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A Mass a day keeps the blues away

Chai Brady

Regular Mass going protects against feelings of loneliness and suicidal thoughts a new Irish study has revealed, with weekly attendance being better than monthly.

The Trinity College Dublin (TCD) study found there are increasing rates of both loneliness and suicidal thoughts among older adults in Ireland, but that attending Mass can “protect against these negative thoughts about one’s own life”.

The research, which involved more than 8,000 older people, also indicated that the more a person attended a religious service – weekly rather than monthly – the less likely they were to have a ‘wish to die’.

The study was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Frontiers in Public Health*. It explored social disconnection and its link to a ‘wish to die’ among older adults.

People who reported a wish to die reported less social participation, never volunteer, and did not regularly attend religious services. The older adults with or without a religion who never attended church reported the highest prevalence of a wish to die at 8.7%, 2.4 times the overall proportion of 3.6%. Overall, 88.6% of participants were Catholic with Anglican being the next largest group at 3.4%.

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A Mass a day keeps the blues away

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Regarding The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) research, TCD said: "A key finding of the study is the protective effect of attending religious services. The research indicates that regular participation in such activities can significantly reduce death ideation among older adults in Ireland."

Focusing on religion, the report stated: "Firstly, religion is associated with lower loneliness and depression. This is most likely due to the opportunity for social connection associated with attending religious services and also the spiritual support from other church members."

"Secondly, the comfort received from religion has been identified as an adaptive response that protects against death ideation. Additionally, the Catholic church, in its teaching and practice of Canon law in Ireland contributed greatly to a heightened level of taboo and stigma associated with suicide... This heightened stigma means that older Catholics may be less likely to consider suicidal thoughts or at least less likely to report experiencing these feelings."

Responding to the report, Psychiatrist Prof. Patricia Casey told *The Irish Catholic*: "It's been known for a long time that religious practise and religious belief have a preventive role in suicide. What's interesting is that it's the first time it's come out in an Irish study. But there are a lot of international studies comparing the suicide rates in religious groups and non-religious groups and showing that religious beliefs do have a preventive role partly because of religious injunctions against suicide, but not exclusively. There is a sense of hope that religion gives."

She added that there there is a social side of religion "which is what secularists

mostly focus on", but that is not necessarily "the principal thing".

"In the study that we did on depression in UCD when I was there, we found that the social element actually had a very little role to play when you control for other factors," she said, adding: "Going to church may have additional benefits that maybe joining a knitting group wouldn't have. You can't hope to supplant one with the other. So I think the spiritual end of things is hugely important."

Responding to the results of the study Seán Moynihan CEO of Alone, a charity that supports older people, called on families and neighbours to support those who would like to go to church but might need help, but also for elderly people to reach out.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* he said: "I would call on older people who are their own best resources, if they have a support infrastructure, to reach out to those people in their world to try and help them. And if going to religious services, going to church and Mass is part of that absolutely I would call for that."

"I would also call on everybody to realise what a scourge loneliness is and if they can find a way of entering the conversation, with families, relatives or friends to even refer older people to us and or to discuss with them how to support them to combat that loneliness," he said.

Mr Moynihan added: "I think the big thing we're trying to get across is that emotional need, and what the Catholic Church has done traditionally has always met that emotional comfort need, especially post bereavement or when people are facing illness, suffering or pain. Maybe that has been undervalued, or underutilised, or maybe just taken for granted."

Donegal parish firm after arson attack on church

Brandon Scott

St Baithin's Church in St Johnston, Donegal, originally built in the 1850s was the target of an arson attack last Wednesday which saw its sacristy "totally blackened with soot". But despite the shocking attack, which resulted in a man being charged last Thursday, Pastor Emeritus of the parish, Monsignor Dan Carr allayed fears and said that the communities have

supported each other in the parish since the attack.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Msgr Carr explained that the damage was not overly extensive but did impact the sacristy. "The damage that was done is not that extensive," he said. "There was a fire lit outside of the window and it then broke the glass of the window and left the sacristy room totally blackened out with soot."

Asked whether or not he

feels increasingly susceptible to attacks or malice after months of sustained targeting of churches in the county - one man who burgled a spate of churches in the county was jailed for a year last Friday - Msgr Carr dispelled any notion of fear lingering in the county's parishes and hailed the mixture of communities which have come together in support since the attack.

"We don't feel any way remote up here so we don't

really have worries," he said. "It's a mixed community of several religions who work tremendously well together and support each other very strongly particularly when this little incident happened."

A man in his 20s was charged in relation to the attack last Wednesday. During the course of his spree it was also revealed that he set fire to the local Orange hall which dates back to the early 19th century.

Pope begins 12 day trip in Indonesia

Staff reporter

Pope Francis arrived in the Indonesian capital Jakarta on Tuesday, kicking off the longest and farthest trip of his tenure to the Asia Pacific region.

He is expected to highlight environmental concerns and the importance of interfaith dialogue during the 12 day trip, which will also see him travel to Papua New Guinea, Singapore and Timor-Leste - the only one of the four countries that is predominantly Catholic.

The journey may well be one that presents its challenges for a man who turns 88 in December and has been battling a number of health issues.

Asia Pacific is one of only a few places in the world where the Church is growing in terms of baptised faithful and religious vocations.

Parts of the Pope's trip, which was originally scheduled in 2020 but postponed due to the pandemic, will retrace the steps of St John

Paul II, who also visited the four nations during his 27-year pontificate.

He is only the third pope to visit Indonesia, which has the largest population of Muslims globally.

During his four days there, he is expected to visit the Indonesian capital's main mosque, meet with outgoing president Joko Widodo and hold a Mass for some 70,000 people, according to the Vatican News.

In Papua New Guinea, the Pope will travel to the remote city of Vanimo to meet with missionaries from his native Argentina who have been reaching out to tribal communities.

In Timor-Leste, the Pope will officiate Mass in the capital Dili, on the same seaside esplanade where John Paul II spoke in 1989 to comfort local Catholics who suffered under Indonesia's occupation of the territory. Timor-Leste gained independence in 2002.

A spark is all it takes



Three legionaries attend the annual 'Fan the Spark' Legion of Mary Young Adult Catholic Conference in De Montfort House, Dublin, August 24. Picture: Aine Blake.

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6 seminarians for Down and Connor ‘a calling from God’

Brandon Scott

The Diocese of Down and Connor has described the vocation success of the diocese, with 6 seminarians poised to enter the national seminary in Maynooth this September, as being the product of years of work, work invested by the diocese but also supplemented by “the calling of God”.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, diocesan spokesman Fr Eddie McGee said that the diocese has been fortunate to avail of the efforts of Vocations Director Fr Conor McGrath and that this work has spawned a variety of initiatives to assist those considering a vocation to the priesthood.

“We have a number of vocations and have had for years,” he said. “It’s not particularly something that’s happened this year but over the last number of years. We have retreats and

have organised events where candidates can come forward.

“A few years ago we appointed a new vocations director, Fr Conor McGrath and he’s been very focussed on the promotion of vocations and supporting those vocations when they come forward. There just happens to be a particular alignment this year where the conditions for those entering proved to be the right time for them individually to enter this September.”

Although diocesan-led work and endeavour are prerequisites for men to be drawn to a vocational calling, Fr McGee also recognised the supernatural dimension involved when men answer the call to priesthood and credited this for the diocese’s recent crop of seminarians.

“I don’t think it’s so much something we are doing – the vocations are a calling from

God and they are there. We need to nurture and support those vocations. The vocations grow out of a community that supports those convictions – be it the faith community or the wider community as well.”

With a career dedicated to the ministry of souls not being currently regarded as the most popular or fashionable, Fr McGee notes that although current seminarians face challenges that were not apparent 50 years ago, once support is forthcoming to aid them in their journey, the challenges might be easier to navigate.

“The decision to enter seminary is always a big decision,” he said. “It’s challenging today in the context of the Church in Ireland and in Europe so it’s particularly challenging for someone to make that step to enter seminary. The key thing is support along the way.”

Acclaimed singer asks Pope to condemn ‘sinful’ bullfighting



Singer Morrissey during a performance.

Staff reporter

Singer Morrissey has sent a letter to Pope Francis asking him “to condemn the sinful spectacle of bullfighting”.

The former frontman of The Smiths, who lent his support to Notre Dame Cathedral after it was damaged following a fire and has famously championed animal rights, sent an open letter addressed to the head of the Church to “add my voice” to a campaign from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta).

In the letter, dated August 2024, Morrissey said: “These abominations have to end, and only you (Pope Francis) can end them. Please, please do.”

“I was raised in a Roman Catholic family and brought up in the Church, but any person who believes in compassion could be writing this to

you: please add my voice to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals’ (PETA) call for you to condemn the sinful spectacle of bullfighting.

“You chose the name of St Francis - patron saint of animals and the environment - because you wish to make nature protection your legacy, but the torture, torment, and killing of bulls for sport flies in the face of his teachings and yours.”

He added: “As compassionate people have realised that bulls suffer almost beyond imagination when stabbed and tortured in the ring, bullfighting’s popularity has plummeted. This year, Colombia banned bullfighting”.

Morrissey said that if the Church will not condemn the “atrocious” that takes place in Pamplona it may lose its “relevance”.

He continued: “As I once sang, we all want the bull to survive. And so it is. Please show mercy and kindness to these animals and condemn bullfighting”.

Statutory inquiry into sexual abuse at schools to be set up

Staff reporter

Cabinet agreed on Tuesday to establish a commission of investigation into cases of sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders.

The investigation is expected to be headed up by a senior counsel or a retired judge. Work will now begin to draw up the terms of reference for the inquiry that will have wide-ranging powers

The investigation could have to potentially inquire into thousands of cases of abuse.

The Irish Catholic did not see the report produced after the scoping inquiry before going to print.



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Blessed Carlo Acutis 'touching hearts' in Ireland

Brandon Scott

In anticipation of the primary relic of the 'Millennial Saint' Blessed Carlo Acutis journeying around parishes in Leinster this month, Catholics are preparing for the momentous event, including one young devotee who testified that the faith and story of Blessed Carlo

"touched her heart".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mary-Aoife Ong, co-director of *Carlo Acutis Youth Ireland* revealed how the exposure to the prospective saint's life story inspired her to join a group dedicated to his legacy.

"Myself and my brother knew nothing about Carlo this time last

year. We had just finished college and we went over to Assisi. When we went over we saw Blessed Carlo laying out in the tomb – just totally ordinary with the jeans and runners. We thought, 'oh my goodness'. There's something about this young guy that really touched our hearts.

"We came back and we said

that we have to try and do something to try and bring that bit of peace that we experienced in Assisi to other people in Ireland. That's how we got involved in Carlo Acutis Youth Ireland."

This year the relic will first stop in St Patrick's Church, Corduff on September 10 and 11 (including an all-night vigil). The relic will

be brought to St Peter and Paul's Church in Portlaoise on September 12 and 13 and then to St Mary's Church in Navan on September 15 and 16. The relic will then return to Dublin, arriving by boat down the River Liffey (weather permitting) to the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Cityquay Parish on September 17.

'There is hope', Clogher Diocese welcomes new seminarian

Renata Steffens

After six years with no entrant for the priesthood, Clogher Diocese welcomes its first seminarian. He is a former teacher in his 20s, and is entering the propaedeutic year this month. Gary Carville, Clogher Diocesan Communications Officer said this is the answering to all the prayers and hopes "that others will continue to answer the call."

Mr Carville said many people are making inquiries about the priesthood

and about the permanent diaconate. The diocese also has another seminarian who is in his final year of theology.

"He'll be ordained a deacon at some stage in 2025 as well ... We will have a man coming out in the next few years as a priest, we have a deacon next year ... And we still have the young man going in and maybe others following him," said Mr Carville. "There is hope. Absolutely. We're very thankful to God."

The Year for Vocation to the Diocesan Priesthood, which started in April 2023, had some impact on the number

of inquiries and on this new seminarian listening to his vocation call, Mr Carville said. "It was a year of prayer for vocations, and I think that where there is prayer, where there is faith, that's where vocations come from."

"God walks with us and once God walks with us, he walks with us in love, mercy and hope," Mr Carville said. "We're going into a jubilee year, a holy year with the theme of Pilgrims of Hope and as people of God, we continue to live in hope."

AMRI new secretary general appointed

Staff reporter

A new secretary general for the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) was appointed. Gerard Gallagher has been a staff member of AMRI working on communications and membership services.

"I am delighted to take on this appointment. AMRI has a great number of Religious ministering both in Ireland and on the missions, as well as lay missionaries, and all are involved in some extraordinary ministries promoting and living the Gospel in the world of today", Mr Gallagher said

taking up his new role.

AMRI president, Fr Tim Lehane SVD said Mr Gallagher "brings his pastoral experience and personal skills to this role in AMRI. Together we have worked closely over this past year, and I know that our members will be fully supported by Gerard as he continues to deliver in line with our strategic objectives as Religious and Missionaries in the life of the Church."

Working for the Church for over 30 years, Mr Gallagher worked closely with the Archdiocese of Dublin in various roles with Catholic Youth Care and the Office of Evangelisation.

A farewell after selfless service...



On August 13 Radio Maria Ireland had a Mass of thanksgiving in The Church of the Immaculate Conception & St Killian, Clondalkin for Fr Eamonn McCarthy as he stepped down from 7 years as Priest Director. This was followed by a reception in the Green Isle Hotel which was attended by many friends of the station. "We are grateful to Fr Eamonn for his selfless service of our Catholic radio and wish him well in his new appointment in the Diocese of Cloyne," said the radio station.

Killaloe 'buoyed' by number of new vocations

Staff reporter

Following successive years of falling vocations and the retirement of priests, the Diocese of Killaloe has been buoyed by the news that three men from counties Clare and Tipperary will enter the seminary at Maynooth later this month.

