

The Irish Catholic

URGENT HERE AND NOW ISSUES NOT BEING ADDRESSED FOR PRIESTS

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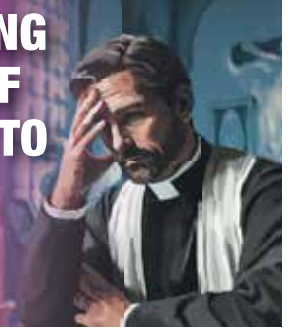
FLABBERGASTED AT GOVERNMENT'S DISREGARD OF LAST YEAR'S REFERENDUM

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CLERGY ARE GOING TO NEED A LOT OF HELP IF HOPE IS TO BE RESTORED

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'Blinkered' Govt ignores mothers in the home

Wishes and votes of parents in referendum are being ignored

Brandon Scott

The Government has been told that it needs to "overcome its profound ideological blind spot" and that it is "blinkered" after the programme for government made no mention of providing supports to parents who wish to stay at home with their children.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Independent TD for Offaly Carol Nolan said that it's "imperative" that "parents are not forced out of the home and essentially reduced to economic units of production".

She said: "In terms of the provision of childcare, of course working parents and providers must be supported but it is equally important for Government to try and overcome its profound ideological blind spot on this issue with respect to parents who want to be supported while looking after their children in the home.

"This is not about pitting one group of parents against another, but the fact remains that there is a woeful lack of commitment to the constitutional imperative which recognises that parents should not be forced out of the home and essentially reduced to economic units of production."

She went on to say that: "We need to shake off that blinkered and reductive understanding of childcare which has become embedded in recent years and which was rejected in the recent referendum. This reductive view is often subtly rooted in a government overreach.

"We need to broaden our horizons to include support for stay-at-home parents. We need to make them feel they are vital contributors to the common good."

Writing in this paper, columnist and barrister Maria Steen said that the voters made their voice very clear during last year's

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Launching on a high note



The Choir of Scoil Íosagáin, Buncrana, led by teacher Andrea McDaid sang during the Diocese of Derry's launch of the Catholic Schools Week 2025. The celebration happened in St Eugene's Cathedral and Mass was presided over by Bishop Donal McKeown and Fr Francis Bradley. Photo: Stephen Latimer.

Historians hope Catholic emancipation will receive proper recognition

Chai Brady

Academics have highlighted Catholic emancipation as a "landmark civil rights achievement" and regardless of Government sponsorship it should be marked significantly in 2029.

The bicentenary of the historic 1829 milestone did not appear in the 'Commemoration' section of the programme for government which listed several events the new Government "could mark" in their 5-year term. While it is implied that Catholic emancipation will be addressed as part of a 250th anniversary commemoration of the birth of Daniel O'Connell this year, Prof. Emeritus of History in UCD Maurice Bric told *The Irish Catholic* that he hoped a State commemoration of Catholic Emancipation would occur in 2029 as it is "such an important event in Irish history for a number of reasons, the main reason being it marks the repeal of the penal laws".

Prof. Bric said that in addition Catholic emancipation is not "just a chapter in the history of Irish Catholicism, it's part of the wider history of civil rights".

"It meant that anybody, whether you were a Catholic, Protestant, dissenter, you could sit in the House of Lords or the House of Commons – the religious test for sitting in parliament was taken out... The civil rights of anybody in Ireland, or England for that matter, were not encumbered by what their private beliefs were," he said.

This occurred in a context where there was "a perception at that time that if you

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SR CLARE CROCKETT AND THE DUSTY DIARY OF A DERRY NUN

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LACK OF CHURCH/STATE DIALOGUE NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

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THE IRISH GOVERNMENT COULD IMAGINATIVELY RE-INTERPRET EMANCIPATION

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The Irish Catholic



Historians hope Catholic emancipation will receive proper recognition

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were Catholic, you were under the control, or influence, of your priest... The anti-Catholic movement in England at that time was quite significant. It [Catholic emancipation] meant that Catholics were no longer second-class citizens, they were in a position to enjoy their civil rights to the fullest extent, and that is quite important".

Prof. Bric, who is the Director of the Daniel O'Connell Summer School, hailed the mention of marking the 250th anniversary of the birth of Daniel O'Connell. This was echoed by fellow historian Prof. Patrick Geoghegan of the Department of History in Trinity College Dublin who said: "It is wonderful to see Daniel O'Connell mentioned in the programme for government and to see his significance and legacy recognised. The document mentions the 250th anniversary of his birth and I think it's there to acknowledge that we are approaching the bicentenary of the some of his most significant achievements – winning the Clare by-election in 1828, the passing of Catholic emancipation in 1829, and O'Connell finally taking his seat in 1830."

Specifically regarding Catho-

lic emancipation, he said it was "a landmark civil rights achievement, and I am absolutely certain it will be commemorated in a significant way in 2029. A crucial part of this commemoration will involve educating, informing people and reminding people about its true meaning and significance".

He added that the programme for government's "recognition of the need for an educational schools' pack on O'Connell's life, contributions, and legacy is a vital step in ensuring his story is shared with future generations".

Historian Prof. James Kelly of Dublin City University said that he does "not think the failure, specifically, to mention Catholic emancipation is an issue" in the programme for government, and that a specific mention could not be expected.

"It can, and will be accommodated by the mention of Daniel O'Connell, which will embrace emancipation, the Clare election, perhaps even the 1826 general election. I do not think one could expect each of these events to be mentioned specifically," he said.

See pages 5 and 13

Politicians are disregarding families, says international speaker

Renata Milán Morales

"The problems we face today stem from a lack of awareness about the function of the family," said Vincenzo Bassi, president of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE), during his recent visit to Ireland. FAFCE represents the voice of families at the European Union and is an advocate for their role in society.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* days after the publica-

tion of the Draft programme for government 2025, Mr Bassi explained that "The function of the family is not considered a priority by politicians because families are not being represented." He criticised the emphasis on economy and productivity, pointing out that they have become "ends" in themselves rather than "instruments" to support society. Mr Bassi explained that "the original responsibility of the people is that of the families. It doesn't

come from some bureaucracy or the State. It is something that comes from the fact of being part of the community."

He warned against the rise of individualism. "We are not walking towards community; we're walking towards individualism, and therefore we're more fragile. It's a trend, which is natural... But what are we doing to accelerate its end?" he asked. "Individualism is not a sign of civilisation. The civilised society starts when the people do not live alone. Make people

lonely and they will be fragile."

Mr Bassi proposed the establishment of "family networks" to give families visibility. "If the family network has representatives who speak with politicians, the politicians will know that they are speaking with the representatives of voters."

He concluded by encouraging families to take responsibility for their own wellbeing. "Families must be the first to act. Without taking care of the family, we cannot expect anything from others."

'Anglicans and Catholics are not very different', Bishop Coll

Renata Steffens

The 2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is taking place from January 18 to 25, with this year's theme being the question Jesus posed to Martha: 'Do you believe this?' (John 11:26).

As part of the week's celebrations, Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll gave a homily during a service in St Canice's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Kilkenny on Sunday, January 19.

For Bishop Coll, Anglicans and Catholics are not very different. He said, "Anglicans and Catholics, were initiated into this faith through the waters of baptism and are continually nourished for the life of faith...by our sharing in the Eucharist, the messianic bread and wine of the New Covenant."

Bishop Coll said, "The fact that Anglicans and Catholics are not able to receive the Eucharist together yet is a matter of sadness."

He also mentioned the IARCCUM, the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, which he attended last year with Anglican Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory Adrian Wilkinson.

He said the IARCCUM and the weekend's liturgy "are most moving experiences for me of spiritual communion. May they be a further impetus to continue our ecumenical journey together so that we might one day break bread together around the same altar."

To mark the Unity week, the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin and the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh John McDowell recorded a video reflecting on this year's theme and the role faith plays in sustaining hope amidst personal and societal challenges today. The video of this discussion between the Archbishops of Armagh is available on catholicbishops.ie.



Catholic Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll and Anglican Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory Adrian Wilkinson.

'Blinkered' Govt ignores mothers in the home

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referenda, but it seems as if the wishes of parents are being ignored.

"The voters made their position very clear when they rejected the attempt to remove from the Constitution the acknowledgment of the debt the State owes to women for the work they do in the home, yet the programme for government makes absolutely no mention of women who wish to stay at home with their children," she said.

"The government push for childcare as being the 'best opportunity' for children or even "enabling" families stands in stark contrast with the evidence about the wishes of most parents. According to the 2022 census, 78% of children are cared for by a parent or a

family member with another 2% cared for by a childminder in the home; less than 20% were in childcare outside the home.

"And so, ignoring the wishes of the vast majority of parents, the new government is so committed to childcare."

Independent Senator Rónán Mullen provided a mixed review of the programme for government, saying that he welcomed certain aspects like the removal of the Citizens' Assembly and retention of the three-day waiting period but stressed more needed to be done to restrict access to pornography online.

"I'm delighted that there's no mention of the Citizens' Assembly," he said. "I've always felt that the only Citizens' Assembly is the one that is directly

elected by the people and I feel that the Citizens' Assembly, while at one level, you can see they're consultative, at another level they're very capable of being manipulated by questions being framed in a particular way by certain privileged academics and other civil society leaders.

"I said at one stage it was a bit of a playground for Woke academics. I would like to see legislation that would put strict age verification requirements on purveyors of pornography online. I'm glad that there isn't a proposal to get rid of the three-day waiting period in relation to abortion."

Newly-elected TD for Cork North-Central, Independent Ireland's Ken O'Flynn said that although he welcomes the absence of topics such as

hate speech and "zealous left rubbish", he thinks the programme doesn't go far enough.

"I don't think the programme for government goes far enough. It's a programme which the answer is spend, spend, spend. Justice is very, very light.

"I do welcome the idea that there is no mention of referendums on this, that, and the other. I've also noted that hate speech hasn't been mentioned either. Which can only be a good thing. The zealous left rubbish, and that's all I can describe it as, seems to have left a lot of the programme for government."

Fr John Joe Duffy, an outspoken activist for the fishing industry and a priest based in Creeslough, Co. Donegal, praised the programme for government for its "comprehensive inclusion

of fisheries".

"I very much welcome the Programme for Government in relation to fishing and education, but really in relation to fishing," he said. "I think it is the first time in my knowledge of programmes for government that has had such a comprehensive inclusion of fisheries – it's unprecedented.

"The commitment to give a dedicated junior minister for fisheries is something that is to also be very much welcomed.

"I think there is a genuine commitment overall within the programme for government to look at the factors that are damaging rural Ireland and looking at that VAT rate for tourism."

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Peace is fragile so we need to pray, says Irish priest in Israel

Brandon Scott

The long-awaited ceasefire in Gaza has boosted the hope of people directly impacted by the devastating conflict that has been raging in the region since October 2023, but while there is “a great sense of rejoicing”, history has shown that peace can be fragile and according to an Irish priest based in Israel, the only way to preserve it is through prayer.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Fr Eamon Kelly LC, an Irish priest who provides pilgrimages at Magdala, beside the Sea of Galilee in Israel, said that the outbreak of war completely decimated the very multicultural hospitality industry, but more importantly, trust among communities too.

“There’s a great sense of rejoicing,” he said. “We were hearing military planes flying over us and we know about the destruction of so many peoples’ lives on both sides of the border and both the Israeli and Palestinian population – such incredible destruction.

“We’re very hopeful. We work with everybody – the whole pilgrimage industry and the whole health industry, they’re unthinkable in both Israel and Palestine, without the collaboration of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Druze ... everybody.

“You have people in all



Fr Eamon Kelly.

aspects of the service industry who work together - they’ve been doing it for decades – and then this war becomes a nightmare for everybody. It takes away all of the source of income from their families but on top of that, it creates a cloud of suspicion between the different segments of the population.”

Although a welcome truce has been forged between Israel and Hamas, Fr Kelly said people in the region are acutely aware of how peace can be instantly shattered by malign forces and that the only appropriate response to this worry is prayer, and lots of it.

“When you see a ceasefire then it says ‘okay, well we’re not going to be shooting at each other anymore,’” he said. “We’re also very realistic. We

know that in these types of situations, we have enough experience of this in Ireland, there may be infractions of the peace agreement and acts of violence by some hotheads and that’s uncontrollable. But how do we react to that? We need to pray a lot.

“No prayer is wasted and prayer is very powerful. I would ask that every Irish family with their little children at home with their grandparents to pray for peace because on the one hand we’re rejoicing but we also know that the hope is very fragile because there are so many people that can really assault the healthy development of the reconciliation.

“If we practise hospitality instead of hostility then we lift up the level of humanity,” he said.

‘Something special’ felt around Derry since opening of Sr Clare’s cause

Staff reporter

There’s “something special” afoot in the city of Derry since the path to sainthood began for one of their own, Sr Clare Crockett, according to a local priest.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr Gerard Mongan Administrator of Long Tower Church in Derry, said that the magnitude of the

local Derry girl’s sensational path to sainthood is “hard to comprehend”.

“There’s something special about the city of Derry since I’ve come back from Madrid last Monday,” he said. “The magnitude of last weekend is hard to comprehend, with so much more to come. We have a local Derry girl, born in the Brandywell, on the road to sainthood.”

Sainthood revolves around

miracles and many supposed miracles associated with Sr Clare will be examined to determine her eligibility for sainthood, but Fr Mongan believes that the greatest miracle attributed to Sr Clare was that of her own personal transformation.

“The greatest miracle for me was her own personal transformation,” he said. “Clare smoked, drank, partied, aimed for wealth and fame but a radical encounter with the Crucified Lord on Good Friday in 2000 led her to leave it all behind to become a sister - that is miraculous for me.

“What a beautiful role model she is for our youth - to continue to be one’s crazy self yet be crazy enough to give one’s life to God and for others.”

Mass will be celebrated to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit for the Cause of Sr Clare on Sunday January 26 in St Columba’s church, Long Tower at 3pm presided by Bishop Donal McKeown.



Sr Clare Crockett. Photo: OSV News/courtesy Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother.



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Nigerian priests in Ireland want new Govt to highlight persecution in country

Brandon Scott

The newly-formed Irish Government ought to do more for beleaguered Nigerian Christians who are routinely persecuted for their Faith, say Nigerian priests living in Ire-

land after a recently published report, The World Watch List, revealed that Nigeria is the country that has seen the highest rates of Christians being kidnapped or killed because of their Faith in 2024.

Fr Peter Johnson PhD, a

Nigerian priest ministering in Mount Merrion, Dublin, said he expects “a stronger role” and not “political gimmicks” from the Irish Government.

“Christians in Nigeria are the most persecuted in contemporary times,” he said. “The per-

secution ranges from physical assault, deprivation, to daily intimidation. The persecution is systemic as there is a constant drive to promote Islamic dominance in both politics and social lives.

“Sadly enough, the cry of Christians to the international community gets shrouded in political gimmicks. Given the paternity of the Irish Church and nation over the Christian faith in Nigeria, one expects a stronger role in the plight of Christians than is currently being experienced at the moment.”

Fr Louis Illah, a priest based in Longwood, Co. Meath called on the new Irish Government and TDs to raise instances of Christian persecution in the country to remind the Nigerian government of their obligations to protect all.

“It is an established fact that for many years Christians in Nigeria have gone through

a series of challenges and difficulties – that’s a fact,” he said.

“Up north we have had issues with terrorist groups, the most prominent is Boko Haram. We’ve had sadly people in government, particularly those who are not Christian, not creating the right environment for people of different faiths to practise their faith freely.

“I think it’s time for Ireland to prioritise the issue. The United States have been very, very upfront in reminding the Nigerian government that there is a need for them to create the right environment for religious tolerance. I think the Irish Government and especially the different TDs, need to do this as well.

“Given what the Irish Government has been known for all over the world, I feel the next formation of Government in Ireland needs to continue to keep this issue in mind,” he said.

Bishop Doran talks about Elphin and Achonry’s joining

Renata Steffens

“Decisions that you make locally are far more important.” Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran said, in his homily during Mass in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Curry, Co. Sligo on January 19 that, even though a surprise to many, the joining of the Dioceses of Elphin and Achonry “is not really going to make a big difference in the day-to-day life of the parish of Curry.”

Bishop Doran was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Achonry in April 2024. This “process of closer cooperation and consultation...is intended to lead eventually to the merging of our two neighbouring dioceses,” he said in a pastoral message in November 2024. And continued: “My own appointment as Apostolic Administrator

of Achonry took me by surprise.”

“Change challenges us and, as we saw in the case of the Wedding in Cana, Jesus has a habit of asking us to look at things in a new way,” Bishop Doran said in the homily.

The bishop said the community should consider decisions and actions they take regardless of the dioceses joining. “Will you continue to gather faithfully for the Eucharist? Will you allow your lives to be formed by the spirit of the Gospel? Will you renew your commitment to share faith with your children?”

“Will you make yourselves available for mission and ministry, including of course those whom God is calling to serve him as priests for the future. Meanwhile, like the people of Corinth, the people of Achonry and Elphin all have gifts to share and we are being invited to share them in a new way.”

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Ongoing Govt survey on Mass attendance ‘flawed’

Chai Brady

An online Government survey which includes questions about attendance at ‘religious ceremonies’ before and after the Covid-19 pandemic will produce “flawed” results, according to the Iona Institute.

Announced last week, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are conducting a survey entitled ‘COVID-19 – Our Lives Five Years On’. It includes the question: “Thinking back to before Covid-19 restrictions were first introduced, did you regularly attend religious ceremonies (e.g. Mass, Sunday Service, Friday prayer), in person (e.g. at a Church, Mosque, Synagogue)?”

It also asks: “Do you now regularly attend religious ceremonies in person?”

The answers that can be given are ‘Yes’, ‘No’ and ‘Prefer not to say’.

A spokesperson for

the Iona Institute said the survey’s results “will be very interesting and very revealing, but also flawed, unfortunately”.

“The survey is intended to gauge the impact of Covid on Irish life, five years after the outbreak of the pandemic. We don’t know exactly what impact the restrictions on Church attendance had during the pandemic, but a number of polls plus anecdotal evidence from priests, suggests it accelerated the previous decline in numbers quite sharply.”

The spokesperson added: “However, because it is an online survey, it might not produce a random sample, so how accurate will the result be? And also, it asks people whether they ‘regularly’ attend religious services. To some people this might mean weekly, and to other it might mean monthly. Therefore, the survey will have to be taken with a bit of a grain of salt.”

Marvellous service in Magheralin



Ava Hamill and Eimear Greene received their JPPII Gold Award for their services in The Parish of Magheralin. Pictured here with Caitriona Hughes, Youth Minister and Fr Maciej Zacharek PP.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Derry launches Catholic Schools Week with Mass

The Catholic Schools Week 2025 is taking place between January 19 to January 25 with the theme ‘Catholic Schools: Alive in Christ’.

To launch the Week in the Diocese of Derry, Bishop Donal McKeown celebrated Mass on January 16 in St Eugene’s Cathedral with representatives of schools from across the diocese.

During the celebration, the students “brought forward a representation of how they, Alive in Christ, are beacons of hope to others,” said Thérèse Ferry, Diocesan Advisor for Primary Schools in Derry. The students also “received a candle to bring back to their schools reflecting the theme of this Jubilee Year of hope.”

The Choir of Scoil Íosagáin in Buncrana, Co. Donegal, led by teacher Andrea McDaid, was responsible for the music during Mass. Ms Ferry said the choir reminded them “that each of us, gifted by God, is a promise, with great potential. We thank all those involved in our schools for the great work they do throughout the year in bringing their pupils closer to understanding that Jesus is our hope.”

Camino Walk in honour of St Brigid

Monasterevin Parish has organised a ‘St Brigid’s Camino Walk’ in honour of the patroness saint of Ireland. This event will take place on Bank Holiday Monday, February 3.

It will start at St Brigid’s Shrine at Mountrice, on the Monasterevin – Rathangan road. The journey is approximately 6km. A bus will leave the Monasterevin Parish Church at 10am and return at 2pm.

The walk will be led by Bishop Denis Nulty, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and will finish in Sts Peter and Paul Church, Monasterevin with a Service of Light at 12:30pm.

All those who participate will be issued with a special St Brigid Camino Passport. St Brigid’s Crosses and refreshments will be provided on the day.

For more information you can contact the Parish Office on 045 525346.

Here's a way that Ireland could celebrate the 1829 act

It is disappointing – if not surprising – that the newly-formed Irish government does not plan to celebrate the 200th centenary of Catholic emancipation in 2029.

They have earmarked several other important dates which will occur under their stewardship: 2026 for the 250th Declaration of US Independence; 2027 marking the birth of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and the death of Constance Markiewicz; 2028 for the anniversary of the original Irish pound; 2029 the 300th anniversary of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" (in which he satirically suggested the Irish should kill their babies and eat them to remedy hunger.)

But – although Daniel O'Connell's birth (in August 1775) will be marked this year – nothing is planned to formally observe Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

Disappointing

It's disappointing, if not surprising. The anniversary was very publicly celebrated in 1929 – and therein lies the problem. Catholic Emancipation – Daniel O'Connell's



Mary Kenny

great achievement – was a genuinely enlightened, and indeed liberal measure, enacted in the face of opposition by those who would now be called "far-right". But the Free State government in 1929 used it to stamp a Catholic identity on the fledgling Irish state.

“Surely they could mark this historic occasion, and take a more nuanced, sophisticated approach?”

The government all but handed over the celebrations to the Church hierarchy and the Catholic Truth Society, which aroused accusations of sectarianism from those not in sympathy with the event.

Predictably, today's political class seek to disassociate

themselves, as much as possible, from that previous brand of "Catholic Ireland", which the first Cumann na nGaedheal government was so anxious to embrace. I think it looks rather cowardly to disown the past, but there it is.

