

# INTERCOM

A Catholic Pastoral and Liturgical Resource • April 2020



Equality, Justice and Peace in the Holy Land



**Assisted Suicide:  
Compassion or  
Cynicism?**  
Professor  
Patricia Casey



**Ecological  
Conversion**  
Fr Eamonn Conway



**An Easter People**  
Dr Orla Walsh

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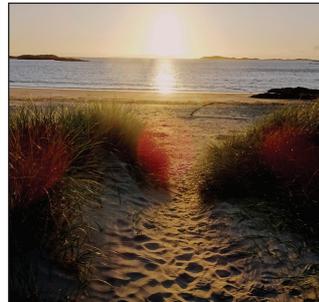




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Cover photograph: Mass with the parishioners of the Holy Family Latin Parish in Gaza © Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. See article pp. 10-11.

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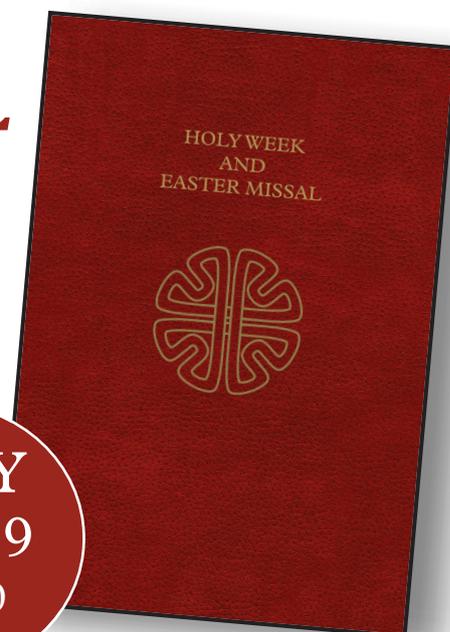
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# Editorial

## Musings on Evangelisation

Fr Chris Hayden  
Editor



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### Editor

Fr Chris Hayden

Email [intercom@catholicbishops.ie](mailto:intercom@catholicbishops.ie)

### Assistant to the Editor

Oisín Walsh

Email [owalsh@catholicbishops.ie](mailto:owalsh@catholicbishops.ie)

Catholic Communications Office,

Columba Centre, Maynooth,

Co Kildare, Ireland

Tel +353 (0) 1 505 3055

Fax +353 (0) 1 601 6401

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What does it mean, to evangelise? Every preacher, catechist and pastoral worker can answer that question. Each of us has a fundamental sense of the task, and of the strengths and limitations we bring to it. But what does it mean to *have evangelised*? That is a trickier question, but an important one just the same. How can we know that we have done what we were called to do? Is there any way of verifying this?

These are important questions, not so that we might rate ourselves, or gauge success or failure, but so that we might be somewhat strategic, applying our energies and resources in the best possible way. If the task of evangelisation is not to be hit and miss, then we need some criteria that indicate when it has been done, what it means to *have evangelised*.

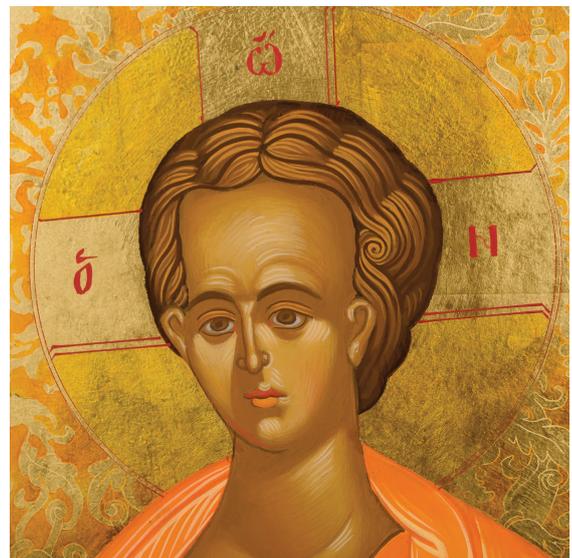
Near the end of his letter to the Romans (15:19), St Paul makes the daring claim to have completed the task of evangelisation, from Jerusalem right round to Illyricum (roughly, present-day Albania). Commentators tell us that he is engaging in hyperbole. That may be true, yet the passage in Romans makes it clear that Paul feels the peace and freedom of knowing that he has achieved what he set out to do, that in a given time and place, the task of evangelisation can be said to have been completed. Evangelisation, Paul implies, is not a completely open-ended task; to evangelise is not to run towards an ever-receding horizon; it is not to be given over to endless frustration.

That said, the sense that we never fully do what we're supposed to be doing is common among clergy. Many of us are far more aware of the interruptions than we are of the project, of the administration than of the ministry. We should not, I think, resort to the cliché that the interruptions *are* the task. Some of them may well be, but not all of them are. We need to be strategic as well as immediate, to make long-term plans as well as complete short-term tasks.

Paul's insistence that evangelisation can, in some sense and in some measure, be regarded as having been completed, both comforts and challenges. It brings the comfort of assurance that there is a broader, longer-term, more far-reaching task before us, and that we need not be confined to the endlessly immediate and urgent. It brings us the comfort of knowing that if we encourage a young man to consider the priesthood, we are not dissembling when we talk about proclaiming the gospel. We should, Paul's bigger picture assures us, be confident that our young friend will, if he chooses this way of life, do considerably more evangelisation than administration.

The challenges are even more obvious. If evangelisation is something actually achievable, rather than an impossibility from which we take refuge by engaging only in lesser but verifiable tasks, then we need to be planning its achievement! We are flesh and blood; we live in the real world, practical matters must be attended to, and yes – the word 'administration' incorporates the word 'ministry.' But for all that, we need long-term evangelistic strategy more, not less, than we need short-term administrative tactics.

It's a tall order. There is no silver bullet. Yet it's a conversation we must be having, with St Paul's assurance that we are not required to achieve the impossible.



Chris Hayden

# Prayers and Reflections for April

## Jesus is Condemned to Death

The first station is for all those innocents who have no one to stand up for them. It is the station of 'bad news'; and hearing the words, 'You're on your own.' We see in the act of Pilate washing his hands the sacrament of irresponsibility and the refusal to uphold the cause of the innocent. All of the mock trials by corrupt judicial systems, the miscarriages of justice deliberate or unintended, summary executions in countries let by tyrants or dictators, those condemned on death row and the babes in the womb who have the death sentence passed on them before they see the light of day, all meet at this first station of condemnation.

*Pass it on! Ronan Drury 1924-2017. Selected Writings*  
Paul Clayton-Lea and Maria Flood, eds., p. 97.