For the first time in two decades, three vocations have been recorded in one of Ireland's largest dioceses where just over half of the 58 parishes are currently served by a resident priest.

The Diocese of Killaloe last year launched a vocations promotion in parishes across Clare, Laois, Offaly, Limerick and Tipperary to coincide with the 'Year for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood'. The promotional campaign has so far visited two thirds of the parishes and will continue into 2025.

Welcoming the news, Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan said, "As

the third largest diocese in the country, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain full cover across the five counties due to retirements and a lower number of vocations. I am delighted that we have been successful in reaching those who had been considering a vocation and helping them in making the next step".

Vocations Director Fr Iggy McCormack has visited 60% of parishes in the Diocese over the past 12 months and will be undertaking visits to remaining parishes over the coming months.

Fr McCormack, who also is Principal of St Flannan's College in Ennis, said, "Our vocations initiative is aimed at encouraging people to discover more about vocations on the diocesan website. Meanwhile, our parish church visits have helped to kickstart conversations within family groups, with local priests and in communities across the diocese on the vocation of priesthood".

Probing the reasons why...

Perhaps this is the kind of conversation that must often take place in private.

Recently, a friend reflectively aired this thought, "with so much contraception now available, one must wonder why Irish abortion figures continued to rise." There were 10,033 abortions in the Irish Republic in 2023, increased from 8,156 in 2022 and 6,577 in 2020.

Perhaps the academic answer would be, 'more research is needed to answer this question'.

But I have carried out some journalism, and even a book, on this subject over the years, and there are some answers I can suggest. I'm not an expert but I have interviewed experts such as Dr Malcolm Potts, a world specialist in birth control, and other practitioners of family planning – now often called 'reproductive rights'.

Findings

I've been told that some 'accidental' pregnancies are (consciously or unconsciously) "fertility testing": a woman, or a couple, may not want a baby, but they may want to know if they can procreate. Unplanned pregnancy



Mary Kenny

may also be 'relationship testing' – a woman seeks to test whether a man will be committed enough to be the father of her child.

“It was often more convenient to decide whether you want to want to be pregnant after you become pregnant, rather than before”

Some people are organised and 'plan' every aspect of their lives. Some people are chaotic, and just live day to day. One practitioner told me she stopped telling some young girls to take the pill when they brush their teeth – because some don't bother to brush their teeth.

An experienced abortion doctor, Peter Huntingford (he had originally been pro-life, but switched sides) told me that it was often more convenient "to decide whether you want to want to be pregnant after you

become pregnant, rather than before".

There is also an expectation today that sexual relations are now 'free' from the inconvenience of pregnancy (or STDs). For some individuals, contraception is a 'hassle', and they'd rather trust to luck – abortion being seen as a safety net.

Consequences

A famous study carried out at Berkeley in California by Kristin Luker ('Taking Chances') probed reasons why some couples deliberately ran the risk of an unwanted pregnancy – ranging from a desire for "spontaneity" to an inexplicable urge of nature. The consumption of alcohol was also a feature.

A practitioner from London's Brooke Advisory Cen-

tre for sexual health told me, "Let's face it – contraception is artificial." Ironically, this was precisely the view of Pope Paul VI.

“The pro-choice assurance of “legal and rare” is soon overtaken by ‘energetically marketed’ as an inconsequential, frequently-available service”

In addition to the above, abortion is widely advertised. Indeed, in the arguments put forward for 'reproductive rights' by the likes of Kamala Harris (and Joe Biden), the word 'contraception' is never mentioned.

The pro-choice assurance of "legal and rare" is soon overtaken by 'energetically marketed' as an inconsequential, frequently-available service.



Prof. Kristin Luker

With Ireland now experiencing an unprecedented level of immigration (141,600 came in 2023), I thought it is time to visit The Irish Emigration Museum, EPIC, on Dublin's Custom House Quay. It's based on the idea that there have always been flows of people both ways (64,000 also emigrated last year.)

EPIC is impressive, having been founded by Belfast man Neville Isdell, who has lived in eleven countries but "Ireland has always been where my heart is". It is professionally constructed, even slick in its presentation. Being subterranean (in the CHQ building), there's a slightly claustrophobic feeling to its tunnels, leading to various exhibition chambers. But it's designed with taste and expertise.

The visit is supposed to be "immersive" as you move from one chamber to another, following the emigration experience. The narrative is simple but

balanced, and includes the significance of Irish missionaries, from the monastic times up to the present. And although emigration is often associated with the desolation of exile, the stories also include emigrants who succeeded – like the former Fenian John Boyle O'Reilly, who became an influential Boston newspaper editor, and Annie Moore, whose statue stands at Ellis Island, who married contentedly and had eleven children. Dónall MacAmhlaigh, who wrote about being a navvy in England in the 1950s, also described the dances he attended, and the general craic he had.

EPIC has a slightly touristy feel, which perhaps explains the entrance price – €16.74 for a senior ticket, although that allows for a return visit. The Museum shop is pleasant but not outstanding, and appropriately enough a young immigrant person was in charge of the desk where I purchased my trinkets.

How sad to learn that the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Saint-Omer, in the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, is yet another Catholic church which has been subjected to, and partly destroyed by, fire.

Saint-Omer's special link with Ireland is that Daniel O'Connell

was educated there – at a time when the Penal Laws restricted Catholic education in Ireland. He witnessed the French Revolution as a schoolboy in Saint-Omer, with blood from the guillotine running in the streets: it turned him against political violence for all of his life.



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St Bernadette's relics: A source of great hope and joy

Staff Reporter

On September 3, the relics of St Bernadette were entrusted to Bishop Kevin Doran to bring home to Ireland, who was leading a pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Diocese of Elphin. This marks the first visit of St Bernadette's relics to Ireland. The Elphin pilgrims brought these relics to Ireland, beginning a journey around the country that starts at Galway Cathedral on September 5.

At this ceremony, Bishop Doran highlighted the deep connection

between Irish pilgrims and the International Marian Shrine at Lourdes, which has been a place of profound spiritual significance since the apparitions of Our Lady to St Bernadette in 1858. "We hope that many people will be able to share in the blessings of the Pilgrimage." Bishop Doran added, "Many people are unable to travel on pilgrimage to Lourdes, but this year Lourdes will come to them, as the Relics of St Bernadette make their way around Ireland."

Archbishop Eamon Martin also

emphasised the importance of this pilgrimage, describing it as a meaningful prelude to the Jubilee Year 2025, themed 'Pilgrims of Hope'. He remarked that the relics' presence in Ireland will remind the faithful of Lourdes' legacy as a sanctuary of prayer and compassion, particularly for the sick and vulnerable. Generations of Irish people have travelled to Lourdes, contributing their time and energy in service, and have found their own faith strengthened by the experience.

During September and October,

the relics of St Bernadette will be on a historic pilgrimage across all 26 dioceses of Ireland for the first time. This unique event offers people of all ages the chance to experience the spiritual gifts of Lourdes locally, connect with Mary's grace as Bernadette did, and find renewed peace and joy. As Archbishop Martin said, "The opportunity to venerate St Bernadette's relics in Ireland will be a source of hope, great joy and inspiration."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Merchant's Quay calls for increased detox and rehab spaces

To mark International Overdose Awareness Day last Saturday, Merchants Quay Ireland called for improved access to quality drug treatment.

Eddie Mullins CEO at Merchants Quay Ireland said that "while the opening of the Medically Supervised Injection Facility (MSIF) this year will play a part in saving lives, it is essential to expand the current capacity of detox and rehabilitation spaces in Ireland. The present infrastructure for addiction treatment is simply not sufficient to handle the demand. We are calling on the government to take immediate action".

The Health Research Board (HRB) revealed 409 people died from overdose-related deaths in 2020 – meaning that more lives are being lost to overdose than to deaths on the roads with more than one person a day dying from overdose in Ireland and 7 out of every 10 drug overdoses being opioid-related.

Newer generations are more open to integrating faith in politics, said JCFJ

Renata Milán Morales

An event held in Venice from August 18 to 25, organised by the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice (JCFJ) in Ireland, along with the Jesuit European Social Centre in Brussels and Aggiornamenti Sociali in Milan, emphasised

the potential contributions of religious individuals to public life. The Faith and Politics Workshop brought together young people from across Europe to explore how faith can inform political engagement.

The JCFJ, in a statement following the event, pointed

that "advocating for more religious people in politics does not mean endorsing theocracy or the imposition of religious laws on a secular society. Rather, it is about recognising that religious individuals have a valuable role to play in the democratic process."

The workshop focussed on dialogue, attentive listening and service, addressing concerns that religious involvement in politics could lead to dogmatism. Organisers noted the importance of viewing politics as a way to serve others, a perspective rooted in

the teachings of St Ignatius of Loyola. Through activities like meditation, prayer and contemplation, participants were "encouraged to approach politics not as a power struggle but as an opportunity for love and service," noted the JCFJ.

South Sudan welcomes new Papal Nuncio



Archbishop Seamus Horgan arrived to South Sudan to start in his new role as Papal Nuncio and was warmly welcomed.

Focus Ireland support increased from the last report

Renata Steffens

The Focus Ireland annual report 2023 was released this week. In the last year, the charity had an increase of 12.5% in the number of people supported compared to

the 2022 report, and an increase of almost 10% in the number of households supported. That is 1,757 households helped to either keep their home or support their exit from homelessness.

Even with the promising rise, homelessness remains a chal-

lenge. Pat Dennigan, Focus Ireland CEO said "this was another challenging year, as homelessness continued to rise sharply."

Sr Stanislaus Kennedy, Focus Ireland Life President and Founder sent a message to the current government. "Homelessness inflicts

severe trauma on everyone, but it is especially devastating for children ... We must all take greater action to stop this crisis", she said.

Mr Dennigan said that "over the past three months, Focus Ireland, in collaboration with the State, has helped over 100 families secure

homes and escape homelessness ... We must build on this success. We urge the Government to adopt a policy that dedicates a portion of the new social housing supply to long-term homeless families", Mr Dennigan concluded.

Violence against women: Schoolchildren's access to pornography must be tackled



Alan Hynes

If there is one genre of engagement with education policy in Ireland that is likely to prompt a unity of weary groans from all working within schools, it is politicians or campaigning groups 'calling on' schools to address some social ill through education.

These generally fall into two broad categories: 1) calling on schools to solve a social ill that properly requires a 'whole of society' approach to solve, often one that is complex and, if it were to be properly addressed, would involve the State incurring a significant expense or taking on a powerful vested interest, or 2) calling on schools to do something they are already doing.

An example of a 'calling on' that ticked the box of both categories came recently through a report in the *Irish Examiner* (Women's Council calls for new curriculum tackling misogyny to be mandatory in school - Wednesday, August 28) on a press release from the National Women's Council (NWC). Both the article and the press release led with a call for Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) to be made compulsory in primary and secondary schools.

RSE

What was not acknowledged in the press release, nor fact-checked by the newspaper, was that SPHE, which incorporates Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE), is already a mandatory part of the primary and post-primary junior-cycle curricula

under the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, issued by the Department of Education in 2019. All post-primary schools are also required to have a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme at senior-cycle.

Having participated, as the Catholic education bodies did, in various consultation processes with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the NWC will be aware that the SPHE curricula at primary and post-primary are undergoing a process of renewal. The new junior-cycle programme was launched last September and the senior-cycle programme is currently being considered for approval by the Minister. The consultation process on the primary specification recently closed.

“Within schools, the effective addressing of issues like violence against women, or any social ill, requires a whole of curriculum and whole of school response”

As noted in their press statement, in order to inform their own submission to the consultation, the NWC consulted with various bodies in a roundtable discussion. Curiously, the NWC did not include any organisation directly engaged in the patronage, trusteeship, management or governance of schools in that roundtable discussion.

The main thrust of the NWC's press statement addressed the need to counter violence against women. Certainly, the Catholic education sector is aware of the need for our schools to play their part in countering this social evil, viewing it as one

of the many ways by which Catholic schools across the globe seek to contribute to the common good of all societies.

Within schools, the effective addressing of issues like violence against women, or any social ill, requires a whole of curriculum and whole of school response. Often those outside of the education sector make it seem that the teaching of a series of rational propositions is sufficient to secure behavioural change. Rather, the whole person, rational, emotional, spiritual, and imaginative must be engaged. It requires that the issue be addressed in SPHE, English literature, religious education and so on.

However, to be truly effective, schools must be understood as only one among many organisations within society that have a responsibility to counter such violence. Schools have their part to play, but any effort by them, no matter how well conceived and implemented, can only be effective if it is part of a whole-of-society response.

Harm

For example, the NWC rightfully identifies pornography as a harm. Contrary to some reporting when the junior-cycle SPHE specification was first published, the NCCA are fully in agreement, as, needless to say, is the Catholic community. Pornography promotes a general degraded vision of the human person, reducing women and men to mere objects, and habituates a negative and degrading view of women in particular. While schools can address this, and teachers can use all their professional skill to do so, they and their pupils are situated in the midst of a culture where pornography is readily available on phones and where soft-porn depictions of women are a staple part of our culture.

To truly address this requires schools to play their part, but to do so alongside

“Contrary to some reporting when the junior-cycle SPHE specification was first published, the NCCA are fully in agreement, as, needless to say, is the Catholic community. Pornography promotes a general degraded vision of the human person, reducing women and men to mere objects, and habituates a negative and degrading view of women in particular”



parents and policy makers. The easy (and cost-effective!) response for politicians is to mandate the teaching of the harm of pornography through the curriculum. The truly difficult response would be for our legislators to figure

out how to regulate pornography, making access to it more difficult for children and teenagers. This would require complex legislation and a well-funded regulatory regime. It would require working to secure support

across the EU. Most of all it would require legislators to take on powerful private vested interests. Will they?

i Alan Hynes is the Chief Executive Officer of the Catholic Education Partnership

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New migration poll obscures as much as it reveals



David Quinn

From time to time, in my capacity as head of The Iona Institute, I commission an opinion poll on some topic or another. When I do so, I am always aware that asking questions in a certain way is more likely to result in a certain outcome. That is why I often base the questions on ones asked previously in other surveys conducted on behalf of a mainstream media outlet, either here or overseas.

