

The Irish Catholic

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Communities resist pressure to dump religious ethos from schools

Ruadhán Jones

School communities across the country have given their backing to Catholic education, as a highly-publicised pilot scheme on converting Catholic schools to secular ones is finding little push for change following "rigorous" consultation. Even Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has indicated no desire for change in his own constituency.

After dozens of Catholic schools and hundreds of parents, staff and teachers were consulted on switching to a non-religious patronage, just two have so far indicated their desire to divest, one in Athlone and another in Nenagh.

In Dublin, almost 150 meetings were held in 29 schools in 11 parishes. While final reports are not due until the end of this month, communities in Raheny and Blanchardstown have already indicated their happiness with Catholic education *The Irish Catholic* understands.

Even the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has contacted the Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell to say schools consulted in his constituency had "no desire for change", *The Irish Catholic* can reveal.

Speaking in the Dáil, Mr Varadkar said, "In my constituency, where there is a proposal to remove some schools from the patronage of the

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Sing praise to the Lord...



Students from Presentation PS, Tralee, Co. Kerry, provide musical accompaniment for First Confession in St John's Church, Tralee. Pictured are musicians Clodagh, Alannah, Jane, Evelyn and Kyrlo.

Call for urgent action on new climate report to stop 'devastation'

Chai Brady

Ireland's political leaders must "urgently act" on a new report on climate change which highlights numerous options to reduce harmful emissions in order to help the poorest, Church-charity Trócaire has said.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a major report on Monday which brings the latest evidence on solutions to climate change – including targeting the use of fossil fuels and unsustainable land use.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Trócaire head of policy and advocacy Siobhán Curran said: "As Cyclone Freddy hits Malawi, the devastation of climate change is stark for those who have done least to cause the climate crisis.

"Our leaders now must show political will and urgently act" describing the next ten years as the "critical decade" for action.

"We need to respond to this report with swift climate action that is rooted in climate justice and this includes an equitable phase out of fossil fuels and scaling up of climate finance for the poorest countries in the world," she said.

After more than 100 years, the world's use of fossil fuels has led to global warming of 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, the panel said.

The IPCC report outlined the options for all sectors to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which includes the increased use of renewable energy, improved energy efficiency and switching fuel.

JASON OSBORNE

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Parishes between a rock and a hard place on schools

“Leave well alone,” a senior Government minister told me not too long ago. It was not advice for me, but hitherto unspoken advice to his colleagues who were very gung-ho on “getting the Church out of schools,” as he put it. Over recent years, he had diagnosed that – despite a vocal minority – there is very little appetite for the divestment of Catholic schools to secular patron bodies such as Educate Together.

Politicians who are close to people on the ground, and in fairness that is most of them, know that local communities are not unhappy with the fact that their children attend the local parish school – even if they themselves are not Mass-goers or have no discernible interest in things spiritual.

Obsession

The obsession of some taxpayer-funder non-governmental-organisations (NGOs) in their campaign against Catholic schools is largely, of course, the product of an echo chamber. This is amplified by sympathetic journalists, often motivated by the fact that they were unable to get their own child in to an over-subscribed Catholic primary school in a leafy suburb of Dublin 4 or Dublin 6.

For all the campaigning, as our front-page splash shows this week, there is very little local appetite for the sort of radical change that some NGOs and a few

Irish bishops' conference and the Department of Education.

It is testing the waters to see what level of interest there is on the ground for transferring Catholic schools to a secular, multi-denominational patron.

Sources familiar with the consultative process described it as “democratic” and “rigorous”, involving five meetings for each school, including with principals, boards of management, staff and parents.

The meetings are chaired by an independent facilitator, who reports back to the patrons and to the Department.

The process is to come to a conclusion by the end of this month.

officials in the Department of Education are pushing for. The simple fact, most people are happy with their local schools. Standards are generally high, teachers are committed, children are content and the school is rooted in the heart of the community.

“Even families who live their lives as if God doesn't exist, often want their children to be taught the Catholic Faith and to make the sacraments with other children”

Of course, this should not be interpreted as a ringing endorsement of Catholicism or a starry-eyed belief that we are about to ‘turn the corner’ and experience a new springtime of faith. The basic fact is that most people live their lives according to the code that if something is not broken, then there is no need to fix it.

And they do not, by and large, discern that the current system is broken. Even families who live their lives as if God doesn't exist, often want their children to be taught the Catholic Faith

Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



and to make the sacraments with other children. They have long since decided to be pic n' mix in their approach to faith, but have no problem in their children hearing the basics of Catholicism in school and being treated like their peers.

Evidently, teachers mostly feel likewise.

None of which should make us smug about Catholic schools. In fact, quite the opposite. The biggest threat to Catholic schools is not campaigning secularists, the biggest threat is that schools are hollowed out from the inside out. If we're honest, this has already happened in many places. A priest told me recently that he used to be concerned that children didn't know the response to the Mass when he would celebrate great school occasions. Now, his observation is that the teachers and even principals are unaware of the basic response of the Mass.

The sacraments

We also need to face the fact that many teachers in national schools who are preparing children for First Holy Communion do not themselves participate in the sacraments regularly, and many are effectively non-believers.

This leads to a situation where schools can become Catholic in name only. This

is why the Church finds itself in a difficult space where local communities are resisting change in favour of the status quo. But, for all the reasons outlined the status quo is hardly desirable if we want our schools to be places where we can form missionary disciples with a lively relationship with Jesus Christ.

“It is necessary to allow the schools that remain Catholic to be truly Catholic”

The transformation of the current school system towards a more pluralist model is not only necessary for the minority of parents who find themselves with qualms of conscience about the schooling of their children, it is necessary to allow the schools that remain Catholic to be truly Catholic. This will allow these schools to teach the fullness of the Catholic Faith while parents who do not wish their children to be raised as Catholics and teachers who have no desire to teach the Catholic Faith have alternative schools.

The current impasse serves no-one.

Call for urgent action on new climate report to stop 'devastation'

» Continued from Page 1
archdiocese, the parents and teachers do not want that.”

“We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater,” the Taoiseach added, saying that “many schools are run by religious orders or religious trusts, and they run them well”.

“We should not force secularism on people who do not want it,” Mr Varadkar continued. “If the school is run well, people like how it is run and the parents and teachers are happy, there should not be a change.”

Sources in the diocese told this newspaper that Archbishop Farrell is open to whatever the people express in the pilot scheme, but it's the school community who make the decisions based on local agreement.

Parents and staff of two schools in Galway City also rejected changing to State patronage, with parents reported as saying they wanted “their children to learn about the Catholic faith” and that “there already is a multi-cultural family atmosphere in the school”.

“There are many advantages to a Catholic school. Parents want high quality education and have this in the schools,” the report on Scoil Chaitríona Junior and Scoil Chaitríona Senior says.

The pilot scheme on divestment began last Autumn and consulted school communities in Galway, Limerick, Cork and Ross, Cloyne and in Athlone, Dundalk and Nenagh. It is a joint project between the

“The biggest threat to Catholic schools is not campaigning secularists, the biggest threat is that schools are hollowed out from the inside out”

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GAA stars 'leaned on' Faith after their mother's death

Chai Brady

GAA Galway legends Ollie and Joe Canning have opened up about how their Faith helped them through their mother's death last year.

Growing up in a Catholic household, going to Mass every weekend and saying the Rosary, they said the family has a strong Faith.

The brothers appeared on the Tommy Tiernan Show over the weekend.

When asked what the Faith means to him, Joe said they "leaned on it a lot last year when mam passed and we still do".

"I still visit the grave and everything, every time I'm home... just for mam, but there's a spiritual side of that as well, that you'd be talking to her, even though obviously you don't get anything back but there's

that thing that maybe she's in heaven and hopefully she is," he said.

Ollie said that people experience death in different ways but for him he reflected back on what his mother had done for the family.

"The feeling I got from it was gratitude. That how lucky I was. I probably didn't appreciate it and all of the things she'd done for us growing up, because you're young and you're boisterous and you just get on with life and it's rough and tumble and you're going to games and you're out farming and it's all go..." he said.

"But I do think when it comes to that stage in life, you do get a chance definitely to reflect back on the experiences you've had with somebody and for me, the overriding feeling I had I think was gratitude and

just being so lucky."

Joe said that in their family they were raised to take the Faith seriously. He added that when they were younger, the siblings – six boys and one girl – would be "nudging each other to try to make each other laugh during the Rosary", adding that it's "a family occasion".

Speaking about the Stations of the Cross, Ollie said that it "was a great parish thing, a great community thing back at that time, and for us growing up it was a mainstay in the parish, along with the GAA".

"Going to Mass every Sunday was the done thing. And then I suppose our parents had a lot of faith, they were practicing Catholics and our granny lived with us as well and she would have been, very, very much the same way," he added.



Joe Canning



Ollie Canning

Minister for Health receives report on review of abortion laws

Jason Osborne

A review of the State's abortion laws has been compiled and sent to Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly.

Barrister Marie O'Shea was appointed last year as the independent chairwoman of the review, and she has submitted her final report to Minister Donnelly.

A spokesman for Mr

Donnelly said he would consider its findings and bring a memo to Cabinet within weeks. It will then be published in mid-April.

The *Irish Times* reported that one source said the report could result in a widening of the laws around abortion, while another cautioned that this could be "politically difficult" as the referendum on the Eighth

Amendment was won under "particular terms" that were presented to the public.

The Pro Life Campaign has previously argued that the review must take into account "the urgent need to provide women in unplanned pregnancies with positive alternatives to abortion" and that it "must consider the issue of foetal pain relief" also.

Condolence at Camp Shamrock...



Ceann Comhairle Sean O'Fearghail TD signs the Book of Condolences for Private Sean Rooney after arriving at Camp Shamrock in Debl, Lebanon, on St Patrick's Day. Private Rooney was killed in an ambush in Lebanon on December 14 of last year.

Latest stats show sharp decline in NI married couples

Staff reporter

There has been a sharp decline in the number of people who are married in the North of Ireland from 61% in 1971 to 46% in 2021, according to the latest statistics.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency released the data this week. It found that 693,000 adults (aged 16 and over) are married or in a civil partnership.

In contrast 577,000 adults – 38% – were single (never married/civil partnered). The agency found that in the last 50 years there has been a decline in the number of adults who were married and an increase in the number of people who are single, up from 31% in 1971.

During the same period the percentage of adults who are 'Separated, widowed or divorced' has risen from 9% in 1971 to 16% in 2021. The num-

ber of divorced adults has risen from 3,000 in 1971 to over 90,000 in 2021.

Of the adult population who live in households, just more than half lived as part of a couple within the same household (53% or 794,000 people in a married, civil partnered or co-habiting couple).

The remaining 695,000 adults (47%) did not live as part of a couple within the same household.

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Fianna Fáil TD decries lack of coverage of Christian persecution

Jason Osborne

Cavan-Monaghan TD Brendan Smith has said that the global persecution of Christians is “not an issue that gets near enough wide-spread coverage as it should” and that he was shocked by the contents of the recent Church in Chains Global Guide.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fianna Fáil TD Brendan Smith said that he thinks “the vast majority of people would

not be aware of the extent of the persecution of Christians” and that there needs to be a “much greater awareness” among the public of these “very serious issues”.

“I believe that people of Christian faith, or of a different faith, or of no faith, that the vast majority of them would be equally horrified by the reports and the extent of the persecution as well,” Mr Smith said.

Church in Chains recently launched their 4th Global Guide which lists 60 countries

where 200 million Christians face persecution because of their faith, ranging from limited persecution to severe.

Having read through the report, Deputy Smith said that “what I read outlines very, very clearly how deplorable these activities are, and how they need to be addressed and stamped out as much as is possible”.

“I will speak to An Tanaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding the need to keep this issue on the agenda in the different

international fora that we participate in,” he said.

“It’s important that in discussions on major policy matters that we never lose sight of the terrible infliction of persecution, hardship and suffering on innocent people.

“I would hope that other European Union countries, and indeed, other countries, that would basically share the same belief as ourselves, that they would work together to try and address these issues,” Mr Smith said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jewish extremists attack Mary’s Tomb in Jerusalem

Church leaders in the Holy Land have decried the latest attack on a Christian holy site in Jerusalem.

On Sunday, two Israeli men, identified by eyewitnesses as Jewish extremists, were arrested after they entered the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in the Kidron Valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

The men allegedly physically attacked a bishop and two priests who were presiding at divine liturgy, while attempting to deface items in the church.

The two men were quickly subdued by worshippers present and detained until Israeli police arrived.

Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilus III condemned the attack saying that incidents “targeting churches, cemeteries, and Christian properties, in addition to physical and verbal abuse against Christian clergy, have become almost a daily occurrence that evidently increases in intensity during Christian festivities”.

The site, believed to be where the Virgin Mary was laid to rest after the apostles carried the Mother of God from Mount Zion following her dormition, is a revered pilgrimage site currently managed jointly by the Greek Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church close to the Garden of Gethsemane.

St Faustina relic finds new home in Co. Donegal

A relic of St Faustina has found a permanent home in St Mary’s Church, Convoys, Co. Donegal, after a celebration on March 19.

A Divine Mercy alcove has been established in a side area of the church, with quotes from the saint, and which will now house the first class relic.

“There was a great atmosphere of devotion and prayer” as the community welcomed the relic in procession, said Fr Eamonn Kelly PP.

The parish sought a relic from the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Krakow, with Sr Norberta presenting the relic to the parish on Sunday during a day of prayer.

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Welcoming migrants our solemn duty, says Archbishop Farrell

Ruadhán Jones

Welcoming migrants and refugees to Ireland is our “solemn duty and noble tradition”, said Archbishop Dermot Farrell in his St Patrick’s Day homily.

He hit back at those who “stir up hostility” and called out the lie that “some have claimed that they are moti-

vated by a desire to defend our Christian heritage”.

The archbishop of Dublin praised the “gifts and talents” migrants have brought to Ireland, pointing out that one in six of those living in Dublin diocese were born outside Ireland.

“Our land is not – and indeed our faith have never been some idealised mono-

cultural fortress. But that is a truth that takes us all a long time to learn,” Dr Farrell said.

However, he said that there are “real concerns” and challenges to be faced.

“Rapid population growth and past policy choices have put extreme pressure on housing and other vital services,” the archbishop said.

“Our way of organising

things can make it difficult to move quickly to avert a crisis.”

But, he continued, “we are a generous country. We are a people who can rise to the challenge of welcome. It comes at a cost; we know this...”

“The Christian community is called to encourage those better reflexes that reflect the Irish tradition of welcome to the stranger”.

Eist Audio goes global as ‘Hearing God’s Word’

Staff reporter

Well-known in Ireland for offering recordings of Catholic speakers on a variety of topics, Eist Audio Productions has introduced the new name of ‘Hearing God’s Word’ as they launch the website globally.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Eist owner Paul Daly said that the new website will enable customers to access their recordings via digital download straight to their email whereas previously it had been tapes, then CDs and USBs.

“So far it’s getting a very good response,” Mr Daly said, adding, “we’re trying to reach a wider and a younger scale, so we’re making it much more inexpensive to buy the product”.

The website has been divided into “different categories, of charismatic

renewal to theology to Scripture, to meditation, to mindfulness, to everything else”.

“It’s very easy to navigate your way around,” Mr Daly said.

The new website can be availed of at www.hearing-godsword.com

Hail glorious St Patrick...



Fr Mark English and servers lead the procession from Slane Hill following vespers to St Patrick’s Church for Mass celebrated by Bishop Denis Nulty on March 17. The community gathered to mark St Patrick’s day on the site he is said to have lit a paschal fire. The event was organised by the Sisters of the Franciscan Renewal.

The Late Late Show's era has been over for some time...

Is the departure of Ryan Tubridy from *The Late Late Show* the end of an era? Maybe the 'end of an era' with the *LLS* came some time ago. I sometimes ask people what they think of the broadcast nowadays, and the most frequent answer I get is "I hardly ever look at it these days". The data bears this out: at the height of its success, it was attracting over a million viewers; this has fallen to 376,000. Granted, that's still quite a few folk, even if they don't seem to feature much among my circle of acquaintances.



Mary Kenny

Ryan Tubridy

Conversation

It was, certainly, once a genuinely national conversation, and I can attest to that from my own (mixed) experience. Back in the 1970s and 80s, the weeks after you appeared on the *LLS*, you were, literally, a nationally-recognised celebrity. In the early days the impact was astounding: half-flattering, half-frightening. Flattering because it hugely exaggerated your significance; but frightening because it was as if the viewing public somehow owned you.

I still encounter older people who seem to remember more about my appearances on Gay Byrne's *LLS* than I do myself (unsurprising, since I had to dose myself up with a half-pint of gin before taking that hot seat). I even encounter middle-aged people whose parents were almost obsessed by my contributions. TV was fairly new

in Ireland, and therefore the impact was sensational.

“The Church's attitude to *The Late Late Show* was, I think, inconsistent – perhaps being such a new phenomenon, no one was sure how to handle it”

Today, young people don't watch ordinary television much: they choose their own screen time wherever and whenever.

The Church's attitude to *The Late Late Show* was, I think, inconsistent – perhaps being such a new phenomenon, no one was sure how to handle it. At first, under the influence of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, it was disapproved of (Éamon de Valera, too, feared that this type of TV would undermine his ideal

Ireland) and some bishops were too quick to comment. Then, it seemed, the clergy seemed too anxious to please, and took the *LLS* too seriously: Sunday homilies would sometimes start with "as they said on *The Late Late Show* last night" (it was then transmitted on a Saturday). Personally, I think the Church should hold itself aloof from an arena in which it cannot win.

Memorable

Still, there were some memorable backstage moments. One of the production team – someone I know and trust – told me recently about a night when Rev. Ian Paisley appeared on the show. Afterwards, a riotously lively party was held in the Green Room, with Paisley in high form – including quaffing the best whiskey, which had been brought out by the then DG.

Yes, it's been the end of an era for some time!

'Go woke, go broke'

"Go woke, go broke" is a phrase sometimes uttered in American business circles, when it's found that compulsory policies of EDI – 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' – don't always lead to a thriving enterprise.

Now it's being asked of failing American banks: did the Silicon Valley Bank collapse because it was so strong on EDI? Forty-five per cent of its directors were women, and there was a policy of including black and an LGBTQ+ representation. The influential *Financial Times*, usually keenly progressive on such matters, has been investigating whether 'inclusivity, diversity and equality'

are beneficial to a business's survival.

The conclusion is inconclusive. Some studies have shown that having more women on a board, for example, leads to higher operating profits. Other studies show that the type of women placed on boards come from the same social and cultural background as the men, so gender wasn't big values divide.

But it's possible that if a business is so heavily invested in flaunting its' woke credentials, it may take its eye off its primary purpose, be that the production of baked beans or the prudent stewardship of

a bank.

It stands to reason that 'inclusion and diversity' is a decent idea: not only is it fair, but it should mean a larger pool of talent to draw on. In Northern Ireland, when Catholics were often excluded from top jobs, it impoverished the whole economy, as well as being unjust.

But if you're too focused on virtue signalling your woke credentials, maybe you're not looking after the shop. A bank's first task is to mind its customers' money, and hire the most suitable individuals for this task. This evidently wasn't happening at Silicon Valley.

● Much of my own screen entertainment also comes from streaming, or selections from YouTube. A friend recommended a real gem to me recently, called *Once Upon a Tram*, being a 1959 documentary about the Howth Tram, which climbed up Dublin's Hill of Howth so dexterously. Narrated by Cyril Cusack, it's a brilliant glimpse of the recent past – and an account of a clean, ecological, and efficient form of public transport which the powers that be saw fit to dismantle.

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Abuse survivor: Inquiry must include Church of Ireland schools

Chai Brady

An abuse survivor from a Church of Ireland (CoI) setting has said the Government's scoping inquiry must include CoI schools in order to identify other victims.

Kerry Lawless told *The Irish Catholic* that the scoping inquiry must not only focus on Catholic religious schools, saying: "If there are cases in Protestant schools, then they need to be investigated as well. And anybody who was abused needs to be felt to be included in whatever inquiry or scop-

ing exercise that is carried out.

"Their experience needs to be taken into account as well, I don't understand why it would just be Catholic schools," Mr Lawless said.

He added that this should particularly be the case "if schools have cases, legitimate cases, that have been disclosed".

This comes after the Government announced that it appointed a barrister Mary O'Toole SC to investigate recent allegations of historic abuse made by former students of schools managed by Catholic religious orders

this month.

In one of the terms of reference of the inquiry, it states the purpose of the report is to "Set out a potential framework for a Government response into historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders that could also form a template for Government responses elsewhere."

In a statement to *The Irish Catholic*, a spokesperson for the Church of Ireland said that the Church would co-operate fully if they were to be included in the terms of reference in

the future.

The spokesman said: "The minister's stated intention appears to be the creation of a consistent approach to such inquiries that would apply across the educational sector. Should Minister Foley extend the terms of the inquiry to include schools which express a Church of Ireland ethos, the Church will co-operate fully."

The scoping inquiry was announced by Minister for Education Norma Foley on March 7 following a series of abuse allegations at religious-run schools including Blackrock College.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Patrick a saint for the world – Archbishop Martin

St Patrick is a "saint for all the world", with connections to every continent due to the Irish emigrants and missionaries, Archbishop Eamon Martin has said.

"Our patron saint's name has been carried around the world by generations of Irish emigrants and missionaries – his appeal remains both local and global," the Primate of All-Ireland said in his St Patrick's day homily.

He added that the Irish patron saint is a "saint for modern times", as his "witness and courage speaks to all the world".

"He challenges us to listen out for the cry of the poor, the ordeal of the migrant, the loneliness of those displaced through war and violence," Archbishop Martin said.

Ukrainian bishop welcomes arrest warrant for President Putin

Jason Osborne

The Ukrainian apostolic visitor to Ireland has welcomed the International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision to issue an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The ICC accused President Putin of committing war crimes in Ukraine, focusing

in particular on the unlawful deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia since the invasion in February 2022.

"The arrest warrant issued for Mr Putin is, of course, welcome news," Bishop Nowakowski told *The Irish Catholic*.

"It is a step towards justice for victims of war crimes in Ukraine, especially regarding

the deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia in this last year," he said.

It is considered unlikely that anything will come of the move, as the ICC has no power to arrest suspects without the co-operation of a country's government.

As Russia is not an ICC member country, the court,

located in The Hague, has no authority there.

"As has often been stated by many, peace, without justice in Ukraine, cannot be considered a true peace," Bishop Nowakowski said.

This comes not long after Bishop Nowakowski said that while "everybody wants peace" in Ukraine and is striv-

ing for it, it's "not something we can talk about" yet.

Bishop Nowakowski told this paper in early March that it is his "ardent prayer" that peace comes "as soon as possible" so there's no more need of war commemorations, but he asked "what does peace look like without justice"?

SVP warns of scam collection in Antrim area

Ruadhán Jones

The St Vincent de Paul society has warned the Antrim Town community not to be fooled by people claiming to conduct door-to-door collections

on behalf of the society.

The warning comes as individuals posing as volunteers called at houses in the Antrim parish area, claiming to be taking up a collection.

The SVP "do not carry out door-to-door collections", said the North

Region's president Mary Waide. "If you see anything like that happening, you should report it," she added.

Ms Waide added that it "is a hard time financially for many people, which can lead to desperation".

She encouraged "anybody who is

struggling financially to come to us and we will do everything we can to help you."

A spokesperson for the SVP said that such issues crop up rarely, as the charity's system of local volunteers guards against fraudulent claims.

Church moves forward with safeguarding revision

Consultation for a revision of the Church in Ireland's safeguarding standards has ended, the national safeguarding body has announced.

"Extensive listening meetings" were held throughout 2022 on revising the Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for Catholic Church in Ireland (2016), the national board of the National Office for Safeguarding said in its March newsletters.

"The valuable exchange of ideas have been drafted into a revised policy," the board said.

"The policy has taken into account lessons from our own past as well as some international learnings, particularly from the experiences of other Anglophone countries."

