


# The Irish Catholic


**GOD MADE THEM  
MALE AND FEMALE.  
THE REST IS  
CHURCH OF WOKE**  
Martina Purdy  
Page 9



**‘WE’RE KILLING THE  
GUYS WE HAVE’ –  
FR RON ROLHEISER  
ON PRIESTS**  
Garry O’Sullivan  
Pages 10-11



**‘WHEN I SAID  
THOSE WORDS,  
SHE GAVE HER  
LAST BREATH’**  
Fr Alan Hilliard  
Page 34



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## Social media ‘biggest challenge’ for youth – teacher and GAA star

Chai Brady

Social media continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing young people today, a Co. Clare GAA star and Catholic school teacher has warned. Senior footballer Gary Brennan, who retired from Clare duty after the end of the 2020 season, told *The Irish Catholic* that the pressures created by online platforms are having a profound impact on mental health and self-esteem among students.

Mr Brennan described how social media amplifies comparisons and creates unrealistic expectations. “It’s a major, major challenge,” he said. “The perception that everyone else is doing amazing things is heightened enormously by social media. It’s difficult for young people to keep a sense of reality under its influence.”

Mr Brennan, who teaches Irish and PE at St Flannan’s College in Ennis, Co. Clare, said the long-term impact of social media remains unknown but is already causing significant harm. “The pressure it puts on young people is enormous. We don’t even know the half of what they’re accessing or seeing online,” he said.

The Clare GAA stalwart highlighted the importance of encouraging young people to engage in physical activity and creative pursuits as a counterbalance to social media. “We’re working hard in school to raise activity levels. Studies show participation rates are declining, and we’re way off what’s recommended,” he said.

» Continued on Page 2

## Dublin celebrates ‘paper-thin’ idea of pagan goddess Brigit

Renata Steffens

A Dominican scholar has questioned the “erasure” of St Brigid in favour of a pagan deity “who might never even have been venerated in Ireland” by Dublin City Council (DCC).

DCC are currently promoting a city-wide celebration of “women past and present inspired by the Celtic goddess Brigit”, from Friday January 31 – February 3.

Fr Conor McDonough OP, who is a PhD student at the University of Galway working on biblical exegesis in early medieval Ireland, highlighted on social media: “The erasure of the historical Brigit continues apace [by DCC]. She existed, she was a nun, she was powerful, and prayerful, and deeply consequential in her own time and beyond. Why marginalise her

in favour of a deity who might never even have been venerated in Ireland?”

Fr McDonough previously said: “It’s really quite incredible how this paper-thin theory became so widely accepted. We know almost nothing about the pagan divinity identified as Brigid in the 10th-century text, *Sanas Cormaic*. Brigid there is described as a goddess worshipped by poets, while her sister, also Brigid, is a goddess of medics, and another sister, Brigid again, is a goddess of blacksmiths. That’s it; that’s all we know. We don’t know whether there was really a cult of Brigit(s) in pre-Christian Ireland, all we have is this very late report, written at a time when Irish intellectuals were actively fabricating elements of the pagan Irish past.”

See page 6



The Young Adults Rathmines prayer group based in Co. Dublin gathered on January 28 for a formation talk on St Brigid. Afterwards the group built St Brigid crosses with paper straws. Pictured is Tania Niño holding a St Brigid cross made on the day.

**ELIE WIESEL, DESPITE THE HORRORS  
HE HAD SEEN RETAINED FAITH**

Mary Kenny

PAGE 5



**GAA REFEREE PRIEST WELCOMES  
NEW FOOTBALL RULES**

Brandon Scott

PAGE 3



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PAGE 12



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## Social media 'biggest challenge' for youth – teacher and GAA star

» Continued from Page 1 off what's recommended," he said.

Brennan said that activities like sport, music, and drama help build confidence and resilience. "Students who stay involved in something that they are passionate about, develop skills and self-belief that help them deal with challenges," he said.

A strong faith and deep sense of community were central to Mr Brennan's own upbringing in Ballyea, Co. Clare. With two uncles in the priesthood, faith was a natural and integral part of his childhood. "Attending Mass and being part of the community were very important to us," he said, and that his faith gave him perspective and empathy, adding: "Faith has been a very positive influence on my life, it might not have been that way for everyone, I can only say that for me it has helped form me and has had a good influence on me and I'll pass it on to my own boys."

See page 13

# Jesuit homeless activist slams continued Govt housing failures

Brandon Scott

The last government's failure to meet its housing targets, represented in a 6.7% decrease in housing delivery in 2024, is "a massive housing failure" according to a leading Jesuit homeless activist, who said that he has "no confidence" in the new Government because of its lack of "radical action" when it comes to tackling the issue.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* in the aftermath of the latest Central Statistics Office figures on housing in 2024, which recorded 30,330 homes built in 2024, down from the initial target of around 40,000, Fr Peter McVerry SJ said that the

figures represent an obvious failure on the part of the Government.

"It's obviously a failure," he said. "They didn't even reach the target and the target was far too low anyway – all the experts are saying that we need 50,000 to meet the expanding population. So the targets are too low and they didn't even meet the targets."

"This Government have been in office for 5 years. Fine Gael have been in Government for fourteen years. Fianna Fáil have been in government for much of that time as well. Here at the end of it we have record homelessness, record house prices, record rents, what else can you call it except

a massive housing failure?"

Ideology-driven approaches to the housing crisis are the main cause of the State's housing problems according to Fr McVerry, who said that Government should embrace the public sector when it comes to addressing the issue and not rely on the private sector like it's currently doing.

"I think the responsibility for the problems lies with the ideological position of a conservative government relying on the private sector to provide housing," he said. "We've got to go back to the public sector for building public housing ... that's the only way in which we're going to address this problem."

"For the private rented sector we need to scrap the HAP scheme and return to RAS. In both of them the Government pays the rent to the landlord but in HAP the landlord takes on the responsibility of managing the tenants, whereas in RAS the local authority manages the tenants."

"This Government isn't going to radically change its policies – we need a radical change of policy. This Government, like the last Government, is tweaking existing policy and it's not working."

"We need far more radical action than this Government is capable of. So I have no confidence that this Government is going to address the homeless or the housing crisis."

## New app is beacon for Catholics

Renata Milán Morales

A group of Catholics in Dublin have created a Catholic events app called 'Beacon', with the purpose of ensuring that "everyone in Ireland is aware of the event and/or community that God is calling them to."

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Ciarán Heelan, app co-founder explained that "Every single person who downloads the app has all Catholic events in Ireland at their fingertips. There are no suggestions, no algorithms, no private groups. This way, someone who knows zero practicing Catholics can find the perfect event for them."

Mr Heelan explained that "The people who are more

likely to find out about these [Catholic] events are the ones who need it the least. Most of these groups promote via word of mouth or WhatsApp groups," forgetting those who have never break into these circles - converts, immigrants, young Mass-goers who don't know other parishioners, people who have moved to a new area...

The co-founder explained that for most of his life he did not know "where most Catholic events were on, or even that they were on" which "stunted" his faith development. "When I got into Catholic circles, I began to realise that there is a lot out there! People say the Catholic Church in Ireland is dead or dying. It's not," he added.

## Bishop finds voice in Singland



Sixth class pupils at St Brigid's Primary School, Singland, Limerick along with Canon Joseph Shire PP, Sarah Ryan, school principal, Bishop Brendan Leahy, and class teacher Sally Quinlivan on the occasion of the bishop's pastoral visit to the school.

# Mayor of Clonmel still hoping for meeting with Franciscans

Staff reporter

The recent unrest involving the future of the Franciscan Friary in Clonmel seems to have come to an end after an undertaking was given by the Abbey House of Prayer Group to end their sit-in last Thursday during High Court proceedings for trespass, but

the Mayor of Clonmel is still hoping that mediation can be sought to ensure the friary remains open to the public.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mayor of Clonmel Cllr Pat English of the Workers and Unemployed Action Group said he made the comments at one of the council's monthly meetings and

although the prayer group "knew they were in the wrong", things might have been different if any sort of plan had been explained to the public.

"I just made a request to the Franciscan order that they come down and talk to the committee in the church," he said. "We're not being told

what the plan is going forward by the Franciscan order and if that was explained maybe it wouldn't have got the reaction it did."

"But there was no real warning so it came as a big shock. That's probably what forced them into the occupation – they knew they were in wrong and that the friars owned it."

Although the sit-in has come to an end, Cllr English is still hopeful of some agreement between the Franciscans and locals.

"Going forward what needs to happen is that people sit around the table and see what the long-term plan for the church is going forward because there is a great

connection between the people of Clonmel and the friary itself," he said.

"Hopefully we can still get some sort of mediation where we can all sit around at the one table and discuss what the Franciscan's plans are for it and what we can do to help them maintain the presence of the church in Clonmel."

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# GAA priest-referee hopes new rules will quicken 'slowed down' game

Brandon Scott

A priest who also dons the black shirt and whistle as a Gaelic football referee has said that he hopes the recent rule changes to Gaelic football, employed at last week's league games, will speed up play that he notices "has slowed down" games he's officiated over the last number of years.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Derek Ryan curate in St Mary's Parish Drogheda, who officiates games in Co. Meath, said that the new rules are "positive" and although there may be a bit of confusion surrounding certain modifications, this will disappear in time.

"From an official's point of view it's all very positive," he said. "We would say, speaking amongst ourselves as referees and from the information we've received from Croke Park, that it's all very clear. At times there can be some grey areas that emerged during a game and some of those areas emerged



Fr Derek Ryan

during certain games over the weekend so it'll take a little bit of time for everybody to get used to the rules.

"Overall it was a very exciting weekend for football. Some of the scorelines reflect increased scoring power now and greater encouragement of players moving forward. Yes, there was confusion but the confusion will disappear in time."

The slower pace of Gaelic football has become a topic of conversation all across the country, with observers complaining that the formations and tactics have become risk averse and more defensively minded and this is something Fr Ryan has noticed

when overseeing club games in Meath.

"This is my sixth year refereeing. I have seen over the past couple of seasons where you begin to notice that you're not running as much in a game on your GPS," he said. "Teams are not moving forward – they're moving from side-to-side almost like a basketball game and are picking their moment to attack. So there was not as much running in a game, it's more like a game of chess ... it certainly slowed down some of the championship games I refereed over the past couple of seasons."

"At times you have to remind yourself that this is a championship game, a Senior Club Championship game in Meath and you're saying to yourself, where is the intensity sometimes? Sometimes players were afraid to take risks on the pitch."

"These new rules are encouraging: Moving forward, the solo and go, the three up front – it's all very, very positive," he said.

## 'We should sing like the Brazilians'

Renata Steffens

The chaplain to the Brazilian community in Cork, Polish priest Bernard Morawski OFM-Cap said the Brazilian Catholics should be an inspiration to the Irish. Working with that community for the past two years in the Holy Trinity Church, Cork, Fr Morawski said that it's an inspiration to see so many young people in the church, "practically all young people."

The priest said that the community is always joyful, singing and praying, which should be an inspiration. The joyfulness of the Brazilian community has been noticed by other members of the Holy Trinity Church.

"There was a choir participating in the English Mass, singing... They sang in English and in Portuguese," the priest said. He said that after seeing the Brazilians singing during Mass, "the Irish director of the Irish choir in our church said that she will [tell] the Irish

choir, 'we should sing like the Brazilian community'."

The singing is not the only difference between the two Masses. The Brazilian missal, the priest said, is distinct. "It is different in a way that it's much more dialogue." In the Irish Mass, he said, this dialogue happens in just a few moments, while in the Brazilian Mass the community response happens much frequently.

Fr Morawski said that the Brazilian Mass attracts people from other nationalities, even those who don't understand the language.

"There's one Irishman from Cork who [a] few times participated in the [Brazilian] Mass, and he said to me when he was leaving that he doesn't understand Portuguese, but he was very happy to participate three times in that Mass," the priest said. The energy of the Brazilian community in Cork makes people 'feel' Mass, even when they can't understand what is being said.

See page 7.

## Where there's a will, there's a way



Fr Maurice McMorrow of St Lasir Church in Wheathill, Co. Fermanagh, comes up with an inventive way to celebrate Mass after the church's power had been disrupted by Storm Éowyn.



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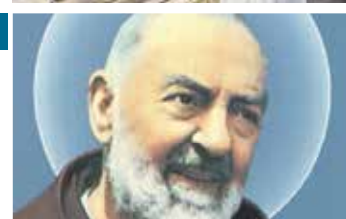


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# Generosity blown over the island after storm Éowyn

**Renata Steffens**

Storm Éowyn left many households without power, water and heat around the island, but the difficulties became an opportunity for the community to unite and support each other.

Fr Diarmuid Hogan, Communications Officer for Galway Diocese said that some parishes in the diocese are opening their doors to providing phone-charging, toilets and tea-making facilities. "Across the diocese and beyond, the resilience and fortitude of both our urban and rural parish communities have again shone in difficult times," he told *The Irish Catholic*.

For the Communications Officer, the storm brought

up the understanding and cooperation of the community, similarly to what happened during the pandemic. "Mass and other liturgies were cancelled across the diocese on Friday, during the Red Weather Warning. Since then, some evening Mass times have been rearranged because of electricity outages. However, the experience of Covid has made our parishioners resilient and more open to postponements and cancellations and parishes are coping and cooperating admirably."

Fr Hogan said that some of the parishes providing support to those who still don't have their power restored include Oranmore, Claregalway, Clarinbridge and Renmore.

Galway was not the only one with parish priests opening their doors to the community. In Dunleer Parish, Co. Louth, a parish within the Archdiocese of Armagh, the parish priest Fr Damien Quigley opened the sunroom at the side of the parochial house for those in need of access to sockets, kettle, or a microwave.

In Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, St Brigid's Hall, a multipurpose community centre, built on the site of the first Catholic church in the town opened their doors to those in need of a warm place to charge their phones or make tea and coffee. Showers were also available, only requiring the community to bring a towel and toiletries. The Tubbercurry Family Resource

Centre also offered similar facilities.

"We just wanted to offer showers and tea, and let people charge [their phones] and sit in a warm room," Mary Barry, a committee member of St Brigid's Hall said. Ms Barry believes it's important for the community to open their doors to those in need.

"I thought that was a great idea... and then I realised there's people five days [without power] and some people don't even have water. People are moving away to other places, to family, they're moving in and out of the area," Ms Barry said. "But then, there are people that are very caught off, they don't have the option of family."

Ms Barry said she knows

people who cannot move in with family member while power is restored and travelled long distances to have showers in a hotel. "They were charged €12... It's just nice if you have a community facility that's responding to needs."

Fr Vincent Sherlock, PP Tubbercurry-Cloonacool believes it is important to exercise generosity and help each other in moments like these. "People have risen to that. People are doing it. Apart from churches... people are inviting folks to come in to charge up their phones or have a cup of tea. It is very important, and I think it has happened for a lot of people. Lot of goodness out there. Thank God," Fr Sherlock concluded.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Rosary 'gives strength' to grieving family

Speaking in the aftermath of the tragic death of Kacper Dudek, a 20 year-old from Lifford in Co. Donegal of Polish descent who died after a tree fell on his car during Storm Eowyn, Fr Michael McCaughey PP of Leckpatrick, Camus and Clonleigh parishes said although there is a "remarkable sense of pain and grief", the rosary has given friends and family "strength" to help navigate these distressing times.

Speaking on Today with Claire Byrne, Fr McCaughey said "I was called to the situation on Friday afternoon and it's something I'll not forget for quite a while. We prayed at the roadside and in turn I spoke later that evening to the family.

"There's just a remarkable sense of the pain and the grief but also when I called to the house, so many of the Polish community and their local friends had called there and had just finished saying the rosary, and that had given them strength."

### Spreading the seed of hope in Cork

The dioceses of Kerry, Killaloe, Limerick and Cashel and Emly gathered last Saturday, January 25 in Springfort Hall, Mallow, Co. Cork for a Laudato Si' conference titled 'Seeds of Hope: Returning Biodiversity to our Parishes'.

Róisín Alexander-Pye, Trócaire's Laudato Si' Officer told *The Irish Catholic* the event had 140 attendees. "We were really happy, with just twenty cancellations on the back of the storm," she said.

Bishop Martin Hayes, Bishop of Kilmore and the Irish Catholic Bishop's Laudato Si' coordinator gave a talk "about the message of Laudato Si", which is integral to who we are as a faith community," Ms Alexander-Pye said. The second talk was given by Kate Chandler, Communities and Engagement Pollinator Officer, National Biodiversity Data Centre.

Workshops were held in the afternoon, with the dioceses working together as mixed groups. "The only time when people came together as a diocese was at the end when the diocesan reps and organising committee wanted to connect before they went home."

## 'St Brigid brought hope to Ireland', Bishop Nulty

**Renata Steffens**

The Feast for St Brigid is celebrated this Saturday, February 1 with a bank holiday on February 3. Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty said "it's critically important" to officially have the Kildare saint celebrated with a bank holiday.

This is the third year the bank holiday will take place, and for Bishop Nulty, having a day to honour

the saint is important, as "it's very clearly a moment in the life of Ireland that's publicly recognised and with the darkness and the difficult weather... it's great to have a bank holiday that represents Brigid as a person who brought great hope to our land and to our people."

The celebrations in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese began last week, the bishop said. "I was over in Solas Bhríde in Kildare, we had a lovely

ceremony where pilgrims came from Noorbeek, Netherlands to get the flame of Brigid to bring it back with them."

The diocese will be busy with celebrations to mark St Brigid's Feast. One of the main events will be Mass in Carlow Cathedral on Saturday, for the Feast Day, when the bishop will make an announcement related to the Jubilee 2025.

"St Brigid is always important

because we have many customs associated with Brigid, like the making of St Brigid's cross... I remember my father putting one on the milking parlour at home and how she was the patron of the cows, of animals. There's a circumstance of people going back to that tradition of keeping Brigid very much to the forefront in our country. That's what makes this bank holiday such an important one."

## A true Derry girl returns home



On Sunday, January 26, Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown celebrated Mass to invoke the Holy Spirit on the cause of Sr Clare for beatification and canonisation. (L/R) Sarah McGarrity (soloist at the Mass for Sr Clare), Fr Gerard Mongan, Adm. Long Tower, Patsy McCallion (steward) and Isobel Caldwell (Musical accompaniment). Photo: Gerry Temple.

## All maternity hospitals to enable abortion, programme for government

**Renata Milán Morales**

The recent publication of the programme for government includes a commitment to "ensure that all maternity hospitals provide equitable access to termination of pregnancy services." This objective has raised concerns.

Eilís Mulroy, spokesperson for the Pro Life Campaign, speaking to *The Irish Catholic* explained that "the new government has not made any commitments such as implementing the recommendations of the Health Committee" from the three-year review of abortion legislation. "This pro-abortion objective was already ruthlessly being pursued during the lifetime of the last gov-

ernment," she added.

The push for greater access to abortion services comes at a time when abortion numbers have risen in Ireland since its legalisation in 2018. An estimated number of 48,000 abortions "have been carried out since the referendum, despite the promise that abortion would be 'rare,'" Sandra Parda, Life Institute spokesperson, told this paper.

Ms Parda has raised concerns over the growing pressure on hospitals already struggling with staffing shortages, "The continued disregard for the full conscientious objections of medical staff, combined with staff shortages in hospitals, should raise serious concerns about the government's push to expand abortion services."



# Elie Wiesel, despite the horrors he had seen retained the faith

**T**he events marked at Auschwitz last Monday (for Holocaust Memorial Day) were a sombre international reminder of the terrible death camps maintained by the Nazi regime. We will be seeing more of such anni-



**Mary Kenny**

versaries this year, notably in April, recalling the liberation of Bergen-Belsen,

whose revelations really shocked the world. There is now a large

amount of what might be called "Holocaust literature". But if we were only to read one book about it, I believe that Elie Wiesel's account, *Night*, should be that book. It's a slim paperback of just over 100 pages.

Wiesel's family lived in a small Transylvanian town, Sighet; the Jewish community there were warned that the Nazis were rounding up and killing Jews (as well as other victims). Although it was 1944, local people just didn't take the warnings seriously.

**“Elie and his family were transported on cattle trucks to Auschwitz. His mother and little sister were gassed immediately; he and his father, able-bodied males, were put to work”**

Elie himself, then a young boy, was very religious, studying Jewish mysticism, and at first it all seemed to be happening outside his orbit. Anyway, rumours circulated that the Allies were winning the war – which they were. But the Nazi mentality was that – as defeat loomed – they made haste to send more victims to the death camps.

And so the persecution began, and Elie and his family were transported on

cattle trucks to Auschwitz. His mother and little sister were gassed immediately; he and his father, able-bodied males, were put to work. The notorious Dr Mengele even inspected them.

This harrowing account of his experiences is written with great simplicity, and full of small, telling details. Jews were not allowed to perform German music, and yet one talented young violinist yearned to play Beethoven, and he died with his violin.

## Attitudes

*Night* not only reports the Auschwitz experience but goes some way to explain Israel's subsequent tough attitudes: many Jews were critical of Jewish communities' passivity in the face of the Nazi persecution.