For example, I once commissioned a poll about how people prioritise home over work and the questions were drawn exactly from ones asked on behalf of the mighty *New York Times*. Of course, even the *New York Times* might ask its questions in not quite the right way, but if you base your poll on one commissioned by a paper like that, it makes you less vulnerable to accusations of question-bias, that is, asking a question in a way that gets the result you want.

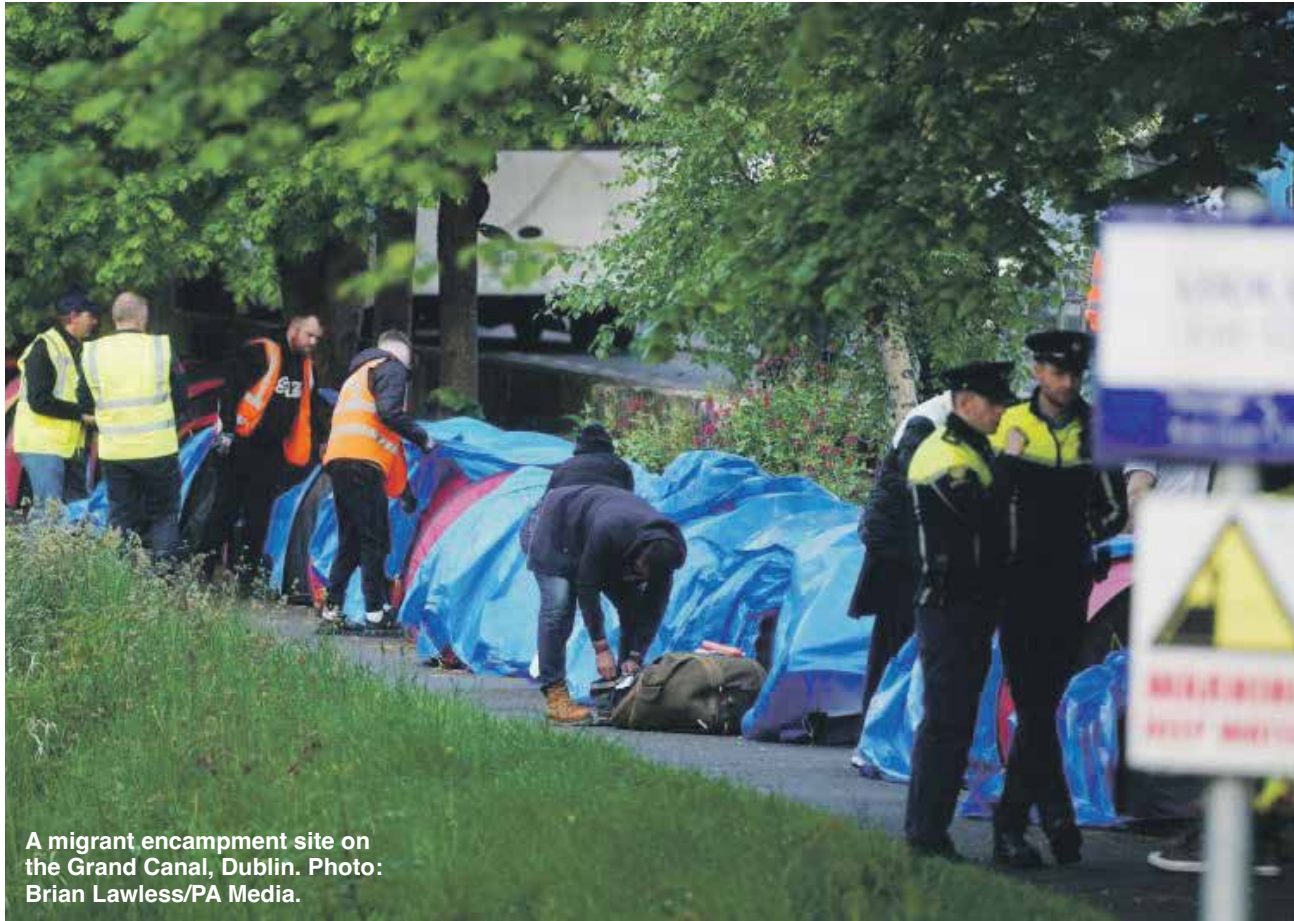
Interpreting

Overall, you need to be careful interpreting survey results. Even when a question is asked in a straightforward way, people are answering the question immediately in front of them without considering anything else. A poll can obscure more than it reveals.

Therefore, if you ask people should we do more to cut carbon emissions, they will almost all answer 'yes'. But if you ask them if they are willing to buy an electric car, cut down on meat, cut out trips abroad, cut down on mobile phone use, pay higher electricity bill and so on as the price of cutting emissions, they will almost certainly say 'no'.

In other words, people want to see carbon emissions cut but at the same time they don't want to pay what they consider too high a price to do that.

At the weekend, the *Sunday Independent* printed the results of one of its regular surveys conducted by polling company, Ireland



A migrant encampment site on the Grand Canal, Dublin. Photo: Brian Lawless/PA Media.

Thinks.

One of the questions asked people what they believe the Government should prioritise in the coming budgets. The top answer was more spending on housing which garnered 45% support.

“How do we reconcile only 22% saying tax cuts in response to one question, and 40% saying they want tax cuts in response to another question?”

Only 22% want it to prioritise income tax cuts.

But then people were asked 'Which of the following two should be prioritised in the budget, tax cuts or investment in public spending?' 40% said tax cuts.

“If a population can grow too fast because of natural increase, then it can obviously grow too fast from immigration as well. It is sheer denialism to suggest otherwise”

How do we reconcile only 22% saying tax cuts in response to one question, and 40% saying they want tax cuts in response to another question?

In some ways we can't. It comes down to the question asked.

Attitudes

What about public attitudes to immigration? Numerous polls have shown that around two-thirds of people believe immigration levels into the country are too high, but now a new poll has emerged which appears to show that the public support extremely liberal immigration policies indeed, in fact, what amounts to open borders.

The poll was conducted by Ireland Thinks on behalf of the Migrant Rights Centre. It put a number of statements to people and in each case a big majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Here are some examples.

Statement one: "Irish companies should continue to be able to recruit people from outside the EU to work in sectors where we can't fill skills or labour shortages".

Statement two: "People from outside the EU, recruited to work in Ireland through the work permit system... should be allowed to bring their immediate family, spouse and or children when they come to work here".

“If those statements were put to me on the spot and I didn't really have much time to think about my answer, I would probably agree with them all as well”

Statement three: "People from outside the EU,

recruited to work in Ireland through the work permit system... should have freedom to change to any job after 2 years".

Levels of agreement with those statements were 82%, 65% and 66% respectively.

There is nothing wrong per se with putting statements like these to people to see what they say in response, but the responses cannot be taken as the last word, not by a long shot.

If those statements were put to me on the spot and I didn't really have much time to think about my answer, I would probably agree with them all as well.

Reconcile

Is there some way to reconcile a big majority of people believing immigration is too high and a big majority agreeing with the above statements, or to put it another way, what is the public really thinking?

It is a bit like how people respond to question about climate change. As I mentioned, nearly everyone agrees that we need to cut carbon emissions, but at the same time are worried about how hard carbon reduction policies will hit them in the hip pocket.

Likewise, people agree that ideally a worker moving to Ireland for a few years should be allowed to bring his family with him, or her.

But if you then explain that this will significantly increase already very high immigration levels, they are very likely to have second thoughts about the matter.

That *Sunday Independent* poll found that immigration is the second most important issue for voters leading into the next General Election (November 15 is being mentioned as a possible date for it), with housing being the top issue.

And of course, the shortage of housing and the immigration issue are connected. Ireland has one of the fastest growing populations in the Western world and the growth is driven overwhelmingly by immigration.

For the purposes of comparison, our rate of population growth is almost three times that of Britain.

In the year to the end of April, Ireland's population grew by 100,000, with only 20,000 of that being accounted for by natural increase (that is, births minus deaths), and the rest by net immigration.

“This is not an either/or issue. It is not a question of zero immigration or open borders. It is a question of getting the balance right”

This cannot but have an effect on the availability of housing. How could it be otherwise? The more people live in a country the more demand for housing there will be.

Once upon a time countries worried that too many babies were being born (some countries still have this concern). They worried that their populations were growing too fast to cope with. Well, if a population can grow too fast because of natural increase, then it can obviously grow too fast from immigration as well. It is sheer denialism to suggest otherwise.

As usual, this is not an either/or issue. It is not a question of zero immigration or open borders. It is a question of getting the balance right. I think most people have no objection in principle to immigration, but they do get worried when we appear to be absorbing too many, too fast, and that concern is absolutely reasonable.

Scorning the past in a dark present



Martina Purdy

Turning to the past with dread, I forced myself to watch *Stolen*, a new RTÉ documentary billed as the inside story of the Mother and Baby homes.

It was not only the wounded past I dreaded to look at, but a documentary which I (rightly) guessed would approach this tragic subject, with its own provocative perspective. This was no dispassionate examination of a shameful past. The personal interviews and facts were emotive enough without the embellishment of interspersed monologues and finger-pointing. The Catholic Church, no innocent in this, was cast as the main culprit.

I decided to watch *Stolen* after a politician lamented the darkness of the past. Dark and bitter it was too: full of pain, abandonment, forced adoptions, indifference, infant deaths from malnutrition, unmarked graves, even callousness, cruelty and bullying from priests and nuns.

And yet there was light too: the light of truth, the light of hope, the light of love which shone unexpectedly in bittersweet reunions and embraces, as one survivor put it, that seemed to last forever. There was a joy too in the surviving baby who went on to have her own daughter, a beautiful little girl.

Reflection

Stolen's spotlight is a torch made with all the values, sensibilities and hindsight of 2024, long after the fledgling Irish state was an impoverished new-born. This first chapter told by RTÉ foreshadowed our own present drama. Chapter two is a tale of a wealthy Ireland where infants no longer die of starvation in over-crowded mother and baby homes, but with medical assistance, and "informed" motherly consent, all encouraged by a "pro-choice" media and state agenda.

Stolen made a single reference to abortion, implying it was a kind of liberation, mentioning it in the same breath as the state's 1973 decision to grant single mothers child benefit.

This documentary rightly laments that 9,000 infants



A woman prays with a rosary at a stone cross during a pilgrimage to the holy well of St Brigid in Liscannor, Ireland. Photo: OSV News/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters.

died in the Mother and Baby homes between 1922 and 1998, concluding that some of these deaths were from wilful neglect. But how is our era of abortion in any way superior?

“We do indeed suffer from a dark past but the present is even darker: an estimated 40,000 unborn boys and girls have been deliberately killed”

The State and the Church can bear some blame for these past infant deaths but abortion? As the Church implacably opposes abortion, we can lay that evil at the feet of the state and the women and the men of Ireland who voted for it.

We do indeed suffer from a dark past but the present is even darker: an estimated 40,000 unborn boys and girls have been deliberately killed before they drew their first breath. A slim minority might have had disabilities (no excuse) but many others were simply an unwanted inconvenience.

It is just that we examine our past and right the

wrongs but in this generation, there is an opportunity to do right. Where are the documentaries on the present injustice of abortion? Where are the politicians? Where are the fathers? Where are the mothers? Where is the media?

Clarity

In *Stolen* we see images of brown envelopes, files, death certificates, names and even unmarked graves. Aborted boys and girls are awarded no certificates, no names, no graves. In a world of mass media there are no scenes on television of this medical procedure. It's all neatly hidden away.

Abortion kills not just the baby but the light, the hope of bittersweet reunions, embraces that last forever. For all its faults - and there are many - it is the Church which offers mercy and lifts up women, broken and traumatised by abortion.

Men voted overwhelm-

“In her desperation, would she have “consented” to a “safe and legal” abortion if this was on offer? Quite possibly. Thank God for her strength and her love, that truly tough love. Because without it, cherished members of my family would have been stolen away”

ingly for abortion. No surprise there - as an early feminist once called abortion the ultimate exploitation of women and children.

“Some people went and took their children and grandchildren away from these homes. Others found less than ideal ways to keep the children”

Let's face it, abortion suits irresponsible men even more than the Mother and Baby homes. Though *Stolen* casts some men in a negative light, they got off lightly.

One interviewee said the men and women of Ireland “colluded” with an all-powerful church and state to deal with unwanted

pregnancies through these institutions. But not everyone “colluded”. Some people went and took their children and grandchildren away from these homes. Others found less than ideal ways to keep the children (how many sisters were really mothers?) The Irish mother of the late musician, Phil Lynott, of Thin Lizzy fame, took temporary shelter in one of these Mother and Baby homes in Birmingham. It was not a happy experience but her child survived to share his talents. Phil Lynott lived to play and dance in the moonlight and share that joy with us.

Possibilities

My own grandmother did not collude with a bad system. Daisy came of age in the 1920s, a post-war world where many of the young men of her generation had perished in war. As a young unmarried woman she fell pregnant not once, but twice, in Protestant England, where Mother and Baby homes also existed.

Her plight was deemed shameful in her small village. But Daisy was a strong woman with a strong family. I never quite appreciated what she did in the years before she met my grandfather, married and gave birth to my dad. In her despera-

tion, would she have “consented” to a “safe and legal” abortion if this was on offer? Quite possibly. Thank God for her strength and her love, that truly tough love. Because without it, cherished members of my family would have been stolen away.

