



NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

It is hard to believe that a war is taking place in Europe. The brutal invasion of Ukraine has shocked all of us and, while we pray for a quick end, we also have a moral duty to help those who are affected by such violence. Here below you will find the appeal from FAFCE, the European federation of Catholic families organisations. FAFCE has direct contacts in Ukraine and some of them are known to Family Solidarity as they have attended the meetings of our European federation. We invite our members to contribute generously to the FAFCE appeal. You can donate directly, through the FAFCE website, or you can use

the free post envelope attached to this newsletter, and we will pass your donation on to them.

Angelo Bottone

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From the President of FAFCE

Brussels, 10th March 2022

Call for Donations for Ukraine (see link at end for donating online)

Following last week's FAFCE appeal for peace in Ukraine, our Members and Partner Associations wish to commit concretely to support Ukrainian families fleeing the war. Indeed, as associations of European families, we feel the responsibility to support our brothers and sisters in need.

For this reason we would be grateful for your kind donation to FAFCE: the entirety of the collected funds will be distributed to our direct contacts in Ukraine and to two associations working on the ground, that requested our help and whose projects are described below.

FAFCE partner, the *Madrina Foundation*, initiated an emergency plan to directly help Ukrainian families, with an expansion of their *Pueblos Madrina* project.

The *Pueblos Madrina* project was initially launched to generate sustainable life projects for families in Spain with dependent children at risk of social exclusion in large

cities, by facilitating their settlement in homes in rural populations, and the labour insertion of parents. Witnessing the current situation in Ukraine, the Foundation Madrina will use its experience in supporting Spanish families to support Ukrainian families. The Foundation will first supply Ukrainian families with food and supplies, mainly for children (baby food, hygiene material, medical equipment, clothes, and coats). The plan also includes a humanitarian transport of Ukrainian families to Spain, where they will be welcomed by Spanish local authorities.

Another FAFCE partner, *Ai.Bi. Amici dei Bambini*, immediately took action to help children and families in Ukraine, where it has been operating since 1999, through the *Friends of Children Ukraine Foundation*, based in Kiev. War is always a tragedy, but for those children who do not even have the comfort of the family's embrace, the drama is even worse. #CHILDREN4PEACE is an Ai.Bi. emergency and solidarity campaign, which comes to the aid of children hosted in orphanages in Ukraine and of families fleeing their homes, who find refuge in Moldova or who are arriving in Italy.

As we have often been stating, our Federation counts on your donations to pursue its daily mission. Seeing the current emergency that is unfolding, we decided to make

this extraordinary call to ask for your help: as said above, all the donations given to FAFCE will directly support the solidarity projects of FAFCE partners and will help Ukrainian families in need.

Above all, we remain united in prayer for peace in Ukraine and for the conversion of our hearts. We especially entrust ourselves and all the involved parties in both Ukraine and Russia to the Immaculate Heart of the Holy Virgin.

We thank you in advance,

Vincenzo Bassi FAFCE President

Donate via <https://www.fafce.org/call-for-donations-to-support-ukrainian-families/>

FAMILY SOLIDARITY ACTIVITIES

- On 16th January our chairman has taken part in a webinar on the declining number of births in Europe, together with FAFCE secretary Nicola Speranza.

- On 3rd February we hosted a webinar with Bishop Brendan Leahy and Dr Nicola Brady on “The Synodal Pathway” The video of the webinar is available on our website, together with the recordings of our previous webinars. If anyone cannot access the internet, we can send them an audio recording of the webinars on DVD. Please do not hesitate to ask.



The Synodal Pathway
of the Catholic Church in Ireland

- This is a letter we have sent to An Post to complain about the 2021 Christmas stamps:

This year, no Christmas stamp produced by An Post for Ireland has a religious theme or even mentions the word “Christmas”. This is disappointing. A representative of An Post stressed “the importance of producing stamps that are as inclusive as possible”, (Irish Independent, 20 December). In the name of inclusivity, An Post chose to exclude those - probably the majority - who celebrate the original and deeper spiritual meaning of Christmas, i.e. the birth of Jesus.