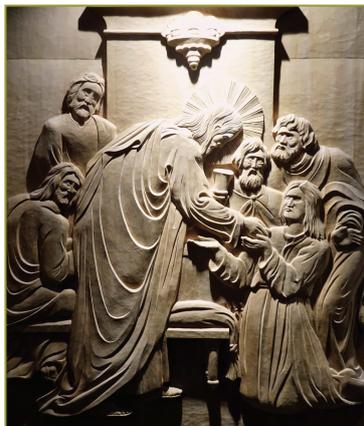


Photo: the Editor



## The Cross Before Me

Good Friday puts the cross before me and challenges me not to look away. If I have followed Jesus' footsteps to Calvary, I do not have to fear because I, like him, am confident in God's enduring presence. Wherever there is suffering or pain, I seek the face of Jesus. I ask him for the strength I need to be a sign of hope wherever there is despair, to be a presence of love where it is most needed.

*Sacred Space for Lent 2020*  
The Irish Jesuits. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2019, p. 96.

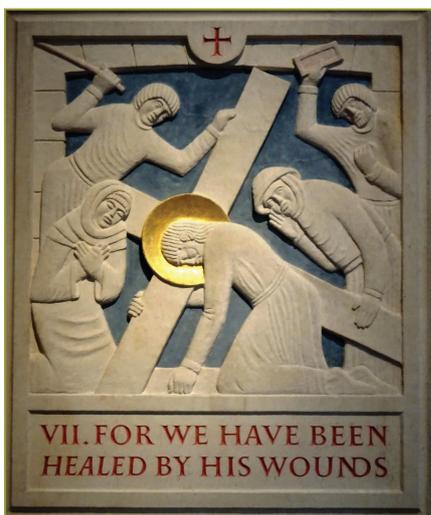


Photo: the Editor

## Mary at the Cross

Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith;  
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own 'yes'  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.  
Filled with Christ's presence,  
you brought joy to John the Baptist,  
making him exult in the womb of his mother.  
Brimming over with joy,  
you sang of the great things done by God.  
Standing at the foot of the cross  
with unyielding faith,  
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,  
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit  
so that the evangelising Church might be born.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 288



## Resurrection – Encounter – Mandate

A central feature of the resurrection accounts in the Gospels is the *encounter*: Jesus meets Mary Magdalene, then the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the eleven apostles and 'more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time' (1 Corinthians 15:6). Each one of these would have told the story for the rest of their lives; we may feel far away historically from them, but in the communion saints, we're all one family. The Risen Lord continues to bring his friends together, sometimes in the most unexpected of ways. With Jesus, every encounter leads to a new mission: when we come across him, everything is changed. We might prefer to plod on as before, minding our own business, yet as Peter and John stated fearlessly to the Sanhedrin, 'we cannot promise to stop proclaiming what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). We see how Jesus gives a mandate to those to whom he appears: 'Go and find the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (John 20:17).

*Learning to Love. Journeys through Life with the Rosary*  
Nigel Woolen, Dublin: Veritas, 2018, p. 115.



## Joyful Evangelisers

May the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.'

Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 80



# Get Connected

## Catholics #BeKind online

Ms Brenda Drumm  
Communications Officer  
Catholic Communications Office  
Columba Centre  
Maynooth  
Co Kildare  
Email [bdrumm@catholicbishops.ie](mailto:bdrumm@catholicbishops.ie)



**#BeKind** – it seems the simplest and most obvious of all the life choices we can make for ourselves. It's a common social media hashtag these days, and while it is a noble message, it's sad to live in a world where we have to remind ourselves to be kind online and in real life. Kindness should be our default.

Research shows that being kind to others can, among other benefits, make not only the recipients of said kindness happier, but also provide those issuing such kindness a mood boost. It's little wonder, then, that random acts of kindness have become an increasingly meaningful currency online and offline. The fact is, people love doing them, love receiving them, and even love just seeing others lend a helping hand.

Trolling, key board warriors, anonymous commentators being mean for the sake of it, children being bullied, celebrities being trolled and bullied off social media, people of different views being shouted down online... and all this harassment translating from online to real life. How has it all come to this?

What can we do as people of God, as the faithful, as Church in the online spaces, to spread kindness and love, to be a balm?

The answer: #BeKind

Social media sites in particular offer us an amazing opportunity to share the love and joy of the Gospel. They also offer us opportunities to converse with and to learn from people of different walks of life, of different cultures and belief systems. As people of faith, we should be understanding and empathic, and be kind to others even if we don't fully understand their perspective. We may not always agree, but if we respond with negativity and nastiness, we are taking the conversation down a direction it can be difficult to come back from. We also need to think about the example we are giving to the next generation.

There are five simple things we can do as people of faith in the online spaces:

1. Positivity: Post positive messages, including random acts of kindness.
2. Honesty and Transparency: Make sure you have your facts right and are transparent about who you are online.

*The Internet causes billions of images to appear on millions of computer monitors around the planet. From this galaxy of sight and sound will the face of Christ emerge and the voice of Christ be heard? – Pope Saint John Paul II*



3. Tone: Think about the tone you use. Make sure you are not attempting to pass off offensive comments through attempts at humour. Do not sound off online. Ask yourself if you would be happy for the people you love to read what you are posting online.
4. Understand social media: Remember that while social media is an exciting forum and presents opportunities, the value of face-to-face relationships should never be forgotten.
5. Be Kind: Make kindness and charity your default.

Social media offers exciting possibilities to share the Gospel and to interact with people we might not otherwise connect with. Social media also takes us into territory where we need to think carefully. It is interactive, conversational and open-ended, and happens in a public space. As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online. Interacting through online media should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness.

In a recent World Communications Day message, Pope Francis said that forming strong communities, even online, requires people who are 'animated by feelings of trust' and are pursuing a common objective. 'The community as a network of solidarity requires mutual listening and dialogue based on the responsible use of language.'

And Pope Francis cautioned that while social media can promote 'encounter,' they also can 'increase self-isolation,' a risk to which young people are particularly vulnerable.

Opposing cyberbullying, isolation and division, the Pope said that Christians are called to use online resources 'to invest in relationships and to affirm the interpersonal nature of our humanity, including in and through the network.'

What is more, Pope Francis said that when online, 'we Christians are called to manifest that communion which marks our identity as believers. Faith itself, in fact, is a relationship, an encounter, and under the impetus of God's love, we can communicate, welcome and understand the gift of the other and respond to it.'

# Rejoicing in our Easter Faith



Photo: istockphoto.com

‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?’ Saint Paul’s no-nonsense rhetorical question to the Christians of Rome is crying out for the obvious answer: ‘Of course we do!’ Yet the very fact that Paul needs to pose such a question hints that he feels the Romans, by the way they are living, cannot answer the question sincerely. These words, which we will hear during the Paschal Vigil, are now addressed to Christians who gather in our parishes, as the great Triduum of Christ’s Passion and Passover reaches its climax. Thus the question goes a-begging. What answer can we give? Can this Easter be a time when we can plunge once more into the mystery of the Cross and so experience what it is, even now, to taste the glory of the resurrection?