“It is so much easier to scorn the sins of the past than to right the wrongs of this era, to safeguard the lives and memories stolen today”

As for *Stolen*, former Taoiseach Enda Kenny, who U-turned on abortion, is featured condemning the injustice of the past century when we buried “our compassion, mercy and humanity”.

Frankly it is still buried, along with our heads, and will remain so until RTÉ or other media decide to shine a light on the darkness of this generation. In the meantime, it is so much easier to scorn the sins of the past than to right the wrongs of this era, to safeguard the lives and memories stolen today.

In Burkina Faso, Christians live in the shadow of the Cross



Despite an increase in Islamist attacks and the threat of martyrdom, the Faith is growing in West Africa writes Michael Kelly

Most of us would probably struggle to point out Burkina Faso on a map, much less say anything coherent about the political situation in the landlocked west African nation.

Pope Francis used the occasion of his Sunday Angelus address at the weekend to highlight the deepening crisis in Burkina Faso, where Islamists killed hundreds of people just days ago.

Yet, the crisis has hardly warranted a mention in the English-speaking press confirming a trend where bloodshed in Africa is somehow seen as less important than when white people are being killed.

About one in four Burkinabè are Christian, while about 63% of people identify with Sunni Islam. Since 2015, the country has struggled against a Islamist insurgency, and reports say that around 50% of the country is now in the hands of the terrorists with the capital Ouagadougou struggling to hold out.

Persecution

Christians are still trying to find ways of living their faith and praying, despite the difficulties and persecution they face. Bishop of Ouahigouya Justin Kientega even recently told Aid to the Church in Need that “the faith has grown”.

“As Christians, people are in constant danger of death. They know this and want to be right with God. So, even though showing openly that you are a Christian represents a real danger, they are very keen to receive the sacraments, and we are seeing a great deal of practice of the faith”

“In this situation, some Christians accept to die. Many have even refused to remove the crosses they wear”.

More than 100 files for the beatification of martyrs are open with the bishops’ conference of Burkina Faso. Many of them are lay catechists.

Though not exclusive targets, Christians have borne the brunt of the Islamist attacks with priests and catechists murdered.

Extremists have massacred about 100 Christians and kidnapped many more in the country in intensified attacks in the last three months.

The last atrocity took place on Sunday when insurgents captured 26 Christians in Sanaba, western Burkina Faso, and took them to a church where they murdered them by cutting their throats.

“The whereabouts of the male population is still uncertain, we don’t know if they escaped, if they are hiding, or if they were murdered”

The massacre happened a day after the deadliest terrorist attack in the country’s history, which saw at least 150 people killed – up to 250, according to some sources – in Barsalogo, central Burkina Faso.

Local Church sources told have Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) that further attacks occurred in Nouna Diocese near the country’s western border with Mali.

A Church source – who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons – said that “around 5,000 women and children have sought refuge in the city of Nouna” after the attacks.

The source added: “There is not a single man among them.”

“The whereabouts of the male population is still uncertain, we don’t know if they escaped, if they are hiding, or if they were murdered.”

They highlighted that a large number of Catholic, Protestant and animist places of worship have been torched and ransacked in the past months.

They told ACN: “In Zekuy, the local catechist realised an attack was taking place when he heard the sound of motorcycles and managed to escape into the woods with the Blessed Sacrament and the rest of the population.

“However, the church was vandalised, and images were destroyed.

“They also tried to desecrate the tabernacle, and painted inscriptions on the wall that had a fresco of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

Last week’s extremist attacks are part of an ongoing armed conflict in Burkina Faso that has plunged the country into an increasingly deeper crisis.

President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, who was elected in 2015, was deposed in a coup d’état in 2022 by an increasingly frustrated military who installed Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba to try to battle the Islamists.

This coup was widely popular amongst Burkinabè. Mr Damiba carefully cultivated his image, and took to wearing a red beret which harkened back to the revolutionary and founding father of Burkina Faso Thomas Sankara.

Insurgency

But, he failed to get a handle on the insurgency, and the lieutenant colonel found himself subject to a putsch just nine months after he took power in September 2022.

Captain Ibrahim Traoré was installed as the new leader, at only 26 year of age becoming the youngest president in the world. A former commando in a special forces unit, he has rallied support behind the junta with promises that the insurgency will be ended.

As with most conflicts now, there is a larger context. Captain Traoré has expressed increasing hostility towards France, the former colonial power. He has also closely aligned himself with Russia’s Vladimir Putin. He has also enlisted mercenaries from the Russian Wagner Group in his bid to put down the insurgency, and his supporters often wave Russian flags at his rallies.

But, Russia’s own difficul-



Sisters of Notre Dame du Lac de Bam in Burkina Faso attend their annual retreat. Despite Islamist attacks, the faith continues to grow in the West African nation.

ties in the war with Ukraine are now likely to destabilise Burkina Faso further.

The Kremlin announced at the weekend that it is withdrawing 100 of its paramilitary officers from Burkina Faso to help in the war in Ukraine.

They are part of about 300 soldiers from the Bear Brigade – a Russian private military company – who arrived in the West African nation in May to support the country’s military junta.

On its Telegram channel, the group said its forces would return home to support Russia’s defence against Ukraine’s recent offensive in the Kursk region.

“Last year, through the generosity of benefactors – including many from Ireland – ACN was able to support 74 projects across Burkina Faso to the tune of €1.5million”

There are fears the pull-out could embolden Islamist insurgents. There is also speculation about the continued rule of Captain Traoré, and speculation about another mutiny in the army and a fresh coup.

A religious congregation, the Missionary Brothers of the Countryside (FMC) explained to ACN: “Everyone is returning to the faith. As Christians, people are in



The church in the district of Zekuy-Doumbala, Burkina Faso which was recently attacked by Islamists. The catechist managed to flee with the Blessed Sacrament, but the church was widely vandalised. Photo: ACN.

constant danger of death. They know this and want to be right with God. So, even though showing openly that you are a Christian represents a real danger, they are very keen to receive the sacraments, and we are seeing a great deal of practice of the faith”.

Last year, through the generosity of benefactors – including many from Ireland – ACN was able to

support 74 projects across Burkina Faso to the tune of €1.5million to assist the Church and ease the suffering of those affected by Islamist violence.

i Michael Kelly is Director of Public Affairs for Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland. If you would like to support their work in Burkina Faso see www.acnireland.org or call 01 837 7516.

Science needs to explain how Genesis understood the universe 3,500 years ago



Dualta Roughneen

It isn't area I would normally consider engaging in because I am not a geologist. I take on faith the determinations of science that the Earth is a certain age. I take on faith that radiometric dating or other such methods give reasonable estimates of the earth's age. I have no reason to doubt that the earth is not 4.5 billion years old, nor any reason to doubt that the universe is three times as old as the Earth itself.

But I know that science is not static. It is made up of theories that get verified based on best evidence available; then they get updated based on better information. Lord Kelvin in the 19th century estimated that the Earth was somewhere between 20 and 400 million years old. Even with that wide range, by today's estimates he was more than 4 billion years out.

Like most people, I will never verify those figures for myself, just like I will never verify most things that I have to take on faith in life. I trust – to an extent – the scientific process of theory, experimentation, verification, falsification, and I trust the scientific community in all the vast realms that they work in, that their work, their means of testing, review, and confirmation are robust and sound, within the possibilities of human understanding.

Trust

I have to trust in this way. We all do. Otherwise we will live in a world of doubt and distrust. No one can spend their lives learning and proving everything for themselves. We would still be in the Stone Age if science did not build on the learnings of past generations and peers.

Don't get me wrong – a healthy scepticism is a good thing. It is also vitally important in order for science to function. We need people who doubt, but also who have the knowledge, skills and training, to disprove what was previously considered 'the best available science at the time'. Charles Darwin doubted Lord Kelvin's science. Ironically, Darwin's son, an astronomer, supported Kelvin's approximations and disagreed with his uncle.

That was only 130 years



ago. Think about it. 130 years ago, scientists were closer to the Biblical chronological age of the Earth (6,000 years old), than they were to today's estimations. The Biblical chronological age comes from the Old Testament, combining the Bible's genealogical records with the Genesis 1 account of creation. Genesis, it is estimated, was written sometime between – best estimates – 1440 BC and 1290 BC. That is nearly 3,500 years ago.

“Most understand the Genesis' chronology of creation and the Bible's genealogy to be a narrative”

With that in mind, the authors of the Book should be forgiven for getting their estimates of the age of the Earth so wrong. Lord Kelvin was very wrong 200 years ago. 3,300 years before that, the Bible got its chronology wrong if it is to be taken literally.

Kelvin, however, does not get the same criticism as the authors of Genesis do for some reason, despite having 3,300 more years of learning and science to draw on.

That is, of course, if you consider the Bible to be a literal chronology. Some people do. But most do not. Most

understand the Genesis' chronology of creation and the Bible's genealogy to be a narrative.

Figurative

Critics claim that Christians say the Bible is the Word of God, and God cannot lie – ergo, the Bible has to be taken literally. If it is taken literally, then it is at odds with science. Therefore, QED, it is a lie. Therefore, QED, it is not the word of God. Therefore, your God cannot exist.

The Genesis creation narrative – the 6 days of creation – and the Biblical genealogy are the two major points of scientific refutation of the Bible being the Word of God. That assumption of course is that whoever wrote Genesis was writing a verbatim transcript of God's word.

But it isn't claimed that the Bible is a transcript. *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* says that “Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit”. It is inspired writing.

The Catechism says a bit more: “According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to

the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

We don't have to take the creation chronology literally. It can be read as allegorical – understanding that what is written has a deeper, further meaning just as a parable may have; or anagogical – viewing the events in terms of their eternal significance.

“Put yourself in the shoes of someone 3,500 years ago when farming was in its infancy, people were still in the Bronze Age and almost universally illiterate”

From this perspective, considering Genesis was written 3,500 years ago, long before the authors had any means of knowing or even hinting at the sequence of events that science now proposes about the beginning of time, the formation of the universe, the creation of earth, dinosaurs, evolution of birds, fish and animals to the arrival of humans, it should be a source of wonder that the Biblical sequencing bears some resemblance to what science now considers to be reality.

This isn't fanciful. Put yourself in the shoes of someone

3,500 years ago when farming was in its infancy, people were still in the Bronze Age and almost universally illiterate: If the Genesis creation narrative is a pure fiction, how did its authors come up with something that is not that far from what science has only recently started putting together at that time in history?

Did they have vivid imaginations that fortuitously ended up in the most famous book in the history of the world which just happened to align reasonably well with what science discovered almost three and a half millennia later?

Are the odds of that type of serendipity less than the odds of there being a Creator?

Overlap

Science says that, first, we have the Big Bang. Genesis says: In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—and the earth was without form or shape.

Then there is some confusion: God said let there be light: but we are not sure what light this means. Then He created the water and the sea. Then there was vegetation. But then the sun and the moon came after to separate the light from the darkness. This sequencing is hard to reconcile and various theories abound that attempt to explain how it aligns with a scientific understanding. Who knows, perhaps the sci-

ence will evolve to align more closely in future?

The most interesting piece is that long, long, long, before Darwin roamed the earth, Genesis understood that sea creatures and birds came before the “tame animals and crawling things and every kind of wild animal”. Genesis also knew that these all came before the human being, who then held “dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals”.

This is pretty much exactly what happened. Life began in the sea. The earliest fossils of life, single-celled bacteria, are found in ancient rocks deposited in the oceans 3.5 billion years ago. By 1.2 billion years ago, the first complex multi-cellular life had evolved. The oldest evidence of full animal life in the oceans comes from about 635 million years ago.

How did humans 1500 years BC know that they came to be after the fish, the birds and the animals? What was their science? How did an almost illiterate civilisation come to understand the sequence of the universe that pretty much aligns with modern science?

“This sequencing, its parallels with a modern scientific understanding, ought to be a source of wonder and a source of questioning”

How the authors come up with this understanding 3,500 years ago, 3,300 years before the study of fossils, before radiometric dating and all the other modern methods we now have for attempting to understand the history of the world, should be a question for science to strive to answer.

For a believer or a non-believer, this sequencing, its parallels with a modern scientific understanding, ought to be a source of wonder and a source of questioning. Rather than a literal interpretation of Genesis being a reason to dismiss the faith, and the Bible, as the Word of God, it ought to drive the question: if God didn't inspire the authors how were they so far ahead of their time?

From this perspective, the onus ought to be on science to explain Genesis rather than Genesis to explain itself.

St Juan Diego and The Virgin of Guadalupe's miracle



Renata Steffens

Like the Shroud of Turin, the sacred object for The Virgin of Guadalupe is a piece of fabric, with an image imprint believed to be miraculous. The Patron of the Americas and Queen of Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe presented herself as the Mother of God on a Mexican hill in the 16th Century.

Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin was an Aztec indigenous, with a conflicting background. Some historians believe he was just a humble peasant, while others contend there is evidence he was an Aztec prince. It is believed he saw the Virgin four times, twice on December 9, again on December 10 and a last time on December 12.

When Juan Diego was about 50 years of age, he and his wife were amongst the first Mexican indigenous to accept baptism and convert to Christianity.

In 1531, he was on his way to Mass when he saw a glowing figure on Tepeyac Hill, on the borders of what is today Mexico City. During the first apparition, Our Lady talked to him in his native language and told him to ask the bishop to build a shrine to her on that hill.

The story says that Juan Diego went to Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico, and told him what he saw, but the bishop was very hesitant to believe and requested time to consider the matter.

Apparition

The second apparition happened on Juan Diego's way home on that same day. He apologised to the Virgin and asked her to send a more honoured messenger. The Virgin told him to go back to the bishop.