Elie Wiesel wrote this memoir in 1958 but found it

difficult to get published. People wanted to forget the past. Then, he was significantly helped by the French Catholic novelist, François Mauriac, who doggedly pursued publishers on his behalf. Eventually, Mauriac got *Night* published in French. However, initially it made little impact. Only in the 1970s did it achieve global attention, when the world was finally ready to listen.

Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1986, and in his acceptance spoke a prayer of gratitude “to our common Creator”. “Blessed be Thou, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this day.” Despite the horrors he had seen, he retained faith.



Elie Wiesel

## The artist's deeper outlook

**B**ob Dylan's spiritual side does not feature in the striking new biopic of his life *A Complete Unknown* – but then, he only converted to an Evangelical Christianity in the 1970s, and the movie focuses on the 1960s. Yet what it does bring out is Dylan's capacity to think in philosophical terms and see experience from a bigger-picture

perspective (he's also portrayed – as played by the actor Timothée Chalamet – as an awkward sod, as many creative artists are).

Later, in 1997, Dylan would perform before Pope John Paul II and an audience of 300,000 young people at Bologna; and the Pontiff would give a sermon based on Dylan's immortal *Blowin' in the Wind*.

And the lyrics of *The Times They Are A-Changing* remain so prescient, and relatable. As I left the cinema, in the company of some other members of a generation who were young in the 1960s, how true these words still are today: “The present now/Will later be past/And the first one now/Will later be last.” Straight from the New Testament too.

**A**s the feast-day of St Valentine approaches, young people (and some not-so-young) may be hoping to find romance. So, I feel compelled to quote some priceless advice for lonely-hearted women given by social etiquette queen Mary Killen in *The Spectator*.

A single woman in her

thirties wrote to lament the fact that she finds it hard to meet “intelligent, interesting bachelors” and that “Apps are hopeless”. The lady looks for suitable chaps at literary parties, but most seem to be married, or treat women casually.

Mary tells her correspondent that she is “looking in the wrong places”.

When eligible men know they are a “scarce commodity”, this prompts “commitment-phobia”. Search further afield, Mary advises. “Start attending lectures and conferences in theoretical physics or quantum mechanics where 98% of the audience is guaranteed to be male.” Seek out science or techie events where “nerdier

types” who “only need a makeover” can be found. Maybe take a course in these fields of study, she counsels.

Mary Killen (sometimes seen on the TV show ‘Gogglebox’) is a very observant and delightfully shrewd Northern Irish lass. Her advice on the age-old quest for the right romantic partner is entirely sensible!

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# St Brigid's Day: Another year closer to being airbrushed from history



Dualta Roughneen

**I**t is that time of year again. Or rather, it is one of those times of year again, where I rail against the appropriation of Ireland's Christian heritage by elements who co-opt religious Feast Days for secular enjoyment.

We are becoming accustomed – inured almost – to the annual attempts to recast Christmas as a 'winter festival' or a generic 'holiday'. St Patrick's Day has been overtaken as the national holiday celebrating Irishness, or some reductive form of self-congratulations.

But it is St Brigid's Day, marking and honouring Ireland's foremost female saint, that has been seen its identity most forcefully and deliberately challenged. In 2023, St Brigid's Day was marked as a public holiday for the first time, following a campaign to have a national holiday of female identity balancing the honour that is afforded St Patrick. After all, Ireland already had three holidays dedicated to men – Christmas, St Patrick and St Stephen's days. Ireland needed a holiday that identified as female. But identifying as Christian was problematic.

## Carelessness

To lose one feast day may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. While St Patrick's Day and the accompanying drunken celebration has morphed through a gradual cultural drift, accidental almost, St Brigid's Day has been subject to something a much more deliberate appropriation.

St Brigid's Day is celebrated on February 1, the first day of Spring, and the date of a pre-Christian festival, Imbolc, and thus the argument is put forward that Irish Christianity had

gazumped the pagan population by taking over this day. The Celtic goddess, Brigit, whom even less is known about than the Irish saint, is first mentioned in the 10th Century, over 500 years after the birth of the Christian saint, yet the argument goes that this goddess pre-exists the saint with little or no evidence to back up the assertion.

**“If an alien were to land in Dublin and review the 80 plus events across the city, they would struggle to find any religious or Christian connection to the festival”**

Fr Conor McDonough OP, who has done some research into this is perplexed: “It's really quite incredible how this paper-thin theory became so widely accepted. We know almost nothing about the pagan divinity identified as Brigid in the 10th-century text, *Sanas Cormaic*. Brigid there is described as a goddess worshipped by poets, while her sister, also Brigid, is a goddess of medics, and another sister, Brigid again, is a goddess of blacksmiths. That's it; that's all we know. We don't know whether there was really a cult of Brigit(s) in pre-Christian Ireland, all we have is this very late report, written at a time when Irish intellectuals were actively fabricating elements of the pagan Irish past.”

Marking the first week in February, Dublin City Council, has created a city-wide celebration honouring the women of Ireland, celebrating the coming of spring “inspired by the Celtic goddess, Brigit”. This year is the festival's fourth edition. If an alien were to land in Dublin and review the 80 plus events across the city, they would struggle to find any religious or Christian connection to the festival.

The alien would ask where the patron saint of midwives,

newborns, Irish nuns, fugitives, blacksmiths, dairy-maids, boatmen, chicken farmers, cattle, scholars, is represented in the ‘vulva stories’? Where is the representation of her formidable Christian faith and the social justice drive that it inspired in her?

The events are much more a celebration of the pre-Christian Celtic Goddess Brigit than the Christian Brigid. Does any reasonable person believe that the celebration would exist without the real, flesh and blood, person that was Brigid of Kildare? Only if they lie to themselves. Yet, her identity has been stolen to celebrate a mythical Goddess or some legendary figure that has little historical evidence.

Brigid really did exist. Born in the 5th Century, she fought the patriarchy to follow her own path of healing and compassion for the poor and the sick. The most well-known story of Brigid is where she defied the will of her father, a wealthy and powerful landowner. She was in the habit of taking food from her father's larder to give, surreptitiously, to the destitute. One day, with a slab of meat under her cloak, she was stopped by her father who wanted to know what she was carrying. When she revealed her goods, the meat had transformed into a bundle of flowers and she was off the hook.

## Drumbeat

Reflective of modern Ireland, the drumbeat to the festival is inclusivity and universality, spiritualism rather than religion. A real-life feminist, with ideals of looking after the less fortunate, is being erased by modern Ireland, and the only reason for this is because of her Christianity and her part in the story of Christian Ireland. This is the triumph of dubious legend over 1,500 years of real-lived Ireland. It is reflective of the denial of Europe's Christian heritage by the European Union, a divisive marginalisation of Christian believers and their heritage.

Each celebration of ‘the goddess Brigit’ that is repeated in media and by government entities, ought



to sit uncomfortably, knowing that the objective is not mere inclusivity but to establish a hierarchy of worldviews that disfavours Christianity in Ireland, while at the same time slowly erasing the contributions of a skin-and-bone Irishwoman who did great things in the 5th Century, a time that was not very favourable to women.

**“The festival and the framing of the national holiday is a lie in itself”**

The national holiday – that extra day off we all benefit from now – would not exist without St Brigid

and her Christian faith. It is dishonest to pretend that anyone would even be thinking about, talking about, or celebrating, any mythical Celtic goddess called Brigit, if Brigid of Kildare and her memory and legacy was not kept alive by the Church down through the years.

## Reality

It may not sit well in the throat of Dublin City Council and their new-age celebrators but that is the reality. Any self-respecting Catholic should avoid the events that peddle the myth that St Brigid was preceded by some mythical Celtic Goddess and that this pseudo-divinity is somehow more deserving of our acknowledgments. The festival and the framing of

the national holiday is a lie in itself. But it is a lie that will quickly push out the Christian celebrations.

The space afforded to St Brigid is being quickly reduced. Instead of being front and centre, she is becoming a peripheral figure along with the Christianity that she held dear. The myth – the lie – is already being promoted in schools where the flesh-and-blood Brigid is being conflated with a mythical legend is becoming the new reality. It is being promoted with public funds through bodies like Dublin City Council whose festival Brigit: Dublin City Celebrating Women celebrates few, if any, that are representative of Brigid's Christian legacy.

**“Any self-respecting Catholic should avoid the events that peddle the myth that St Brigid was preceded by some mythical Celtic Goddess and that this pseudo-divinity is somehow more deserving of our acknowledgments”**



# The Polish priest who says Mass in Portuguese in Cork



Renata Steffens

**W**hen thinking about the nationality of chaplains to foreign communities, it is usually assumed they are a native from that community's country, however, that is not the case with the Brazilian Chaplaincy in Cork. Fr Bernard Morawski OFMCap is a Polish priest who worked with Spanish speakers for many years and today says Mass in Portuguese every Sunday in the Holy Trinity Church, Cork.

Two years ago, Fr Morawski considered the possibility of moving to Ireland or England to practice English. He came to Ireland and was surprised by the size of the Brazilian community here, so he decided to talk to his superiors about moving to Dublin to assist with that community, as he had worked in Latin America and thought Spanish and Portuguese were not very different. With his superiors' support, he moved to Portugal for three months to learn Portuguese before officially moving to Ireland.

## Assist

At first, Fr Morawski was going to move to Ireland to assist Fr Severino Pinheiro da Silva Neto, the Chaplain to the Brazilian Community in Dublin, but in 2023 the Brazilian priest Fr Ademir Marques arrived in Ireland for that.

"The superiors decided to send me to Cork to work with the Brazilian Community. It's not much work daily, I have Sunday Mass, every Sunday at 4pm. I have every Friday evening the prayer group, Brazilian charismatic prayer group, which I'm attending,

supporting [and] sometimes giving some talks."

When moving to Ireland, the Polish priest stayed around ten days in the Provincial House in Dublin, where he met Fr Neto and had the opportunity to ask some questions about the Brazilian community. He still maintains close contact with the Brazilian priest, and if he has any doubts or questions, he still calls the priests in Dublin.

The priest is not as comfortable with Portuguese as he is with Spanish yet, "but it's enough. I understand people, people understand me. There's [a] good communication, so it's not a problem."

From the beginning of his vocation life, Fr Morawski knew he wanted to be a missionary. He talked to his superiors and after being ordained priest, he worked for five years before getting permission to move abroad.

**“The way Latin American people celebrate Mass is much different than the way it is celebrated in Ireland or Poland. For him, their way of celebrating Mass is ‘more alive’”**

The priest has been working as a missionary ever since. "I've been a missionary in Central America, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica... I really loved it, and [at] the beginning when I arrived in Guatemala, there were many things that were very difficult for me." At first, Fr Morawski found difficult the way Latin American people greet each other, touching with hugs and kisses. However, after the first cultural shock, he thought "it's really very warm, very friendly and very nice."

The differences didn't stop

in the greeting traditions, or even the food. The way Latin American people celebrate Mass is much different than the way it is celebrated in Ireland or Poland. For him, their way of celebrating Mass is "more alive".

At first, he was frustrated, because "similar to [the] Irish", his Mass experience was much stricter, "people [are] very much in silence, [the] priest is doing practically everything, and when I came to Latin America [there] was clapping hands and talking... In my mind, [at] the beginning, was that people have no good faith. But it's a different expression of faith."

Today, the priest understands that all the differences in the way the Brazilian and Latin American Catholics celebrate Mass is only different, a not a 'wrong' way of doing it. "The Polish Mass for me now is boring."

When he went back to Poland to visit after a few years celebrating Mass with the Latin American community, the priest went to Mass and was "looking around from the Altar I was beside in the Mass, I [was] smiling to the people, I [was] happy to be with the people," But they were all "very serious... so very much distant, when the Latin Americans are very much like a family".

## Sabbatical

After ten years in mission in Latin American, the priest asked to take a sabbatical year to learn English. He went to the US for a few months and then moved to Australia.

After one year in Australia, he felt his English was not good enough, and having met so many Latin Americans to whom he was ministering to, he "asked to stay a little longer." He lived there for fifteen years.

In Cork, Fr Morawski has been working to improve the Faith experience of the Brazilians there. Currently, the



Fr Morawski in Nicaragua in 1998 visiting mission communities.



Costa Rica 2005 during Palm Sunday.



Good Friday in El Salvador 2007.



Fr Bernard Morawski celebrating a wedding in Melbourne, 2019.

chaplains has one Extraordinary Minister of the Holy Communion, and the Chaplain is preparing formation for another six people, which will probably happen next month with authorisation of Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin.

"Continuing from last

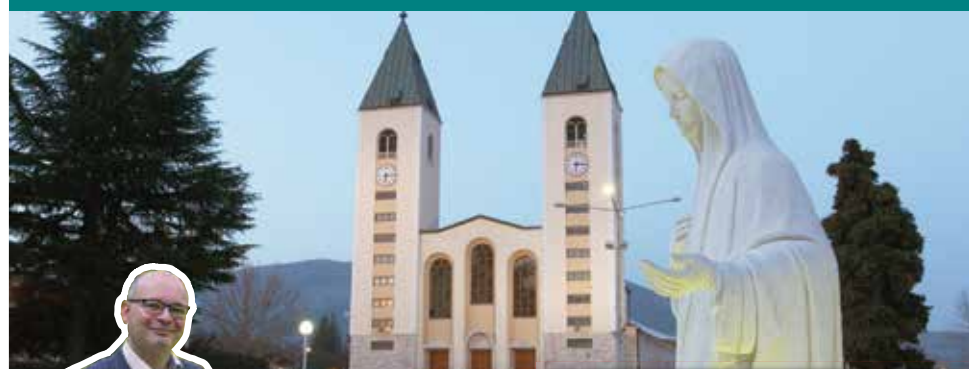
year, we have been organising a pilgrimage to Knock, [with] all the Brazilians from Ireland together, and we will possibly be doing that in June." Another pilgrimage the chaplaincy is organising is to Italy for the Jubilee at the beginning of April.

The priest thinks it is

"important to support the family", so they are planning more programmes to work with families and couples for the near future. He has now been in Ireland for almost two years, and hopes to "give" himself to that community "for as long as possible."

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Fr Bernard Morawski with the Brazilian Community in Cork, 2024.



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# The fundamental role of the family



Renata Milán Morales

**S**ociety has lost touch with the importance of the family. In a world increasingly driven by individualism, the community once nurtured by family networks has faded, leaving behind a sense of “fragility and isolation,” explained Vincenzo Bassi speaking to *The Irish Catholic*. The president of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) and international speaker, described families as the oldest social institution, pre-dating laws and the State itself.

One of the realities Mr Bassi observed is the disconnect between modern life and the spirit of service in family life. Families, he said, offer a vocation to serve others, “Families are not perfect. It is like life; you have problems. But the family gives the

opportunity to have a concrete vocation to service the others. And it makes sense.” This sense of purpose is integral to human flourishing. It allows people to find meaning and connection in their lives. Without it, society risks “descending into a cycle of loneliness and fragility,” as Mr Bassi explained.

**“Such a mindset leads to what Pope Francis has called a ‘throw-away culture’”**

The fragmentation of families is intensified by global economic trends that prioritise productivity over community. Mr Bassi notes that the European Union often views people not as individuals with inherent dignity but merely as workers or consumers. “The economy has become the goal, not the instrument,” he explained. This shift reduces people to

their professional identities, separating them from their roles as parents, siblings, and neighbours. Such a mindset leads to what Pope Francis has called a “throw-away culture,” where the value of a person is tied to their economic output.

## Family networks

This economic focus has also led to the loss of the middle class, traditionally the support of family and community support, “The middle class was normally the class who took care of the others. But if you increase the tax rate the middle-class families become poorer.” This economic pressure not only affects individual households but also undermines the relationships that once sustained societies.

The globalisation of economies has weakened local communities by encouraging people to spend their resources outside their communities. Mr Bassi argues that this trend makes communities poorer, as money is not invested locally. He proposes a solution in the form of family networks, which could revitalise local economies by encouraging families to support one another and priori-



Family members attend the Festival of Families in Croke Park stadium in Dublin August 2018. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring.

tise their communities' needs. “If you spend your money in a family network within your community,” he explains, “you do that because there are people who can take care of your children, your needs. And you live better.”

**“Family networks could recreate this dynamic, offering practical and spiritual benefits”**

This vision of family networks is not only about economics but to involve a sense of community and solidarity. Mr Bassi draws inspiration from the past, when priests and families worked together. In those days, villages functioned as extended networks of families, providing mutual support and a shared sense of purpose. Mr Bassi believes

family networks could recreate this dynamic, offering practical and spiritual benefits. He notes that when priests are in regular contact with families, they become more active and less isolated themselves.

One of the challenges in rebuilding these networks is the culture of individualism, which Mr Bassi sees as “a natural trend.” “The human being is against our civilisation. Individualism is not a sign of civilisation,” he said. True civilisation, he explained, begins when people live together with a shared goal, accepting and valuing their differences.

## European Union

In addressing these challenges at the European level, Mr Bassi faces significant challenges. One of them is the need to shift politicians' perspectives on the family. He told this paper the importance of moving away from ideological debates and focusing instead on the practical, functional role of families in society. “The problems we have now are the consequence of the lack of aware-



Vincenzo Bassi, president of FAFCE.

ness concerning the function of the family,” he said. Families are essential resources for the common good.

**“Without taking care of families, we cannot expect anything from the others”**

Mr Bassi also highlights the need for families to take responsibility for their own futures. He calls for a greater sense of action among families, urging them to organise and advocate for their needs. “The function of the family is not considered a priority from the politicians because the families are not represented,” he explains. By forming networks and working together, families can ensure that their concerns are heard.

Mr Bassi believes that by rediscovering the value of family and community, society can overcome isolation and fragility. This requires practical changes, such as “revising tax policies to support families and fostering local economies that prioritise community over globalisation.”

“Without taking care of families, we cannot expect anything from the others,” Mr Bassi said.

**“This shift reduces people to their professional identities, separating them from their roles as parents, siblings, and neighbours”**

## A much larger world

“How much better it would be to build a Europe centred on the human person and on its peoples, with effective policies for natality and the family,” said Pope Francis in April 2023, encouraging politicians to think about the role of the family.

This natural tendency towards individualism was criticised by the writer GK Chesterton, at the end of the 19th Century, when

he noticed the start of this cultural shift. Chesterton, in his essay *On certain modern writers and the institution of the family*, observed that, “It is not fashionable to say much nowadays of the advantages of the small community. We are told that we must go in for large empires and large ideas. There is one advantage, however, in the small state, the city, or the village... The man who lives in a small community lives in a much

larger world. He knows much more of the fierce varieties and uncompromising divergences of men.”

According to Vincenzo Bassi, “the civilised society starts when people do not live alone – when they live in community. The differences can be considered as an investment as well. That's very Catholic... [Yet] make people lonely and they will be fragile. If you don't want to be fragile, you need to live in community.”

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# Catholics declare that God made them male and female: the rest is 'Church of Woke'



Martina Purdy

**T**he band played *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, as the culture wars exploded at Donald Trump's inauguration in Washington last week. "We will forge a society that is colour blind and merit-based," the American President declared, as he announced an end to government policies which try to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of life. President Trump also made it official government policy that there are two genders only: male and female.

Tucked in behind the new US President, and cheering him on was an American-born Hindu businessman of Indian immigrant parents, Vivek Ramaswamy. Was he witnessing a new separation of church and state? He is a fierce critic of the church of 'Wokeism' - claiming this strange doctrine is in fact a religion, and a false one at that I would add. "Woke-ness," he says, "is the new orthodoxy."

## Woke

In his book *Woke Inc*, he explains why he thinks Wokeism is in fact a religion.

Wokeism is a love of identity politics which gives meaning to the lives of followers

Wokeism in fact dictates the thoughts and deeds of its adherents.

Ramaswamy describes the 'great awakening' - and how wokeism has infected government, corporations, academia, the media and even Christian churches.

Since his college days, 20 years ago, he has watched people being persecuted and fired for rejecting this new religion.

So what is wokeism? It depends who you ask. Ramaswamy defines it as a belief system that divides the world

into two classes, according to race, sex and sexuality: *the oppressed and the oppressor*. And, it seeks to 'right the wrongs' through all means necessary, particularly political and economic power. Just as Christians see God's hand in all creation, wokes see the guiding hand of identity-based power in everything.

Wokeism, the faith of the far left, follows the false gospel of manipulating the virtues of *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* - fighting discrimination, real and imagined with opposing discrimination (which actually just leads to injustice, building barriers and creating resentment). Note the rows between trans activists and feminists.

**“Wokeism even borrows some of the language of Christianity - mercy, kindness and compassion - but of course contrasts sharply in other ways”**

Critics claim woke inclusion is only for those who agree - and that woke diversity excludes diversity of thought.

Georgetown professor Joshua Mitchell claims that America has "relocated its religion to the realm of politics". While Christ is the scapegoat for sin in Christianity, he argues that the woke scapegoat is the ordinary "straight white male" - representing the privileged oppressor who must atone for errors such as racism.