Members of the public and also some Bishops have complained about this regrettable decision by An Post. We

want to add our own voice to their complains and highlight the frustrating failure by An Post to mark Christmas, a fundamental feast for Irish people, with a proper celebratory stamps.

- Our chairman was invited by *The Irish Catholic* newspaper to comment on the crippling cost of living for young couples. Here is an extract of the article:

(...) Chair of Family Solidarity Ireland Angelo Bottone, says he is not unaware of the issue, either, telling this paper that the cost of living crisis is affecting especially those with a young family. "There is a surge in costs with the heating, lighting and generally with bills. This is reported everywhere, and there's plenty of evidence from those of us who have a young family. Obviously, there is a general increase in the cost of living across the board, but that affects more those who are more vulnerable, more at the margin. "I would include young families or those who want to start a family in there. Sometimes they've even to postpone their plans because of those costs," he says.

Mr Bottone says that the current situation is particularly affecting those who "want to start, or are at the beginning of, family life," as they're younger and they "might be in less secure employment". Speaking of those young people trying to live out their faith via a marriage vocation, Mr Bottone says there are "major burdens" on them at the

moment. “The economic factor is having an impact, particularly for young couples who want to live according to the Catholic Faith – they don’t want to postpone the time of their marriage, they want to have children, and so on. The cost of living, particularly the costs of heating, lighting and housing, of course, are becoming major burdens for them.”

Seeing this current crisis as rooted in a wider context of falling fertility rates and higher ages of marriage, Mr Bottone says that the “promotion of marriage” is a longterm investment that could be made today to make a difference in the long-run.

“If we promote marriage, which is the stable commitment that creates an environment for a family to bring children into the world and to continue with their education – that’s a long-term investment. It has other consequences also, such as an economic impact, because obviously if the fertility rate keeps dropping and there is a growing elderly population, the young people have to work for the elderly population or otherwise they have to take other measures, such as increasing immigration, perhaps.”

The solution to the present crisis requires more than an economic solution, Mr Bottone suggests, saying that a “cultural approach” is also of value. “What is needed is a more cultural approach as well, which means that it’s not simply based on economics. It’s based on the way we see

our future and the role of the family. If the State regards the family just like any other form of living together, even without a strong commitment to each other, obviously people in difficulties will commit less or will choose the easier, short-term solution, but this has long-term impacts on the economy, and that's what we're seeing here."
(The Irish Catholic, 24th February 2022)

A LETTER TO FAMILY SOLIDARITY FROM *FAITH ON FIRE*

In 2020, Family Solidarity gave a substantial donation to *Faith on Fire*, a new organisation that train catechists and makes them available to parishes. This is a letter of acknowledgment that we have received from Petra Conroy.

It's impossible to overstate how much of a difference the support from Family Solidarity has made to us. Because of your donation and the trust you showed in an organisation that hadn't actually started yet, Faith on Fire was able to make fantastic progress and we've just had our second formation day with the new team of twenty catechists. We were delayed somewhat by Covid, of course, but I'm really delighted to say we are now well underway. The stages are outlined below:

- .May 2020 - Faith on Fire goes public with its first Call for Catechists: we looked for people passionate about the Catholic faith and passionate about sharing it with others; people with existing experience or training in evangelisation or catechesis.*
- .July 2020 - Deadline to apply for the first Faith on Fire Catechist panel, with over sixty applying. We are delighted and encouraged by the number and standard of applications from all over Ireland.*
- .October 2020 - After some delay, in the hope of holding in person interviews with the shortlisted applicants, we go ahead on Zoom, interviewing nearly 40 wonderful people.*
- .November / December 2020 - the first Faith on Fire catechist panel is finalised: twenty 'on fire' catechists from Down to Cork and from Clare to Kildare, ranging in age from twenties to eighties.*
- .July 2021 After many delays due to Covid, our first gathering of the new Fire panel is scheduled for 17th July - only for the Covid restrictions on indoor gatherings to be extended at the last minute. Deciding that our first gathering must be in person, we make the difficult decision to delay again.*
- .October 2021: With great joy: the first Faith on Fire Formation Day for our new panel takes place in*

Dublin and is a great success. These days are an essential element of our ongoing support for our catechists.