On December 10, Juan Diego had visited the bishop again, who asked for proof before he would approve the construction of a church. On his way home, he saw Our Lady, told her what happened and she said the next day he should go back to the bishop and she would provide proof.

He missed the appointment on the next day, as he was taking care of

his ill uncle. On December 12, when Juan Diego was looking for a priest to administer last rites to his uncle, he saw the Virgin again. This time, she told him to gather roses and take them to the bishop as proof. She also mentioned his uncle would be cured of his illness.

Even though it was winter and no flowers should be in bloom, Juan Diego found many roses on the hill, which he collected on his tilma (a simple cloak) as proof for the bishop.

When he met with the bishop for the third time, he opened his tilma and let the roses fall to the floor. The image of Mary was imprinted on the inside of the tilma. Having his proof, the bishop ordered a church to be built on the hill and Juan Diego went back to his home, where he found his uncle cured.

After the construction of the church, Juan Diego moved to a hut nearby and spent the rest of his life taking care of the pilgrims who came to the shrine. When he died, his body was buried in the church.

“The existence of Juan Diego and the authenticity of the Virgin of Guadalupe were questioned many times throughout the years”

On the site of that first church, built in the 16th Century, a new one was constructed. This second church is known as the Old Basilica, it was given the status of a basilica by Pope Pius X in 1904. The Old Basilica was finished in 1709, but became dangerous when its foundations started to sink. A New Basilica was built close by and the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on Juan Diego's tilma is kept in it.

The existence of Juan Diego and the authenticity of the Virgin of Guadalupe were questioned many times throughout the years. Even the former abbot of the Basilica of Guadalupe, Fr William Schulenburg, denied the historicity of Juan Diego, and argued it would be ridiculous to canonise a saint who never existed.

Similar statements were made in various occasions before, for example, Spanish academic Juan Bautista Muñoz, said on April 18, 1794 the Guadalupe event lacked historical basis.

Opposing those doubtful state-



The Virgin of Guadalupe

ments, in 1754, Pope Benedict XIV granted the Virgin of Guadalupe a Feast for December 12. On the same year, a Papal Bull declared the Virgin of Guadalupe as patroness and protector of New Spain, and in 1810 she became the symbol of Mexican independence when patriot priest Fr Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla raised her picture on his banner.

Expert

Prof. Fr Fidel Gonzalez Fernandez, who is a recognised expert in his field, was named president of a Vatican Commission aiming to prove the existence of Juan Diego and the events in Guadalupe. Prof. Fernandez was leading a group of 30 researchers from multiple nationalities.

During their research, they found 27 Guadalupe Indigenous

manuscripts of documents and testimonies, and eight of mixed Spanish-Indigenous origin.

“Microscopic analysis show no visible brush strokes, but revealed the existence of a reflection on the Virgin's eye”

The main argument of those who oppose the existence of Juan Diego and consequently the visit of the Virgin is the lack of documents dating from the 20 years following the Guadalupe apparition. However, that could be the result of documents being destroyed or lost, and not necessarily their inexistence.

The Vatican accepts the historicity

of Juan Diego and his sanctity. Pope John Paul II, was the responsible for the canonisation of St Juan Diego on July 31, 2002. He had beatified the new saint on May 6, 1990.

To this date, the miracle of St Juan Diego's tilma cannot be explained by science. The cloak was made with a fabric composed by threads of maguey cactus, which normally should disintegrate in 20-60 years. However, the tilma is still preserved with the virgin image on it almost 500 years later.

Another inexplicable fact about the image on the tilma relates to its pigments, as they do not match any known colouring. Microscopic analysis show no visible brush strokes, but revealed the existence of a reflection on the Virgin's eye, so small it would be impossible to paint by hand. Some believe that reflection of an old man is St Juan Diego.

“To this date, the miracle of St Juan Diego's tilma cannot be explained by science. The cloak was made with a fabric composed by threads of maguey cactus, which normally should disintegrate in 20-60 years”

‘Religious Conversations’: God & the man in the sky



Eoin McCormack

Have you ever found yourself in the often-awkward position in work or in another social setting where you are somehow elected the spokesperson for all things Catholic? This column over the next several weeks is taking a look at how we can be prepared for those uncomfortable conversations so many Catholics find themselves in today.

Last week, we explored the philosophical assumptions underlying much of the religious debate in modern Ireland. As more Catholics distance themselves from the Church, research shows that nearly all of them end up in the ‘no-religion’ category. This suggests that, while surface-level discussions about Catholicism often focus on scandals or contentious issues, there is a much more profound philosophical development present - religious relativism. Catholicism is not merely held in contempt for the scandals, but rather, traditional religious practice is increasingly irrelevant in any sense. To read last week’s column be sure to visit www.irishcatholic.com.

This week we are continuing a similar line of enquiry by looking at one of the most prevalent underlying issues when it comes to religion in contemporary culture, and that is the issue of God.

Relativism

One of the most misunderstood realities of Church teaching that makes modern-secular people baulk, is in fact the oldest and most simple Church teaching there is - belief in God. While much of the secular media might reference what it deems to be controversial issues such as women priests or the Church’s stance on homosexuality and so on, when it comes down to it, the evidence suggests that the biggest difficulty people have with Church teaching is in fact its most fundamental and the first line of our creed: I believe in God.

Atheist-rationalist philosophies of the enlightenment period have become



Creation of sun, moon, and planets within the Sistine Chapel ceiling

remarkably commonplace in western culture which now promotes a secular relativism - there is no truth, there is no God, religion therefore is irrational and irrelevant. Renowned author on these issues Charles Taylor, in his book *A Secular Age*, simply comments: “Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.”

Influencers

While the average person may not be able to fully articulate their philosophical position on the existence of God, you can be sure that speaking through them are an array of ‘influencers’ from the atheist movement who have slowly but surely impacted contemporary cultural presuppositions. Karl Marx for example, described religion as an “opium of the masses” in 1843, Nietzsche then declared “God is dead” in 1882, and by 1952, Bertrand Russell characterised belief in God as irrational as believing that there is a “China teapot revolving about the sun.”

These influences, amongst many others, have so popularised the degrading of religious belief to the extent that many people are not even aware that there may be any good reasons for believing in God. Factors like these paved the way by 2008 for Irish author Mala-

chi O’Doherty to reflect in his book *Empty Pulpits - Ireland’s Retreat from religion*, that we (the Irish) “have smartened up and become proud rationalists who agree that all devotion and ritual subservience was a bit like a belief in Santa Claus that went on too long.”

Defining terms

So how can we respond to similar accusations that have become so commonplace amongst our friends and colleagues in the culture?

By all accounts as Catholics, the first thing we can do if engaged in a conversation about God is to affirm the secularist when he/she demands that there is no ‘man in the sky’. This, I have found, so surprises your questioner that they are puzzled enough to ask you: “But I thought you were religious? Isn’t that what Christians believe?”

This is your prime moment to reveal something so basic yet so profound, about who the Church teaches God is. Not a ‘man in the sky’ that the atheists so easily characterise, not a ‘being’ of any kind, not even a ‘supreme being’ in fact, but rather: “God is the fullness of Being” (CCC 213), for anything less would be a mere creature, fiction, or fantasy.

From the very beginnings of scripture, God reveals exactly

who he is. Not a ‘super being’ like the pagan gods, but rather the creator from which all else comes. Or as the catechism describes, the one who “transcends the world and history” (CCC 212). God in other words, is the immaterial creator of all things, outside of space and time, the very grounding and source of all things.

“No pope, saint, or theologian worth their salt has ever taught God to be a ‘man in the sky’”

This explanation might sound abstract at first, but it is the most fundamental point to even begin to talk about God. Translated to English, ‘Yahweh’ as revealed to Moses in the burning bush, means ‘I am who I am’ - God is not a being in any sense but rather the verb ‘to be’. Explaining this distinction in your ‘religious conversion’ at the watercooler at work or over a coffee with a friend, may just be the first time they’ve ever encountered a challenge to the simplistic caricature of God that has come from much of the atheist movement. No pope, saint, or theologian

worth their salt has ever taught God to be a ‘man in the sky’.

Reasons

Once you have correctly defined the ‘subject’ of God, the next important step in this conversation might be to offer your friend/colleague some compelling reasons for why you believe. As already discussed, research is demonstrating that more and more people don’t believe that are any good reasons for believing in God in any instance, influencing them to abandon religion entirely. Proposing some simple and rational reasons therefore, may just bring the other person to reconsider their initial misconceptions.

In this context, highly acclaimed Christian apologist William Lane Craig consistently reminds his audiences that even ‘listing’ 4 or 5 reasons you have for believing in God can go a long way in changing minds. Conversations which might begin throw away remarks like “God is a childish conception, there are no good reasons to believe in that”, could be quickly turned around if you are prepared to say, “Do people really think that? Gosh, I can think of at least 5 good reasons for the existence of God.”

I can almost guarantee you that the specificity of your response will probe your inquisitor to explain what on earth you are talking about.

So, what ‘reasons to believe’ might you list in a simple conversation that could really make someone reconsider their views?

This list of course is not certainly exhaustive and something that you should consider deeper in your own considerations, but if you were to have a simple ‘list’ of reasons to hand it might look something like this:

1. Personal testimony: Revealing the authentic reasons for faith from your own experiences may be the most compelling place to start. Consider where have you felt God’s presence in your own life?

2. The Resurrection of Jesus: While this might sound an odd thing to bring into a discussion about the existence of God, ask your proponent what seems more rational; that all the appearances of the risen Christ were ‘made-up’ or that the resurrection really happened, and the apostles weren’t willing to go through torture and death for the sake of a lie?

3. Philosophy 101 - ‘The First Mover’: All things that exist have a cause, the universe exists, therefore the universe

has a cause. This ‘cause’ we call God.

4. Wonder at creation or ‘The complexity of life’: For life to exist in all its complexity and beauty it seems ludicrous to think it was an accident. Consider the specificity needed in the gravitational pull for the earth not to have either imploded or exploded, but yet it is exactly as it needs to be to allow life to flourish. It seems therefore to point to a ‘designer’.

“Or if there is no objectivity, can any moral action be simply understood as ‘living your own truth?’”

5. Truth & ‘Objective Morality’: You will be hard pressed to find someone who won’t agree that some moral actions are objectively wrong. Where does this moral objectivity come from? Or if there is no objectivity, can any moral action be simply understood as ‘living your own truth’?

Expectations

To be clear, for the most part you are not going to ‘win’ an argument and have someone fall on their knees to worship God. Faith is a gift only God can give after all. As Pope St John Paul II once said: “The Church imposes nothing; she only proposes, she proposes like a lover to the beloved.” To ‘propose’ the faith however, we need to know how. In having a reasonable, well thought through explanation for your faith, you may just be tilling the soil for the Holy Spirit to do the rest.

As William Lane Craig consistently says, even just ‘listing’ your reasons is often enough to make someone at least take you seriously and perhaps at best reconsider their initial biases. For the most part, people haven’t formally philosophised like the enlightenment philosophical atheists as to why they don’t believe in God, they have in fact just ‘picked-up’ caricatures and misconceptions in the culture and assume them to be true. Your simple ‘list of reasons to believe’ may just be the first time they have ever encountered a true, authentic explanation for God.

Next week’s column is taking a look at conversations we have about Mass. How can we explain its meaning and contest claims that is boring or irrelevant?

“People haven’t formally philosophised like the enlightenment philosophical atheists as to why they don’t believe in God, they have in fact just ‘picked-up’ caricatures and misconceptions in the culture and assume them to be true”

Letters

Letter of the week

A commitment to justice and human dignity

Dear Editor, The recent report from the Vienna-based Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe) highlights a deeply concerning rise in anti-Christian violence across the continent [The Irish Catholic – August 29, 2024]. This increase in hate crimes, particularly against Christian converts from Islam, underscores a critical issue that is often overlooked or misunderstood.

In Ireland, we are rightly preoccupied with serious issues such as homelessness, housing shortages, and the challenges within our healthcare

system. These concerns dominate our public discourse and rightly so but we can't become indifferent to the plight of Christians facing persecution both at home and abroad.

The OIDAC Europe report reveals a troubling trend that is not confined to far-off lands but is happening in our neighbouring countries. These incidents are not isolated but are part of a broader pattern of rising intolerance that threatens religious freedom—a fundamental human right.

In Ireland, where religious persecution might seem a distant concern, it is crucial that we recognise the seri-

ousness of this issue. Our society must be vigilant in defending the rights of all religious communities, including those who are vulnerable due to their faith. The suffering of persecuted Christians deserves our attention and action, just as much as the social and economic challenges we face domestically.

Addressing religious persecution is not just a matter of compassion but a commitment to justice and human dignity.

*Yours etc.,
Rob Duggan
Dublin 3*

The true purpose of relics

Dear Editor, The upcoming pilgrimage of St Bernadette's relics to Ireland is a momentous occasion, of course. This visit offers a profound opportunity for spiritual renewal across the country [The Irish Catholic – August 29, 2024]. However, it also prompts us to reflect on the role of relics.

St Bernadette, with her extraordinary life of faith and humility, continues to inspire worldwide. The presence of her relics in Ireland allows us to connect with her story and the miraculous events at Lourdes. For many, this pilgrimage will be a source of hope and healing, especially for those unable to journey to Lourdes themselves. The carefully planned liturgies and Masses will undoubtedly be spiritually enriching, drawing us closer to the saint and her message.

However, we must also consider whether the veneration of relics alone can sustain our faith in an increasingly secular society. Relics are powerful symbols that connect us to the sacred, but they are not ends in themselves. The true purpose of relics is to inspire us to live out our faith more fully in our daily lives. They remind us of the holiness we are all called to, encouraging us to seek God's grace in every aspect of our existence.



