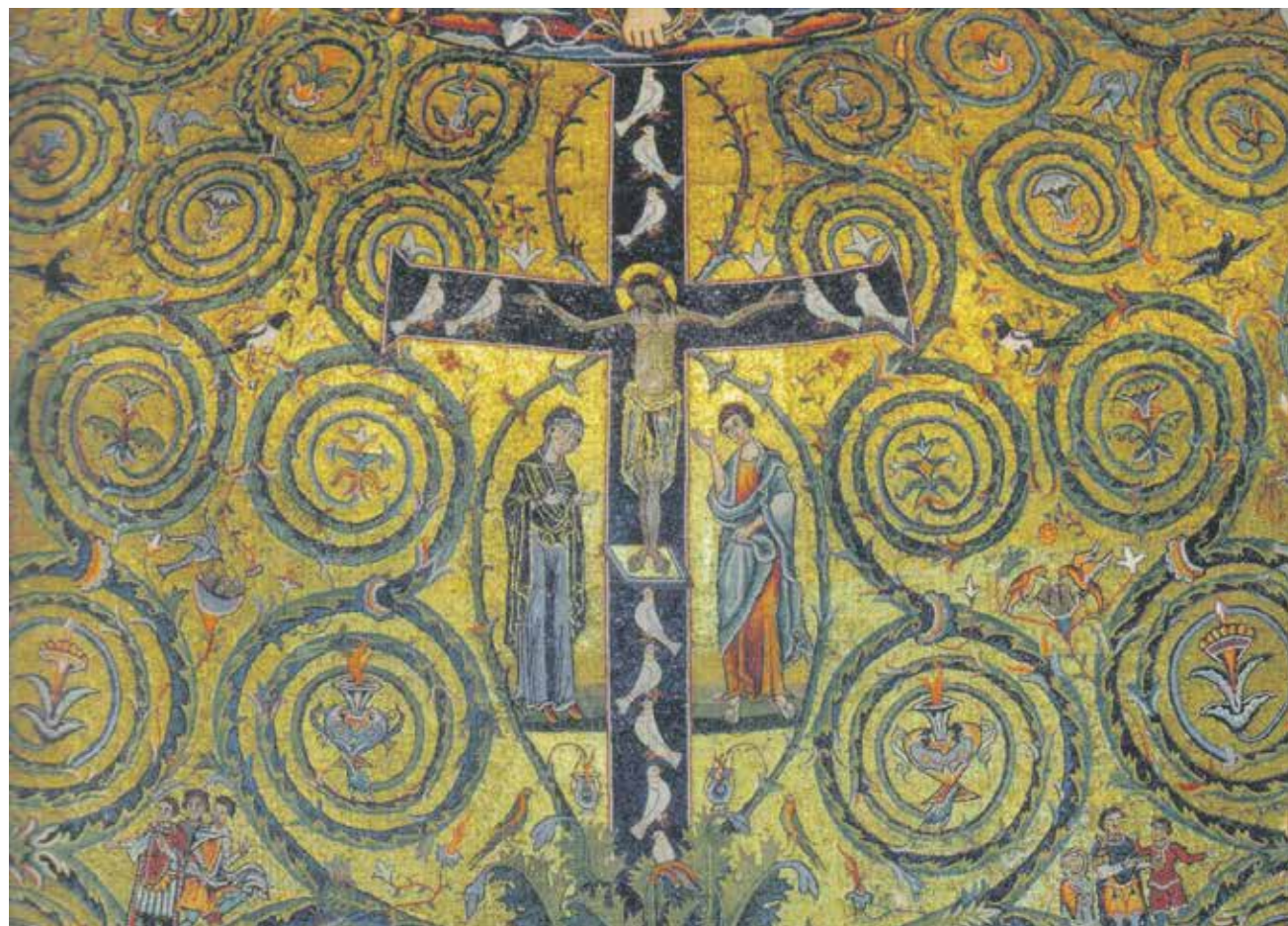
who was for so long a feature of the pages of *Punch* in its heyday, a companion piece to Ireland's landlord shooting Pat.