Oppressors must confess their sin, though not all non-whites are viewed as victims "The high priests of diversity decided Asians were privileged or 'white-adjacent'," said Ramaswamy, now a wealthy businessman.

Wokeism even borrows some of the language of Chris-

tianity - mercy, kindness and compassion - but of course contrasts sharply in other ways: Christians find their true identity in Christ and believe that 'God made them male and female'.

Wokes believe that truth is subjective and feelings are paramount.

Ironically, woke has taken root in a way never envisaged by America's Founding Fathers, conscious of freedom from religious persecution, never envisaged. The US constitution prevents any law establishing a religion.

Yet wokeism, with powerful and wealthy allies, has taken root in US institutions - and has spread to Europe, stifling freedom of expression for fear of being cancelled or losing their jobs. "There are a number of things you just can't say," states Ramaswamy, recalling how the President of Harvard resigned in 2007, his fate largely sealed after a controversial speech in which he suggested there might be more men than women in science and engineering because statistically boys did better in maths.

Ramaswamy was on the student advisory committee to find his replacement. "It quickly became clear that the committee's mandate was to appoint a woman to make up for Larry Summer's cardinal sin. That's exactly what we did."

## Application

A friend of mine who works in finance says she keeps her mouth shut in the office while colleagues feel free to express views that offend her own Catholic faith. "You have to be very careful these days," she says.

Others do not feel they can object when asked to declare their pronouns "she/her". A few years ago, I heard a story about a man in London who binned the Pride flag from his desk and his door, only to be told by his

boss that he would have to go for 'diversity training'. That is until he explained that he himself was a gay man with a male partner. He was exonerated but would a straight male have been so fortunate and free?

Trump's attack on wokeism may be turning the tide: Whitehall's biggest department last week dumped the Stonewall Diversity Scheme.

**“Woke remains quite a powerful force, which, religion or not, clashes quite profoundly with Catholicism”**

But at the same time, the London Telegraph reported that UK tax office employees were being given the equivalent of one day off a week to promote trans ideology, and Stormont politicians in Belfast rejected a call to keep male prisoners who claim 'trans identity' out of female prisons.

So woke remains quite a powerful force, which, religion



US President Donald Trump shakes hands with Chief Justice John G. Roberts after taking the oath on the day of Trump's inauguration in the Rotunda of the US Capitol in Washington January 20, 2025. Photo: OSV News/Fabrizio Bensch, pool via Reuters.

or not, clashes quite profoundly with Catholicism in how it views sex and sexuality.

If we are to spread our faith to the next generation about God, we must be aware of persecution by the church of woke, and prepared to counter it peacefully.

We must be able to declare that God made them male and female.

This is not just a theological position; it is a biological reality

and should not be a controversial statement.

A test of any society is the percentage of the population who feel free to speak their mind. "Free at last! Free at last!" a preacher bellowed at Trump's inauguration ceremony. He and many of the audience watching felt liberated to hear it pronounced by the leader of the free world that there were two genders, male and female.

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## The importance of perspective

**I**t's been a while since I listened to the BBC news at 8am and frankly I was taken aback the other morning. Not of course by the news that Thailand now allows 'gay marriage'. But by the way it was presented by the South East Asian Correspondent Jonathan Head

who described the 'day of celebration for Thailand's LGBTQ+ community'. This was the line I found rather disturbing: "Thailand has long been famous for its tolerance of diverse sexual identity and lifestyle..." That's one way of putting it! The age of consent in Thailand is 15.

**K**indness was the chosen word for 2024, according to a newly published survey of 6,000 children by

Oxford University Press, who described this as "encouraging". I should be encouraged that this fruitful word is being celebrated. But my experience

is that "Be Kind!" is often an attempt to shut down Christian views on wokeism. Speaking the truth with love is a better description.



# Relentless Ministry

## ‘We’re killing the guys



For our new series on priests and the challenges in their busy lives, **Garry O’Sullivan** sat down for an exclusive interview with **Fr Ron Rolheiser** speaking on this topic.

**Fr Rolheiser, could you speak a little bit about the state of priesthood, the challenges for priests these days?**

“Well, one of the big challenges is that there is just a flat-out shortage of priests, you know, like, okay, I’ll give you the Canadian and United States situation. I’ll do a priests’ retreat now and one third of the priests will be from other countries – one third.

I think up to now, dioceses, certainly Canada, United States, they patch it by bringing in people from Africa, from Asia, and different places. Not that that’s a bad thing. Some international clergy is good, but it’s not a long-term solution.

That is not the solution for a local church. And so this is a big crisis. And I don’t think it’s fully recog-

nised because, it’s steady as she goes, we’re still patching and so on. I don’t think we’re looking ahead far enough to see what’s that going to be like in 25 years.

I’m not sure what it’s like in Ireland, but in the United States, with religious vocations really, really down, diocesan vocations used to be good. But I’ll give you an example. I teach in a seminary in Texas. And when I got there in 2005, we had 100 diocesan seminarians there. Now we have 50. And the seminary down in Houston, about the same, so you’re getting half the guys you used to and of that half most of them are not native-born Americans.

It’s a big crisis. Some places like Canada are trying to do it by amalgamating parishes. So bigger, bigger mega parishes, that is also a patch job, how big can it get? It’s a temporary patch. But we just must add more clergy, pure and simple.

**“For long range health and stuff, if you’re clergy, that’s not an answer”**

And not only that, but we are also killing the guys we have. I gave a priest retreat in Pittsburgh and at the end, the vicar came in and he says, ‘bad news for you guys, we’re just so short, there’s no more sabbaticals. You can do something short. Go



Fr Rolheiser pictured in Newman University Church.

**“If I take my day off am I being selfish, but the issue is you’re running a marathon. You got to do this for 40 or 50 years, you got to pace yourself. And yet, at the same time, you have to be careful not to be self-indulgent”**

for a week or whatever. But this idea of three months or a year, we just can’t do that right now. We just don’t have the people for it.”

For long range health and stuff, if you’re clergy, that’s not an answer.”

**What are the solutions?**

Married clergy would be a solution. And the Church has to decide if they want to go in that direction. For now, you’re right, women priests is off the table for now. Remotely, there could be a question of women deacons or whatever. Regarding the laity. I’ll give you an example. In the 90s, I was provincial in western Canada, there was a shortage of priests and what some bishops were doing, pretty creatively, was putting a lay person in charge of a parish, and they would have a priest come in every two or three weeks, say Mass, consecrate hosts, etc.

And sometimes this was a nun, sometimes a lay person highly trained and they would do a very good job. The people would like it, a lot of times they’d say, we don’t need a priest, we need someone to come in and consecrate some hosts, but that’s not the solution either.

**“Sometimes it’s going to be some creative resurrection somewhere”**

Again, those are creative patch jobs. It patches it for a while, but, really, I don’t know the answer. And then sometimes when you look at Church history, often-times you can’t pre-think an answer. Sometimes the answer comes along with

somebody coming with an absolutely new vision.

I’ll give you an example. The Church has been in this kind of situation before. And then Francis of Assisi comes along, takes off his clothes and walks naked and walks out of Assisi and we got 700 good years out of that. Sometimes it’s going to be some creative resurrection somewhere. With an answer. So see right now, as far as we can think, the only solution would be right now married clergy, because they’re not going to ordain women and vocations... And importing from Africa and Asia to a certain extent, that’s a good thing but it’s not the answer for our churches.”

**How do priests look after themselves under all this pressure?**

“Well, I think today when I speak to priests it’s to help them keep their morale going and to be happy crea-

tive priests you know, like, if I’m a priest and say every day I’m in a crisis, what’s going to happen? Working just out of crisis mode, you know we trust God. And you do what you can.

There’s a great scene. If you’ve ever seen the movie *Of Gods and Men*, of these Trappists who were martyred in Algeria, and when al-Qaida came the first time, it threatened them. And then they had like nine months till they came again. The Abbot said, ‘we went back to our life’.

**“That’s all you can do, go to bed and say it’s God’s Church”**

The bells, the garden to sit in, it’s what we have to do. It’s what they did. So be a happy priest. Do what you can. You don’t have to save the world. You just have to work in this parish. We can torture ourselves or on the other hand say, ‘What can I do healthily and what can’t I do’ and just accept those limits.

They tell the story about Pope John XXIII, which I think is true. They say some nights he went to bed and said ‘Goodnight, it’s your Church’. That’s all you can do, go to bed and say it’s God’s Church. There’s a danger of getting a saviour complex.”

**Aren’t priests expected to be at everything, to do everything, to be a Jack-of-all-trades person?**

“I try to talk with priests in spiritual direction or with seminarians, and that is in our lives, the tension between laying yourself out for the gospel and taking care of yourself long range.

Somewhere in-between self-care and self-sacrifice. I always tell priests ‘you can burn out, or you can rust



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

# we have’, Fr Rolheiser

**“Be a happy priest. Do what you can. You don’t have to save the world”**

out, so try to find the in-between’. See the danger in a priest’s life is there’s always something. It’s a funeral. It’s this or that, whatever, you want a day off but this woman is sick in the hospital, you go to see her.

**“The crisis is going to go on for the next 50 years”**

And then if I take my day off, am I being selfish? But the issue is you’re running a marathon. You got to do this for 40 or 50 years. So in 40 or 50 years, you got to pace yourself. And yet, at the same time, you must be careful not to be self-indulgent. And how do you not respond to need, like, saying ‘I’m going on vacation’, but

‘Mrs Murphy’s dying. Can’t you stay for that?’

There’s always a Mrs Murphy who’s dying. And so, it’s really a great tension in priests’ lives. How do you just respond? Jesus said, give yourself over. You die, you die, you know? And at the same time, you’re running a marathon for 50 or 60 years. How do you pace yourself? That’s the tension.

And probably priests could be helped by either a good spiritual director or even a good friend or mentor who will say you’re overdoing it or you’re under doing it. I know priests who are very much into self-care (laughs) more than into ministry. I know priests who are the opposite and are killing themselves.

That’s a great tension. And it’s something that I think priests need to talk about but also dioceses

need to talk about, or they will say, we can’t even do sabbaticals anymore. Well, what are they saying, no more rest because we were in crisis? But the crisis is going to go on for the next 50 years.”

**And it’s kind of management’s job to manage a crisis rather than piling it on the priests, right?**

“Yes, and we were just talking to a priest earlier on how do you take a day off when there’s something happening? How do you take a day off when Mrs Murphy’s dying in the hospital, he gets a call from the family, what does he say, ‘I can’t come. It’s my day off? I’m watching football on television.’

And the priest says to himself ‘I can’t do this’. And it’s just crises all the time. Somebody always dies. Somebody needs you. How do you not respond but if you respond you’ll die.”

**Fr Rolheiser was interviewed in University Church in Dublin, and many thanks to Fr Gary Chamberland for making it possible.**



Fr Gary Chamberland pictured with Fr Rolheiser

**“They tell the story about Pope John XXIII, which I think is true. They say some nights he went to bed and said ‘Goodnight, it’s your Church’”**



Fr Rolheiser in Newman University Church, during his recent visit to Ireland

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# Questions to consider before supporting DEI policies



David Quinn

**‘D**iversity, Equity and Inclusion’ (DEI) is one of the great catch-cries of our time, and President Donald Trump now has it firmly in his cross-hairs. DEI policies have become extremely widespread and are to be found in businesses, the public sector, universities, and even the military. To some extent, ‘DEI’ has a Christian impulse behind it, and this is probably why a lot of Christians sympathise with it, but DEI also has problematic aspects.

Let’s start though by explaining DEI the way its best proponents do, Harvard University, for example.

On the website of the Harvard Business School, DEI is defined as follows:

**Diversity:** The presence and participation of individuals with varying backgrounds and perspectives, including those who have been traditionally underrepresented.

**Equity:** Equal access to opportunities and fair, just, and impartial treatment.

**Inclusion:** A sense of belonging in an environment where all feel welcomed, accepted, and respected”.

## Context

In an American context, what might be a group that has been “traditionally underrepresented”, has not been fairly and justly treated, or made to feel “welcomed, accepted and respected”? The most obvious example is black people.

Brought to America as slaves (half a million of the 10 million Africans brought across the Atlantic during the years of the slave trade ended up in what is now the United States), they started at the very bottom of society and have not climbed as far up the social ladder as they ought to in the meantime. African-Americans are still disproportionately likely to suffer multiple social disadvantages, which is a product of racism, past and present, the fact that they started out as slaves, and now widespread family breakdown.

DEI is intended to ensure that groups like black people

are fairly treated in business and elsewhere.

This entirely syncs with Christian values. Christianity teaches that the “last shall be first, and the first shall be last”. DEI policies therefore have a Christian basis, even if this basis is rarely or never acknowledged.

What then, can the problem be? It very much depends on how DEI policies work out in practice and what kind of worldview is being promoted alongside them.

For example, at first glance, Marxism seems to have elements in common with Christianity. It promotes fairness and equality. It wants to lift up the downtrodden. We can see why many Christians, including priests and religious, have been attracted to one or another form of socialism down the years.

**“A great, authoritarian State was built in the name of establishing equality”**

The reason Marxism was not embraced by more Christians is that it was extremely anti-religion, regarding religion as a delusion, an ‘opium’, that stopped the downtrodden confronting their real circumstances.

Another reason is that it was purely materialistic in outlook and therefore rejected all possibility of the supernatural.

A third reason is that it turned out to be anti-freedom. A great, authoritarian State was built in the name of establishing equality.

A fourth reason is that it promoted a highly divisive view of the world that treated everyone either as an oppressor or oppressed. It saw the world through a ‘class warfare’ lens and promoted hatred of the ‘ruling class’ and anyone with substantial property.

DEI (also called ‘woke-

**“It can end up attacking fairness in the name of ‘fairness’, and it has a strong tendency to divide the world into either the ‘oppressed’ or the ‘oppressors’”**



ness’) is not anti-religion per se, nor does it see the world in purely materialistic terms. But it does share two problematic traits in common with socialism, namely it can end up attacking fairness in the name of ‘fairness’, and it has a strong tendency to divide the world into either the ‘oppressed’ or the ‘oppressors’.

## Unfair

How can it ever be unfair to promote ‘fairness’? Here is an example. In American universities, thanks to the very high marks they often achieve, Asian-Americans are overrepresented in comparison with their numbers in the population, and African-Americans are underrepresented. Therefore, a lot of American universities deliberately devised admission policies that artificially reduced the number of Asian-Americans gaining a university place, and artificially boosted the number of African-Americans gaining

one. This is sometimes called ‘affirmative action’.

Needless to say, Asian-Americans believed this policy was very unfair. Why should they be held back to address past wrongs? And anyway, haven’t they been victims of discrimination as well?

**“We can see now how DEI in practice can begin to go off the rails”**

In 2020, Californians voted by a wide margin to reject ‘affirmative action’ policies. This is despite California being a very liberal State. More recently, the US Supreme Court struck down these same race-based admissions policies in US colleges.

So, the question from a Christian point of view is whether it is fair to discriminate against one group (in this case the likes of Asian-Americans) in order to advance another group, in this case African-Americans?

Likewise, is it fair to discriminate against men in hiring and promotion practice in order to advance women?

We can see now how DEI in practice can begin to go off the rails and become very

**“The whole system must be pulled down and changed, at least according to the most hardline DEI proponents”**

controversial indeed.

A second aspect is even more controversial, and that is the tendency to divide the world into oppressor and oppressed groups. On the ‘oppressor’ side of the ledger are men and white people above all. White people, and white men in particular, have benefited historically by being ‘oppressors’ and therefore must be pulled down, says this theory.

Other groups – women, gay people, racial minorities – must take their place.

## Supremacy

We then begin to hear a lot about ‘white supremacy’ and ‘toxic masculinity’. Even if you are anti-racism and never discriminate against anyone based on colour, the mere fact of being white, puts you at an advantage, it makes you ‘privileged’, which means you benefit from ‘white supremacy’ even if you are not aware of this fact. This is why the whole system must be pulled down and changed, at least according to the most hardline DEI proponents.

But declaring whole

groups guilty like this is deeply unchristian. Christianity views us as individuals. We are guilty of our own sins, and we can repent and be forgiven for those, starting off again with a clean slate. Ideas of ‘group guilt’ are totally contrary to this. If you are white, you are an oppressor until such time as a totally equal world is created. But how much discrimination must be inflicted on those ‘guilty’ groups in order to get there? Would the attempt to cure injustice cause even more injustice?

These are the questions we must consider before uncritically embracing DEI policies. The general impulse behind them is good and Christian in many ways, but in practice, DEI policies can become both unfair and unchristian.

When socialism first arose, Pope Leo XIII came up with a Christian response, namely the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Perhaps we need to come up with a Christian version of DEI that promotes fairness, but not through unfair practices and a divisive worldview?



# Social media is 'biggest challenge' for youth, GAA star and teacher warns



**'My two priest uncles were a great example of the Faith and priesthood,' Gary Brennan tells Chai Brady**

**G**ary Brennan, Clare GAA stalwart and respected secondary school teacher, has warned that social media poses one of the greatest challenges to young people today. In a wide-ranging interview with *The Irish Catholic*, he shared how his faith, family, and involvement in sport shaped his life and instilled values of empathy and resilience.

Mr Brennan's reflections highlight not only the pressing issues young people face but also the enduring importance of faith and community in navigating life's challenges.

Growing up in Ballyea, a village about six miles from Ennis, he was surrounded by a strong sense of faith and community. His family, particularly his mother's two brothers who were priests, played a significant role in nurturing his spiritual life.

"Faith was a big thing, but felt a very natural thing as well," Brennan explained. "We had a very strong community spirit there. At home, faith was always very important to my parents. I have two uncles in the priesthood—two brothers of my mother—so that was obviously a great example for us and gave us an insight into the priesthood."

The presence of his uncles enriched family life, as did the community's connection to the parish. He said: "I just have great memories of them always being great fun with us and being very good, kind to us always."

"It was just a very normal and natural thing for us attending Mass and being a part of the



Footballer Gary Brennan.

community was very important to us."

Mr Brennan also recalled the close relationship between the local primary school and the parish. "There was a good connection between the primary school and the parish community as well. I was part of school choirs at different stages and served Mass. It was just always something that was part of life."

## GAA and Faith intertwined

Sport was another foundational element of Mr Brennan's life. He said: "I've been involved in the GAA as long as I can remember. My father coached and managed, so my earliest memories are being on the sideline and being in pictures with him and running around, getting in people's way—that's where I was at that age."

"GAA was always around me growing up. It was both something I took an interest in very quickly and something I wanted to get to the very highest level of if I could."

Mr Brennan remembered his early days in the sport, recalling the slower pace at which things were done in comparison to today. "Nowadays they start in the local club at five years of age or four years of age even, but I remember my mother ringing up the local trainer for the under-10s and they asked what age I was, and when she said six, nearly seven, he said, 'You can hang on to him for another two years so.'"

He credited his love for GAA to his family, especially his two younger brothers, with whom he spent countless hours practicing. "I was lucky, I suppose, that I had two younger brothers, and we were always play-

ing at home and practicing ourselves. I loved going out with the ball. Again, it was a very normal and natural part of my childhood and something that I really enjoyed doing and wanted to get as good as I possibly could doing."

When asked how faith and sport formed him, Mr Brennan said, "All of our experiences form us. I think my faith was very important in giving me a sense of empathy and being able to put myself in others' shoes, and considering what it's like for others."

He continued, "It helped give me a sense of perspective and a sense of empathy, and I'd like to think I care for others, and the way I like to try and carry myself and behave. My faith and sport were equally important in developing that."

**“I relied on my faith, but I always felt a great support, I think my faith helped in that”**

Challenges in sport taught Brennan resilience, and faith offered comfort in moments of difficulty. "There wasn't any major moment, I suppose, I felt I relied on my faith, but I always felt a great support, I think my faith helped in that. My grandparents on my father's side, for example, are deceased. My grandmother died before I was even born, and my grandfather died when I wasn't even three, but I often felt their presence, or felt their support."

He also reflected on the setbacks he faced as a young ath-

lete. "At 14, at 15, at 16, I wasn't good enough to make a county squad, and that could be very disheartening. But I suppose I was lucky that I had good people around me, with those good values, who encouraged me to keep going and to work hard and to try and improve on the things I needed to improve on, and that helped me eventually to get to a level where I was able to make an impact and be good enough for county."

## Social media: A major challenge

In his role as a teacher of Irish and PE at St Flannan's College, Mr Brennan witnesses the challenges facing young people today, particularly the impact of social media.

"It's a major, major challenge," he said. "I think it's putting an enormous amount of pressure on young people. The nature of people to compare themselves to one another is heightened enormously by social media, and the perception that everyone else is doing amazing things is heightened by it."

"It's difficult for young people to keep a sense of reality with the major influence of social media. I think it will be a long time before we really figure out how to manage social media use, and use it in a way that helps us rather than potentially hurts. There are people that do manage that, but in a broader societal sense, it's probably one of the biggest challenges we have because we don't even know the half of what they are accessing or seeing online."