A final draft is expected to be signed off in September of this year, following consultation with the Irish bishops and leaders of religious orders.

CBS run riot...



Omagh CBS celebrate their victory over Summerhill College at Croke Park by a record margin, 6-16 to 3-8, in the Hogan Cup final on St Patrick's Day, March 17.



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Rory Fitzgerald

The View



Destroying the last Christian thought from our Constitution

The rewriting of Ireland's Constitution continues apace. We are now due to have as many as three constitutional referendums this November. These are being marketed as being about women's rights and equality. However, they look set to change the definition of the family, while also inserting the concept of gender into the constitution. Such alterations may seem innocuous to many, but they could have far reaching consequences.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar pointedly announced the referenda on International Women's Day, as a plan to "enshrine gender equality and remove the outmoded reference to 'women in the home'".

Article 41.2 says that, "by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and that "mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home".

Of course, the assumption that women have duties within the home is indeed anachronistic. Yet Article 41.2 merely gives women an additional constitutional protection to rely on, if they so choose. It doesn't actually take rights away from women at all, rather the opposite: it empowers women to require the State to give them some economic protection, if they choose to be homemakers or stay at home mothers.

Treatment

The equal treatment of men and women is now very well established in Irish and EU law. So why is the State going to the trouble of a referendum, which actually reduces women's constitutional protections?

Article 41.2 is clearly dated, yet removing it could have wider consequences than many imagine. For example, if the concept of biological sex is removed altogether and replaced with gender, it could impact women's rights to female-only spaces. Its removal could also undermine a future constitutional challenges to the Gender Recognition Act, 2015, which was enacted with little public



discussion. This act enables adults to legally change sex by simply signing a form.

“The assumption that women have duties within the home is indeed anachronistic”

Similar laws were rejected by the parliaments of Spain, the UK, Germany and other European states in recent years. Many parliamentarians felt that unrestricted gender self-identification laws like Ireland's would clash with the rights and privacy of other citizens, who may not in conscience agree that it's possible to change sex, or may not wish to share spaces like changing rooms with people of the opposite sex. Others noted how women's sports have been impacted in the US by male athletes competing as women. Some argued that sex-specific spaces are essential for the safety of women. We have, after all, even seen reports of convicted male rapists cynically claiming to be transgender to enter women's prisons.

This fraught issue is fast becoming a hot political topic in Ireland. A person born a

male who now identifies as a woman named Barbie Kardashian is currently in Limerick women's prison, serving over five years for threats to kill, rape and torture that individual's own mother. Many believe the law should change to prevent such outcomes. Yet any constitutional challenge to Ireland's gender self-identification law could centre on how it legally alters the constitution's meaning, as regards the terms "woman" and "mother".

Undercover

Unless Eamon de Valera was a deeply undercover trans rights activist, Article 41.2 was obviously intended to only apply to biological women. However, by legally categorising some males as women, the Oireachtas has arguably unconstitutionally effectively redefined this article to include some biological males. Removing the constitutional references to women and mothers could therefore actually shield Ireland's gender recognition legislation from constitutional challenge.

There is some irony in this, as the most vocal opponents of gender self-identification laws are often secular-minded feminists, who would understandably bridle at outmoded references to a woman's

duties in the home. Much will depend on the precise wording of the referenda, which is due to be published in June, but traditionally minded Catholics and certain feminist groups could yet find common cause on this issue.

“Another issue for November is the alteration of the constitutional definition of the family”

As Ireland's political and cultural landscape becomes increasingly fragmented, unexpected alliances are likely to form. As the Irish State becomes more aggressively secular, Muslims and Catholics are likely to align across a range of political issues. We recently saw the Irish Muslim Council come out in support of the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association's letter arguing that teaching "what it means to be transgender would require to teach something about which there is neither a scientific nor social consensus to highly impressionable young children".

The letter also argued that "it might add to a growing psychological contagion

amongst young and vulnerable children".

Irish Muslim Council Chair Dr Umar Al-Qadri wrote in support, agreeing that "it's not appropriate to teach primary school children such a complex and contested topic", arguing that while "every child in primary school should be supported, respected and treated with consideration. We think it is unacceptable to teach children about gender identity under the pretext of teaching them about diversity".

Glimpse

Such episodes are a glimpse of the future of Irish politics. In our increasingly multicultural society – where the indigent Irish have also split into differing cultures, with different belief systems – unexpected political alliances will form. It seems we could soon see Muslims, secular feminists and Catholics align in campaigns to change how transgender issues are taught in schools.

Yet on other issues, these groups may take opposing sides. For example, another issue for November is the alteration of the constitutional definition of the family. The constitution requires the State to protect the family which it says, "possesses rights antecedent and superior

to all positive law". The family, as understood by the Irish Constitution, is the traditional family based on marriage between a man and woman.

The Government looks set to propose a redefinition of the family that includes cohabiting couples, same-sex couples and single parents. This is the perhaps most significant constitutional change proposed. It would mean the end of the special place which the traditional married family has in the Irish Constitution. However, Article 41.3 requires the State to "guard with special care the institution of marriage, on which the family is founded, and to protect it against attack". This places the State in a bizarre position, where merely holding a referendum to dethrone the traditional family is arguably unconstitutional of itself.

“The Government looks set to propose a redefinition of the family that includes cohabiting couples, same-sex couples and single parents”

Yet the Government's drive to eradicate the few remaining vestiges of Christian thought from the Constitution now seems relentless. The traditional Catholic people of Ireland seem stunned into silence by the disorientating pace of change. Just ten years ago, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail posed as friends of traditional Catholic Ireland, claiming to be pro-life parties. Yet both parties facilitated the abortion referendum in 2018, leaving many feeling betrayed and disenfranchised.

Traditional Catholics are now waking up to a brave new Ireland where officialdom routinely holds them and their beliefs in contempt. Ireland's Muslim, Eastern European and African communities are now far more likely to be their political allies than are Fine Gael or Fianna Fail. They awaken to find themselves strangers in a strange land.



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- 3pm: The Passion of Our Lord (Basilica)
- 7.30pm: Prayer and Veneration of the Cross (Basilica)

Holy Saturday

- 10am: Morning Prayer (Parish Church)
- 11am: Blessing of Bread for the Polish Community
- 9pm: Easter Vigil Mass (Basilica)

Easter Sunday

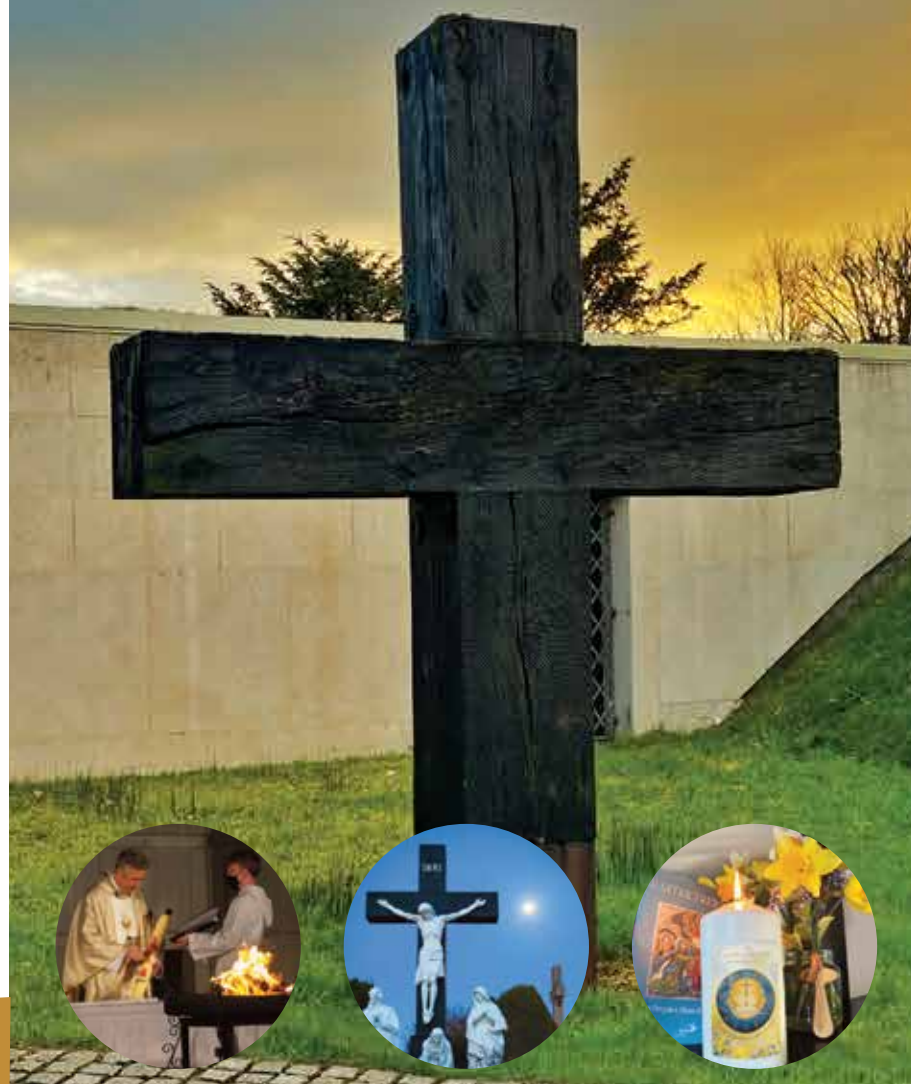
- Mass: 9am (Parish Church)
- 10am, 12 noon and 3pm (Basilica)

Family Mass at 10.30am Easter Sunday

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Parents and teachers want to keep local Catholic schools



Politicians need to learn that it is voters not the Church leading resistance on schools, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

Almost everyone seems to be in agreement that Ireland needs to have a more pluralist school system, giving parents a choice of multi-denominational and Catholic schools. Bishops are for it, politicians are for it and the general public doesn't seem to be opposed to change.

Despite this, many politicians frequently pillory the bishops, claiming they are obstructive and don't want to lose control of the schools.

But this goes against the evidence of a new pilot

scheme proposed by the Department for Education and agreed to by the bishops which has been taking place since October 2022.

It is testing the waters to see what level of interest there is on the ground for transferring Catholic schools to a secular, multi-denominational patron.

What this scheme is proving is that it is not the hierarchy, but the people on the ground, teachers, principals, school management and – crucially – parents who don't want change; they are happy with their Catholic school.

Though the majority of reports have not been released, sources familiar with the process say there is little appetite for change in the eight areas being consulted across the country.

There are a variety of reasons for this, the main one being that the standard of education and respect shown to students in Catholic schools are of a high quality.

In two schools in Galway city, for instance, parents consulted as part of the pilot scheme stated firmly that they were against a change of ethos. The reasons they listed were: “parents chose the school for its Catholic ethos”; “parents want their children to learn about the Catholic Faith”; “there already is a multi-cultural family atmos-

phere in the school”; “there are many advantages to a Catholic school. Parents want high quality education and have this in the schools.”

In Raheny, Dublin, it was widely reported that meetings got heated over fears that schools would be forced to change ethos. Somewhere around 80% of parents who gave their views wanted to keep the school's Catholic ethos.

As a result of this, one of the major sticking points emerging to changing patronage is a 2018 law that bars Catholic schools from prioritising local Catholic children for a place in the school.

This is raising concerns for parents that, if their school changes patron, they won't be able to get a place for their child in a school of their choice.

Even when parents do express an openness to change, fears that the quality of education will decrease dissuades them.

In Galway, parents queried whether they could change back should divestment go wrong; the answer was a firm no.

Teachers and principals were similarly reluctant to change patron, with 20 out of 25 staff in Galway emailing the independent facilitator to express their opposition to a change in patronage.



In the meetings held with school staff, few of the issues that emerged related to ethos particularly. They were largely procedural concerns around rights to transfer to a Catholic school should their change ethos and similar matters.

However, one of the reasons they want to remain with the Catholic ethos is that the governance structure gives them greater freedom to respond to matters locally.

The governance of Education and Training Board (ETB) schools, by contrast, is more centralised, with one insider telling me that teachers fear

it could be “stifling”.

The staff of the two Galway schools said they wanted to hear from colleagues in multi-denominational schools before they would be willing to commit to a change in ethos.

Other issues that cropped up were if, for instance, four schools each had a minority of 25% who wanted a change of ethos.

That's enough to justify a new, multi-denominational school. But which school will it be when there's no majority?

So the situation as it stands is that matters determining

the willingness of divestment of schools is not in the hands of the bishops, but with the State.

If politicians want to win over local schools and communities, then they have to convince them that the model of education they are offering is better and that parents' freedom of choice will truly be respected.

It is their law and their model for education that is the cause for concern among parents and staff, as the pilot scheme is proving; for now, it appears the majority of communities are happy with their Catholic school.



Healthy and well-adjusted societies do not see surges in the use of drugs, writes **Jason Osborne**

According to a recent United Nations report, Irish people are the joint fourth-highest consumers of cocaine globally, relatively speaking.

The report (based on data from 2019 – the most recently compiled) revealed that 2.4% of Irish people reported having used the drug the previous year, which sees us

Cocaine habit blows hole in myth of progress



Cocaine recently seized by gardaí. Photo: Garda Press Office

level with the United States and Austria. Only Australia, the Netherlands and Spain ranked higher in their levels of cocaine usage.

This may come as no surprise to readers, as we also saw last year the Health Research Board report that between 2011 and 2019,

there was an explosive 171% increase in the number of young people receiving treatment for cocaine abuse.

I read these latest reports over the weekend, as I made my way through that most famous social-dystopian novel, *Brave New World*. In it, the denizens of the ‘world

state’ use the popular drug, soma, in order to lift themselves when they're feeling down, or simply to take a break from reality.

Aphorisms about the drug abound, such as “Was and will make me ill, I take a gramme and only am,” or “a gramme is bet-

ter than a damn”. I would be lying if I said I didn't see more than a little bit of a parallel between this dystopian attitude towards soma and the developing Irish attitude towards cocaine.

We live in an age of self-congratulation, with politicians and those supportive of their social reforms delighting in the ‘progress’ we're making on a range of fundamental issues, from the redefinition of the family to the redefinition of sex itself.

This glowing self-reflection is often accompanied by sneers towards the dark, Catholic past from which we've ‘thankfully’ emerged, where, common sentiment would have it, the vast majority of the island's inhabitants were kept from being themselves, and so, from being truly happy.

Reports like the above blow a hole in this omnipresent narrative we're wrapping ourselves in. Healthy, happy, well-adjusted societies do not see surges in the use of drugs

which, as Huxley says of soma in *Brave New World*, raise “a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe” and our minds.

Lest anyone think it's a prudish stance I'm adopting, I'm well aware of Chesterton's line of thought, and fully agree with it, that in Catholicism, the pint, the pipe and the cross can all fit together. We're a religion that doesn't deny the goods of the earth, the wonderful things God has given us to enjoy together in harmony, and that ultimately enable us to cast our minds back to him with renewed gratitude.

Cocaine doesn't do that, and its rise is evidence of a significant segment of society's inability to face up to a reality that in some way they must find wanting. If we're serious about combatting this, we need to ask searching and searching questions about why the happy new direction we're heading in is seeing less than desirable results.

Upcoming votes could be very radical indeed



Proposals seem designed to weaken the rights of parents in favour of the State, writes **David Quinn**

We look set to have three more referendums later this year, probably in November. We have a Government that can't get enough of them and is determined to completely recast Ireland in its image.

The three come under the heading 'gender equality', although, as we will see, this is extremely misleading.

The referendum proposal that has grabbed most attention so far is the one on 'mothers in the home', which is found in Article 41.2 of Bunreacht na hEireann.

“A lot of people falsely believe this provision says a woman's place is in the home”

The second proposes a change to Article 40.1, the section that makes us all equal before the law, while the third will be another referendum on marriage and family, changing Article 41.3 and perhaps, even more fundamentally, Article 41.1 as well.

Despite the attention it has received, the proposed referendum on mothers in the home is probably the least significant of the three, but we will deal with it first anyway.

A lot of people falsely believe this provision says a woman's place is in the home. It does not. Instead, it says that “mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home”. In other words, the State should endeavour to organise the economy in such a way that both parents are not forced to leave the home every day in order to earn a pay-packet and make



ends meet.

The provision recognises that home is more important than work, which is hardly an indefensible point of view. It is almost certainly what a big majority of people today, parents especially, still believe.

Union movement

The 'mothers in the home' provision was not simply a product of Catholic social teaching, as many today think. A century ago, the trade union movement internationally fought hard for the home. It didn't want mothers and fathers to be forced out of the home each day, often into jobs that were physically very demanding. Children sometimes had to work as well because society was so poor.

If living standards could be raised to such a point that a mother could stay at home if she wanted and mind the house and the children, that was considered a huge advance. This is the ideal that Bunreacht na hEireann sought to uphold.

Today, we might consider it sexist that the mother is singled out as though only she has duties in the home. But back then it was assumed the father had a duty to go out to work that was often dangerous.

Although the wording of the referendum has not yet been published, it is assumed it will refer to 'carers in the home' rather than mothers, so as to make it gender-neutral. We will wait to see whether it does more than that, and whether some women might want to keep the one provision of the Constitution that actually refers to mothers.

The second referendum is to deal with marriage and the family. You might think we had already covered that when we voted in favour of same-sex marriage in 2015. Wasn't that called the 'marriage equality' referendum?

But as I, and a number of others pointed out at the time, the next logical step was to hold a 'family equality' referendum because, even after the passage of same-sex marriage, the Constitution still pledged the State to guard marriage with "special care". Wasn't this still discriminatory? Why wasn't the State also pledging to guard single-parent families and cohabiting couples with "special care".

“The Government has decided they do not, and therefore wants to abolish the special position of marriage in the Constitution”

The reasoning behind guarding marriage with special care made a lot of sense before the 2015 referendum. Prior to that, society and the State recognised that the family of mother, father and child had special value and importance. There can be no society at all unless men and women have children together, and it made perfect sense to encourage them to commit to each other through marriage and to provide them with special support and help to do so.

But now that we believe that the family of mother,

father and child has no special value, why believe a married family of two men, or two women, has special value compared with other types of families? The Government has decided they do not, and therefore wants to abolish the special position of marriage in the Constitution.

But it might go even further than this. The Citizens' Assembly wants it to. Article 41.1 describes the family as “the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society”.

It says it is “a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law”.

Family life

This means the family is more important than the State. It has rights of its own that the State simply recognises and cannot take away.

The Citizens' Assembly wants this wording amended so that it would “protect private and family life” instead.

This would seem to weaken the position of the family compared with the State, possibly weakening the rights of parents along the way.

If so, then this referendum will be a lot more important than the one on mothers in the home.

The third referendum will deal with Article 40.1 which begins: “All citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law.”

The Government wants to insert mention of “gender equality” into this provision, although it is a bit hard to see why at first,

since it says we are all equal before the law “as human persons”, without regard to gender or anything else. The provision is about as egalitarian as it is possible to get.

“The Government might end up with more opposition than it bargained for”

A referendum to change Article 40.1 will probably be presented as a women's rights measure. In fact, and crucially, this will not be the case because the meaning of “gender” has changed so drastically in the last few years. It no longer simply means a biological male and a biological female. It can now mean virtually anything. A biological male can declare he is a “woman”, for example and a biological female can declare she is a “man”. They are also say they are “gender non-binary”, meaning neither male nor female.

The report of the Citizens' Assembly on gender equality is explicit about the malleable meaning of gender when it says: “Some of the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes are deeply destructive and adversely affect all genders. Trans and non-binary people suffer from particular facets of inequality. Advancing gender equality through implementing our recommendations can benefit the whole of Irish society, regardless of gender identity”.

Gender equality

In other words, a gender equality referendum would be a trans-rights referendum in many ways, and not one about women's rights at all.

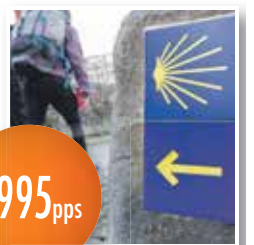
It will be interesting to see who emerges to oppose it because there are plenty of feminists who oppose certain aspects of gender ideology on the grounds that they undermine women's rights. The Government might end up with more opposition than it bargained for.

JOE WALSH TOURS SPRING PILGRIMAGES



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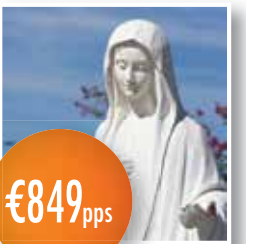


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Kerry celebrates faith life of young people

Ruadhán Jones

Hundreds of students from across the diocese of Kerry gathered to celebrate and develop their faith life on March 14.

The Ceiliúradh na nÓg celebration day built on the work of chaplains and teachers in fostering parish-based initiatives for students to get involved in.

Across the academic year

2022-23, the students participated in a faith-based programme of exploration, action, reflection and presentation.

The day began with music and prayer, being followed by Bishop Ray Browne's address.

Guest speaker Fr Chris O'Donnell spoke about inclusion, the theme of the day, echoed in talks by representatives from Youth for Christ, Scripture Union, Trócaire, Siamsa Tire and the Kerry Diocesan Youth Service.



Resolving technical difficulties.



Students from St Brigid's Presentation Secondary School provided musical accompaniment on the day.



Students get into the spirit of the drum workshop.



Students and staff of St Brigid's Presentation Secondary School, Killarney, with Bishop Browne.



Students and staff of Presentation Secondary School, Tralee, join Bishop Browne at the day of celebration, March 14.



Bishop Browne with students and staff of Presentation Secondary School, Castleisland.



Bishop of Kerry Ray Browne meets with students and staff of the Intermediate School.

Kildare and Leighlin students test their Meitheal

Staff reporter

Students from schools in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese celebrated the work of their Meitheal groups at an achievement night in Holy Family Church Askea.

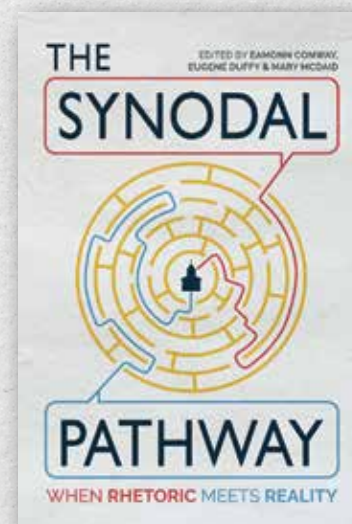
Meitheal is a leadership programme operating in around 30 secondary schools in the diocese.

The students, leaders and other participants educate each other in the Faith through leadership, taking action, liturgy, reflection and evaluation.

The Meitheal group leaders gathered in Askea, March 10, to mark the end of the programme, receiving certificates recognising their effort during the year.



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Polarised debate rages over Poland's titanic pope



Debate over John Paul II's handling of abuse during his time as archbishop threatens to further tear Poland in two, writes Jason Osborne

It's hard to overstate the place St Pope John Paul II occupies in the Polish psyche and society, as few other countries have comparably titanic figures at all, never mind within living memory. Having visited more than my fair share of Poland's major cities and walked many of their streets, it's a country adorned with statues of a man many credit with almost single-handedly toppling the communist regime under which Poland laboured for decades.

Streets and squares are named after him, while places associated with his life are commemorated by plaques and information boards – right down to the places he stayed and studied in. Even the time of his death – 9:37pm – is quickly recalled here, albeit for different reasons. Many members of the older generations remember it prayerfully, with reverence, while for younger Poles it has become something of a meme, born out of the fact that their elders – particularly grandparents – held it in such esteem.

Legacy

It's perhaps no wonder then that when some aspect of the former pope's life and legacy is questioned, it becomes an issue of heated national debate, rather than a merely ecclesial dispute.

Such is the situation right now in Poland, where a recently aired documen-

tary, *Franciszkanska 3*, and a recently released book, *Maxima Culpa*, aimed to demonstrate conclusively that then-archbishop of Kraków Karol Wojtyła knew about clerical abuse and sought to cover it up. The situation is by no means as clear-cut as the documentary, produced by Marcin Gutowski and aired on TVN24, a private TV network in Poland, and the book, by Dutch journalist Ekke Overbeek, make it out to be.