- .December 2021: The second of our Formation Days for Catechists takes place. The presentations include theological formation suited to our context in parishes, workshops on catechetical programmes and skills, and a chance to share the wealth of experience in the group, to eat, laugh, pray and celebrate the Eucharist together.*
- .Next steps: the new panel will complete the initial formation days by the end of February, and at the same time, we begin formalising our outreach to the first parishes we will work with, offering lively and engaging adult faith formation.*
- .2022 here we come!*

Faith on Fire has a simple but powerful mission: to gather and support the many faith-filled people around Ireland who have experience or training in evangelisation, and to make them available to work with parishes near them, supporting the delivery of engaging and authentic adult faith formation, with a special focus on supporting the faith of parents. We are convinced this simple idea will be a great boost to the faith in Ireland.

Despite its huge importance, it is not easy to attract donations for catechesis. We are so grateful to Family Solidarity for allowing this flame to start burning.

Best regards and with very many thanks
Petra

HOW DURING THE PANDEMIC COUPLES HAVE CHANGED THEIR PLANS TO HAVE CHILDREN



As now people live longer and fertility rates are declining, the postponement of the retirement age is almost inevitable to address the issue of balance between generations, unless we have more births. A recent survey from Canada can help understanding why couples postpone or abandon childbearing and it shows that marriage is a key positive factor mitigating the negative effect of the pandemic on birth rates.

Last year the Commission on Pensions recommended to raise the State retirement age to 68 in order to maintain a

sustainable pension system and the Government is considering this possibility.

We can't have too many elderly people without a substantial cohort of younger population paying for their pensions. To tackle the problem of an aging population importing, other solutions are possible: importing working force through immigration and incrementing the birth rate. These are not mutually exclusive, and immigrants also tend to produce more children than natives, at least initially, before they conform to the local trends.

The birth rate in Ireland has constantly declined, reaching its lowest point during the pandemic. According to the last figures available, in the second quarter of last year the number of births in Ireland dropped by 14.6pc, compared to the previous year.

With the exception of Scandinavian countries, this is a common trend, but Ireland experienced the second biggest drop in Europe. We don't have proper studies yet on who has delayed or stopped having children here in response to the pandemic, and why Covid is impacting Ireland's fertility rate more negatively than other countries, but we can get some insights from studies conducted abroad.

For instance, a recent survey of the Canada statistics office explores how during the pandemic couples have changed their plans to have children. It emerged that

almost a quarter (24pc) of people aged 15-49 have changed their intentions. 19.2pc want to postpone childbearing or have fewer children while 4.3pc want more children or earlier childbearing. This is not surprising but let's explore more the demographic characteristics of those who have negatively revised their fertility plans.

The difference between sexes is not significant: 18.5pc of men and 19.9pc of women want to postpone or stop having babies. The existence of other children, instead, is a significant factor. Non-parents are twice more likely to postpone or not begin childbearing compared to those who already have children (25pc vs 12pc). With regard to age groups, those between 25 and 34 were more likely (30.5pc) to negatively revise their fertility plans. This is understandable as they are also those who are more likely to consider whether having children soon, compared to the younger or older cohort, who might think that this issue is not yet, or anymore, relevant for them. (The current mean age of mothers is 31.3.)

When looking at the conjugal status, the percentage of those people who negatively changed their fertility plans is lower among those who are married (14.2pc) compared to couples who are not living together (28.6) or cohabiting (20.6). This proves that people in stable committed relations are feeling less the impact of great uncertainty and economic downturn following from the pandemic.