## Promoting physical activity

Mr Brennan emphasised the importance of sports and physical activity in countering the negative effects of social media and screen time. "As a PE teacher, it's something I am working on constantly. We actually have a group in our school that are looking at raising activity levels—all the studies show that activity rates are declining. We're way off recommendations," he said.

He added, "Students who can keep an interest, keep a

passion for a pastime, you just see the confidence and the skills it gives them to help deal with school and deal with any challenges they come across. Sport does that in particular. I suppose I am very biased in that sense, but equally music, drama, or art—anything that allows young people to express themselves."

Mr Brennan is hopeful about the future, both for society and for his own family. "I hope we can try and have as healthy and as kind a society as we can have in a general sense," he said.

On a personal level, he prays for good health for his family and the ability to pass on the values that have guided him. "For ourselves, just please God keep our health and give the boys, our sons, every chance to enjoy the things that we enjoyed growing up and that we can help and encourage them in every way with that."

Mr Brennan offers a powerful reminder of the importance of faith, sport, and community in helping young people navigate an increasingly complex world.

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**“I think my faith was very important in giving me a sense of empathy and being able to put myself in others' shoes, and considering what it's like for others”**



# Out&About

## Derry's Catholic Schools Week



**DERRY:** The Choir of Scoil Íosagáin, St Mary's Road, Buncrana sang during Derry Diocese's Catholic Schools Week launch in St Eugene's Cathedral on January 16. The Mass was celebrated by Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown and Fr Francis Bradley. The school's choir sang led by Ms Andrea McDaid.



**DERRY:** Derry Diocese launched the Catholic Schools Week in St Eugene's Cathedral on January 16. The Choir of Scoil Íosagáin, St Mary's Road, Buncrana sang at the Mass. Pictured with some of the pupils are (L-R) Sinéad McLaughlin, Principal, Fr Francis Bradley, Chairperson of the Board of Management of the school, Andrea McDaid, teacher and School Choir teacher, Fiona Gubbins, teacher, Karen Callaghan, teacher, Shay Kinsella, Deputy Principal.



**CAVAN:** Holly Greene, a pupil of Carrickleck School, Kingscourt with her grandparents Sean and Geraldine Greene at the recent Grandparents Day in Kingscourt Parish, marking Catholic Schools Week.

### IN SHORT

#### Twenty schools in Down and Connor receive award

Twenty schools in the Diocese of Down and Connor were awarded the 'Spirit of catholic education Award' last week in a ceremony held in St Mary's University College, Belfast.

The event, which took place on January 22, marked the 2025 Catholic Schools Week in the diocese, and it was a way to recognise and pay tribute to all the work done within the schools. These awards are presented annually in conjunction with Catholic Schools Week to celebrate the schools' contribution to Catholic Education.

At the ceremony, the schools received a certificate recognising their work commitment

and response to the call of Christ "you are my witnesses" (Luke 24:48), as well as their ongoing role in upholding the distinctive gospel, inspired ethos and values of Catholic Education within their school communities.

"Catholic Schools Week provides a timely focus on the role and significance of Catholic Education and the contribution it makes to providing a holistic educational experience that enriches and ennobles the lives of all its children and young people so that they have the opportunities to reach and fulfil potential," the diocese said in a statement.

"Within this gospel-inspired educational environment, pupils are brought to understand and appreciate the importance of their sacredness as children of God, caring for others in need within their school, parish, com-

munity, and wider society, contributing to building peace and reconciliation and being ecologically aware.

"It also provides an opportunity to affirm and pay tribute to the ongoing work of the governors, school leaders, teaching and support staff as they seek to form young people in their spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social development."

#### Replicas of the Shroud of Turin unveiled in Dublin

Recently, the parish of St Kevin and St Kilian in Kilnamanagh-Castleview, Dublin unveiled replicas of the Shroud of Turin during Masses at St Kilian's Church, Kingswood and St Kevin's

Church, Kilnamanagh.

The replicas are now on permanent display to the public in both churches, offering sacred spaces for prayer and reflection. Visitors are welcomed during regular opening hours.

The age and origins of the Shroud of Turin are debated, but many believe it is the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. It bears the image of a crucified man and is a powerful symbol of Christ's sacrificial love.

Fr Frank Drescher PP said the Shroud is a reminder of Christ's love and hope of the Resurrection. "It's not just a story of pain and suffering, it's a story of deep, passionate love — love for each one of us," he said. "The Shroud is like a message left behind, telling us: 'I did this for you because I love you, and now I'm alive so that you can have life too.'"



Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**CARLOW:** Graiguecullen/Killeslin Parish received a number of pupils from the Catholic schools in the parish for Mass on Sunday, January 26 to mark the end of the Catholic Schools Week 2025. "Despite the awful weather, they still came to celebrate their faith and represent their school and our parish", the Parish said.



**CAVAN:** Pictured following the recent annual Ecumenical service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at Saint Ernan's Church of Ireland, Kingscourt are Rev. Martin O'Kelly, Rector of Kingscourt Union, Rev. Alan Melbourne, Edenderry and guest preacher at the service and Ann Burns of Kingscourt Parish Assembly.



**ANTRIM:** Pictured at the 'Spirit of Catholic Education Award Ceremony' in St Mary's University College, Belfast on January 22 are Fiona McConway, Principal – Moneynick PS, with students from Moneynick Primary School, Randalstown, Mrs Veronica Craig, staff – Moneynick PS along with Mrs Michele Deery, Catholic School Support Service.



**ANTRIM:** Mr Maurice O'Neill, Principal – St Malachy's PS, Roisin Garland, RE Co-ordinator – St Malachy's PS and two students from St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellsan, pictured at the 'Spirit of Catholic Education Award Ceremony' in St Mary's University College, Belfast on January 22.



**ANTRIM:** (L-R) Mr Josh Hall, teacher – Aquinas Grammar School, Belfast, two students from Aquinas Grammar School, Mrs Naoishe Hampsey, RE Head Teacher – Aquinas Grammar School and Mrs Michele Deery, Catholic School Support Service pictured at the 'Spirit of Catholic Education Award Ceremony' in St Mary's University College, Belfast on January 22.

## ANTRIM

Rosary at the Lourdes Grotto in the New Lodge every Monday at 7pm and Thursdays at 7.30pm. All welcome.

Belfast regional launch of the book *The Rock From Which You Were Hewn* takes place on February 16 at 12.30pm following 11am Mass. Dom Basil Mary MacCabe OSB will launch it at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Antrim Road. Refreshments provided.

## CLARE

Boher National School Parents Association is organising a 'family fun bingo night' (suitable for all the family) on February 7 at 7pm in the Lakeside Hotel and Leisure Centre. Tickets are €10.

## CORK

Killeagh/Inch Monday Club invites you for a stroll and a chat with the walking group on Monday mornings at 10.30am at the playground carpark in Killeagh Woods. All levels of walkers are welcome.

## 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.

## FERMANAGH

St Michael's Parish Young at Heart (YAH) Golden Age Club next meeting is on Sunday February 2 in St Michael's Community Centre, Belmore Street at 3pm. All those living in the Parish over 50 are welcome.

## GALWAY

Day conference 'The Kingship of the Christ and Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – 100 years of Quas Primas' takes place in Galmont Hotel on February 8 at 9am. The event is free, but places are limited. To register email info@roundtower.org. Band and dance in the evening.

## MAYO

Join the Marian Franciscans in Knock for a Traditional

Latin Mass on February 7 at 4pm in the Adoration Chapel. Meet-and-greet afterwards.

## MONAGHAN

Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Monaghan Charismatic Prayer Group take place from February 7 at 6.30pm to February 9 in the 4 Seasons Hotel. Opening Mass will be celebrated by Bishop of Clogher Laurence Duffy. Talks will be given by many guest speakers. Admission is free but donations accepted. More information on 087 9717447.

## SLIGO

Half a day retreat for women using dance and movement, self-nurturing practices, meditation and more takes place in Tubbercurry FRC on February 6 from 10am to 1.30pm. Cost is €10 and book is essential on 071 9186926. Lunch provided.

## TIPPERARY

A retreat for young adults (18-40yrs) takes place from February 14 to 16 in Mt St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea. Step aside from the busy world to focus on the love of Jesus. Full meals and a single room are offered. Admission is a donation. More information with Michael on 086 2453123 or Sr Una 090 6481666.

## WATERFORD

An afternoon of Prayer takes place on February 16, from 2pm to 5.30pm in the Edmund Rice Chapel, celebrating Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church. All welcome! More information with Sile on 086 8590394.

## WEXFORD

Human Life International is organising a conference on February 1 from 1.30pm to 6.30pm in Seaford Hotel, Gorey. Guest speakers are John Pridmore, former London gangster, Patrick McCrystal, Human Life International, Sr Mary Magdalene OP Dominican Sisters in Ireland, and Mickey Harte, GAA manager joining via Zoom. Entry and food are €10 each. Purchase your ticket on 094 9375993.



# Thank you Sisters!



Denigrating the contribution of religious congregations is fashionable nowadays, but a nun's wise intervention helped me secure a scholarship, writes **Liam Lally**

**M**y first contact with 'the nuns' occurred on a Saturday in June 1964 when, along with a crowd of 6th class boys and girls, I sat an entrance exam to gain a place in the Sisters of Mercy Secondary School, Belmullet, Co. Mayo. With a quarter of an hour still to go I was sitting back, feeling quite pleased with myself, when a nun who had been patrolling up and down the exam hall announced in a clear, not-to-be-disobeyed voice: "If you are finished, don't just sit there looking around you, check over your work." On checking over my work I found that I had one sum totally wrong. That nun's wise intervention helped me secure a scholarship, thus opening for me the door to post primary and third level education. The staff of that school – nuns, priest-chaplain and lay teachers – prompted, coaxed, cajoled (and sometimes threatened!) us to work hard so that we might become the best that we could be.

## Fashionable

It is fashionable nowadays to denigrate the contribution that religious congregations have made to the development of this country. The criminal sexual abuse of children by some members of religious communities is a shameful chapter in their history. The sexual abuse of a child by a member of a religious order deserves to be highlighted, condemned and punished but in doing so we must not fail to acknowledge the enormous good that most members of those religious communities have done during their lives.

The contribution made by the religious orders/congregations to education in general in Ireland, and the involvement of the Sisters of Mercy in the poorer areas of our country in particular, ought to be acknowledged publicly and proudly.



In 1894 three sisters arrived in Belmullet in North Mayo; one became matron in charge of the workhouse, another a teacher in the workhouse school and the third acted as housekeeper. The occupants of the workhouse were the poorest of the poor. With the closure of the workhouse and the outbreak of the civil war, the sisters withdrew to Ballina but such was their concern for the impoverished people left behind, that they returned later to open a Commercial School for girls, followed in 1943 by a secondary school.

**“Let us never forget that the Sisters of Mercy and other religious congregations were offering second level education for ridiculously low fees for many years prior to the O'Malley initiative”**

Up to that point there was no opportunity for the children of Erris in northwest Mayo, an area the size of Co. Louth, to receive post primary education to Leaving Certificate level in their own neighbourhood. Only the children of parents who could afford to send their sons/daughters to boarding school in Ballina, Tuam and elsewhere, and appreciated the value of education, had that privilege; few were in a position to do so.

Initially Our Lady's Secondary, Belmullet, was for girls only at first, but in 1959 boys were enrolled and for the first time thus opening the door to the treasure of full post primary education for all the children of Erris. In recent times, various politicians have promoted co-education – the Sisters of Mercy were well ahead of them.

## Brave

Donagh O'Malley as Minister for Education announced the introduction of free post primary education in the mid-1960s and is rightly lauded for that brave decision. But let us never forget that the Sisters of Mercy and other religious congregations were offering second level education for ridiculously low fees for many years prior to the O'Malley initiative. The sisters also offered scholarships – many of which were gained by children whose parents could not afford even the small fee charged at the time. The Sisters were able to keep fees low because their salaries as teachers were ploughed back into the school's funds. A nun teaching all her life, for example, would have contributed to the school's funds well in excess of one million euro on present day valuations. Those of us who benefitted directly from such generosity, and society in general, ought to acknowledge our indebtedness to the religious orders.

As well as helping to keep school fees at an exceptionally low level, the salaries of the sis-

**“The nuns possessed that unique and precious gift – the ability to see the well concealed beauty and potential in often taciturn, recalcitrant teenagers, nourishing and challenging them to bring that hidden talent to fruition**

ters were also used to acquire/erect the school buildings. Voluntary secondary schools were not in receipt of building-grants from the Department of Education until the mid-60s. Those sturdy buildings that one sees at the heart of many secondary schools were paid for out the congregations own funds, augmented sometimes with parents' contributions.

**“I hope they can smile as they recall the youngsters that passed through their hands; the rascality they witnessed and often ignored”**

In many instances those buildings were later surrounded by a rash of prefabs and featureless extensions provided by the Department of Education. In fairness to the department many of their recent school buildings are of exceptionally high quality both functionally and aesthetically, the recent extension to the convent school in Belmullet being a good example.

As the Mercy Sisters reflect on their contribution to society and to education in particular, I hope they can smile as they recall the youngsters that passed through their hands; the rascality they witnessed and often ignored; the high achievers as well as the success of those who struggled academically; the fulfilled lives lived in different circumstances around the world; the annual drama productions; the successful sports events and many more.

The nuns possessed that unique and precious gift – the ability to see the well concealed beauty and potential in often taciturn, recalcitrant teenagers, nourishing and challenging them to bring that hidden talent to fruition. For that, and much, much more, I say: "Thank you sisters!"

**i** Liam Lally is the former Safeguarding Officer for the Spiritan Congregation in Ireland. Liam also worked as a teacher and principal, and a counsellor and supervisor, for more than 30 years and has been involved in many voluntary organisations.



# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## Signs of great hope in Syria



Fr Jacques Mourad spoke to **Luca Attanasio** of *The Synodal Times*

**T**here is still much uncertainty in Syria. A month and a half after the ousting of Bashar al Assad and the seizure of power by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani and his Islamist rebel group Haiaat Tahrir al-Sham (Hts), on the one hand scepticism seems to prevail, the fear of a leap backwards towards an imposition of libercidal lifestyles and laws or measures disrespectful of minorities such as the proposal of some circles close to the government (partly denied) according to which school books should have a much more Islamic matrix. On the other, there is an air of novelty, of rebirth after more than fifty years of dynastic rule and 13 years of bitter war, of a desire to return to the mosaic of cultures, faiths, ethnic groups that Syria has represented for centuries. The churches are living this moment with trepidation. But if at first it was disquiet that prevailed, as time passes, a sense of greater hope begins to peep out.

*The Synodal Times*, in order to delve deeper into how the Christian community is living this phase and to have an authoritative opinion on the current evolving political moment, turned to Jacques Mourad,

**“We cannot pretend that all of a sudden religious fanaticism has disappeared, but at least we do not have the same fear that we have experienced so many times before”**

Syriac Catholic Archbishop of Homs since March 2023. A monk of the community of Deir Mar Musa, founded by the Jesuit Paolo Dall'Oglio (who disappeared on July 29, 2013 while in Raqqa, at that time the Syrian capital of the so-called Islamic State, and has never been found), Fr Jacques had been kidnapped by a commando of jihadists in May 2015 and had endured long months of captivity, first in isolation and then together with more than 150 Christians from Quaryatayn.

**“Certainly today the situation for us presents elements of concern”**

**Your Excellency, what is the situation in Syria?**

“Concretely, it is not easy to identify the situation in Syria now. It's been a little over a month, it's really still early. It's true, there is real fear, we don't know if we are moving towards the best or if we are going backwards, but at the same time I can tell you for sure that there are signs of hope. For me personally everything is happening it is a general improvement compared to the previous regime, there is no comparison to the condition we Syrians experienced under the Assad regime.

Yes, it is true, compared to other population groups, we Christians could not complain so much, but let us not forget that so many Christians have also disappeared, ended up in prisons, have been tortured, so many have been affected by the war and have been victims. We are an integral part of this people who have suffered all these years. Certainly today the situation for us presents elements of concern: we cannot pretend that all of a sudden religious fanaticism has disappeared, but at least we do not have the same fear that we have experienced so



Fr Jacques Mourad

many times before”.

**In the days immediately following the Hts' seizure of power you expressed a feeling of serious concern about what was happening and fears for the future, what made you at least partially change your mind?**

“When they took Aleppo I imagined a different scenario because for days there was heavy bombing, I feared more action by the Russians and I imagined the beginning of a new war, Aleppo had been already destroyed, there had been many deaths and I feared a similar situation. Believe me, in those days the fear of a return to war was palpable, among all the citizens of Syria, not just the Christians. I also imagined a further flight of Christians from Aleppo and thus the definitive disappearance of our millennial presence, the end of our history. But when the whole country was liberated and the fighting ended, we entered a new phase we could observe a real liberation of the country. Everything has changed. Today, there are still many acts of violence and revenge, humiliation, especially against the Alawites (the Shiite minority group that the Assad family belongs to, loyal to the former regime ed.) which is unacceptable to me as a man and as a Christian. But what Jolani said: “The revolution is over, and we have to build a country and a government” suggests that we want to do this together and move away from the level of mere revenge. As I said ear-

lier, acts of vengeance persist on the ground and I believe it is urgent to do something about it. As a Church, the real problem is that we would like to do something, but the work of reconciliation is not at all easy because there are still so many armed groups around, and they have different aims and interests.”

**“We can count on many people among our faithful who are well educated and can help in the management of power in the future”**

**Mohammed al-Jolani recently wanted to meet representatives of the Christian churches, how did it go?**

“All the bishops of Syria met with Jolani and it was a very positive meeting. I was not able to be there but many bishops were there and all the participants came back with a positive impression. They talked about everything, even acts of violence, and it was a sincere dialogue. As Christians we try to do something together, to make a contribution of our own and we hope to reach agreements, even among us Christians who are sometimes divided. It is clear that there is total agreement on one point, and that is that we are all opposed to the birth of an Islamic state.

At the same time, we can count on many people among our faithful who are well edu-



Fr Jacques Mourad

**“We are the ones who must get busy and choose our role in the Syrian government of the future, we must not wait for them to choose for us, we must try to work for it”**

cated and can help in the management of power in the future. But I would like to emphasise one thing: we are the ones who must get busy and choose our role in the Syrian government of the future, we must not wait for them to choose for us, we must try to work for it. There are only a few of us left (about 300,000, mostly Greek Orthodox, ed), but we can play a fundamental role.”

**You, are a deep connoisseur of the context of Islamic extremism also because of a painful event that involved you in May 2015 when you were kidnapped along with other Christians by Daesh. Are those who have taken power in Syria today a continuation of that political Islam or are they different?**

“They are not ISIS. At the same time, I do not believe they can bring Syria to a fully democratic level as the people want and deserve. But they have done a great job to liberate the country after some 14 years of bloody war, there is a value in these young Syrian soldiers who have put their lives on the line, who have lived a long time in exile and care about their homeland. Hopefully they will fully understand that their role has been of great value but that they are not the ones who can form the government of Syria's new phase alone. I cannot imagine Jolani as the president of the country because it would be wrong to have him governed by a military leader. He can play an important role of course in the future government but not be the president.”



# Catholics and Orthodox hope to celebrate Easter 2025 together



AC Wimmer

**P**ope Francis posed Jesus' profound question "Do you believe this?" to Christians worldwide during an ecumenical vespers service Saturday evening as momentum builds for Catholics and Orthodox to consider celebrating Easter on the same date in this historic anniversary year.

Speaking at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls at the conclusion of the 58th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Pontiff reflected on Christ's encounter with Martha following the death of Lazarus, emphasising that hope "rises from the ashes of death".

"This tender encounter between Jesus and Martha teaches us that even in times of deep desolation, we are not alone and we can continue to hope," the Pope said during his homily, which centred on the week's theme "Do You Believe This?" from John 11:26.

## Jubilee

The celebration on January 25 marked the solemn conclusion of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which the Pope linked to the ongoing jubilee year.

"This message of hope is

at the heart of the jubilee we have begun," the Pope said, citing the Apostle Paul's words to the Romans that "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5).

Earlier last Saturday, the Pope urged journalists at the Jubilee of the World of Communications to tell "stories of hope", echoing the strong appeal to hope in the papal message for the 59th World Day of Social Communications.

**"The council's profession of faith 'transcends all the divisions that have riven the body of Christ over the centuries'"**

At the vespers service, the Pope noted that this whole jubilee year's focus is on hope and "providentially" coincides with the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

He emphasised that the council's profession of faith "transcends all the divisions that have riven the body of Christ over the centuries."

Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, addressed the Holy Father before the apostolic blessing. He recalled the Pope's historic 2014 visit to Ecumenical

Patriarch Bartholomew I in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), where Francis had affirmed that "the Catholic Church does not intend to impose any requirements except the profession of common faith" for achieving full unity.

## Unity

This hope for unity has gained momentum in recent months. Last November, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople confirmed ongoing conversations between Church representatives about establishing a common Easter date, potentially beginning in 2025.