During the Synod on the Word of God which was held in Rome in 2012, Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, who was then the Archbishop of Ranchi in India, told a story about a young Hindu boy who had gotten to know some Catholic priests through education provided by the Church. He was an enquiring young fellow who wanted to know more about what these Christians believed. So, one of the priests gave him a copy of the Gospels and told him to go off and read them and then

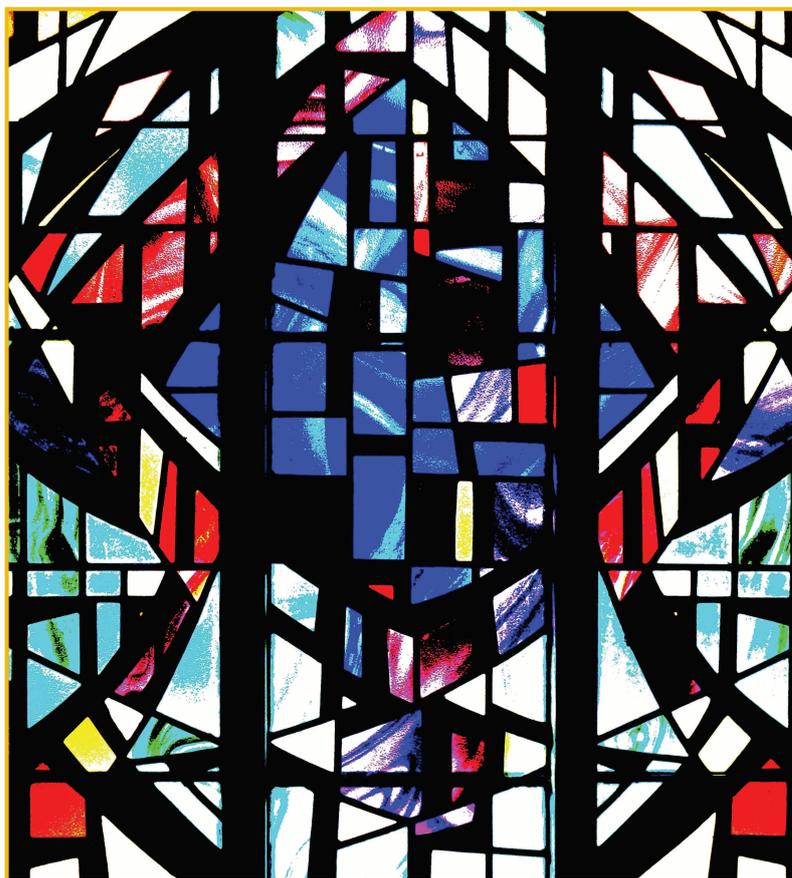
come back with his questions. The boy went away and came back flabbergasted and with an air of recrimination. He wanted to be sure he had got something right, so he demanded clarification. ‘Jesus is risen from the dead?’ he asked; ‘I mean, really risen from the dead?’ The priests were pleased to see how animated he was and calmly, even nonchalantly replied, ‘Yes!’ ‘Why didn’t you tell me’ the boy shouted at them, astonished that this was not the first thing they would have announced!

*Why didn’t you tell me?* Is it possible that somehow we have neglected letting our people know that one most important and life-changing thing, that Jesus the Crucified is risen from the dead? History tells us that at the end of every speech he gave in the Roman Senate, Cato the Elder would conclude by saying ‘Carthage must be destroyed!’ He wasn’t going to let people forget or ignore what he felt was the most important issue. It strikes me that every time we speak, preach, teach or engage in debate, our first words should be ‘Jesus is risen from the dead’, if not said out loud then at least to ourselves so that we know what underpins our celebration of the Paschal Mystery and why it is we invite others to come and share this mystery with us. It’s good news; good news is attractive, good news invites people to share in the story,

and what a story we have to tell over these Paschal days.

The even more wonderful truth is that the baptised are already a part of that story. As Paul reminds us, we have been plunged into the mystery of Christ’s death, we have passed through the gates of the underworld with him and now we share in the newness of life that Saint Paul speaks of.

For us to enter into the fullness of our baptismal faith, a change of perspective will help. Rather than looking into the empty tomb, let’s turn around and look out from the tomb, from the perspective of the crucified and risen Lord. This year we hear Matthew’s account of the discovery of the empty tomb. An angel descends, there is an earthquake, he rolls away the stone, sits on it and leaves those guarding the tomb for dead. But amid all this noise and the brilliance of his apparel, we should remember that this is not the resurrection. That has already happened in the dead of night. God’s creative word was spoken into the belly of the earth and by the power of the Spirit, this Jesus who was crucified was raised to life. The Slovenian theologian, Nataša Govekar, writes, ‘The Christian, in virtue of baptism, has already left death behind and no longer looks at the world *toward the tomb*, but *from the open tomb out*. From the moment Christ entered the



Stained Glass Windows from the Church of Our Lady of the Wayside, Clonmore, Co Carlow

tomb the earth itself was changed: it became the holy ground that guards and gives growth even to our bodies. It has been fertilized by a grain of wheat, an incorruptible seed and it is on the point of giving birth to risen humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Peter Chrysologus said that the angel didn't roll away the stone in order to let Jesus out! That had already happened. Rather the stone was rolled away to help our faith. The man with the golden tongue goes on: 'Pray, brothers and sisters, so that the angel might now descend and roll away all the hardness of our hearts, open our blocked feelings and witness to the fact that Christ has risen, even in our souls, because just as the heart in which Christ lives and reigns is like heaven, so the breast in which Christ is yet enclosed dead and buried is like a tomb.'<sup>2</sup>

Life according to our baptism, as announced by Paul, leads us to be grafted into Christ. Our sinfulness and suffering is crucified with him. This pouring, or better yet, plunging, into the baptismal water thrusts us into the bowels of the earth and we arise to be clothed and anointed as God's new creation. 'O truly blessed night, when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and divine to the human.'<sup>3</sup>

At a time when the flame of faith seems to be wavering, and the Lord's

disciples are inclined to remain closed in the safety of what they know and what works for them, at a time when many see nothing but 'ruin and calamity in the present conditions of human society',<sup>4</sup> now more than ever, we need to look out from that open tomb and go into the world telling people that the crucified one is risen as he said he would. This is the outward-looking, missionary approach proposed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. The joy of the Gospel is born from the announcement of the resurrection. The joy of the Gospel is made flesh in the lives of the Lord's disciples who carry this message into the world.