As we welcome St Bernadette's relics, we should see this pilgrimage not just as a chance for veneration, but as a call to action. It is an opportunity to reinvigorate our faith communities, to deepen our commitment to prayer, and to live the Gospel more authentically. In a time when many struggle with belief, the relics can serve as a catalyst for a deeper, more personal encounter with Christ.

While the veneration of relics like those of St Bernadette is invaluable, it is our response to their message that will truly sustain the Faith in Ireland.

*Yours etc.,
Katie Brady
Tallaght, Dublin 24*

The significant challenges that still remain

Dear Editor, I liked the idea of the 'Year for Vocation to the Diocesan Priesthood', and after it stopping I would say, in my opinion, it sent the right message.

Increasing the visibility of the priesthood is important in breaking down misconceptions and highlighting the joys and challenges of this vocation. I was keen to watch the stories of current priests, shared during the year. They offered a realistic view of what it means to serve God and the community.

Despite these successes, we must acknowledge the significant challenges that still remain. Vocations are still scarce across these isles, and the secularisation of society poses an ongoing threat to religious life. Young people today are bombarded with messages that often contradict the values of faith, making it difficult for them to hear and respond to God's call. A good step, much more to do.

*Yours etc.,
Niamh Cleary
London, England*

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.

Amnesty International moving from its original purpose

The announcement last week that Amnesty International Ireland is planning to lay off the majority of its staff due to encountering a severe financial crisis is sad news for the individuals concerned.

Amnesty International is a celebrated international organisation that built its reputation on being a defender of human rights, supporting and advocating for the persecuted, and in many cases, putting lives on the line in some of the most difficult places in the world under some of the most authoritarian regimes.

But in recent years, Amnesty has changed. It has moved its focus from standing up for the persecuted to engaging heavily in the culture wars. In Ireland, Amnesty has prioritised engaging in the drive for abortion in Ireland, it has dedicated significant time and energy for the decriminalisation of prostitution, it involved itself in the same-sex marriage referendum, and in taking a partisan stance on the immigration discussion and supporting the government's proposed hate speech legislation.

As recently as June this year, Amnesty launched a new campaign urging the government to liberalise Ireland's 'restrictive' abortion regime and 'gestational limits' in parallel with a global campaign on abortion rights.

A look at Amnesty's financial statements from recent years indicate that it has carried an operating surplus but also significant loan debt to be repaid to its parent organisation Amnesty International which seems to be driving the cost saving exercises.

However, the issue of mission creep is one that affects many NGOs. There is a tendency to lump all charities – or NGOs – together under one umbrella when criticising the growth and burgeoning influence that many of these organisations have on policy. There is a lot of nuance under that umbrella, as schools, churches, amongst other have charitable status under the law.

However, for organisations like Amnesty, and many large scale humanitarian and development organisations to move from their original purpose, and the purpose that they sell to their fundraisers – feeding the poor, saving lives, fighting poverty – to engaging in policy, advocacy, systems and belief change.

Often, the policy and advo-

cacy work is at odds with the predominant culture of the countries these NGOs are working, being significantly more religious than where these organisations are headquartered. Often, under the guise of 'social norm' change, NGOs will seek to use their financial clout to change legislation in countries to be more aligned with the progressive policies that are in place in their own countries. Just as Amnesty in Ireland was able to use funding from abroad to influence the abortion debate in Ireland, many NGOs bring money from Ireland to promote cultural and social change in poorer countries.

While fundraising on their historical reputation for fighting famine, wars and natural disasters, funds are then spent on issues that many of their supporters would have no idea about. Some organisations seek to introduce comprehensive sexuality education into the curriculums in conservative countries, often undermining religious and cultural traditions, and family values.

There is a broad and fuzzy line that separates what are the appropriate issues for international NGOs who raise funds and are headquartered in the progressive global north to be addressing in faraway poorer countries and what they should not be doing. Increasingly secular, even faith-based organisations, are unfriendly to the religious and conservative beliefs of the countries they work in and seek to undermine them.

It may be clear that working to stop female genital mutilation is a worthy moral cause, but the line is less clear when NGOs seek to change the attitudes and beliefs – and the laws – around the permanency of marriage, gender roles, abortion, school curriculums, religious teaching and the likes.

Amnesty moved far from its original purpose yet continued to raise funds based on its legacy as a genuine human rights defender.

Increasingly staffed with people who desire to change the world through policy papers from behind a computer rather than people with a missionary zeal or vocation to do corporal works of mercy, international NGOs obsess internally about 'decolonising' their organisations, while seeking to export belief systems from the global north to the poorer south.



Leave a Legacy of Hope

Pupils in Makululu, Zambia, receiving fruit trees for planting during Laudato Si' week.



Refugees studying Sustainable Agriculture at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya.



Thank you

For many people, writing their Will gives peace of mind and allows them to care for those they love when they are gone from this world.

After you've taken care of your family, friends, and loved ones, would you consider including a gift to support the work of the Salesians of Don Bosco?

Gifts in Wills, both large and small, have been a hugely important source of support for Salesian work over the years. They have enabled us to work directly with youth in need in Ireland and internationally, as well as being able to support the training of young men in their callings as members of the Salesian Congregation.

Every day, Salesians serve thousands of vulnerable and marginalised young people around the world, including those who have been trafficked and those living on the streets. Salesian work occurs in over 130 countries worldwide, in parishes, schools, universities, clinics, refugee camps, and youth centres. Salesians carry out their work as part of the global mission of the Catholic Church and in the spirit of our founder Don Bosco. They are immersed in the communities which they serve, and so are ideally placed to respond to the needs around them. In supporting the work of the Salesians of

Don Bosco, you can be assured that your gift will bring hope and make a real difference.

As the Salesian province in Ireland, we work through our development/mis- sion office known as Salesian Missions Ireland/Don Bosco Aid. **By naming Salesian Missions Ireland/Don Bosco Aid in your Will, you can help to build a brighter future for those in need, and we will ensure that your legacy gift is allocated in line with your instructions.**

Should you make the very generous decision to do so, your solicitor will guide you through the process, using the information below.

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For more information, feel free to contact us: DBA Office, Salesian Provincial House, 45 St Teresa's Road, Crumlin, Dublin D12 XK52, or (01) 465 0717 / dba@salesiansireland.ie. You can also find out more about our work at www.salesiansireland.ie.

41 | Your Faith



The light and beauty of the heavenly presence

Lourdes has always been a place of prayer and healing in my family, especially during times of suffering and illness. My journey with Lourdes began in childhood, inspired by books and the 1943 film *The Song of Bernadette*, which my parents brought back after a diocesan pilgrimage to this Marian shrine. I was captivated by the life and example of St Bernadette, her simplicity, her humility and her single-hearted



St Bernadette gives hope to young people facing the challenge of discerning their future, says Fr Barry White

devotion to God. In September 2013, as a seminarian, while on the annual pilgrimage with the Diocese of Meath, I prayed at the

grotto at Lourdes for the grace to discern my call to priesthood. That prayer was answered on July 17, 2022, when I was ordained a

priest. A year later, in July 2023, I returned to Lourdes on a pilgrimage of thanksgiving, offering Masses in gratitude for the gift of priesthood. For many young people, either in secondary school or college, on diocesan pilgrimages from Ireland, Lourdes offers them the opportunity to assist the sick and disabled along with spending time in prayer at the Grotto or participate in liturgies.

St Bernadette Soubirous, born in 1844, in Boly Mill, Lourdes,

exemplifies humility, faith, and perseverance. Despite her impoverished background, Bernadette's spiritual experiences profoundly transformed Lourdes and the Catholic world. Her family struggled financially, and by 1856, they were forced to live in a former prison, the 'cachot'. Bernadette's health was poor. Ahe contracted plague in 1855, suffered from severe asthma, and later tuberculosis, which claimed her life at 35. Yet, even in these



difficult moments, Bernadette's faith grew stronger. On 1858, while gathering firewood near the Grotto of Massabielle, she saw the first of 18 apparitions of the Virgin Mary, whom she described as "a lady dressed in white, wearing a white dress, a white veil, a blue girdle, and a yellow rose on each foot." Despite scepticism and interrogation, Bernadette said the lady revealed herself as "I am the Immaculate Conception."

“To obey is to love! To suffer in silence for Christ is joy! To love sincerely is to give everything, even grief!”

As Lourdes began to develop as a place of pilgrimage, Bernadette chose to retreat into a life of contemplation, work, and prayer at the convent of Nevers. Far from the crowds and the growing fame of Lourdes, Bernadette dedicated herself to God, living a hidden

“A quiet encounter with Bernadette and the Virgin Mary can change a person's life... May the Virgin Mary and St Bernadette help you to live as children of light”

life of humility and service with the Sisters of Charity. She passed away on April 16, 1879, at 3pm, summarising her life and mission with the words, "To obey is to love! To suffer in silence for Christ is joy! To love sincerely is to give everything, even grief!" Pope Pius XI canonised Bernadette on December 8, 1933, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

In today's digital age, where the impact of images and social media can often distract from deeper spiritual values, St Bernadette's life reminds young people of the beauty and power of a life of humility and contemplation. She was not distracted by the glittering lights of this world but instead experienced the light and beauty of a heavenly presence that transformed her life and continues to inspire millions.

Challenge

St Bernadette gives hope to young people facing the challenge of discerning their future, the challenge of financial stability, seeking a home, or bearing illness. Her story teaches that with faith, humility, and perseverance, even the most difficult circumstances can lead us towards God. Her

childlike faith and acceptance of suffering is a great example for young people to follow.

Last year, at World Youth Day, Pope Francis urged the young people in Parque Tejo, Lisbon, to "shine, listen, and be unafraid", drawing inspiration from the Transfiguration of Jesus. He emphasised that, like Jesus' face that "shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2), young people should let Jesus' light illuminate their lives and love with the same conviction (6 August 2023). He has encouraged young people to embody Jesus' love and live courageously, trusting in God's plan for their future, "Make the most of these years of your youth... take risks, dream freely, and live passionately" (*Christus Vivit*, 143). This message aligns with the example of St Bernadette, who responded to God's call despite her youth and frailty.

“The torchlight procession expresses the mystery of prayer in a form that our eyes of flesh can grasp”

Returning to my own experience, as a 22-year-old seminarian praying for guidance and courage to follow God's path, I stood at the grotto where St Bernadette encountered Our Lady. This sacred place reminded me of how Bernadette's frailty and poverty were transformed by the light of Heaven, revealing

the beauty of a holy life. I prayed for her guidance in saying 'yes' to God's plan for me. St Bernadette inspires young people, showing the potential for a life filled with light and grace.

Experiences

The arrival of St Bernadette's relics to Ireland will feature events echoing Lourdes' experiences. For example, the candlelight procession is inspired by St Bernadette who carried a candle during the apparitions. Our Lady called for processions and pilgrimages at Lourdes. A key event during the visit of the relics is the candlelight procession with the statue of Our Lady, which mirrors the nightly processions in Lourdes. Pope Benedict XVI, on his visit to Lourdes, reflected on the candle procession, "The torchlight procession expresses the mystery of prayer in a form that our eyes of flesh can grasp: in the communion of the Church, which unites the elect in Heaven with pilgrims on Earth, the light of dialogue between man and his Lord blazes forth and a luminous path opens up in human history, even in its darkest moments." There will also be a ritual of water which symbolises the healing waters at Lourdes and the invitation of Our Lady during the ninth apparition on February 25, 1858, to wash in the spring at the grotto. Other devotions during the visit of the relics will be the recitation of the Rosary, meditations, Stations of the Cross and Eucharistic Adoration. These practices can connect people to the experience and spirituality of St Bernadette and Lourdes. As the relics of St Bernadette journey through Ireland, people, especially youth, can develop a spiritual companionship with this young French saint and be encouraged by her

intercessory support and example.

“This tour of the relics is not just about their veneration but also about inspiring a deeper connection to the spirituality St Bernadette brought to the world”

The tour of the relics of St Bernadette around Ireland will run from September 4 to November 5, a chance for parishes, dioceses, and religious communities to experience the spirit of Lourdes. This visit aims to replicate the deep devotion felt at Lourdes and to invite participation in prayer, penance, and healing. The presence of the relics reminds us of the grace Lourdes represents, bringing faith, hope and love to Ireland. This tour of the relics is not just about their veneration but also about inspiring a deeper connection to the spirituality St Bernadette brought to the world.

Venerating these relics reminds us to follow her example of simplicity, humility, and faith, letting Christ's light shine through us. As young people prepare for the Jubilee of Youth in Rome in 2025, they can seek St Bernadette's spiritual companionship. As Pope Benedict XVI said, "A quiet encounter with Bernadette and the Virgin Mary can change a person's life... May the Virgin Mary and St Bernadette help you to live as children of light."

i Fr Barry White, Curate at the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King, Mullingar.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



A little less Bob and a lot more Hope!

Prequels and sequels have a mixed history. I prefer the latter, because if I'm into a story I like to see it continued rather than reversed.

Rings of Power (**Amazon Prime, Wednesday**), a Lord of the Rings prequel of sorts, is back for a second series, with the first three episodes 'dropped' already. I nodded off during the first two episodes, once when I was tired and once when I wasn't. It's all a bit turgid and ponderous with great big wads of awkward but occasionally poetic dialogue. It lacks a lighter touch, a bit of whimsy, though you get just a little of that with the Dwarves and the Harfoots (Hobbit-like individuals with an inexplicable Irish accent). The names of the characters are confusing if you're not thoroughly immersed in the Tolkien mythologies, while the interweaving plots do meander somewhat. On the plus side, the special effects are impressive and it improves matters to watch it on a big screen with big sound.

You might find some religious undertones – e.g. there's a rather bloody crowning of thorns type scene, followed by a resurrection of sorts with someone disappearing from within their outfit. Some characters look like Jesus, or at least like the image of Jesus we are conditioned to expect



Stella O'Malley

from classical art and other films and TV dramas. In one scene an alleged messenger of God makes a rather dramatic appearance that certainly evokes iconic religious imagery.