"In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we can live the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea as a call to persevere on the path toward unity," the Pope said last Saturday, renewing his appeal that Christians might take "a decisive step forward toward unity around a common date for Easter."

Highlighting the "providential" timing, the Pope noted that Easter will fall on the same date in both the Gregorian and Julian calendars this year. "Let us rediscover the common roots of the faith," the Pontiff urged. "Let us preserve unity!"

Representatives from various Christian churches and ecclesial communities present in Rome participated in the evening celebration, including Metropolitan Polycarp representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Archbishop Ian Ernest of the Anglican Communion, who is concluding his service.



Pope Francis, Orthodox Metropolitan Polykarpos of Italy and Malta, left, and Anglican Archbishop Ian Ernest, director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, right, give their blessing at the end of an ecumenical prayer service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity January 25, 2025. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

## Pope is Italy's most trusted public figure

### Almudena Martínez-Bordiú

Pope Francis has established himself as the most trusted public figure in Italy, according to a recent survey conducted by the Demopolis National Research Institute that analyses trends in Italian society.

More than 3,000 Italians participated in the survey carried out in January, expressing their opinion on the challenges facing the Catholic Church in the country, their perception of the Jubilee of Hope, and their assessment of the pope.

The results of the study were presented to the Holy Father during an audience at the Vatican Apostolic Palace by the director of the institute, Pietro Vento, together with researchers Giusy Montalbano and Maria Sabrina Titone.

According to Vento, the pontiff "is today a trusted figure" for citizens, since the survey shows that 76% trust his leadership.

"Since the first year of his pontificate, he is the public figure that Italians trust the most: far beyond faith or religious practice. They like that he's attuned to the real needs of families, the clarity and spontaneity of his words," the director of Demopolis explained.

Also, two-thirds of Italians said the magisterium of Pope Francis is characterised by the incessant call for peace, fraternity, and his firm opposition to war. Of those surveyed, 60% of Italians highlighted the Holy Father's attention to the weakest members of society and his continuous invitation to return to the Gospel.

The survey results also show that 4 out of 10 Italians are particularly struck by the importance the Pope gives to young people and also pointed out his commitment to a welcoming Catholic Church as well as its ability to renew itself by listening to the signs of the times. In addition, 40% highlight his concern for the climate crisis.

Regarding the Catholic Church, 45% of Italians expressed their confidence in the institution. Although 72% identify as Catholic, just over 1 Italian in 6 (17%) is a practicing Catholic and attends Mass regularly, according to the study.

On one hand, less than a quarter made reference to the sexual abuse scandal. On the other hand, they showed interest in the crisis of vocations to religious life.

Global conflicts are also a cause for concern in Italy, where 70% expected that by 2025 the commitment to peace will grow and the fight against hunger and inequality will be strengthened.

In the context of the Ordinary Jubilee of Hope, 75% of Italians said there is a crisis of hope and hope that the holy year will give priority to social needs beyond its spiritual dimension.

The survey involved the participation of 3,008 Italians over 18 years of age, selected according to sex, age, and the area where they reside.

**i** This story was first published by ACI Prensa, CNA's Spanish-language news partner. It has been translated and adapted by CNA.

## Never forget Auschwitz horrors, Pope says ahead of 80th anniversary

Ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Pope Francis emphasised that the horrors of Auschwitz "must never be forgotten or denied" while also making passionate pleas for peace in current global conflicts.

Speaking after the Angelus prayer on Sunday, the Pontiff noted that this year marks 80 years since the liberation of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp.

"The horror of the extermination of millions of Jewish people and others of different faiths during those years must never be forgotten or denied," he said on January 26.

The Pope noted that many Christians were also killed in Nazi death camps, "among whom there were numerous martyrs". He renewed his "appeal for everyone to work together to eradicate the scourge of antisemitism, along with every form of

discrimination and religious persecution".

"Together, let us build a more fraternal, just world, educating young people to have hearts open to all, in the spirit of fraternity, forgiveness, and peace," the Pontiff urged.

Addressing ongoing conflicts, the Pope spoke at length about the crisis in Sudan, which began in April 2023, describing it as "the most severe humanitarian crisis in the world" with "dramatic consequences even in South Sudan".

"I stand close to the people of both countries and invite them to fraternity, solidarity, to avoid all forms of violence, and not to allow themselves to be manipulated," the Pope declared. He called on warring parties to "stop hostilities and accept to sit at the negotiating table", urging the international community to support peace talks and facilitate humanitarian aid.





## World Report



Edited by Brandon Scott  
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

### A lust for life



Archbishop Joseph F Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, celebrated the National Prayer of Life at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington on January 23, 2025. Photo: OSV/Mihoko Owada.

## Thousands fill National Shrine for 2025 March for Life vigil:

More than 5,000 students, families, and other pro-life Catholics packed into the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, for a vigil service last Thursday on the evening before the national March for Life.

Attendees filled the pews in the upper church, which is designed to hold about 3,500 people. They crammed into the various Marian shrines along both sides of the basilica to worship at the vigil Mass during the National Prayer Vigil for Life. Hundreds more flowed into the basilica's crypt, which is similarly adorned with shrines to the Blessed Mother.

Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, was the primary celebrant and homilist for the Mass. Four cardinals and 21 bish-

ops concelebrated the Mass with Archbishop Naumann, and 50 deacons and 300 seminarians were also in attendance.

"When we march tomorrow, we march as pilgrims of hope," Archbishop Naumann said during the homily after the Gospel reading, which was part of the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

"With the love of God revealed and the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ, how can we not have hope?" Archbishop Naumann said.

The Gospel reading teaches us that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," which the archbishop related to the importance of defending the sanctity of unborn life, saying during his homily that Christ "humbled himself to be an embryo in Mary."

Archbishop Naumann

said during the homily that "culture is more significant than politics" and urged people to be "witnesses to your peers" to help transform people's hearts.

"To transform our culture, we must touch the hearts [with] efforts like Walking with Moms in Need, where we try to surround women in difficult pregnancies with a community of love and support," the archbishop said.

Archbishop Naumann added that Christ told his disciples that "if we're going to follow him, we have to follow him all of the way to Calvary — that we have to be prepared to take up the cross."

Speaking directly to the young people in attendance, the archbishop told them they have "a unique power to be that light" for others,

telling them to "be as only young people can be like" and cited Blessed Carlo Acutis, who died at age 15 and will be canonised as the first millennial saint in April.

"My good young people here, you're called to be witnesses to your peers, you're called to help them to come to know what brought you here tonight," Archbishop Naumann said.

Archbishop Naumann celebrated the Mass in place of Bishop Daniel Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, who could not attend because of a death in his family. Bishop Thomas is the chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities. Archbishop Naumann serves on the committee and is a former chairman.

## US bishops say refugee program is 'work of mercy' after criticism

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) last Sunday argued that its long-standing refugee program is a "work of mercy" after Vice President JD Vance criticised the bishops' positions on immigration issues.

Vance had made the remarks during an interview on Sunday with Margaret Brennan on CBS News' "Face the Nation".

Brennan had asked Vance, who is Catholic, about the USCCB's criticism last week of the Trump administra-

tion's various directives on immigration, specifically the government's rescinding of the policy that restricted immigration arrests at "sensitive locations" such as churches.

Vance responded that "as a practicing Catholic" he was "heartbroken" by the bishops' criticisms.

The USCCB argued that its own work with refugees is part of a "long history" of Catholic advocacy for vulnerable migrants.

"Every person resettled through

USRAP is vetted and approved for the program by the federal government while outside of the United States," they said.

"In our agreements with the government, the USCCB receives funds to do this work; however, these funds are not sufficient to cover the entire cost of these programs."

"Nonetheless, this remains a work of mercy and ministry of the Church," the bishops said.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope accepts resignation of Cardinal Gracias (80)

● India's most prominent cardinal is standing down as Archbishop of Bombay, having reached the age of 80 last December.

Cardinal Oswald Gracias has been one of Pope Francis's closest advisors, having been a member of the Council of Cardinals since it began in 2013.

Cardinal Oswald has been succeeded by Archbishop John Rodrigues, until now coadjutor archbishop of Bombay.

"Cardinal Oswald Gracias was a giant of a man, and now as his successor I have mighty big shoes to fill," Archbishop Rodrigues said.

In a video message, Cardinal Gracias expressed heartfelt gratitude to all his collaborators in the archdiocese, including bishops, priests, religious, the laity, and the citizens of Mumbai.

### Syro-Malabar cardinal to head Interreligious Dialogue dicastery

● One of the youngest cardinals was appointed by Pope Francis to head the Vatican's Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad, 51, who has been the coordinator for papal travels since 2021 and was made a cardinal in December. He fills the position after the death last year of Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot.

Cardinal Koovakad is from India, and a member of the Eastern Catholic Syro-Malabar Church.

### New Chinese bishop ordained under Vatican-China agreement

● The Vatican announced last week that Pope Francis has erected a new diocese in China and appointed Fr Anthony Ji Weizhong as its first bishop.

The Pope decided last October to suppress the Diocese of Fenyang in mainland China, which was originally erected in 1946 by Pope Pius XII, and at the same time erect the new Diocese of Lüliang.

Diocesan borders have been an area of dispute between the Vatican and China in the decades since

the Chinese Communist Party came to power and started to redraw diocesan lines, seeking to bring them more in line with Chinese administrative boundaries.

Pope Francis appointed Fr Weizhong as bishop of Lüliang on October 28, 2024, having approved Fr Weizhong in the context of the "Provisional Agreement," better known as the Vatican-China deal, which appears to give the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) some ability to choose episcopal candidates.

### Cardinal Schönborn retires as Vienna archbishop

● Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, OP, concluded his term as archbishop of Vienna, Austria, last Wednesday, his 80th birthday, when Pope Francis accepted his resignation.

Cardinal Schönborn, a theologian who led Austria's most populous archdiocese for three decades, helped write the Catechism of the Catholic Church and chaired the Austrian bishops' conference for 22 years. He is currently chairman of Pope Francis' Council of Cardinals.

The Vatican announced January 22 that Pope Francis had accepted Cardinal Schönborn's resignation and appointed an apostolic administrator, Fr Josef Grünwirdl, to oversee the Vienna Archdiocese until the appointment of Schönborn's successor.

### Pope: AI poses 'unique set of challenges' for humanity

● Pope Francis says AI — artificial intelligence — poses "a unique set of questions and challenges" for humanity.

In a message sent to the 2025 World Economic Forum (WEF) taking place in Davos, Switzerland, the Pontiff said AI is intended to imitate the human intelligence that designed it.

"Unlike many other human inventions, AI is trained on the results of human creativity, which enables it to generate new artefacts with a skill level and speed that often rival or surpasses human capabilities, raising critical concerns about its impact on humanity's role in the world," Pope Francis writes.

"Furthermore, the results that AI can produce are almost indistinguishable from those of human beings, raising questions about its effect on the growing crisis of truth in the public forum," he says.



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Parents as economic units of production

**Dear Editor,** The lack of support for parents who wish to stay at home with their children has, and continues to be, something the Irish Government chooses to ignore. The omission of such supports in the Government's programme is a glaring oversight and reflects a troubling "ideological blind spot" that fails to recognise the vital role these parents play in the fabric of our society.

Independent TD Carol Nolan rightly emphasises

that parents must not be "reduced to economic units of production". The choice to care for one's children in the home should not be a privilege afforded only to the wealthy, but a viable option supported by public policy. It is disheartening that the Government continues to prioritise institutional childcare to the exclusion of parents who choose to raise their children at home – a choice supported by the majority of families, as evi-

denced by the 2022 census, which found that 78% of children are cared for by parents or family members.

As columnist Maria Steen has pointed out, voters recently affirmed the constitutional recognition of the State's debt to women for the work they do in the home. To ignore this democratic mandate is to ignore the will of the people. The Government's approach appears increasingly out of touch with the realities and

preferences of Irish families.

Supporting stay-at-home parents is not about undermining working parents or childcare providers. It is about fairness, balance, and recognising the diverse ways families contribute to the common good. These parents are building the foundation of society, and they deserve to feel valued and supported.

*Yours etc.,  
Clara O'Connell  
Dublin 3*

## Commit to a State commemoration of Catholic emancipation

**Dear Editor,** It is astonishing that the Government's programme for commemoration neglects to mention the bicentenary of Catholic emancipation in 2029 [*The Irish Catholic* – January 23, 2025]. This landmark civil rights achievement, which ended centuries of religious discrimination and allowed Catholics to fully participate in public life, deserves explicit recognition. While Daniel O'Connell's 250th anniversary is rightly celebrated, Catholic emancipation is a pivotal event in its own right—impacting not only Irish Catholics but the broader history of civil rights.

Failing to acknowledge this milestone risks diminishing its significance. I urge the Government to commit to a State commemoration that educates and unites us around this transformative chapter in Irish history.

*Yours etc.,  
John Delaney  
Cork City*



## An urgent issue for priests

**Dear Editor,** I'm sure that I am among thousands who agree with Garry O'Sullivan's 'Urgent Priest Issues' [*The Irish Catholic* – January 23, 2025].

Their situations remind me of frontline war participants who endure horribly while their military and political bosses dictate in comfortable rooms, athletes who self-punish during the best weeks of their young lives while promoters, spectators, audiences, commentators and investors look on in comfort, and STEM teachers and students who don't also keep

the 'big picture' in mind.

Regardless of age, location, and weather, everyone may now attend Mass in comfort in virtually all Irish parishes. Without travelling, celebrants could present daily via online Masses, and parishioners could attend via computers in homes, churches, schools and universities, pastoral/social centres, and workplaces.

Like-minded local people could assemble on Sundays in churches with large screens near Tabernacles. Senior celebrants could transmit Masses

for all parishioners in their dioceses. Their homilies could, in addition, helpfully refer to particular beliefs and current issues.

The inexpensive American Magnificat daily Mass missal, distributed by *The Irish Catholic*, is now a superb Mass aid for Mass attenders, especially for online ones. Perusal of it the evening before sets attenders up to profit immensely. The apposite rephrasing of Scripture readings makes their sense clear for lay people. The Missal also has

most informative short homilies and reflections composed during the past 2,000 years. Its short biographical accounts are most enlightening and motivating.

In short, it was never easier to attend Mass and revive Mass attending everywhere, despite the decline in Celebrant numbers. That decline is, I think, a blessing in disguise. It evokes helpful 'outside the box' thinking.

*Yours etc.,  
Joe F. Foyle  
Ranelagh, Dublin*

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.

## Tensions in faith and science

**Dear Editor,** After reading the articles by Bishop Doran and Fr Swan on the tensions between science and faith, I decided to send you some of my ideas as a fervent Catholic and as a scientist, now almost 89 years of age, who taught and did research in chemistry at QUB.

After reading Teilhard de Chardin's publications on evolution in the early 1960s, I thought quite a lot about Original Sin. It suddenly dawned on me one morning in 1960, that his difficulties would disappear if 'Original Sin' had not happened in finite space-time on Earth as Genesis states, but in the transcendental and infinite realm of God.

When tempted by Satan, who is also transcendental (Genesis), Creation rebelled against God, and brought evil natural first and then moral, when rational humanity emerged via evolution. The whole of creation, except the idea of Jesus, the Alpha Christ, and the idea of his mother Mary, committed Original Sin and was actualised in space-time, our finite world.

The whole idea was generated in the Alpha Christ. However, the Alpha Christ freely accepted to be actualised with us. Mary, also as the Immaculate Concept,

actualised as the Immaculate Conception, freely accepted God's will, so one can understand why she is named as Co-Redemptorist.

In very recent years, on the basis of mathematical equations called 'The Bell Inequalities', developed by J.S. Bell, experiments have been developed to test the possibility of molecular instantaneous interactions of tiny particles.

Einstein liked Bell's mathematics, but not the molecular interactions, which he called "spooky action at a distance." This is the first scientific evidence that matter-energy ( $E=mc^2$ ) is indeed a spiritual substance (e.g. 'Spook').

Karl Rahner SJ named matter as 'frozen spirits'. In transubstantiation, a profound change, invisible to scientific tests occurs, from blemished by Original Sin to immaculate. So, the consecrated bread and wine are immediately the body and blood of Christ.

The idea of Mary also refused Satan's temptations (Eden), so she also is always totally immaculate from Alpha to Omega. This is not emphasised in the teaching of the Church.

*Yours etc.,  
Prof. John Rooney  
Belfast, Co. Antrim*

## Satan is the prince of lies

**Dear Editor,** Fr Rolheiser's article 'Lies and the sin against the Spirit' [*The Irish Catholic* – January 16, 2025] was a powerful encouragement to truthfulness, sincerity, personal integrity and facing challenging realities: "Satan is the prince of lies. That's why the biggest danger in our world is the amount of lies, disinformation, misinformation and flat-out denial of reality that's present almost most everywhere today – wherever, it seems, we don't find the truth to our liking."

He gives some examples of this denial of reality: the Holocaust, history of slavery and the Sandy Hook school shootings.

Disappointingly the article never mentioned the greatest disaster-denial in history: abortion, our silent holocaust. One estimate of the total death toll since the 1960s is 1.5 billion, equivalent to wiping out the entire US population 4.3 times over or all Catholics worldwide.

St Mother Teresa saw the full reality of abortion. She said: "The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is war against the child." This recognises the secondary victims of abortion – the parents, often wounded by a tragically misguided and irreversible decision that is completely opposed to their nature and calling.

*Yours etc.,  
Fr Morty O'Shea, SOLT  
Queens, New York*

## 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



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, January 30, 2025

We are  
people of  
light

Deacon Greg  
Kandra  
Page 33



Evan Cawley during the March 2024 Evangelium Conference.

## I once was lost, but now I am found

I grew up in a Catholic family in Sligo, but it wasn't a faith-filled environment. We went to Mass only for special occasions like funerals, baptisms, and confirmations. I received my sacraments, but they didn't feel connected to God. It was more like a formality, and the deeper aspects of the faith - who God is, who Jesus is - were never discussed. I went to a multid denominational primary school, so I had exposure to different religious beliefs and practices, but nothing really clicked for me at that time. My first real encounter with faith came when I was around 13. I found only the story of a pope who had a vision of someone still burning in Hell, even after a thousand years. It terrified me, so I thought I should pray, but I didn't know much else. The only prayer I knew was the Hail Mary, so I would pray that every night before bed - though, even then, I felt no real connection to God.

By the time I was 15 or 16, I was in trouble with the law. I wasn't going to school, had been arrested a few times, and was hanging around with the wrong crowd. But then, one day, me and three other boys met a Pentecostal preacher on the street. There was something different about him. One of the boys I was with had a cough, and this preacher prayed for him. The cough instantly went away. We were all stunned. I remember thinking that maybe there was something to this whole 'God thing.'

### Preacher

I remember, a few months later, meeting that preacher again with a group of friends. He asked us, "Do you know who Jesus is?" We answered the usual, "The Son of God," but it felt different this time.



**I had always assumed that Catholics didn't take their faith seriously, says Evan Cawley**

He laid his hands on us, and we all felt something - something real. It was the Holy Spirit. We were all completely changed that night. The next day, we went to his house, got New Testaments, and started reading them. We'd meet up the next day and discuss what we'd read, amazed by the wisdom and depth of what was in those pages. I was on fire for Jesus. I remember even blessing myself if I cursed and praying to ask God for forgiveness right there in the street.

**"I still prayed, but something was missing. I realised I needed a church, but there was none around that I felt connected to"**

At school, I was a completely different person. I used to be a bully, but after that night, I stood up for people who were being picked on. One day, a classmate asked me what I was so happy about, and I told him, "I found Jesus." I started praying morning and night, reading the Bible every day. I'd been transformed by the encounter with the Holy Spirit, and for a while, it felt like nothing could shake that fire. But soon, my friends started falling

away. One stopped reading after a few days, another after two weeks. My best friend Andrew stuck with it a little longer, but even he eventually fell away. I kept going, but after finishing the New Testament, I stopped reading. I still prayed, but something was missing. I realised I needed a church, but there was none around that I felt connected to. I asked God for one, and the next day, I met two Mormon missionaries. I thought that was an answer from God.

### Mormons

I ended up getting really involved with the Mormons. They seemed so committed to their faith for God. They loved Jesus, and I was drawn to that. I went to England with them. My parents didn't like it, but I felt like it was the right thing to do. After a while I started to notice that some of their teachings just didn't match up with the Scriptures, and that led me to seriously question whether the Mormon church was the true Church. Eventually, I left. Sadly, that marked a period where I fell back into my old ways. I stopped reading the Bible, stopped praying, and started drinking again. But even during that time, I still believed that Jesus was Lord.