To live our baptismal calling to its fullest extent, we also need to realise that baptism does not act as a sort of anaesthetic, shielding us from the pain and heartbreak of this world. It does not do that, but it gives our pain and heartbreak a new context, an infinite horizon. That is why we should pay close attention to the words with which the whole great event of the Triduum opens: 'We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered.'<sup>5</sup>

While we journey with the Lord in these Paschal days, we will see him break bread, pour wine, wash feet. We will see

him handed over to a kangaroo court and be condemned to die. We will watch him in the long hours of his dying and see him placed in the tomb and with the women we will go there early in the morning and hear something marvellous: Jesus the Crucified is risen! We should glory in his Cross, for all has been changed. Baptised into his death and resurrection, we now have a God's eye view from the tomb, a crucified and resurrected perspective.

'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?'

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nataša Govekar, *La vita in Cristo*, Lipa, ROMA 2015, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Chrysologus, *Sermons*, 75:4.

<sup>3</sup> *Exsultet*.

<sup>4</sup> Pope John XXIII, Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>5</sup> Entrance Antiphon, Holy Thursday, Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

Fr Enda Murphy is a priest of the Diocese of Kilmore and is currently an official at the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.



# Visions for the Future: The Prospects for Equality, Justice and Peace in the Holy Land

**W**e recently joined with eleven other Bishops from across Europe and North America on this year's Holy Land Coordination group visit. Mandated by the Holy See, the Holy Land Coordination meets every January to act in solidarity with the Christian community as it experiences intense political and socio-economic pressure in the Holy Land. The bishops do not seek privileges for Christians, but dignity and justice for them and for others in similar conflicts.

Meeting with communities in Gaza and the West Bank, we were moved by the care of the local Catholic Church for the people. Catholic churches, congregations, groups and communities provide much-needed education and healthcare services. The local Church's commitment to peace and justice in very challenging circumstances is a powerful witness to the Gospel of life and of hope. Through Trócaire, parishes in Ireland contribute vital supports for people living in this region.

We witnessed, through these ministries to young people, the elderly, sick, and unemployed, the Christian community's practical commitment to, and love for, the people of Palestine. Their courage and resilience are inspiring and we pray that the light of their faith and work may not be diminished by the increasing difficulties in the region.

Bishops on the trip encouraged Christians in their home countries to pray for and support this mission. Practically speaking, this support can come in the form of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Pilgrims should take the time to try to meet with local Christian communities who are the living stones of the Christian faith in the Holy Land, and to visit and stay in Palestine, thereby providing important human and economic support to the local population.

Despite the hope we received in witnessing the great resilience of the people, we were saddened and moved by the plight of the people living in Gaza, in particular, and the daily suffering and



Photo: Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales

Mass with the parishioners of the Holy Family Latin Parish in Gaza

striving to survive which they endure. In Gaza, 80% of the population are living on humanitarian assistance, there is a 50% unemployment rate and a sense of hopelessness for the future among young people who see conditions deteriorating and hope fading. Trócaire's work in Gaza includes supporting families, particularly women, who are living in poverty and at risk of violence. Trócaire also carry out campaigns to change the political environment which has allowed the breach of human rights to continue in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The *Occupied Territories Bill*, which would ban trade between Ireland and illegal settlements, is one such example of how Ireland can respect the rights of those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The Christian community is a small minority in the Holy Land and we were concerned to hear about its continued decline. Christians are often doubly isolated because they are not Jewish Israelis or Palestinian Muslims. We thank God for them and pray that they may have the courage to continue to practice and witness to their faith in such difficult circumstances. They are the living link to Christ and his legacy in the Holy Land.

Over the 20 years of Holy Land Coordination visits, Bishops have seen hopes for a solution dimming. The construction of settlements and the separation wall are destroying any prospect of two states existing in peace. Local Bishops have warned that people in the Holy Land are facing further

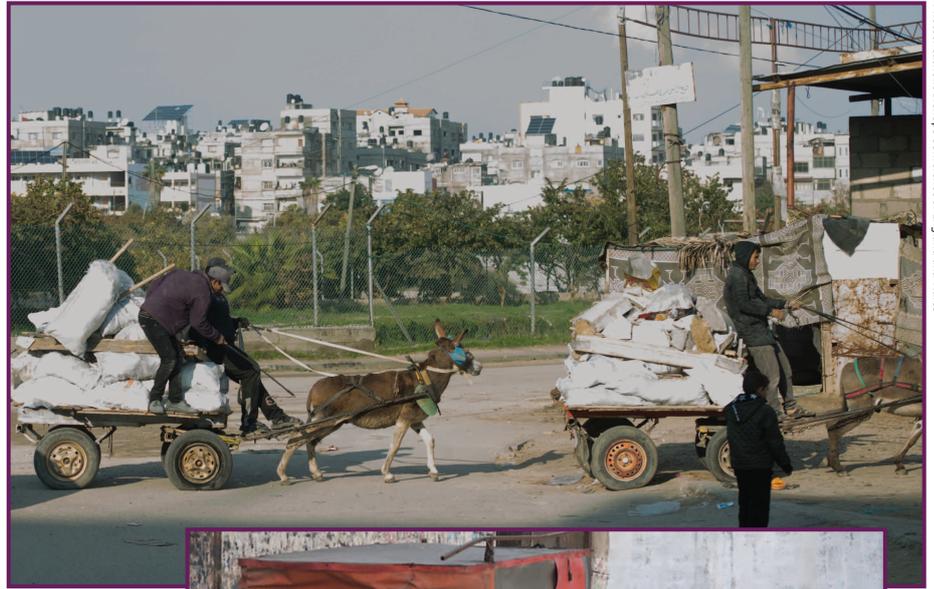
‘evaporation of hope for a durable solution.’ On their trips, the Bishops have learned of the beauty and wisdom of the Jewish people and their faith, and they recognise their homeland of Israel. However, this should not mean that other peoples, religions and states do not have equal rights to coexist in peace. Despite the Israeli settlements being declared illegal under international law, the international community is not working hard enough to broker a workable solution in this region, one that respects the rights and legitimacy of both the Israelis and Palestinians. In the meantime, each year the visiting Bishops encounter the suffering and hopelessness of the Palestinian people, as well as increased fear, suspicion and resentment on all sides.

The local Catholic Bishops lament the international community’s failure to help realise justice and peace here in the place of Christ’s birth. We therefore call on the new Government of Ireland to work harder to build and maintain peace in the region. It must commit to working towards a just resolution of the ongoing conflict, to ensure the human rights of all are respected and upheld, to reflect on the daily suffering of many living in this region and to make its alleviation a priority. The Holy Land Coordination 2020 stated that ‘governments must do more to meet their responsibilities for upholding international law and protecting human dignity.’ Putting it more strongly, they stated that in some cases international governments ‘have become actively complicit in the evils of conflict and occupation.’