Yet surely they could mark this historic occasion, and take a more nuanced, sophisticated approach?

The Catholic Irish people – who had met with long discrimination in their own country – were entitled to mark this significant piece of legislation as a victory. This should be understood in the context of its time.

Progressive

But the 1829 Act can be also be seen now as an important progressive event which paved the way for the emancipation of slavery, and eventually universal suffrage. Frederick Douglass, the American anti-slavery campaigner, said he



Daniel O'Connell

took his inspiration directly from O'Connell's example.

The Irish government could imaginatively re-interpret Catholic Emancipation for our time, and our world today.

And the perfect candidate to head up a celebration for 1829 is former President

Mary Robinson. She is a great admirer of Daniel O'Connell, because he established the rule of law, and the principle that laws can be changed by parliamentary democracy – which is the foundation of political governance today.

I heard Mary Robinson say all this at a dinner at London's

Reform Club, founded to honour the Reform Act of 1832 – which followed in the wake of Catholic Emancipation – and prompted the movement towards universal suffrage.

Supporter of the Reform Act and co-founder of the Reform Club? Daniel O'Connell.

“The Irish government could imaginatively re-interpret Catholic Emancipation for our time, and our world today”

YMCA's eclectic reinvention

The acronym "YMCA" has gone through some change over the course of my lifetime. As a youngster, it signalled the sports field where I used to play (but not on Sundays) in Sandymount, Dublin, this being an outpost of the Young Men's Christian Association. This "YMCA" represented some upstanding Protestant Christians, some of whom attended church three times on a Sunday.

Then, "YMCA" somehow morphed into a very popular, very camp hit song in 1978, with accom-

panying video of fancily dressed young men in tight trousers singing the praises of the aforesaid association in America (which provided hostels for young men at budget prices). It became a global phenomenon for the Village People, and widely interpreted as a "gay anthem".

And now it's been embraced by President Donald Trump, whose politics, if not exactly aligned with the Sandymount Protestants of my childhood, certainly signal another revolution – to a Trumpian brand of conservatism. Topsy-turvy world!

The Jewish British conservative commentator Melanie Phillips has written a new book emphatically arguing that Judaism and Christianity built western civilisation – and the West will crumble if it does not support and uphold this legacy.

The title is unambiguous: *The Builder's Stone: How Jews and Christians Built the West – and Why Only They*

Can Save it. This is a theme which has appeared among several leading thinkers in recent years; Tom Holland's *Dominion – The Making of the Western Mind* argues that secularists and atheists, even if they don't know it, owe their moral values to the traditions of Christianity, and its Biblical source, Judaism.

Melanie started her political life as a left-winger, but the attacks on

the family was one of the prompts which brought about a change of mind. Her new book is bound to be interesting, although also controversial: she is impassioned about seeing Israel as the beacon that lights our western civilisation. This will surely draw criticism: the Israel of the Bible is not, for so many Christians, aligned with Mr Netanyahu's regime.

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Lack of Church/State dialogue needs to be addressed by the new Government



David Quinn

We have a new Government, but will a new leaf be turned in Church/State relations? That is to say, will relations between Church and State begin to thaw, and will there be any kind of formal, structured dialogue between Government representatives and Church leaders, not just Catholic ones?

The question is very relevant, because no such meeting has taken place for several years. Going all the way back to Bertie Ahern's time as Taoiseach, a formal process of Church/State dialogue was established but aside from a few meetings, it never really went anywhere. Then Brian Cowen took over as Taoiseach. This was around the time of the financial crisis,

so the Government had other things on its mind.

“The public and our politicians react as though the abuse and cover-ups are happening today”

In 2011, Enda Kenny took over. The financial crisis was still in full swing, and the Kenny-led Government, in power with Labour, turned out to be extremely hostile towards the Catholic Church. In his first year in office, the Cloyne report into child sex abuse by priests in that diocese was published to general public outrage, and Enda Kenny announced that he was closing the Irish embassy to the Holy See. The abuse the Cloyne report uncovered had mainly happened decades before, which is what most of these investigations reveal, including the recent investigation into abuses in Catholic schools, but each time the public and our politicians react as though the abuse and cover-ups

are happening today.

In any case, Church/State relations become much worse under Enda Kenny. His time in office also saw the huge public controversy over the death of Savita Halappanavar, and the subsequent passage of abortion legislation under the terms of the X-case. During this period, Fine Gael politicians like Lucinda Creighton, Fidelma Healy-Eames and Terence Flanagan lost the Fine Gael party whip, and subsequently their seats, for voting against the Government on the matter. Other countries allow a free vote on issues like this.

Nevertheless, there was a meeting between State and Church leaders in 2013.

Referendum

In 2015, we had the referendum on same-sex marriage, and then in 2018, under the Taoiseachship of Leo Varadkar, the referendum on abortion. The State was in no mood to meet with Church leaders, and at that point, Church leaders have might felt it was just as well.

Also in 2018, Pope Francis visited Ireland, and on that



Pope Francis exchanges gifts with Irish President Michael Higgins during a private audience at the Vatican September 17, 2021. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

occasion, Leo Varadkar spoke about the need for a new “covenant” between Church and State.

In May 2019, a meeting did take place in Dublin Castle which included 28 representatives of Churches, faith communities and non-confessional organisations. Why non-religious organisations were there is a good question. They often have interests and aims at direct variance with those of the Churches. Wouldn't it be better to meet them separately?

Also, with the Catholic Church being easily the biggest Church on the island, wouldn't it be better, at least sometimes, to meet with its leaders separately as well? The State can't play favourites between the various religions, but it ought to recognise the fact that one of them is particularly big and in a democracy, numbers are supposed to count for something.

“The State was content to close down public worship for longer than anywhere else in Europe”

Since 2019, no similar meetings have taken place. In 2020, Covid broke out and our lives changed drastically for about two years. But one of the things notable from that period was how little attention was given to the Churches. The State was content to close down public worship for longer than anywhere else in Europe. When we could go to Mass during those two years, it was with severe restrictions on numbers, although everyone accepted that some restrictions had to exist.

In Britain, public worship

was only banned during the first lockdown and after that, it was never banned again. The Government there listened to religious leaders, including the Catholic bishops. Here, we were fining priests for saying Mass in public.

Hostile

This might not even have been a hostile act as such by the Government, and more a product of the fact that it has become deaf, dumb and blind to religious concerns.

As reported in this newspaper a few weeks ago, the Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin, contrasted the openness of the Government in the North to dialogue with religious leaders about pandemic restrictions, compared with the lack of any similar dialogue in the South.

In their statement in November just ahead of the General Election, the bishops drew attention to the lack of Church/State dialogue. They said in a very understated way: “The current structures for Church-State dialogue are not functioning for the greater good of society and need review. Any such structures must be made work so that the voice of Churches and other faith communities can be heard and contribute to a national reawakening based on the reality of people's lives, and not ideology or special interests. As a Church, we are open to engaging with Government and with other Churches and faiths on this question.”

But it is not just in Ireland that such dialogue is not taking place. The EU used to be quite good at meeting religious leaders, but more recently, this has changed.

Last week, the Archbishop of Luxembourg and Vice-President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, Jean-Claude Hollerich, noted that the

head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has shown a lack of willingness to engage in dialogue.

“Mass attendance may have fallen sharply over the last few decades, but hundreds of thousands of people still go to Mass every week”

Yes, Europe is becoming ever more secular at present, but at the same time, both the EU, and our own Government, seem perfectly content to hold meetings with various NGOs and lobby groups that have very little connection with the general public. A good example in Ireland is the National Women's Council. Its representatives appear to be a semi-permanent presence inside Leinster House, whereas Church representatives almost never seem to be in that building.

Mass attendance may have fallen sharply over the last few decades, but hundreds of thousands of people still go to Mass every week. This is simply not reflected in the attitude of the State towards the Church, or religion in general.

The lack of Church/State dialogue on almost everything bar the future of schools shows an attitude of indifference at best on the part of the State, and contempt at worst. The Church is actually not being treated equally with other parts of civil society such as the NGO sector. It is treated far, far worse than that. This needs to be remedied by the State restarting Church/State dialogue. Over to you, Micheal Martin and Simon Harris.

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Our belief in the afterlife is vanishing



Breda O'Brien

Jen Hogan writes a regular feature for *The Irish Times*, in which people in the public eye are asked the same series of questions. They range from "How agreeable are you?" to the much more serious "What do you expect to happen when you die?"

I have been trying to figure out why the majority of the participants either avoid the question, are unsure, or have beliefs that do not align at all with traditional Christian

beliefs about the afterlife.

Is being less likely to believe in an afterlife correlated with being the kind of person who becomes well-known enough to be asked to answer these questions?

Or is it just that belief in the afterlife is declining rapidly? It is hard to get data on this. An 'Amarach' survey from 2023 asked whether the respondents believed in life after death. 41% did, compared to 56% in 2003 and 76% in 1981.

Figures

The figures for belief in God were 55% in 2023, 87% in 2003, and 95% in 1981. However, according to this poll, belief in God cannot be directly correlated with belief in the afterlife or even with the existence of the soul. While 44% believed in the

soul, only 41% believed in an afterlife.

In *The Irish Times* articles, some were like veteran journalist, Vincent Browne, who when asked what he thought would happen when he died, responded bluntly, "Nothing. I'll be dead."

“Apparently, at a time when 95% of people believed in God, fully a quarter of the population believed in reincarnation”

Many responded with a variant on being remembered in by people who love them.

The most original answer



Man in black jacket standing in front of grave

came from Kathryn Thomas, the television presenter. "I'm going to turn into a dolphin and swim around the Caribbean."

Does that qualify as a belief in reincarnation, which, according to 'Amarach' research, 17% of people believe in, a drop from 22% in 2003 and 26% in 1981? Apparently, at a time when 95% of people believed in God, fully a quarter of the population believed in reincarnation.

Existence

Heart-warmingly, one of the most positive affirmations of the afterlife came from hotelier, Noel Cunningham. As a gay man, he stated: "I have absolutely no doubt, having lived, at times, tormented by the perceived notion that being gay is both sinful and evil, that my God is a forgiving, loving God. And when I arrive at those gates, I will be embraced warmly and taken through, and I will meet my beloved family and friends again. And it will be a place of immense peace and contentment. I will walk in a beautiful garden."

Interestingly, he is also in recovery after a protracted battle with alcoholism. He does not say whether he is in recovery due to a 12-step programme, but for those who are, the emphasis on a higher power leads many to rely on a loving and forgiving God. Either way, Noel Cunningham even uses some of the traditional iconography of the afterlife - the gates of Heaven and a garden.

It would be unwise to read

“The horizons of our lives have shrunk to the here and now if we will only be remembered as long as the last person has memories of us”

too much into an entertaining series of articles in *The Irish Times* but belief in an afterlife does have ramifications beyond the personal.

Kathryn Thomas touches on this when she says that her six-year-old daughter is obsessed with death.

In my experience, it is a normal developmental stage for children to be deeply curious about death, just as they are curious about the time before they are born. This can be triggered by an experience of death, including the death of a pet, but does not have to be.

“Fame delays the moment when our names are no longer mentioned but makes no personal difference to a dead person”

Ceasing to be is a big idea and children grapple with it. If only two-fifths of the Irish population believe in

an afterlife, the explanations that we give our children will change greatly. At times in the past, we tended to be too glib about death as if all loss was somehow compensated for by eternal life. We are going in the opposite direction now.

The horizons of our lives have shrunk to the here and now if we will only be remembered as long as the last person has memories of us. Perhaps it accounts for the obsession with fame that so many young people feel? Obviously, fame delays the moment when our names are no longer mentioned but makes no personal difference to a dead person.

It certainly adds to the burden of life if this short span is all we have and we have no prospect of meeting our loved ones again.

When people have an eternal horizon, they can be less frantic about their everyday lives, more open to the long view, and less the centre of their own personal universe and strivings. A culture without this perspective may explain at least some of the rise in anxiety so often noted today.

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Sr Clare Crockett and the dusty diary of a Derry nun



Martina Purdy

The story of a nun's diary, found in the dust of a derelict house, captured my attention the other day. It came from a rather unexpected source: the author and republican, Danny Morrison, who I first met as a political correspondent in Belfast, long before I ever considered entering a convent myself!

Mr Morrison had heard, on the news, that Sr Clare Crockett had just been made a Servant of God. And, reminded of another religious woman, also from Co. Derry, he emailed me a chapter from his book *All the Dead Voices*.

Although mainly about his uncle, Harry White, an IRA man born in Belfast in 1916, the chapter concludes with the discovery of the nun's diary. And so, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the lives of these two Derry girls, one famous, and one hidden, became entwined in a surprising tapestry.

The diary belonged to Sr Mary Columba, and while she was pondering her path to sainthood, on retreat in Belfast in 1939, Harry White was deeply engaged in his own mission, travelling to Liverpool to bomb England. Sr Mary Columba and the IRA man had very different struggles. White trained IRA recruits at Killiney Castle in Dublin, among them Brendan Behan, author of the *Borstal Boy*, and Sr Columba Mary engaged in spiritual battle, through the "cold, hard dry work of praying before the Tabernacle."

Perseverance

Her perseverance paid off, as she later records: "Most people get a wrong idea of prayer in the beginning... A heart to heart talk with a very dear friend should be, and is, the true idea of prayer."



Sisters of Nazareth plot Derry



Sr Clare Crockett mural

Her writing reveals a great desire to help others: "... I will especially pray for the souls of priests and the forgotten ones who have none to pray for them. Oh! how many are waiting for our help..."

“When Harry White sought refuge at his Aunt Susan's door in Glasgow, she said two things: ‘You have blood on your hands!’ and ‘I am going to Lourdes, but I held back because I knew you were coming’”

Harry White's connection to the nun is revealed when Morrison finds himself in Altaghoney, a townland near Claudy, in Co. Derry, and pays a visit to a house, now derelict, where his uncle had spent some time 'on the run' in the 1940s. His 'safe house' in fact belonged to the nun's family, the O'Kanes. While Sr Mary Columba was long gone when the IRA man arrived, (she had entered the Sisters of Nazareth in the 1920s and spent most of her life in England), her younger sisters, Brigid and Rose, remained and were sympathetic to White's cause.

Like many of their generation, they held their religion and their politics in a curious tension. Indeed,

when Harry White sought refuge at his Aunt Susan's door in Glasgow, she said two things: "You have blood on your hands!" and "I am going to Lourdes, but I held back because I knew you were coming".

By the 1990s, the O'Kane home was a place where old ghosts meet, quite abandoned, with broken windows, torn curtains and fading wallpaper. "In the ruins," wrote Mr Morrison. "I found her prayer book, *Treasure of the Sanctuary*, containing hundreds of tracts."

Among the old photographs, books, cards for Christmas and St Patrick's Day, Mr Morrison spied a note, written by Sr Mary Columba, recording a cherished visit from her "dear father" to her convent in Hammersmith in July 1924.

Treading

Morrison had the family's permission for his search but still felt he was treading on old relics. He discovered the nun's diary with the words: "Today I shall go

blind for our darling Lord's sake. I will look on no face but His and see nothing but Him."

The journal was written in pencil with gaps of several years, even decades, between the entries: 1933; 1938; 1939; 1942; 1943; 1944; 1953; 1972. The final entries were scribbled in shaky handwriting and reveal an openness to the changes of Vatican II.

“Our darling Lord doesn't want my head, he wants my heart - my love... my heart just as it is”

Morrison, who handed the precious items to the family, thought that parts of the diary were similar to St Thérèse of Lisieux's biography, *The Story of a Soul*. He was struck by Sr Mary Columba's reflections on love and eternal life: "Little things on little wings lead little souls to Heaven."

In another passage, she writes: "Our darling Lord doesn't want my head, he wants my heart - my love... my heart just as it is."

"...On waking each morning I will bid my darling Lord, 'Good Morning', and clasp His hand, telling Him we shall spend the day together. That He is all mine, and I am all His. And when night comes, I shall always say, 'Good Night' before going to sleep and again tell Him how I love Him."

This religious woman certainly does not fit the media stereotype of the

harsh-faced nun in habit. "It is better to go out from Our Lord's Table," she writes, "with a smile for everyone."

Sr Columba Mary also declares: "We are not made to keep Rules only but to be generous in our outlook in kindness to others, helping them in their difficulties ..."

"Our Lord was not severe in His dealings - remember Magdalene, the good thief..."

She reflects on the limits of science which is powerless to bring "eternity within our grasp." "My eternity is in my own hands. I can make it a happy one - or I can make it miserable..."

Eternity

Sr Columba Mary passed into eternity on August 1, 1975, at St Joseph's home in Derry. Regrettably, an historical inquiry institutions run by the Church and State between 1922 and 1995 found abuses at homes run by her order. "It is clear that at certain times, and with certain nuns, things were just not right," said Sr Brenda McCall, who apologised on behalf of the Sisters of Nazareth. She also rightly praised the work of some "wonderful



Sr Clare Crockett's grave

and inspirational nuns".

I began to wonder where Sr Columba Mary was buried, and with a friend went to Derry last Friday. Records show she is not interred in her home parish in Claudy - nor with the Sisters of Nazareth in Derry City Cemetery.

I did however find the grave of Sr Clare Crockett, and after giving thanks, left a posy with a pink tulip, and marvelled at the ripples, magical connections, that now flow through her grace-filled life. The mystery was solved when Fr Gerard Mongan later confirmed that she is buried at St Columba's in Longtower.



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Relentless Ministry

Urgent here and now issues not being addressed for priests



Garry O'Sullivan

Speaking to priests recently, the key take-away is how busy they all are. In one group of priests— a quick survey showed— none of them had had a day off in six weeks! Another told me he had 17 funerals in four weeks. Shocked, I spoke to more priests who didn't think 17 funerals in a month was anything special! I began to realise that the further I dug, the crazier it was getting. One priest encapsulated it when he referred to it as 'Relentless Ministry'. He said: "The Irish are innately spiritual, just look at the amazing response to the relics touring the country recently, faith is alive. But the model we are pushing is dead."

It is with something approaching incredulity that many priests that I speak with react when they hear fresh news of the Church in Ireland's 'synodal pathway'. In many cases, a pleased incredulity to be sure, but anyone could be forgiven for a certain level of fatigue. Even the bishops in their Winter Meeting statement admit it.

For many, Pope Francis is asking us to play senior hurling, while we struggle to pull together a reserve team. Most priests in most parishes are at full stretch, and then some.

Workload

Even where priests are enthusiastic about synodality, [don't get me wrong, as a lay person I was an early enthusiast] the daily dose of funerals, weddings, baptisms, sick calls, safeguarding training, GDPR forms, music

rights checklists, heating bills, insurance requirements, cemeteries, schools, diocesan committees, special collections, leaves little time for what some view as 'blue sky' thinking about the Church of the future.

Add to the daily grind, the need to cultivate an authentic spirituality of ministry, and most priests will admit that they are struggling.

“Many priests are in serious danger of 'burn out', while some will openly admit that they often feel bullied by the unrealistic demands”

To be clear, most priests are happy in their ministry – but many feel entirely unsupported by their superiors, especially as the work load grows. Most bishops are motivated by genuine feelings of goodwill for their priests' welfare, but there is a subtle 'don't ask/don't tell' when it comes to issues like the need to get at least one day off every week, or annual leave entitlements. Priests are responsible for arranging their own cover, and the truth is that there is no spare capacity in the system. Cover invariably means asking the busy priest in the

“All the patient discernment in the world will not change the reality that we are fast running out of priests, and without priests we do not have the Eucharist, and without the Eucharist, according to Pope Benedict XVI, we do not have a Church”



Pope Francis meets with parish priests in Rome to talk about the Synod.

neighbouring parish to keep an eye on the welfare of the souls entrusted to you, as well as his own.

And this is not about beating up on the bishops, most of them have been in parishes and understand only too well the vicissitudes of priestly life. But I do think it is fair to say that the Church as an institution does have a culture of washing its hands of problems, or burying its head if you prefer. It doesn't make people bad, but it is bad management and bishops are essentially managers to their priests.

Many priests are in serious danger of 'burn out', while some will openly admit that they often feel bullied by the unrealistic demands of people, many of whom are

“The Church as an institution does have a culture of washing its hands of problems, or burying its head if you prefer. It doesn't make people bad, but it is bad management and bishops are essentially managers”

parishioners in name only and rarely if ever attend Mass, and certainly don't financially support the parish. These are often the loudest and most demanding, the ones that will be on Joe Duffy's *Liveline* when a church finally closes because there's no priests and no money and few parishioners to keep it going. They want and demand a Church that they knew 40 years ago, that is going or gone. Those people should be ignored.

Priority

Most priests are naturally inclined to be people-pleasers, and that's no bad thing *per se*. But, this tendency to 'meet people where they are at' can often lead to a priest being treated as a doormat, or giv-

'synodal pathway' however visionary and future-looking is not addressing the urgent here-and-now issues. Take the current church infrastructure in parishes for example. Will some churches have to be closed? Yes, it's a no-brainer. Which? Where? According to what criteria? Do we close remote country churches, or the ill-attended cavernous churches where people have long since gone to the Tesco superstore for their bread and wine?