When I joined the army, I wasn't living out my faith at all. I was just caught up in the distractions

of life. But then something happened while I was in Syria. It was an event that shook me, and when I came back, I knew I had to get my life back in order. I started watching debates between atheists and Christians. I began to think about my faith in a way I hadn't before. Around the summer of 2020, I joined a Protestant church for a short amount of time. That September I went to college to study Teaching, History and Religion

**"I realised that the Catholic Church seemed to align more closely with the early Church than anything else I'd encountered. All I wanted was to be like the first Christians"**

During my first year of college, I took a module on the History of Christianity. I assumed that the Catholic Church had only been founded at the Council of Constantinople, but as I read more about the early Church, I was struck by how different the Church in the first centuries looked compared to what I had been taught. I came across the Didache, a first-century Christian document, and it was eye-opening. It described early Christian practices like saying the Our Father three times a day and fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays - things that Catholics still do

today. I realised that the Catholic Church seemed to align more closely with the early Church than anything else I'd encountered. All I wanted was to be like the first Christians. This began to change my view on Catholicism.

It wasn't long before I found myself back in a Catholic church, this time in Ballymun, Dublin. When I walked in, I could feel the Holy Spirit in a way I hadn't felt in years. The Mass was beautiful, and I felt like I had come home. I remember hearing the hymn Amazing Grace. 'I once was lost, but now I was found'. It felt like the culmination of a ten-year journey of seeking and searching. I knew, in that moment, that the Catholic Church was the place where I belonged. I had been through so much, but I finally felt like I had found the true Church.

### Alive

I've met so many amazing Catholics - people who are genuinely alive in their faith, who love Jesus and who live out their beliefs. I never expected that. I had always assumed that Catholics didn't take their faith seriously. Finding a church where you feel at home is difficult but I found one with St Saviours, in Dublin. I remember going in for Confession. I stayed for Mass, then I saw the altar rails, I saw young people and I remember the homily was great. I knew this was going to be the place where I could grow in faith and grow in virtue.

I am convinced that this journey, this faith, is all God's grace. He moves first, as we see in Mark 3, when Jesus chooses the twelve apostles. He chooses us. All I've done is say "yes" to His call. Everything else is God's work.



# My favourite prophet: Jonah the depressed



Jason Conroy

As a boy, my favourite Old Testament heroes were the prophets Elijah and Jonah. Elijah's story is like the 'Die Hard' of the Old Testament - instead of John McClane single handedly taking out a building full of terrorists, it's Elijah singlehandedly overcoming the evil King Ahab and the 450 priests of the demon Baal, whom apostate Israel had fallen into worshipping.

Even Elijah's entrance is cool: "As the Lord lives in whose presence I stand" - he has taken his stand with the Lord, and so the Lord's fearsome power is at work through him; he declares that the Israelites will have no rain until they repent.

Immediately, Elijah goes into hiding. The prophet's heroic faith allows him to work hand-in-glove with the mysterious arrangements of Providence. Moving from one hiding spot to another, like Jason Bourne or some action hero on the run from a corrupt organisation, he is fed by ravens in the desert, then told to take refuge in the house of an unknown widow in a foreign city. We see a sort of international, underground resistance movement of the Friends of God, operating like splinter cells awaiting secret commands from above.

Finally, like a knight errant or an old western gunslinger, Elijah returns and challenges the evil king Ahab to a duel for the soul of Israel. Before the crowds he overcomes the 450 priests of Baal; and in sheets the rain returns to Israel.

## Defeat

Then, a complete reversal. Suddenly he's on the run again from his enemies, as if his victory had



Jonah preaching in Nineveh, Andrea Vaccaro

meant nothing. He gives up. "Elijah went into the wilderness, a day's journey, and sitting under a furze bush, wished he were dead. 'O Lord', he said, 'I have had enough. Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.' Then he lay down and went to sleep."

Is that it? He fought to the end; does it really end like this?

**“All you frustrated and upset at God, who have given up: The book of Jonah is God's response to you”**

I was always strangely drawn to this image of the hero at his lowest moment, melodramatic teenager that I was. Somehow, the prophet's defeat resonates more profoundly than his victory.

**“Now, Lord, take my life, because it is better for me to die than to live.” And he wanders out and sits himself down in the wilderness”**

Jonah too gets the hero's call: "Up! Go East to the great city Nineveh, and cry against them, because their wickedness has come before me." How does Jonah react to the excitement and privilege of the prophetic call? He runs away. Sound familiar?

For all you depressives and half-hearted heroes, who feel like you have run away; all you frustrated and upset at God, who have given up: The book of Jonah is God's response to you.

Jonah boards a ship for Tarshish, in modern day Spain, which is

about as far west you could go in the ancient world. But what happens when you try to run away from God? Instead of going West, Jonah goes down, down, down: down to Joppa, down into the hold, and eventually down into the depths of the sea.

When God sends a storm on the ship because of Jonah, his all-too-familiar reaction, at a moment of crisis, is a refusal to respond: he goes to sleep. Viktor Frankl relates how, in his time in Auschwitz, cigarettes were a currency essential for survival; once an inmate started smoking their cigarettes instead of trading them for food, he knew they had "give-up-itis"; they wouldn't survive.

## Chances

Yet being thrown overboard is the best thing that ever happened to Jonah: as he sinks into the depths, he remembers God, and prays; and a giant fish swallows him, and vomits him out on the dry land, right back where he started. So, now we know where running from God gets you.

Jonah has been given a second chance. Again, God calls him, and

he goes to Nineveh, the rotten capital of all that was rotten and vicious in the ancient world. Three days walk in breadth, Jonah makes only a half-hearted one-day journey into it. But even his lukewarm efforts result in unimaginable success. After hardly a few words, "the people of Nineveh believed in God," and they all, praying and fasting, to the last man repent. "And God relented, and did not inflict on them the disaster he intended."

What does Jonah do next? He becomes angry and sullen at God's goodness, and says "Now, Lord, take my life, because it is better for me to die than to live." And he wanders out and sits himself down in the wilderness.

**“God makes a plant grow to give him shade from the sun for a day; then the plant dies, and Jonah is again angry at God”**

Both Jonah and Elijah are in the wilderness, and both have given up on life. What is the Lord's response?

Elijah wakes to find a jar of water and a bread cake beside him, and in the strength of this food he walks forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. Here, God asks Elijah twice: "What are you doing here?" and Elijah twice renews his mission.

For Jonah, God makes a plant grow to give him shade from the sun for a day; then the plant dies, and Jonah is again angry at God. God asks him twice, "Do you do well to be angry?"

God's answer to Jonah, and to Elijah - and to you - is to draw near, gently question, and then draw your attention away from yourself. The book of Jonah ends with a question. God says: How could I not have pity on the Ninevites and send you to them?

After all the ups and downs: Isn't the sky still blue? Isn't God still good? Doesn't He come back for me after all? And aren't there people whose futures will yet be changed by how I act now? Those who ask, "What have I left to hope for from life?" need, in a sense, to have their world turned upside down, like Jonah's was. It is God who questions us: "Will you choose me, or Baal? Will you stand with me, like I've stood with you? Will you believe?"

**Jason Conroy is a philosophy student from Co. Kildare, currently studying at KU Leuven, Belgium.**

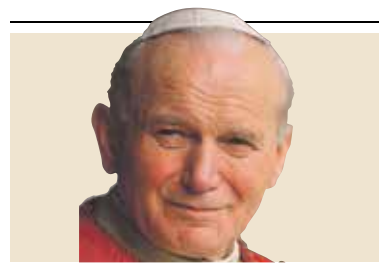
## Reading between the lines

Jonah is the son of Amittai, which means 'dove', linking his story to psalm 55: "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest... I would wait for him who saves me from the raging wind and tempest." Jonah also learns the lesson of Psalm 139: "If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand hold me fast." Jonah's reaction to the Ninevites is comparable to Cain's reaction to Abel, (whom God also questions: "Do you do

well?") and the Elder Son's reaction to the Prodigal Son. Jonah is "vomited out" like the lukewarm in Revelations 3. In Matthew 16 Peter is called "Simon son of Jonah!" Peter also runs away, in the hour of the cross, and then is reconciled to God after jumping into the sea; Like Jonah and Elijah, God repeats the same question: "Do you love me?" In the misadventures of Jonah, we see glimmers of one who also slept during a storm and calmed it, who went down to the depths and came up again on the third day.



# The drama of the separation of faith and reason



Pope Emeritus St John Paul II

With the rise of the first universities, theology came more directly into contact with other forms of learning and scientific research. Although they insisted upon the organic link between theology and philosophy, St Albert the Great and St Thomas were the first to recognise the autonomy which philosophy and the sciences needed if they were to perform well in their respective fields of research. From the late Medieval period onwards, however, the legitimate distinction between the two forms of learning became more and more a fateful separation. As a result of the exaggerated rationalism of certain thinkers, positions grew more radical and there emerged eventually a philosophy which was separate from and absolutely independent of the contents of faith. Another of the many consequences of this separation was an ever-deeper mistrust with regard to reason itself.

## Revelation

[...] The more influential of these radical positions are well known and high in profile, especially in the history of the West. It is not too much to claim that the development of a good part of modern philosophy has seen it move further and further away from Christian Revelation to the point of setting itself quite explicitly in opposition. This process reached its apogee in the last century. Some representatives of idealism sought in various ways to transform faith and its contents, even the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, into dialectical structures which could be grasped by reason. Opposed to this



kind of thinking were various forms of atheistic humanism, expressed in philosophical terms, which regarded faith as alienating and damaging to the development of a full rationality. They did not hesitate to present themselves as new religions serving as a basis for projects which, on the political and social plane, gave rise to totalitarian systems which have been disastrous for humanity.

In the field of scientific research, a positivistic mentality took hold which not only abandoned the Christian vision of the world, but more especially rejected every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision. [...]

**“It should also be borne in mind that the role of philosophy itself has changed in modern culture”**

What has appeared finally is *nihilism*. As a philosophy of nothingness, it has a certain attraction for people of our time. [...] Nihilism is at the root of the widespread mentality which claims that a definitive commitment should no longer be made, because everything is fleeting and provisional.

It should also be borne in mind that the role of philosophy itself has changed in modern culture. From

universal wisdom and learning, it has been gradually reduced to one of the many fields of human knowing; indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role.

[...] In the wake of these cultural shifts, some philosophers have abandoned the search for truth and made their sole aim the attainment of a subjective certainty or a pragmatic sense of utility. This in turn has obscured the true dignity of reason.

## Faith

[...] Yet closer scrutiny shows that even in the philosophical thinking of those who helped drive faith and reason further apart there are found at times precious and seminal insights which, if pursued and developed with mind and heart rightly tuned, can lead to the discovery of truth's way. Such insights are found, for instance, in penetrating analyses of perception and experience, of the imaginary and the unconscious, of personhood and intersubjectivity, of freedom and values, of time and history. The theme of death as well can become for all thinkers an incisive appeal to seek within themselves the true meaning of their own life. But this does not mean that the link between faith and reason as it now stands does not need to be carefully examined, because each without the other is impoverished and enfeebled. Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience and so run the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. By the same token, reason which is unrelated to an adult faith is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being.

This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal - not, I trust, untimely - that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy. The *parrhesia* of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.

**i** From the late Pope Emeritus St John Paul II *Encyclical Letter, Fides et Ratio* (45-48)

**“Indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role”**

# Meditations on the interior life

AC

## The secret of renewal

Lord, I see, in my life, that You refresh me each day, but I must also make the effort, I must be open to You in prayer and not lazy. You have mercy, so many times. You forgive so much. You are a faithful Friend to all who approach You, a wonderful Creator and a marvellous Repairer, a Rebuilder of ruins, namely us, when we fail. I see a building in ruins, a Church in ruins, and You come and set to rebuild it. Come Lord and renew the Church in Ireland. When the old tem-

ple in Jerusalem was in ruins and overgrown with briars and weeds, You inspired people to go into the hills to cut timber and hew rock and rebuild it.

Are you strong enough, Lord? You built the universe, the stars are like dust in the palm of Your hand, so it is easy for You to rebuild ruined lives, to restore faith. One thing is necessary, our openness to You. We are discouraged, disappointed, hurt, criticised but we are Yours. Reviving, Renewing Lord, the first thing You revive and renew and rebuild is our own personal relationship with You, and this through prayer, only prayer. Nothing replaces prayer and love of You.

# Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



## What is a consecrated virgin?

**What does it mean to be a consecrated virgin? What are the rights and duties of the designation? And what is the process of becoming a “consecrated virgin”?**

A: The Code of Canon Law defines consecrated virgins as chaste and never-married women who “through their pledge to follow Christ more closely... are consecrated to God, mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church, when the diocesan Bishop consecrates them according to the approved liturgical rite” (Canon 604).

Consecrated virginity is the oldest form of consecrated life in the Church, predating the development of religious life by several centuries. Since apostolic times, there have always been women who chose to renounce marriage in order to dedicate their lives and hearts more fully to Jesus. For this reason, they were traditionally called and formally recognised by the Church as “brides of Christ.”

Since at least the fourth century, if not even earlier, the Church has had a special liturgical ritual - distinct from but in some respects parallel to priestly ordination - for bishops to solemnly consecrate women to a life of virginity. Many of our earliest female martyr saints - such as Sts. Agatha, Agnes, Lucy and Cecilia, who are named in one of our Eucharistic prayers at Mass - are considered consecrated virgins.

With the development of religious orders in late antiquity, the custom of consecrating women outside of monasteries gradually fell out of practice, and by the Middle Ages the Church no longer had consecrated virgins “living in the world.” But in the mid-twentieth century, the Second Vatican Council document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, called for a revision of the ancient rite of consecration to a life of virginity, and in 1970 the new ritual was promulgated. And so in a situation similar to the revival of the permanent diaconate, the vocation of consecrated virginity was restored to the life of the Church.

In 2018, the Vatican issued a document called *Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago*, or ESI, which provided bishops with more detailed guidance on this state of life, covering

topics such as the discernment of vocations, formation and the life and mission of consecrated virgins.

Consecrated virginity is a unique vocation for women in that it is centred in the local diocesan Church rather than a particular group or religious community. The diocesan bishop is the one who accepts women into this state in life, and who ultimately serves as the “superior” of consecrated virgins in his diocese. In general, consecrated virgins are called to pray for the needs of their diocese and to serve the needs of their local Church according to their own specific gifts and talents.

In paragraphs 80-103, *Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago* describes the formation process for aspiring consecrated virgins as lasting between three to five years. Formation for consecrated virginity is envisioned as involving, among other elements: personal mentorship and spiritual direction, some level of academic theological study and a gradual adoption of the lifestyle of a consecrated virgin.

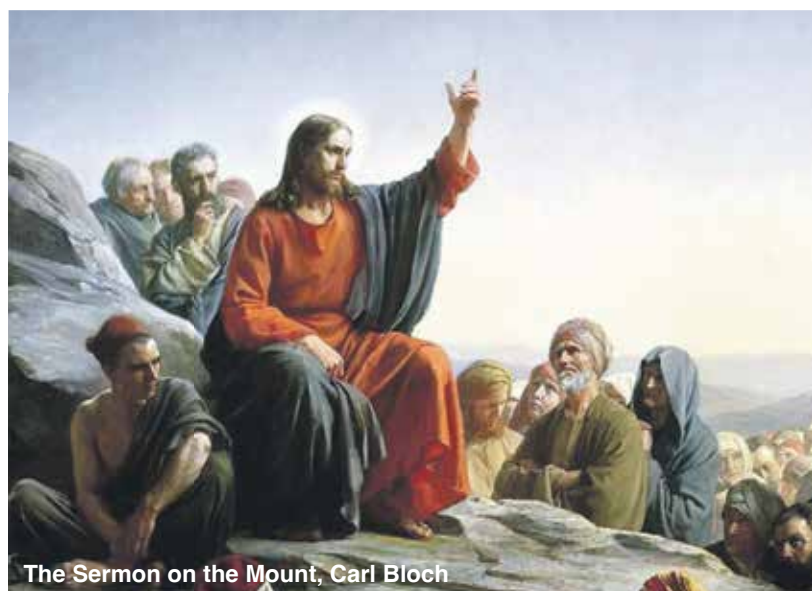
In terms of a consecrated virgin's duties and obligations, the introduction to the rite of consecration to a life of virginity states: “They are to spend their time in works of penance and of mercy, in apostolic activity, and in prayer, according to their state in life and spiritual gifts.”

*Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago* more specifically describes consecrated virgins as having an obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours (ESI 34) and to attend daily Mass in regions where this is possible (ESI 32). Consecrated virgins are also expected to live a relatively ascetical life, discerning the concrete penitential practices with their confessor or spiritual director (ESI 36).

Consecrated virgins do not make vows of poverty and obedience in exactly the same way as religious Sisters do. However, consecrated virgins are still called to live in a spirit of evangelical poverty (ESI 27) and to co-discern major aspects of their life and mission with their bishop. (ESI 28).

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





The Sermon on the Mount, Carl Bloch

# An invitation to something higher



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

**W**hat is a sin? Is it a sin to not go to church on Sunday? Is it a sin to cheat on your taxes? Is it a sin to get drunk? Is holding a grudge a sin? Is masturbation a sin? Is infidelity in marriage a sin?

For too long preachers, catechists, Sunday school teachers, Church hierarchy, and moral theologians have been too focused on sin. Well, indeed there is sin around, but that should hardly be our focus in terms of understanding what it means to live a moral Christian life. Here we should take our cue from Jesus.

In his *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7) Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come to fulfill them." What he is saying here is basically this: 'I have not come to do away with the Ten Commandments; I have come to invite you to something higher'.

Unfortunately, we tend to think of living a moral life mostly in terms of keeping the Commandments and avoiding sin. What we call "moral theology" has classically been focused on ethical issues, what's right and what's wrong? But that's not what we hear from Jesus as a moral teacher. His *Sermon on the Mount* (perhaps the greatest moral code ever written) focuses instead on an invitation to do what's higher. It assumes we are already living the elementary essentials of morality, the Ten Commandments, and instead invites us to something beyond those essentials, namely, to be the adult in the room who helps the world carry its tension.

## Form

Jesus doesn't offer us moral theology in its classical or popular form. Rather he invites us into an ever-deepening discipleship (which is what moral theology, proper catechesis, and

Sunday school are meant to do).

**“We tend to think that Jesus is referring to the hypocrisy of some of the scribes and Pharisees. He isn't”**

Here's an example of an invitation that lies at the very heart of the *Sermon on the Mount*. At one point, Jesus invites us to a "virtue that goes deeper than that of the scribes and the Pharisees." It's easy to miss the point here because, almost without exception, we tend to think that Jesus is referring to the hypocrisy of some of the scribes and Pharisees. He isn't. Most of the scribes and Pharisees were good, honest, sincere people who practiced a high virtue. For them, living a good moral and religious life meant keeping the

Ten Commandments (all of them!) and being a man or woman who was scrupulously fair to everyone. It meant being a just person.

So, what's lacking here? If I am a person who keeps all the Commandments and am fair and just in all my dealings with others, what is lacking in me morally? Why isn't that enough?

Jesus' answer to that takes us further than the Ten Commandments and the demands of justice. He invites us to something beyond.

## Beyond

He points out that the demands of justice still permit us to hate our enemies, to curse those who curse us, and to execute murderers ("an eye for an eye"). He invites us to something beyond that, namely, to love those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to forgive those who kill us. That is the essence of moral

theology. And note that it comes to us as an invitation, inviting us always to something higher. It's not concerned about what's a sin and what isn't ("thou shalt not"). Rather, it's a positive invitation beckoning us to reach higher, to transcend our natural impulses, to be more than someone who just keeps the commandments and avoids sin.

**“Our first concern should not be, is this a sin or not? Is it a sin to not go to church on Sunday?”**

I remember once hearing a lecture from the late Michael Hines in which he offered this image of God as forever inviting us to something higher: Imagine a mother coaxing a toddler to walk. Squatting on the floor in front of the

child, an arm's length away, her fingertips just inches away from the fingertips of the child, she gently coaxes the child to risk taking a step forward; then when the child takes that step, she moves her fingertips back a few inches, and again gently tries to coax the child into risking another step. And so, all the way across the floor.

That's the image we need for Christian discipleship and moral theology. Our first concern should not be, is this a sin or not? Is it a sin to not go to church on Sunday? Is it a sin to entertain lustful thoughts? Is it sin to hold a grudge?

## Challenge

The question with which we need to challenge ourselves is rather, what am I being invited into? Where do I need to stretch myself toward something higher? Am I loving beyond my natural impulses? And more specifically: Am I loving those who hate me? Am I blessing those who curse me? Am I forgiving murderers?

"I have not come to do away with the Ten Commandments; I have come to invite you to something higher - all the way across the floor."

**“The question with which we need to challenge ourselves is rather, what am I being invited into? Where do I need to stretch myself toward something higher?”**

## Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milan Morales

# Man created in the image of God

**M**an occupies a unique place in creation: he is 'in the image of God'; in his own nature he unites the spiritual and material worlds; he is created 'male and female'; God established him in his friendship.

Of all visible creatures only, man is "able to know and love his creator". He is "the only creature on Earth that God has willed for himself", and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity.

## The dignity

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely

giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. He is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.

God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him. St Paul tells us that humans take its origin from two men: Adam and Christ... the first man, Adam, he says, became a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit.

Because of its common origin the human race forms a unity, for "from one ancestor (God) made all nations to inhabit the whole Earth". "This law of human solidarity and charity", without excluding the rich variety of persons, cultures and peo-

ples, assures us that all men are truly brethren.