Many historians in Poland accept that Cardinal Wojtyła probably did know about abuse carried out by members of the clergy, but what remains unknown, according to an article by Polish Catholic journalist Paulina Guzik, is “what he knew, from whom he knew it, and how much of the cardinal's decisions regarding abusive priests were influenced by the anti-Church actions of the communist Security Service (SB)”, which, she notes, “often falsely accused good priests of immoral behaviour only to discredit them”.

“Marcin Gutowski and Ekke Overbeek for the most part used archival records produced by the communist Security Service which doesn't give a full picture of the case”

The intricacies of dealing with Poland's recent history can be difficult for those of us who come from abroad to grasp, never having had to deal with systemically dishonest archives such as those left over from the communist secret service. Widely acknowledged that truth and often-maliciously fictitious lie mingle in their reports and records, definite, historical facts can be incredibly difficult to come by. This is especially true with regards to the Church's dealings with the communist apparatus in Poland. One of the few truly independent organisations operating in Poland at the time, the Church was a rallying point for resistance to the regime, which earned it the antagonisation of the secret service.

As mentioned above, clergy were routinely targeted and slandered in order to discredit them. A prime example of this is Blessed Fr Jerzy Popieluszko,



St John Paul II greets the crowd in Czestochowa during his 1979 trip to Poland. Photo: OSV News/CNS file, Chris Niedenthal

who became associated with the popular ‘Solidarity’ movement, to the authorities' displeasure. Regularly intimidated and slandered by the secret service, Fr Popieluszko was ultimately tortured and murdered by three SB agents in 1984.

Cautious

Against this backdrop, Polish historians are naturally cautious when it comes to dealing with the contents of the secret service archives, with some being outright derisive in their response to the recent works.

Pawel Skibinski, professor of history at the University of Warsaw, told RMF Polish radio that the work of the journalists accusing Cardinal Wojtyła doesn't qualify as a proper historical query.

“I must honestly admit that I am shocked by the level of construction of these materials,” he said, adding that if students brought him work of a similar standard, he would “send them away,” adding that “we are treated very badly as recipients” of media reports.

Mr Skibinski reinforced the observation that the journalists in question, Marcin Gutowski and Ekke Overbeek for the most part used archival records produced by the communist Security Service which doesn't give a full picture of the case.

In response to these com-

plexities, the Church in Poland announced March 14 at a press conference in Warsaw that it will be establishing an independent commission to look into the truth of the matter.

According to *OSV News*, the Polish bishops announced they will create a commission of experts to investigate cases of abuse of minors by clergy that will cover the time that John Paul II governed the Archdiocese of Krakow as Cardinal Karol Wojtyła.

Archbishop Wojciech Polak of Gniezno, primate of Poland and delegate of child protection for the Polish bishops'

conference, said that the task of the commission would be the “thorough examination of documents contained in both state and Church archives so that its content is shown in its entirety, taking into account the laws and state of knowledge as well as the socio-cultural context” of the times.

Determined

“Concrete decisions” regarding what the commission will look like are yet to be decided but the bishops say that they're determined to investigate the cases from 1945 to 1990, and are also considering

examining later cases.

The commission will be made up of historians, lawyers, doctors and psychologists, and, according to *OSV News*, it “will not be focused only on priests that committed the crime of sexual abuse in the archdioceses of Kraków when cardinal Wojtyła was archbishop (but) it will investigate what we know about all abusive clergy in Poland after World War II”.

Whether the commission will get to the truth of things of course remains to be seen, but in the meantime, the fierce debate that the



Bishop of Kraków Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II, is pictured in an undated photo. Photo: OSV News/ CNS file

documentary and book have ignited has seen Polish society split down the middle in the polarised fashion that has become so common in the western world today.

“His words and deeds demonstrated and awakened love for the fatherland, actively supporting the Polish people in their efforts to regain freedom and an independent state existence”

Generally speaking, those of a progressive, or liberal, bent are more likely to accept the claims at face value, and use them to argue for a diminished place for the Church in Polish society, while people who lean towards the conservative or the traditional are more likely to circle the wagons and decry the accusations as attacks against the “good name” of John Paul II.

This latter tack has been the approach taken by Poland’s conservative government, and was also the Church hierarchy’s initial reaction.

The Sejm, one of Poland’s parliamentary bodies, passed a resolution March 9, quickly after the headlines broke following the documentary and book, “in defence of the good name of St John Paul II”.

“His [John Paul II’s] words and deeds demonstrated and awakened love for the fatherland, actively supporting the Polish people in their efforts to regain freedom and an independent state existence. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland strongly

condemns the media’s disgraceful campaign, based largely on materials of the apparatus of violence of the People’s Republic of Poland, whose object is the Great Pope – St John Paul II the most eminent Pole in history,” MPs wrote in the resolution adopted March 9.

“This is an attempt to discredit John Paul II with materials that even the Communists did not dare to use,” the Sejm went on to argue.

“The Sejm of the Republic of Poland expresses its respect for the work of John Paul II and his contribution to the history of Poland, Europe, and the world. At the same time, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland considers it its duty to future generations to remind...the Polish Pope was a tireless advocate of human rights and defender of the poor in all corners of the world. He showed special sensitivity to the rights of working people and social justice.

Testimony

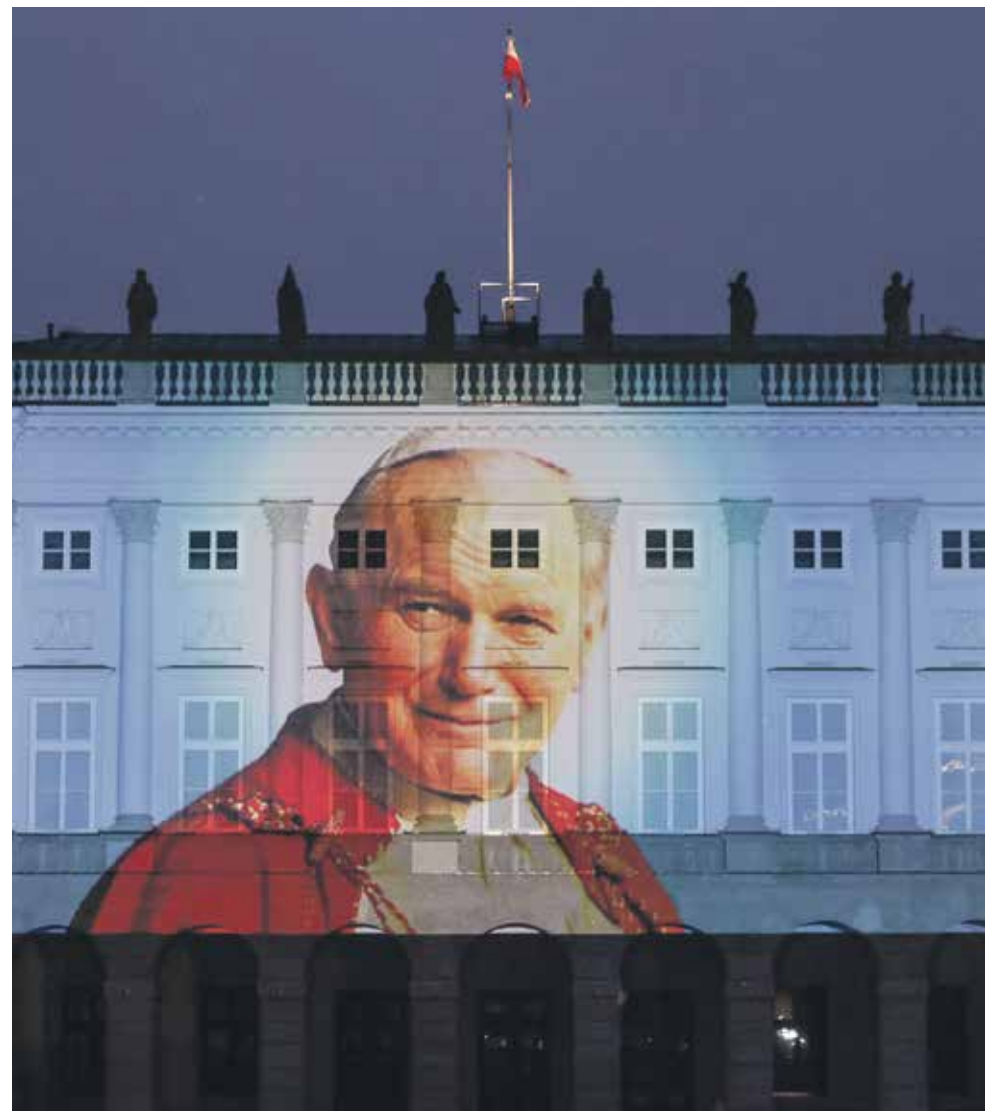
“Let our attitude be a testimony to all those who try to take away our dignity and erase our memory. John Paul II was a model not only for the public but also for the entire political class at a time when our democracy was being born. The Polish people and their democratically elected representatives will never allow his memory to be destroyed with materials fabricated by the communist system, which he opposed. In recognition of the merits of John Paul II for the defence of identity, freedom, and the national community, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland pays tribute and gratitude to the great compatriot,” the Resolution concludes.

The defensive approach is unlikely to win either the government or the Church

any friends among their opponents, with an adversarial approach winning out that’s seeing people settle into ideological hardlines rather than reaching out across the divide for dialogue. It may be that they’re just reading the room and responding accordingly – after all, a recent poll conducted by the Pollster Research Institute on a sample of 1,037 Poles found that when asked if John Paul II is an authority for them, 70 percent of respondents answered that he was, while 21 percent answered “no” and nine percent, “I don’t know”.

“The conducted canonisation process, including an in-depth scientific historical analysis, leaves no doubt as to the sanctity of John Paul II”

However, a better tactic, and one that hopefully the upcoming independent commission will bolster, is perhaps to trust the process and let the truth speak for itself. The Polish bishops’ conference in a March 14 statement said “The conducted canonisation process, including an in-depth scientific historical analysis, leaves no doubt as to the sanctity of John Paul II”. Maybe, then, the Church in Poland ought to take solace in that, and pursue a less adversarial, more transparent relationship with large, disillusioned segments of Polish society, and trust that the truth will, ultimately, speak for itself.



St Pope John Paul II projected onto the presidential palace in Warsaw. Photo: Kancelaria Prezydenta Twitter



St Mary’s Basilica in Kraków’s main square.

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Songs and praise, odes to St Patrick



From Brazil to Ireland: Fr Bortolini Neto with a great devotion to St Patrick, writes **Chai Brady**

Why would a Brazilian man have such a strong connection with Ireland's patron saint? The answer is easy for priest and musician Fr Emilio Bortolini Neto who decided to write his thesis on St Patrick and has recently brought out a book with dozens of songs related to the saint.

Fr Bortolini's faith was inspired by music, particularly that of George Harrison in his solo career after The Beatles. Mr Harrison was always searching for God despite having fame and money, and this came through in much of his work.

In the preface of Fr Bortolini's book *Apple of My Eye* Fr Billy Swan who is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns and is doing a doctorate on St Patrick said there are certain saints of the Church who have a strong universal appeal.

"Their virtue and holiness are attractive to peoples of every nation and culture. I think of saints like St Francis of Assisi with his witness to simplicity and poverty; St Therese of Lisieux as a prophet of love at the heart of the Church," Fr Swan explains.

Universal appeal

"Another saint with this universal appeal is St Patrick of Ireland. Born in Britain at the end of the 4th Century, St Patrick was one of the first Christian missionaries to a previously pagan land and became the symbol of a triumphant Christian faith and the father in faith of countless Irish missionaries who brought the Gospel around the world. Being British by birth, Patrick's association with Ireland shows he is a saint who transcends national boundaries to embrace people of different cultures, traditions and nationalities. This is one of the reasons why St Patrick's Day is celebrated in cities all over the globe from



St Patrick

Canada to America, to Africa, Australia and Brazil. Patrick does not belong to the Irish only, but to everyone," Fr Swan says.

“He undervalued the ‘wonderful story’ of St Patrick’s life that ‘remains a window of how God’s grace can triumph in the life of a human person’”

While in seminary in Rome Fr Bortolini studied the life and writings of St Patrick. While some of his lecturers were surprised by his choice considering there were many saints in South America he could choose from, when he brought them his research, they were delighted to learn more about the saint.

Fr Swan says that while he was studying in Rome he undervalued the “wonderful story” of St Patrick's life that “remains a window of how God's grace can triumph in the life of a human person. His story contains the categories that we share in our own human experience today – religious indifference that

can be shattered by suffering, displacement, human trafficking, slavery, exile, forgiveness, social and ecclesial unity, meaning and mission. I believe this is one of the reasons why Patrick appeals to people all over the world – that God's gift of salvation arrived through his humanity that he shares with all of us”.

Fr Bortolini made contact with Fr Swan to learn more about St Patrick, his passion confirmed for Fr Swan the fact that although St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, he belongs to the universal Church.

Divided in three parts

As Fr Bortolini says the book is divided in three parts: The first he names ‘Him: St Patrick and us’ and is about the historical St Patrick, the second, ‘Them: from St Patrick to us’, is about Irish history, and the third part is Fr Bortolini's personal view of Ireland, and it's called ‘Us: Ireland, I love you’.

He says: “All of them are comprised of songs and comments on them, connecting the lyrics with our ordinary lives. Every com-

ment has a few parts, with lyrics of a song as a title... The general title, ‘*Apple of My Eye*’, is an expression from the Bible (Zc 2:8), where God says, through the Prophet Zechariah: ‘Whoever touches you, touches the apple of my eye’, quoted by St Patrick in Confession 29, to express a deep love, an identification between the one who loves and the one who is loved.”

“The Irish felt loved by both God and Patrick, and passed on that love, abroad and in their own country”

Fr Bortolini speaks about the author C.S. Lewis who wrote in *Mere Christianity* about a “good infection” that can be passed on. “Patrick felt loved by God, and passed on that love to those who had enslaved him. The Irish felt loved by both God and Patrick, and passed on that love, abroad and in their own country. I feel loved by God and by many Irish I met, and turned this love into music. And I hope you, dear reader, feel loved by God, St Patrick and me,

and spread this love around you, in a kind of a ‘virtuous’ cycle.”

Songs

In the book there are 32 songs written by Fr Bortolini which are divided into three chapters.

This first part shows the connections between the story of St Patrick and people's daily lives.

In Fr Bortolini's own words it starts with an introduction, which is the answer to the question ‘Who was Patrick?’ with the song ‘Patrick Was’, presenting some elements of his life and personality.

The first part, ‘(Break the Chains)’ is about Patrick's youth, starting with his life at

home – ‘Everything Is Fine’, his kidnapping ‘Kidnapped Kid’, and his life as slave, marked by loneliness, ‘A Man Without a Friend’, then a feeling of being dislocated in ‘Stranger in a strange land’.

And then his nostalgia for his home and family with ‘I Wish I Was There’, followed by his desire to escape from that life – ‘Set Me Free’, and his hopes ‘Somewhere on the Shore’, the patience it took ‘Wait’ and, at last, his long-dreamed deliverance ‘Freedom’.

The second part, ‘Bridges and Houses’, is about the years between the end of his slavery and his return to Ireland, marked by stability ‘Houses’ and challenge ‘Bridges’, starting with



Fr Emilio Bortolini Neto

some difficulties he had before getting home – ‘Desert’, until he finally got there ‘Home Again’.

“‘Holy Revenge’, it is about his coming back to Ireland, when he paid with love and kindness the mistreatment he received from the Irish the first time he was here”

Looking back, he realised his slavery was a blessing in disguise ‘Life Is a Paradox’, and started to have dreams, in which the Irish asked him to ‘Come Back’, leaving him in doubt about his future – ‘At the Crossroads’ – until he realised he would be ‘Bound Forever’ with Ireland and decided to go back to it.

As Fr Bortolini writes in the third part, ‘Holy Revenge’, it is about his coming back to Ireland, when he paid with love and kindness the mistreatment he received from the Irish the first time he was here. In the songs Fr Bortolini composed St Patrick declares his love for the people in ‘Apple of My Eye’, and the reason why he came back in ‘Back for Good’ – willing to do for them what God had done for him ‘What You’ve Done for Me’.

Fr Bortolini adds that his other songs in the same vein are about God being the greatest present St Patrick brings to the Irish, with the songs ‘No Other God’ then ‘God With a Capital G’. For that reason, he spent everything he had becoming a ‘Poor Rich Man’. Soon enough he faced human cruelty, for many

people who he had just baptised were kidnapped and killed by the soldiers of Coroticus, the ‘Son of the Devil’, whom he asked to do it ‘No More’.

St Patrick also suffered when a friend revealed a terrible sin he had committed when he was young, Fr Bortolini captures this in the song ‘Broken Promises’. He also articulates in ‘The Least of All Believers’ how St Patrick feels. Fr Bortolini says St Patrick could feel God’s presence even in his dreams in the song ‘In My Dreams’.

Fr Bortolini says that St Patrick, even while loving the whole country, some places were special to him, like Armagh, which is emphasised in the song ‘The Place I Love Above All Lands’ and about Croagh Patrick in ‘On the Top of the Mountain’.

“He taught the song of Gospel to people and invited them to ‘Sing With Me’, and, when his mission was done, he knew it was ‘Time to Go’, but felt very thankful to God, for everything he had given him, and to the Irish people, who accepted his message ‘Thank You,’” Fr Bortolini says, explaining his songs.

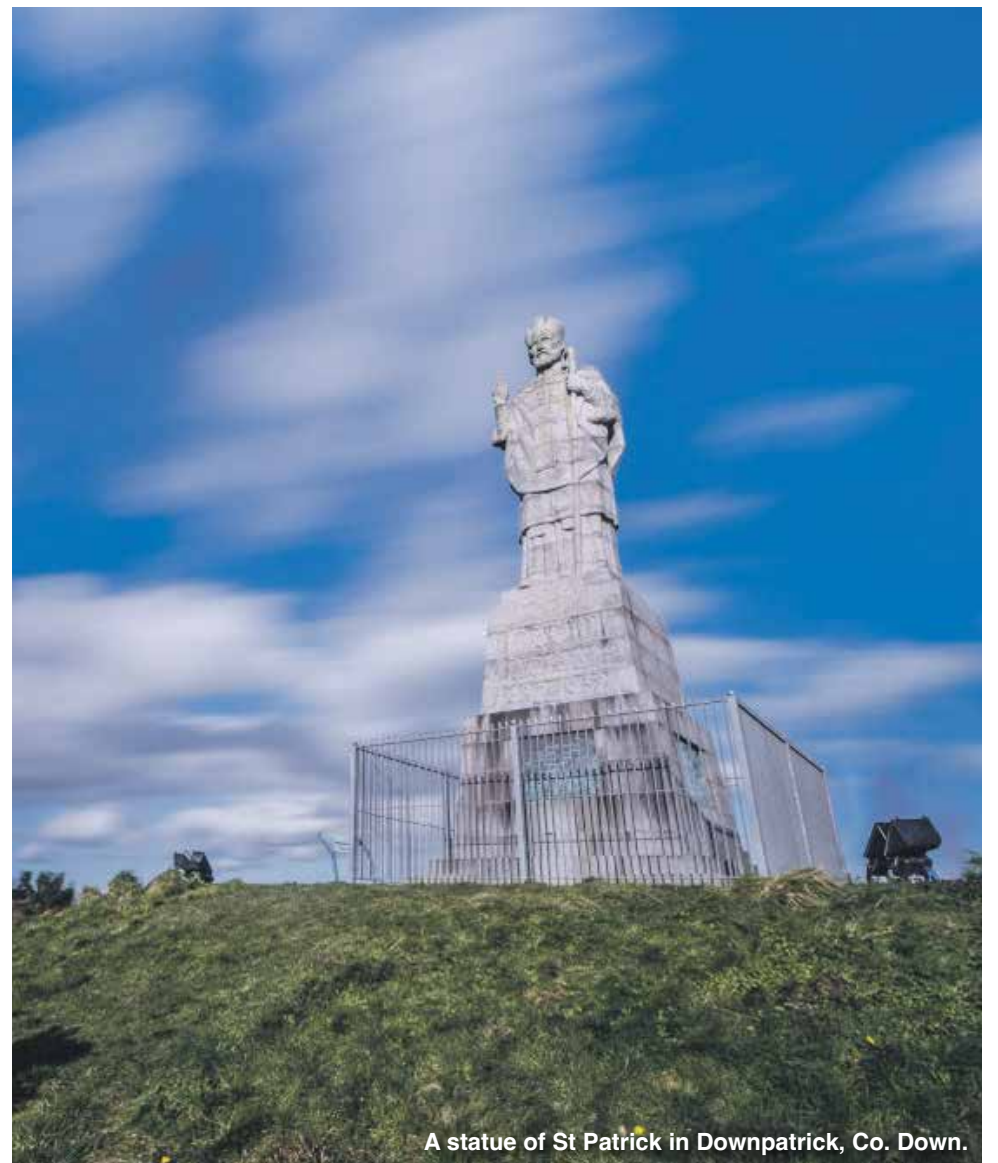
Our beloved saint

Fr Bortolini says: “This work is not exactly a storytelling. I love storytelling, but that’s not the approach I used here. The first songs that came to me were a kind of diving into the inner world of our beloved saint, and I decided to keep that approach, instead of just telling what happened to him from the outside. That’s why most of the songs are sung in the first person, as if Patrick himself would be telling us

how he felt and dealt with the situations he’d been through.”

“In all his endeavours, Patrick remained grounded in Christ and united in Christ-understanding himself to be loved and chosen by God as ‘the pupil of my eye’”

As Fr Swan says in the preface of the book: “*Apple of my Eye* is a wonderful fruit of Fr Bortolini’s love of Patrick and years of contemplation on the story of his life. Patrick’s story and the power of the Gospel that shapes it, is captured by music, poetry and dialogue in *Apple of My Eye*. It invites the reader to engage with the story of Patrick in an imaginative way and to consider how the stories of Scripture are moments that reveal who we are and who God is. The title of the work comes from the twenty-ninth chapter of Patrick’s autobiographical *Confessio* where he narrates his story and credits God for choosing him for the mission to the Irish and for the success he observed as he looked back on his life. Thanks to Patrick’s mission, the Irish who previously worshipped idols and unclean things had now been raised to the dignity of becoming sons and daughters of God in Christ. In all his endeavours, Patrick remained grounded in Christ and united in Christ-understanding himself to be loved and chosen by God as ‘the pupil of my eye’. Here is a phrase that is commonly translated as the ‘apple of my eye’, indicating the special love the master has for his servant.”



A statue of St Patrick in Downpatrick, Co. Down.