Being an immigrant was not found to hold a significant bearing on the likelihood of changing one's fertility plans. Age, being married and already having children are the key factors that mitigate the decision to delay or abandon childbearing.

If we want to increase the birth rate in Ireland, we need similar studies tracking trends in fertility intentions here. Understanding the sociodemographic characteristics of couples and of women of fertile age, will help to inform and plan long-term policies.

RADICAL ASSISTED SUICIDE ORGANISATION OPENS IN IRELAND TO ALMOST NO REACTION



Exit International, one of the most radical assisted suicide organisations in the world, has launched an Irish branch. They want almost no limits on euthanasia/assisted

suicide. They believe that any adult who wishes to kill themselves, and is mentally competent, should be facilitated in doing so. The person doesn't have to be sick, let alone terminally ill. They only have to find their life 'unbearable', a tremendously subjective term.

The current proposal for assisted suicide in Ireland would "only help a very small group of terminally ill people", they claim, while there should be no restrictions at all to access it, for those who have reached the legal age and are of sound mind.

People who oppose the so called "right-to-die" always warn of the slippery slope. They say once permitted in limited circumstances, assisted suicide is normalised and demands grow that it be made available on ever wider grounds.

The launch of Exit Ireland proves that the slippery slope is more than real. It is already happening. They want no limits as they believe that suicide is a right. No one should interfere with the free choice of death. Moreover, they think that the law discriminates against those who are physically unable to kill themselves, as so helping suicide should be decriminalised too.

Exit Ireland is led by Tom Curran, the partner of the late 'right-to-die' campaigner Marie Fleming, who has been their Europe coordinator since 2010. Two years ago, he

told the Sunday Independent that assisted suicide should be offered to people with mental illnesses. Will the Irish campaigners who say want assisted suicide only for the terminally ill, and insist there is no slippery slope, now decry Exit International and its aims? If they mean what they say, they should.

The newly launched Exit Ireland website links to the 'Peaceful Pill Handbook', which provides information on how to kill yourself. The latest version of the Handbook focuses on the Sarco euthanasia pod. 'Sarco' (short for sarcophagus), is described as "an exciting futuristic project". It is a coffin-shaped machine that releases deadly nitrogen once activated from inside. Its use has been approved in Switzerland, where facilitating suicide is legal. We can assume that Exit Ireland want this killing capsule to be legal here as well. Do the Irish supporters of assisted suicide approve the lethal machine? They have been silent so far.

The machine was developed by Philip Nitschke, one of the founders of Exit International. Nitschke, referred by the media as "Dr Death", is a medical doctor who left the profession in his home country after the South Australian Medical Board imposed restrictions on his activity, including a ban on offering information on lethal sedatives to patients. In the past, Philip Nitschke has held suicide workshops in Dublin organised by Exit International.

It is incredible how the public debate can move so swiftly from seeking assisted suicide only for the terminally ill, to demands that it be granted to anyone of sound mind who wants it. The launch of Exit Ireland confirms that the slippery slope flagged by prolife campaigners in the past was not scaremongering but an easily predictable development. The only two limits that Exit International still defend -age and mental competency – have been lifted in other countries.

Soon, there will be someone here who will say that it is wrong to deny minors who suffer unbearable pain what is instead offered to adults. The same can be demanded for those who are mentally incompetent. If death is the solution, it is hard to justify any limit.

THE COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS OF IRELAND PUBLISH POSITION PAPER ON PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland has warned that physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia (PAS-E) is not compatible with good medical care and that its introduction in Ireland could place vulnerable patients at risk.

PAS-E is also known as “assisted dying” and in the New Year the issue will be the focus of a Special Oireachtas

Committee set up to examine the Dying with Dignity Bill (2020).

The College of Psychiatrists is the professional and training body for psychiatrists in Ireland and represents 1,000 professional psychiatrists (both specialists and trainees) across the country. It has published a position paper on this issue which sets out some key issues regarding the introduction of assisted dying in Ireland. These include:

- Assisted dying is contrary to the efforts of psychiatrists, other mental health staff and the public to prevent deaths by suicide.