Theme-wise, there's the familiar struggle between good and evil, most interesting when it's within some of

the characters. Sometimes characters do the wrong thing while trying in good faith to do what's right. There's an interesting discussion about making choices for good over evil, a choice we're told we must make every day. A character is encouraged to leave behind his evil ways and follow the path of good.

There's a topical discussion on what attitude one should have towards good art if the artist was immoral. I'll keep watching as the show is tolerable – maybe there are some stand-out episodes to come.

I wasn't expecting to find some religiously themed drama in Reeling in the Years (**RTÉ One, Thursday**), which highlighted 1980, but there was a bit – Dermot Morgan being Father Trendy (on The Live Mike) before the Father Ted days. Fr Trendy was a gentler, more innocent, character and his metaphor laden sermons were always funny. In this clip he weaponised comedians for the cause – urged us to be a little less Morecombe and a lot more Wise, to have a little less Brendan (ha!) and a lot more Grace, not to sit on our Laurels but to be more Hardy in our religion, and to have a little less Bob and a lot more Hope!

But there were many serious things going on in 1980 – e.g. the murder of Archbishop Romero in El Salvador and the subsequent carnage at his funeral. Bishop Eamonn Casey, back in the news recently, gave a first-hand account of the panic after an explosion and shooting. President Reagan was elected and we were reminded of a better time in US politics. This was the year of the H-Blocks and the hunger strikes – we were told that this ended on the

PICK OF THE WEEK

POPE FRANCIS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

EWTV Saturday September 7, 8am

Pope Francis visits the children of street ministry, from Caritas Technical Secondary School in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND

Channel 4 Monday September 9, 7.20pm

The Angry Family: The whole family meet the school counsellor and Fr Hubley to uncover what – and who – is to blame for the constant bickering in the Barrone family. (S6 Ep1)

LIVE: TRUMP V HARRIS - US PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Channel 4 Tuesday (night) September 10, 1.30am

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris go head-to-head for the first time as the battle to become president reaches a pivotal point.

53rd day after the intervention of Catholic clergy. Then 3 UDR men were blown up by an IRA landmine, bringing the Troubles death toll to 2,000. It's good to be reminded of the past like this, especially if we can learn lessons.

And finally, some snippets – I watched some of the Kamala Harris interview on CNN. Compared to Donald Trump she was articulate and intelligent, engaging but also irritating. Some answers were too vague and, I'd say, carefully crafted to avoid causing offence. But what sinks her for me is her gung-ho attitude to 'reproductive rights' (euphemism for abortion), undermining her talk of welcoming diverse opinions – no

way she's a moderate Democrat on this one.

On Free Speech Nation (**GB News, Sunday**) Irish psychotherapist Stella O'Malley of Genspect made lots of sense on the transgender issue – e.g. why medicalise gender dysphoria before less invasive approaches are tried? The young may fall for the gender confusion, but, the doctors shouldn't.

On Apocalypse Maybe (**Al Jazeera, Saturday**) there was a fascinating discussion on doomsday cults and their ill effects, but the sting in the tail was how some extreme strands in current climate activism were following a similar path – worrying.

Film

Aubrey Malone



Art attacks for jailbirds in correctional facility

A cavalcade of beautiful losers forms a theatre group behind bars in New York in *Sing Sing* (15). It's a feelgood that, Divine G (Colman Domingo) informs us in the introduction, deals with the 'transformative' power of art.

Is it a good idea for an actor to praise a film before you see it? Is that not telling you what to think of it? And are these people not 'transformed' already?

Films about the rehabilitation of prison inmates work better when there's a backstory showing them at the time when they committed the crimes they've been incarcerated for.

The details of such crimes are transmitted to us off-screen here. The affectionate cast of characters seem such benevolent souls, it's hard to see them doing anything worse than 'killing a fly on a holy picture'.

I didn't share the euphoria of most reviewers about this, finding it to be a little too sweet, a little too fond of itself.

It's an ensemble piece that plays out like 'Stanislavski behind bars'. Based on a true story, it has Domingo both running and acting in a Rehabilitation Through Theatre programme with his spirited colleagues. They traverse history in an eclectic melange of times and themes.



Sing Sing (2023)

A Lee Strasberg-style director puts them through their paces, not sparing their blushes when it comes to home truths regarding their thespian chops. Or lack of same.

I felt he was off kilter some-

times. He rails against one of them, 'Divine Eye', (Clarence Maclin) for his subdued rendering of the 'To be or not to Be' soliloquy from Hamlet, telling him to 'go large'. But Hamlet was an introvert. It was better the original way.

Maclin is the loose cannon of the group. Things would have been more effective if he stayed like that.

Sing Sing (get the pun?) isn't so much about prison life as about a set of people who discover the fact that acting out characters' lives makes them feel better about their own ones.

Fair enough. But we see very little of the actual prison. What we do see doesn't look like any prison I've ever seen. At times it looks more like a holiday camp.

Domingo has a meltdown at one stage of the rehearsals. This is the most realistic scene in the film. He's subsequently called upon to apologise for it. Why? He's just come through a grilling interview

by an aggressive parole officer which seems to threaten his chances of an early release.

When you're doing time, especially 'hard' time, is it natural to involve yourself year after year in the predicaments of fictional people?

Some of the inmates in the film don't look like inmates. They look like professional actors. Many of them indeed are – playing themselves.

The relationship between Domingo and Maclin is captured well. The last few scenes between them are particularly evocative. I was relieved to be spared the 'climactic performance' trope the film seemed to be heading towards.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Song and dance, but with an unforgettable Irish air

The Companion to Irish Traditional Music, edited by Fintan Valley (Cork University Press, €69.00 / £65.00 / \$75.00)

J. Anthony Gaughan

This is a magisterial study of Irish Traditional Music. At the outset the author defines this genre of music. For him it is a body of melody, song and dance and associated activities that comes from the period before recorded and broadcast music. It has distinct features which are uniquely of Ireland but it has borrowed forms and practices from our neighbouring island as well as from Europe. In turn it has contributed to music in North America and Australia. It has not been evenly spread throughout the country, as it depended on available talent and social conditions. Different styles developed around the talents of exceptional performers.

Traditional music has been intimately associated with the rural poor and the politically downtrodden in the past and it was the major cultural resource for this greater part of the Irish population.

Treasures

It still treasures this association. However, owing to rural migration and upward social mobility into all class levels, this music is now solidly established as an art form and as an authentic representative of Irishness.

Nowadays there is even a certain swagger associated with this traditional music and an appetite for its various renditions. Witness the reception given to Michael Flatley's wonderful Riverdance.

Valley's treatment of the subject is both comprehensive and meticulous. He discusses every aspect of Irish Traditional Music. The blurb lists these as follows; "all tune types, style and ornamentation; composition and arrangement; ballads, sean-nós and Irish language song; dance-steps and sean-nós dance,

céilí and sets; solo-playing and sessions; competitions and awards; céilí bands, groups and professionalism; instruments and technology."

But as well as these, "organisations, media and promotion; teaching and learning; education and transmission; collectors and archives; history and revival; performers, stylists and commentators; broadcasting and recording; women in traditional music; Irish music, throughout Ireland and worldwide; bibliography of Irish music, song and dance; literature and tutors; analysis of All-Ireland fleadh results 1951 – 2023 and a list of the major senior winners over its seventy-three years." In point of fact, everything a reader would want to know.

In this study Valley includes numerous biographical sketches of persons who made major contributions to the preservation of our traditional music.

Among them is that of Patrick Weston Joyce (1827-1914), the celebrated author of *Irish Names of Places* which was once the bible to hand for all writers on Irish subjects, as was his *English as We Speak it in Ireland*.

“He constantly appealed through his own publications for people to share with him their music and song manuscripts”

A national teacher and highly regarded scholar, he was born at Ballyorgan in the Ballyhoura mountains in Co Limerick and spent his life collecting the music of the district. In this pursuit he collaborated with George Petrie, president of the Society for the Preservation and Publication of the Melodies of Ireland. His largest and most enduring publication is *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* (1909).

He constantly appealed



Music and dance in the old days painting by Daniel Maclise

through his own publications for people to share with him their music and song manuscripts.

Research

In conducting his research Valley visited every nook and cranny of the country. As I had some friends who were very much associated with Irish traditional music, I checked his report on North Kerry.

And there was Michael Dowling (1934-2014), singer and organiser, chair of the local branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (1968-2008); he organised a number of All-Ireland fleadhs in Listowel between 1970 and 2002. There also was Tim Leahy, talented concertina player and most deservedly included was Seán McCarthy (1923-1990), the prolific ballad-maker.

Fr Pat Ahern is listed as a fiddle player, promoter, educationalist and founder of Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland. His

Dancer Michael Flatley in performance



entry could be far more fulsome. In recent years no one has done more than Pat and Siamsa Tíre to drag Irish Traditional Music centre-stage in the national psyche.

This Companion to Irish

Traditional Music – a huge tome of just under a thousand pages – will be seen to be as important and for the same reasons to our native music as Fr Patrick Dinneen's enlarged Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla was

to the Irish language movement in the 1920s.

Fintan Valley is entitled to claim with Virgil: *Exegi Monumentum aere perennius* ("I have raised a monument more lasting than bronze").

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.

An exceptional Irish woman artist

Hugh Lane Municipal Museum, Charlemont House, Parnell Square, Dublin; runs to January 5, 2025. Admission Free

More Power to You: Sarah Purser, a force for Irish Art: A major exploration of Sarah Purser (1848-1943), her extraordinary legacy, and enduring impact on the Irish arts scene, curated by Logan Sisley, Head of Collections, Hugh Lane Gallery.

Peter Costello

The major exhibition at the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery for the autumn of this year is devoted to a show on the remarkable Sarah Purser, whom the organisers call “a force in Irish art”.

For the curious, what remains of her top-lit studio at 11 Harcourt Terrace still survives. But her long-time home, Mespil House, was torn down shortly after her death in 1943, and the site and grounds cleared to make way for blocks of flats, then new to Dublin. In this way the old made way for the new, though a magnificent ceiling was retrieved by the OPW and now graces *Áras an Uachtaráin*.

The exhibition includes a time line of her life, which reminds us that she was born in 1848 into post-Famine Ireland and died in 1943 during the darkest year of the Emergency. This is an historical context visitors should keep in mind.

Charming

A real charming item is a bust of a very young George Russell, the dreamy young man in Pim's Drapery store, rather the older mystical AE; though this a youth one feels already with his own special vision.

There are, of course, images of other notable figures who were friends of hers, as well as people of consequence. But contrast the three images of Miss Maud Gone, one a full length portrait of the beautiful young woman with her pet monkey, whom the poet Yeats fell in love with, which contrasts with a slightly later one of a more warrior like woman, an image almost of Éire herself.

Sarah Purser was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable Irish women of her generation, a generation many think of as filled with remarkable women. Born into comfortable circumstances, thanks to her own astute dealings in stocks and shares, she continued to live in style, but with resources to

support all kinds of activities of the cultural life of Dublin and Ireland in her time.

This is not a grand show. It is quiet and domestic in many ways, demure perhaps in the current parlance of the internet. But there are remarkable things in it.

Almost the first item on exhibition, her sea-weed collector, at once strikes a new note that one is to see interesting pictures. One of these is an 1895 study for the portrait of a young girl, moody and almost sullen, but with a remarkable presence.

At the end of the show are three striking documentary photographs, of Miss Purser at a meeting of the National Gallery Board, in a group, and in lively conversation with James Montgomery, the then Film Censor and a renowned Dublin it: two figures of folklore in the Dublin of the Irish Revival.

Intermingled among her works and the works of other Irish artists, are examples of European painters which she helped to bring to Ireland through her efforts in the Friends of the National Collections of Ireland, or directly by her own purchase.

These represent sharply contrasting images, from an indifferent Duncan Grant contrasting with a fine impression of Concarneau by a French artist, one of a number of Europeans in the show.

“There are many images that will linger in the mind from this show, making it one not to be missed”

There is an enjoyable sequence of contrast all through the exhibition. But one still sticks in mind. It is of Sara Purser standing, with her white cat, in the evening gloaming shortly before her death on the steps of Mespil House. It is by her friend Mary Swanzy, but what a contrast this image of gathering darkness is with the iridescent canvases Miss Swanzy had brought back from her travels through the South Seas two decades before.

But in a way it sums up those last years of Sarah Purser. One evening a departing friend later recalled, she paused on those steps to ask the much younger man about Dublin culture.

She had been a hostess noted for her Second Tuesday soirees often attended by up to 70 people. Those evenings belonged to the culture of



Miss Maud Gonne, 1898, by Sarah Purser (Courtesy the Hugh Lane Gallery)



Portrait Study, 1895, by Sarah Purser (Courtesy the Hugh Lane Gallery)

her youth. Was it true, she asked, if cultural life was now transferred to the bars of public houses?

Remarkable

Ironically, also in the show there is a small painting of Kathleen Behan, one of five Miss Purser did of the young woman who was for a short time her housekeeper in the 1920s, another remarkable female, “the mother of all the Behans”.

Her son Brendan at that

very time in the 1940s was serving terms of imprisonment in England and Ireland, where he was gathering some of the experiences that went into the making of his first book and play more than a decade later, products if ever there were of Dublin's public houses.

There are many images that will linger in the mind from this show, making it one not to be missed, and which may well be a mind and eye opening experience for many visitors.

Stepping aside for a moment to think about life



Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho

A Hundred Roads to Here: Introductions to Mediation, by Donagh O'Shea OP (Dominican Publications, €12.00 / £10.50)

Peter Costello

This is a book which will have I think an immediate appeal to those who are attracted to the idea of mediation, but have somehow failed to get the knack of it.