“I dream of a Church transformed.” – Pope Francis

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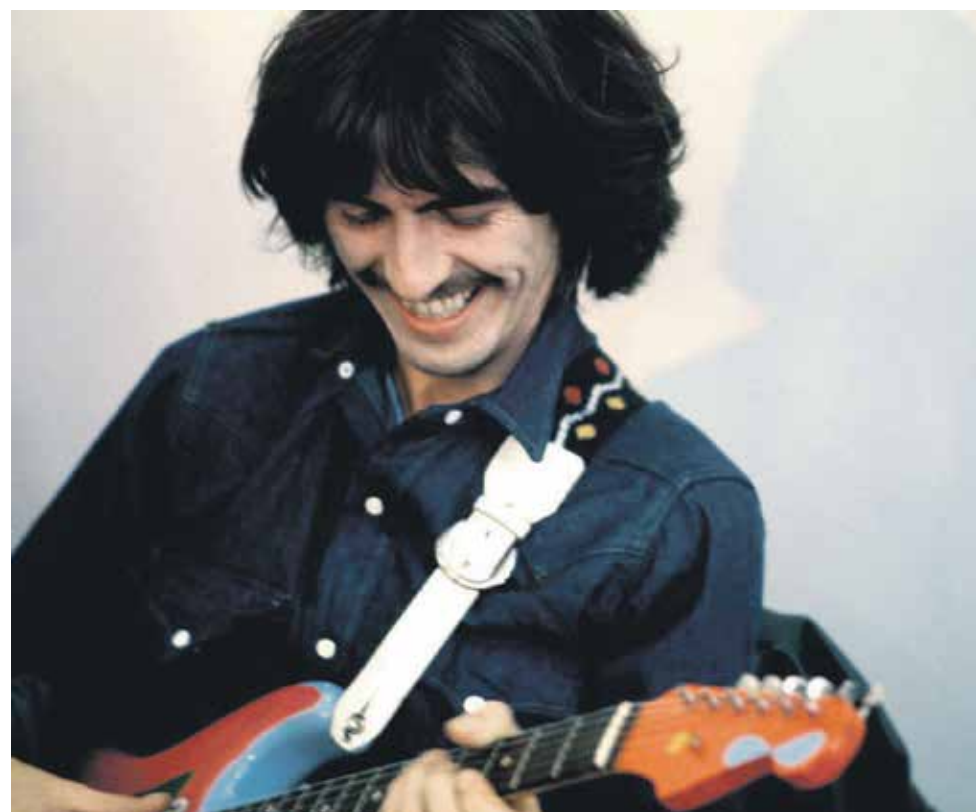
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The Irish Catholic

'We are here to fight abortion', says crowd in Belfast

Ruadhán Jones

A large crowd attended the Belfast Rally for Life to fight the imposition of abortion on the North by the Westminster government.

One of the keynote speakers, Down Syndrome rights activist Conor O'Dowd, urged those present to help protect children with Down Syndrome, saying "I am here to fight abortion in Belfast today".

Mr O'Dowd made a heartfelt plea, saying "We would like to stop those doctors

taking away our babies with Down Syndrome."

Bernadette Smyth of Precious Life, the largest pro-life group in the north and the organisers of the Rally, said that in the year of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement, communities must "call for peace in the womb" in order to "end the violence of abortion".

The rally also heard opposition to new laws set to come into effect in May that will criminalise peaceful pro-life efforts at abortion centres.



Judith and Cahill protest for the pro-life cause at the Custom House Square statue.



Aaron Doherty and Niamh Uí Bhriain of the Life Institute at the Rally for Life at the Custom House Square in Belfast on March 11.



Michael O'Dowd joins his son Conor, who has Down Syndrome, on stage at the Rally for Life. Conor has protested against the aborting of children with Down Syndrome in Ireland.



Fr Sean Gough, a priest based in England who was arrested recently for praying outside an abortion facility.

THE SYNODAL TIMES

APRIL
2023 ISSUE

In April, The Synodal Times will be featuring coverage from the Continental Assemblies taking place across the world, including those being held in Asia and Africa, and analysing the final reports they send to Rome.

Lay people will not only be represented at the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October, churches be allowed to vote! How will this work? We will be taking a look back to when the Pobal De movement in Ireland sent a submission to the Synod of the Laity in 1987 and we ask – has anything changed at all?

Thousands of laity in Belgium are campaigning for the priesthood to be abolished. Are priestless churches on the horizon?

While a frenetic final session of Germany's Synodal Pathway, laden with twists and surprises, will be covered by us.

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Out&About

Top of the class



DUBLIN: The winners of the first-ever Oireachtas Essay Competition are pictured after receiving their prizes from Ceann Comhairle Sean O'Fearghail TD at a ceremony in Leinster House, March 10. The competition was devised by Senator Ronan Mullen with the support of An Ceann Comhairle and the Oireachtas Education Unit. The seven winners: Dara Morley (Connacht), Kate McKeon (Munster), Prachi Agrawai (Dublin), Leanne Healy (Ulster), James O'Connor (overall English), Antaine O'Seaghda (overall Irish) and Seanan Corr (Leinster ex-Dublin). Photo: John McElroy.



MONAGHAN: Fr Jerry White SSCC makes a presentation to Sr Agnes of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal when they recently visited Bawn. Also pictured is Sr Solanus.



LAOIS: First class students at Killeshin NS show off their sock puppets as they prepare for some theatrics, March 13.

IN SHORT

Irish bishops welcome historical abuse inquiry

The Irish bishops have welcomed the announcement of an inquiry into historical sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders.

An inquiry "informed by the views and engagement of survivors, and one which facilitates the telling of stories and a listening process, will serve truth and justice", the bishops said in a statement following their Spring meeting.

The Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) also welcomed the inquiry, encouraging all orders to cooperate in any ways they can.

Orders should make records and documents available and engage "with the inquiry in an open and transparent way", AMRI said.

Winners announced in Columban schools' competition

The Columbans in Ireland and Britain announced the winners of their schools' media competition on the subject 'Building Peaceful Futures'.

In Ireland, the article winners were Katie Bonnes, St Louis Grammar School in Ballymena, Co. Antrim (first); Kalina Matuszewska, of Christ King Secondary School, Co. Cork (second); and Aaron O'Neill of Scoil Mhuire Strokes-town, Co. Roscommon (third).

Image winners were Gabriela García Velarde of Christ the King Secondary School, Douglas, Co. Cork (first); Maria Rosa Black of St Louis Grammar School in Ballymena, Co. Antrim

(second); and in joint third place Clíodhna McKeever of St Catherine's College in Co. Armagh and Jennifer Dineen of Scoil Phobail Sliabh Luachra in Rathmore, Co. Kerry.

The competition attracted 172 entries.

We must recognise migrants as people, says UK Bishop

A UK bishop has hit back at an English government bill to crack down on illegal immigration, saying the starting point must be to "recognise migrants and refugees as people".

Society should "never view people arriving from elsewhere as a political problem to be solved", said Bishop Paul McAleenan, lead bishop for migrants and refugees at the Eng-

land and Wales bishops' conference.

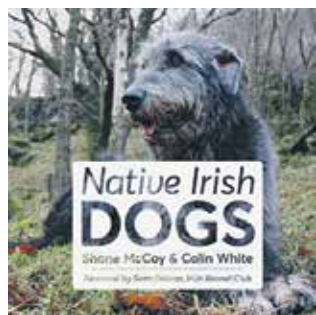
He was speaking at the launch of the bishops' 'Love the Stranger' document on Tuesday, March 15. The document articulates "our Christian duty to look beyond such labels" as refugee, asylum seeker or migrant, "to see the person who has left their homeland in search of a better life", a spokesperson for the bishops said.

"People are driven to leave their countries, sometimes making dangerous journeys or risking exploitation, because of conflict, poverty, oppression, or lack of opportunities," Bishop McAleenan said.

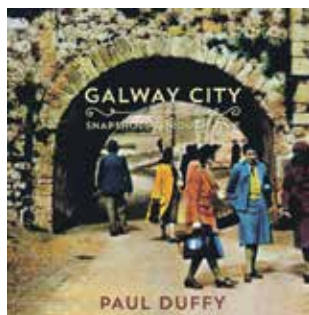
"Looking beyond our own borders, we have a duty to help people flourish in their homelands, as well as welcoming those who leave in search of a better life."

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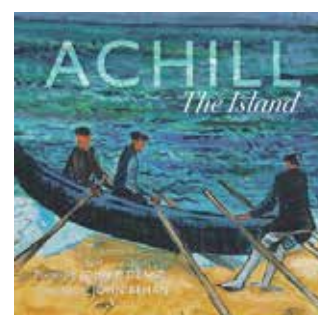
The Liberties
Maurice Curtis



Best Loved Poems - West of Ireland
Thomas F. Walsh & Liam Lyons



Best Loved Poems - South of Ireland
Gabriel Fitzmaurice & John Reid



Achill The Island



What Have The Irish Ever Done For Us?
David Forsythe



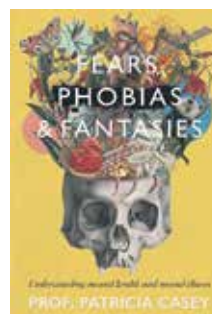
Banshee Rising
Riley Cain



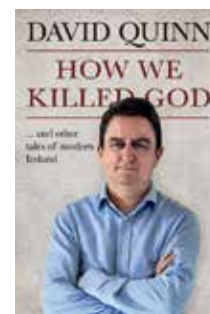
All the Risings
Kevin Kenna



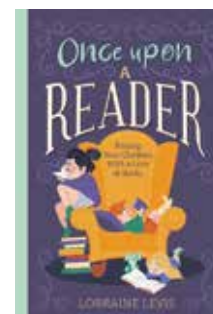
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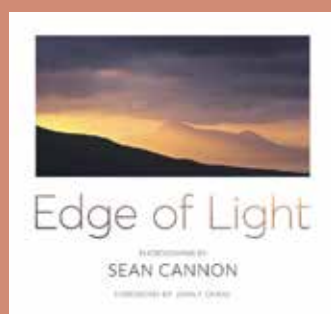


How We Killed God
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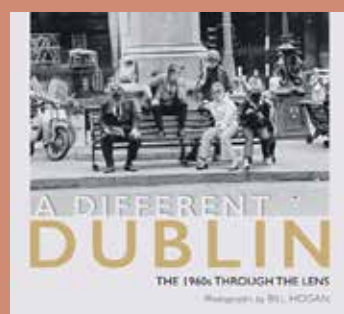


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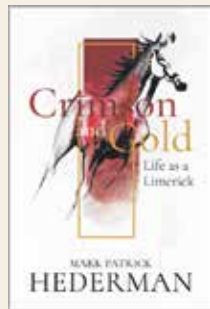


A Dangerous Visionary
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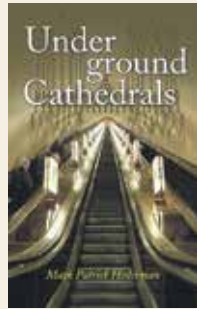
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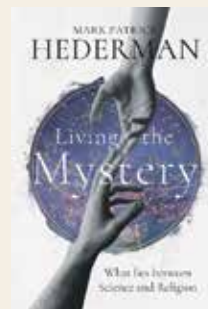
COLLECTION



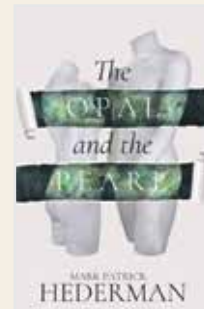
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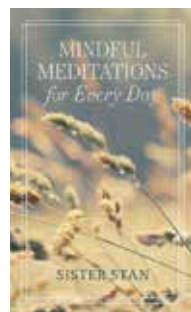


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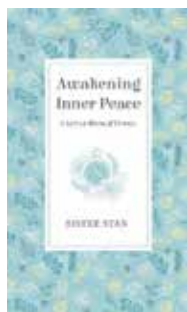
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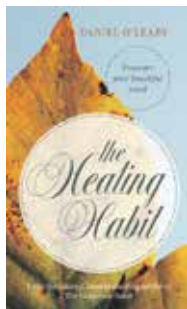
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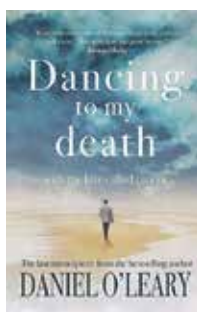


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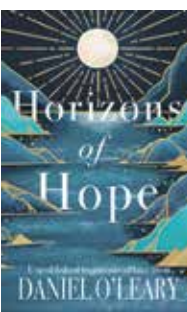
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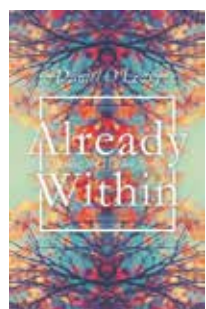


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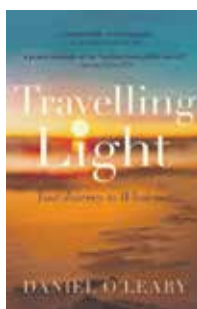


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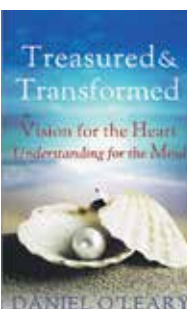
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SENEGAL: Irish Ambassador to Senegal Derek Hannon receives a warm welcome from Archbishop Waldemar Sommertag, papal nuncio to Senegal, on March 8.



ROSCOMMON: Members of Moore history group are pictured following Mass celebrated in St Mary's Church Moore, Ballydangan, by Fr Michael Molloy PP in honour of 6th Century St Caireac Dergain of Clonburren, patron of Moore. Pictured are (from left) Eucharistic Minister Kathleen Fehilly, readers Padraic Kilduff and Mary Cuddy, Fr Molloy and Mary and Denis Whyte who brought up the gifts.



DUBLIN: Fern Dean Nursing Home resident Mairead Duffy is pictured with her son Fr Aquinas Duffy and her daughter Roisin Holland on the occasion of her 90th birthday, March 11.



ARMAGH: Students from St Patrick's Grammar School join with Mark Reilly from ACDC Signs on March 14, as banners go up to mark the 150th anniversary of St Patrick's Cathedral.



ROSCOMMON: Maura O'Brien, Maria Reynolds, Kathy Cuddy, author Xandra Kilduff, Jessica O'Brien and Sabina Fahy-Reynolds.



CARLOW: Some 30 students from the Parish of Borris were confirmed by Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty on March 4. The pupils represented the three areas of the parish, Borris, Rathanna and Ballymurphy.



LIMERICK: Boys from Scoil Iosagain CBS Sexton St, who received the Sacrament of Confirmation recently at St Michael's Church, Denmark St. Included are Eoin Tarrant, class teacher, Fr Leo McDonnell PP, Denis Barry, school principal, Fr Krzysztof Tyburowski and Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy who administered the Sacrament.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



ROSCOMMON: STEMInist is a dress created by three girls in Elphin Community College, Martha, Mary and the model Vanessa, made out of building materials for a junk kouture competition. There are elements of each subject Science, Technology Engineering and Maths within the dress.



CARLOW: Bishop Nulty joins Fr Philip O'Shea – retired PP from Myshall – and Fr O'Shea's grand-niece Graine who was one of those confirmed.



CARLOW: Borris parishioner Leo Scully is pictured with his grand-niece Katie Scully, Bishop Nulty and Fr Nolan.



ROSCOMMON: Padraic Kilduff, author and sacristan, is pictured with his painting of St Caireac Dergain.



CARLOW: Bishop Nulty is pictured with Borris PP Fr Rory Nolan.

ANTRIM

Lectio Divina takes place each Friday in St Joseph's church after 7pm Mass and on Monday in St Comgall's church after 10am Mass in Antrim parish.

ARMAGH

Annual 24 hours with the Lord in Armagh Parish takes place on March 24-25 in St Malachy's Church. From 7am-11pm on the Friday and 8am-4pm on the Saturday, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed in the Church.

CARLOW

Holy hour takes place each Monday in Lent at 7pm in St Clare's Church, Graiguecullen, while Stations of the Cross take place at 10am on Mondays followed by Mass.

CAVAN

Christian Meditation takes place every Thursday evening at 7pm in the Conference Room at the back of Cavan Cathedral.

CLARE

A series of Lenten talks on the theme 'Lord teach me to pray' continues on Monday, March 2-7 from 8-9.15pm in Maria Assumpta Hall, Ennis parish.

CORK

Way of the Cross takes place on Fridays during Lent at 7pm in St Peter and Paul's Church in Cork City.

Lenten Talks on Prayer take place Wednesdays at 7.30pm in St Finbarr's South Church. Next talk March 29 on 'the Our Father prayer'. Refreshments follow.

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

DONEGAL

Lenten 'Sycamore' programme, an informal course about the Faith and its relevance, takes place in Stranolar Parish centre from 8-9pm each Thursday in March.

DUBLIN

Talk on Pope Benedict XVI on

Monday, March 20, at 7pm in St Saviour's Dominican Priory. 'An introduction to the man and his thought', delivered by Fr Vincent Twomey SVD. Contact laydominicansaviours@gmail.com for more information.

Carmelite Lenten series of talks on Saturday March 25 and April 1 from 12-1.45pm in the Garden Room, Carmelite Community Centre, Aungier Street. Talk on March 25, 'The scales fell away from their eyes' on recognising Christ, delivered by Dr Martin O'Sullivan.

The Feast of the Divine Mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 16, in Corpus Christi Church, Drumcondra, with Holy Hour at 3pm followed by Mass at 4pm.

GALWAY

A weekly gathering for young adults (18-35 years) takes place on Wednesdays at 7.30pm in the Cathedral. An opportunity for adoration, silence, prayer, music, Scripture and reflection, followed by refreshments. Contact youth@galwaycathedral.ie for more information.

KERRY

Youth 2000 Munster Retreat takes place March 24-26 in St Brendan's College, Killarney, for ages 16-35. More information on www.youth2000.ie

KILDARE

The Legion of Mary will lead the Stations of the Cross on Friday's during Lent at 3pm in the Church of Our Lady and St David, Naas.

LAOIS

The rosary will be prayed for Lent Monday to Saturday at 6.30pm and at 3pm on Sunday in the Church of the Assumption, the Heath, Portlaoise parish.

LIMERICK

Adoration will be held every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during Lent in the Adoration Chapel, Abbeyfeale from 10am-8pm.

LOUTH

The Legion of Mary Dundalk Curia Acies takes place March 26 in St Malachy's Church at 4pm. Renewal of Act of Consecration to Our Lady for Legion

members active and auxiliary. All welcome including non-legionaries.

MAYO

Castlebar Easter programme for secondary school students presented by the Legion of Mary April 11-14, 10am-1.30pm. Meet 10am for Mass in the Church of the Holy Rosary, Castlebar. To register contact legionofmarycastlebar@gmail.com or 087 9216572 on WhatsApp.

A Youth 2000 prayer meeting takes place in Knock Shrine every Thursday at 8pm in The Hub, St Joseph's Chapel, for prayer, adoration, Lectio Divina, friendship and a cup of tea.

TIPPERARY

Three-part series of talks on the mystery of the Eucharist continues Tuesday March 21, 7.30-8.30pm in St Oliver's Parish Church, Clonmel, E91N578. On the theme 'The Mystery of the Eucharist'.

Morning prayer takes place after 10am Mass in St Mary's church, Clonmel parish. For the duration of Lent, an evening Mass is on at 7pm, Monday-Friday, excluding Tuesday when a Station of the Cross takes place at 7pm.

TYRONE

The Seven Joys of Our Lady fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order meets each second Tuesday of the month in St Brigid's chapel, Brocagh, Clonoe Parish, at 7pm followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 8-9pm.

WESTMEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar, Monday to Friday from 2-7pm.

WEXFORD

Divine Mercy devotions take place the first Tuesday of the month at 7pm in Wexford Friary, including blessing with the relic of St Faustina.

Rosary and devotions at the shrine at Rocklands Wexford take place on Tuesdays at 2.30pm.

World Report

IN BRIEF

Legionaries of Christ to ordain 32 new priests in 2023

● In 2023 the Legionaries of Christ religious order will provide 32 new priests for service to the Church. Twenty-nine of them will be ordained in Rome in the papal basilica of St Mary Major on April 29 by Cardinal Fernando Vérquez, president of the Governorate of the State of Vatican City.

The other three will receive priestly ordination at different times of the year.

The soon-to-be new priests of the Legionaries of Christ come from Germany, Colombia, Chile, South Korea, Canada, Brazil, El Salvador, Spain, the United States, Italy, Mexico, and Venezuela.

The April 29 ordination in Rome can be viewed live on the congregation's website at 10 am Rome time.

French church vandalised with satanic and anarchist graffiti

● The walls of Sacred Heart Church, located in downtown Bordeaux, France, were vandalised with satanic graffiti and communist and anarchist symbols the night of March 12-13.

In addition, the vandals burned trash on the church's esplanade.

The news was confirmed on March 13 by Constance Pluviaud, head

of communications for the Archdiocese of Bordeaux.

"On the night of March 12-13, the door and some of the walls of the façade of the Church of the Sacred Heart were defaced with graffiti. A trash fire in front of the church was extinguished by firefighters called to the scene. This fire did not damage the church," the archdiocese reported in a statement.

Church in Spain: Fewer than 1,000 diocesan seminarians for first time in decades

● Spanish seminaries continue to suffer a downward trend in enrolment. According to official data from the Spanish Bishops' Conference, in the 2022-2023 academic year the total number of aspirants to the priesthood is fewer than a thousand for the first time in 21 years, since records were first kept on a national level.

In the current 2022-2023 academic year there are 974 candidates for the diocesan priesthood.

The number of young men entering the seminary has also fallen for the first time below 200, at 172, and ordinations were fewer than 100, at 97.

These are significant figures, although for years there has been a downward trend. There were close to 1,700 seminarians in the 2002-2003 academic year, when more than 350 men entered and almost 200 were ordained.

Vatican official says London property deal was a 'Via Crucis'

● The substitute secretary for general affairs in the Vatican Secretariat of State said they "were forced" into spending \$17 million rather than an anticipated \$2 million to \$4 million to buy out an Italian broker over a London property deal.

"It caused me deep pain to find that we still had to give money for this affair," testified Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, who serves as "substitute," the No. 3 position in the Secretariat of State, during a Vatican trial March 16.

He is a witness for the defence. Gianluigi Torzi, the Italian broker who has been accused by the Vatican of fraud, embezzlement and a variety of other financial crimes, "had all the power and we couldn't do it any other way," Archbishop Peña said during testimony as a witness for the defence.

"It was a Way of the Cross, actually a double Way of the Cross. If the Lord fell three times, we fell six," he said.

Senior Church figures rebuke German bishops over same-sex union blessings

A synod of German bishops overwhelmingly approved Church blessings of same-sex unions and unions between divorced and remarried Catholics, but the move has faced harsh criticism from some members of the Catholic hierarchy who have accused the German bishops of abandoning the Faith.

German Cardinal Gerhard Müller and American Cardinal Raymond Burke rebuked the German bishops and called on them to be sanctioned in an interview on EWTN's *The World Over with Raymond Arroyo*, which aired on Thursday night, March 16.

"There must be a trial and they must be sentenced and they must be removed from their office if they are not converting themselves and they are not accepting the Catholic doctrine," Cardinal Müller said during the interview.

Revealed doctrine

"That is very sad that a majority of bishops voted explicitly against the revealed doctrine, and the revealed faith of the Catholic Church and of all our Christian thinking, against the Bible, the word of God in the Holy Scripture and in the apostolic tradition and in the defined doctrine of the Catholic Church," the cardinal added.

Cardinal Müller said the laypeople and the bishops who supported these resolutions at the German Synodal



Cardinal Gerhard Müller. Photo: CNS /Matt Cashore, University of Notre Dame, courtesy *Today's Catholic*

Way are "influenced by this LGBT and woke ideology, which is materialistic and nihilistic".

"It is absolutely blasphemous to make a blessing about those forms of life which is, according to the biblical and the ecclesial doctrine a sin because all forms of sexuality outside of a valid matrimony is sin and cannot be blessed," he said.

"If you look in the Bible, it's absolutely only the matrimony between man and woman who are united in love in the body and in the soul," the cardinal said, "and to have the possibility [to]

become fathers and mothers and to found a family".

Cardinal Burke urged the Vatican to sanction the bishops who voted in favour of blessing homosexual unions.

Heretical teaching

"Whether it's a departure, heretical teaching and denial of one of the doctrines of the Faith, or apostasy in the sense of simply walking away from Christ and from his teaching in the Church to embrace some other form of religion, these are crimes," Cardinal Burke said. "I mean, these are sins against Christ himself and, obviously then, of the

most serious nature. And the Code of Canon Law provides the appropriate sanctions."

The cardinal warned that the Church is being "used" to push an ideological agenda.

"These are human inventions, human ideologies that are being pushed and the Church is being used," Cardinal Burke added. "And what it does is it renders the Church then into some kind of a human agency, almost like a government agency that's being manipulated to foster certain programs and certain agenda. And so we need to wake up to what is happening."