We know only too well in Ireland the price to be paid for conflict and political and sectarian division. We do not want the young people of Palestine today to be a lost generation. They deserve, as all others do, the right to education, to explore their full potential and to live lives of political and religious freedom, without being surrounded daily by walls and fear.

We implore our government to help build a new political solution rooted in human dignity for all. While this must ultimately be shaped by the peoples of the Holy Land in dialogue, there is an urgent need for the Government of Ireland to play its part by:

- Insisting upon the application of international law;
- Following the Holy See’s lead in recognising the State of Palestine;



Gaza city, where 80% of the population are living on humanitarian assistance and there is a 50% unemployment rate.



- Addressing the security concerns of Israel and the right of all to live in safety;
- Rejecting political or economic support for settlements;
- Resolutely opposing acts of violence or abuses of human rights by any side.

We strongly believe from what we have witnessed during our visits that, in taking these steps, the international community can meaningfully stand in solidarity with those Israelis and Palestinians who are refusing to give up their non-violent struggle for justice, peace and human rights. As Bishops, we are morally obliged to remain vocal on this matter of promoting the faith and protecting basic human rights.

Since we have returned from the Holy Land, the ‘Peace-to-Prosperity’ plan has been presented by the American administration as a means of ending the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. However, we believe, as the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land has said, that no such plan should be presented without the agreement of the two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians. Any proposals must also have as their foundation stone, the equal rights and

dignity of both. The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land has stated that the ‘Peace-to-Prosperity’ plan ‘does not give dignity and rights to the Palestinians. It is to be considered a unilateral initiative, since it endorses almost all the demands of one side, the Israeli one, and its political agenda. On the other hand, this plan does not really take into considerations the right demands of the Palestinian people to their homeland, rights and dignified life.’ Their fear is that presenting such a plan will increase tensions and violence, while the prospect of a solution dims.

The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land has called on the world churches to pray for the Holy Land, to work towards justice and peace and to be the voice of the voiceless. At this time, we join our prayers to theirs.

*Bishop Alan McGuckian  
Bishop of Raphoe and Chair of the Council for  
Justice and Peace  
Bishop Noel Treanor,  
Bishop of Down and Connor and  
Chair of the Commission for Social Issues and  
International Affairs*

# The Key to Ecological Conversion

The Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, published in 2015, and *Querida Amazonia*, the Post-Synodal Exhortation published in February of this year, tap readily into the increasing awareness that young people have of the enormity of the ecological crisis that we now face.

*Querida Amazonia* ('Dear Amazon'), following the 2019 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region, has been described as a love-letter from the Pope to the Amazon peoples. The Amazon tropical rain forest is not only a region of immense natural beauty; it also provides a fifth of the world's oxygen. While the Synod was taking place in Rome, vast regions of the Amazon were burning because of fires started maliciously. Cattle ranchers, acting illegally and eager to expand their grazing lands, have destroyed almost a fifth of the forest in the past fifty years. The result is the irrevocable destruction not only of a region of unique natural beauty but also of the way of life of indigenous peoples, bringing a whole array of social problems, from sexual exploitation to alcoholism to family breakdown.

In recent years, missionaries have been at the vanguard of efforts to protect the Amazon. It wasn't always so. During the Synod last October, prayers of reparation were offered 'for the mistakes made as a Church and as humanity; especially through the abuses of colonization, the systematic violence to human rights and the ethnocide carried out on so many peoples throughout the continent.'

## Teaching on Ecology since Vatican II

The Church's teaching on ecology has come a long way. Yet its 'coming of age' didn't begin with Pope Francis. According to Donal Dorr, the 1971 World Synod of Bishops first 'linked an 'option for the poor' with an 'option for the earth' – though it did not use these terms.'

Pope John Paul II referred to the ecological crisis several times during his

26-year pontificate. His 1990 'Message for the World Day of Peace' was a decisive step forward for the Catholic Church, in which he not only drew attention to issues like the depletion of the ozone layer, urbanisation, deforestation, the use of chemicals and their effects on the environment, but he also called for Catholics to respond by adopting a simplicity of lifestyle in their everyday lives. He also highlighted the need for a resolution of the ecological crisis at international and inter-governmental level, a call we would hear reiterated by Pope Francis 25 years later, in *Laudato Si'*.

Dorr is critical of the way in which John Paul II tended to see 'the value of the rest of the natural world almost exclusively in terms of its value for humans,' rather than presenting the earth as possessing a dignity and value in and of itself. At the same time, he acknowledges that John Paul II paved the way for Pope Benedict XVI's later emphasis on the earth as a precious gift. John Paul II was also the first pope to speak of the need for an 'ecological conversion,' which he did in a General Audience in 2001.

In turn, Pope Benedict XVI set the stage for all the major issues that Pope Francis subsequently unfolds in *Laudato Si'*. In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) he writes that 'the environment is God's gift to everyone and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes.'

## All aspects of ecology are integrally linked

It is no coincidence that at key points in *Laudato Si'* and *Querida Amazonia*, Francis relies upon his immediate predecessor. In *Laudato Si'* Francis develops Benedict XVI's position that the ecology of nature

must include human ecology: 'the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations, and so forth.' It follows, he says, that 'the deterioration of nature is closely connected to the culture which shapes human coexistence' (*Laudato Si'* 6). In *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis writes,

In the Amazon region, one better understands the words of Benedict XVI when he said that, 'alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a 'human' ecology which in turn demands a 'social' ecology. All this means that humanity... must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology' ( 41).

This paragraph presents the distinctive insight of the Church in addressing the ecological crisis: that all aspects of ecology, the ecology of the natural world, human ecology and social ecology are integral. They stand or fall together.

## Young people, ecology and the 'God bit'

My experience of teaching *Laudato Si'* to third-level students, especially future primary school teachers, is that they will readily endorse certain aspects of the Encyclical. For instance, they find the weight of science that lies behind *Laudato Si'* compelling and are not surprised to hear that it has been widely acclaimed as an incontrovertible analysis of the ecological crisis. They also very much welcome the focus on our current duty to protect the planet for future generations.

They recognise, too, that we in the West are living at the expense of those in the global South. They are open to reflecting on their own complicity in environmental degradation because of their consumer habits, and take seriously the need to be personally more responsible. They endorse wholeheartedly the critique of governments and the demand for a



Previous page: The Veins of a Continent – Amazonian waterways. Above: Former Amazonian Rain Forest

global political solution to the ecological crisis.

Student teachers are happy to develop lesson plans for the pupils they teach that communicate the above aspects of *Laudato Si'*. However, they struggle with what we might call the 'God bit.' I put this specific challenge to them: in my lessons, am I reflecting sufficiently the distinctively Christian basis for caring for the earth and the poor of the earth? Could an atheist environmentalist, for instance, teach what I am teaching?