## The breath of life

The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual: "then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7-9). Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God.

In Sacred Scripture the term 'soul' often refers to human life or the entire human person. But 'soul' also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image.

The human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God": it is a

human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul.

## Body and Soul

Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. For this reason, man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honour since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.

The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not "produced" by the parents - and that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.

The spiritual tradition of the Church also emphasises the heart, in the biblical sense of the depths of one's being, where the person decides for or against God.



# We are people of light

Mal 3:1-4  
Ps 24:7, 8, 9, 10  
Heb 2:14-18  
Lk 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

**T**hink Christmas was over weeks ago? Think again.

The Feast of the Presentation officially closes the Christmas season, 40 days after the Nativity, so there's still one last chance to wish the world "Merry Christmas!" It is also one final opportunity in our liturgy to reflect on a vitally important motif of this season: the consoling, redeeming, transformative presence of light.

Think back to Luke's account of Christ's birth, the story retold on Christmas Eve. We found "the glory of the Lord" shining around the shepherds, even during their night watch in the fields. Then in Matthew's Gospel, on the feast of the Epiphany, we learned of the magi, who followed a star to find the newborn king in Bethlehem.

And now we return to Luke's gospel and encounter the aged Simeon in the temple, who takes the baby Jesus into his arms and blesses God, saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people, Israel."

## Light

We can't escape it. Light has been everywhere.

Small wonder that this climactic feast has also been known for centuries as Candlemas, a time for blessing candles that will be carried home to remind us daily of the miracle of Christmas, the miracle of illumination,

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra

Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. In some churches around the world, candle-light processions remain popular and serve as a beautiful punctuation mark at Christmas' end.

**“It is a flame that has continued to burn, whether we are aware of it or not, in the grace of the sacrament”**

This central message remains: we are people of light. The lights on the tree may be in a box in the attic, and the bulbs that were strung on gutters and on evergreens are stashed in the basement, but the Light that truly matters continues to give off its glow.

What a wonder it is. And what a source of boundless hope. The great challenge for us in the days and weeks ahead is to keep that light burning. It can be easy for us to forget that the first tangible gift we receive as baptised Christians - after the splash of water and the dab of oil - is a lit candle. "Receive the light of Christ," we're told. It is a flame that has continued to burn, whether we are aware of it or not, in the grace of the sacrament - no

matter how life might try to snuff it out, quench it, or lower its glow to something resembling little more than leftover ash. (Lent is coming soon enough, and we will be reminded of how easily a strong flame can burn out and leave a dusty residue.)

Trust and believe: the light is there. Really. Our job now is to keep the glow alive.

## Inspiration

These dark days of winter are a good opportunity to nurture the light of Christ in our hearts, to draw inspiration and hope from prayer, to (literally or figuratively) carry the light from Candlemas and the flickering joy of this last burst of Christmas into our everyday lives.

We hear a lot about the "spirit of Christmas." Well, this feast cries out to us and asks us to keep alive something else: the spirit of Candlemas. Christmas was just the beginning. There is more.

We recall Christ's presentation in the temple and that beautiful scene of an old man cradling new life, and we can't help but think as he did, "Here is hope." Here is light.

To those who have forgotten the bright promise of a star: there is still light. To anyone who fears or who worries, or who wonders about what the future may hold: there is still light.

Darkness doesn't win. The light of Christ, the light of hope, prevails.

That is reason for us to smile and to say it one last time this season: Merry Christmas.

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



The Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple, Ludovico Carracci

## Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milan Morales



St John Bosco

## St John Bosco: the carer of souls

**J**ohn Bosco was born on August 16, 1815 in Becchi, a small hamlet in the municipality of Castelnovo d'Asti (now Castelnovo Don Bosco), into a family of poor farmers. His father, Francesco, died when John was only two years old, leaving his mother, Margherita, to raise him and his siblings. Margherita inspired her children with a strong sense of faith, teaching John to pray and see God in the beauty of nature and in the faces of the poor. Her generosity inspired him to care for others, even as a young boy.

At the age of nine, John had a profound dream in which a majestic Man and Lady instructed him to help poor boys with meekness and charity. This dream became a guiding force in his life. To entertain and inspire the children in his community, John per-

formed tricks and preached, combining games with spiritual teachings. He realised that to make a lasting difference, he needed to become a priest. However, his older brother Anthony, a farmer, opposed his studies, leading to constant conflicts. At the age of 12, John left home to work as a farm servant, continuing his education whenever he could. Three years later, after Anthony married, John returned home and resumed his studies.

At 20, John entered the seminary, dedicating himself to six years of rigorous study. He was ordained a priest in 1841, becoming Don Bosco (in Italian, *Don* is a title for priests). He soon devoted himself to helping abandoned boys in Turin. Witnessing their struggles during the industrial revolution, particularly the harsh conditions in prisons, moved him deeply.

Determined to prevent these young people from falling into crime, he sought them out in the streets, offering guidance and support.

In December 1841, Don Bosco began gathering boys for Sunday activities. By summer, his group had grown to 80. He called this initiative the oratorio, a youth centre where boys could find companionship, moral guidance, and opportunities for work. Recognising the urgent need for safe lodgings, he began housing boys, despite initial setbacks when they stole from him. In 1847, he provided shelter to a boy from Valsesia, soon followed by others. Although funds were a constant challenge, Don Bosco persevered, relying on his mother and benefactors.

By 1852, Don Bosco was housing 36 boys; by 1861, this number had grown

to 800. He established workshops in tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, printing, and mechanics, prioritising orphans and destitute boys. To support these efforts, he founded the Salesian Congregation, which trained lay brothers to assist in the work.

Don Bosco also created a system of education based on reason, religion, and loving kindness, offering young people practical skills and moral guidance. He expanded his mission across Europe and Latin America, founding the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesian Cooperators.

When Don Bosco died on January 31 1888, his final words to his followers were: "Love each other as brothers. Do good to all and evil to none... Tell my boys I wait for them in Paradise."



# A view from the Quays

## Growth is the only evidence of life



Fr Alan Hilliard

**O**n April 2023 I was worried about my aunt. She was the most difficult thing about me being away. She was ninety-two, never married, was in a nursing home for nearly six years and I was minding her house as best I could. She had a beautiful nature, when I'd talk about Covid and how difficult it was she'd add, "and the war years were tough too." The phrase that captured her though was one that is ingrained in my heart. No matter what the doctor would say about her demise and her move away from her independence she always say, "Thank God for so much!" I was the only person she asked for whenever she needed anything.

She was born in 1930 and was two years older than my mother. They were inseparable. For me heading to the United States was worrying. When I landed, I booked my first flight home with the primary purpose of visiting her. That flight coincided with her death. I sat with her for two nights and the end of the day of February 7 after the nursing saying she had a good few days left in her. This worried me as I was due to fly back the following Sunday.

### Prayer

A few hours later, at 11:30pm I sat and prayed night prayer. I was working on my computer in her room. And my gut just decided to say night prayer. I sat with her told her I was saying night prayer and added that night prayer is commending us into the night in the hope of a new dawn. We rest with God that we can rise with him. I came to the end of night prayer



and the words are "the Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end." When I said those words, she gave her last breath. We had her funeral on the Friday, and I got on my flight the following Sunday back to the US. When I was back in class the next day, I told my students the story and whenever I am in touch with them, they always say it was one of the profoundest things they ever heard.

**“It is rare to hear to the voice of God and there are many visions that are drug induced but few that seem to be of God”**

They picked up on the

themes of hearing the voice of God and responding. The course they were doing was reflective one and they were looking at what they were called to be in life. Where they'd be happy and how they'd make the world a better place. Call and response. They and I learnt that we need to hear the voice of God and respond to His promptings – they are there for us. There is an interesting verse in the first book of Samuel: "The boy Samuel was ministering to the lord in the presence of Eli; it was rare for the Lord to speak in those days and visions were uncommon." The same could be said of today. It is rare to hear to the voice of God and there are many visions that are drug induced but few that seem to be of God.

And yet God does work but do we hear that voice and

see manifestations of Him enough or are there too many distractions? Samuel heard God's voice as John, Andrew and Simon did. This was time too when the voice of Roman occupation was the one obscuring the voice of God, yet his Son was walking the roads with him. For Samuel the Philistines were beating the drum and the people suffered. In any time in any space there are always noises to drown out what is important to us and God's voice suffers but He still speaks. One great disservice we've done is we have made the call of God a burden.

### Vocation

The call of vocation comes with the price of seeming loneliness in a life or different struggles. We've translated the call of God into something

we must bear like a cross. There are times in life where we have to bear crosses, and we ask for God's help and support. This is true but not always the case. The call of God must be understood in its truest sense. A man who preached only a few yards from here in our neighbouring parish on St Stephen's Green and who is now a saint. John Henry Newman said, "Growth is the only evidence of life." Samuel, Andrew, John and Simon were called not to carry a burden but were at a stage in their lives where they were being called into a new and exciting space.

**“God is always calling us to a place that is more fulfilling and more life-giving. That no matter what happens we can say ‘Thank God for so much’”**

I remember a man who used to smoke two hundred cigarettes and drink fifteen pints a day and then go home to his mammy for his dinner. One day he saw his life for what it was and like Samuel, Andrew, John and

Simon Peter he realised his life was going nowhere and he moved from stagnation to life. In some ways my aunt's call to enter the presence of God was the same. Her life had stagnated here. Her dementia was affecting her well-being, she was weakening and losing her dignity, and the call was to new life – fully alive in God.

### Promptings

My part and my call were to pay attention to the promptings of God and respond and be there and help her on hear her final call. It was a lesson to me to pay attention to my deepest self and to hear what God wants for me. God is always calling us to a place that is more fulfilling and more life-giving. That no matter what happens we can say 'Thank God for so much'.

I read a line this week from the great mystic and monk Thomas Merton that fits with these thoughts today: "You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope."

So, let's think about it, let's pray about it and let's do something about it.

## Be not afraid, because God is always near, Pope says

Carol Glatz

**G**od tells Christians not to be afraid because he is always close, accompanying the faithful throughout their lives and through all their challenges, Pope Francis said. "God says 'Do not be afraid' to Abraham, Isaac and many others in the Bible, but he says it to us, too. 'Be not afraid,' keep going," because God

"is your traveling companion," the Pope said on January 22 during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall. He looked at the effect of God's transforming power on a young Mary in Nazareth. Mary learns of her mission to be "the mother of the long-awaited Davidic Messiah" whose name will be "Jesus," which means 'God saves,' reminding everyone forever that it is not man who saves, but only God," the Pope said. "Illuminated with trust,"

he said, "Mary welcomes the Word in her own flesh and thus launches the greatest mission ever entrusted to a human creature," placing herself in service, collaborating with God's plan. "Let us learn from Mary, mother of the Saviour and our mother, to open our ears to the divine Word, to welcome it and cherish it, so that it may transform our hearts into tabernacles of his presence, into hospitable homes where hope grows," the Pope said.



## TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



# The uneasy mix of politics and religion

**L**ike it when I come across someone that defies expectations, someone with unexpected ideas or unusual hobbies. Mind you there can be unpleasant surprises, like when you discover a close friend is a racist... this is not autobiographical.

Barbara Dickson is a famous Scottish pop and folk singer, and she is also a committed Catholic. She spoke to Pam Rhodes on *Songs of Praise* (BBC One, Sunday). She was baptised in the Protestant tradition, but when she became Catholic, she said it felt like "coming home." Originally inspired by a small Franciscan church in Edinburgh, she now worships in St Mary's Cathedral in the city. Still performing, she leans on her faith when on the road and says a Hail Mary before shows. She sang a beautiful song, a simple version of *Creators of the Stars of Night*. I'd like to have heard more of her singing, but the rest of the music was her choice from the usual choral fare, including the Celtic flavoured *Be Thou My Vision* and *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*, sung by choirs from various churches, many in Scotland.

Far from Scotland, in Washington the 52nd **March for Life Rally** (EWTN, Friday) was impressive as usual, and EWTN gave the usual full live coverage. I was struck by how many young people were among the



52nd annual March for Life rally in Washington 2025. Photo: OSV/Bob Roller.

thousands on the march. The presenters said it was the biggest human rights rally in the world, but you'd struggle to find much coverage in mainstream media, especially in Ireland. Try an internet search and you'll see how much this huge rally is ignored over here.

It was the first public event speech by Vice-President JD Vance since his inauguration, and I'm sure the US pro-life movement got a considerable boost from that. His visionary talk celebrated the movement and stressed the need for support for families and for women in crisis pregnancies. Likewise, there was support from House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority leader John Thune. I didn't notice any con-

tributions from pro-life Democrats, if there are any left in that polarised political environment. Republican Congressman Chris Smith called for "love and compassion" for opponents. Lila Rose of 'Live Action' reminded us that "one change of mind can save a life." Archbishop Joseph Naumann urged an approach of prayer and legislation. Several references were made to attempts to bring in legislation to ensure no taxpayers' money would fund abortions and that babies surviving failed abortions would have to be cared for.

Attendees were still celebrating the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and the fact that around half the states had restrictive anti-abortion laws. One speaker spoke of the thousands of lives

saved as a result. Another commentator welcomed the lives saved by the abortion reversal pill; five thousand she estimated. Surveys were referenced that showed most women willing to keep their babies if they weren't under financial and other pressures.

There were some elements that made me uneasy, such as the uneasy mix of politics and religion typical of the USA and the volume of praise for President Trump, at a time when his mean-spirited speeches show no signs of abating (does he need to keep Biden bashing?), when there are moves to extend capital punishment, with immigrants are being hauled away in handcuffs, a huge amount of US aid being withdrawn world-

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### JUDGEMENT AT NUREMBERG

**BBC Two Saturday February 1, 12:45pm**

(1961) Four eminent German judges are accused of crimes against humanity in Stanley Kramer's acclaimed film, which tackles some of the most sensitive questions about the Nazi holocaust.

#### NEW! THE CONVERSATION

**EWTN Monday February 3, 5:30pm**

Fr Robert McCabe discusses the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart, where they help people fully abstain from alcohol and live for God in His Church.

#### FATHER STU

**Film 4 Wednesday February 5, 9pm**

(2022) Rosalind Ross's biographical drama about a hapless boxer-turned-priest whose gloves are off in the fight for the Lord, starring Mark Wahlberg and Mel Gibson. Rough language!

wide, pending review. There was much use of Christian religious imagery and rhetoric, as there was at Martin Luther King rallies in the past, but I think the movement must ensure support from other religions and secular human rights activists.

Also stateside, there was that controversy about the words of Episcopalian Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde to President Trump at a church service. Usefully, quite a bit of her talk was played on **Sunday** (BBC Radio 4). Her Christian teaching, with her call for mercy, was clear, compassionate and brave, given the context. It's worth

finding the full text online but I'm not sure church is the place for what seemed a very public reprimand to a specific member of the congregation, though many might regard it as more of a timely exhortation. Rev. Dr Robert Lee regarded it as "speaking truth to power," while Pastor Lorenzo Sewell's characterisation of the sermon as "spiritual abuse" and Trump's description of it as "nasty" were over the top.

We're getting a lot of 'OTT' these days.

## Music

Pat O'Kelly



# A historical celebration of music

Following a number of seasonal events, the NSO came back on track with its 2024/25 series at the National Concert Hall in a Russian programme featuring South American conductor Diego Matheuz and French pianist Lise de la Salle. With Rakhmaninov's ever popular *2nd Piano Concerto* and Shostakovich's *7th Symphony* (*Leningrad*), I found the relationship between artists and music-making deeply satisfying.

Mlle de la Salle provided a wealth of tone colouring in her excellently polished performance in the concerto and seemed totally at ease with Maestro Matheuz with whom she was working for the first time. There was a particular rapport between them in the central Adagio while their grandiose finale



National Symphony Orchestra

had full-blooded panache.

The current year marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Shostakovich and the NSO chose his *7th Symphony* to honour the occasion. The piece dates from the early 1940s when the composer was still living in his native Leningrad and before he and

many other artists and intellectuals were moved to the Crimea then considered safe from bombardment.

At times the music reflects the bleakness of its period, but it still manages to end with a sense of 'stentorian defiance' as the programme note writer (Michael Quinn) reminded

us. The keening lament of the third movement Adagio is symbolic of 'the violence of Stalin's purges and Hitler's murderous enmity'.

The main work in tomorrow (Friday 31st January) evening's NSO programme at the National Concert Hall is Rakhmaninov's magnificent *2nd Symphony*, written mainly in Dresden where the Rakhmaninov family were then living.

The composer's *First Symphony* had not been sympathetically received at its 1897 premiere leaving Rakhmaninov verging on a nervous breakdown. While a noted psychiatrist Dr Nikolai Dahl came to his assistance, it was over ten years before the composer presented his second symphony to the St Petersburg public in 1908.

The lengthy work has a slow introduction during which its principal ideas show themselves in one form or another. The second movement is a relatively short scherzo that offers suitable contrast to what has preceded it while the slow movement shows the great romantic almost overstating his romanticism. But never mind, the music is wonderful. Rakhmaninov's finale is an orchestral tour de force that brings the symphony to a brilliant conclusion.

There will not be a concerto in tomorrow's programme its place is being filled by a song cycle - *The Celestial Stranger* - by Irish-born Welsh-domiciled Stephen McNeff. The composer has kindly supplied the following introduction.

*The Celestial Stranger* was inspired by the 1997 rediscovery of texts by the 17th century cleric and mystic Thomas Traherne in the library of Lambeth Palace in London. In these, Traherne imagines a person from another world discovering Earth and being enchanted by its beauty. The cycle also includes settings of Walt Whitman, Dylan Thomas and Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani. (1838-1917).

Colombian-American conductor Lina González-Granados, noted for her spectacular interpretations of the symphonic and operatic repertoires and her dedication to highlighting new and unknown works by Latin American composers, will direct *The Celestial Stranger* with tenor Gavan Ring as soloist.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The Great War silence

**The First World War Centenary Roll of Honour and Essays**, edited by Ronan McGreevy and Emer Purcell, associate editor Tom Burnell (National University of Ireland / Four Courts Press, €30.00 / £24.95)

Peter Costello

**T**his is an important book, but of the kind that will be important to read not as a narrative, but to use for research and reference.

Essentially it is a reprint of the *Roll of Honour of the National University of Ireland* issued after the Great War (as it was then called, but which now, in agonised hindsight of a hundred years we have to call World War I). It records the names of all those associated with the NUI, and some other institutions, who served in the war.

However, this is filled out with explorative and detailed essays, on women, doctors and Catholic chaplains; the professionals of the war, rather than the amateurs, the ordinary rankers; those who survived rather than those who died, to a large extent.

### O'Flaherty

Approaching this large book, I thought that I might find a way in by looking to see what it recorded about the novelist Liam O'Flaherty. And here he is in the role of honour as "William O'Flaherty" on page 51, noting his college entry in 1913, and that he had been wounded.

Having written an illustrated biography of O'Flaherty I was well aware that he had been wounded in the head by shrapnel at the battle of Langemarck in August 1917. This left him with a visible scar on his forehead, which can be seen only in a few photos of his later life.

But the incident left him



*The Last General Absolution of the Munsters*

marked for the rest of his life; some of his odd behaviour as an eminent writer can be put down to him being, as so many millions of Europeans were, damaged mentally, as well as physically, by the war.

**“He had been a clerical student training to be a Holy Ghost Father, and was studying philosophy”**

The effect of the war was recorded by the English historian Guy Chapman in a huge anthology *Vain Glory* (1937), with pieces from writers in the many nations

involved in the war: it is evidence of just how damaged a whole generation was, the generation who came in some places to support Hitler seeing him as a man of peace. It seems to be a book unknown to Irish historians.

Using the roll of honour the editors have assembled biographical entries on many of them. There is none on O'Flaherty: he had been a clerical student training to be a Holy Ghost Father, and was studying philosophy at UCD: he was far from being merely a "man of Aran", and was more widely read than he often revealed in later days.

### Waller

But this is only one small instance of how nearly everyone of those listed in this book has a story of their

own, which it would have been impossible for the editors to have uncovered. But others, using their work, will now be able to do so.

Certainly reading through both the lists of names and entries one learns many surprising things about people one knows of. Often surprising things. One that struck me was that for James Harness Waller. He served in Royal Engineers in the Gallipoli and Mesopotamian theatres.

**“On a Catholic note: the cover show that remarkable painting by Fortunino Matania”**

He was the inspired inventor of an arch-based building system, the patent for which he later sold to Seagrams, for a lifetime pension. His firm, Delap and Waller, still exists, and I often heard mention of it by my father, who was a consulting engineer in the 1950s.

**“Anyone at all interested in Ireland's role in the Great War as it really was, rather than how it seemed in the view of extreme nationalists, will find this an immensely valuable book”**

Anyone at all interested in Ireland's role in the Great War as it really was, rather than how it seemed in the view of extreme nationalists, will find this an immensely valuable book.