US 'The Office' star blasts Hollywood's 'anti-Christian' bias

Actor Rainn Wilson, best known for his role as Dwight in the hit TV series *The Office*, recently took to Twitter to criticise Hollywood's "anti-Christian bias".

Wilson's tweet responded to a depiction of a cannibalistic Christian preacher in a new episode of HBO's popular zombie series *The Last of Us*, starring Pedro Pascal.

"I do think there is an anti-Christian bias in Hollywood," Wilson said. "As soon as the David character in *The Last of Us* started reading from the Bible I knew that he was going to be a horrific villain."

"Could there be a Bible-reading preacher on a show who is actually loving and kind?" Wilson asked.

Based on an award-winning video game of the same name, *The Last of Us* depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which the main characters are constantly on the run from hordes of zombies and crazed villains.

In one of the latest episodes, a Christian cult led by a preacher named David quotes Scripture to justify their cannibalism.

David the preacher also attempts to rape the show's main female character,

Ellie, who is 14.

Other Twitter users commenting on Wilson's tweet pointed out that the show changed the character of David from the video game, intentionally making him a preacher to bash Christianity.

"As SOON as the pastor started reading from the Bible I knew he was going to be awful. I was like 'watch that guy be David the creepy cannibal from the video game.' And then it was David. Shocked. Surprised. Never seen it before. He wasn't a pastor in the video game," one Twitter user responded.

Pro-life org: Promoting abortion is hidden agenda for women's rights groups

An international pro-life Catholic organisation warns that the West's fight against gender-based violence in Africa has a hidden agenda of promoting abortion.

The warning from US-based Human Life International follows a French

government announcement that it will provide US \$7.5 million to women's civil society organisations in Africa to improve their response to the violence in 10 countries.

According to Human Life International, the plan includes cooperation with

the African affiliate of abortion giant Planned Parenthood Federation and other self-declared "women's empowerment groups".

These groups will roll out programs in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger and other coun-

tries.

"Abortion and ancillary 'services' are hidden in various ways from the blatant to the subtle," George Wirnkar, Human Life International regional director for Francophone Africa, told *OSV News* March 13.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Argentina prays for it's Pope



A woman prays before a crucifix during a Mass in honour of Pope Francis' 10th anniversary as Pontiff at the cathedral in Buenos Aires March 13. Photo: OSV News/Agustin Marcarian, Reuters

Pope Francis: Gender ideology is 'one of the most dangerous ideological colonisations' today

Pope Francis has said that gender ideology is "one of the most dangerous ideological colonisations" today.

In an interview with journalist Elisabetta Piqué for the Argentine daily newspaper *La Nación*, Pope Francis explained the reasoning behind his strong statement.

"Gender ideology, today, is one of the most dangerous ideological colonisations," Francis said in the interview published on the evening of March 10.

"Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs differences and the value of men and women," he added.

"All humanity is the tension of differences. It is

to grow through the tension of differences. The question of gender is diluting the differences and making the world the same, all dull, all alike, and that is contrary to the human vocation."

Pope Francis has frequently used the term "ideological colonisation" throughout the 10 years of his pontificate, particularly to describe instances when aid money for developing countries has been tied to contraceptives, abortion, sterilisation, and gender ideologies.

In a conversation with Polish bishops in 2016, Pope Francis said: "Today children – children – are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex.

Why are they teaching this? Because the books are provided by the people and institutions that give you money. These forms of ideological colonisation are also supported by influential countries. And this is terrible!"

The Pope told Ms Piqué that he was not currently writing a new encyclical and denied that he had been asked to write a document on the subject of gender.

While he is not writing something on gender ideology, the Pope said that he talks about the subject "because some people are a bit naive and believe that it is the way to progress".

He said that they "do not distinguish what

is respect for sexual diversity or diverse sexual preferences from what is already an anthropology of gender, which is extremely dangerous because it eliminates differences, and that erases humanity, the richness of humanity, both personal, cultural, and social, the diversities and the tensions between differences".

The Pope noted that he always distinguishes "between what pastoral care is for people who have a different sexual orientation and what gender ideology is".

"They are two different things," he added.

Feminists attack churches on International Women's Day

Various marches were held on March 8 for International Women's Day in Latin America. Some feminist groups, however, used the occasion to vandalise Catholic churches and public buildings.

Mexico was one of the countries where the most violence took place. In the country's capital, Mexico City, protesters attacked the metropolitan cathedral located in Constitution Plaza.

Faced with the fences protecting the church, they opted to tear down a

nearby traffic light. In images shared by local media, several women can be seen hitting part of the fence attempting to destroy it, while the police try to disperse them by firing tear gas.

In Puebla, about 80 miles southeast of Mexico City, local feminists tried to destroy the angel statues that sit on top of the fence in front of the cathedral. City hall was also hit with graffiti and vandalism.

Something similar was experienced

in Mérida, where feminists tagged the St Ildefonso of Yucatán cathedral with graffiti. One of the messages read: "Abort the Church."

In Xalapa, Mexico, a woman protected by other feminists, threw paint at the police and the Faithful who were guarding El Beaterio church.

According to the local Catholic media outlet *Catolin*, among the slogans they chanted were "get your rosaries off our ovaries" and "death to pro-lifers".

Nicaragua suspends relations with Vatican

● The president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, has ordered the closing of the Vatican embassy in Managua and the Nicaraguan embassy to the Holy See in Rome, according to *Reuters*.

The government of Nicaragua said March 12 that it had proposed "a suspension of relations" with the Holy See, the *Associated Press* reported.

According to the AP, Vatican sources confirmed there had been a request from Nicaragua to shut down the two embassies.

The proposal to suspend relations between the Vatican and Nicaragua follows just days after Pope Francis likened Nicaragua's Sandinista government to Nazi Germany in an interview. He also called Ortega "unstable".

The Nicaraguan government expelled the Vatican ambassador from the country one year ago, a decision the Vatican called at the time an "incomprehensible" and "unjustified unilateral measure".

The Vatican embassy, called a nunciature, has been run by a chargé d'affaires since early March 2022.

The Pope's comments about Nicaragua's dictatorship were published on March 10 by the Spanish-language news outlet *Infobae*.

Historic building near Vatican to become Four Seasons hotel

● A Catholic order of knighthood has signed a leasing agreement that will allow a Four Seasons hotel to manage part of a historic building close to the Vatican.

The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem signed an agreement with Fort Partners, a Miami-based development company, on March 10, according to a statement.

The lease to Fort Partners includes an agreement to use that part of the building for a hotel under the management of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

The other part of the building houses the

headquarters of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The order is a lay institution under the protection of the Holy See whose first mention in historical records dates to 1336. Today, the charitable group has approximately 30,000 members in almost 40 countries and is dedicated to supporting the Church in the Holy Land.

The Renaissance-era Palazzo della Rovere is about a three-minute walk from St Peter's Basilica and features a turret, a grand courtyard, and frescoes by Pinturicchio on the main floor.

Vatican-China deal 'not best deal possible' top Holy See diplomat says

● The Vatican's foreign minister has said that the Vatican-China deal was "not the best deal possible" and that negotiations are underway to make the deal "work better".

In an interview with Colm Flynn for *EWTN News*, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Vatican secretary for Relations with States, said that Holy See diplomats are "negotiating improvements" to the Holy See's provisional agreement with Beijing on the appointment of bishops, first signed in 2018.

"Obviously, the objective is to get the best deal possible, which certainly this agreement is not the best deal possible because of the other party: They were only prepared to go so far and to agree to certain things. But that was what was possible at the time," Archbishop Gallagher said.

"It wasn't really a great time to sign the deal, for various reasons. It was always going to be difficult; it was always going to be used by the Chinese party to bring greater pressure on the Catholic community, particularly on the so-called underground Church. So we just go forward."

Letter from Holy Land

Tom Tracy

The priest-director of the Cultural Heritage Office for the Custodia Terrae Sanctae, or Custody of the Holy Land, in Jerusalem opened a drawer of vestments and casually dropped an unexpected historical tidbit about a clerical chasuble he was showing a group of foreign guests. The chasuble was part of a collection of vestments that the archbishop of Paris wore for the marriage of Emperor Napoleon III of France with the Empress Eugenie, and which the empress later donated to the Church in the Holy Land.

“The Franciscan Friars arrived in the Holy Land in the 13th Century and have an uninterrupted presence here for the subsequent eight centuries during which time they occupied a unique footing as caretakers of the holy places”

The gift was part of an imperial tradition, it turns out, that accounts for no small number of European religious art objects and other treasures to have been collected and preserved in the Holy Land even as many similar treasures back home were lost, looted and destroyed over the course of European history.

Some of these objects cared for by the Franciscans in the Holy Land, including a collection of 13 Church bells discovered hidden in Bethlehem and dating back to the Middle Ages, have travelled to some of the great museums of the world.

But now they will have a permanent home in Jerusalem as the Custody of the Holy Land moves forward on creating a new “Historical Section” of its popular Terra Sancta Museum, which opened to the public in 2017. The museum is situated at the Church of the Flagellation, the first station of the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem. Until now, that section has been limited to archaeological artifacts from the first millennium.

A new section of the museum will serve as a point of dialogue and exchange with the local Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities – as well as pilgrims and visitors of all faiths and backgrounds who come to Jerusalem to explore its history and cultures.

“We want to make a Christian museum here in Jerusalem so there is something Christian to occupy the space of culture even if you are only one and a half percent of the population,” Franciscan Fr Stéphane Milovitch, director of the Cultural Heritage Office for the Custodia Terrae Sanctae, told OSV News. “The Church is still here and has 2,000 years of presence here; it can be a bridge with the different communities.”

Franciscans in Holy Land advance next phase of Jerusalem’s Terra Sancta Museum



Franciscan Fr Stéphane Milovitch, director of the Cultural Heritage Office for the Custodia Terrae Sanctae in Jerusalem, is pictured January 30, 2023. Photo: OSV News/Tom Tracy

“Over the centuries, European monarchs sent gifts and religious treasures for use in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and which have been preserved here”

The Franciscan Friars arrived in the Holy Land in the 13th Century and have an uninterrupted presence here for the subsequent eight centuries during which time they occupied a unique footing as caretakers of the holy places. They provide a source of spiritual care to pilgrims from abroad and in service to the local Christian communities of the greater region, including Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Catholic Church

Today the Custody cares for some 50 Christian shrines and parishes and until 1850 was the only Catholic religious order serving the Holy Land. That meant the Franciscans were in a unique position to serve as a voice of the Catholic Church with the various Islamic rulers – some of which had hostile relations with the Church following the Crusader era.

Over the centuries, European monarchs sent gifts and religious treasures for use in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and which have been preserved here. But the Custody also preserved its centuries of its own archives, con-

taining singular records of communications with the local rulers as well as baptismal and marriage documents of the local Christian community.

One well-preserved collection is that of some 450 earthenware pharmaceutical pots from the 17th and 18th centuries underscoring the space the friars occupied as medical doctors and pharmacies: The first friar-doctor sent to the Holy Land by Pope Pius II in 1460 was Brother Baptist of Lubeck. The medically trained friars cared for visiting pilgrims as well as local communities.

“We had the biggest pharmacy in the Middle East,” Fr Milovitch said with pride. “Even today the Christian hospital, St Joseph, receives patients from many cultures; many ladies go to give birth at St Joseph Hospital but also many Muslims from the West Bank come to be cured; we try to make bridges with the community.

“We would like to display the pharmacy and how it used to be before – through some works of art we can show the Church took care of the body and health of everybody, and not just since the Second Vatican Council but

even before,” the priest added.

The new Historical Section of the Terra Sancta Museum will be installed at the heart of the Franciscan headquarters in St Saviour’s Monastery. It will be divided into two parts: the history and mission of the Custody of the Holy Land, and the Treasure of the Holy Sepulcher.

Rare collections of paintings, sculptures, archival documents, gifts from European courts – even a 13th-Century gilded copper crosier of the bishop of Bethlehem – will allow pilgrims to deepen their knowledge of the sanctuaries and discover the beauty of the liturgy in the Holy Land, according to the museum’s organisers.

“The museum also will include an extensive collection of locally produced mother-of-pearl religious art objects along with Palestinian jewellery”

There also is a research element to the project with international partners anxious to assist and learn from the collection. Here too in the Holy Land a discovery was made in 1906 of a French-made pipe organ believed to be the oldest such pipe organ in Christianity and which remains fully original.

That organ is expected to be part of the new museum collection.

Researchers have made a facsimile to better understand the nature of liturgical music from the Middle Ages, according to Fr Milovitch.

The Franciscan collection also includes a one-of-a-kind set of written communications with Egypt’s Mamluk Sultanate dynasty, which held sway in the Holy Land from 1260 to 1516. However, little documentation has survived from the period.

“We have many thousands of documents we kept over the years because our archives were never invaded,” Fr Milovitch said.

Local icons

Researchers from France as well are keen to explore the local icons produced in Jerusalem over the centuries and to understand how the Jerusalem school of iconography compares with other iconography styles.

The museum also will include an extensive collection of locally produced mother-of-pearl religious art objects along with Palestinian jewellery. Mother-of-pearl craftsmanship was introduced by the Franciscans in the 16th Century to enable local Christian families in Bethlehem to support themselves. That art became part of Palestinian cultural heritage.

“The patrimony we have interests not only Christians but also humanity (in general), because everybody likes music and everybody likes art,” Fr Milovitch said, adding “it is important to create a bridge with the different cultures”.

Top papal aide says Germany can't go it alone on same-sex blessings



Elise Ann Allen

A top aide to Pope Francis said there's a need for dialogue with the German bishops after a recent vote in favour of blessing same-sex unions, insisting that the move does not align with official Catholic doctrine.

"A local, particular Church cannot make a decision like that which involves the discipline of the universal Church," said Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, March 13.

"There must certainly be a discussion with Rome and the rest of the Churches in the world ... to clarify what are the decisions to make," Cardinal Parolin said.

Over the weekend, the influential and wealthy German Church concluded its controversial "Synodal Path" reform process, a multi-year consultation launched in 2019 and aimed at giving lay people a stronger voice after the country's devastating clerical sexual abuse crisis further emptied Church pews.

The final meeting in the process brought together more than 200 representatives of Catholic life in Germany, who voted overwhelmingly in favour of same-sex blessings, but delayed the start date until March 2026.

Formally banned

While these blessings are already routinely given by many congregations and pastors in Germany, they are formally banned by the Catholic Church, a position the Vatican reiterated in 2021 when its Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a statement against such blessings on grounds that God "cannot bless sin" and that it would be "illicit" for a priest to lend any legitimacy to same-sex unions.

Yet despite the Vatican's position, 176 participants in Germany's concluding Synodal Path meeting voted in favour of the blessings. Fourteen participants voted against them while 12 abstained, but the necessary two-thirds majority was still reached.

Participants also voted in favour of offering communion to divorced and remarried couples with no



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni stands next to Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, at the headquarters of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* March 13, 2023. They were the featured guest speakers at the event which presented the book, *L'Atlante di Francesco. Vaticano e politica internazionale*, (The Atlas of Francis. Vatican and International Policy) by Jesuit Fr Antonio Spadaro, the journal's director, who is on the right. Photo: CNS/courtesy of *La Civiltà Cattolica*

annulment, and they urged Pope Francis to reconsider the requirement of priestly celibacy.

“This decision should fit inside the synodal path of the universal Church. There it will be decided what developments there will be”

Speaking to journalists, Cardinal Parolin reiterated Rome's position on the blessing of same-sex couples by referring to the 2021 Vatican statement, saying "the position of Rome is that," and that the vote of the German bishops must be inserted into Pope Francis's broader Synod of Bishops on Synodality, which is touching on similar themes and will conclude in 2024.

"This decision should fit inside the synodal path of the universal Church. There it will be decided what developments there will be," he said, calling it a good sign that the German Church opted to hold off on offering blessings to same-sex couples until 2026.

Vatican officials and German bishops have been going back and forth about the Synodal Way for years, with the Pope penning a letter to the German Church last summer cautioning against stoking division over issues such as priestly celibacy, women's priestly ordination, and same-sex blessings, and a slew of other issues.

In November, the Vatican attempted to shut down the process altogether during a meeting with several department heads as part of the German bishops' ad limina visit to Rome, but the process went forward regardless.

In January, several top Vatican officials, including Parolin, sent a letter with Pope Francis's explicit approval saying they would not accept a proposed new governing Church body in Germany composed of bishops and laypeople, yet plans are moving forward to establish that body, the Synodal Council, regardless.

Act of rebellion

Pope Francis himself has suggested he did not approve of the Synodal Path process, at one point calling it "very, very ideological" and something "made by the elites".

Cardinal Parolin resisted the notion that the German vote was an act of rebellion, saying, "Let's not talk of rebellion. In the Church there have always been tensions and differing positions".

Yet he was clear that Germany's Synodal Path "is making decisions that don't exactly align with the current doctrine of the Church. Even if they say that all this is happening inside of Canon Law, we must meet and revisit this".

Cardinal Parolin spoke alongside Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the March 13 presentation of a

new book written by Jesuit Fr Antonio Spadaro, a close friend and aide of Pope Francis who has interviewed him several times and travels with the pope on every international trip.

The new book, *The Atlas of Francis: Vatican and International Politics*, was published for the tenth anniversary of Pope Francis's election and explores Francis's foreign policy in a global context that is increasingly interconnected, yet polarised and divided by war and violent conflict.

“The Holy See dialogues with everyone and firmly believes in multilateralism’ at a time when ‘we are unfortunately witnessing its erosion”

To this end, Cardinal Parolin in his remarks highlighted Pope Francis's emphasis on fraternity, saying Pope Francis has proposed to the world "a diplomacy of man for man, of people for people," which focuses less on profit and more on the growth and development of people.

Lauding what Fr Spadaro describes as the Pope's "diplomacy of mercy," the cardinal noted that in his most recent speech to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See in January, he repeated the word mercy multiple times, offering it as a clear guideline for international diplomatic endeavours.

"The heart of diplomacy of mercy doesn't consider anyone ever definitively lost," he said.

On the war in Ukraine, Cardinal Parolin lamented that "the word peace is largely absent," whereas

the "too loud and thunderous voice of arms" is present. The solution to the conflict, he said, "does not come by polarising the world between the good and the bad".

If the starting point is "no one is the incarnation of the devil, then it is possible to leave a door open," he said, saying the Holy See strives to promote dialogue "even when those who are uncomfortable are present in the dialogue".

Negotiation

"The only realistic solution to the threat of war is negotiation," he said, saying this is the reason "the Holy See dialogues with everyone and firmly believes in multilateralism" at a time when "we are unfortunately witnessing its erosion".

With Ms Meloni sitting by, Cardinal Parolin said the Holy See has Italy's full backing on its offer to lead peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia.

"The Pope wants to visit both capitals; he's said it from the beginning. He maintains that a service to peace can only be made if he is able to meet both presidents, President Zelenskyy and President Putin," he said.

Noting that the Holy See holds "a different view than singular states," Cardinal Parolin said it has "a universalistic view and an approach of working concretely for peace".

"I would say that we are trying to unleash all of our creativity to find the ways that would allow us to have a first step for a ceasefire," he said, insisting that as a universal entity, the Holy See seeks to intervene "without putting into play any type of particular interest".

The problem, he said, "is finding the way to begin".

“Cardinal Parolin in his remarks highlighted Pope Francis’s emphasis on fraternity, saying Pope Francis has proposed to the world ‘a diplomacy of man for man, of people for people’”

Letters

Letter of the week

A return to fast and abstinence this Lent

Dear Editor, I agree with Mary Kenny's views that opting for simple guidelines for fasting and abstinence for Lent are the best way to respond to the challenges of Lent.

In my youth, fasting and abstinence and making our Easter duty seemed to be essential for doing a good Lent. However, some clergy have since abandoned this approach, with the result that very little extra is done, apart from the Stations of the Cross. For example, last year I attended

Mass most days during Lent, but not one homily mentioned fasting and abstinence, and there was no encouragement to go to Confession. I think that this silence on such vital matters would lead parishioners to conclude that there was no need to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I think the clergy should be more proactive in challenging and guiding us to change; to do a fruitful Lent. They could also share the messages of our Lady of Lourdes and Fatima when

she appealed for us to pray for sinners and to make sacrifices and do penance for them.

St Teresa of Avila in her numerous writings continually reminded us to "do the will of God". This is not easy. Lent is a grace-filled season and I think the clergy have a responsibility to inspire us to avail of the graces so that we make it a holy and special time.

Yours etc.,
Jim McCarthy
London, England

Parishes must invest in welcoming people back to church

Dear Editor, Parishes must make the most out of their insurance claims due to Covid closures [*The Irish Catholic* – March 9, 2023].

Considering the fact a huge number of previous Mass-goers have not returned there has to be a huge drive to welcome people back. While this was talked about after the pandemic, and bishops are now seeming to realise the extent of the drop-off, not much has happened.

If the Church is really about the salvation of souls, bishops, clergy and lay people must emphasise the importance of Mass attendance and the Eucharist. The Church is not an online community and people should not be 'shopping around' for Masses online. The pandemic has had a hugely detrimental impact on the importance the Faithful place on Mass attendance and this must



be acted upon with strong leadership.

If insurance rebates are coming in, parishes must invest in messaging in the community calling for a return to

the church.

Yours etc.,
Gary O'Donnell
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

Covid inquiry must look at 'battering ram science'

Dear Editor, The recently announced inquiry into Ireland's handling of the Covid crisis is welcome. It is also welcome that Prof. Martin Cormican, the HSE lead on Infection Prevention and Control during the Covid years, tells us that the evidence base for mandatory wearing of masks by the general public, was weak if not non-existent.

Why were we told so insistently, to 'follow-the-science' on this point. Given that

there was no science, is it time for a State apology to those who were challenged and convicted for not complying with this mask-hysteria, given that they were just about as useful as using chicken-wire to keep mosquitos out?

Any inquiry must look at the way science was used as a battering ram, by those without a scientific background. Were the scientists under impossible media, commercial, and political pressures

to provide definitive, snappy sound bites?

In the past pseudoscience in the form of progressive, social evolutionary Darwinism, gave a cloak of respectability to the twin horrors of racism and eugenics.

Today, our Minister for Education is content to turn the question of teaching 'trans' gender ideology (a departure from the male-female paradigm) over to the NCCA as her 'expert' group to

decide the matter, something that ought to be the preserve of parents, as expressed through their school's patron. In this, as in so many other areas, if established science is ignored and public policy slavishly follows the clamour of the noisiest activists in the room, then we risk ending up on the wrong side of history, again.

Yours etc.,
Gearóid Duffy,
Lee Road, Co. Cork.

Government fails homeless and renters once again

Dear Editor, It is disgraceful that the Government has once again let down working people struggling with extortionate rents by ending the eviction ban at the end of this month.

Until there is an increase in housing stock and more properties on the market prices will continue to grow and people who are already facing soaring inflation will be turfed out of their homes. The €500 given to renters is a drop in the ocean. People must see it for what it is – a plaster on a gaping wound.

Unscrupulous landlords are a big issue, but landlords in general should not shoulder all the blame and should not be unfairly

targeted, after all it is they who are providing the housing to many people and are also contending with soaring prices.

Subsequent Governments have consistently, over the past decade actually, failed to properly tackle this crisis and have allowed it to spiral into a situation in which we have a record number of people who are homeless in this country. A reliance on private developers is a key issue and the Irish people are bearing the brunt of this insufferable incompetence.

Yours etc.,
James Byrne
Clontarf, Dublin 3

Transforming Dublin into 'the light of the world'

Dear Editor, May I encourage all Dubliners to make a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Dublin, located in the Carmelite church, Whitefriar Street, Dublin.

Their prayers there will see Dublin transformed into "the light of the world", it is meant to be.