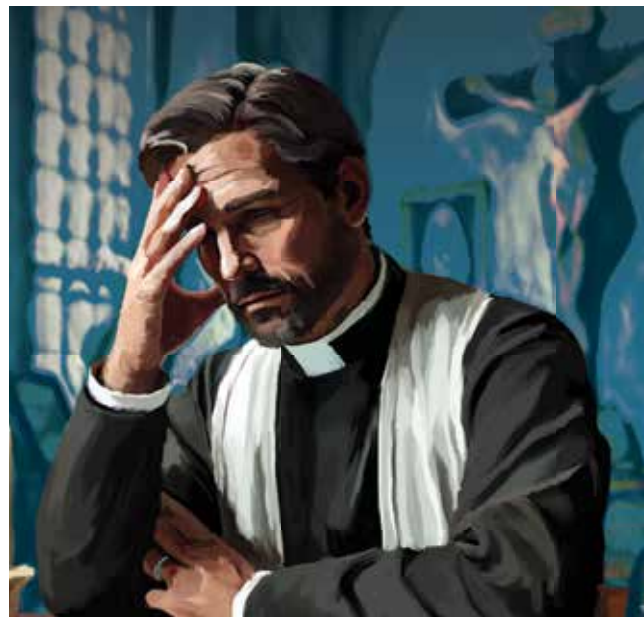
“Their hearts are full with the hopes and disappointments of their people, whom they love dearly and serve with devotion”

Like most priests and lay-people, we long for a Church that is more participatory and where everyone feels at home and feels both listened to and understood. But all the patient discernment in the world will not change the reality that we are fast running out of priests, and without priests we do not have the Eucharist, and without the Eucharist, according to Pope Benedict XVI, we do not have a Church.

There is also the fact that many priests feel mildly chided by the fresh emphasis on synodality, as if they have not spent decades listening to the joys and sorrows of their people. Any priest will



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



“The Church is great at pointing outwards when it comes to social justice, but its internal checks and balances leave a lot to be desired”

tell you, that their hearts are full with the hopes and disappointments of their people, whom they love dearly and serve with devotion. And all the while, there is always that parishioner whose opening greeting to the priest is always “Father, do you know what you should do?” as if the path to renewal is easy to follow, and the priest just hasn’t embraced it.

If we’re honest, too, how many of our parishes are brimming with people willing to help ease the burden of priests? How many families, even if they are not church-going, will allow a local lay leader preside at a funeral liturgy or bury a loved one? Anecdotal, priests will tell you that some parishioners are unhappy if the funeral is presided over by a non-Irish priest, where then will come the appetite for the necessary lay-led liturgies?

Compensation

And the elephant in the room, priests are badly paid and are unlikely to be getting minimum wage for the hours they work. Funerals and weddings supplement a meagre wage; if these are reduced or taken away by laity, will the priest be compensated for loss of much needed income? Priests won’t talk about money but they have to live and are entitled to be treated justly. The Church is great at

pointing outwards when it comes to social justice, but its internal checks and balances leave a lot to be desired.

“It’s easier to plan for some imagined future than face the seemingly intractable challenges present in our reality”

Synodality, if it is to be more than an academic exercise or a process that will take decades, it must address the pressing challenges facing the Church in Ireland today, in every parish in the country. One priest I know replaces the word ‘Synodality’ with ‘Conversations’. The need for careful deliberation is piercing, but so too is the urgency of the situation and we really, really need to talk about it. There is no point in planning the Church of the 22nd Century, when the one in the here and now is in a deep structural crisis. But it’s human nature – it’s easier to plan for some imagined future than face the seemingly intractable challenges present in our reality.

Clergy are going to need a lot of help if hope is to be restored to our Church today

Fr John

As we clergy grow less in number, the word I hear most spoken of from my brother Priests, is the word ‘relentless’. And it’s coming from good men whose only desire is to serve, but physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, they are now feeling as if they can’t give any more, they are tired, they are exhausted, they are on reserve.

What is the answer from our hierarchy to these good men? - give them more parishes, give them more responsibility as they walk themselves into an early grave. Is it any wonder so many of our brothers are suffering from stress and burnout and mental and physical health related illnesses? And is it any wonder those who are considering priesthood no longer find diocesan priesthood attractive, and instead look to religious orders where the pace of life is a little different?

Can we blame our bishops solely, is it their fault? I don’t think we can lay the blame totally at their feet. We clergy are operating out of a dysfunctional mindset that our seminary formation created, a clerical mindset that certainly served us well in the ‘good old years’, when there was an abundance of priests. But that is in the past now, and if we are to survive until the so-called retirement age of 75, we clergy are going to have to do a reboot on all that we were taught, all that we learned and lived by, because the Church as we once knew it, it is now dead, and sadly so many of us are reluctant to bury it.

Conditions

We are such a blessed nation; we are a deeply spiritual people whose DNA is rooted in faith, not neces-

sarily in religion but faith, and that’s why so many of our people still want their child baptised, still desire a Church wedding, and still want some sort of a Church celebration at the end of life. We cannot shake off our deep spiritual roots as an Irish people. And while I’m not totally comfortable with the ‘travelling relics’ that we had this past year, the people of God certainly turned out, and while it will take greater than I to critique all of that, it certainly gave me great hope that faith/spirituality is certainly not dead.

And yet our clerical mindset can dismiss all of this and refuse to welcome these good people or worse still, place conditions upon them, as if our God was a conditional kind of God. Our people have walked away in their droves from what we have been giving them and from how we have treated them, but they haven’t walked away from God.

The greatest obstacle to change, the greatest barrier that Synodality is going to meet along the way is clergy and clericalism. We still see ourselves as in charge, we are the bosses, we still hold the purse strings, and only Father knows what is right. But if we are a men of faith, men of God, surely we need to step out into the deep waters, or at least to dip our toes in it, and rid ourselves of the fears that we might have, and bring alive the People of God model of Church, where we are all fellow pilgrims working our way towards our home in Heaven.

Some dioceses appear to be making significant strides towards this goal, but I wonder if all of this training is just superficial, without teeth or clout. We cannot treat our people like children, we have to believe in them and see them as equals, as fellow Kingdom builders and bring

life back to Christ’s Church once again.

From a practical point of view, clergy are going to need a lot of help if hope is to be restored to our Church today. We need to be inspired about the direction we must go, and our bishops must begin to invest money and personnel in establishing the bones of this new model of being Church, providing the establishment, the training and ongoing support to Parish Councils, Lay led Liturgy teams, Children’s Liturgy Teams, Parish Baptismal Teams, Parish Youth Ministry Teams, Parish Bereavement Teams, Welcoming Teams etc, so that the clergy no longer feel overburdened in the relent-

less task of ministering to God’s people in the modern day world. However, all the investment in the world will be of no use unless the clergy buy into the changes.

What a difference this change in mindset could bring about, what a difference this model of being Church could make to we clergy and our people, and what a rejuvenation it could give to our Parish communities.

Fr John is an Irish priest working in a parish who would rather not be identified at this time for pastoral reasons but the name and details are with the Managing Editor.

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Programme for government pretends that referendum never happened



Maria Steen

The programme for government 2025 was finally revealed last week. After long negotiations a pact was agreed between Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and nine Independent TDs.

Having examined the programme, I admit to being flabbergasted at its total disregard of the results of last year's referendum and the ramifications this has for children and their parents in particular.

To recall, the voting public overwhelmingly rejected the government's proposal to change the definition of family and erase the words "woman", "mother" and "home" from the Constitution.

A national referendum is the ultimate exercise in democracy when the people are asked to vote on a change to the law; one would think the government would sit up and listen. In this case, the voters made their position very clear when they rejected the attempt to remove from the Constitution the acknowledgment of the debt the State owes to women for the work they do in the home, yet the programme for government makes absolutely no mention of women who wish to stay at home with their children.

Instead, under the heading "Investing in our Future" the programme states that "affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare is not just about giving children the best opportunities, it is also about enabling families to make decisions that work for them."

Support

The government push for childcare as being the "best opportunity" for children or even "enabling" fami-

lies stands in stark contrast with the evidence about the wishes of most parents. According to the 2022 census, 78% of children are cared for by a parent or a family member with another 2% cared for by a childminder in the home; less than 20% were in childcare outside the home.

And so, ignoring the wishes of the vast majority of parents, the new government is so committed to childcare – despite our oft-reported history of abuse in industrial schools and other state-run or supported institutions, not to mention the current horrific performance of TUSLA with regard to vulnerable children in care – that it promises to "grow State involvement and investment in the sector".

“Studies and statistics attest to the fact that children from single parent households are at much greater risk of poverty”

Their solution? State-owned childcare facilities. To be clear, the government programme supports the separation of children from their parents for much of the week and their placement in state-run institutions: there is no support for parents wishing to care for their children themselves or to have a grandparent or other family member do so.

And if parents want their little one to be cared for in their own home by a childminder, even they will now come within the remit of the National Childcare Scheme. We are assured, however that the regulations will be "sensible".

The socialist undertones of the programme are further emphasised in the section entitled "Reducing Childhood Poverty". Again, despite the people's rejection of the government's

proposal to change the definition of family to essentially water down marriage even more than it has been already, there is no mention of strengthening or supporting marriage.

This despite the fact that marriage is one of the biggest protections against childhood poverty: both studies and statistics attest to the fact that children from single parent households are at much greater risk of poverty. According to one study by the Heritage Foundation, being raised in a married family reduced a child's probability of living in poverty by about 80 percent.

Nutrition

The Marxist vision is developed further in the promise to extend a "hot meals" programme in schools nationwide. Lest you think that this is for disadvantaged children who might otherwise go hungry, I can confirm that this is to be rolled out in all primary schools in 2025, with a commitment to extend it to all secondary schools in the lifetime of the government.

Regardless of the socioeconomic circumstances of the children and their families, the State is now going to feed the children of the nation a hot meal five days a week. There is even to be a Summer 2025 Holiday Meals pilot project, so that state meals continue all year round. "Why is this so bad?" you might ask.

I could talk about the cost of the programme (€300 million), the problems with providing nutritious meals at scale (there are already reports about cheap ultra-processed food being provided at €3.20 per meal), or the incredible waste that will inevitably ensue when picky eaters turn up their noses at what is on offer, but really my main concern is the cost to the family.

There is something unnerving about the State stepping into the shoes of parents who are otherwise providing adequately for their children. Parents have a duty to care for their children and one of their duties is to feed them – they have a right to perform that duty and not have it taken from them by the State.

For those parents who are struggling to feed their children, the government would spend taxpayers' money more judiciously, and serve families better, by providing cookery workshops to educate parents in how to



“It is in the preparation of a meal that children learn about nutrition, self-sufficiency and service of others. Seated at the table, they learn social skills, table manners, and etiquette that will empower them in social settings later in life”

provide nutritious meals for their children at home.

The raising of children happens in the day-to-day little things, and family mealtimes are critical in this regard. Catholics in particular understand the significance of breaking bread together and its importance in experiencing a sense of community.

So much is learned by children in the preparation of meals and in the sitting down together and partaking of a meal and engaging in conversations around the dinner table: it is truly an essential part of their education.

“This is where they develop their sense of personal identity and value”

It is in the preparation of a meal that children learn about nutrition, self-sufficiency and service of others. Seated at the table, they learn social skills, table manners, and etiquette that will empower them in social settings later in life.

In the conversations around the dinner table, children are intellectually stimulated: they learn about the world around them, about their family history, their parents' lives, and their own history – this is where they develop their sense of personal identity and value.

My personal view is that, next to family prayer, it is probably the most important and formative family activity in the life of a child.

By supporting a childcare model over parental choice, many will feel forced into the workplace. By feeding children in school, the State is setting up a dynamic at home where busy parents won't bother to cook a hot meal because the children have already eaten.

Connection

Many parents no doubt will be attracted by getting something for "free" – this is always what the socialistic vision offers. However before accepting this, parents would do well to consider the cost to their family relationships.

Missed family meals mean less time spent together as a family around the kitchen table. Less time

around the kitchen table means fewer chances to connect between parents and children. Less time spent in each other's company results in children who feel disconnected, less confident, more alone and less likely to confide and trust in their parents and other family members.

In the midst of a mental health crisis among the Ireland's youth, the last thing children and teenagers need is more State or institutional involvement: the State makes for a cold mother.

“This is the vision of the home to which the Constitution pays tribute and which the Irish people voted to retain”

Children, whether infants or teenagers, need someone who knows them and loves them to care for them, someone who takes the time to know what food is good for them, what they like to eat, and who provides a homely atmosphere in which they can truly be themselves and flourish.

This is the vision of the home to which the Constitution pays tribute and which the Irish people voted to retain. The government in its plans would do well to remember this. And we would do well to remember that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

“If parents want their little one to be cared for in their own home by a childminder, even they will now come within the remit of the National Childcare Scheme”

Why - and perhaps how - the nation should mark the Bicentenary of Catholic Emancipation



Peter Costello

In the new Programme for Government, which Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have been labouring over with the rural independents, there is a curious omission.

No provision is made for any official arrangements to mark the Bicentenary of the Catholic Emancipation which falls in the summer of 2029.

Given the huge volume of effort and goodwill that went into celebrating the 'Decade of Remembrance', recalling the long years of revolutionary Ireland between 1913 and 1923, not to commemorate an earlier historical landmark, which was hailed as a great social change, not only for Ireland, but also for our neighbours in England, Wales and Scotland, a change achieved through peaceful campaigning and by parliamentary action rather than by violent means, seems a strange lapse.

But perhaps in these days people are not too clear about what 'Catholic Emancipation' was, what it meant in 1829, and what it was thought to have achieved in 1929.

Certainly, back in 1829, the passing of the "Catholic Relief Act", which is the actual title of the Westminster parliamentary bill, was seen and celebrated by Irish people as a great national achievement.

It marked the end of a long process that had begun with a series earlier relief acts between 1774 and 1793, that had begun the tedious process of abolishing the infamous and odious 'Penal Laws'.

Process

This process had come to a head with the recent campaign by Daniel O'Connell to take his seat in Parliament, when he was forbidden as a Catholic to do so. It was clear that it was time to do away finally with the last of the Penal laws.

O'Connell, nicknamed 'The Liberator', became a much admired figure of international fame.

In turn, at the centenary in 1929, the governments of the new Irish State saw fit to sup-



A scene from a mass gathering held in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, June 23 1929 to mark the centenary of Catholic Emancipation. The caption to the photograph indicates that an individual had fainted. Photo: Capuchin Archives.

port the commemorations of this important event by facilitating the celebrations held over several days in late June of that year.

The climax of these was a Pontifical High Mass held in the Phoenix Park, on June 23, attended by up to 300,000 worshippers.

“The Post Office had issued a commemorative stamp designed by Irish artist Leo Whelan, with the head of Daniel O'Connell - Ireland's first ever commemorative stamp”

After this the Blessed Sacrament was paraded through the city, escorted by members of the Irish Army, and attended by both William Cosgrave, the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, and Mr de Valera, in his robes as Chancellor of the National University of Ireland. Benediction was celebrated on a temporary altar erected on what is now the Rory O'Moore Bridge.

The day before the Post Office had issued a commemorative stamp designed by Irish artist Leo Whelan, with the head of Daniel O'Connell - Ireland's first ever commemorative stamp.

Many schools were closed, so teachers and children could attend the events - some 40,000 children attended the Mass in the Park, supervised by some 8,000 stewards.

Special bronze badges

depicting the bell of St Peter's Church, which was the church that rang out first when Emancipation had been declared a century before. The proceeds from these badges, it was reported, were expected to cover the cost of the entire celebrations.

Given the tone of Catholic triumphalism that hung over the events of 1929, it would seem that the present government does not wish to be seen to give support to an event which would be seen as overly Catholic and perhaps offensive to many in the present day.

Bear in mind the hierarchy itself may feel that it does not want to sponsor an event that would seem to rake over old antagonisms.

But these notions arise perhaps from a failure on the part of government and Church to understand the historical significance of the events of 1829.

At the opening service of the centenary celebrations Dr James MacNamee, the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, mentioned in concluding his address, to recall the suffering of earlier generations of Catholics, but "in no desire to rekindle the fears and animosities of the past."

Pride

Rather he suggested people should recall "with grateful pride the signal service to the cause of Catholic freedom of such great Protestants as Grattan, Burke and Tone". The Protestants of 1929 would be animated too by their own spirit of justice and fair play.

But of greater significance were remarks made by the Rev. J. C. Breakey of Belfast at the Abbey Presbyterian Church on Parnell Square, preaching on

threat of a Stuart invasion to overthrow the House of Hanover receded after 1745. The infamous Penal laws were indeed odious, but they applied to Non-Conformists of various kinds as well as Catholics, and had long ceased to be tolerable to right thinking folk.

Significant

Anyone familiar with the course of Irish history will agree that the Catholic Relief Act was a significant moment that deserves commemoration.

But it ought to be seen as a celebration, not of sectarian division, but as a celebration of the religious freedoms enjoyed in Ireland, and which all can agree upon.

The civil servants advising the government will always ask first, "What was done last time?". While a recreation of what was done in June 1929 might not now be agreeable to either the Catholic Church or the government, some way can easily be found.

The celebrations as a whole ought to be returned from the national level back to parish level, with each parish holding its own appropriate commemorations, along the lines of

exploring what the passage of the act meant for their locality.

This could be done in a spirit of inter-faith appreciation of those religious freedoms that the Rev. Breakey and Dr McNamee spoke about in 1929. This would be in keeping with the past, the present, and the much desired peaceful future of the country.

As for the government they could facilitate the event by providing Dublin Castle as a venue for an interfaith conference on the theme of expanding and protecting religious freedoms in Ireland and elsewhere in the world today. These proceedings could be published as a book.

And though the sale of little bronze badges might not cover all the costs, as they did in 1929, a commemorative postage stamp, again with an image of Daniel O'Connell, who has in the past two centuries been all too often denigrated by Republicans and Socialists, would not come amiss either.

Peter Costello, the author of many books dealing with the life and culture of nineteenth century Ireland, is the former Honorary Librarian of the Central Catholic Library in Dublin.

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“The civil servants advising the government will always ask first, “What was done last time?”. While a recreation of what was done in June 1929 might not now be agreeable to either the Catholic Church or the government, some way can easily be found”

Out&About

Feast of the Baptism in Co. Carlow



CARLOW: The Graiguecullen/Killeshin Parish, Co. Carlow, had a service for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on January 12.



WATERFORD: The Holy Family Mission joined Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus (Phonsie) Cullinan on his boat journey from Faithlegg to Waterford on the Feast of St Ita, January 15, to celebrate the Jubilee of Hope.



DUBLIN: (L/R) Srs Brigeen Wilson, Eilish Mc Kenna, Gabriel Magee, Fionnuala O' Connor, Noleen Slattery, Therese Marie Frost. The Carmelite Monastery of St Joseph community in Kilmacud, South Dublin recently celebrated Sr Eilish's birthday.

INSHORT

Kilmore priest appointed Domestic Chaplain to the Pope

A priest from Kilmore Diocese who has been working in a Dicastery in the Vatican since 2021 has been appointed Domestic Chaplain to Pope Francis with the title of Monsignor.

Msgr Edna Murphy did his primary degree in QUB and graduated with honours. During that time, he was a student for the priesthood and a resident of St Malachy's College, Belfast. He studied in the Irish College in Rome and later in the Institute of San Anselmo, also in Rome.

After his ordination to the Diocese of Kilmore in 2001, he served as a curate in Laragh Parish until 2008, when he returned to Rome to complete his studies. He returned to the Diocese of Kilmore in 2013 and was appointed Director of Pastoral Services and Youth Ministry.

On September 2, 2021, he was appointed as the *Capo Ufficio* (head of office) of the Second Section of the Congregation

of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments.

The appointment to the Domestic Chaplaincy had immediate effect and is a great excitement in the diocese, among clergy and particularly Msgr Murphy's home parish of Knockniny and the parishes he has served in the diocese.

Diocese of Elphin's youngest Irish-born priest dies

The youngest Irish-born priest of the Diocese of Elphin died on the morning of January 16. Fr Donal Morris, parish priest of Kilbegnet and Glinsk was a native of Co. Roscommon and grew up in the Ballinaheglish Church area, in the Parish of Oran.

Fr Morris started his journey to priesthood after his leaving certificate by undertaking the pre-seminary formation year at Donamon, in the same parish where he has served for the past five years. He completed his formation at St Patrick's College, Maynooth and was ordained in 1995.

His first assignment after ordination was as a curate in Kilmurry, in Tusk Parish. During his priesthood, Fr Morris worked as a Chaplain to the Castlereagh Prison where he worked for seven years. The priest also worked in Knockcroghery Parish, St Joseph's Parish, Loughglynn Parish, and his final assignment was the Parish of Kilbegnet and Glinsk.

Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran said in a statement, that in spite of his declining health, Fr Morris "gave himself very generously in the service of his parishioners."

The bishop also said, "Donal carried his illness with great courage. As he commented recently, there was no point in speaking words of faith at the death-beds of others, if he didn't reflect that faith in his own dying. He deeply appreciated the care that was given to him, especially in the Hawthorne Unit at St Vincent's Private Hospital, which he jokingly described as his 'local'."

"He was always very concerned that those who had served as priests in the past would not be forgotten after they died. We will certainly not forget him anytime soon," said Bishop Doran.

Edited by Renata Steffens
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



ANTRIM: Parishioners gathered in the first of a series of Parish Pastoral Council formation days as part of the Pathway to the Future Leadership training of the Down and Connor Diocese on January 11.



ANTRIM: The event, organised by the 'Pathways to the Future' team, explored facilitating leadership within parishes. (L/R): Stephen McAnee (Chairperson of Pathways to the Future), Jim Deeds (Facilitator), Aishling Steen (Pathways to the Future).



DUBLIN: Celebrating Christian Unity, Bishop Paul Dempsey in a ceremony in Blakestown on January 11, welcomed Bishop Nectarie of the Romanian Orthodox Church who began his ministry as Bishop of Ireland and Iceland.



ANTRIM: Over 40 parishioners gathered on January 11, to participate in the first of a series of Parish Pastoral Council formation days as part of the Pathway to the Future Leadership training of the Down and Connor Diocese. Jim Deeds was the facilitator of the event, which took place in Ballyclare and Ballygowan Parish.