There is no allusion in either book to the satiric thrusts of Thomas Love Peacock in his 1831 novel *Crotchet Castle* at the 'Athens of the North', and the Scottish economists of the day with their sweeping financial and social theories, and their love of 'paper money', voiced by his character Mr Mac Quedy in debate with the classicist English cleric Dr Follott.

The Scots, it seems, can laugh at themselves, but fail to see the funny side of those south of the Tweed who laugh at them. But then, that is a failing of us all.

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.

Lenten thoughts on the spiritual benefits of Christ's sufferings



One of the illustrations from Bishop Varden's lenten Book.

Healing Wounds: The 2025 Lenten Book, by Eric Varden (Bloomsbury Continuum, £12.99 / €15.50)

Peter Costello

Here we are, as I write on the sixth day of a New Year. Christmas is well past; but life and faith go on. This title is the first book addressed to Lent and Easter tide that has come to hand; the first of many more to come.

The author, Eric Varden, a former Fellow of St John College, Cambridge, is the Trappist monk who has been Bishop of Trondheim in his native Norway since 2019. He is the author of two previous books for Bloomsbury Continuum, *Chastity: Reconciliation of the Senses* in 2023 and *The Shattering of Loneliness* in 2018.

Never one to avoid difficulties, in this new book he faces the problem of pain and suffering as represented

in the sufferings of Christ at the Crucifixion. This book he notes "purposes to meditate on the wounds Jesus Christ sustained in his sacred passion and on the way in which they enable the healing of ours."

He says that the Chastain devotion "to prettify even idealise wounds" is a perverse tendency.

“The author uses this poem as the framework for his own meditations on the theme of suffering pain and the mysterious processes of healing”

Realising this, he makes use of a medical text the *Rhythmica oratio ad unum quodlibet membrorum Christi*.

This was once attributed to St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Today it is thought in fact to be the work of Arnulf of Leuven (1200-48). The Latin title might be rendered, the author suggests, as "A Rhythmic Oration to each of the members of Christ Suffering and Hanging on the Cross."

The author uses this poem as the framework for his own meditations on the theme of suffering pain and the mysterious processes of healing, healing of both body and mind.

Integrity

From this précis it can be seen that this is no commonplace book for Easter - it is a work of serious intention and integrity. It is therefore more challenging than similar Easter titles that readers may previously have encountered.

The book, like the poem, is divided into seven sections, each of which focuses

on one particular part of the Saviour's crucified body, each part being introduced by the connecting fragments of Arnulf's poem.

“An important element in the book's development are some six images, of very different ideas of Crucifixion”

The poem had a contemporary vogue; nor was it later forgotten - it appears even in Bach's St Matthew Passion. It was through a cantata by another composer that Varden came to know of the poem.

An important element in the book's development are some six images, of very different ideas of Crucifixion. These are not intended as mere flourishes to the text as a whole, but are an important part of the

Giving thought to the possible future



Jim Deeds, poet and author, speaking out.

Dreaming a New Dream: Conversations on the future of the Church in Ireland, by Jim Deeds, with a foreword by Julieann Moran (Messenger Publications, €9.95 / £8.95)

Peter Costello

The pastoral minister Jim Deeds will be familiar to many readers as the co-author with Brendan McManus of *Discovering God in the Mess* and its two follow-up titles. This is his first solo title and aims, in a very short space indeed, to urge people to give thought, not to the glorious past, but to the fresh possibilities of the future.

This is a short book, a mere 80 pages, little more than a pamphlet. However, it is the intention of Jim Deeds that the readers rather than him will do the creative work. Like a good teacher he does not provide the answers, but poses the

questions, which the readers must answer for themselves.

In this way they will arrive at some notion of where they feel they are now, and where they might be going. The future of the Church, he suggests, lies in the hands of those who are "Church," "the people of God" or whatever term you care to use.

He want those who go to church on Sunday to think about why they go there, and what they would really like the place, and he people, to be like in the coming years,

It poses the questions. The answers of necessity have to be the reader's own.

One thing he suggested shocked me a little. Should there even be a church, in the sense of a building. After all the universal enthusiasm for the restoration of Notre Dame, which I shared, this is an idea to bring one up short. As they so often used to say, the very idea makes you think.