Yours etc.,
Fr. Noel Mc Keown, OP
Newry, Co. Down

facebook community

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

Expanding outreach to Islam, Vatican establishes diplomatic ties with Oman

Good news. People sometimes forget that there are Christian Churches in all countries of the Arabian peninsula other than Saudi, hopefully it won't be too long before that changes. Papal visits to UAE and Bahrain were historic, it was great that the Papal Masses were televised. – **Declan McSweeney**

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

Church is facing a major demonic assault

Dear Editor, In the mid 1880's Pope Leo XIII issued the St Michael prayer to be prayed after Mass worldwide. He is thought to have had a revelation of a major demonic assault on the Faithful in the then future times.

Whatever happened it appears to me that we have lived through a brutal spiritual assault for the last 50 years at least, and it's intensifying by the moment. It's my observation that, slowly in the 60s, speeding up during the 70s and 80s, hitting very high speed in the first two decades of this century, this assault has been manifest. Now at breakneck speed, institutional insanity is rampant in the 'woke' western world, but most dangerously in the 'woke' members of the Catholic Church.

Already it seems the Church has suffered hugely from this assault. But has it?

We know from the lips of Jesus that the gates of hell will not prevail against his Church, do please remember it is his Church. So why has God allowed this to occur?

God's will is always the salvation of souls, but we must choose, do we turn humbly to him in our nothingness, or do we reject him in our arrogance and pride.

What is gained by allowing this spiritual 'assault', is, that those who have rejected God in the depths of their being, while putting on an outward show of obedience, have been emboldened to reveal their true identity, and who and what they really serve.

This revelation is most scandalous in what it uncovers about some clergy and religious as most lay people follow their leaders. The greatest revival so far evident, is in the faithful grassroots.

Now the Church is humbled, mocked, disgraced. Its teachings (God's actually) ridiculed, ignored, and actually persecuted in some instances.

Who will stand by Mary, as she sees her son's teachings, sacraments, (especially his Eucharistic body), disregarded and abused, will you? Will I?

Yours etc.,
Vincent Freney,
Ballala, Co. Mayo.

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, March 23, 2023

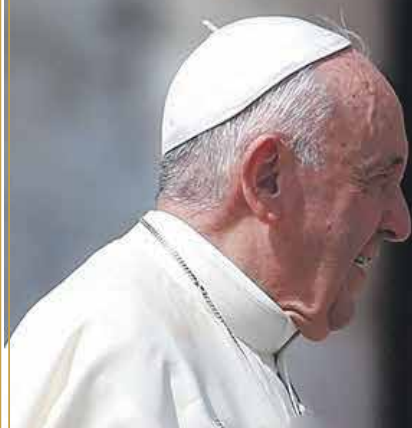
Questions of Faith

Does God do what we want?

Page 32



Remember, stay, rejoice: Praying the Triduum



In the final days of Lent, the liturgies of Holy Week issue each of us with an invitation to 'be with' Jesus in a special way. This time, described by Pope Francis as "the heart of the mystery of our salvation" is a time to pray for the grace to be truly with Jesus, becoming conscious not just of what he suffered but of the impact that his life, death and resurrection have on me. Monty Williams SJ emphasises the importance of this closeness and response to Jesus in his book *Spiritual Intimacy*, "it is a huge grace to be simply present...without running away, falling back into ourselves, or trying to remedy the situation".

I think there are three verbs through which we can understand the dynamic of the



As our Lenten journey edges towards Holy Week, Sr Anouska Robinson-Biggin FCJ identifies three invitations in the Triduum

Triduum and our response to it: remember, stay and rejoice. Pondering these words and the way in which they describe our participation in the Easter Triduum can help us become ever more conscious of our response to this great point in our liturgical year. As Louis Savary says: "In order to be conscious, it is not enough to be simply awake or aware of what is going on. To be truly conscious, you also need to respond

appropriately to what you are experiencing." Having received so much, what do we desire to do or be in return?

At the heart of the Holy Thursday liturgy is the act of remembering, bringing to mind the Last Supper. The evening Mass of the Lord's Supper is the only Mass of the day. The white or gold vestments remind us that this is a joyful occasion, as does the ringing of the bells at the Gloria.

Our celebration is rooted in our remembering that Jesus and his friends were also holding a celebration at that time, of Passover: remembering Israel being set free by God, their release from slavery in Egypt and in time into the Promised Land. We are reminded of that first Passover in the first reading of the Mass (Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14). But for Jesus, this celebration was so much more. As Monty Williams SJ recounts: "With the meal, [Jesus] gives a way of being united with God that is more than just memory and ritual. He makes the bread and wine of that Passover meal his body and blood. He shares that with his companions. He ensures that his essence remains with those with whom he shares his life and mission. We become

what we eat. We become partakers of the same relationship he has with the Father."

Do you feel you 'become what you eat' when you receive Holy Communion? If so, what difference does this make to you? Do you feel like you partake in the same relationship that Jesus had with his Father, that of beloved child? If you struggle with this, what gets in the way?

However, the Mass of the Lord's Supper is not only about remembering the institution of the Eucharist sacramentally. In the Gospel we hear about another act that we are called to participate in, in Jesus's memory: the washing of the feet. The disciples were shocked, unnerved by Jesus, their master, washing their feet. Peter especially struggled

“St Ignatius of Loyola would ask us at this point to be with Jesus in his suffering, not to take it on ourselves, but to be fully present to him in his anguish”

with this and initially refused, though with Jesus' guidance he eventually allowed his feet to be washed, even if he did not understand fully what Jesus was doing.

We may not understand fully, either, and so it is important to take the time to pray with the washing of the feet. Ignatius would invite us to imagine the scene. If you were at such a celebration, where would you be? Who would be there with you? How would Jesus be involved? Would you let him wash your feet? It can be hard to appreciate what that was really like: when the priest and members of the congregation re-enact this at Holy Thursday Mass, the 'disciples' will often have pre-washed their feet out of consideration for the priest, but the feet of Jesus' disciples would have been dusty, dirty, maybe even smelly. Yet still Jesus knelt before them and acted as their servant.

“As we hear once more the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded of what Jesus went through, freely and out of love, for us”

Maybe you have no problem allowing Jesus to wash your feet, and so in your prayer, maybe Jesus is leading you to wash the feet of others. Whose feet would they be? Can you do it?

Good Friday: the Stations of the Cross, walks of witness, the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord – they are all about staying with Jesus, a call that even the disciples struggled with: after Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, they fled. The liturgy of Good Friday is not a Mass, the hosts that we receive at Holy Communion were consecrated on Holy Thursday night. This is a solemn day, a day of fasting and abstinence as prescribed by the Church. The liturgy of Good Friday commemorates the passion and death of Jesus, and the sombre mood of the service reflects this. The service begins and ends in silence. The priests enter and their first action is to lie prostrate before the altar expressing the “grief and sorrow of the Church” (*Paschale Solemnitatis*, no. 65). The people kneel.

As we hear once more the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded of what Jesus went through, freely and out of love, for us. St Ignatius of Loyola would ask us at this point to be with Jesus in his suffering, not to take it on ourselves, but to be fully present to him in his anguish. The Stations of the Cross offer an example of what it means to do this:

Veronica, in the midst of Jesus' long walk to Calvary, stepped out of the crowd and performed an act of kindness in response to his agony. Have you ever done that for someone? If so, how?

As we pray the general intercessions, which have been handed down by tradition and articulate our prayers for all of the people and needs of our world, we are reminded that Christ's Passion encompasses not just you or me, but the whole of creation.

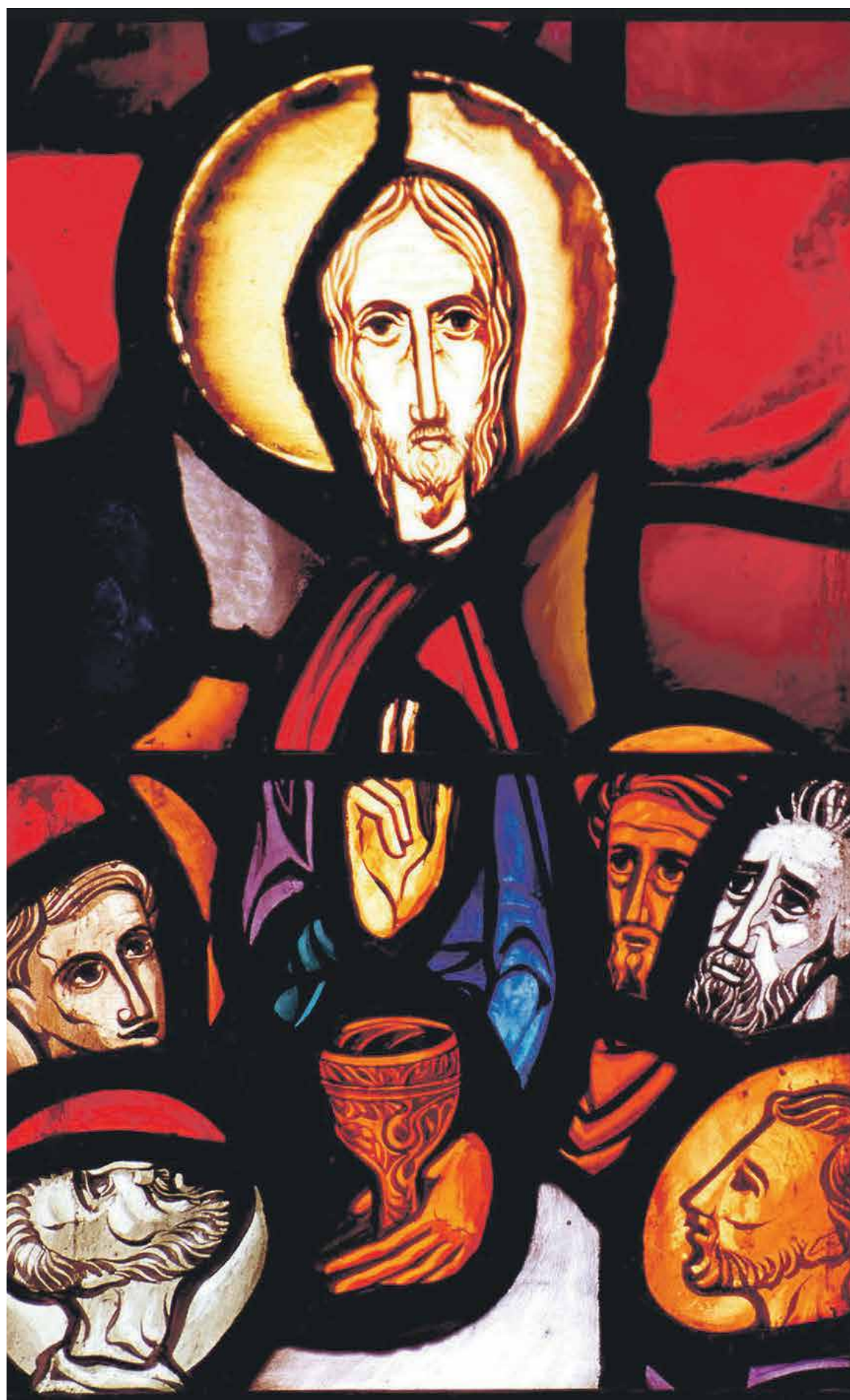
As we venerate the cross and show our love for the one who loved us so much, enough to die for us, we remember the many ways in which Jesus continues to suffer today, through people we know, people we don't know and all of the natural world. The Lampedusa Crosses are a remarkable symbol of this. They are made out of the wood of boats carrying people fleeing conflict, poverty, ecological crises and abuses of power, boats that sunk on their way to safety. The 2013 General Chapter Directions of the FCJ Sisters stated: “As women of the Church, standing at the foot of contemporary crosses, we are channels of hope, love and mercy in our villages, towns and cities.” As we live Good Friday this year, call to mind the contemporary crosses of which you are aware. Can you be present with Jesus at the feet of them, like Mary and the women? Can you be the disciple Jesus loves and be a channel of hope, love and mercy in your village, town or city?

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday, too is a day on which we 'stay': a quiet day, a day at the tomb. Jesus is dead; the one who loved us unto death is gone. Ignatius invites retreatants to spend this day with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to be with her at this time; to use all of our senses to experience what this day was like for her, before we move, as the sun sets, into the time of great rejoicing.

In the evening of Holy Saturday, when all goes dark, we gather together to celebrate the Easter Vigil. This liturgy re-tells the story of our salvation, from creation to resurrection.

We begin outside or in the porch of the Church, with the liturgy of light. A fire is lit and, from that, so too the Easter candle. Bit by bit, light spreads throughout the Church and in a beautifully symbolic way, we see the victory of the light of Christ over the darkness of the church and, symbolically, our world. The vestments are once again white (or gold), holy water is back in the fountains and the bells will ring again. We hear in the *Exultet*, the song of praise after the liturgy of light, that “this is the night”, and so it is: the night above all



Christ depicted with his disciples at the Last Supper.

others when we celebrate our redemption, our freedom from sin and death and our joy at being children of the resurrection. In the liturgy of the word we are reminded of our covenantal relationship with God that has been sealed with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If there are new members of the Church to be baptised, this also happens at this Mass, and they are welcomed into the body of the Church as it is revitalised through the new life of Easter. The Easter Vigil is a liturgy of great joy, a joy that cannot only be ours. We must share it and so at the end of the Mass we are sent

out on mission, to “glorify God by our lives”. Do we do this? Can you, having heard and lived the story of your salvation and mine, be transformed by it this Easter?

“Talk to God, as a friend talks to a friend, about the days you are about to spend together”

“Becoming conscious changes you”, writes Louis Savary, and so it should be with the Easter Triduum. Our understanding of

and being with Jesus in his suffering, and then sharing the joy of his resurrection, should change us, it should change me. I can choose not to engage with what I see, hear, experience in the liturgies of the Easter Triduum, but that in itself is a response – and that changes me, too.

So what will your response be this Easter? What do you desire it to be? Talk to God, as a friend talks to a friend, about the days you are about to spend together.

i Sr Anouska Robinson-Biggin
FCJ is chaplain at Goldsmiths and London South Bank Universities.

Expressing the truth without the flummery

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

When *A Hidden Life* came out in 2019 from maverick American filmmaker Terrence Malick, it was greeted with almost unquestioning adulation. The film promised to tell the story of Blessed Franz Jagerstätter, an Austrian who was executed by the Nazis for refusing conscription.

“The Austrian farmer is a martyr of the Church, having refused conscription by the Germans during their occupation in WWII”

From the word go, however, to any poor soul who would listen, I argued that this film is grossly overrated. Malick effectively gags the hero, robbing us of the most remarkable element of Jagerstätter's witness; his subtlety of argument in the face of evasions and lies.

We should be grateful then, that a film truer to Blessed Jagerstätter's life does exist. It has two titles, the more common one being *The Refusal* (*Verweigerung* in German, released 1972). It is also known as *The Fall of Jagerstätter*, a title which doesn't convey the theme as well at all.

This TV-movie is obscure and undeservedly so. It should be better known than *A Hidden Life*, if this was a just world, as it is a significantly better film. In its style and substance, it couldn't be further from Malick's film.

The only connection really is

Blessed Franz Jagerstätter pictured with his wife Franziska. Jagerstätter's life is beautifully captured in a little known German TV movie, *The Refusal*.



Franz himself. The Austrian farmer is a martyr of the Church, having refused conscription by the Germans during their occupation in WWII. Franz sees the black heart of the regime and while others in his small village cow-tow willingly, he refuses.

Whereas Malick's film has a Jagerstätter-adjacent character, *The Refusal* gives the impression of going right to the truth, quoting extensively from Jagerstätter's writings and interspersing interviews with those who knew him, including the parish priest who discouraged Jagerstätter from his path.

It's shot on a TV scale, but the director, Axel Corti, showed later that he was well capable of shooting the kind of epic that Malick wanted to. So I think we can treat the style, pared down as it is, as being deliberate.

Director Corti limits himself largely to conversations, filmed

very tightly with wide lenses or else in close up with a square frame zeroing in on the face. It is black and white, with spare sets, rough-hewn houses and streets, poky little churches and courtrooms. The use of interviews, though at times a little clumsy, does add to the down-to-earth feel.

No fuss

We actually begin the film with a shot of Jagerstätter in jail. A Nazi guard arrives and cuffs him in the most procedural manner. No fuss, no 'heil-ing' or grandstanding. Just that. It sets the tone for the film, one interested in the effort to systematically undermine the meaning of words and truth by bureaucratic power and the threat of violence – and one man's refusal to accept this.

One shot I remember in particular comes early on at a funeral,

where the camera pauses over each weather-beaten face as the congregation sings a hymn. The film's black and white colouring is stark, they look somehow iconic. And there, with his determined expression is Jagerstätter.

What really distinguishes the film is its focus on words and how people, particularly the Nazis, use them to justify themselves. As I said, this is a film of conversations, and Franz is at the centre of it all.

His actions bring to light the hypocrisy of some, the misguidedness of others, and the desire to lie for an easier life. But his actions would be useless if he couldn't back them up with the truth. Although he was an uneducated farmer, Jagerstätter's eloquence is simply remarkable. It is reminiscent of St Joan of Arc, the ingenuity the Spirit gifted the peasant girl in answering the trickiest arguments.

Throughout, he evidences his own prayerful reading of Scripture and a hunger to gather the truth about the Nazi regime. He refuses to live under the illusion of a Germanic fatherland and national need. He speaks to disillusioned soldiers when no one else will. He undermines the propaganda whenever the opportunity is afforded him.

“In the comments under the film on YouTube, one man reminisces about meeting Jagerstätter's wife”

But most importantly, any time he is challenged as to how his faith drives him to refuse conscription, he has an answer. He was not voiceless; God gave him words that speak to us from the black pitch of the Nazi terror.

His example as a thoughtful man of conscience is terrifically rendered here. Axel Corti deserves credit for his direction, Kurt Weinzier for his acting. It is hard to convey a hidden zeal and hunger, one poorly conveyed in words, but they manage it.

Lastly, a quick aside. In the comments under the film on YouTube, one man reminisces about meeting Jagerstätter's wife. It is clear from the interviews that end the documentary most people who knew him thought he was misguided. And at the time, his wife tried to talk him out of it. But the commenter notes that for the 60 plus years she lived after him, to the age of 100, Franziska stood by her husband and consistently argued his cause for beatification. Not long before she died, her prayers were answered.

The Refusal is a beautiful story, starkly told, without a hint of pomp and circumstance; merely the truth, unadorned.

Saint — of the — week

By Ruadhán Jones



St Macartan

St Macartan: Carrying on the legacy of St Patrick

A week on from the feast of one of Ireland's three patron saints – St Patrick – we have the feast day of one of his heirs, St Macartan. The first bishop of Clogher diocese, he became known as St Patrick's "Threin Fhir", or "Strong Man", both for his dedication to the fledgling Church in Ireland, and also as he was effectively the great saint's bodyguard.

Born sometime in the early to mid-400s, Macartan was a pagan who, having heard of St Patrick's preaching, travelled to Drumlease, Co. Leitrim to get an experience first-hand. Soon Patrick baptised him, and Macartan joined him on his missionary works. When Patrick became worn out, Macartan carried him on his broad shoulders across rivers and over rough ground. He was ordained to the priesthood while Patrick was still alive, perhaps by the saint himself.

The story of St Macartan's ascent to the bishopric of Clogher is a curious one, recounted in an old saint's life. Patrick and Macartan were crossing a stream in the area of

Clogher, when Macartan groaned, exclaiming, "Ugh, Ugh!"

"Upon my good word," said Patrick, "it has become usual with you now to be making that noise." Macartan replied, saying: "I am now old and infirm and all my early companions in mission-work you have settled down in their respective churches, while I am still travelling."

"Found a church then," Patrick replied simply, adding, "that shall not be too near us (at Armagh) for familiarity, nor too far from us for communication." And so it was that St Patrick appointed his strong man as bishop of Clogher.

A monastery was established near the ancient royal fort of Rathmore on the outskirts of the town in and around 454, making it one of the oldest bishoprics in Ireland. To commemorate the occasion, Patrick gave Macartan his staff and a number of precious relics contained in a shrine known to tradition as the Domhnach Airgid (the silver church). Included among the relics is a fragment of the True Cross, now preserved in the National Museum of Ireland.

Macartan preached the Gospel in Tyrone and Fermanagh until he died in the year 506 of natural causes. He is thought to be buried at Clogher, Co. Tyrone. The Cloch-Ór (golden stone) from which the diocese takes its name is reputed to have been a ceremonial stone sacred to the druids and gifted to Macartan by an old pagan noble. The same pagan had harassed the saint until the example of his patient love won the local ruler over to the Faith.

A number of miracles are associated with St Macartan. Once, it is said, when his monastery didn't have food to feed visitors, Macartan prayed and suddenly water tasting of wine gushed up from the ground and grains of corn tasting of honey fell on the monastery.

St Macartan's strength and fidelity gained him the name of Patrick's strong man, and one of his best known mottos was *Fortis et Fidelis* (strong and faithful).

'Annunciation': Salvation and the words of the air



Bishop Robert Reed

Perhaps you're like me – I just love Christmas and though the liturgical calendar moves on as it must, I'm always sad to see it go. Like the reformed Ebenezer Scrooge, I try to hang on to it for as long as I can – the birth of the humble baby, told to the astonished shepherds by angels – not just ordinary angels, mind you, but herald angels – messengers charged to announce things from on high, with a big, celestial noise.

“The ‘announcement’ is one made by the archangel Gabriel to a young woman of Nazareth – Mariam, who is full of grace”

That's what the word “annunciation” is all about. It's the big announcement, and not about the latest deal on Amazon with free shipping, but about something bigger than our imaginings –

information dropped from heaven to earth, for our good. For our delight. For our salvation.

In March, with Christmas now feeling well-behind us, we nevertheless touch it again, for on March 25 we observe the Solemnity of the Annunciation as recorded in the Gospel of St Luke. The “announcement” is one made by the archangel Gabriel to a young woman of Nazareth – Mariam, who is full of grace.

God's will

Motivated by that grace, she generously acquiesced, permitting this announcement of God's will to change her life, and that of the entire human family, for history has been hinged upon her “fiat,” her “yes”, just as our salvation hinges upon our consent to being saved. In that, Mary has modelled for us the means of uttering a trusting “yes” even when it comes with a hint of fear, or a breath of doubt.

“Behold,” she said, “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

Mary was, no doubt, overwhelmed by all of this. I'm certain that these annunciations – both Gabriel's and her own – had an immediate impact on her faith, her life, and her relationship to her family and to Joseph. Despite all that, her holy response, simple and direct, changed the history and trajectory of humankind, and

of her whole being.

She became the new Eve who saved us from original sin – who helped us become the children of light once more. By the working of the Holy Spirit, God enlarged our humanity without diminishing his divinity.

In the Church of the Annunciation, built in Nazareth, over the place where this history-altering encounter occurred, the inscription on the marble altar explains the mystery: *Verbum caro hic factum est*. That is, “Right HERE, the Word became Flesh.”

In that instant of annunciation – much quieter than the angel song of Christmas – the waiting was over; the cries and hopes of God's chosen people through centuries were fulfilled. Sacred was that child conceived in Mary's womb, a divine Person, wrapped in our human nature. Similarly sacred is every human person from the moment of conception.