ANTRIM

Fr Antonio and Brother Shawn from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal will visit the Parish of Loughgiel and celebrate Mass and Eucharistic Healing Service in St Patrick's Church, Magherahoney on January 22 at 7pm.

CAVAN

Positive age rescheduled New Year Party will now take place on Tuesday, January 28 at 1pm in Castlemanor Community Centre, Billis.

CLARE

West Clare FRC activities for the over 55s: Quiz Time takes place on January 30 at 2.30pm in Kilrush Community Centre. More information on 065 905 2173.

CORK

'Seeds of Hope: Returning Biodiversity to Our Parishes', a Laudato Si' conference for the Dioceses of Kerry, Killaloe, Limerick and Cashel and Emly takes place on January 25 from 10am to 4pm in Springfort Hall, Mallow. Guest speakers will give a talk in the morning and workshops will happen in the afternoon. Register at maria.murphy@trocaire.org. Suggested donation is €10.

DERRY

'Come follow me' Eucharistic procession takes place on February 1 starting at 1pm in Long Tower Chapel. Derry-Medjugorje Procession united at the same time. For more information contact be.healed.derry.procession@gmail.com.

DUBLIN

Priorswood Parish's men's fitness class takes place on Wednesdays from 1.30pm to 2.30. €5 per class. More information on 089 486 7102 or priorswoodparish@yahoo.ie.

FERMANAGH

This year, the Christian Unity Week Service in Enniskillen takes place in St Michael's Church on Thursday, January 23 at 7.30pm.

GALWAY

SafeTALK is a half-day suicide prevention training for anyone over 18 and takes place for free at the Town Hall, Clifden on February 25 from 10am to

1.30pm. Learn basic steps to recognise when people have suicide thoughts and to connect them to suicide first aid resources. Book by email: darlene@breakingthrough.org.

KILDARE

St Brigid's Camino Walk organised by Monasterevin Parish takes place on February 3 at 11am, starting at St Brigid's Shrine at Mountrice. The walk will be led by Bishop Denis Nulty and will make a journey via Umeras, finishing at Sts Peter and Paul Church with a service of light at 12.30pm. More information on 045 525346.

LOUTH

Prayer meeting takes place each Monday from 8pm to 9.30pm in 'Bethany', 34 Point Road, Dundalk. More information on 042 933 1602. All welcome.

The Holy Family Parish, Drogheda invites you for Eucharistic adoration every Thursday and Friday from 10am to 9pm in St Mary's Blessed Sacrament Chapel. More information on stmarysdrogheda@gmail.com.

MAYO

The Catechism Café's 'Faith in a Faithless World' on January 31 at 7.30pm in St John's Rest and Care, Knock. Join for a series of talks, panel discussion and Q&A session. Light refreshments and pizza offered on the night. Guest speakers are Ciarán Clarke, Clodagh Gallagher, Ronan Mullen and Ben Scallan.

The next Latin Mass takes place on Sunday, February 9, at 6pm, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock.

SLIGO

Irish-language family gathering organised by the Dominicans accommodates all levels. Irish classes and faith formation for parents and children will have an information meeting for parents on January 25 in Summerhill College at 3pm. Beginners in Irish are welcome. More information at dominicans.ie.

WATERFORD

Every Wednesday morning after 10.30am Mass at St Joseph and Benildus Church, a coffee gathering happens at the Benildus Parish Centre at 11am. No booking is required, everyone welcome.

Filipinos celebrate Santo Niño in Dublin



Renata Steffens

The Filipino Community in Dublin gathered to mark the feast of Señor Santo Niño de Cebu. The 26th annual celebration in Dublin took place in St Joseph's Church, Berkeley Road, Dublin 7 on January 19. It is estimated over 600 people joined the celebration this year.

With an outdoor celebration followed by Mass, the event's main celebrant was Bishop Paul Dempsey. The bishop was assisted by co-celebrants Fr Paul Churchill PP, Fr Roner Anildes OSA, Fr Michael Kennedy and deacons Rev. Declan Barry and Rev. Norvil Cagua.

"We have observed an increasing number of attendees every year. The devotion has become very popular

among Filipinos living in Ireland - young and old alike. Every year, this celebration is made possible with the help and participation of all religious, social, and civic Filipino associations," said Lorna Patindol, one of the organisers of the event.

The celebration of the Feast of Santo Niño started on January 10 with rosary, novena and Mass happening every evening until January 18, and the procession on January 19.

The feast, also known as Fiesta Señor, celebrates an image of Child Jesus, which is more than 500 years old and of Flemish origin. Pope Francis authorised the image's coronation in 1965 as part of the 400th anniversary of the evangelisation of the Philippines. The Feast is celebrated every third Sunday of January.

The statue that processed through the roads of Dublin received new vestments for the 2025 Feast and the community was encouraged to bring their own Santo Niño statues and red/yellow panyolito (a small handkerchief) and Cofradia del Santo Niño medals.



Edna Go and Nadine Marie Go - carrying the banner during the outdoor procession of the Feast of Santo Niño 2025.



Dr Liza Patindol offering the Sinulog dance and bouquet of flowers to Santo Niño.



Claire Acocoro Cosgrove offering the Sinulog dance.



Michaela Ocleasa, Lenie Dabatos and Trisha Quejada - holding the statue of Santo Niño during the outdoor procession.



Schuyler To giving his in-kind offerings to Bishop Paul Dempsey during the Feast Day Mass.



THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

Daring to hope in Syria



Caritas Italiana worker in Aleppo and member of the Focolare movement **Davide Chiarot** spoke to **Luca Attanasio** of *The Synodal Times*

Syria is experiencing a momentous moment. It is normal for the whole world to wonder about its future, whether it will be truly democratic and pluralist as the new leaders claim, or whether, as in the case of Afghanistan, it will turn into a nightmare or possibly worse. The international community is wondering whether to look with distrust at the markedly Islamic matrix of the new leadership that came to power a little over a month ago, or whether instead to give credence to the statement made by Ahmed al-Sharaa, commonly known as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani to Ibrahim Faltas, vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land “I do not consider Christian Syrians a minority, but an integral and important part of the history of the Syrian people”. Whether to trust the praise of Jolani himself for the work of the Pope or the reassurances that the new government continually offers about the new social order that the country will experience.

These are more than legitimate questions. The first to ask them, however, are they, the Syrians,

oppressed by an atrocious 13-year-long conflict (which hopefully will come to an end) and harassed by a dynastic regime that has lasted over 50 years. In the meantime, the streets of the cities are alive with anticipation, tranquillity and hope seem to prevail. To better understand the new situation from the inside, *The Synodal Times* turned to someone who, by choice and vocation, lives among the people, the Caritas Italiana worker in Aleppo and member of the Focolare movement Davide Chiarot.

“It is well known that young people were forcibly conscripted and forced into action”

Davide: “The situation in the city remains quiet. The effort of the new interim government is to re-establish security as quickly as possible. This means that a series of operations have been put in place throughout Syria, especially in Homs and on the coast where raids and controls are underway that are leading to arrests of senior cadres of the old regime and the seizure of weapons caches. These are areas with a large Alawite presence, the Shiite minority group of the Assad and loyal to the power that had always had a strong majority at the top. The action this month also focused on regularising the police and army: offices were opened in all cities and all citizens in possession of weapons were invited to hand them in and register. The armed labour base of the regime theoretically has nothing to fear because it is well known that young peo-



Davide Chiarot



ple were forcibly conscripted and forced into action”.

Davide, are the clashes and episodes of violence over?

“Unfortunately, there are still some episodes of revenge, especially against those who were evidently part of the power during the regime. Some of the prisoners who entered prison after the regime change and are accused of having been agents of Assad or in any case close to the regime possibly are being treated in a good manner. But on the whole there is a general interest in avoiding reprisals, acts of revenge, and the aim is to collect testimonies, evidence and then hold regular trials. During this period, several mass graves and prisons where torture was practised were discovered. The white helmets and the UN are trying to preserve these sites both to provide information to the relatives of the victims and because they may contain useful material for future trials”.

What are the main problems facing the country at the moment?

“Well first of all, Israel’s presence in the south is a cause for concern. It is unclear how far it will extend and what it may hold. In this sense there is a lot of anticipation for the truce for Gaza, an event that could favour an easing of ten-

“On the one hand there was the feeling of having a power that somehow protects you and on the other hand you lived without the real news reaching you”

sions. The second problem is the tensions in the north-east between Kurds and pro-Turks. Clashes between armed militias of the two blocs continue. One of the objectives that the new leadership has set itself is precisely the dissolution of all armed groups in order to bring them together in a single army. On this delicate point, an agreement seems to be on the way. And finally there is the problem of the blockade of the banking system and the daily withdrawal limit of 500,000 lira a day (about 40 dollars, ed.). But for everyone, even for us at Caritas, for the churches, the NGOs, the limit on the flow of liquidity is a serious problem, payments cannot be made and there are many difficulties in continuing activities”.

In this transitional period, is daily life resuming normally?

“Schools are regularly open, but I cannot tell you if salaries are arriving regularly. There is a provisional reorganisation of ministries, which slows everything down a bit. Then there is the aspect of water and electricity supplies, which is still a problem. They are negotiating agreements with Turkey to increase the supply. In the meantime, there is a great deal of politi-

cal and geopolitical ferment, diplomatic relations are being established, there have been many reciprocal visits, especially by representatives of Arab countries, the United States and a few European countries. Everyone, leaderships and populations, are hoping for a suspension or at least reduction of sanctions”.

“Everyone knew how harsh the regime was but it was hard to imagine this level of cruelty, the torture, the prisons”

Some 40 days have now passed since the new leadership took power, does hope or fear prevail among the population?

“On the one hand, hope prevails, the situation was so bad that the change was welcomed by all, or at least by many, positively. Even among Christians there is a widespread feeling that a new page has been opened. But on the other hand, there is great concern. Recently there was a meeting with the bishops and patriarchs of all the churches

and there was an effort, the feeling is positive, but we still need to understand better. Christians felt somehow protected but lived with an underlying fear that somehow pushed them to justify the regime. But what is emerging now is truly frightening. Everyone knew how harsh the regime was but it was hard to imagine this level of cruelty, the torture, the prisons. In a way, on the one hand there was the feeling of having a power that somehow protects you and on the other hand you lived without the real news reaching you. Now you come to terms with reality and ask yourself: what will be the future and what will be the relationship especially with Islam, which, as is well known, which, as is well known, is not limited to managing the private sphere of the population.”

Are there fears of retaliation and revenge?

“Basically everyone has suffered a system of oppression. Furthermore, I think people are aware of how all churches have spent themselves to help everyone. In particular, everyone recognises the inclusive, transversal value of the work of Caritas. I don’t think there is resentment towards Christians, the real culprit is the regime, the people in general have good relations and have suffered together in thirteen years of war”.

Are refugees outside the country starting to return?

“There is an initial return from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, but the numbers are still very low, people are waiting to understand. The easing of sanctions to facilitate reconstruction would be very important. In the meantime, we at Caritas are implementing a very ambitious project that focuses on encounter, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, it is called PeaceMed and involves 26 countries on both sides of the Mediterranean. It is an important sign to recreate trust in Syria and in this whole area that is so tried but also full of wonderful people”.

“The effort of the new interim government is to re-establish security as quickly as possible. This means that a series of operations have been put in place throughout Syria”

First Italian diocese presents abuse study

Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone demonstrates 'courage to look, courage to act'



Sabine Kleyboldt (KNA)

It was the first time that he had quoted a Pope when presenting a study on abuse, said lawyer Ulrich Wastl on Monday: Francis had said on sexualised violence that "every single case is one too many" for the Church. Words that were later repeated by Ivo Muser (62), Bishop of Bolzano-Bressanone since 2011.

Under his leadership, the diocese had commissioned the independent report from the Munich law firm Westpfahl-Spinker-Wastl - it was the first of the more than 200 dioceses in Italy to take "the painful path of clarification", praised Wastl at the presentation. The law firm had already carried out investigations on behalf of the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising and other German dioceses.

Around 1,000 files were examined for the more than 600-page report "Sexual abuse of minors and adult charges by clerics in the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone from 1964 to 2023". The research identified 67 cases of abuse and 59 victims between the ages of 8 and 14. Of the 41 accused priests, who were between 28 and 35, the allegations were proven with a high degree of probability or certainty in the case of 29; in the case of 12 clerics, they could not be sufficiently assessed.

Dark field study worthwhile

However, these figures only reflect the bright field, said lawyer Nata Gladstein. "We believe that the dark field is much larger." There have not yet been any corresponding studies, but they would certainly be worthwhile.

According to the study, the number of cases has fallen sharply since the 1990s; however, many of the offences were already known to the diocese man-

agement before 2010. There had been massive mistakes by decision-makers at various levels, partly out of ignorance, refusal or even with the best of intentions, said Wastl. In 24 cases of abuse, those responsible in the diocese had acted incorrectly or at least inappropriately, in some cases for years.

“The most surprising result for the reporters was that more than 51% of those affected were female, while only 18% could be clearly identified as male”

The team was left speechless by the case of a priest who had "groped" and abused little girls since the 1960s, but had been transferred from one parish to the next for decades. It was only after around 50 years that someone "had the courage" to remove him from pastoral care, according to the expert.

The most surprising result for the reporters was that more than 51% of those affected were female, while only 18% could be clearly identified as male. This is of particular interest from a German perspective, where the number of males far outweighed the females, as well as from a South Tyrolean and Italian perspective, Wastl continued. A separate scientific study would also be worthwhile here.

Systemic causes

According to the legal experts, the results of the "Courage to look" project hardly differed from findings from German dioceses in terms of the systemic causes. Wastl cited immature sexuality, the isolation of priests and the fatal concept of the "presumption of innocence". This is carried around "like a monstrosity" by those who do not want to come to terms with the past. During ongoing proceedings, a priest should not be removed from pastoral care.

But what if there is never a conviction, for example if cases are time-barred?

Another problem is "lay clericalism", where the parishes themselves want to protect their priests. Parishes should therefore be more involved in the prevention of abuse and "combat the evil (...) at grassroots level". The rapporteurs also recommend setting up independent ombudsman offices and getting more women into positions of responsibility. With their study, which the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone has

now completed at the third attempt, the "courage to look" could grow into the "courage to act", said Wastl.

After the press conference, which lasted around 90 minutes, Bishop Muser and Vicar General Eugen Runggaldier accepted the two volumes bound in red in the South Tyrolean languages of German and Italian. Muser announced a statement for Friday. He expressly thanked those affected for their co-operation in the study. Their suffering is shameful for the church.



Archbishop John Kennedy

Church wants to prevent halving of religious education in Poland

Warsaw (KNA) In Poland, the dispute between the Catholic Church and the centre-left government over the subject of religion in state schools is escalating. Leszek Gesiak, spokesman for the Bishops' Conference, told the TV channel *Polsat News* on Monday: "We will take further legal action depending on how the situation develops." The bishops' own lawyers are currently analysing the case, he added.

Despite considerable objections from the Church, Education Minister Barbara Nowacka had ordered on Friday that the amount of religious education lessons be halved to one hour per week from the coming school year. On Sunday, the Presidium of the Bishops' Conference described the minister's decree as an "unlawful act" because the required agreement with the Catholic Church and other affected religious communities had not been reached.

Church warns against confrontation

"We expect the Ministry of National Education to return to constitutional standards and refrain from confrontational measures against believers who are full citizens of the Republic of Poland," explained the chairman of the Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda, and his deputy Archbishop Jozef Kupny on Sunday.

The reduction of religious education to one lesson per week and the new obligation to offer religion only in the first or last lesson of the day restrict the constitutionally guaranteed right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their own faith. The bishops also criticise an encroachment on the rights of pupils and religion teachers. Some of the latter now fear losing their jobs.

The Catholic Church had already appealed to Poland's Supreme Court

against another decree by Education Minister Nowacka in 2024 and was ruled in favour by the constitutional judges. This concerned the joint religious education of different year groups if fewer than seven pupils choose the subject in a class. The government did not recognise the Constitutional Court's ruling.

Minister: Common sense

Nowacka justified her decision to cap religious education with "common sense". Young people should not be taught more hours of religious education than biology, chemistry, physics and social studies put together, she said.

The subject of religion has only been back in Polish schools since 1990. It is voluntary. Parents can therefore withdraw their children from religious education. In 1961, the then communist rulers in Warsaw banned all religious education in all educational institutions.

Gaza pastor calls for reconstruction efforts

The ceasefire is causing a sigh of relief in Gaza. However, more efforts are needed for a lasting ceasefire and reconstruction, demands the Catholic priest of Gaza City.

Jerusalem (KNA) The ceasefire in the Gaza Strip is an important step, according to the Catholic priest of Gaza, Gabriel Romanelli. However, much more effort is needed to turn the temporary ceasefire into a permanent truce and to rebuild the completely destroyed Gaza Strip, said the Argentinian religious from the "Verbo encarnado" (Incarnate Word) community at a virtual meeting with an international group of bishops in Jerusalem.

The cessation of hostilities had led to a sigh of relief in Gaza. At the same time,

freedom of movement is still restricted. Romanelli expressed hope that the ceasefire agreement reached between Hamas and Israel would be honoured. However, this does not equate to peace. He criticised the fact that the issue of reconstruction is not part of the first phase of the agreement.

Romanelli described the situation in the Gaza Strip as very bad. Most of the houses and infrastructure had been destroyed and the people were without shelter. In addition, the hospitals that still exist are completely overloaded, there is no electricity supply, fuel prices have risen dramatically, the water supply is inadequate and there are no jobs. Uncertainty is a

major challenge for the people. Nobody knows whether the war will continue or not.

According to Romanelli, the Church continues to provide massive humanitarian aid. Last month, for example, around 60,000 people in the old town of Gaza City and other neighbourhoods were provided with food.

According to the religious, the Catholic parish in Gaza City is still home to almost 500 people, including almost 60 Muslims. Overall, the war has also hit the Christian minority in the Gaza Strip hard. From a total of 1,017 Christians before the war began in October 2023, the number has fallen to less than 700. According to the report, 20 Christians were killed by the Israeli army and

a further 27 died as a result of a lack of medical care, among other things. Between 250 and 270 Christians had left the Gaza Strip for various countries such as the USA, Australia and Russia. Christian institutions such as schools were also affected by war damage.

Twelve Catholic bishops from nine countries are taking part in the solidarity meeting, which runs until Wednesday. The programme includes meetings with Church and diplomatic representatives as well as visits to parishes and Christian institutions. The bishops' meeting has taken place every January since 1998 on behalf of the Holy See and at the invitation of the Catholic bishops of the Holy Land.



World Report



Edited by Brandon Scott
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Mother and daughter reunite



Freed Palestinian prisoner Nidaa Zaghebi embraces her daughter, Cilla, after her release from an Israeli jail in Jenin, West Bank, January 20, 2025, as part of a hostages-prisoners swap and a ceasefire deal between Hamas and Israel. Photo: OSV News/Raneen Sawafta, Reuters.

Nigeria tops report for number of Christians killed, kidnapped in 2024

Nigeria was the country with the most Christians killed and kidnapped in 2024, according to the latest report from advocacy group Open Doors.

The World Watch List, released January 15, found that 3,100 Christians were killed and 2,830 Christians were kidnapped in Nigeria in 2024, far more than other countries in the same year.

The report also said the country with the most Christians arrested in 2024 was India, at 2,176, and Rwanda experienced the most attacks on Christian churches or buildings with 4,000.

The Open Doors watch list confirmed that Christian persecution continued to grow

“in absolute terms” among the about 100 countries the group monitored in 2024, with 13 countries classified at “extreme levels” of Christian persecution.

The group estimates over 380 million Christians worldwide experienced at least a “high level” of persecution and discrimination because of their faith.

North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan are the report’s top five countries for Christian persecution in 2024. Nigeria ranks Number 7 on the watch list. Eritrea, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, India, Saudi Arabia, and Myanmar round out the top 13 countries, all classified as having “extreme” levels of

anti-Christian persecution.

With the release of the World Watch List 2025, Open Doors Italy Director Cristian Nani said, “380 million Christians in the world do not enjoy the basic human right to believe what they want. How many more killed, displaced, abused, and imprisoned Christians do we need to count before we put religious freedom at the centre of public debate?”

“In 32 years of research, we record a steady increase in anti-Christian persecution in absolute terms,” Mr Nani added. “2024 is again a record year of intolerance: 1 in 7 Christians suffer discrimination or persecution because of their faith: It is

crucial to get back to talking about religious freedom in the public debate.”

Nigeria has been grappling with Muslim extremist violence since 2009, perpetrated by groups such as Boko Haram, which reportedly persecute Christians, sometimes kidnapping them for ransom and, in some cases, killing them.

While a 2025 report from the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need said the abduction of Catholic clergy and religious in Nigeria decreased from 28 in 2023 to 12 in 2024, it is still one of the most dangerous countries in which to be a priest or religious.

Mixed messages from Pope as Trump begins presidency

Pope Francis sent a message to Donald Trump on the occasion of his inauguration as the 47th president of the United States on Monday, offering prayers for “wisdom, strength, and protection” in the exercise of his duties and invoking blessings upon the “beloved American people”.

In the message, released by the Holy See Press Office on January 20, the Pontiff expressed hope that under Trump’s leadership, the American people would

“prosper and always strive to build a more just society”.

The Pope acknowledged the “numerous challenges” facing the human family, including “the scourge of war,” and asked God to guide Trump’s efforts in “promoting peace and reconciliation among peoples.”

The message concluded with the Holy Father invoking “an abundance of divine blessings” upon Trump, his family, and “the beloved American people.”

One day earlier – on Sunday – Pope Francis criticised potential plans for mass deportations in the United States during a wide-ranging Italian television interview.