Bishop Eric Varden of Trondheim

meditations that Mr Varden wants to lead his readers through.

Suffering

What one takes from this book will depend on what one brings to it. Yet if the theme of suffering seems to dominate, this is not in fact the case. The theme of the book is announced in its very title, *Healing Wounds*. It is the healing, the return after the violence of the world and society, to a sense of wholeness, a sense Mr Varden seems to suggest, of

completeness in God.

This is not a simple or easy book to read. A thoughtful perusal of it, might indeed take from now until April 20, when the Church after the suffering of the Passion, will announce the healing resurrection of the Christ - as it has done for two thousand years.

(By the way his own website, *Coram Fratibus*, at the Trondheim website is English and is well worth a visit for its interesting commentaries of belief, life and the events of the passing day.)

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4028 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Classifieds: 01 687 4095

Remembering
MEMORIAM CARDS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
CARDS & NOTELETS
BOOKMARKS

Samples / Information
KENNEDY PRINTERS
 BANTRY, CO. CORK, IRELAND
Tel. 027 50102
www.kennedyprinters.ie
 email: info@kennedyprinters.ie

Listen to
The Confession Box



Available now on all major podcast streaming services!

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

trócaire

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

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

Please pray for the beatification of
Little Nellie of Holy God

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

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912



Merchants Quay Ireland
 Homeless & Drugs Services



A gift in your Will to Merchants Quay Ireland can be lifesaving.

Hundreds of men and women at their darkest hour, come to Merchants Quay Ireland for food, showers and support when there's nowhere else to turn.

A gift in your Will in any amount, will change lives. And we'll always remember your kindness.

You can decide a specific amount or give a percentage after taking care of your loved ones. Even 1% is enough to help.

All your solicitor will need is this:

- Merchants Quay Ireland of 24 Merchants Quay, Dublin 8
- Revenue CHY Number: 10311
- Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20026240

Just ring 01 5240139 if you'd like more information, or to let us know about your legacy. Thank you for the good you leave behind.

KERRY DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE TO FATIMA
LED BY BISHOP RAY BROWNE. 11TH - 15TH MAY €899PP. Fully escorted pilgrimage. Contact: Barter's Travelnet Cork on 021-4851700

MEDJUGORJE
EX CORK 21ST - 28TH MAY €949PP Spiritual Director: Fr John Keane . Fully escorted pilgrimage. Contact: Barter's Travelnet Cork on 021-4851700

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

40-BED UNIT OUTSIDE KILDARE
PIC PERSON IN CHARGE WANTED to take over as the present PIC of 30 years is retiring. It's a 40 bedded unit and is just outside Kildare Town. Accommodation can be sorted if needed. Phone 045-521496 or 0872522612 ask for Breda or Seamus. Email lour@iol.ie

Will the MSC Missions

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

Please help us with a gift in your Will

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

www.mscmissions.ie

YOUR LAST GIFT MEANS WE ARE ALWAYS FIRST THERE

A Gift in Your Will to GOAL Means We Can Be First There When Conflict and Crisis happen

GOAL GOAL.IE/GIFTINWILL

The Irish Catholic
PREPAID CLASSIFIED AD COUPON

The Irish Catholic, Unit 3B, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277
 Phone: 01 687 4095

Number of insertions: ____ weeks
 Do you require a Box number? (€6 extra charge) Yes No
 Miracle Prayer €50 | Initials: ____

Please provide us with the heading you would like the ad to appear under: (For eg. Looking to buy, Pilgrimage to..., etc)

Please print your advertisement in the space below, placing one word in each box, Minimum charge of €24.60 (including VAT) for 5 lines/25 words. Additional lines cost €4.92 each.

1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City/County: _____
 Eircode: _____ Phone: _____

Pay by: Cheque/Postal order:
 For € _____ payable to: The Irish Catholic

Pay by: Credit Card
 Card number: _____
 Expiration date: ____/____/____ CVV number: _____

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.



Your Lasting Legacy

Many people are choosing to include a loving gift in their Will to support families, children and young people experiencing homelessness. You can make a real difference by helping future generations find a place called home.