It has become clear to me that, in many cases, the reason they struggle with this is because of a lack of development of their own personal faith.

### A personal relationship with God as Creator

It is welcome that students learn so much from *Laudato Si'*. Furthermore, we can and should see God's grace at work in people who care passionately for the environment but do not recognise or accept that there is any faith dimension to what they do. There is a danger, however, that as Catholic pastors and educators we would settle merely for establishing common ground with others concerned about the ecological crisis.

Young people today suffer immensely because of the false 'doctrine' of autonomy. Their culture teaches them that they are free to be or to do anything they wish as long as it doesn't harm anyone else. This is considered the only absolute moral principle. Life is understood fundamentally as self-invention. How life begins, how life ends, marriage, sexual and gender identity, can all be redefined and manipulated. Yet if

human and social ecology can be manipulated, at will, to personal and selfish ends, why not nature as a whole, including our planet?

Older generations, who felt oppressed by a constricting and over-bearing moral code when they were growing up, might welcome and even envy the apparent autonomy of today's youth. Yet increasingly, we are aware of the precarious state of so many young people's mental health, and how in too many cases their sense of self-worth has no foundation other than the number of 'likes' they get on social media. We need to ask ourselves why 'industries' that engage in resilience-training, well-being and mindfulness are burgeoning. They are trying to fix something that's not working.

### The key to ecological conversion

Pope Francis has repeatedly taught that 'the book of nature is one and indivisible' (*Laudato Si'* 6), and that there are 'rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator' (*Laudato Si'* 71) that must be recovered and respected. This passage is particularly important:

The acceptance of our body as a gift from God is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept your body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or

masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognise myself in an encounter with someone who is different' (*Laudato Si'* 155).

The task of evangelisation is to help young people realise that their personal happiness is dependent upon them accepting the rhythms inscribed in nature by its – and their – Creator. When students realise this, and I have had occasional such light-bulb moments in class, there is an almost audible sigh of relief as they realise that life is a gift, that self-worth is inherent and that they have inviolable God-given dignity. So, life becomes a journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, which is also acceptance and surrender to the mystery of God, rather than the more fragile and risky project of self-invention.

This recognition and insight is key to ecological conversion, because acceptance of one's own dependence leads to recognition of the interdependence of all creatures, and the need and desire to care for our fellow creatures and our common home.

### NOTE

'<https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/-fragile-world-church-teaching-ecology-and-pope-francis>.

Fr Eamonn Conway  
is head of the  
Department of Theology  
and Religious Studies,  
Mary Immaculate College,  
Limerick



# Assisted Suicide: Compassion and Choice or Callousness and Coercion?

An American organisation, *Compassion and Choice*, formerly the Hemlock Society, has adopted an appealing and catchy slogan to promote their campaign for assisted suicide. The words 'compassion' and 'choice' resonate with modern society since their antonyms are cruelty and coercion. There is a danger that this language may help shut down the debate and generate a false impression that only religious people, driven by paternalism and imbued with the belief in a God of punishment, will have any objection to this practice. But there are powerful reasons why even atheists may balk at the normalisation of assisted suicide. As clinical psychiatrist and ethicist Dr. Mark Komrad points out, euthanasia is a violation of an ethical injunction that predates Christianity, with the Hippocratic Oath of ancient Greece prohibiting it. Referring to psychiatrists in particular, he said 'We prevent suicide, we do not provide suicide.'

The religious arguments against assisted suicide are well known to the readership of *Intercom*. The secular arguments are generally less well appreciated. It should not be forgotten that many powerful organisations, such as the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, the World Medical Association (WMA, formed in the wake of the Holocaust) and a raft of others, including the Israeli Medical Association, are opposed. However the British Medical Association is neutral, while the Canadian Medical Association favours assisted suicide and, along with the Royal Dutch Medical Association, has campaigned for the WMA to adopt a neutral position.

Turning to the secular arguments, one is that the human life is precious and should be valued. All humans deserve to be treated as such, irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, social status or their capacity for achievement. Those who are frail or elderly should not be treated in an inferior manner when it comes to respecting their right to lifelong care until nature takes its inevitable course. The proponents of assisted suicide may well counter this, arguing that giving an individual choice in how they die is

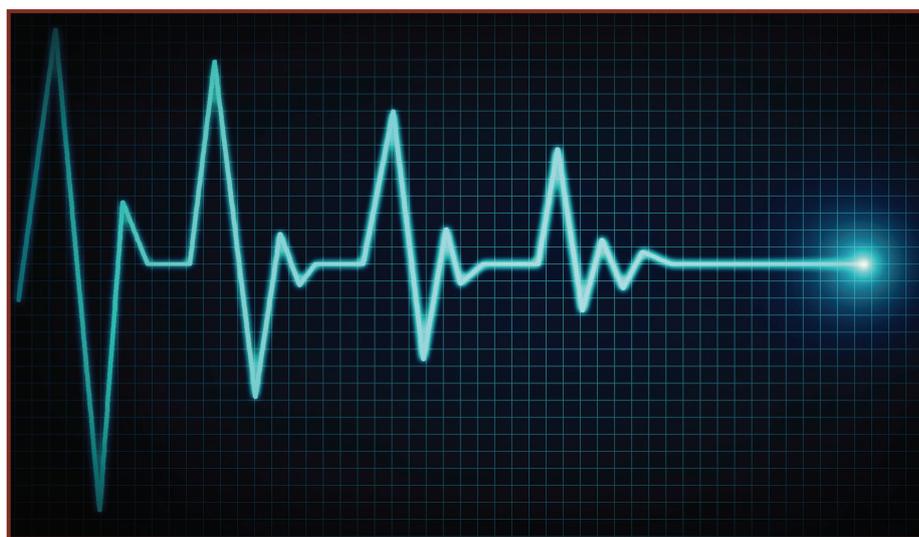


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actually showing them respect rather than the contrary. This omits the unintended consequence that subtle coercion may remove choice from the frail and elderly if they are groomed into perceiving themselves as a burden, especially if assisted suicide becomes socially normalised. Living in a continent which faces a huge ageing population, it is unarguable that such a solution would have some appeal to governments struggling to deal with the pension crisis and with health resource problems.

behaviour is minimally tolerated it will open more doors and extend the criteria for general acceptance of that behaviour. There is some evidence of this in respect of assisted suicide, as its use has extended from those who were terminally ill and had unmanageable pain, through to conditions that were difficult for individuals to deal with emotionally, such as motor neurone disease, then further reaching others with conditions such as depression, and finally, perhaps most cruel of all, to children who may be

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*How can the poor person living alone in a tower block, compromised by emphysema, have a fruitful, meaningful life when viewed from the perspective of a wealthy doctor living in a leafy suburb, unless one clings to the view that of itself every life is worthy of life?*

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This utilitarian approach is very much at variance with the dogma of respect. For example, the philosopher Immanuel Kant stated that human beings should be regarded as a value in themselves and not as a means to achieving another goal, such as reducing healthcare costs. Human beings should also value themselves in all their vulnerability and frailty, and shun the pressure of self-deprecation and defeatism.