“If this is true it is a disgrace because it makes the poor unfortunate who have nothing pay the price of imbalance. This is not how things are solved,” the pope said on Italian broadcaster Nove’s “Che Tempo Che Fa” programme.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis key in Cuban government’s release of 553 prisoners

● The Cuban government announced the release of 553 prisoners through the mediation of Pope Francis “in the spirit of the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025”.

“President [Miguel] Díaz-Canel sent a letter to the supreme pontiff in which, in the spirit of the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025 declared by His Holiness and which has just begun, he communicated the decision to benefit by granting freedom to 553 people sanctioned in due process for various crimes established by law ... [These people] will receive their respective benefits gradually,” the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement dated January 14.

Cuba’s statement refers to Pope Francis’ call to release prisoners during the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, which began on December 24, 2024, at the Vatican.

Rome to host ecumenical vigil for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

● The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which runs January 18–25, takes on special significance this year because of the 1,700th anniversary of the first ecumenical council in history, the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

On January 25, the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, Pope Francis will conclude this week of prayer with ves-

pers in St Paul Outside the Walls Basilica at 5:30pm Rome time.

In addition, on Thursday, January 23, at 6 pm, the Diocese of Rome will organise a travelling vigil involving three different places of worship: the Lutheran church located at 70 Via Sicilia, St Andrew Orthodox Church at 153 Via Sardegna, and St Camillus de Lellis Parish at 41 Via Piemonte.

Autobiography by Pope Francis tells about his advancing age

● In a new book, Pope Francis said he feels “all right” despite his illnesses. “The reality is, quite simply, that I am old,” he says in “Hope: The Autobiography”, which was co-written with the Italian journalist Carlo Musso.

The book was originally going to be published after his death, but Francis decided to let it go out during the 2025 Jubilee. In the autobiography, he said using a wheelchair didn’t affect his governance of the Catholic Church. “The Church is governed using the head and the heart, not the legs,” says the 88-year-old pontiff. He has been dealing with medical issues, including surgery in 2021 and 2023, and often battles with influenza.

Pope: A woman will soon be head of government of the Vatican state

● Pope Francis recently appointed a woman to head a Vatican authority for the first time. Now he has announced another top female appointment at the Vatican. This time not at the head of the Church, but in the Vatican state.

In March, he will appoint Sr Raffaella Petrini as head of government of the Vatican State, he said on Sunday evening as a guest on an Italian television talk show.

The social scientist is already deputy governor and thus deputy to the head of government, Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, who turns 80 on 1 March. Sr Petrini has also been a member of the Curia authority for bishops since July 2022, in which she also votes on the appointment of bishops in other countries. In October, the Pope also appointed the nun to the Apostolic See’s Property Administration, which is responsible for all of the Vatican’s investment decisions.

1,600 of Rome’s poor attend ‘Bernadette of Lourdes’ premiere

● A musical that tells the story of St Bernadette, visionary of Our Lady of Lourdes, made its debut in Rome on January 14. The premiere was reserved for a select group of guests: 1,600 people from low-income families.

The Office of the Papal Almoner, headed by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, invited more than a thousand low-income people and refugees to enjoy the show in the large auditorium located on Via della Conciliazione, the wide avenue that leads to St Peter’s Square.

Letters

Letter of the week

Dry January and the need for lasting solutions

Dear Editor, The concept of 'Dry January' has gained popularity in recent years, with many people abstaining from alcohol for the month as a way to reset or cleanse after the excesses of the holiday season. While commendable in its intentions, I believe this initiative falls short of addressing the deeper, more enduring struggles some people face with alcohol consumption.

Fr Robert McCabe, Spiritual Director for the Pioneers, recently suggested that rather than simply abstaining for one month, individuals might find greater

benefit in attending an open AA meeting in their region [*The Irish Catholic* – January 16, 2025].

I wholeheartedly agree with this proposal. Alcoholics Anonymous offers a space for genuine fellowship and ongoing support that extends far beyond the limitations of a temporary challenge like Dry January. For those who find themselves grappling with temptation, the lived experiences of AA members can inspire and encourage a life of sobriety grounded in community and faith.

Moreover, Fr McCabe's

reference to the life of Venerable Matt Talbot is particularly poignant. As we mark the centenary of his death, Talbot's story offers a powerful example of transformation through prayer, self-sacrifice, and reliance on God's grace. His life reminds us that the journey toward freedom from addiction is not merely about abstinence but about inviting God to rewrite the story of our lives.

The Pioneers, with their commitment to prayer, sacrifice, and outreach, provide a beautiful model for those seeking deeper healing. Their embrace of repara-

tion as a path of hope, particularly in a world where addiction continues to cast its shadow over so many lives, is a model to follow.

Let us not limit our efforts to January alone. Initiatives like Dry January may serve as a helpful starting point, but lasting change requires deeper, sustained support. Attending an AA meeting or looking to the example of holy men and women like Matt Talbot can provide a wellspring of strength for those who seek it.

*Yours etc.,
Sean McDonagh
Swords, Dublin*



Time for religious sisters to speak up for themselves

Dear Editor, It is understandable that Irish religious sisters have felt 'scapegoated' in our media for the past failings of society. Many have felt

silenced in fear of being 'shut down'. Perhaps the time is right for both our religious sisters to speak up for themselves and the many amazing women that

have done so much good for so many, but also for those of us of faith who know the truth. The reality is that without the contribution of our religious sisters, many

would have been deprived of an education and good health care.

*Yours etc.,
Deacon Frank Browne,
Rathfarnham, Dublin 14*

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.

Let's welcome the synod document, rather than dispute its status

Dear Editor, In his cover note accompanying the Final Document of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis wrote, "The Final Document is part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter (cf. EC 18 § 1; CCC 892), and as such, I ask that it be welcomed and received. It represents a form of exercise of the authentic teaching of the Bishop of Rome." This means that the Final Document is more than a "reasonable record" of the Synod's proceedings, as Fr McKeown OP [*The Irish Catholic* – January 16, 2025] describes it. It has the same magisterial status as Pastoral Exhortations such as, say, St John Paul's *Familiaris consortio* and Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*.

The difference between the 'teaching Church' and the 'learning Church', which Fr McKeown wants strictly upheld, was considered during a five-year study (2009-2014) conducted by the International Theological Commission.

A "strict separation" was judged to be an over-reaction that emerged during the post-Tridentine era and was subsequently "banished" by Vatican II. A report of the Commission's findings, published under the direction of the then Prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, reiterated the distinctive teaching role of pastors but also the reality that all the baptised "participate in their own proper way in the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king".

The recent Synod put this conciliar teaching into practice. The fact is that laity, priests and religious, participating fully and equally by virtue of their common baptismal dignity, discussed, discerned and decided upon a text that now participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter.

Let's welcome the document rather than dispute its status and instead get on with its implementation.

*Yours etc.,
Tom Mahon
Dundalk, Co. Louth*

You cannot pass on what you don't have

Dear Editor, In the light of the very disturbing findings of the 2024 Grace Reports on the faith and belief status of today's Irish teachers, principals and members of Boards of Management (BoMs) of Irish Catholic schools I was absolutely amazed at the assertion from Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) concerning the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies (CCRS) and its place in Catholic Primary Schools.

What does the Grace Report say? How have Ireland's Catholic bishops responded to the findings? What is the purpose of Catholic primary schools?

Leading spokesperson for both CPSMA and the Dublin Archdiocese defend the CCRS requirement. They say the certificate is simply a professional qualification and they go on to stress that you do not need to be a Catholic to get it.

It hardly needs saying that all those teaching the CCRS course should always themselves be witnesses to the Gospel in their own lives and

in their professional repute. I would contend that only those teachers who understand, live and witness to their faith and are willing to teach that same faith should be commissioned and permitted the privilege of teaching Catholic religious education and preparing young people for the Sacraments.

Children can see through the hypocrisy of being prepared for First Communion, Reconciliation or Confirmation by unbelievers. Is it any wonder we have a crisis in Irish Catholic Education?

The Grace Reports revealed the astonishing extent of unbelief among teachers and BoM members of Ireland's Catholic schools.

You cannot pass on what you do not have. Children can see through pretenders! Our Church authorities seem to want to pretend that all is well and that having an academic certificate will provide a fix: it won't and they should admit it; you cannot pass on what you do not have.

*Yours etc.,
Alan Whelan
Killarney, Co Kerry*

Your Faith

**My Church
institutionalised**

Fr Dominik Damagala

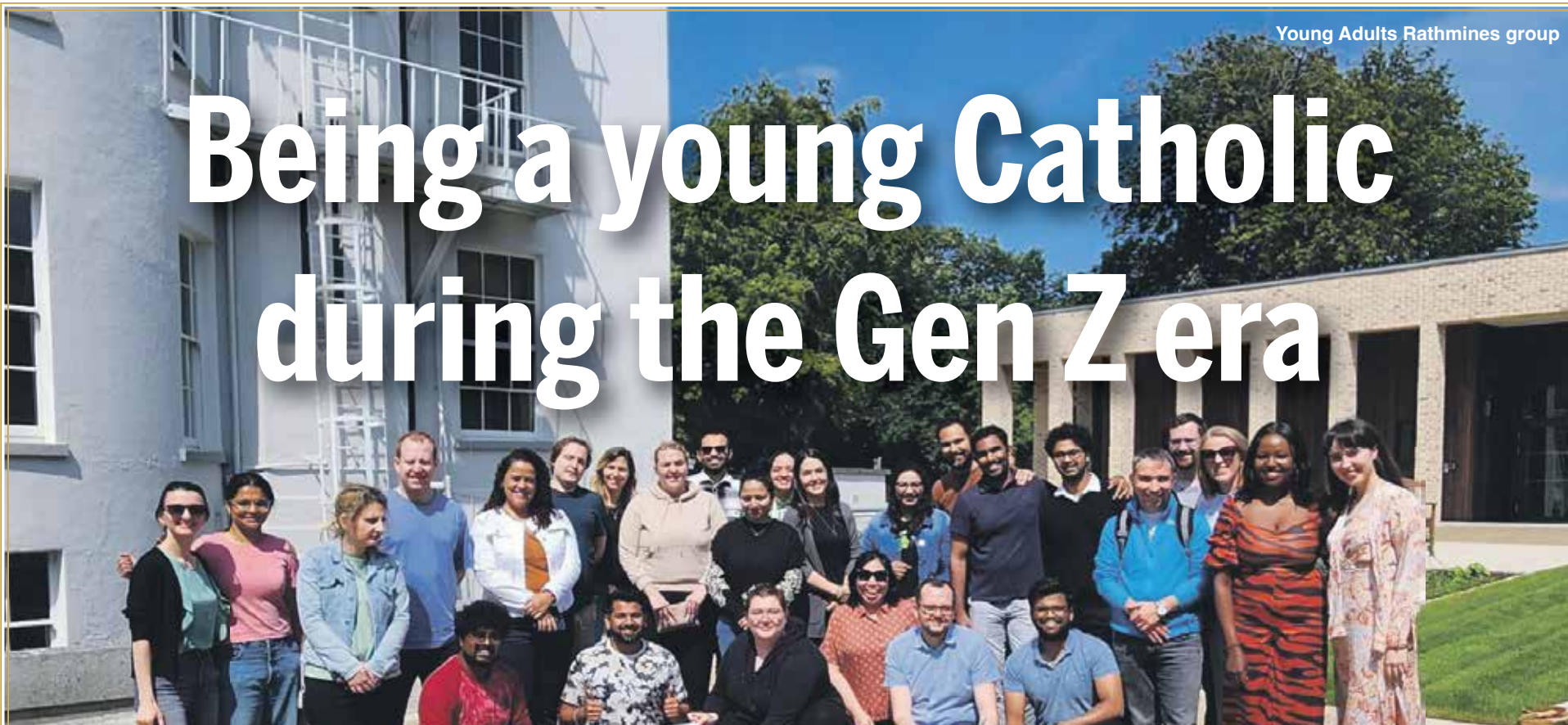
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The Irish Catholic, January 23, 2025



Young Adults Rathmines group

Being a young Catholic during the Gen Z era



As a fellow Generation-Z-man who is a devout Catholic, times are looking tougher than ever before. With the age of freedom and pop culture further drifting the minds of young people, it is fair to say that we need a strong mind and will power to stay true to ground - which can be extremely difficult at times. But that is what makes us different from the rest. To have a strong Catholic mind, it takes more than just saying "I am Catholic" or attending Mass, and from my experience recently, also a need to defend the reason why one should be a committed Catholic. Let's dive deeper on ways in which one can stray away from modern culture and maybe help others to get closer to God:

Prayer in your life

As young adults, we often have limited time to ourselves. Many have new year resolutions, but just don't have the time, or that's the often-used excuse. Prayer doesn't take long, a small prayer before sleeping or the first thing in the morning makes a huge difference on thanking God for everything He has done. This act of thanking will help you becoming grateful in life, happier and more fulfilled - something the current generation lacks. Instead of complaining, understanding that



There are some people with genuine questions, and it is our duty to answer each one of them and hopefully bring them closer to God, says Rohith Kinattukara

God created you with a purpose is the ultimate motivation to get up and continue your hard work and it all starts with a single prayer.

Meeting like-minded people

Joining a youth group is a great start. Many churches around the country have started to have youth groups where people can connect within a Catholic community. Not only does this help in meeting like-minded people, but it is also a great form of networking. These youth groups help in socialising, asking questions related to faith and have different activities that align with the faith.

I am part of the Young Adult Rathmines group based in the Rathmines Parish in Dublin. Their latest session, taken by the leader of the group Eoin McCormack, on 'Speed Apologetics', gave me the idea to write this article. Being part of the group has not only

boosted my faith, but also made me understand the true meaning of community-building and to witness how the youth is also called to spread the Faith, which inspires others who would like to see and understand more about it. I personally have learned a lot more, and I do my best to share my faith with same passion.

Defending Faith

This is a topic that would resonate with many people, especially younger Catholics. In this day and age, there is no tougher task than defending the Faith. I have dealt with all sorts of questions. Staying calm and understanding where they are coming from makes a lot of difference. The bible verse Luke 10:16 says and reminds us that "Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." This a powerful statement clearly gives you all the reasons to continue being a

committed Catholic and proclaiming the good news. There are some people with genuine questions, and it is our duty to answer each one of them and hopefully bring them closer to God. Remember, if no one is there for you, to listen to you, He is always there to give you strength, and this is a beautiful reason to why we should keep defending the Faith. In Mathew 28:20 Jesus reminds us "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of ages," and there is nothing more comforting and encouraging than this.

Saints as a role model

The amazing stories of the saints have always inspired me. The saints walked this Earth, like us. However, their lives have a twist. They answered the universal call to holiness from God to accept their dignity and to spread the good news. What we can learn from the saints is that they had their struggles, their weaknesses - as St Augustine said, "There is no saint without a past nor a sinner without a future" - but also enjoyed activities with friends, family or community never forgetting their relationship with God.

A great example is the soon-to-be canonised Carlo Acutis. A teenager who used to love playing games, loved TV shows and, what he was most famous for, his love for computers. He used that knowl-

edge of building websites, and his main purpose was to spread the Eucharist and share the Faith with young people. This is a great example of how younger people can use their hobbies, social media, and so on to spread the idea of God and show the world how happiness is received by having God by your side.

Conclusion

Times are getting tougher. While Jesus was in the desert for 40 days, He was tempted by the devil, and He always stayed true to himself. This is even more relevant in our current times, with distractions filling our everyday life. The art of saying 'no' makes a huge difference in life, as the late Steve Jobs used to say, "It's only by saying 'no' that you can concentrate on the things that are important" and I can't stress this enough. Let us all pray for the youth, and forgive those who denounce the Lord, as Jesus mentioned in Mathew 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." There is nothing more inspiring. God Bless!

Rohith Kinattukara is a Catholic student from Griffith College Dublin studying MSc in Procurement and Supply Chain Management who loves to write and breathes tech.

The life of the other St Francis



Fr Adrian Crowley

St Francis of Paola was born in 1416 in the south of Italy. His parents were childless and prayed fervently to St Francis of Assisi for a child. In thanksgiving they named their son Francis. At birth the boy had a serious eye infection, and his mother once again prayed to the saint of Assisi and promised if he was healed, she would offer him to a Franciscan monastery. At the age of 15 he was completely healed and in thanksgiving spent a year with the Franciscans. After this year he returned to his family, and they went to visit Assisi. There he was deeply inspired by the life of St Francis and resolved to give himself to God and follow a similar path. At home, with his parents' support, he began to live as a hermit on the family farm. Later he moved into the woods where he built a hermitage. He had a very kind heart and soon his hermitage became an open shelter where the poor were welcomed. He had a cheerful, benevolent face, was humble and never drew attention to himself.

Under his care the blind, the handicapped, the sick found relief and healing. In desperate cases, Francis himself guided the doctors through successful operations or advised them about the medicine to give. A famous surgeon, Peter de la Cava had a patient with a skull fracture which oozed cerebral matter, after a mule



St Francis of Paola in Ecstasy, Pietro Bianchi

kicked his head. The doctor later remarked, "It was not the surgeons' skill nor the medicines which saved him, but the prayers and intercessions of Francis. It was humanly impossible to heal so severe a wound with the brain out of its place".

The minims

Impressed by his life, other young people gathered around him and lived the gospel in its fullness. One of these companions described him, "During the day he works the equivalent of six people put together; he fasts the whole day and eats only after sunset, and just enough to sustain him.

“It was not the surgeons' skill nor the medicines which saved him, but the prayers and intercessions of Francis. It was humanly impossible to heal so severe a wound with the brain out of its place”

He sleeps very little but prays. His bed consists of a wooden plank, and often he sleeps standing or sitting. He walks barefoot and does not drink wine. He does not eat fish but only bean soup while allowing his followers to eat much more. He lived such an austere life that nobody could imitate him. During Lent and Advent, he ate only bread and water.”

“As his fame spread, people came from all over Italy to see Francis and all found healing and consolation”

In 1467 the Vatican sent a special envoy to investigate Francis. When he saw the penitential life, he was living the envoy said, "it is

because you are a peasant and ignorant." The saint replied by filling his hands with burning coals from the fire and saying "It is true. I am a rogue and rustic, otherwise I could not do this." Amazed by the fact that his hands were not burned by the coal, the visitor recognised his holiness and soon after left his luxurious life in Rome and joined the hermitage, becoming a close co-worker of the saint. In 1470 the Minims (as they were called) were recognised as 'diocesan hermits' under the direct rule of the Holy See. Soon afterwards the Pope approved them,

“The saint replied by filling his hands with burning coals from the fire and saying 'It is true. I am a rogue and rustic, otherwise I could not do this”

and new houses began to spring up in Italy.

As his fame spread, people came from all over Italy to see Francis and all found healing and consolation, returning home contented. Miracles continued. All who asked for healing were urged by him to pray and trust in God. The local bishop, a supporter and friend, wrote to Rome "he helped and helps to save many souls."

Life in France

In 1481 King Louis XI of France who was seriously ill, heard of the 'healing hermit'. He sent an ambassador to Italy to bring back the saintly healer. Under obedience he went, and a new phase of his life began. It had a threefold effect. He helped to renew and refresh the Church, to create modern Europe, and to extend the Minims. At Naples he was welcomed with great honour by King Ferdinand, who tried to bribe him with a huge amount of money. He refused the money, and

when he broke a coin in two, fresh blood to come out. To the amazed King he gave a stern warning, "Sir, here is the blood of your subjects crying for vengeance."

“Francis instead helped him to accept the will of God, urging him to solve the most urgent problems of the kingdom”

In Rome he was warmly received by Pope Sixtus IV. His preaching, rich with Biblical references impressed the Cardinals and convinced them he was "of God". Arriving in Fréjus he found the city terrified by an outbreak of the plague. Survivors had barricaded themselves in their houses, others had fled to the countryside. Francis gathered the citizens in the square, healed the sick and put an end to the plague, a miracle which is still celebrated. He met King Louis at a castle near Tours. He refused to live in the royal castle but in a small hermitage near the church. The king visited him every day asking for a miracle of healing. Francis instead helped him to accept the will of God, urging him to solve the most urgent problems of the kingdom. Eventually he became the king's trusted advisor, who returned to faith and died peacefully. His successor Charles VIII also greatly respected and trusted Francis, seeking his advice, friendship and wisdom. He brought peace between Spain and France, prevented a war between France and Naples and ended the civil war between the French and the Bretons. Everywhere he was trusted because of his extraordinary closeness to God.

He continued to spend most of his time in prayer and penance until he died in 1507. To all visitors he gave rosaries and candles, urging prayer above all else. A judge who knew him said, "He spent most of his time in prayer and contemplation."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You made Francis of Paola a light for Europe, and through him worked many miracles. At his prayer and intercession, bless Europe in our times that millions may receive the light of Christ.

The autumn years

Francis was someone whom God used to teach and inspire others. To a disoriented society he was a light. He tried everywhere to convince people to live a Lenten lifestyle. He urged this as a way of remaining close to God, not self-indulgence but self-denial.

By 1500 the work which God was doing through Francis had spread quickly and produced much spiritual fruit. Nine hermitages were founded in France in 6 years. In Genoa, Rome, Spain

and South America new houses were founded.

Francis lived for 91 years, dying on Good Friday 1507 his life's-work and mission complete. He had done all that God had asked of him. In death as in life, having glorified God, he was glorified by God. The Royal family of France prepared his tomb. Huge crowds came to pray, including kings and princes. In 1519 just twelve years after his death Francis was declared a saint. His fame spread rapidly and lasts to this day.

St Paul's 'conversion'



Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Today's Catechesis is dedicated to the experience that Paul had on his way to Damascus, and therefore on what is commonly known as his conversion. It was precisely on the road to Damascus, at the beginning of the 30s in the first century and after a period in which he had persecuted the Church that the decisive moment in Paul's life occurred. Much has been written about it and naturally from different points of view. It is certain that he reached a turning point there, indeed a reversal of perspective. And so he began, unexpectedly, to consider as "loss" and "refuse" all that had earlier constituted his greatest ideal... What had happened?