For more information, please contact Assia:
 086 103 3130 assia.buono@focusireland.ie
 Focus Ireland, 9 - 12 High Street, Christchurch, D08 E1W0
Focusireland.ie

The Gift Of A Lifetime
Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie

Leisure time

Let Your Compassion Live On



A gift in your Will to the Mater Hospital Foundation is the promise of help, hope and healing for the next 100 years...



CHY: 9768 | RCN: 20024505

For more information, please contact James at jsullivan@materfoundation.ie or phone 01 830 3482.

We will pass on the flame of faith.

For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland.



For more information about leaving a legacy to *The Irish Catholic*, phone 01 687 4028 or email info@irishcatholic.ie

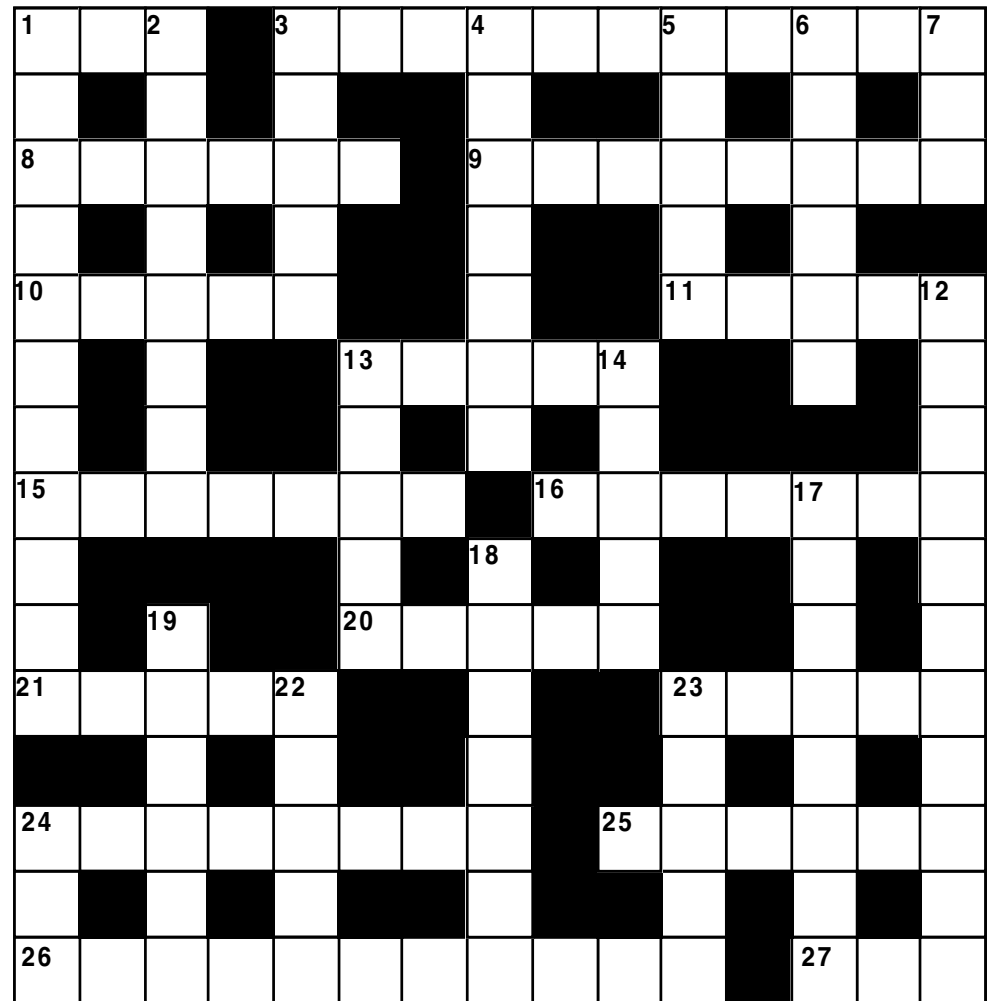
The Irish Catholic

Crossword

Gordius 698

- Across**
- 1 White priestly vestment (3)
 - 3 Put them on before your shoes (4,2,4)
 - 8 Citizen of an ancient city that was besieged for ten years (6)
 - 9 Prehistoric creature (8)
 - 10 Mother-of-pearl (5)
 - 11 Nigeria's largest city (5)
 - 13 Dance involving many dancers in a "train" (5)
 - 15 Shockingly evil (7)
 - 16 High-speed car setting (3,4)
 - 20 Stallion (5)
 - 21 Take hold of (5)
 - 23 The first five books of the Bible, especially important in Judaism (5)
 - 24 A grand (8)
 - 25 Part of the eye (6)
 - 26 Farmed fowl that are kept in cages (7,4)
 - 27 Take a seat (3)

- Down**
- 1 Amazing (11)
 - 2 Type of vegetable (8)
 - 3 Location (5)
 - 4 Beaming, aglow (7)
 - 5 Three-legged seat (5)
 - 6 Fee (6)
 - 7 Military term of address to a superior (3)
 - 12 Venerated organ



- 17 Pieces of jewellery that are usually worn in pairs (8)
- 18 Width (7)
- 19 One who controls and directs a working elephant (6)
- 22 Cowboy group enlisted to help a sheriff in pursuit of criminals (5)
- 23 Implements (5)
- 24 Bath (3)

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 9

GORDIUS No. 697

Across

- 1 Disrespect 6 Team 10 Mania 11 Carnation 12 Sextant 15 Least 17 Halo 18 Reef 19 Pieta 21 Legends 23 Ensur 24 Zinc 25 Ague 26 Attar 28 Stand-in 33 Porcelain 34 Meath 35 Eddy 36. Blue cheese

Down