- It is likely to place vulnerable people at risk – many requests for assisted dying stem from issues such as fear of being a burden or fear of death rather than from intractable pain. Improvements in existing services should be deployed to manage these issues.

- While often introduced for patients with terminal illness, once introduced assisted dying is likely to be applied more broadly to other groups, such that the numbers undertaking the procedure grow considerably above expectations.

- The introduction of assisted dying represents a radical change in Irish law and a long-standing tradition of medical practice, as exemplified in the prohibition of deliberate killing in the Irish Medical Council ethics guidelines.

NEW ASSISTED REPRODUCTION LEGISLATION WILL ALLOW USE OF GAMETES FROM A DECEASED PERSON



The new assisted reproduction legislation will allow the use of sperm or eggs from a deceased person. Fatherless children will be created intentionally.

The Irish government has approved the publication of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2022 that will legislate for issues such as IVF, gametes donation, surrogacy. The Bill is extremely problematic from an ethical point of view. For instance, it provides for posthumous assisted reproduction, which is the use of gametes (sperm or eggs) of a deceased person. Posthumous assisted reproduction will be permitted if a person has consented to use his sperm or her eggs when dead. The law will also allow those gametes to be retrieved from the body of the dead person, if necessary, when the person has consented to it in advance.

Only the surviving partner of the deceased person can use the gamete, according to the Bill, and only after one year from the death. This raises important ethical question. (It also complicates and delays the administration of estates on death) How is it in the interest of children to be deliberately conceived when their father or mother is already dead? The whole Bill favours and accommodates the desires of the adults over the child's best interest.

What is even more shocking is that the law permits the use of the gametes of a dead person together with gametes coming from a sperm donor or an egg donor. This means that not only one of the parents is already dead before the child is even conceived, but the child will be separated also by the other genetic parent. So, it will be legal for someone who is not even genetically related to the child to decide to create an orphan. How can this be in the best interest of the child?

No one should have a right to deliberately generate an orphan and this the reason why posthumous assisted reproduction is banned in many European countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Hungary. But Ireland has taken the most liberal and adult-centred approach, avoiding any debate on the morality of such arrangements. The same could be said about many other provisions of this new law, such as surrogacy for example.

According to the new law, the person who uses the gametes of her deceased partner must be a woman, as she has to carry the pregnancy. This means that this provision will be used mainly by women using their dead partner's sperm but nothing prevents a woman in a lesbian relationship from using the eggs of her deceased partner and carry the pregnancy herself. In this way, the resulting child will be denied both biological parents and will be intentionally created and brought up by someone with whom she, or he, has no genetic connection. Again, how is this in the best interest of a child?

OFFICIALS WARN AGAINST COMMERCIAL OVERSEAS SURROGACY

There is a mounting pressure in Ireland to have foreign commercial surrogacy arrangements recognised here. The matter has been considered by a Special Oireachtas Committee, but ahead of that meeting, the Attorney General's office produced a document highlighting the ethical pitfalls with commercial surrogacy. It also challenges the recommendations on the matter of the Rapporteur on Child Protection.

To summarise, the document warns that commercial surrogacy commodifies babies, exploits women, and if we ban it here and recognise it overseas, that creates a double standard.

International commercial surrogacy by its nature involves paying poor women, usually in low-income countries to conceive and give birth for a commissioning couple or a single person. Usually, the gametes (eggs and sperm) are provided by the intending parents, but sometimes it comes from “donors”, who are also paid or compensated. In Europe, commercial surrogacy is legal only in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Many European countries ban ‘altruistic’ as well as commercial surrogacy because it splits motherhood into several women potentially creating identity problems for the child.

