



THE TWO SWORDS

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FIRST EDITION



KENT CATHOLIC SOCIETY



Foreword



Welcome to the first edition of the Two Swords – the magazine of the Catholic Society of the University of Kent. The magazine is the work of the students, and I want to thank each of them for their hard work over the last year in bringing this project to fruition. I must, however, pay special thanks to Mateusz Naglik and Marko Prymachuk, whose vision and dedication have really made this magazine possible. All over Europe, we are witnessing something of a revival in the hearts and minds of young men and women, who are embracing or re-embracing the Catholic Faith. This magazine is a witness to the great things that Jesus Christ is doing through his Church at the University of Kent.

Please continue to pray for us here and be assured of my prayers.

In Domino,
Fr Mark Wharton
Catholic Chaplain.



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"Interview with Father Mark Wharton, chaplain priest of the University of Kent"

Author: Marko Pryimachuk, 2nd Year Law Student

- Father, I'm sure that many of our readers already know you, but for those who will read our magazine for the first time and don't know your work and our ministry, please tell us a little about yourself and how you came to be a priest



Well, I'm Father Mark, I'm 34, and I've been ordained for just over two years now. I was ordained on the Feast of St Therese, the 1st of October, in 2022, and I grew up in the north of England, where my family still lives. I didn't grow up in a Catholic household. My parents don't have any religious beliefs at all, and my father's parents were very devout Protestants. So they gave a very clear witness of Christian faith. But as I got older, I began to examine in my mind some of the claims of Protestantism, and I grew dissatisfied with them, particularly questions about truth, whether it is objective, and what happens when we celebrate mass. And in my case, really very crucially, questions about the human person, openness to life and contraception – when does life begin? How can we care for people who are coming to the end of their lives? And as I began to investigate some of the claims of the Church, I started to believe that it is true.

- Can you say that you followed the steps of St Augustine in the sense that you met the faith through intellect and accepted it through your heart?



That's very true. **I had an intellectual conversion first, and then my heart followed, and once my heart followed, it was really irresistible!** Particularly once I started to go to adoration, then it became clear to me that this was the Lord and that I wanted to be able to receive him in Holy Communion. So I went to see a priest at Farm Street, the beautiful church in Mayfair run by the Jesuits, and after a few weeks I became a Catholic.



- That's beautiful.

Yes, quite quickly.

- What role does the Catholic faith play in your daily life? What does your average day look like?



The most important thing in my day is my personal prayer. I go to adoration each day for one hour, and I celebrate Mass every day. The beginning of my day looks like this: I get up quite early in the morning to pray for an hour and have the Blessed Sacrament in my house. That also includes some spiritual reading and reading of the scriptures. The rest of my day is spent seeing a lot of students one-to-one. Also, we have daily Mass, Adoration, and Confessions at the university, and that's interspersed by seeing and talking to people. And then through the week we have other events. We have two RCIA groups of eight people who are preparing to enter the church. On a Tuesday, after the evening mass, we have pizza and then a talk, given by a guest speaker. We were blessed to have great speakers this year, and we've had talks on who Jesus is, the teachings of the church, purgatory, and next term we'll focus really concretely on the questions of the theology of the body, openness to life, and the place of the family. That is my day and it usually ends quite late. In the evening I finish the day with the last prayer of the church, Compline, and the Rosary.

- How did you become the chaplain at the University of Kent? Because as far as I know, you graduated from Oxford, spent quite a lot of time in the United States of America, always dreamed of being a parish priest, and here you are with us.



Well, only God could do this. After the seminary I was working as a deacon in a parish in South London, in Bromley. We were doing a lot of work, the Mass attendance had increased, and I was seeing more and more people one-to-one about spiritual life. Then one day the bishop phoned me, and he asked me to go to the university to do this job because Father Tom Herbst, who was a chaplain priest just before me, had passed away, so there was a vacancy, and six weeks after I was ordained, I came to the university.

- And what was the first impression?