In this regard we have two types of sources. The first kind, the best known, consists of the accounts we owe to the pen of Luke, who tells of the event at least three times in the Acts of the Apostles. The average reader may be tempted to linger too long on certain details, such as the light in the sky, falling to the ground, the voice that called him, his new condition of blindness [...] But all these details refer to the heart of the event: the Risen Christ appears as a brilliant light and speaks to Saul, transforms his thinking and his entire life... What was his inner reality is also outwardly apparent, his blindness to the truth, to the light that is Christ. And then his definitive "yes" to Christ in Baptism restores his sight and makes him really see.

In the ancient Church Baptism was also called "illumination", because this Sacrament gives light; it truly makes one see. In Paul what is pointed out theologically was also brought about physically: healed of his inner blindness, he sees clearly. [...] It radically changed Paul's life in a fundamental way; in this sense one can and must speak of a conversion. [...]

The second type of source concerning the conversion consists in St Paul's actual Letters. He never spoke of this event in detail, I think because he pre-



Conversion of St Paul, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

sumed that everyone knew the essentials of his story... Without speaking in detail, he speaks on various occasions of this most important event, that, in other words he too is a witness of the Resurrection of Jesus, the revelation of which he received directly from Jesus, together with his apostolic mission. [...] In his "self-apology" he stresses that he is a true witness of the Risen One, that he has received his own mission directly from the Risen One.

“In this sense it was not simply a conversion... but rather a death and a resurrection for Paul himself”

Thus we can see that the two sources, the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St Paul, converge and agree on the fundamental point: the Risen One spoke to Paul, called him to the apostolate and made him a true Apostle, a witness of the Resurrection, with the specific task of proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles, to the Greco-Roman world... Paul learned that despite the immediacy of his relationship with the Risen One, he had to enter into communion with the Church, he himself had to be baptised, he had to live in harmony with

the other Apostles. Only in such communion with everyone could he have been a true apostle. [...]

In all these passages Paul never once interprets this moment as an event of conversion. Why? There are many hypotheses, but for me the reason is very clear. This turning point in his life, this transformation of his whole being... came from the outside: it was not the fruit of his thought but of his encounter with Jesus Christ. In this sense it was not simply a conversion... but rather a death and a resurrection for Paul himself. [...]

Turning now to ourselves... It means that for us too Christianity is not a new philosophy or a new morality. We are only Christians if we encounter Christ... He does not show himself to us in this overwhelming, luminous way, as he did to Paul to make him the Apostle to all peoples. But we too can encounter Christ in reading Sacred Scripture, in prayer, in the liturgical life of the Church. We can touch Christ's Heart and feel him touching ours. Only in this personal relationship with Christ do we truly become Christians. And in this way our reason opens, all Christ's wisdom opens as do all the riches of truth.

Let us pray the Lord to illumine us, to grant us an encounter with his presence in our world, and thus to grant us a lively faith, an open heart and great love for all, which can renew the world.

i From the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI General Audience at the Paul VI Audience Hall on September 3, 2008.

Meditations on the interior life

AC

God's little island

Ireland, Lord, Your little emerald isle, has had faith in You since St Patrick lit the fire on Tara, a fire of divine love. On the hills minding sheep he prayed to You hundreds of times, by day and by night, in snow and rain, hail, sunshine... he prayed. He knew it was Your calling in his life to come and proclaim Christ, the unique Saviour.

It is Your little island in the Atlantic, Your people. The prin-

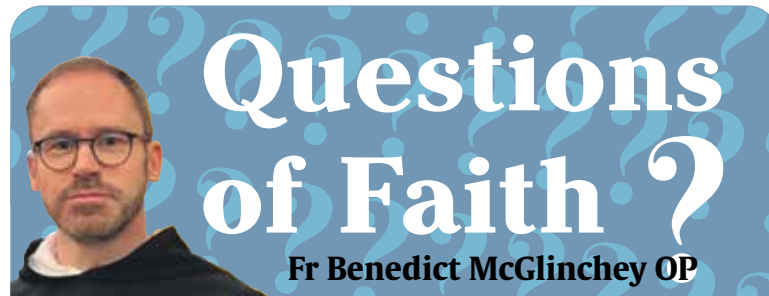
cesses welcoming faith and love of God gave their brooches, earrings and jewellery to be made into chalices and then gave themselves to live in purity, prayer and holiness. It became an island of saints and scholars. The entire country accepted Christ.

And now Lord, secular society has come, and churches are half empty, parishes dwindling, priests very few and holiness obscured. Disgrace and shame have come upon us. It is not the fashion any more... many have left Your Church. Still, You are the treasure, the pearl of great price,

nothing changes that, You are forever precious and worthy of all our love.

Is there any healing for us, Lord? Let Your face shine on us, walk among us. You are ever-renewing, ever reviving, ever helpful. Whoever calls on You truly is helped.

Faith of our fathers? I have faith Lord, faith in You, in Your limitless goodness and power and love, faith in Your divinity, faith in all You teach, faith in You who can move mountains, touch the dead to life, heal a broken Church, get us through a crisis.



Questions of Faith?

Fr Benedict McGlinchey OP

What happens at the consecration?

Q: What happens at the consecration?

A: Our understanding of what happens at the consecration of the gifts of bread and wine at Mass is based on Scripture. In passages like Chapter 6 of St John's Gospel, we see that Jesus shocked His listeners by the realistic way in which He spoke about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The words of Jesus at the Last Supper, understood within its Passover setting, point to a strong Eucharistic realism. An understanding of the Eucharist as being the body and blood of Christ is affirmed by the Church Fathers, from St Ignatius of Antioch onwards. Writing in the early second century, St Ignatius warns against a group who consciously abstain from the Eucharist. He says that "they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ." For the early Church Fathers, the teaching that the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Jesus Christ is a continuation of the teaching of the Apostles.

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) reminds us that while we seek to explain what happens at the consecration as much as possible, we can never exhaust or fully understand the mystery. It remains a mystery of faith. But over time, theologians (particularly St Thomas Aquinas) developed the philosophical and theological tools to describe what happens at the consecration. For Aquinas, Christ is truly, corporeally (that is, in his glorified body) and substantially present on the altar. A substantial presence means that Christ makes Himself wholly and entirely present. Therefore, the Eucharist is not just a reminder or a symbol of Christ, but it is Christ Himself.

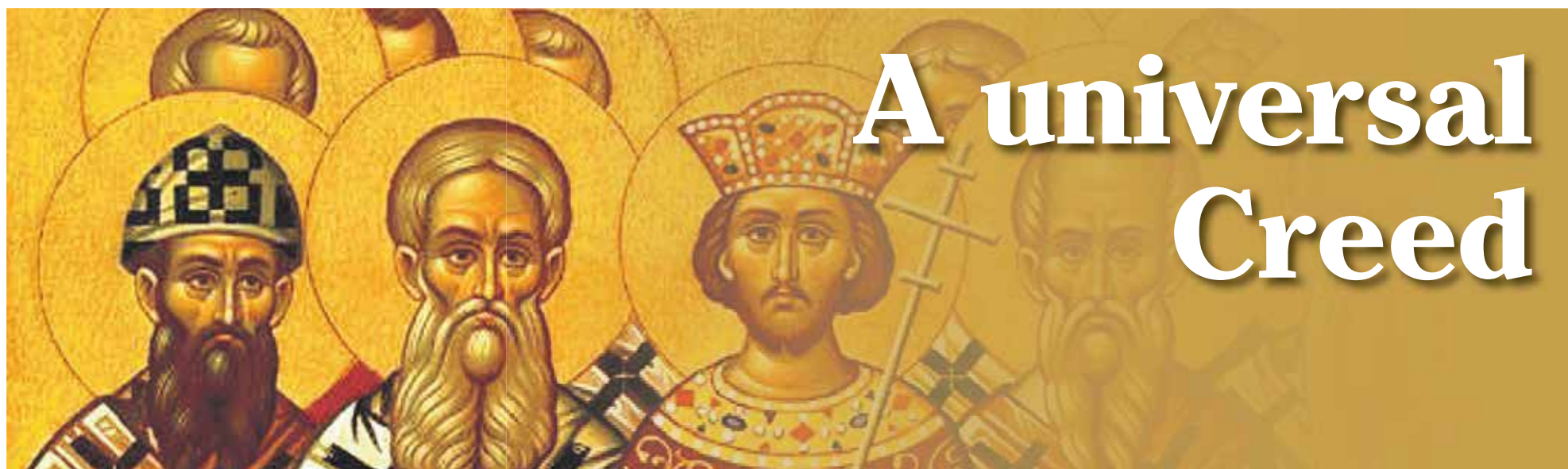
It is the consecration of the bread and wine at Mass that brings about this real, substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist. A validly ordained priest offers recently made unleavened

wheat bread and wine made naturally from grapes. He pronounces the words of institution stipulated by the Church ("This is my body", "This is the chalice of my blood"). The Council of Florence (1439) teaches that at these moments the gifts of bread and wine are respectively converted. The whole substance of the bread is converted into the body of Christ. The whole substance of the wine is converted into the blood of Christ. This is called 'transubstantiation'. This change is instantaneous and is totally unlike any other change that occurs in the natural world. It is entirely supernatural.

After this has happened, the host and the contents of the chalice have the quality, quantity and other attributes of bread and wine such as taste and smell (what are called 'the accidents'), but the host is not bread and the contents of the chalice are not wine. This is totally unique in created reality: no other created thing exists in this way. The Council of Trent (1551), affirming Aquinas, taught that the bread and wine have been converted into something entirely different, namely the body and blood of Jesus Christ, though the accidents remain. This is what happens at the consecration. This teaching was confirmed by Pope St Paul VI in 1965 in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (1965) who was responding to arguments that the consecration results simply in a change of meaning in the Eucharistic gifts.

Although the consecration brings about the change in the gifts, it is important to remember that it finds its proper place only within the liturgical setting of the entire Mass. This gives the consecration its full, sacrificial and ecclesial significance. It is for this reason that Canon Law forbids the consecration to take place outside the Mass.

i Fr Benedict McGlinchey OP is Vocations Director for the Irish Dominicans.



A universal Creed



Fr Rolheiser

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true, good, or beautiful, whatever its outward label (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, New Age, Neo-Pagan, or purely Secular), comes from God and must be honoured.

“We do need to safeguard precisely the truths expressed in our creeds and not slide into an amorphous syncretism in which everything is relative”

John Muir once challenged Christianity with this question: “Why are Christians so reluctant to let animals into their stingy Heaven?” The creed in the Epistle to the Ephesians asks something similar: Why are Christians so reluctant to let other denominations, other faiths, and good sincere people without explicit faith into our stingy concept of God, Christ, faith, and the Church? Why

are we afraid of faith fellowship with Christians of other denominations? Why are we afraid of faith fellowship with sincere Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and New Age religious? Why are we afraid of paganism? Why are we afraid of natural sacraments?

There can be good reasons. First, we do need to safeguard precisely the truths expressed in our creeds and not slide into an amorphous syncretism in which everything is relative, where all truths and all religions are equal, and the only dogmatic requirement is that we be nice to each other. Although there is, in fact, something (religious) to be said about being nice to each other, the more important point is that embracing each other in faith fellowship is not saying that all faiths are equal and that one's particular denomination or faith tradition is unimportant. Rather it is acknowledging (importantly) that, at the end of the day, we are all one family, under one God, and that we need to embrace each other as brothers and sisters. Despite our differences, we all have the same radical creed.

Then too, as Christians, we

“Christ is God and therefore is found wherever anyone is in the presence of oneness, truth, goodness, and beauty”

believe that Christ is the unique mediator between God and ourselves. As Jesus puts it, “no one goes to the Father, except through me.” If that is true, and as Christians we hold that as dogma, then where does that leave Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Jews, Muslims, New Agers, Neo-Pagans, and sincere non-believers? How do they share the kingdom with us Christians since they do not believe in Christ?

Expression

As Christians, we have always had answers to that question. The Catholic catechisms of my youth spoke of a “baptism of desire” as a way of entry into the mystery of Christ. Karl Rahner spoke of sincere persons being “anonymous Christians”. Frank de Graeve spoke of a reality he called “Christ-ianity”, as a mystery wider than historical “Christianity”; and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin spoke of Christ as being the final anthropologi-

cal and cosmological structure within the evolutionary process itself. What all of these are saying is that the mystery of Christ cannot be identified simplistically with the historical Christian churches. The mystery of Christ works through the historical Christian churches but also works, and works widely, outside of our churches and outside the circles of explicit faith.

Christ is God and therefore is found wherever anyone is in the presence of oneness, truth, goodness, and beauty. Kenneth Cragg, after many years as a missionary with the Muslims, suggested that it is going to take all the religions of the world to give full expression to the full Christ.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of us all - and so we should not be so reluctant to let others, not of our own kind, into our stingy Heaven.

Creeds ground us. Within a short formula they summarise the main tenets of our faith and keep us mindful of the truths that anchor us.

As a Christian, I pray two creeds, The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed. But I also pray another creed which grounds me in some deep truths which are not always sufficiently recognised as inherent in our Christian creeds. This creed, given in the Epistle to the Ephesians, is stunningly brief and simply reads: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of us all.

That's a lot in a few words! This creed, while Christian, takes in all denominations, all faiths, and all sincere persons everywhere. Everyone on the planet can pray this creed because ultimately there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who created and loves us all.

This has far-reaching consequences for how we understand God, other Christian denominations, other faiths, sincere non-believers, and ourselves. There is only one God, no matter our denomination, particular faith, or no explicit faith at all. The one same God is the loving creator and parent of everyone. And that one God has no favourites, doesn't dislike certain persons, denominations, or faiths, and never disdains goodness or sincerity, no matter their particular religious or secular cloak.

Coexistence

And these are some of the consequences: First, Jesus assures us that God is the author of all that is good. In addition, as Christians we believe that God has certain transcendental attributes, namely, God is one, true, good, and beautiful. If that is true (and how could it be otherwise?), then everything we see in our world that is integral,

Heaven and Earth: The visible and the invisible

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milan Morales

The Apostles' Creed professes that God is “creator of Heaven and Earth.” The Nicene Creed makes it explicit that this profession includes “all that is, seen and unseen,” meaning ‘all that exists’, creation in its entirety. It also indicates the bond, deep within creation between Heaven and Earth.

‘The Earth’ is the world of men, while ‘Haven’ can designate both the firmament and God's own place. Finally, ‘Heaven’ refers to the saints and the place of the spiritual creatures, the angels, who surround God.

The angels

The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls “angels” is a truth of faith. St Augustine said, “Angel’ is the name of their office, not of their

nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit.’” As purely spiritual creatures, angels have intelligence and will. Christ is the centre of the angelic world. They are his angels. They belong to him because they were created through and for him.

Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan: they closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham's hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself.

From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. It is the angels who ‘evangelise’ by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection. They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgement.

The angels in the life of the Church

In her liturgy, the Church joins with the angels to adore the thrice-holy God. She invokes their assistance. From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. “Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.”

God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity and order. Scripture

presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days of divine “work”, concluded by the “rest” of the seventh day. Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator.

Each creature possesses its own goodness and perfection. For each one of the works of the “six days” it is said: “and God saw that it was good.” God wills the interdependence of creatures. the sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower... Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.

The visible world

The beauty of the universe: the order and harmony of the created world results from the diversity of beings and from the relationships which exist among them. Man discovers

them progressively as the laws of nature. The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man's intellect and will.

The hierarchy of creatures is expressed by the order of the “six days”, from the less perfect to the more perfect. Man is the summit of the Creator's work, as the inspired account expresses by clearly distinguishing the creation of man from that of the other creatures.

In creation God laid a foundation and established laws that remain firm, on which the believer can rely with confidence, for they are the sign and pledge of the unshakable faithfulness of God's covenant. Creation was fashioned with a view to the sabbath and therefore for the worship and adoration of God. Worship is inscribed in the order of creation.

My Church institutionalised

Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10
Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15
1 Cor 12:12-30
Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Dominik Domagala



Every good love story has something from a personal and emotional note. I remember, for example, one of my favourite movies, the famous *Sleepless in Seattle*, with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. After losing his beloved wife, Sam Baldwin is making a difficult choice to start everything over and is moving to Seattle with his young son. However, changing the cities and surroundings doesn't ease Sam's sadness and lack of purpose. After months of misery, Sam's son, Jonah, makes an anonymous call to the national radio program, from where the reporter calls back his dad. At first, the audition seems like a joke, but the radio reporter Annie starts listening to Sam's story, and the chain of calls where Sam can express his feelings and be genuinely heard continues. The movie's plot gets intriguing when the radio reporter Annie writes a personal letter to Sam asking them to meet in person at the Empire State Building on Valentine's Day. That's how their love story begins.

Community

This Sunday's second reading, taken from the first Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (12:12-30), gives us an impression of an instruction about what the Christian community, the Church, should look like. Let's just look at this one: "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body" (12:12), or at the

end of it: "You are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then mighty deeds; then gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues" (12:27-28). St Paul gives here an instruction, a lecture on the nature of what we call the Church: it is a living and organic community. Although it consists of people, it is united in the power of the Holy Spirit. Though many, the members of that community should be united for one purpose. What is it?

“Although all functions are important, it is not being an apostle, a prophet, or a teacher which matters the most”

Interestingly, this Sunday's second reading precedes the famous chapter 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians, the so-called *Hymn on Love*. It goes: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (13:1). No wonder couples worldwide choose this very "Hymn on love" as their first reading during the nuptial Mass, because it perfectly



Christ teaching at Capernaum, Maurycy Gottlieb

emphasises the purpose of their union: love. In fact, this reading is not just a passage written for wedding couples; on the contrary! St Paul, in his 13th chapter, has given the space and time to fully describe the most essential charisma (feature) of the community of believers. Although all functions are important, it is not being an apostle, a prophet, or a teacher which matters the most. It is not the ownership of the gifts of healing, assistance or administration. No. All these, pointed out by St Paul, are not the essence. In the 13th chapter of his Letter, he describes what the Church is built of: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude" (13:4).

Love

Yes, the necessary ingredient of the construction which we call the Church is indeed love, and without it,

everything sooner or later collapses. St Paul speaks, in this case, not of some general kindness which, by the way, everyone should have for another. The Bible uses here the word 'AGAPE', the love which is selfless, the act of expecting nothing in return. That is the first and most crucial material to be shared and multiplied by all of us, the Church members.

“Nothing hurts more than a dismissive answer: 'It's not my business'”

I guess that we all have, in some ways, the experience of the Church's institutions, which, although efficiently dealing with the 'workload', did not always make a good impression on its visitors. Sometimes being right, and others not,

“The biggest problem which we might be facing in the Church is surprisingly not the crisis of this or another, but it is the crisis of the lack of selfless love between each other, the love which should unite us together”

many feel that the Church should be renewed or even 'de-institutionalised.' Some will say that the Church is not right in the way how it deals with women, while others would argue that its ministers are arrogant or too clerical. Indeed, we can always work on sharing the responsibilities and making others not feel excluded or dominated.

But let me share with you that nothing hurts more than a closed door when one needs to come in. Nothing disappoints more than a cold 'no' when one is asking for the time to talk and be heard. Nothing hurts more than a dismissive answer: "It's not my business." The litany could go on and on, and certainly, Dear Readers, you could add much more to it. The biggest problem which we might be facing in the Church is surprisingly not the crisis of this or another, but it is the crisis of the lack of selfless love between each other, the love which should unite us together. And if you think that I exaggerate, have a look, once again, at what St Paul says: "Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end" (13:8).

Healing

A Dominican Biblical scholar, Fr Lagrange, while speaking of today's Gospel (Luke

4:14-21), notices something simple yet profound: "Jesus went on to explain how this scripture was now fulfilled, gently leaving His hearers to conclude that the messenger who brought them news of this grace was no other than Himself" (*The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, p.124). When Jesus reads the words of prophecy, taken from the prophet Isaiah, the Lord announces in the synagogue that now is the time of Salvation. They can find cures and healing from all kinds of blindness, oppression, envy, jealousy or selfishness in Him.

Now I remember why I like the famous *Sleepless in Seattle* so much. The man who was knocking found the door opened for him. When he was talking, he was heard. And when he was asking for help, he heard: "It is my business too." The acts of selfless love change us. They also change this very Church of ours. There is only one way to renew the Church, and it is through its members.

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Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milan Morales



St Francis of Sales

St Francis of Sales: The call to the devout life

St Francis de Sales was born to a noble family at Chateau de Sales, Switzerland on August 21, 1567. He was a Bishop and is a Doctor of the Church.

Francis was both intelligent and gentle. From a very early age, he desired to serve God. He knew for years he had a vocation to the priesthood but kept it from his family. His father wanted him to enter a career in law and politics. In 1580, Francis attended the University of Paris, and at 24-years-old, he received his doctorate in law at the University of Padua.

He studied theology and practiced mental prayers but kept quiet about his devotion. After much discussion and disagreement from his father, Francis was ordained to the priesthood and elected provost of the Diocese of Geneva, in 1593.

During the time of the Protestant reformation, Francis lived close to Calvinist territory. He decided he should lead an expedition to bring the 60,000 Calvinists back to the Catholic Church. For three years, he trudged through the countryside.

No one would listen to him, no one would even open their door. So, he wrote out little pamphlets to explain true Catholic doctrine and slipped them under the doors. This is one of the first records we have of religious tracts being used to communicate the true Catholic faith to people who had fallen away from the Church. By the time Francis returned home, it is believed he brought 40,000 people to the Catholic Church.