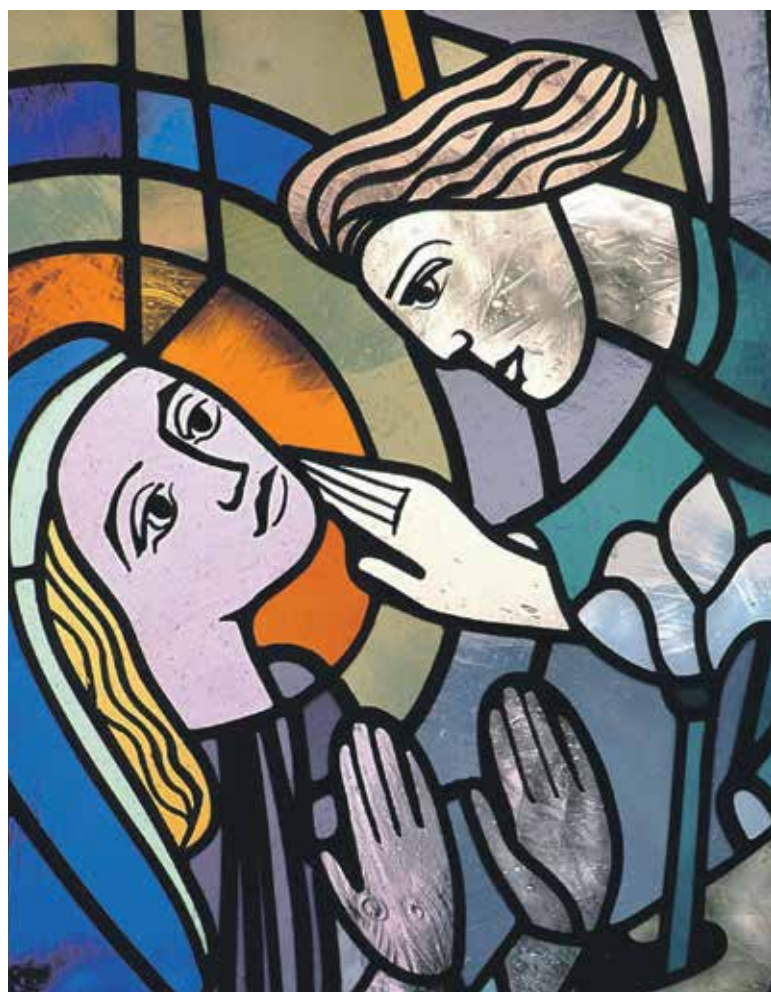
Through these combined annunciations of March and December, God gave us the greatest weapon of all in our ultimate battle against Satan. He gave us his only Son, the Word of God made flesh, and our Blessed Mother, who loves us so much, and the Church that is Christ's body. Let's not forget that Mary has been taken up, body and soul to heaven. She literally has the ear of the one who saves.

“He freely suffered and died a cruel death and is risen – a reality we will celebrate soon and very soon”

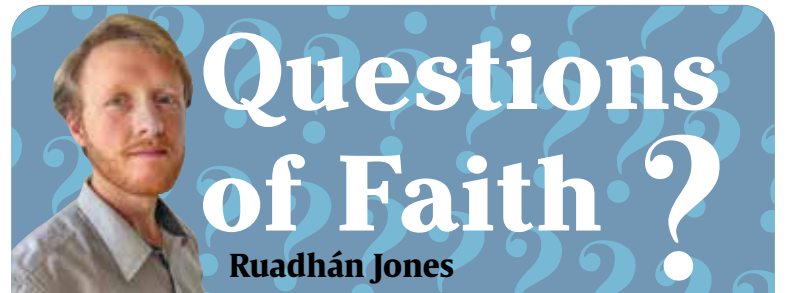
And so, this month – today, and every day – I make this solemn announcement to you: Jesus is with us, and will be until the end of the age, as he has promised. He has fulfilled the will of his father, gathering disciples and friends, offering us the sacraments – preeminently his living body and blood in the Holy Eucharist, which he commended to us on the night when he made his own “fiat” in Gethsemane. He freely suffered and died a cruel death and is risen – a reality we will celebrate soon and very soon.

O Mary, Mother of the Word Incarnate, pray for us.

i Bishop Robert Reed is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Boston, pastor of St Patrick/Sacred Heart Parishes in Watertown and president of the CatholicTV network.



A depiction of the Annunciation from St Mary's Church in Willmar, Minnesota, US. Photo: CNS



Ruadhán Jones



When Christians petition God for things they want, atheists and sometimes fellow Christian's bristle. Isn't that treating God like a fairy godparent or a gumball machine – you make your wish or put your prayers in and out comes what you want?

This is a good question, given that the Catholic tradition is pretty clear about the nature of God. He is not just another being in this world, subject to change. He is the unchanging Creator of all that is.

The Old Testament puts a particular stress on this fact. The Jewish faith existed beside other religions that claimed to have gods who interacted with their people and lived within the created world. As is the case with the Greek gods, they sometimes fought alongside or with them and had children by them.

But the Jewish God wasn't like this. As Genesis shows, he created the world and all things in it, existing before time and space came to be. In the psalms it is said, “They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment... but you are the same, and your years have no end.” The Bible is pretty clear: God is our unchanging Creator, a fact which distinguished him from the other gods.

But if God is the unchanging creator of the world and all beings, how is it that he will change his mind about, say, having a sunny day instead of wet one, just because we ask?

Well, there are a few potential answers to this question. The first thing to say is, God does not do what we want per se. Our prayers are effective when they are in accordance with his will for us. We pray as Jesus prays, “thy will be done”, asking in the humble knowledge that what we want and what we need may not be the same thing.

The second thing to say is that praying for what we want isn't a bad thing. It doesn't cheapen God's majesty to ask for what we

desire. It would be silly to tell the man on a sinking ship that he should pray for world peace rather than beseeching God to save him, as Fr Herbert McCabe would joke. Just because our desires may be small or personal doesn't invalidate them.

Nor does it suggest that we are changing the goalposts in our definition of God's ‘unchanging’ nature. Asking God for what we want and hoping that he will give it to us is something that God himself has prepared us for.

God revealed himself to us first through the prophets and now through Christ. With each revelation, he humbles himself by coming closer to us and bringing us closer to him, teaching us how to pray to him and even giving us his name.

For example, in the Old Testament when God vents his fury to Moses, some theologians suggest that in doing so God is actually preparing us for petitionary prayer. He has no need to tell Moses of his plans, unless he wants to open up the possibility of a prayerful response.

This is made clearer in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the culmination of God's revelation. Christ's incarnation elevates us to the levels of sons and daughters of the father, brothers and sisters of Christ.

We can now pray as Christ taught us, addressing God directly as “Father” and expecting a paternal response.

The reason we can do so is that we pray through Christ, with him and in him. In other words, when we pray, we are joining in prayer with God's Son. The very act of prayer is part of God's will for us; it is us doing what God wants!

And so, if God answers our prayer for a nice day, it is not: we pray for a nice day and God wills it. It is that, God wills: that we pray for a nice day. God encourages our petitionary prayer to bring us closer to him, granting us small signs of his interest in our lives.

Binding and loosing



“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” These words of Jesus apply not just to those who are ordained to ministry and administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but to everyone inside the body of Christ. All of us have the power to bind and to loose.

“In grace, just as in love, you can be gifted beyond what you deserve, but the reverse is not true”

What is this power? How do we bind and loose each other on earth in a way that engages heaven?

One part of this allows for some easier explanation. Here's an example: If you are a member of the Body of Christ and you forgive someone, Christ forgives that person and he or she is loosed from sin. Likewise, if you, as part of the Body of Christ, love someone and remain connected to him or her, that person is connected to the Body of Christ and through you (biblically) touches the hem of Christ's garment, even if he or she is not explicitly confessing that. That is one of the incredible gifts given us in the Incarnation.

But what about the reverse? Suppose I refuse to forgive someone who has wounded me in



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

some way; suppose I hold grudges and refuse to let go of the wrong that another has done to me, am I binding that person in sin? Does God also refuse to forgive and let go because I refuse to forgive and let go? How does the Body of Christ work regarding the “binding” part of the power that Jesus gave us?

This is a difficult question, though a couple of preliminary distinctions can shed some light on the issue.

To begin with, the logic of grace – and grace, like love, has a logic – only works one way. In grace, just as in love, you can be gifted beyond what you deserve, but the reverse is not true. The algebra of undeserved grace works only one way. Love can give you more than you deserve, but it cannot punish you more than you deserve. God gives us the power to set each other free, but not the same kind

of power to keep each other in bondage.

Second, in this life, as C.S. Lewis used to say, hell can blackmail heaven, but this is not true in the other realm. Thus, while we can hold each other captive, psychologically and emotionally, on this side, God does not ratify those actions.

Refusal

When we bind each other here in this world by refusing to forgive each other, that refusal does not bind God to do likewise. Put more simply, when I hold a grudge against someone who has wronged me, keeping him constantly aware that he has done wrong, I am keeping that person tied to their sin – but God isn't endorsing this. Heaven will not go along with my emotional blackmail.

These distinctions though provide only an ambience for an understanding of this. What does it mean to bind a person?

The Christian power to bind and loose is the power to bind and loose in conscience, in truth, in goodness, and in love. When I refuse to forgive another, when I hold a grudge, I am acting not as the Body of Christ, nor as an agent of grace, but precisely as part of the very chain of sin and helplessness that Christ was trying to break. When I act this way, it is I who need to be loosed from sin since I am acting contrary to grace. My non-forgiveness may well bind another person emotionally, keeping her bound in that way to her sin, but it is the very antithesis of the power that Christ gave us.

Biblically, we bind each other when, in love, we refuse to compromise truth and when we refuse to give each other permission to take false liberties and make bad choices. Thus, for example, parents bind their children when they, lovingly but clearly, refuse to give them permission to ignore

Christ's teaching on marriage and sexuality. We bind a friend when we refuse to give him our approval to cheat in his business in order to make more money. A friend binds you when she refuses to bless your moral compromises.

“Ever since God took on concrete human flesh, grace has a visible human dimension”

In Robert Bolt's play, *A Man For All Seasons*, we see Henry VIII literally beg Thomas More to bless his marriage to Anne Boleyn. Henry appeals to their friendship, appeals to their shared humanity, and tries to morally bully Thomas by telling him that his refusal to approve is timidity and arrogance. Yet Thomas refuses to approve. He binds Henry in conscience and Henry knows he is bound. In the end, he kills Thomas for his refusal to compromise and give permission, to (biblically) loose him.

Ever since God took on concrete human flesh, grace has a visible human dimension. Heaven is watching earth – and is letting itself be helped by the best of what we do down here, but not bound by the worst of what we do down here.

“When I refuse to forgive another, when I hold a grudge, I am acting not as the Body of Christ, nor as an agent of grace, but precisely as part of the very chain of sin and helplessness that Christ was trying to break”

I am the Resurrection and the Life

Blessed is the parish which has a catechumen on the final stages of the journey to Baptism at Easter. This Sunday's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is the third story from John's Gospel, chosen to throw light on the meaning of Baptism.

First, at the well in Samaria, Jesus offered a sinful woman a living water which would slake many forms of thirst: her lonely thirst for a lasting relationship, a sinner's thirst for mercy, and a confused soul thirsting for worship.

“The Preface in today's Mass celebrates his humanity, his divinity, and his relationship with us this day”

Then, last Sunday, in the healing of a man blind from birth, Jesus was revealed as the light of the world, opening our eyes to the presence of God in goodness, right living and truth.

Today we reflect on how the raising of Lazarus from the dead is related to the new life of Baptism.

Jesus was human and divine

John's gospel differs from the other three in his emphasis on the divinity of Christ as well as on his humanity. “The Word (divine life) was made flesh (fully human) and dwelt among us.” John has seven (the divine number) statements beginning with “I am,” echoing the revelation of God to Moses, “I am who am”. For the Jewish mind this is not an abstract, aloof philosophical statement of mere existence but an assurance that “I am with you”. Jesus tells Martha, “I am (for you) the Resurrection and the Life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

The Preface in today's Mass celebrates his humanity, his divinity, and

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



his relationship with us this day.

“For as true man he wept for Lazarus his friend (human feeling):

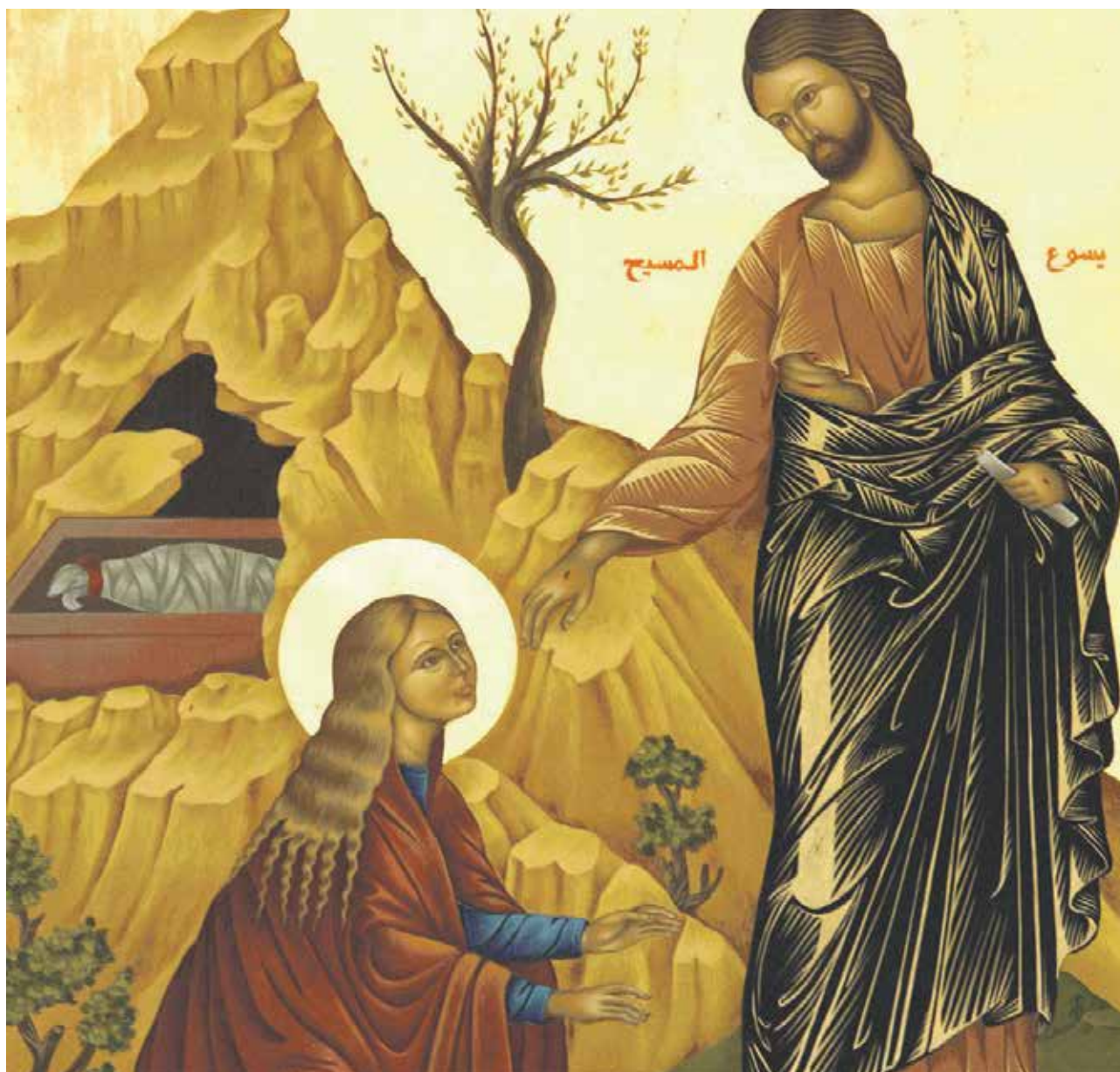
and as eternal God raised him from the tomb, (divine action):

just as taking pity on the human race, he leads us (present tense) by sacred mysteries to new life.”

What are the sacred mysteries leading to new life? The sacraments of initiation, namely Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Since the majority of people being baptised are children, the Sacrament is administered with a little water poured on the head rather than the ancient ceremony of entering into a pool or bath of water prior to emerging to be clad in a white garment. These actions recall sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Dying and rising with Christ

In my life's journey the book that had most influence on my life was Blessed Columba Marmion's *Christ, the Life of the Soul*. He opened my mind with St Paul's explanation of the birth of Christian life in Baptism: entering the pool of water expressed dying with Christ before emerging to express our sharing in his resurrection. “By our Baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life” (Rom 6:4). Up to then I had been feeding on various devotions without much satisfaction until Marmion opened up the rhythm of Christian life as a constant dying and rising with Christ. “All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his suffering by reproducing the pattern of his death” (Phil 3:10). And here I am, 60 years later, still delighting in Scripture and the riches of the liturgical year.



Mary Magdalene is depicted with the resurrected Christ in this icon at the Haifa Melkite Cathedral in Israel. Photo: OSV News/Haifa Melkite Cathedral, Bridgeman Images

The new life of Baptism

This new life is explained by St Paul in today's Second Reading. “The Spirit of God has made his home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him. Though your body may be dead it is because of sin, but if Christ is in you then your spirit is life itself because you have been justified; and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through the Spirit living in you.”

Jesus waited until Lazarus was four days in the tomb before calling him to come out. In the medical practice of those days, after three days it was beyond doubt

that the person had died. As Martha said, “By now he will smell!” But Jesus had predicted that the sickness of Lazarus would not end in death but in God's glory. So, when it was beyond doubt that Lazarus was dead, Jesus prayed and called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, here! Come out!”

And people are told to unbind him and set him free.

The Resurrection is a present reality

Pope Francis reminds us that Christ's resurrection is not an event just of the past, but Christ is risen (present tense). “When all seems dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible source. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around we see persistent

injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 276). Such is the power of

the One who said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Prayer for catechumens today

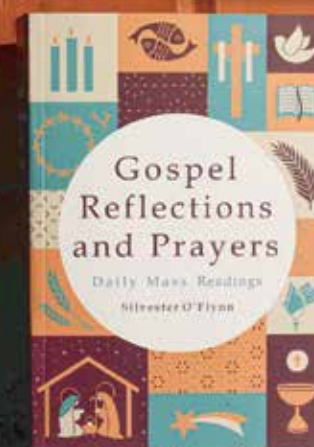
Lord Jesus Christ, you commanded Lazarus to step forth alive from his tomb and by your own resurrection freed all people from death.

We pray for your servants who eagerly approach the waters of new birth and hunger for the banquet of life.

Do not let the power of death hold them back, for, by their faith, they will share in the triumph of your resurrection, for you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

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TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Media revels in self-congratulation for shiny new Ireland

St Patrick's Day has become more of a secular celebration than a religious one. The 'St' is often dropped and the horrible 'Paddy's Day' has accelerated the process. And yet the spiritual side has co-existed, happily or uneasily.

It's always open to Christians to celebrate the spiritual side and ensure that in their families due regard and respect is given – this often manifests as going to church in the morning, attending parades in the afternoon and having a few drinks at night. And so, **Mass for St Patrick's Day** (RTÉ One) that morning – came, appropriately, from St Patrick's Church in Wicklow town. The music, both choral and trad was excellent, while the homily of Fr Donal Roche PP was very positive, even while regretting that the sacred and the secular weren't as much in harmony as they used to be. The opening sequence was informative – we learned that when St Patrick originally landed in Wicklow the locals chased him away with stones!

St Patrick's Festival Parade (RTÉ One) followed shortly after. The festival's choice of the snake as its emblem had an unpleasant and telling significance. Karen Walshe, artistic director of the festival, referenced the planet, the environment, "mythical goddesses" and "Disney friends"



People attend the St Patrick's Day parade in Dublin. Photo: OSV News

but not a word about the saint of the day or Christianity. There was the obligatory appearance of drag queen Panti Bliss (aka Rory O'Neill) – giving off a very different vibe to the one previously regarded as 'Queen of Ireland'. I'm uneasy with media driven self-congratulation for the shiny new Ireland – the shine is on the surface only.

The **Late Late Show** (RTÉ One) usually features plenty of this back slapping and last Friday's show was pretty much as expected – plenty of trad music and local celebrities, finery and greenery. The opening shots of a monastic ruin was another telling metaphor, but the musical clips from around the world in the opening sequence were

entertaining. I found parade grand marshal, soccer coach Vera Pauw, and American actor Patrick Duffy (*Dallas!*) quite engaging, while the recorded interview with Liam Neeson was pleasantly low-key – the actor was quite modest about his achievements and his craft, didn't like the over-commercialisation of the day, especially in the USA where he lives, and in the face of this, he said, he just says a prayer to St Patrick. Patrick Duffy was the only other guest I heard talking (very briefly) about prayer or the actual saint of the day. In the celebration of all things Irish great praise was heaped on **Derry Girls**, as writer Lisa McGee was present. From the

few episodes I saw I found it frequently funny and often touching, but the foul language was gratuitous and off-putting, and as regards religion there were insights but also insults. More impressive was the Derry girl celebrated on **Songs of Praise** (BBC One, Sunday) – we heard about the inspiring life of Sr Clare Crockett from her sisters Megan and Shauna – from "wild child" to religious sister who died, age 33, in the Ecuador earthquake of 2016, serving her young students to the end.

On **News in Depth** (EWTN, Friday) the question posed was: 'Is Ireland Still Catholic?' Colm Flynn's report started with trad music in a west of

PICK OF THE WEEK

SUNDAY MORNING LIVE

BBC One Sunday March 26, 10.30am

Sean Fletcher and Holly Hamilton get to the heart and soul of the issues of the day. Last episode in current series.

FILM: FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

RTÉ One Sunday March 26, 2.15pm

(1971) In pre-revolutionary Russia, a Jewish peasant with traditional values contends with marrying off three of his daughters with modern romantic ideals and has interesting chats with God, as growing anti-Semitic sentiment threatens his village.

WALK SOFTLY WITH GOD

EWTN Sunday March 26, 10pm

A glimpse into the lives of pilgrims who travel to Lough Derg where St Patrick's Purgatory, a pilgrimage site on Station Island, sits on the lake.

Ireland pub and broadened out into a useful exploration. A vox pop found people who had drifted – one young man said he considered himself Catholic but didn't practice – "I don't have time!" Another man blamed the scandals for his agnosticism. As with the previous programme, monastic ruins served as a metaphor, but there were signs of vibrant faith too, with faith-filled young people from Youth 2000 and the Holy Family Mission in Waterford getting their say – a perspective usually ignored in secular media, even when religious issues are discussed.

Fr Owen Gorman found

there was less emphasis now on ritual and more on social justice, more of the horizontal and less of the vertical – but it struck me that when you give weight to both you have the shape of the cross. Fr Gorman thought the Church was low on energy, an "old army" in need of youthful vigour. Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan of Waterford and Lismore reckoned we were more devotional in the past, but wondered how deep that was, theologically.

He did have hope however – in the end it always came down to personal holiness and being authentic disciples of Jesus.

Film

Aubrey Malone



Landmark legal action of Catholic activist

The actress Loretta Young, whose career started as a child and spanned decades, was a huge advocate of Catholic causes. The money she donated to some of them came from an unusual source – swear boxes. She arranged for these to be installed on the sets of films she was starring in. The idea was that if any of her co-stars used blasphemous language in her presence they had to make "donations" to them.

The proceeds of the boxes went to a shelter for unmarried mothers, St Anne's Maternity Home, in Los Angeles. One of its trustees, Sr Winifred, declared (in a sentiment that was before its time), "The girls there aren't bad. Abortion is too easily

come by these days." A subsequent companion home, the Holy Name Adoption Foundation, was set up later.

Last year was the 50th anniversary of a court action taken by Young against the TV network NBC. She took it because it allowed foreign stations to re-run episodes of her programme *The Loretta Young Show* without excluding (as contractually agreed) outdated images of her.

The case was settled in her favour. She was awarded \$550,00 in damages.

Two years earlier she threatened another legal action, this time against the producers of the spoof film *Myra Breckinridge* starring the recently deceased Raquel Welch. In one scene her image



Catholic actress Loretta Young.

was spliced onto a raunchy collage to make her look as if she was part of it. She ordered it to be removed, demanding \$1 million (€934,000) within

ten days if it wasn't.

She felt constrained to take these kinds of actions because of a 'Goody Two Shoes' perception of her which annoyed

her intensely. This was partly due to her friendship with Fr Patrick Peyton, the famous 'Rosary' priest. In 1945 she campaigned to have the Rosary read out by a group of actors on August 15, the feast of the Assumption.