Donagh O'Shea is fully alert to their situation. He is an interesting writer with several books to his credit. One of these is called *Take Nothing for the Journey* (Dominican Publications, 1990, €11.99), about a three month camping journey in isolated parts of Ireland, which clearly connects up with his latest title.

The new text consists of a hundred sections running to about a page or so. These, he says, need not be read in order, but can be randomly dipped into. And this indeed is the best way, I found, casting up as it does interesting associations and connections.

In his sections he evokes some 36 spiritual writers of very different eras and cultures onwards from Anthony of the Desert (241-356), also known as St Anthony the Great, from whom the monastic ideal comes down. But not everyone who wishes to meditate will be so well read as to have some sense of all these writers.

But they also include the more approachable classic Japanese poet Basho, who died in 1694. He was the great writer of Haiku, those three line, seventeen syllable poems that look easy to do, but are not so easy to write when you try - a bit like meditation.

The point of these poems is to catch the immediacy of a passing moment. The author quotes one.

*The old pond.
A frog jumps in.
Plop!*

This is a well known poem in Japan, but not the best of Basho's work. The poet observed that many people could write haiku as good as

his own; his skill was in uniting them in a sequence, as he did in that classic work *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, the most effective account of his journeys.

I had a friend interested in mediation, who enjoyed writing haiku. I tried to explain to him back then that he should follow Basho's model and make them part of a journey of his own. But he did not have the discipline to do this. He never did. He could not, so to speak, make up the connections.

Following Basho he could have created “a journey to the interior” - the aim of all mediation. But as Hopkins reminds us:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed ...

But the Jesuit's pain is far from what Basho, and indeed Donagh O'Shea, would want people to experience through meditation.

The journey can be figurative. All that is really required is the ability to sit still in one's own room. Pascal (who was commented on by one of the contributors to these pages a couple of weeks ago) remarked that “All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” But for a philosopher that may be easy, but not for the rest of us.

As a writer I spend much of my day “alone” in this sense. I take a daily walk, but alone, not with others. This provides me with an opportunity to think - many problems are solved on the roads around our house. But also to observe, not things, not life itself outside of myself, but inside myself. This certainly helps my inner journey.

I feel I have not done full justice to this most absorbing book, which is remarkably free from mere blather, but I can at least from my own contact with Donagh O'Shea in these pages, warmly recommend it to all readers as an aid towards, not reading, but meditating. standing back from what is around one, to grasp what is hidden inside one.

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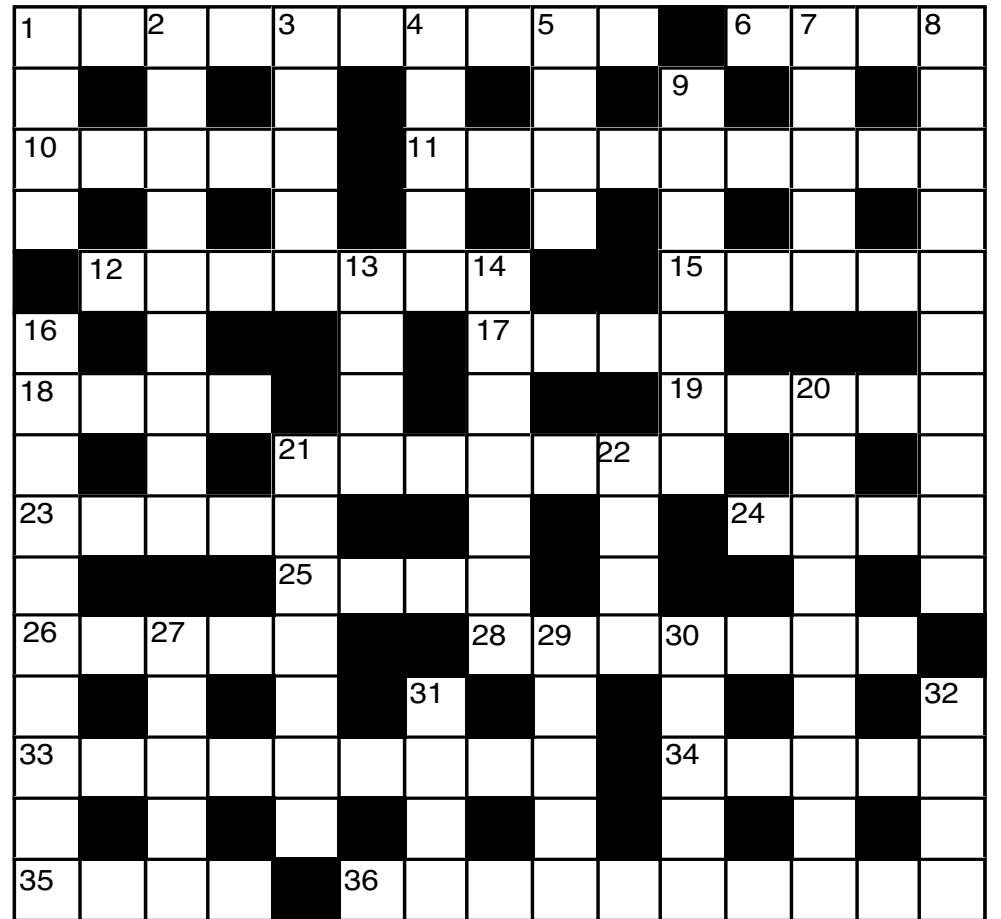
Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 679

- Across**
 1 Sport involving Grands Prix (7,3)
 6 Deeds - of the Apostles? (4)
 10 Contribution to a meeting or discussion (5)
 11 Edict from the Pope (5,4)
 12 Struck out, erased (7)
 15 Foe (5)
 17 Type of golf club (4)
 18 Substance with a low pH value (4)
 19 The trunk of the body (5)
 21 Dupe, hoodwink (7)
 23 Franz, composer of the Merry Widow (5)
 24 A Dundonian, for example (4)
 25 Individual part of an agenda (4)
 26 Animal innards (5)
 28 Violent crime (7)
 33 Capsicum (3,6)
 34 Large deciduous tree (5)
 35 Percolate (4)
 36 Instrument which measures wind speed (10)

- Down**
 1 Move swiftly and lightly (4)
 2 Top up (9)
 3 Release, undo a knot (5)
 4 Plenty (5)
 5 The back of the neck (4)
 7 What produces an effect (5)
 8 Venture out to make a raid (5,5)
 9 How pasta should be served (2,5)



- 10 Rosti (5)
 11 Spare ribs (5)
 12 Boyhood (7)
 13 Ripped (4)
 14 Predicament (7)
 15 Rioja (5)
 16 In which one tells comrades to get ready for battle (4,2,4)
 17 Isis (3)
 18 Hide (3)
 19 Aesop (5)
 20 Remember (9)
 21 Made holes with a power tool (7)
 22 Solemn promises (4)
 23 Century (7)
 24 Burn (4)
 25 Spur (4)
 26 Eight (5)
 27 Type of confection (5)
 28 Bandsaw (7)
 29 Rugby formation (5)
 30 In which to keep photos or stamps (5)
 31 Peninsula (7)
 32 Scorch (4)
 33 Opine (5)
 34 Reel (4)
 35 Archbishop (7)

SOLUTIONS, AUGUST 29

GORDIUS No. 678

Across

1 Parking bay 6 Scum 10 Rosti 11 Spare ribs 12 Boyhood 15 Rioja 17 Isis 18 Hide 19 Aesop 21 Century 23 Padua 24 Burn 25 Spur 26 Eight 28 Bandsaw 33 Peninsula 34 Opine 35 Reel 36 Archbishop

Down

1 Pure 2 Responded 3 Irish 4 Gusto 5 Alas 7 Cairo 8 Mascarpone 9 Hearsay 13 Once 14 Disturb 16 Shopkeeper 20 Squeamish 21 Casting 22 Ruin 27 Genre 29 Awash 30 Dhoti 31 Purr 32 Heap

Sudoku Corner 549

Easy

	2	9		3			5	
		3	1				2	
			6	7				4
8		7						
	3	6				2	4	
						3		9
2				9	5			
	8			1	7			
	7			2		5	1	

Hard

					2	3	7	
1	2		5					
4				6	3		2	
5	7					4		
			8		4			
		4					3	6
	1		3	4				5
					6		1	9
	5	8	9					

Last week's Easy 548

4	3	8	5	2	6	1	7	9
5	9	7	8	3	1	2	4	6
2	6	1	7	4	9	5	8	3
3	1	9	2	8	4	6	5	7
6	8	5	3	1	7	4	9	2
7	2	4	9	6	5	3	1	8
9	4	2	6	5	8	7	3	1
1	7	3	4	9	2	8	6	5
8	5	6	1	7	3	9	2	4

Last week's Hard 548

3	7	2	5	8	4	9	6	1
1	9	6	2	7	3	5	8	4
5	8	4	1	6	9	7	3	2
7	2	9	3	4	6	8	1	5
8	1	3	9	5	2	4	7	6
4	6	5	8	1	7	2	9	3
9	4	7	6	3	5	1	2	8
6	5	1	7	2	8	3	4	9
2	3	8	4	9	1	6	5	7



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Fundraising Department
 Rehab Group Head Office

10D Beckett Way, Park West Business Park, Dublin D12 K276

Charity number: CHY 4940

Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20006716

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



RTÉ and a distortion of our nation's history

In the aftermath of the Ryan Tubridy saga which engulfed RTÉ in a sea of negative publicity for much of last year I resisted the temptation to follow so many other citizens who stopped paying their licence fee. However, I'm beginning to reconsider for the simple reason that I'm fed up with the constant anti-Catholic bias throughout the various platforms of the national broadcaster. A recent radio programme has pushed me to the brink.

On Bank Holiday Monday, August 5, I tuned into a documentary on Radio 1 entitled 'Farmed Out'. It was advertised as a programme about the thousands of children who were fostered out to farming families throughout Ireland in the middle decades of the 20th Century.

Farming

I had a particular interest in this having known a number of young men and women in my own community who had come to live with farming families. As a child I can remember wondering why they had different surnames to the families they lived with. During the radio programme I was struck by a few things that confused me. Clearly the documentary



was designed to portray this policy of fostering children out to farming families as a negative one.

However, the adults interviewed who had been foster children had, for the most part, very positive experiences. They were asked if they knew of children who had bad experiences and while they said yes none of those interviewed on the programme could say that about their own experience.

Another aspect of the programme that soon became clear was that they were only talking about children fostered out from Catholic run institutions. I was somewhat taken aback because all the men and women fostered out in my local area were from the Church of Ireland community and were living with Church of Ireland farming families. Listening to the programme you could be forgiven for thinking that this was only a Catholic phenomenon, and

the programme contained all the usual negative stereotypes about the Catholic Church and religious sisters and priests.

What most annoyed me was the contribution by RTÉ's favourite historian, Catherine Corless who stated that the only vetting of prospective foster families was that they be Catholic and that the children go to a Catholic school. Again, the implication was that this was just a Catholic phenomenon.

Widespread

I would have thought that as an historian Ms Corless would be well aware that this practice of fostering out children was widespread across society and that one of the rules laid down by the state was that the foster families should be the same religious denomination as the child.

Why would Ms Corless have not made this clear unless she and the programme makers wanted to present this purely as yet another example of the negative influence of the Catholic Church on Irish society. I can reach no other conclusion and that along with other examples of anti-Catholic bias

within RTÉ, some highlighted in this paper recently, leads me to consider cancelling my payment of the licence fee.

I am a tax paying Irish citizen who happens to be Catholic and a priest. Surely, I and all the citizens who share the same Faith have the right to expect that our national public service broadcaster would at least be fair and balanced when it treats issues that concern our Church.

A final thought and one I'm really reluctant to draw attention to: I consider myself a fairly committed ecumenist and I have a number of valued friends within the Protestant denominations. However, it saddens me that I have never heard the leadership of the Church of Ireland speak out when

RTÉ and other sources continue to present certain practices and traditions as only pertaining to the Catholic Church when often such practices and traditions were also part of their history too. Their silence contributes to the distortion of our nation's history, a distortion which sadly too many are happy to perpetuate.

The wisdom of a child!

An exasperated mother, whose son was always getting into mischief, finally asked him: "How do you expect to get into heaven?" The boy thought it over and said: "Well, I'll run in and out and in and out and keep slamming the door until St Peter says: 'For Heaven's sake, Dylan, come in or stay out!'"

A Thoughtful Proverb

I sought my soul,
But my soul I could not see.
I sought my God,
But my God eluded me.
I sought my neighbour,
And I found all three.



Funds are urgently needed for Metahara Clinic in Ethiopia

Sr Fikrte Motto of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady has contacted The Little Way Association from Metahara Health Clinic which is run by the Sisters with many lay helpers. She tells us that the Catholic Mission in Metahara began providing health care to the community in 1981. Despite difficulties, a clinic was established to help the sick. Now, 60 to 80 new patients visit the clinic daily for various conditions which include malaria, eye diseases, typhoid and typhus, as well as skin infections.

Sister writes: "We urgently need financial help, and that is why I am turning to The Little Way Association. Prices of medicine and our running costs have risen unexpectedly. We lack funds to reach needy communities in the district, we have no ambulance, we need to tackle the malnutrition and chronic diseases of many of those who come to our clinic. These, and other, reasons make me turn to you and your friends and supporters with confidence. Please help us. Many needy people, as well as our Sisters, will be eternally grateful."

**Can you spare a donation for the Sisters?
Even the smallest donation will help them.**

Every euro that we receive in response to this Appeal will be sent, without deduction, to the Sisters for this project or a similar Health Clinic project in Ethiopia, run by Sisters, in need of help.



"Without love, deeds, even the most brilliant, count as nothing." - St Therese

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