The planned Irish law covering this area will allow non-commercial surrogacy while prohibiting commercial surrogacy agreements in Ireland. In practice, some Irish couples are going to places like Ukraine to avail of commercial surrogacy there. Those couples are now campaigning for Ireland to recognise these arrangements, but the document from the AG’s office raises several objections. It expresses concerns about “commodification of children and exploitation of surrogate mothers”, and says, “These issues are heightened in international surrogacy, especially where intending parents from a wealthy country such as Ireland undertake a commercial arrangement with a surrogate mother in a poorer country, or one where the rights of women are less protected.”

The paper also warns that prohibiting commercial surrogacy here but recognising it when Irish couples go abroad would create a double standard. It states: “If commercial surrogacy arrangements are to be prohibited in Ireland due to concerns relating to welfare of children and surrogate mothers, those concerns arise to an even greater extent in relation to commercial surrogacy arrangements undertaken outside the State. Providing for recognition of foreign commercial surrogacy arrangements while limiting domestic surrogacy to altruistic arrangements, thereby providing a greater standard of protection for women in Ireland than abroad, would create a double standard in Irish law which may be difficult to justify.”

In December 2020 Dr Conor O’Mahony, the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, produced a report that addressed the ‘best interests’ of a child born through different forms of assisted reproduction, including surrogacy arrangement. The report by Dr O’Mahony recommended that Irish law should make provision for international commercial surrogacy, when certain criteria are satisfied.

It is a plain contradiction to make a certain practice illegal here and at the same time to give it legal recognition if it happens abroad.

The Attorney General's office suggests the Joint Oireachtas Committee some possible options in dealing with international commercial surrogacy. The current legislative provision could be maintained, that is, those who intend to become parents of children born via international surrogacy arrangements will apply to court, and each case will be considered individually. A second option is that the same requirements for surrogacy in Ireland would apply for arrangements abroad and so only parents commissioning non-commercial arrangements abroad would receive parental status here. The third option would be to allow commercial surrogacy in Ireland, but that would make Ireland an outlier in Europe and internationally. But there is one option that neither this document nor the drafted Bill consider, even if it is the solution adopted by Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Austria, Norway, Finland, and many other European countries: i.e. a total ban of surrogacy in all its forms. This avoids the problems inherent in all surrogacy procedures.

FAFCE'S OPEN LETTER TO FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON: "ARE WE STILL FREE TO PROTECT LIFE?"

Dear Mr. President,

Following your speech at the European Parliament on the occasion of the start of the French Presidency of the

Council of the European Union, we would like to express our concerns about some contradictions in your statement.

While on the one hand you speak of a *“rule of law that is existential for our Europe”*, on the other hand you propose to enshrine in the Charter of Fundamental Rights a practice that is illegal in several EU Member States.

Similarly, you rightly point out that this Charter has enshrined *“the abolition of the death penalty throughout the Union”*, yet you wish to recognise as a fundamental right a practice that is considered by many citizens a fatal act of violence against our most vulnerable members.

The recognition of a so-called *“right to abortion”* would, moreover, be in flagrant contradiction to the Charter itself, which enshrines in its first two articles the inviolability of human dignity and the right to life.

Dear Mr. President,

We are concerned to witness all those who, in accordance with science, believe that human life begins at conception.

In 1948, Denis de Rougemont stated that *“the supreme conquest of Europe is called the dignity of man and its true form is in freedom”*. Should we fear that limits will be imposed on the freedom to take responsibility for new life, by accompanying mothers and families in difficulty?

As you said in your statement, democracy, progress, and peace are all *“under threat”*. The first and greatest threat

is the killing of the unborn. If, as you said, democracy was born in Europe and has been given new lives over the last seventy years, do we not owe the same to the children who will participate in and make that democracy possible?

Dear Mr. President,

We sincerely invite you not to use this Semester for political and ideological purposes. We invite you to work for the common good of our peoples, our families, and our children, who are the future of Europe. Our Federation, together with all persons of good will, is at the service of the institutions to work together constructively, respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. If these common touchstones are missing, the words dearest to you—such as “values” and “democracy”—will be emptied of their meaning.