In 1602, Bishop Granier died, and Francis was consecrated Bishop of Geneva. In 1604, In Dijon, Francis

saw a widow listening closely to his sermon - a woman he had seen already in a dream. Jane de Chantal was a dedicated Catholic Christian on her own.

Jane wanted him to take over her spiritual direction, but Francis wanted to wait. Jane was on a path to mystical union with God and, in directing her, Francis was inspired to follow her and become a mystic himself. In 1610, he founded The Order of Visitation.

Francis was overworked and often ill because of his constant load of preaching, visiting, and instruction. He believed the first duty of a bishop was spiritual direction. For him active work did not weaken his spiritual inner peace but strengthened it.

Francis insisted that every Christian was called to holiness and sanc-

tity, lived within their own state in life. He gave spiritual direction to lay people and recognised that Christian marriage and family life is itself a call to holiness.

His book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, was written for lay people in 1608.

For busy people living in the world, he advised, "Retire at various times into the solitude of your own heart, even while engaged in discussions or transactions with others and talk to God."

He died on December 28, 1622, and was canonised on April 19, 1665, by Pope Alexander VII. In 1923, Pope Pius XI named St Francis de Sales the patron saint of Catholic writers and the Catholic press because of the books he wrote. His feast day is celebrated on January 24.

Music, an instrument of evangelisation



Rohan Healy

Music and poetry, like prayer, are unique forms of communication between the human and the divine. The Ard-Ollamh's, or chief poet's, social status was matched only by the High King of Ireland. The great poet kings Solomon and David, whose psalms ring out daily though the Divine Office in every nation. From Gregorian chant to Bob Dylan, from choral hymns to Kris Kristofferson, music continues to act as an unquenchable wellspring of inspiration, communication and elevation of spirit.

Like the psalms, the best of modern music explores and encompasses the full length of human experience, desolation and consolation, love and loss, tears of joy and sorrow. The best music reaches what is intrinsic among all people of the world, accesses the law written on our hearts, holds a mirror to our transgressions and comforts us in our brokenness.

Music

Music is also a powerful evangelical tool. Worship music and hymns can be wonderfully edifying and affirming for the faithful, but what about the lost sheep, separated from the flock? The prodigal son at the peak of his hedonism. The lyrics of Dylan's *All Along The Watchtower* come to mind, in reference to the thief on the Cross:

"No reason to get excited
The thief, he kindly spoke
There are many here among us
Who feel that life is but a joke
But you and I, we've been through that
And this is not our fate
So let us stop talkin' falsely now
The hour's getting late."

We think of Nick Cave's dark and challenging lyrics that wrestle with God like Jacob, or Sufjan Stevens' haunting take on *The Transfiguration*, of Gram Parsons' *Sin City*, of Johnny Cash's *When The Man Comes Around*. Vectors that

reach out and penetrate the soul and turn our gaze heavenward, that can bring our thoughts and hearts to higher places, that can heal.

“In general the state of popular music is undeniably banal at best, and degenerate at its worst”

Johnny Paycheck has a simple but powerful song called the *Outlaws Prayer*, a commentary on religious hypocrisy and superficiality that resonates down the ages and speaks potently to those who may feel they don't 'fit in' to Christianity. Here are the final lines of the song, after he'd been asked to leave a chapel because of his unconventional way of presenting himself:

"You know, Lord, I'm not perfect
Some even call me no count
But I'll tell You, I believe a man is judged by what's in his heart
Not his bank account
So if this is what religion is
A big car and a suit and a tie
Then I might as well forget it, Lord
'Cause I can't qualify
Oh, by the way, Lord, right before they kicked me out
Didn't I see a picture of You
With sandals and a beard?
Believe, You had long hair too"

"And all mankind will see God's salvation" (Luke 3:6). Prophesied by Isaiah, the way prepared by John the Baptist and fulfilled in Christ. "Lead ALL souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy." Popular and contemporary music has a huge role to play in spiritual warfare, and it's not hard to see

“Triune Records Ireland' hopes to foster just that with the creation of a label designed to produce and promote Catholic artists starting here in Ireland”



Rohan Healy, producer at Triune Records Ireland pictured at the studio.

that the prevailing culture in popular western music is by and large not of the edifying kind. Gwen Stefani is a practicing Catholic and is partnered with the *Hallow* app, rock guitarist John Petrucci of Dream Theatre is another one, Nick Cave in recent interviews has discussed his increased Church attendance and faith, Suzi Quatro is a legendary Catholic rock star. They are out there if you go looking, however in general the state of popular music is undeniably banal at best, and degenerate at its worst.

Alternative

All of this to pose the question 'what if there were a viable alternative?' An active attempt to produce and promote music that can be enjoyed by all people but is created by Catholics and with a Catholic ethos. The material may be challenging, like the works of Catholic creators like Scorsese, Kerouac, Dostoevsky and even Warhol post-shooting in 1968, but always in the context of Catholic

understanding of our place in the Cosmos and a relationship with Jesus.

“We are developing projects with several Irish Catholic artists”

'Triune Records Ireland' hopes to foster just that with the creation of a label designed to produce and promote Catholic artists starting here in Ireland. The first release, David Virgin's new album *Notre Dame*,



Triune Records Ireland

“Popular and contemporary music has a huge role to play in spiritual warfare, and it's not hard to see that the prevailing culture in popular western music is by and large not of the edifying kind”

is out now via Triune and all proceeds from sales on Bandcamp.com are going to the Dominican Priory at St Saviour's. David has worked on stage and in studio with Nick Cave, INXS, Billy Bragg and Cat Power, to name a few.

We are developing projects with several Irish Catholic artists so look forward to upcoming releases during 2025, along with some live events planned in association with the Lay Dominican Chapter at St Saviour's.

Triune Records Ireland is a new label established in 2024 for the development and promotion of music by Catholic artists with a Catholic ethos. The father and sons' team of David 'Virgin' Healy, Rohan Healy and Alex Healy hope to call upon their extensive experience in the music business (Eurovision, Voice UK, Warner Music, Atlantic Records, BBC Radio 1, etc.) to bring music to the world that can be enjoyed by Catholics and the general public alike.

A Eucharistic Word: Holiness

Michael R. Heinlein

One of the enduring memories during a recent family pilgrimage to Italy occurred early one morning when my two oldest children, ages 7 and 5, accompanied me to morning Mass. The location was none other than the tomb of St Francis of Assisi. While we arrived a little early for the once-a-month English Mass scheduled there, we could see there wouldn't be a seat. But, as we neared the altar at the tomb, it became clear pews to the side were empty. Our daughter exclaimed, "We can go to Mass closer to the saint!"

I thought about that line often during Mass that morning and have continued to think about it ever since that day. Going to Mass

closer to the saints is really something that ought to be part of our collective effort to worship God in spirit and truth, to embrace the call to holiness.

That early morning in Assisi has challenged and renewed my thinking on this. Parenthood has its challenges, of course. But, as those devoted to them know, challenges were the daily bread of so many saints. Going to Mass closer to the saints means embracing the trials and troubles of daily life, as they come and in whatever form they come.

Me having a unique fascination and curiosity about the saints, I began thinking about the struggles saints encountered. And as I've thought about all these unique sacrifices and sufferings, and more, I think of what propelled them, grounded them and enabled them to make sense of

it all. Truly in the Eucharist, as the saints came to know, we find the answer to our searching, the satisfaction to our yearning, the meaning of it all.

"We can go to Mass closer to the saint!" We must go to Mass closer to the saints. Truly through their witness and example, and by the help of their prayers, we can enter more deeply into the Eucharistic mystery, therein finding a pattern for living that allows us to join our sacrifices to Christ's. In the communion of saints, we can find friends for the journey of holiness - a journey that entails carrying Christ's cross, knowing our doing so bears purpose and brings life. And the Eucharist is the lynchpin that holds this mystery together.

Michael R. Heinlein is a member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



The long-awaited return of inspiring stories

As the Anne Murray song says, "We sure could do with a little good news today." Well, I have some this week.

It was great to see news coverage of three of the Gaza hostages being released last Sunday, great to see them smiling and reunited with their families. This was facilitated by the new ceasefire deal, but as with all ceasefires I feel so bad for those killed between the deal being agreed and it being enacted. Sadly, there was so much evidence of cynicism on this occasion – when the ceasefire was delayed for a small few hours the bombing by the Israeli Defence Forces continued, with more people killed unnecessarily – at least eight according to the scrolling updates on Sky News last Sunday morning. Cynicism on the other side was shown by the Hamas approach to trickle releasing the hostages, who should never have been held at all – initially just 3 of a possible 90 or so.

On **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1, Monday) a young Israeli man was critical of Hamas for the original massacres and hostage taking and critical of his own government for not reaching a deal sooner. As a result, his aunt, who should have been released if an earlier deal had



Ronan Tynan, Irish singer, doctor and paralympic athlete.

been successful, was shot dead in captivity. He was still happy for the hostages newly released and just wanted the Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace together. He credited Donald Trump, or at least his election, with the success of the ceasefire. Indeed, the timing does seem to suggest that this was a significant factor.

On the **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Monday) the host

yet again flew his anti-Trump colours. When a reporter did a vox pop among Trump supporters gearing up for the inauguration he described their contributions as 'twaddle' and praised the Newstalk reporter for showing restraint by not having a go at them. I wasn't impressed by the Trump supporters, but I'd expect some objectivity and neutrality from the presenter.

Presumably in the interests of a balance the show is not always committed to, we also heard contributions from Trump opponents, giving out about threats to 'reproductive rights', 'nuff said.

It was good to see a practising Catholic as guest on **The Meaning of Life** (RTÉ One, Sunday). Ronan Tynan has had such varied career and life paths, and, on the show, he told Joe Duffy of his life as a singer, doctor and paralympic athlete. All through the challenges of life he had remained committed to his life as a Catholic. He has a special devotion to St Therese of Lisieux, but is also conscious of friends who have died, especially his twin brother Edmond who died in infancy. In a way he reckons half of him is gone to Heaven already! His achievements as a Paralympian was welcomed in some quarters but not in others. He learned about 'people's distaste for disability'.

His experiences in the USA were of particular interest to me as I hadn't heard about them before. He sang at 64 funerals for the victims of the 9/11 attacks in New York, some where there was no body in the coffin and some where the funeral was halted because a body had just been found. This stemmed from his close relationship with NY officials who were so

PICK OF THE WEEK

WALK FOR LIFE WEST COAST

EWTN Sat 25 Jan 7.30 pm

Live coverage of the Walk for Life West Coast and One Life LA with Fr. Patrick and Catherine Hadro. Fr Mark and Bro. John report from within the walk, speaking to participants.

FIRST COMMUNION

BBC One (NI) Tues 28 Jan 10.40 pm

Four Catholic families prepare to celebrate their children's First Holy Communion, one of the biggest days of their lives so far. It's a sacred ceremony but also a time to celebrate.

MOVIE: FATHER BROWN

Film 4 Thurs 30 Jan 3 pm

(1954) Robert Hamer's mysterious crime comedy starring Alec Guinness as Fr Brown, a priest-cum-detective tasked with accompanying a priceless religious artifact from London to Rome.

supportive during the Paralympics. Further he sang for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Snr – in the latter case at the dying President's bedside. Asked the usual question about arrival at the pearly gates he said he'd want to show humility and sorrow for any wrongdoing.

Political commentator Larry Donnelly also said he was a practicing Catholic in an answer to a question on the matter from the host on **Brendan O'Connor** (RTE Radio 1, Sunday). The host sort of apologised for asking with this odd comment: 'Sorry, I kind of assumed nobody

was'. Maybe that was tongue-in-cheek, but it suggested what I suspect is a common enough mindset among some media folks. This was part of a very positive item on Sr Clare Crockett, the nun from Derry killed in an Ecuador earthquake – the item arose out of a *Sunday Times* article. Susanne Rogers of Social Justice Ireland found her a 'very relatable' candidate for sainthood, while journalist Brenda Power thought it was 'a fantastic story'. Brendan O'Connor suggested 'we could do with a bit more of this'.

More good news!

Film

Aubrey Malone



Bevy of eclectic offerings kicks off 2025

We Live in Time (15) is a flashback-filled love story starring Andrew Garfield and Florence Pugh. Pugh has cancer but is upbeat about it – and indeed about everything. The film narrowly avoids being a tearjerker as she navigates her way through her medical problems.

There are some cringy scenes, most of them engineered by Garfield. His unflappable joviality *In Extremis* I've always found irksome. Pugh is more endearing in her disquisitions on transience, pregnancy, intimations of mortality.

The film is heart-warming in that overweeningly feel-good way that often makes me feel anything but good. John (*Brooklyn*) Crowley

explores the tragi-comic relationship with honourable intentions but milks the pain on display, overcooking the film's 'embrace the moment' message telegraphed by the title.

F.W. Murnau's gothic horror classic *Nosferatu* (15) is an adaptation of Dracula that spearheaded German expressionism over a century ago. It was re-made by Werner Herzog in 1979. Robin Eggars now warms his hands (or should I say teeth) at the fire with a stunning array of blood-curdling effects and an expansion of Murnau's characters.

Bill Skarsgard plays Count Orlock. He stalks the haunted Ellen Hutter (Lily Rose Depp) with vampiric venom. There's a hypnotic magic about the eeriness.

Magnus van Horn's *The*



A scene from the film *We Live in Time*

Girl with the Needle (15) also recalls German expressionism, its stark mono-chrome cinematography capturing the decay of post-World War II Copenhagen chillingly.

His film tells the portentous story of a pregnant

girl, Karoline (Vic Carmen Sonne), who works as a wet nurse for a demonic woman (Trina Dyrholm). She runs an adoption agency fronting as a sweet shop.

Karoline's growing fears of what might happen to her

soon-to-be-born baby is the main business of this uncompromising odyssey into alienation and exploitation.

Maria Callas was arguably the greatest soprano of all time but her life was a car crash, especially after Aristotle Onassis dumped her for the widowed Jacqueline Kennedy. Pablo Larrain, who helmed a bi-opic of Ms Kennedy (Jackie) directs Angelina Jolie in *Maria* (R).

It's a poignant depiction of the broken-down diva as she pops pills and fantasises, like the Norma Desmond of *Sunset Boulevard*, about a parade that has long since passed her by.

A Real Pain (R) is an amusing 'buddy' film starring Jesse Eisenberg, who also writes and directs, and Kieran Culkin. They're two cousins

embarking on a Holocaust tour of Poland.

Eisenberg is strait-laced, a happily married man with a successful career. He tries to avoid confrontation at all costs. Culkin is the goofy sidekick who delights in pulling people down, especially when they're spouting socio-political clichés.

Their main interest in the tour is to visit the childhood home of Eisenberg's grandmother. (Her actual home is used in the film).

The 'odd couple' trope has been deployed innumerable times in the past. Here it acquires an added dimension. The mismatched pair discover revelatory inner truths about themselves and one another against the backdrop of some of history's grimmer back pages.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Our true history is always local history

Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society, series 2, vol. 24, for 2024,

edited by Tony Bergin, €20.00 / £16.99; inquiries to Kerry County Library, Moyderwell, Tralee, Co. Kerry, V92 X092, Ireland; the editor can be reached at journal@kerryhistory.ie.

J. Anthony Gaughan

It is a familiar saying that all politics are local. The same is essentially true as well of history: the real history of a country is to be measured in local events and local developments, whatever the centralising “capitalists” in Dublin may think. By creating a richer sense of local identity, locals help create a more mature sense of our changing national identity.

One of the best, indeed primary sources of that history, is to be found in the articles published year by year in our local history journal, such as *Seanchas Ard-macha*, *Cathair na Mart*, *The North Munster Journal*, and indeed, the *Dublin Historical Record*. Historians and archaeologists would be lost without these accumulating resources.

Special

They keep us in contact with the past in a very special way. This applies as well as to matters of religion and Church affairs, for ecclesiastical buildings and events have been a staple in such journals since they began many of them back in the early 19th century.

The Kerry Archaeological and History Society is a leading light of these journals. Their current publication under review is their latest annual volume, and it provides, as usual, a rich

and varied menu of all things Kerry. This latest volume of the KAHSJ, expertly edited by Tony Bergin, exhibits the scholarship one has come to expect in this magazine. It has studies on five completely different subjects.

Adrian Fitzgerald describes the unsuccessful attempt his ancestor, Maurice Fitzgerald (1772–1849), 18th Knight of Kerry, made to establish a steam packet company to run ships between Valentia Island and Halifax in the Canadian Province of Nova Scotia to carry passengers and mails.

Helen O’Carroll locates and describes the Famine Burial Grounds of Tralee Workhouse. John O’Connor provides an account of the building of Tearaght Lighthouse in the Blasket Island-archipelago.

Tony Bartlett presents the results of the archaeological works undertaken at Knockavrogeen West Megalithic Tomb in the Dingle Peninsula. Jeremias Cronin records the travails of Brian Ó Ceallaigh, the Celtic Studies scholar, as he was trapped in Germany while studying in Marburg University at the outbreak of World War I.

“Maurice was an improving landlord and among other developments extended the Island’s slate quarries”

So much for the contents over all: now for a closer look at one of the contributions that is especially interesting. Adrian Fitzgerald’s article is a fascinating account of the efforts of an ancestor to improve the economic conditions of

“Adrian Fitzgerald’s article is a fascinating account of the efforts of an ancestor to improve the economic conditions of his area”



Valentia Island in Kerry, the rugged scene of great ambitions in the past.

his area. Maurice Fitzgerald, 18th Knight of Kerry, resided on his estate, aptly named *Baile an Ridire*, the Town of the Knight, near Listowel.

Extensive

However, the family also had extensive land holdings on Valentia Island. These had been purchased from the Annesley family in 1757. Maurice was an improving landlord and among other developments extended the Island’s slate quarries. It seems that much of the slate on the roof of Westminster Palace, where the House of Commons sits, was imported from the Island’s quarries.

In promoting his various projects Maurice was encouraged and assisted by Alexander Nimmo, a remarkable engineer and geologist. A Scot, he came to the Office of Public Works in Dublin where he designed thirty piers and harbours along the Southern and Eastern Seaboards, including the pier at Valentia Island. Maurice and Nimmo were kindred spirits and Nimmo was a key ally of Maurice in promoting the Packet Steam Project linking Valentia and Halifax in the Canadian Province of Nova Scotia.

“It seems that the success of the proposed shipping-line was assured. It was announced that the Calpe was ‘nearly ready for sea’”

Maurice took the first

steps towards setting up the shipping line with the establishment in June 1824 of the American and Colonial Steam Navigation Company.

Subsequently he busied himself in London seeking financial support for the new company. Initially it seems that the success of the proposed shipping-line was assured. It was announced that the *Calpe* was ‘nearly ready for sea’ and that another ship was ‘building in Glasgow’. However, owing to a collapse in the London financial market the project stalled. Nor did serious disagreements among the directors of the company help the project.

Committed

Maurice, however, remained committed to the project. A revised prospectus was published in 1827. But there was little further investor interest. The only remaining ship, the *Calpe*, was sold and no more was heard of

the American and Colonial Steam Navigation Company.

“The Trans-Atlantic Cable was laid between Valentia Island and Heart’s Content, Newfoundland, in 1866”

Before concluding his article, Adrian Fitzgerald ruefully compares the success of the Valentia Island Trans-Atlantic Cable Telegraph Company with Maurice’s failed attempt to link the Island to Canada with a shipping line.

The Trans-Atlantic Cable was laid between Valentia Island and Heart’s Content, Newfoundland, in 1866. It operated successfully for a hundred years until it was wound up by Western Union International in 1966. And the Cable Station continues to benefit Valentia Island as it is its main claim to be awarded the UNESCO World Heritage Site Award.

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.

A rival to Notre Dame: the revealing restoration of Monreale Cathedral in Sicily



The cloisters of Monreale Cathedral

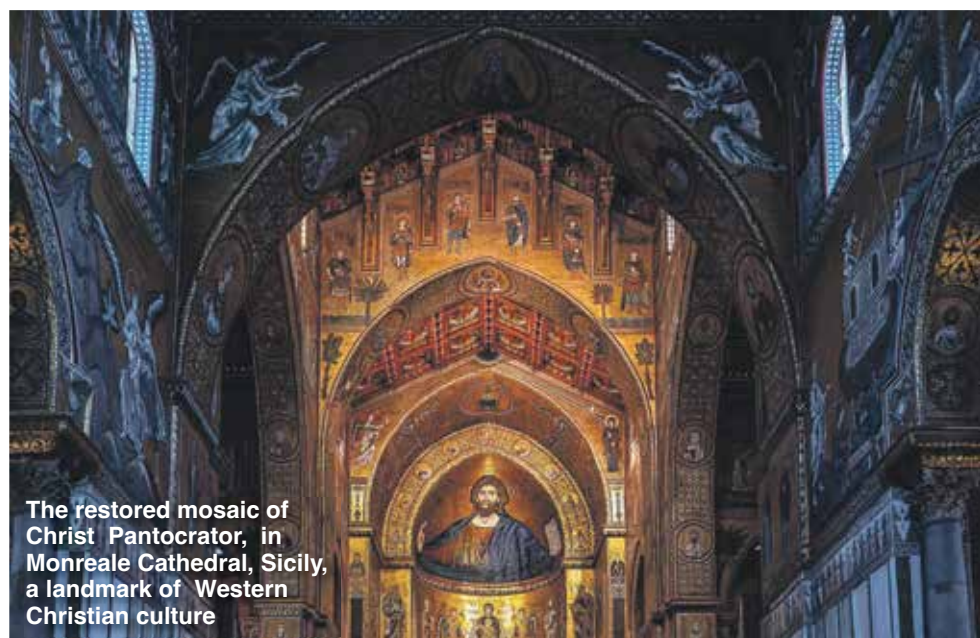
Peter Costello

The recently completed restoration of Notre Dame in central Paris has absorbed the interest of so many people over the last five years that other such work in other places have been sadly overlooked.