- 1 Damp 2 Senseless 3 Enact 4 Pecan 5 Curé 7 Evita 8 Monstrance 9 Gallops 13 Adze 14 Thieves 16. Free sample 20 Eliminate 21 Learned 22 Diva 27 Tired 29 Tense 30 Nymph 31 Ball 32 Shoe

Sudoku Corner 566

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 565

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

Last week's Hard 565

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

Notebook

Vincent Sherlock



Every step counts

I signed up for this... in the name of the local GAA club as part of a national fundraising event where a club might gain some prize money if its members and friends can walk 4000km during a five-week window of opportunity. In honesty and more personally, I signed up because I know I need a push to do a bit of exercise. Like many, I go through times when I am good at exercise, but these times get overshadowed by my default setting of 'taking it easy'!! So watch this space... hopefully there might be less of me occupying it.

Coming back to the name of the project. It is such an obvious title but one that might merit a bit of reflection too.

- A step towards reconciliation
- A step towards a healthy life-style
- A step towards sobriety
- A step towards deepening of faith
- A step towards community involvement
- A step towards more wholesome family time
- A step towards honesty



We are still in the days of New Year's resolutions and, though we know that a date is even set when these most likely fail, maybe we don't let that hold us back. Negativity is so draining and destructive. Can we try to park it in the early days of January with our eyes fixed on December?

Is there a step that needs to be taken? The answer is obvious. It is

fair to say that each one of us could be doing at least one thing better than we are currently managing. To look at the entirety of what we might need to achieve or hope to achieve may well be daunting. More than that, doing so might render us incapable of anything resembling achievement. All too easily, we might shake our heads, allow the

heart to sink and say "What's the point? I tried this before and look where that got me... nowhere."

“Finding himself in that situation one night, he went to the local shop to buy a new pack. Coming home, he looked at it and, for the first time saw the message ‘SMOKING KILLS’ written on the pack”