On the contrary, our societies deserve concrete, supportive, and effective European policies, based on the real needs of families. Such policies are necessary to face the triple challenge of the digital, environmental and demographic transitions.

Please accept, Mr President, the expression of our highest consideration.

Vincenzo Bassi, President

Antoine Renard, Honorary President

WE MUST PRACTICE THE ART OF LIVING, HERE AND NOW, HOWEVER BROKEN THE WORLD MAY BE

“We only get one shot at living, day by day. Let’s not waste it.”

by David Thunder, 8th March 2022

Just as we thought we were on the other side of the pandemic, with all the harms that inflicted, both natural and political, we were confronted with another giant curve-ball: Russia’s invasion of the Ukraine, the most significant military incursion in Europe since World War II. Scenes of tanks moving in on Kiev rekindled some of the visceral anxiety and fear that was still raw from a global pandemic. Many felt, and continue to feel, indignant and helpless in the face of this global spectacle of avoidable human suffering. This sentiment is understandable and very human. But it should not distract us from the business of living our own lives, to the fullest, to the best of our ability. No matter how tough things get, we only get one shot at living. No matter how much we may lament the imperfections and injustices of this world, the clock keeps ticking, and every day is a precious gift, that will only come around once.

We must practice the art of living, here and now, however broken the world may be. While we may — and should — dream of a day when political structures are more just

and fundamental liberties are properly protected, we should never have contempt for the little things that give life meaning, in the here and now. The smile of a baby child; the love of a spouse; a family dinner; a close and enduring friendship; or a bit of support we give to someone in need. We only get one shot at living, day by day. Let's not waste it. The great train of life does not wait for the Trudeaus and Bidens and Putins and van der Leyens of this world to come to their senses. Don't get me wrong: I understand the importance of fighting for a better and more just world. But the noble fights we join are not just a stepping-stone to a better life; they must also be part of a life worth living. The zeal with which we fight for change should not be allowed to obscure our duties toward ourselves and our loved ones to make the most out of the life we have, right now. We must practice the art of living, here and now, however broken and messed up the world may seem to us. I offer this little carpe diem reflection, not as an excuse to stop fighting for what we believe in, but as a reminder to myself and my readers that one of the ways we fight for what is right and good is by shaping our life into something beautiful, no matter what our political and economic leaders do, and no matter how ugly things may get in the world around us. Those of us who fight bravely for noble causes run the risk of getting burnt out and expending so much of our emotional energy on an external cause that we lose a

sense of meaning and purpose at a personal level. But if we lose our soul, so to speak, in the pursuit of a better world, the pursuit itself becomes senseless. On this matter, the experience of the utilitarian crusader John Stuart Mill is rather instructive. The young John Stuart Mill, who had been taught by his father from an early age that his mission in life was to bring about the “greater good of the greater number,” entered the political fray with great enthusiasm and energy as a young man, fighting for noble causes like womens’ suffrage. He had barely reached the age of 20 when he was already confronting what might otherwise be described as a “mid-life crisis.” He realised, for the first time, that even if he made the whole world happy, his own life would be devoid of meaning:

It was in the autumn of 1826. I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to; unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times, We must practice the art of living, here and now, however broken the world may be the-world-is-falling-apart-dont-sweat-the-big-stuff-smile becomes insipid or indifferent; the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first “conviction of sin.” In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: “Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and

opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.

Mill then entered a deep and prolonged depression, according to his own account, which you can find in his short autobiography. And what lifted him out of his depression was the discovery, through Romantic thought, that what gives meaning and purpose to life is not just achieving good in the world, but realising one's full personal potential, or growing on the inside as a human being.