An argument against the introduction of assisted suicide is the slippery slope hypothesis. This proposes that once the slope has commenced, it will only get steeper. This implies that once a

autistic or suffering with depression. Canada is to the fore in trying to extend Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) to children.

Another secular concern is that MAID cedes too much responsibility and power to doctors who may begin to assume godlike authority where life and death are concerned. Their narcissism might run riot, generating singular decisions that ending lives prematurely would be the best option for some, who know no better. The nebulous question of quality of life crops up here and it may spur power-seeking doctors to decide who has and has not a good quality of life. In other



words, identifying those whose life is unworthy of life. How can the poor person living alone in a tower block, compromised by emphysema, have a fruitful, meaningful life when viewed from the perspective of a wealthy doctor living in a leafy suburb, unless one clings to the view that of itself every life is worthy of life? Deviation from that value would rapidly unleash eugenic euthanasia.

Consider how a patient would feel, knowing that their doctor supported and/or practised euthanasia. Could you trust that doctor to unquestioningly offer the best treatment possible, up to the natural end of life? Could you trust them to have your best interests at heart? And might the day come when, despite your protestations, you come under the doctor's needle, as happened recently in Holland?

The question of advance directives needs to be considered also. If an individual at a time of full or near full health makes a decision that at a certain point in the course of their illness their life should be ended, surely there can be no quibble about accepting that person's wishes? However, this argument neglects the reality of the medical evidence that as people progress through different stages of an illness, their level of psychological adaptation changes. Impairments that previously appeared impossible to live with, over time are accommodated and accepted. We know that human beings are resilient and that adhering rigidly to advance directives without making allowances for the ability to adapt to

changed circumstances and to factor in the inner strength that people possess, is in itself disrespectful of the human condition.

Another of the emotive arguments is that unexpected suicide among cancer patients can be reduced when sufferers are aware that assistance with death in the face of intractable pain is available. This knowledge, according to the arguments, defers the rush to suicide and reduces the desperation that leads to suicide. Thus, the availability of assisted suicide actually reduced the actual suicide rates, even when those dying with assistance are excluded from the data. This can be tested by studying the suicide rates in states where it has been legalised and comparing rates of suicide before and after the legal changes.

Professor David Patton, from the Industrial Economics Department of Nottingham University, compared rates of non-assisted suicide in Washington and Oregon between 1990 and 2013. The study, published in 2015 in the *Southern Medical Journal*, found that there was a 6.3% increase in total suicides (assisted and non-assisted) and no decrease in non-assisted suicides, as claimed by proponents of the measure.

One of the arguments against physician-assisted suicide is that it would be hypocritical to, on the one hand, spend millions on suicide prevention initiatives while at the same time recommending suicide to others as a way out of their turmoil. What type of message is this, that is so empty of hope

and marked by pessimism towards our patients? Does this give the wrong message to vulnerable people? Should not those who are requesting assistance be referred for psychiatric evaluation, given the data on the high prevalence of depression in this group? And of course the answer is yes. A further question is whether assisted suicide increases suicide contagion when it is presented as a viable option in difficult situations. The Oregon Health Authority Data (2015) showed that as of 2012, the Oregon suicide rate was 42% higher than the national average, and this data did not include cases of assisted suicide. Further studies in other states on this question are continuing.

As the threat to the innate value of human life continues apace, it is crucial to be well informed, and one of the very helpful resources is the Charlotte Lozier Institute and the work of Richard Doerflinger.<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> See [www.lozierinstitute.org](http://www.lozierinstitute.org). For an interview with Richard Doerflinger on Physician-Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia, see <https://lozierinstitute.org/qa-with-the-scholars-physician-assisted-suicide-and-euthanasia/>. - Ed.

*Patricia Casey is Consultant Psychiatrist, Mater Hospital Dublin and Professor Emeritus at UCD. She is a columnist with the Irish Independent*



# Being Ready to Challenge Legal Recognition of Surrogacy

Surrogacy is an area of wide-ranging complexity, acting as it does as a kind of nexus for a whole host of other ethical concerns. This article will touch upon only some of them and even then, only tangentially. Also, it is worth bearing in mind at the outset that despite the seriousness of the ethical judgments which they necessitate, our responses to male or female infertility, or the physiological inability of a partner to carry a child to birth, require a significant degree of pastoral and human sensitivity.

For many couples, coming to understand that they may never have a child except through measures associated with Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) is a devastating process that has often been compared to grief, comprehending as it does the possible loss of cherished hopes and dreams.

Previously it was the case that when confronted with this reality, many couples resorted to the adoption process, particularly inter-country adoption, as a means to bring a child into their lives. The reality now, however, is that in order to overcome these obstacles, an increasing number of people both nationally and internationally are availing of processes termed gestational surrogacy, and 'altruistic' gestational surrogacy. The rise of these practices is inextricably linked to the growth and accessibility of the IVF industry.

Gestational Surrogacy is where a couple utilise in vitro fertilisation to enable the transfer of an embryo created with their own gametes (or gametes from donors), to the uterus of another woman prepared to act as a 'surrogate mother' or 'gestational surrogate' for their own child.

A good working understanding of 'altruistic surrogacy' is captured in the definition provided by the Irish Bishop's *Code of Ethical Standards for Healthcare*:

'Surrogacy involves a woman carrying a baby throughout pregnancy, only to then hand that baby over to the 'commissioning couple.' Even when a direct payment for the child is not involved, the child is usually the



Photo: iStockphoto.com

subject of a financial agreement and is treated as a product to be delivered as part of that agreement.'

Two questions inevitably arise at this point. The first is whether or not gestational surrogacy can be considered a justified course of action by couples seeking to remedy issues relating either to their personal infertility or to an inability to carry a child to birth.

The second is whether or not so-called 'altruistic' surrogacy can be considered ethically permissible, particularly in light of the claim most frequently put forward by its supporters, that it is a self-sacrificing act performed for generous motives with no obvious pitfalls.

These questions are going to play an increasingly visible role in the life of our society, now that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health has published its Report on the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Bill.

This report gives the green light to the introduction and regulation of altruistic- or so called 'non-commercial' forms of surrogacy, while allowing for the reimbursement of 'reasonable expenses.' This is despite the fact that there is mounting international concern around allowing any kind of surrogacy to exist at all.