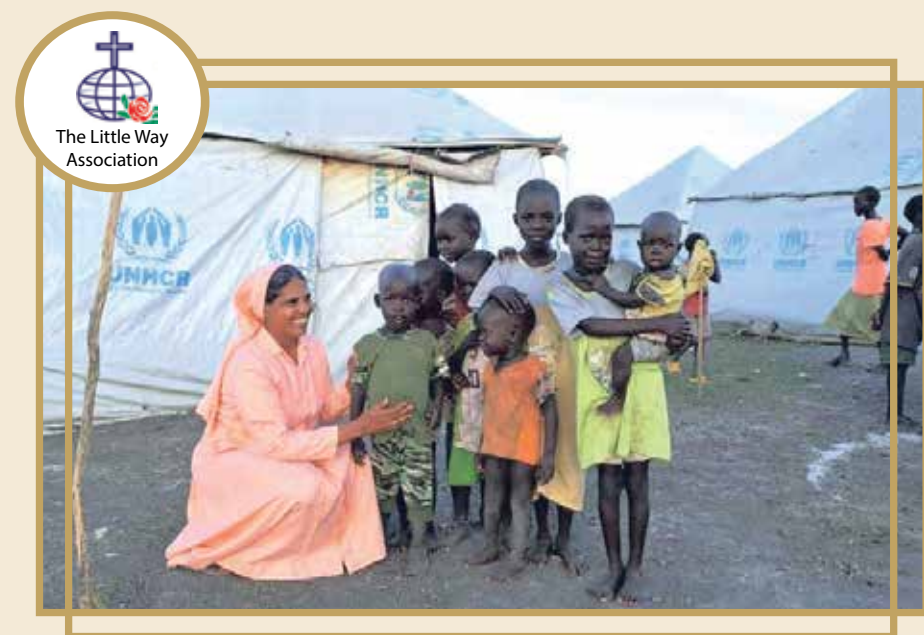
Back then to the five-week walking challenge and, more pertinently to its title – “EVERY STEP COUNTS”. Think of the faith... a small prayer today, a candle left lighting in the local church, five minutes of someone else's Holy Hour, a decade of the Rosary... are all steps and they all count.

The crucial step is the first one! I met a man once at a wedding reception. It was my first and last time to meet him. He told me that he smoked sixty cigarettes a day and that he could not go to bed if he had only one or two cigarettes left in a packet. Finding himself in that situation one night, he went to the local shop to buy a new pack. Coming home, he looked at it and, for the first time saw the message

“SMOKING KILLS” written on the pack. He shouted to his wife who had gone to bed, “I'm giving up the cigarettes”. She laughed but he threw the pack in the fire and never smoked again. The first step was the message on the pack, the next step was his. Every Step Counts.

Attitude is the key

A friend and classmate from secondary school died last year. Literally larger than life, a lovely story was recalled in a piece written about him after his death. Sitting outside a Galway pub on a Tuesday evening, cigar in one hand and a glass in the other, he spoke to a tourist who commented on him enjoying himself and he welcomed her to Ireland and assured her he had enough money to last him the rest of his life. “That is,” he pointed out “if I die on Thursday!”



Sisters in Kodok, South Sudan urgently need our help to build three simple classrooms for children displaced by war

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate in 2022 sent 12 Sisters, at the request of the local bishop, to help rebuild part of the diocese of Marakal. The town of Kodok was destroyed by warfare in 2013 and many survivors fled to UN camps or other countries including Ethiopia and Eritrea. These people are now gradually returning to Kodok, and the DMI Sisters plan to erect a primary school for 180 disadvantaged children, saving them from child labour, violation and abuse.

Please will you help the Sisters

The sum of €10,000 will enable an engineer and skilled labourers to be chosen, construction materials to be purchased, the building work be done, and five volunteers from the community to be trained as teaching assistants to the DMI Sisters. 180 boys and girls will then be registered and primary education be set in motion. The Sisters will also help the children with simple health needs.

Your gift to The Little Way Association will make this project become a reality, ensuring a good, basic education and a better future for these children. Whatever you can spare will be sent without deduction and will be gratefully received. Thank you and may God reward your generosity.

If we receive additional funds we will allocate them to similar projects for children.



“A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul.”
- St Therese

We wish all our friends and benefactors a peaceful and blessed New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain many graces for all our friends and benefactors during 2025.

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance.

We like to send a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

- €..... **CLASSROOMS FOR CHILDREN DISPLACED BY WAR**
- €..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**
- €..... **WELLS AND SANITATION PROJECTS**
- €..... **MASS OFFERINGS** (please state no.)
We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass
- €..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN. EXPENSES**

To donate online go to
www.littlewaysassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address