Mill began to see that he must care for his own soul, and that if he did not, he risked losing his bearings completely. None of this means that fighting hard for a just cause is a bad idea, just because there's a risk we'll lose our interior bearings or burn out. However, there are more and less intelligent and gracious ways to pursue a cause. If we pursue a cause in the world so zealously as to forget who we are on the inside, the cause itself can become our own undoing. How can we responsibly engage in the art of

living in a fast-changing world weighed down by threats of bio-surveillance, disease, political corruption, and social inequality and exclusion, while keeping our inner moral compass intact and preserving the *joie de vivre*? Two considerations come to mind: First, given the frenetic pace, and ceaseless challenges of modern life, both at the personal and political levels, the only way to preserve inner poise and balance is by tending to our soul, rather than simply running forward with determination. It would be a tragic loss if we dedicated our energies to creating a better world and lost our interior equilibrium and sense of meaning and purpose in the process. That is a lesson we can learn from the autobiography of John Stuart Mill, and probably from our personal experience as well. We must practice the art of living, here and now, however broken the world may be

Second, the very disappointing calibre of our current crop of politicians does not warrant much optimism about the possibility of far-reaching and humanising structural changes in our political institutions, at least in the short term. There is a very real possibility that your and my efforts to live and work with dignity, raise a family, and build up thriving communities, may have to be undertaken in spite of, rather than with the support of, the political structures we find ourselves nested within. The truth is, there are no easy solutions for building up humane and just communities in a world that is, in many

ways, hostile to human freedom and dominated by unjust political and economic elites. Nonetheless, we would still do well to consider how each one of us can go “back to basics,” and renew and rebuild our personal and social lives, with or without the help of our political leaders and institutions. If political leaders and public authorities enable us in these efforts, we should be grateful for their assistance. If they do not, we can still learn to cultivate corners of freedom and creativity, and if necessary, engage pro-actively in entrepreneurial and counter-cultural initiatives that flow from who we are and what we believe in. We cannot know in advance how far-reaching the impact of these initiatives will be, and which of them will serve as examples for the wider community to emulate. But they are at least a way of taking back a little bit of control “in our own backyards.” We can only reconcile outward initiatives with our deeper aspirations as human beings if we know who we are. And we can only know who we are, if we take time out to care for our souls, and foster the types of friendships and communities that build us up, rather than tear us down.

David Thunder (from Dublin) is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Navarre, in Spain.



EU BISHOPS' PRESIDENT APPEALS ON MOSCOW PATRIARCH KIRILL: *"INTERCEDE WITH RUSSIA TO STOP THE WAR IN UKRAINE"*



The President of the EU Bishops, Cardinal Hollerich, addressed a letter to Moscow Patriarch Kirill on Tuesday 8 March 2022 asking him to issue an urgent appeal to Russian authorities to immediately stop the hostilities against the Ukrainian people.

In the letter addressed to His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, the President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), H. Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, appealed on the Patriarch to intercede with Russian

authorities to *“show goodwill for seeking a diplomatic solution to the conflict, based on dialogue, common sense and respect for international law.*

Addressing the Patriarch as someone that could bring a sign of hope for a peaceful solution to this conflict, Cardinal Hollerich recalled the 2016 joint statement issued by Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis deploring the then unfolding hostilities in Ukraine. *“Please do not let those powerful words go in vain”* – the President of COMECE added.

In January 2022, while tensions at the EU Eastern border were mounting, Cardinal Hollerich called for putting *“particular interests aside and promoting steps leading to de-escalation and confidence-building”*.

Following the Russian military invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, COMECE President condemned the hostilities *“as a serious threat to peace on the whole European continent and beyond”* and appealed on European societies and governments to welcome refugees seeking international protection.

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE IRISH PROLIFE MOVEMENT

Were you involved in pro-life work in the 1980s or 1990s? Dr Laura Kelly is an historian based in Glasgow who is researching the history of the pro-life movement in Ireland. The voices of men and women who took part in pro-life activism have been left out of the historical narrative and there is no balanced account of their work. For this reason, we believe that it is really important that the experiences of people who took part in this work are recorded and kept for future generations.

If you are interested in taking part in an oral history interview, or would like more information, please contact Dr Laura Kelly at L.e.kelly@strath.ac.uk.

Interviews can be anonymous if you wish, and your memories will be treated with the utmost sensitivity and respect.

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