Far from being a 'Holy Mary', she had a particular interest in the subject of unmarried mothers. In 1935, during the shooting of *The Call of the Wild*, she was impregnated by her co-star, Clark Gable. She kept it secret for fear it would lead to a demand from her studio to have the baby aborted. Abortion, in her view, was a mortal sin.

Before her bulge became obvious she went on a 'vacation' to England to have the

baby there. It was a girl. She named it Judy after St Jude, the patron saint of desperate cases. She put her in an orphanage and later 'adopted' her.

Rumours swirled around Hollywood for years about Gable being Judy's father. Young refused to confirm them. When Judy wrote her autobiography she revealed that he was. Young was furious.

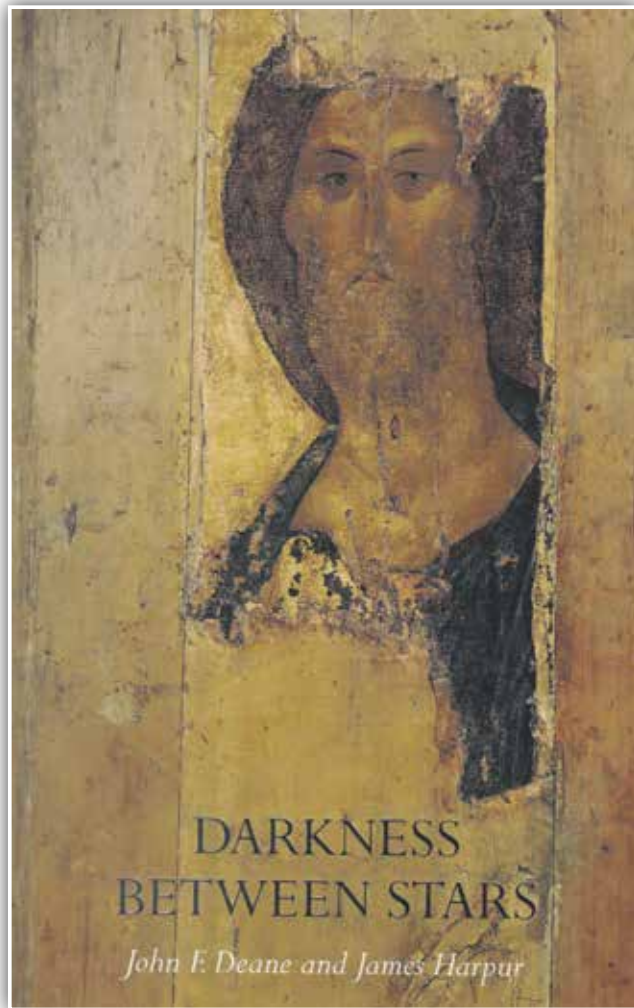
After she died, her daughter-in-law said she once told her that Gable 'date raped' her. She blamed herself for not fending off his advances. This kind of thinking may sound incredible to us in our 'MeToo' era but it was prevalent in the 1930s.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Two modern poets explore mysteries of faith



Darkness Between Stars,
by John F. Deane and
James Harpur
(Irish Pages Press, Belfast,
€24.99/£22.00)

Thomas Macarthy

This book is an entirely unexpected project. Two poets of seniority and assured reputation have come together to publish the poetic faith essence of their many-volumed careers.

Deane is a Catholic poet who once studied for the priesthood and Harpur is a highly educated Classicist from the Anglican and Quaker traditions. Deane has been Teilhard de Chardin Fellow in Christian Studies at Loyola University in Chicago while Harpur has translated Boethius and written brilliantly upon Iona, Lindisfarne and the Book of Kells. This charge-sheet of Christian endeavours surely condemns them in our age of humanist literature. But they have endured spectacularly; and this new book comes to us as one more of their flaring assertions of the value of belief.

The book is not only important as a joint quest of faith, but for the marvellous selection of the best poems by both poets;

it demonstrates how questions of tradition and belief are crucial scaffoldings in the infrastructure of their own best poems – so we have published, here, Deane's 'Francis of Assisi 1182-1982' and 'Christ, With Urban Fox':

"this is not praise, it is obedience,
the way the moon suffers its existence,
the sky its seasons. Man-God, God-man, Christ,
suburban scavenger...."

Companion-pieces

As companion-pieces Harper has re-published here his masterpiece 'The White Silhouette,' his poem of The Book of Kells; as well as the superb 'Magna Karistia,' a poem written as a kind of continuation of the words of Friar John Clyn of Kilkenny in 1349, the good friar who left the gift of untouched parchment to posterity so that others could complete the praises of God in a time beyond the Plague:

"Lord, for years I have been dying
Leached white by sterile days,
Lacklustre nights; instead of trying
To exorcise the haze
Of tepid piety – instead of

crying

Out for grace, I mouthed your praise"

The collection is full of such marvels and it is moving to see just how well these poets wrote over such already-long careers; and not only that, but how they leave behind the evidence of a parallel yet inexorable journey towards that curious, unmodern light of Christ.

Deane's marvellous 'Snow Falling On Chestnut Hill,' a meditation on Brahms, Boston snow and the Christmas rose or helleborus, has withstood the test of time and will be a familiar anthology piece in the future, as will fragments of his superb 'According to Lydia' with its ghosts of Kfar Nahum, snow-topped Hermon and the stones of Samaria.

Company of faith

James Harpur has always kept the widest possible company of faith near at hand on his writing-desk, from Joseph of Arimathea to St Symeon Stylites, from St Aidan to Richard Rolle. His Anglican faith-quest has been no less complex than the Thomist Deane and his Irish sense of faithful belonging is palpable:

"I pass through the Romanesque arch
of Killeshin and gaze from its hilltop ruins
at the fields of Laois and Timahoe's tower
and the church where my grandad Thomas
is lighting red candles on the altar
rehearsing his sermon for Evensong."

Darkness Between Stars concludes with an important and penetrating prose dialogue of 26 pages between the poets. Both poets outline that yearning for the transcendent in a society that has been overwhelmed by what is immediate and corporeal.

The dialogue goes some way towards explaining the awkward persistence of their faith-quest. Persons of faith often create resentment among the unfaithful who feel excluded from the charisms of believing. An effort is sometimes made to hide faith from the resentful or mocking humanist gaze.

But poets can't hide, they are too dramatically self-aware. These two poets have heard the clamour of something Christ-like in the distance, and they can't help themselves from wanting to slouch towards the light. This book is the evidence of that journey.

Hoping for a better

A Commonwealth of Hope: Augustine's political thought,
by Michael Lamb
(Princeton University Press,
£35.00 / US\$29.99)

Frank Litton

We are told that the world is divided into those who see the glass half-full and those who report it half-empty. This seems to be the case with politics. For many, perhaps the majority, all goes well. The journey may be bumpy, but with their eyes firmly fixed on the horrors of the past, they ignore the distempers of the present believing that things can only get better.

For others, including grumpy old men but surely not confined to them, present grim realities make some features of the past look positively good. They mourn their absence as they watch things get worse.

“Lamb, following the thread of hope as it is discussed in sermons, letters, and of course the City Of God, reveals a complex account of politics that is a wonderful resource”

What we are dealing with here, are examples of presumption and despair – an unwarranted assumption that things can only get better versus the belief that we are 'going to hell in handcart' and there is nothing we can do about it. The virtue, hope, avoids either extreme as it motivates us to see beyond obstacles to the better world that faith promises.

In this excellent book, Michael Lamb, focuses on St Augustine's discussions on the virtue of hope to deliver an account of St Augustine's political philosophy that corrects the common assumption that it paints a pessimistic, despairing view of politics.

Some thinkers, quite properly, work diligently in their study. Their volumes present a coherent analysis. Augustine was not such a thinker. The kind of analysis that elucidates Aquinas, does not work with Augustine.

He was Bishop active in the world, deploying his vast intellect and great rhetorical skills to solve problems in theory and practice he encountered in his work, all



the time intent on moving his audiences to walk in the light of the Gospel. His work is a mosaic. Lamb following the thread of hope as it is discussed in sermons, letters, and of course the *City Of God*, reveals a complex account of politics that is a wonderful resource.

Political masterpiece

The 14 years during which Augustine composed his political masterpiece, the *City of God*, saw the unshakeable given that was the Roman Empire under threat as the peoples on its periphery that it once successfully managed broke loose and moved towards Rome intent on a takeover. The *City of God* was in part a defence of Christianity against the charge that it had greatly weakened the Empire. In general it was an account of what politics was, and could be, in a fallen world mired in sin.

We find in its pages a dark view of politics. Indeed Augustine writes, "that was an apt reply and true which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate who had been seized. For when the King had asked what he had meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride: 'What do you mean by seizing the whole earth; because I do

it with a petty ship I am called a pirate, while you who does with a great fleet, are styled an Emperor'." Justice having been taken away, Augustine observes, what are Kingdoms but great robberies?

“The sharp distinction Augustine draws between the two cities serves to warn Christians against too close an accommodation with the Earthly City”

Augustine famously distinguishes between an Earthly City and a Heavenly City [City of Men and City of God]. Some hold with obvious good reason that we have banished the Heavenly City and along with it the understanding of right and wrong, rooted in the classics and articulated by Aquinas in the perspective of the Gospel. Justice has been taken away displaced by nihilism. The lust for domination whose outcomes Augustine described, is unconstrained as the elite servants of a globalising capitalism compete for power after power.

The sharp distinction Augustine draws between the two cities serves to warn Christians against too close

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.

politics in the City of Man



Antonio Rodríguez's *Saint Augustine, at work on the City of God*

an accommodation with the Earthly City. We cannot but inhabit this city. It is where we are our living, rear our children. How can we avoid pursuing its rewards and avoiding its punishments? The esteem of our neighbours is important and we win it by obeying social norms. Yet, we are called to be 'counter-cultural' and bring the mores of our time before the judgment of the Gospels.

Two temptations

The distinction warns us against two temptations. The first is to suppose that the powers of the Earthly City can be captured and put into the service of the Heavenly City. We find, however, that the reverse invariably happens, the Earthly City harnesses the authority of the Heavenly City to its own purposes, as it goes about sustaining structures of inequality and oppression.

The second temptation is to suppose that the Earthly City is a lost cause. It is 'Babylon' and we are its prisoners. The first temptation is to presumption, the second to despair.

Hope resists both temptations. It teaches us to recognise that while the kingdom has not come, God's will is not 'obeyed on earth as it is in heaven,' it is present as a promise prefigured in the Eucharist. Hope

moves us to answer the call to work for its coming instructed by faith and guided by love.

We are political animals; the rewards of our coming together are clear: enhanced security and all the benefits, economic and social, that follow from the division of labour. Without politics the space for human flourishing would be slight indeed.

The problem is that the pursuit of these rewards is derailed by the urge to dominate. While Augustine details this, unmasking the face of power, exposing its bogus justifications, he recognises that it is a problem whose solution we should seek. The goods of human association are not a lost cause and Christians should work, in hope, to secure them. And, of course, they do, promoting policies and seeking laws that prevent great harms.

Another kind of contribution is required in these turbulent times when economic forces would reduce us to isolated atoms, the playthings of the market, and the once unshakeable given of liberal democracy is challenged. A new vision of community is required. Surely Christian thinkers have a contribution to make. A close reading of this fine book will help them elaborate it.



St Augustine of Hippo, the earliest known image from the 6th Century, in the Lateran in Rome

Politics and religion as they now affect us



The flame of liberty still burns above the smoke to September 11 (9/11) attacks.

The Politics of God: The Rise and Rise of Political Religion, by T. P. O'Mahony, foreword by Dr Mary McAleese (Veritas, €19.00)

Joe Carroll

TP O'Mahony was for many years the excellent Religious Affairs Correspondent for *The Irish Press*. After its demise, he has continued to comment on religious topics worldwide for many other publications as well as writing several books on aspects of religion.

In his latest book he wrestles with an aspect encountered in his many travels covering papal visits and religious gatherings: how religion and politics nearly always get entangled.

In an irony that he points out himself, the increasing influence of politics on religion (or is it the other way around?) throughout the world is at a time when "indifference to and disengagement from religion grows in Ireland".

In Ireland north and south, religion and politics used to be hard to separate. Daniel O'Connell knew how to exploit this to win Catholic Emancipation. But that was in the 19th Century. As the 20th Century was ending, secularisation, especially in Europe was the dominant trend. Religion was still around, but it was a dying force.

The Twin Towers

All changed utterly, according to the author, with the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on 9/11. The geo-political consequences have been immense.

"There is now a very changed appreciation of religion and its role in world affairs." This is because of the religious motivation of the attackers, most of whom were of Saudi Arabian origin where

the extremist Wahhabi version of the Muslim religion has dominated since the early 18th Century, around the 1740s.

The follow-up invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the US-UK forces led to the collapse of the Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein and the growing influence of the violent extremist movements such as Al-Qaeda, Isis and their African version in Boko Haram. The "rise and rise of political religion" in the 21st Century clearly does not apply to Christianity in the way of the violent versions of these Islamic movements. Some might argue that the Crusades were the Middle Ages equivalent of the Isis attempts to establish a caliphate.

Church and state

The author describes how the Catholic Church and state were hand in glove in most of Europe until the Reformation broke the tie and brought in its version of Protestant state churches as in Britain and the Scandinavian countries. The author would argue, and is supported by Dr McAleese in her introduction, that in Ireland for much of the 20th Century Church and State relations were almost a "theocracy" under the 1937 Constitution. No longer, of course.

This book displays a wide knowledge of contemporary writing on politico-religious issues. It shows how in spite of the declining influence of religion in Europe, it is still a potent force in the politics of the United States. It would have been useful if more space had been given to the current situation there and how the abortion issue is a critical one for politicians.

For those interested in religion and politics, there is much to absorb in this book.

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Remembering

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— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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Trócaire

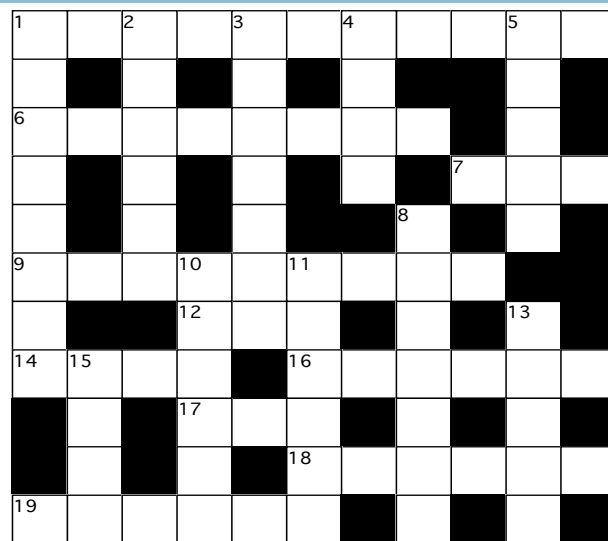
It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives.

Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 475



Across

- 1 You're being pulled by a boat when you're doing this (5-6)
- 6 Awful - Russian czar Ivan had this nickname (8)
- 7 Huge deer (3)
- 9 Help someone meet a person for the first time (9)
- 12 A female sheep (3)
- 14 Sport played with drivers and putters (4)
- 16 City road (6)
- 17 Avail of something (3)
- 18 Final score (6)
- 19 Say again (6)

Down

- 1 Keeping an eye on (8)
- 2 You aim at this (6)
- 3 Coloured arch in the sky (7)
- 4 Murder (4)
- 5 Some people put colour on these parts of the fingers and toes (5)
- 8 She's a movie star (7)
- 10 Say 'no' to an offer (6)
- 11 The Sahara is one (6)
- 13 Gave out cards (5)
- 15 "___ upon a time" (4)

SOLUTIONS, MARCH 16

GORDIUS NO. 602

Across - 1 Hesitation 6 Aped 10 Vague 11 Redbreast 12 Jostled 15 Paste 17 Emma 18 Rate 19 Regal 21 Spectre 23 Slept 24 Sign of the Cross 25 Amin 26 Abeam 28 Dogfish 33 Splendour 34 Annex 35 Rots

Down - 1 Have 2 Sign on the dotted line 3 Treat 4 Terse 5 Odds 7 Plans 9 Prepare 13 Limp 14 Descend 16 Trespasser 20 Glissando 21 Stamina 22 Rung 27 Eclat 29 Oprah 30 Franc 31 Hoof 32 Axis

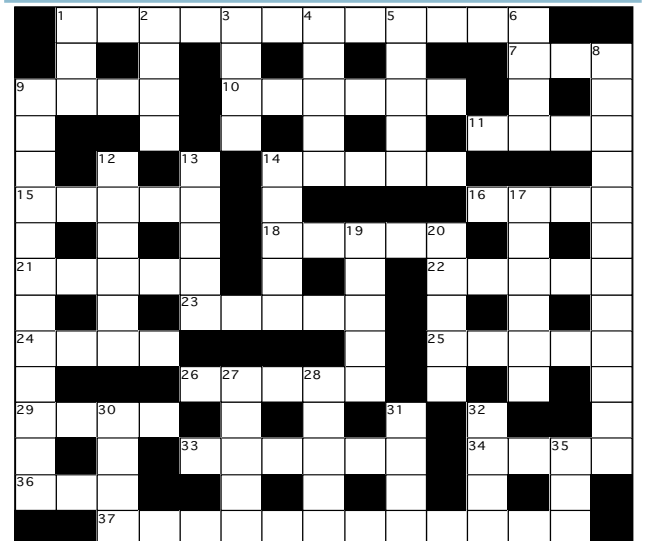
CHILDREN'S No. 474

Across - 1 Mixing bowl 7 Noodles 8 Nearer 11 Spread 14 One 15 Pea 16 Piece 17 Say 18 Art 19 Elastic 20 Hedge

Down - 2 Ice pop 3 Ignore 4 Ground 5 Owl 6 Listen 9 Roasted 10 Recycle 11 Silver 12 Replay 13 Agents 15 Peach

Crossword

Gordius 603



Across

- 1 Digit nicknamed the pinkie (6,6)
- 7 Ms Gardner was Oscar-nominated for 'Mogambo' (3)
- 9 Male deer (4)
- 10 Courting (6)
- 11 Gorse (4)
- 14 Name shared by cities in Scotland and Australia (5)
- 15 Steer clear of (5)
- 16 Gyrated (4)
- 18 Appended (5)
- 21 Wear away (5)
- 22 Take the tail off a bunny for a Jewish teacher (5)
- 23 Material used in making jeans (5)
- 24 Avails of (4)
- 25 Grassy plains of South Africa (5)
- 26 Impudent (5)
- 29 & 33 Person born in the years immediately following the Second World War (4,6)
- 34 Outgrowth found on the heads of certain breeds of cattle, etc (4)
- 36 Male sheep (3)
- 37 Became involved in an activity; had a part or role therein

(12)

Down

- 1 One item in an auction (3)
- 2 West African country, capital Lome (4)
- 3 Licentious (4)
- 4 Turned to ice (5)
- 5 Musical composition for nine players (5)
- 6 Fairy fort (4)
- 8 Feast commemorating the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Our Lady (12)
- 9 Nine, sixteen, twenty-five, etc (6,6)
- 12 Sullen (6)
- 13 Did nothing (5)
- 14 Shrimp-like crustacean (5)
- 17 Small, rounded stone (6)
- 19 Mannequin (5)
- 20 How Verdi might play a tee shot (5)
- 27 Legally bring into the family (5)
- 28 Children's humorous magazine (5)
- 30 Swelling (4)
- 31 & 32 A stroke in tennis that sends the ball barely across the net (4,4)
- 35 Scarlet (3)

Sudoku Corner

475

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 474

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

Last week's Hard 474

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

Notebook

Fr John Harris



Assisi: A place imbued with openness to God

Greetings from Assisi. I am here with a group of priests from different parts of the world on a spiritual retreat. Assisi is a place like very few in the world. The spirit of the person of St Francis permeates the medieval streets and it allows a person while walking in the 13th Century to be open to God, to dream dreams and to think differently.

Openness

This city of St Francis has given millions of people the space to be open to the spiritual in their lives. It was because of this openness that Pope John Paul II invited the representatives of all religions to meet here for the first World Day of Prayer for Peace, on October 27, 1986. In all there were 160 religious leaders who spent the day together with fasting and praying, each in their own tradition. 'The spirit of Assisi', as it now called, was possible because the story of Francis allows this openness to the spiritual, allowing us all the freedom to go beyond the everyday events of our lives to ask the deeper questions and to seek the truth.

When Pope Benedict XVI



The Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi in the Umbria region of Italy.

visited his home country, he addressed its parliament, the Bundestag. The bunker where Hitler and his closest collaborators committed suicide was not too far from where the Pope stood in the Reichstag building. He said that for many in western secularised societies today there is nothing beyond mere functionality and he said that the world now resembles a concrete bunker with no windows, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions. While yet we live enclosed in our own

manmade environment, we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that even in this artificial world, "we are still covertly drawing upon God's raw materials, which we refashion into our own products". The Pope asked that windows be flung open of our bunkered existence letting us see again the wide world, the sky and the earth and learn to make proper use of all our world has to offer in the loving gaze of our loving God.

Freedom

Whenever I come to Assisi, I am given the freedom to open up the windows of my heart and mind to the bigger picture of God both in my personal life and in the world around me. Assisi is the skylight of

my bunker allowing me to see beyond my daily preoccupations to the sky of God's light and to sing the glory of God. But why do I have to come to Assisi to do this?

I come from an island of deep faith with many places like Assisi, places imbued with the spirit of openness to God. Lent is meant to be the time in which we are all given the opportunities to open the skylights of our bunkered existences and to see beyond mere functionality into the light of God's love. The remaining days of Lent can be opportunities for us all to open up the windows of our bunkers and see the sky of God shining in the face of Jesus.

From C.S. Lewis:

"If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark, on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in', aim at earth and you will get neither".

I wasn't at the match

A friend of mine contacted me after the match last Saturday to tell me what it was like being present to see Ireland win the Grand Slam in Dublin. I said I had followed it on the computer from Italy. He was sorry I wasn't with him to experience the whole event fully. Knowing that he has not returned to Mass since the pandemic I asked if he had gone to Mass on the Sunday. He said he had watched it on his computer. He failed to see that while he was sorry for me not being in the Aviva on Saturday, he saw no contradiction in his being content to follow Mass on the computer.



A PLEA FROM HONDURAS:

PLEASE HELP PROVIDE FOOD FOR FAMILIES AND THE ABANDONED LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY

The Missionary Sisters of Christ the Master in Comayaguela, Honduras are counting on our help to bring vital food, medicine and other assistance to more than 800 people. Sister Alba Moreles Galvez has written to THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION: "We have been working in this extremely impoverished area for ten years, where families live in wooden shacks in very basic conditions. I hope that the Little Way will assist us with five programs. These are: 1) Comprehensive Nutrition. We need to provide food to three groups, as well as training in gospel values and the development of agricultural projects. 2) A group of girls live and are educated at a Home run by our Sisters. They have nowhere else to go. 3) We wish to provide food and medical aid to older adults, who are often abandoned. 4) Provisions are needed by extremely poor families, as well as training in literacy, to give the young especially a better chance in life. 5) At San Isidro Farm we hope to expand self-sustaining agricultural projects, such as egg production."

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez recommends that we help the Sisters, whom he knows well. He asks for as much as we can send these communities living in extreme poverty.

This Lent, we urge you to give alms to our fund for the hungry, sick and deprived. Without any kind of deduction for administration, this fund is used to support missionaries providing life-sustaining assistance to destitute families and individuals.



Sr Alba writes: "We provide education, complete formation, to children and young people in situations of extreme poverty, we take care of the abandoned sick and we go where no one wants to go to evangelize."



"We can never have too much confidence in our God Who is so mighty and so merciful."
- St Therese

LENT WITH ST THERESE

In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine: "Jesus wills that we give alms to him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give to Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Catechism says: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

WELLS NEEDED

Missionaries repeatedly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean, safe water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

Can you help provide a well?

In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and forwarded without deduction.

Little Way benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions in the Missions.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

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