Central Paris gets millions of visitors each year; Palermo, the capital of the Island of Sicily, is less popular, for various reasons, yet for those who take the time to go there and have, as well, the leisure to appreciate what they are seeing, it is a remarkable place.

During the restoration, which cost something in the region of €1.1 million and was funded by the European Union, the mosaics were deep cleaned, restored and repaired. The famous mosaics and their gold settings now gleam as new. But also a totally new and more effective lighting system has been installed which makes them easier to see. The entire nave is dominated by an image of Christ Pantocrator, 'Christ the All Ruler' behind the altar. The walls of the main body of the church as well as the side aisles are also richly adorned. But the Cathedral is only a part of an ecclesiastical settlement on the heights of a hill, some 925 feet in the air, which can be seen from many miles away.

The cathedral was built between 1172 and 1186 by William the Good. That last date at least was when the great bronze doors were hung, though the interior decorations were not completed till after 1200.



The restored mosaic of Christ Pantocrator, in Monreale Cathedral, Sicily, a landmark of Western Christian culture

It has been called by Christopher Kininmonth, the British travel writer, "One of the wonders of the world in its day, and has remained so ever since."

The cathedral is the product of Sicily's long and complicated history, which owes much to the interaction of several historical cultures. After the little known eras of prehistory, Sicily passed through a Greek period, a Roman Period and then a Barbarian period as the Roman Empire collapsed in the third century AD.

Relieved

The island was relieved of the barbarian Ostrogoths by the invasion of the Byzantine general Belisarius; but liberation also saw the arrival of the malaria spreading mosquitoes which led to a loss of population. There now began another series of invasions, this time by the Muslims, mainly Berbers from North Africa rather than true Arabs. But the Normans, who conquered the island after 1061, brought a return of Christianity.

However, the architecture of the cathedral owes something to Byzantium, to the Muslims, and, of course, to the ideas that the Normans brought south with them from Normandy.

Here in Ireland we have always been reluctant to recognise the genius of the Normans; but in Monreale visitors can see that culture in its finest flowering. It is an example of what can happen when cultures, rather than being in conflict, merge and become involved with each other.

Renewing our sense of what the world owes the Church

Pour L'Église: Ce que le monde lui doit ("On Behalf of the Church: What the World Owes to Her"), by Christophe Dickès (Perrin, €16.00); can be purchased directly on-line from Chapitre.com.)

Tim O'Sullivan

In a letter last November, Pope Francis called for a renewal of the study of Church history. In this stimulating book, Christophe Dickès, a noted French historian and journalist, makes a similar point. He suggests that there is a need for a balanced look at the history of the Catholic Church and its legacy.

While acknowledging the grave scandals afflicting the Church today, he maintains that we who live today can act like judges of past generations, sometimes in an anachronistic way. He argues that we need to recover a sense of the complexity of the past and of the hugely positive contribution of the Church over time to the world in which we live.

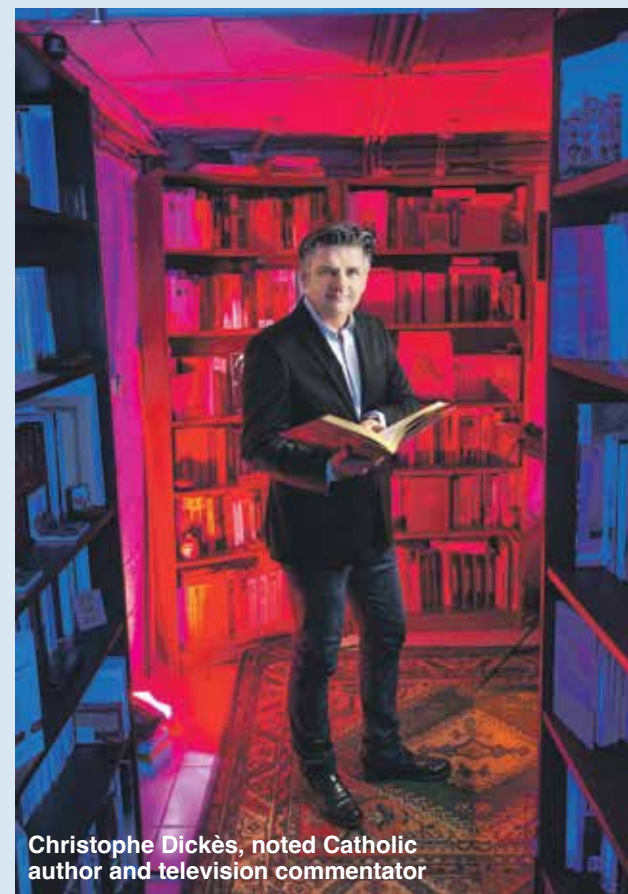
There are some parallels to be drawn with *Dominion* by the British author, Tom Holland, which also examined how Christianity shaped the modern world. Dickès himself has produced several other books, including a *Dictionary of the Vatican and of the Holy See*, and he presents, on KTO, the French Catholic TV station, a respected history programme on the Church and Christianity. He is the author, too, of an historical book on St Peter, which has aroused great interest.

Themes

In this book, three overarching themes look at the Church's contribution to societies, to politics and to humanism while there are individual chapters on attitudes to time, on education, on health and social care, on science, on *laïcité* and religious-secular distinctions, on the Christian legacy of Europe, on the conception of a 'just war', on international law and the rights of native peoples, on the place of women and on the importance of conscience.

For space reasons, the author decided not to examine the enormous contribution of Christianity to the arts or to philosophy. The book is both learned and accessible, wide-ranging and relatively short so coverage of some topics is necessarily of an overview nature.

A fascinating first chapter argues that our conceptions of time are of Christian origin and can be traced, for example, to the pioneering



Christophe Dickès, noted Catholic author and television commentator

work of Christian monks in institutionalising the 'hours' of the day. The author also refers to Pope Gregory XIII's reform of the calendar, which still applies today.

Dickès also sets out the immense service provided by the Church across the world and across the centuries in healthcare and education. For example, in 2021, the universal Church ran 150,000 primary and secondary schools and over 5000 hospitals as well as thousands of other services in both education and healthcare. The author argues that the Church 'schooled' Europe and the world and that hospitals under various names were an invention of ancient and then of medieval Christianity, with a huge involvement of female personnel.

In the scientific arena, he argues that the heritage of the Church in the transmission of science has been downplayed. Though there were mis-steps, Christians overall believed in a Creator who had inscribed his laws in nature and had created a quantifiable and measurable world. Some Popes themselves had strong scientific interests – thus, Pope Sylvester II was a learned mathematician.

In the period between the Renaissance and the French Revolution. Rome itself was an important centre for the circulation of ideas and for multilingual printing, and this contributed greatly to the spread of knowledge. Moreover, the first scientific academy was founded in Rome in 1603.

The author does not seek to downplay darker moments in Church history, but he contends that Church leaders are sometimes not as attentive as they ought to be to long-term Church history and that today's crisis of the Church is linked in part to ignorance of its history. In rejecting her history, he argues, the Church can become chained to present crises, but a Christianity which no longer believes in itself, or loves its history, is destined to disappear, just as paganism disappeared at the end of the Roman Empire.

Positive

However, the book finishes on a more positive note. Dickès quotes the French Dominican writer, Yves Congar OP, to the effect that the Church needs to have eyes in front and behind. Today's Christians have received a rich heritage which they are required to transmit. There is a need to avoid both the negationism of 'cancel culture' and nostalgic, rose-tinted perspectives on the past.

Dickès argues that we need instead to draw upon the resources of the past while finding ways to be innovative in the present. History itself, he concludes, is a source of hope and reminds us of what we owe to past generations, and of their creativity, and of our own freedom in each generation to choose the path ahead.

i Dickès is an expert on media copyright, and it is understood that an English version of his important book will appear in due course.

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 Phone: 01 687 4095

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 Miracle Prayer €50 | Initials: ____

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 Please print your advertisement in the space below, placing one word in each box, Minimum charge of €24.60 (including VAT) for 5 lines/25 words. Additional lines cost €4.92 each.

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 For € _____ payable to: The Irish Catholic

Pay by: Credit Card
 Card number: _____
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KERRY DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE TO FAT

LED BY BISHOP RAY BROWNE. 11TH - 15TH MAY
€899PP. Fully escorted pilgrimage. Contact: Barter's Travelnet Cork on 021-4851700

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

40-BED UNIT OUTSIDE KILDARE

D.O.N. DIRECTOR OF NURSING WANTED to take over as the present D.O.N. of 30 years is retiring. It's a 40 bedded unit and is just outside Kildare Town. Accommodation can be sorted if needed. Phone 045-521496 or 0872522612 ask for Breda or Seamus. Email lour@iol.ie

Leisure time

Leave a Lasting Legacy to Rehab Group: Empower others through your will.

RehabGroup

Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

Leaving a gift in your will to Rehab Group enables people to pursue opportunities, be more independent, participate in society and live the life of their choosing.

To learn more about the difference your legacy will make.

Call: (01) 2057200

Email: fundraising@rehab.ie



For further enquiries contact:

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

MQI

Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

A gift in your Will to Merchants Quay Ireland can be lifesaving.



Hundreds of men and women at their darkest hour, come to Merchants Quay Ireland for food, showers and support when there's nowhere else to turn.

A gift in your Will in any amount, will change lives. And we'll always remember your kindness.

You can decide a specific amount or give a percentage after taking care of your loved ones. Even 1% is enough to help.

All your solicitor will need is this:

- Merchants Quay Ireland of 24 Merchants Quay, Dublin 8
- Revenue CHY Number: 10311
- Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20026240

Just ring 01 5240139 if you'd like more information, or to let us know about your legacy. Thank you for the good you leave behind.

Crossword

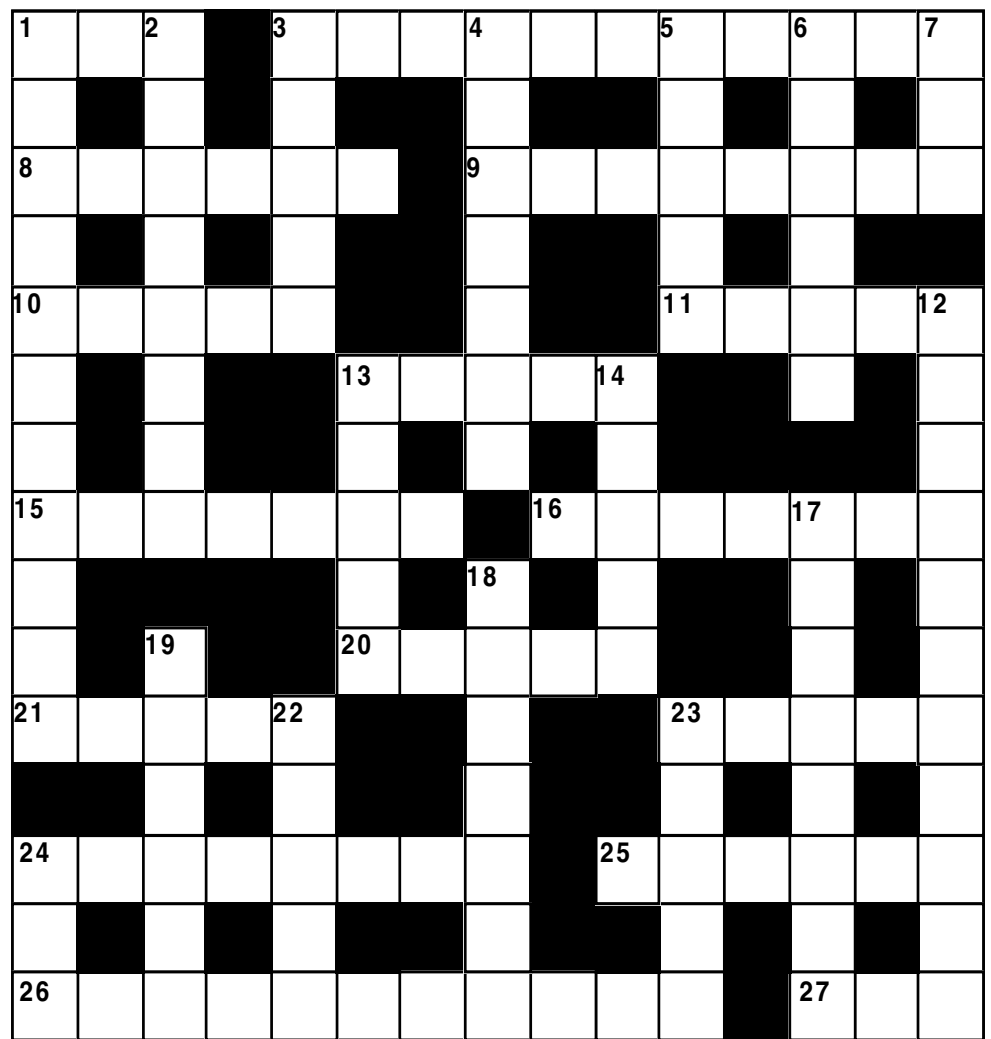
Gordius 699

Across

- 1 The young of a wolf (3)
- 3 Use it to protect surfaces when painting and decorating (7,4)
- 8 The unit of currency in Russia (6)
- 9 Army rank (8)
- 10 Original name of St Peter (5)
- 11 Freshwater fish (5)
- 13 Makes beer (5)
- 15 Sum of money put aside (4,3)
- 16 Archangel's name (7)
- 20 Inane (5)
- 21 Subvention (5)
- 23 Rest on or in water (5)
- 24 Safe, presenting no danger (8)
- 25 Disclose (6)
- 26 Supporting statement, ratification (11)
- 27 Golf peg (3)

Down

- 1 Baptism (7)
- 2 Nickname for natives of Birmingham in the UK (8)
- 3 A gourd or cantaloupe (5)
- 4 Bird of prey, the windhover (7)
- 5 Cut of meat (5)
- 6 Great river of South America (6)



- 7 Dine (3)
- 12 Type of pasta dish (11)
- 13 Sham, counterfeit (5)
- 14 Unscrupulous or out of the sunlight (5)
- 17 Not guilty (8)
- 18 Flower (7)
- 19 Stick used by musketeers (6)
- 22 Grouting is part of this person's trade (5)
- 23 Large flotilla (5)
- 24 Garden implement (3)

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 16

GORDIUS No. 698

Across

- 1 Alb 3 Pair of socks 8 Trojan 9 Dinosaur 10 Nacre 11 Lagos 13 Conga 15 Heinous 16 Top gear 20 Horse 21 Grasp 23 Torah 24 Thousand 25 Cornea 26 Battery hens 27 Sit

Down

- 1 Astonishing 2 Broccoli 3 Place 4 Radiant 5 Stool 6 Charge 7 Sir 12 Sacred Heart 13 Cough 14 Adore 17 Earrings 18 Breadth 19 Mahout 22 Posse 23 Tools 24 Tub

Sudoku Corner 567

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 566

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

Last week's Hard 566

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

Notebook

Fr John Harris OP



This year's special Dominican jubilee in Kilkenny

What has Krakow, Vienna and Kilkenny in common? To the best of my knowledge, these are the only three Dominican foundations of the thirteenth century north of the Alps, still occupied by Dominicans today.

In 1225 William Marshal the Younger gave to the newly arrived Dominicans to Kilkenny, a fortified tower, still perfectly preserved. Adjoining it the friars built their church, the Black Abbey, which, restored from its ruins in the nineteenth century, remains one of the architectural treasures of Ireland today.

From at least 1405-1516 the mayor of Kilkenny was elected in the chapter room each September 29. It is said that Cromwell himself may have stayed in the fortified tower when he took Kilkenny in 1650.

In 1540, with the suppression of the monasteries by order of Henry VIII, the Black Abbey became a court house it was taken for granted that that was the end of the abbey as a centre of worship. For a short period with the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 the building was claimed back and functioned as a church.

From 1642 to 1649, the time of the Confederation of Irish Catholics the Black Abbey again became a



The Black Abbey of Kilkenny. Photo: William Murphy/infomatique

place of Catholic life and worship. At the provincial chapter held in the Black Abbey in 1643 it was agreed to establish at Galway the first monastery of Dominican nuns in Ireland, this marked the beginning of the stories of our Dominican sisters in Ireland, still vibrant to this day.

On December 19 1646 the papal legate Rinuccini ordained a number of priests in the Black Abbey, encouraging his fellow bishops to come out of hiding and to begin the public celebrations of the sacraments, especially priestly ordinations, a sign of hope for the Church in Ireland.

During the next 100 years the abbey fell into ruin. In 1776, Fr Michael Vincent Meade OP, working as curate of St Canice's parish in the city, became tenant of the ruins of the medieval Dominican priory. It is written that "Fr Meade then put his mind to the building of a convent. Not having either a site or the necessary stone, he found both by simply demolishing the thirteenth-century choir and putting up a two-storey house in its stead".

In 1788, another Dominican, Laurence Shaw, restored again by vandalising, lopping off the top storeys of the Norman tower and used the

stones to rehabilitate the transept of the church as a chapel. But Fr Shaw left the city in 1800, with the chapel unopened. On February 9 1816, Fr John Gavin OP celebrated Mass in the Black Abbey for the first time since the arrival of Cromwell, 136 years earlier.

Little by little, with halting steps, the abbey rose up again throughout the nineteenth century, until on May 22 1864 Solemn Mass was sung for the opening of the church's restored nave to public worship on the newly consecrated high altar.

Marking 800 years of the Black Abbey this jubilee year of hope the abbey can be a beacon for what it means for us as pilgrims of hope. The building is not a monument to the past but a testimony to the hope of past generations which we need for the present and going into the future. Like those who have gone before us we must learn to use the stones of the past, the lessons we have learned to build anew.

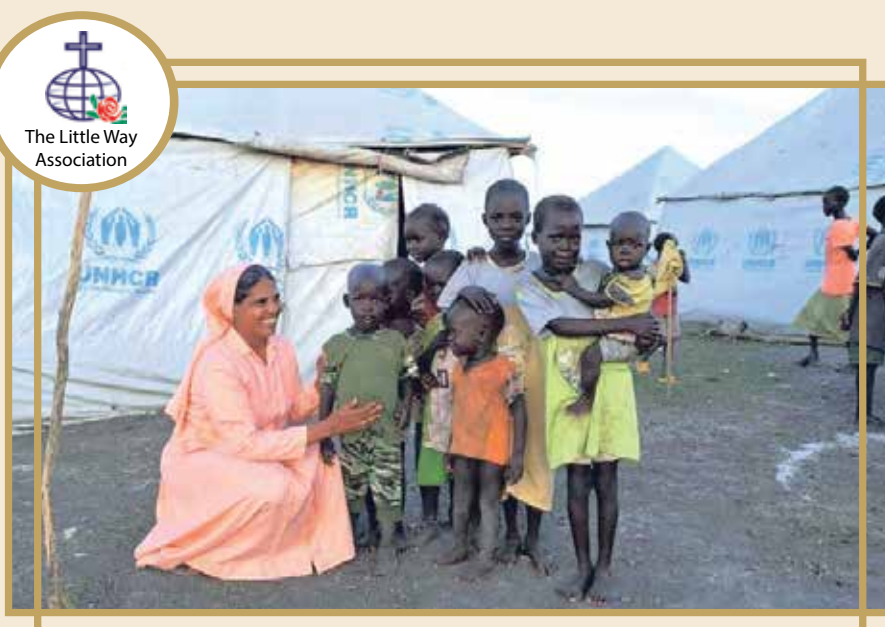
Two loves in my heart

At the recent funeral of the late president Jimmy Carter of the USA, one senator during his eulogy reminded his audience of a story Jimmy had told back in 2018. Mr Carter was telling of a time when as a young man he was a missionary in Massachusetts under the auspices of the Southern Baptist Union. One preacher particularly impressed Jimmy with his ability to win souls for Christ.

Jimmy asked him the secret of his success. The man somewhat embarrassed said; "I try to have two loves in my heart, one is for God and the other love I have in my heart is for the person who happens to be in front of me at any particular moment".

Is she necessary?

Four weeks after the new baby arrived home her older sister of four years old asked her dad, "Daddy, do you think she is really necessary?"



Sisters in Kodok, South Sudan urgently need our help to build three simple classrooms for children displaced by war

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate in 2022 sent 12 Sisters, at the request of the local bishop, to help rebuild part of the diocese of Marakal. The town of Kodok was destroyed by warfare in 2013 and many survivors fled to UN camps or other countries including Ethiopia and Eritrea. These people are now gradually returning to Kodok, and the DMI Sisters plan to erect a primary school for 180 disadvantaged children, saving them from child labour, violation and abuse.

Please will you help the Sisters

The sum of €10,000 will enable an engineer and skilled labourers to be chosen, construction materials to be purchased, the building work be done, and five volunteers from the community to be trained as teaching assistants to the DMI Sisters. 180 boys and girls will then be registered and primary education be set in motion. The Sisters will also help the children with simple health needs.

Your gift to The Little Way Association will make this project become a reality, ensuring a good, basic education and a better future for these children. Whatever you can spare will be sent without deduction and will be gratefully received. Thank you and may God reward your generosity.

If we receive additional funds we will allocate them to similar projects for children.



"A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul."
- St Therese

We wish all our friends and benefactors a peaceful and blessed New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain many graces for all our friends and benefactors during 2025.

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance.

We like to send a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **CLASSROOMS FOR CHILDREN DISPLACED BY WAR**

€..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**

€..... **WELLS AND SANITATION PROJECTS**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS** (please state no.)
We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass

€..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN. EXPENSES**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address

IC/01/23

To donate online go to
www.littlewaysassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.