On a Catholic note: the cover show that remarkable painting by Fortunino Matania, *The Last General Absolution of the Munsters* at Rue du Bois (1916), showing a mounted Fr Francis Gleason with his hand raised in blessing over the troops before their advance on 8 May 1915 at Aubers Ridge.

### Chaplains

The role of the chaplains is described in a specific essay by Barbara McCormack of the RIA. These men were well regarded by the rankers as they saw it as their

duty to be in the front line where the Catholic soldiers were likely to be killed, and so shared the front line horrors of the day with great courage out of a sense of priestly duty.

As I say, this is an excellent, though specialised book, one which has much to reveal about the attitudes that in later decades cast a cloud of silence rather witness over the lives, experiences and deaths of those, who like Thomas Kettle on the Somme in September 1916, one among the all too many who

Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,

But for a dream born in a herdsman's shed,

And for the secret scripture of the poor.

**“These men were well regarded by the rankers as they saw it as their duty to be in the front line where the Catholic soldiers were likely to be killed, and so shared the front line horrors of the day with great courage out of a sense of priestly duty”**



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.

# The last days of the Irish Country House

**A Vanishing World: The Irish Country House Photographs of Father Browne,** edited by Robert O'Byrne (Messenger Publications, €25.00 / £17.99)

**Peter Costello**

**T**his the latest album of images to be culled from the astonishing Fr Francis Browne Collections; it is also by far the best. The images, derived directly from the digitalised negatives, are crisp and clear, and also perfectly reproduced, which has not always been the case in the past.

Today Fr Browne, born in 1880 in Cork, is recognised as Ireland's greatest ever photographic artist, the equal of Robert Doisneau, Cartier Bresson, or Jacques Henri Lartigue. Like them he could capture through his instinctive talent and long application, not only the critical moment, but also the most formal composition. In this album the emphasis is on the formal, which is exactly the correct mode for capturing the fugitive sense of the last years of some of Ireland's great houses.

Here for once the excellence of the images had been joined with an informative and well researched text by cultural historian Robert O'Byrne, a former vice-president of the Irish Georgian Society. It seems that Fr Browne worked to a detailed programme in making these records over a period of many years.



Mr Brookes the Butler at Dunsany Castle 1950 detail



Front hall Castletown Co. Kildare July 1947.

**“This is a lost world. But we should keep in mind studying these images that they are all, everyone one of them the creation of a deeply spiritual man”**

These days, when anything can be forgiven a genius it seems, we learn that this was not the case with Fr Browne. Photography was for him an avocation; his true vocation was as a Jesuit priest. His vows came before all else, as the few surviving letters he wrote to his Father Provincial show. Fr Browne devoted much of his time to giving “missions” in places all over the country. He was a much sought after preacher, it is recorded.

**“In most of the houses all the accumulations of the centuries are on display”**

Famous now for his photograph taken on the first stage of the Titanic's doomed voyage in 1912, he was offered a ticket to go on to America, but on asking permission of his Provincial, received a peremptory telegram, “GET OFF THAT SHIP. PROVINCIAL”, which he did, saving his own life and images of that doomed vessel.

For some the great houses of rural Ireland were equally doomed. Many of them have not survived. Some have been turned into grand hotels. A very few remain in private hands, but not always the hands of the families who once built them.

In all Robert O'Byrne's essays describe in sufficient detail some 20 houses, though in all some twenty three are imaged. (One of these was not a country house at all, but Mespil House, the suburban mansion of artist Sarah Purser, demolished in 1951.)

In most of the houses all the accumulations of the centuries are on display. I was especially moved by the images of so many libraries, shelf upon shelf of books, that arouse the possessive instinct of the bibliophile: what were these books, where are they now, have they a good home, are they being looked after?)

O'Byrne alludes casually to Fr Browne wandering with his camera from room to room. But that is clearly not the case. All these images are carefully thought out, lit, and photographed: we are seeing a very great artist at work, not a casual dilettante.

These great houses are called “a vanishing world”, and so they were. Yet images of those who lived in them are only given for three. One of them is the rarest of rarities: a photograph of Mr T. Brookes, the Butler at Dunsany Castle, in 1950.

## Lords

His employer Lord Dunsany was a man of unusual views: when he went out to dinner anywhere he brought him with a special health salt to use at the table, which he would recommend to those sitting beside him, one of

# A travel guide for holiday makers in Catholic Europe

**Highways and Byways: A European Pilgrimage.**

by Nicholas Schofield, (Gracewing, £15.99 / €18.99)

**Peter Costello**

**T**he author Nicholas Schofield, aside from being a parish priest in Uxbridge, has also been an historian and antiquarian and a long time columnist of the Catholic Times.

He has previously written *Highways and Byways*: discovering Catholic England. In this book spreads his wings to provide an overview of places of Catholic and Marian interest across Europe from, as the blurb might say, Andorra to Zaragoza. All that in 103 short chapters.

I always find these kinds of books an agreeable pleasure, as they provide vivid little vignettes of people and places without going on too long. At this time of the year when so many of us are planning, or attempting to plan, they help us to plan a holiday that will not get us involved in the anti-tourist protests that are sweeping over parts of Europe, such as Spain and Venice, and to seek out and visit lesser known places, with the emphasis on those of Catholic interest.

The brief chapters are broadly divided into sections on Rome, on Southern Europe, Western Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and Northern Europe. But his chapters are less rigidly organised for he leaps boldly from country to country and back again.

He deals briefly, in an Irish context, with “Catholic Memories in the Phoenix Park”, Kerrytown, Kincasslagh (focused on the penal Laws and Mass Rocks), Knock and Kilemore Abbey. This will give the reader an idea of the sorts of places that interest him as a man of traditionalist outlook. This is not a book for the stay-at-homes, but for the actively religious.

Being English Schofield naturally gives attention to British links with the remoter districts of Europe - though surely he ought to be aware that in European references to Schottische monks are in fact to Irish monks, our saints being as often as not called Scotti in those days.

In other places he certainly surprises the reader. About San Marino he points out the citizens of this little republic that has managed adroitly to survive the ages on its difficult to access mountain top, for a time resisted in arms the efforts of Papal agents to seize the statelet for the Papal States. But the Pope of the day finally saw to it that they remained free. In 1944, imagining San Marino to have been seized by the retreating German, the hilltop capital was bombed by the Americans.

As I say these are brief encounters, but at times too brief, as I feel he could have got more out of his days in Scandinavia, and to have made more of the royal tombs in Roskilde in Denmark, or the extraordinary surviving wooden churches of medieval Norway.

But the past is all too often relevant today. Writing about the Austrian Abbey of Melk (famous from Umberto Eco's best-seller *The Name of the Rose*), he writes how the Irish St Coloman, was unable to communicate with the locals and was put to death. Later he was credited with many miracles and favours.

On their website, monks of Melk draw out St Coloman's significance for the twenty-first century: “In our times, where listening to each other has become increasingly difficult, he can be seen as a contemporary saint, as he, in a strange land, was not understood. Whoever is different, looks or speaks differently, makes himself suspicious and causes fear easily become the victim of prejudice”. The Irish pilgrim continues to challenge a millennium after his violent death.”



Melk Abbey, a place with Irish links.

whom was an astonished Sean O'Faolain.

Mr Hudson has to stand in here for all those people who kept these houses going, ready to serve “the family” as well as they could, but out of a sense of something more than feudal connection.

Two Lords appear: the 5th Lord Dunraven of Adare Manor. (No word here of the family's interest in psychical research - O'Byrne will have no truck it seems with aris-

tocratic eccentricity.)

The other is the 12th and last Earl of Fingall, one of the Catholic Plunkett's, the family of St Oliver Plunkett; the Plunketts at Dunsany were the Protestant branch, who supplied the Episcopalian Archbishop of Dublin, whose statue still stands in Kildare Place, gazing with a puzzled expression at the Department of Industry and Commerce across the road.

A line from a play of Yeats came into my mind looking

at these images: “Study that house. I think upon its jokes and stories, I try to remember what the butler said to a drunken game keeper...”

Yes, indeed, this is a lost world. But we should keep in mind studying these images that they are all, everyone one of them the creation of a deeply spiritual man, as true a humanist as his French contemporaries. We should not jump too quickly to judgements about what he intended.



Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4028 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)

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*Please pray for the beatification of*

***Little Nellie of Holy God***

“May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model”

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

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# The Irish Catholic

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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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3				
4				
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7				

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# Leisure time

## KERRY DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE TO FATIMA

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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.

## DIRECTOR OF NURSING REQUIRED

A POSITION FOR DIRECTOR OF NURSING 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](mailto:lour@iol.ie)

We will pass on the flame of faith.

For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland.



For more information about leaving a legacy to *The Irish Catholic*, phone 01 687 4028 or email [info@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:info@irishcatholic.ie)

The Irish Catholic

## Crossword

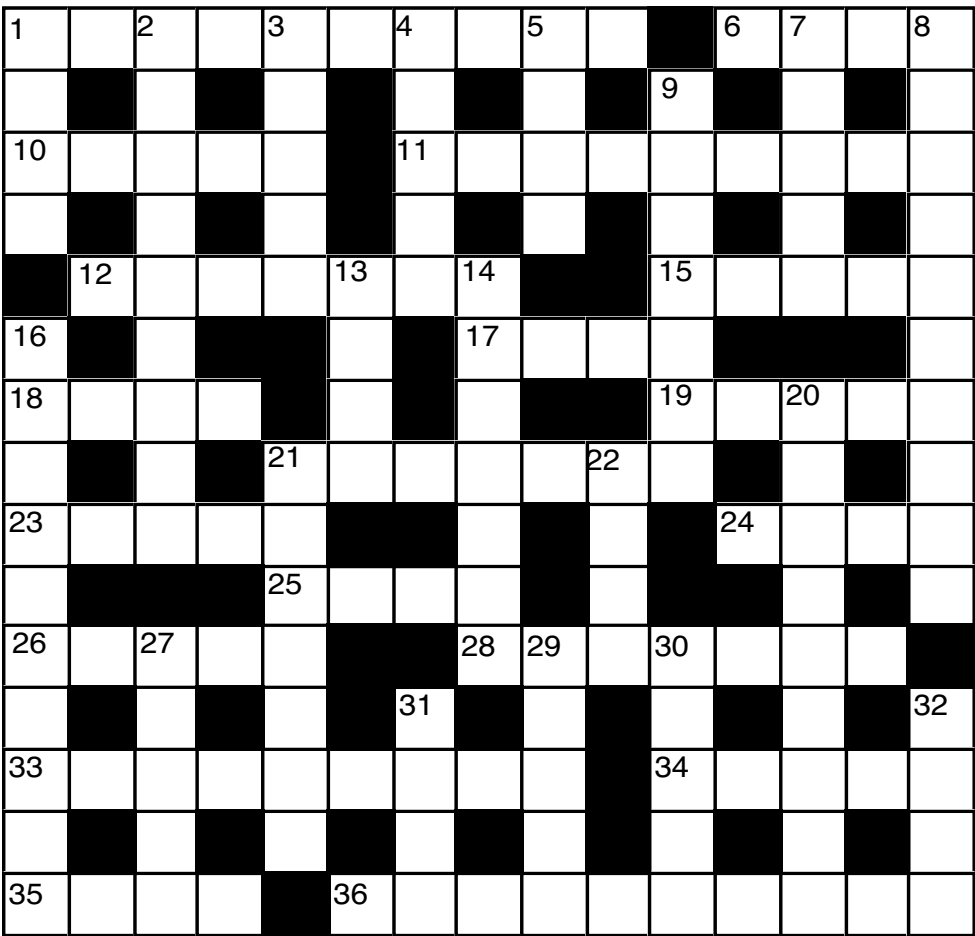
Gordius 700

### Across

- 1 One who can sense another's thoughts (4,6)  
6 Fashionable (4)  
10 Youngster (5)  
11 Capable of speaking in either of two languages (9)  
12 Ingratiated, put under a spell (7)  
15 Contribution to one's religious organization, amounting to one-tenth of one's income (5)  
17 Curved structure (4)  
18 Removed (4)  
19 Wading bird (5)  
21 Corpse (7)  
23 Deciduous conifer (5)  
24 Mexican filled pancake (4)  
25 Periphery (4)  
26 Cleaned with a cloth (5)  
28 Popular Spanish drink (7)  
33 Horatio Nelson's final naval battle (9)  
34 Copper or lead, for example (5)  
35 Riverside plant (4)  
36 Strengthened (10)

### Down

- 1 Small rodents (4)  
2 One who lives locally (9)  
3 Supplementary clause,



- or one on horseback (5)  
4 Stroll (5)  
5 Jazz great, Ms Fitzgerald (4)  
7 What a ghost might do (5)  
8 & 27d Dish on which donations may be placed

- (10,5)  
9 A different one (7)  
13 Historic Central American civilization (4)  
14 Harms (7)  
16 Adam's Ale that is not sparkling (5,5)  
20 True-to-life (9)

- 21 Popular cheese (7)  
22 Famous English Public School (4)  
27 See 8 down  
29 Moses' brother (5)  
30 Cajun stew (5)  
31 Leer (4)  
32 Attired (4)

## SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 23

### GORDIUS No. 699

#### Across

- 1 Cub 3 Masking tape 8 Rouble 9 Sergeant 10 Simon 11 Trout 13 Brews 15 Nest egg 16 Gabriel 20 Silly  
21 Giant 23 Float 24 Harmless 25 Reveal 26. Endorsement 27 Tee

#### Down

- 1 Christening 2 Brummies 3 Melon 4 Kestrel 5 Gigot 6 Amazon 7 Eat 12 Tagliatelle 13 Bogus 14 Shady  
17 Innocent 18 Blossom 19 Ramrod 22 Tiler 23 Fleet 24 Hoe

## Christmas Crossword Notice

Dear Readers,

Due to an unfortunate omission, the prizes for the completed Christmas crossword were not advertised in that edition and we are grateful to the reader who brought this to our attention.

We apologise for this oversight and any disappointment caused to our Crossword fans.

In order to correct this we have decided to double the number of prizes in the Easter Crossword.

Again sorry for the disappointment. We made a mistake.

Garry O'Sullivan  
Managing Editor

## Sudoku Corner 568

### Easy

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

### Hard

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

### Last week's Easy 567

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

### Last week's Hard 567

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



## Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



# The four foundations for unity

**I'm writing this piece** at the end of the week which began calmly enough on Sunday the January 19 and ended calmly on Saturday January 25. The five days in between gave us the wildest weather storm ever recorded in Ireland. One of my priest friends from Cork proudly sent me an image of the entire map of Ireland covered in status red. He declared that at last the rebels had taken over the country!

And of course, in a sense they had because now we have a Cork Taoiseach once again. It was difficult to avoid the juxtaposition of what was happening with the weather and what was happening politically both here in Ireland and internationally with the inauguration of President Trump for his second term.

Both Micheál and Donald had stormy beginnings last week. As a self-confessed political junkie, I was glued to what was happening both in Washington and Dail Eireann and what a week for junkies. Much of the commentary in Ireland was around the lack of women appointed to senior cabinet posts.

## Eclipsed

Across the pond a woman not appointed to Donald's cabinet took centre stage and at least for a little while eclipsed the new president in



Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde. Photo: OSV News/Kevin Lamarque, Reuters

terms of international media coverage. The Episcopalian (Anglican) Bishop of Washington, Mariann Budde was, as per tradition, hosting an inter-faith prayer service on the day after the inauguration of the new president.

The president, his entire family, his cabinet and the members of congress were in attendance. Being the host, Bishop Budde was the preacher. While it is the final paragraph of the sermon which has gained most attention, the entire address was brilliant and entirely appropriate for the begin-

ning of any new government's term.

The bishop chose unity as her theme and at the beginning set out her understanding of unity as: "a way of being with one another - it encompasses and respects our differences that teaches us to hold multiple perspectives and life experiences as valid and worthy of respect." I can't do justice to the bishop's homily here, so I suggest you search for the full text.

## Reality

She proposed that there are at least four foundations that need to be in place for unity to become a reality. The bishop was talking about unity in the context of a country or society, but I think what she says could also apply to a family, a community, a church or indeed a group of churches seeking to come closer together.

1. The first foundation for unity

is honouring the inherent dignity of every human being

2. The second foundation for unity is honesty - in both private conversation and public discourse

3. The third foundation for unity, is humility which we all need because we are all fallible human beings.

4. The fourth foundation and the one that incurred the wrath of the new president, and his supporters was mercy. I'll quote part of what she said which caused so much anger and prompted Mr Trump to call her 'nasty' "Let me make one final plea. Mr President.

Millions have put their trust in you. And as you told the nation yesterday you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared. And we're scared now.....

.....Our God teaches us that we

## A separate thought

I was intrigued that on the morning of his inauguration the president-elect, his entire family and the political establishment went to a church service before the day's proceedings began. Then on the day after the inauguration there was the interfaith

prayer service spoken of in the main article here.

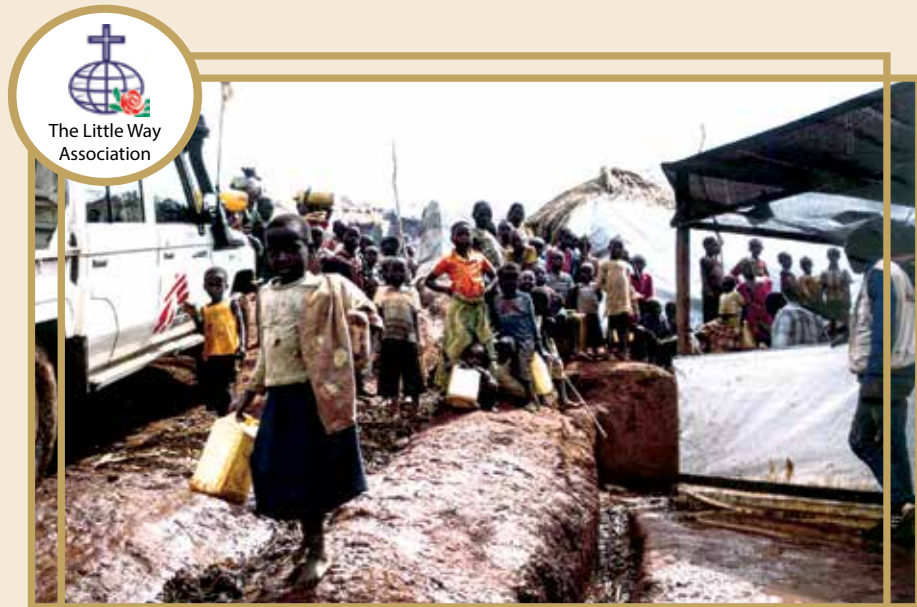
As far as I could see the only religious aspect attached to the inauguration of our new Taoiseach and government was a cursory prayer delivered at great speed by the Ceann Comhairle as she began the session. Do our politicians need God less?

## How to get a refund

After Mass one member of the congregation had lingered after the other members had shaken hands with the priest on their way out. The priest recognised the young man as one whom he had married a couple of months before.

As the young man shook hands with the priest, he asked, "Father, do you believe someone should profit from the mistakes of others?" "Certainly not," replied the priest. "Well...in that case...could I have the €200 back that I gave you for marrying me?"

are to be merciful to the stranger for we were all once strangers in this land. May God grant us the strength and courage to honour the dignity of every human being; to speak the truth to one another in love and walk humbly with each other and our God. For the good of all people in this nation and the world."



The Little Way Association

## EMERGENCY IN SUDAN:

**Please help The Little Way Association to ensure that medical help and care reaches thousands of those in need**

Some time ago, our Association was pleased to be able to assist Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in their vital medical work in many places in Sudan. As Pope Francis has often reminded us, a forgotten tragedy has been unfolding away from the eyes of the public. Civil war has devastated the health care system and left millions of children and adults in desperate need of medical care. Over 4 million children have fled from their homes.

In South Darfur, MSF is seeing one of the worst maternal and child health emergencies in the world. "Thousands of children are on the brink of death and starvation," writes MSF. "Newborn babies, pregnant women, and new mothers are dying in shocking numbers. And so many of these deaths are due to preventable conditions, but almost everything has broken down. The scarcity of functioning health facilities and unaffordable transportation costs mean many women and children arrive at hospital in critical condition. With the conflict now well into its second year, the needs remain enormous."

**PLEASE HELP US TO CONTINUE PROVIDING VITAL CARE TOGETHER. WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE.**

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION to enable MSF to continue to provide life-saving medical care to thousands of malnourished children, pregnant women, new mothers and their babies in South Darfur.

**PLEASE BE AS GENEROUS AS YOU CAN, AND PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN. THE NEEDS ARE IMMENSE.**



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight." - St Therese

## MISSION CHAPELS

St. Therese, our patroness, wished to spread the Gospel throughout the world "until the end of time". We receive many requests for help from bishops and priests to build, renovate or complete their mission chapels. We are often asked for funds to provide a permanent roof for a chapel.

In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of straw or other flimsy material which, as you may imagine, is easily damaged or destroyed in bad weather.

*Your donation will help a priest in a mission country to provide a decent chapel for his congregation, a fitting place for the celebration of Holy Mass.*

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