Rather alarmingly, our own Oireachtas Committee process, and the 'stakeholder' involvement which underpinned it, was essentially dismissive of the minority of witnesses who expressed a deeply cautionary perspective on the practice. The fact remains, however, that surrogacy, even 'altruistic' surrogacy is deeply and irredeemably problematical. According to the Irish Bishops *Code of Ethical Standards*, the primary reason for this is that surrogacy in any form is not consistent with the dignity of the person. For even when it is practised with the 'best of intentions,' advocates of altruistic surrogacy too often remain

blind to its potential to cause immeasurable harm to the child in later life.

This latter point is underlined by the observations provided by the Commission of the Bishops Conferences of the European Community (COMECE). COMECE highlight the unavoidable fact that in all kinds of surrogacy the function of maternity is divided between two or three women, the one who has carried the child and given birth, the one who brings up the child, and often also an oocyte donor:

‘This dissociation between the educational, genetic and physical dimensions (relating to the pregnancy and intrauterine relations) could upset the formation of the child’s personal identity and do him/her a very painful injury, especially if the conditions surrounding their birth are revealed belatedly.’

The Irish Bishops, for their part, highlight surrogacy’s potential to embed and normalise its role in legitimatising the exploitation of impoverished women. This is a perspective echoed in virtually all discussions around commercial surrogacy at the European level, and is one of the principal reasons that India has comprehensively banned the practice. Most recently, a consultative body established by the Swedish government recommended that both commercial and altruistic surrogacy be prohibited.

One of the main reasons why a blanket ban is a good idea and why the Oireachtas Report recommendation is so misguided, is that in practice, altruistic surrogacy does nothing but create a legislative loophole for the ‘sale of children’ through its creative manipulation of what constitutes ‘reasonable expenses.’ This in turn simply permits the continuance of an opening through which the exploitation of financially vulnerable women can continue, but this time with the ‘blessing’ of the state.

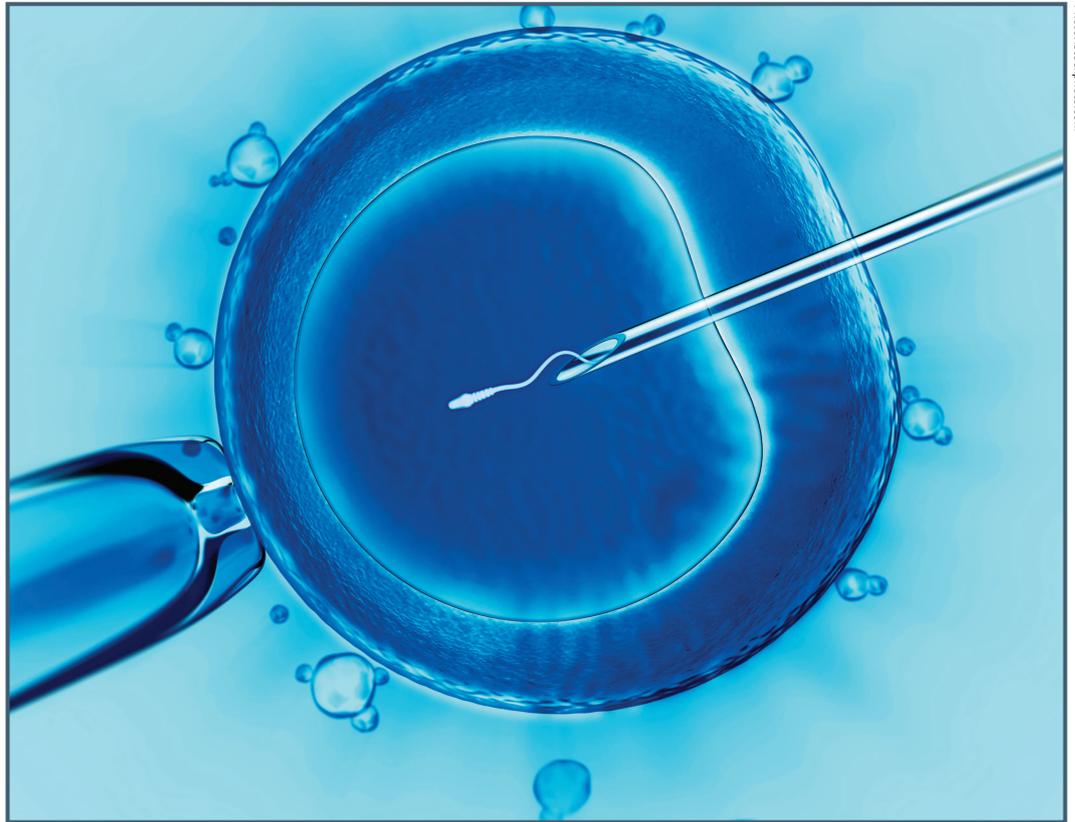


Photo: iStockphoto.com

The Oireachtas Committee Report claims that ‘consideration of the welfare and best interests of children born through AHR is a key principle underpinning the Scheme.’ The fact of the matter is, however, that nothing like genuine consideration appears to have been given to the potential of surrogacy in any form to dramatically escalate and deepen the division between the physical, psychological and moral elements which constitute the families concerned.

On a more poignant note, the European Bishops also point to advances in research on the development of the infant psyche, which ‘never cease to show us how detrimental it is to separate a very small infant from its mother, thus removing its first points of reference, causing it to live in real chaos. This breaking off can be devastating.’

It is a matter of the most profound and tragic irony, then, that such an outcome, so rightfully decried by the state in terms of the ‘forced adoption’ scandals, is now being celebrated as a public good with respect to surrogacy. These issues only serve to highlight the need for a renewed focus on, and indeed celebration of, adoption as a positive public good that respects the value of human life and the integrity of the family. Needless to say, adoption also avoids very many of the alarming ethical shortcomings associated with the different forms of

surrogacy and its use of IVF procedures, especially in terms of ‘surplus’ embryo production.

From a Catholic ethical perspective, surrogacy will present us with an opportunity to re-examine the circumstances in which such ‘non-traditional’ forms of adoption may take place; i.e. embryo adoption. This latter form of adoption occurs where the genetic parents have renounced their moral obligation to provide embryos with the possibility of gestation and development.

It is vitally important, therefore, that we make our concerns heard and felt when the legislation on Assisted Reproduction comes before the Dáil and Seanad for scrutiny. We should aim to do this in a way that is pastorally sensitive but ethically courageous. As Catholics, we have a rich tradition of thought on these matters. Ours is a voice that is needed now more than ever, especially as biotechnological prowess threatens to completely overshadow the fundamentals of human dignity.

David Mullins is a bioethics commentator with a special interest in the application of Christian ethics to emerging technology. david\_mullins77@hotmail.com