I thought, 'Lord, what is happening?' because the first Mass I said there was about seven people; it was a weekday, and I looked out from the altar, and I thought, 'Lord, I don't really know what I'm here for and what I'm supposed to do and how I'm supposed to





do and how I'm supposed to do it. Later, I went to see an older priest who's very wise because I was quite shocked in some way that I was finding myself here because this was not what I envisaged was about to happen. An older priest said to me, "Mark, you have to do what priests do, and then it will become clear." This advice was probably the best advice I have ever received in relation to this ministry, and that's what I started to do. Immediately it began to change: we started having a daily mass, with adoration and confessions. I preached about spiritual life, and it began to grow and deepen. Suddenly the Lord presented some very key students who were interested in Catholic life and whom I immediately discerned. The question at the university was not so much, Can I get a hundred people to go to mass every Sunday? **The question really became, how can I strengthen the faith of these students who are here? That really became the primary question.**

- So as you described, after you arrived, you started doing what priests meant to do, and the ministry started flourishing. Could you please tell me more about the process of developing this ministry and, furthermore, what sort of events take place there? Maybe you can tell more about the Men's and Women's Club and the activities of the society in general?



It's a great question. I had to pray about it a lot because I was a bit lost about what to do, so from the prayers was given the vision that we need a profound focus on the Blessed Sacrament, which includes a focus on the liturgy. Therefore, we put a lot of effort into the liturgy here. We have the Novus Ordo Mass in English, with very beautiful music and a lot of chants. Also, we celebrate Mass ad orientem, so the priest faces the altar, and the people face the same direction as the priest, which is quite unusual for a lot of students. However, if they give themselves to it, to a different kind of liturgical model, I have discovered that for the students who do that, there's a deepening process which takes place.

- Why do you think that liturgy is the key part for growth?



Because the liturgy is the worship of God, and in the liturgy we encounter in a very concrete way the saving action of God. It's worship, and we were made to worship, and as we worship, as we enter deeply into the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, it's he who actually begins to do the work. It's he who actually begins to change the mind and the heart. We fundamentally cannot convert anybody; only God can do it, and the first person that God is interested in converting is you, personally. The conversion begins with a radical encounter with Christ in the liturgy, because the liturgy is really ascendant; we are going up, and we are entering into the offering of Christ. It changes us if we expose ourselves to it. However, there are some things to say about that which are important. One is that the not magic, so it has to be surrounded

by other events which feed the mind and the heart so that the whole person begins to see and experience and understand what's happening. One of the first talks we had this term was by Father Marcus Holden, who's the parish priest of St Bedes in Clapham Park and the Episcopal Vicar of Evangelisation, on the Mass, particularly that the Mass is a sacrifice. After the event, it was interesting to me talking to people how a number of liturgical things that we practisesuddenly began to make sense.

- Surprisingly, although it was about the Eucharist, which might not appear to be the most interesting topic for many people, after the event, students were asking questions for 90 minutes, and I think there is something really impressive about that.



That's right, the Catholic faith has a content which has to be known One of the challenges for a lot of Catholics in general, I think, is that we just don't know the faith. Hence, we can't appreciate it, and we don't seek to evangelise. We have a monthly men's and women's group. Men and women meet separately, and the men are studying a book, "On Virtue According to St Thomas", and the women are studying a book, "A Series on Our Lady in the Scriptures". They're both aimed at forming the mind so that we can understand the content of faith with a practical application, which is conversion, virtuous living, and bringing our lives more in conformity to the life of Christ and to his will. So what happens at these groups is we meet, have dinner, and then for about an hour and a half we go round the room reading from a text. We stop the reading, and we point things out in the text, ask questions, analyse what has been said, and check that people are beginning to understand.

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Yes, indeed. However, there are another two focuses which we have. The third one is on the creation of communion. **I don't think that the church is called to build community. I think that she's called to build communion. From communion comes community.**

We managed to build a communion, a community of people who actually really want to be together. **Often I will come to the university at some point in the day, and I will find many of the students sitting together in the chapel talking, being together. And that's a great sign for my heart because they need the support of one another, and this indicates the formation of**

However, we build the formation of communion with God first and then communion with others, which results in the creation of a strong community; it builds fraternity; it builds friendship. So one of the key things we have is just the creation of an environment where people can really be themselves, be safe, be happy and crucially ask whatever questions they want to ask. **No question cannot be asked.**

There is a freedom here where nobody's going to say to you, 'That's a stupid question'. Nobody's going to do that, and if somebody did, I would counteract that straight away because the way we learn is by asking, and it's in the smaller conversation between people, in between events, that things begin to be clarified. At the most natural level, if I don't feel like going to mass, but I know that my friend is going, I'm actually much more likely to go, and we see that dynamic often.

- I think these groups have a lot to do with feasting the mind and opening the heart, which ultimately makes a person a strong and devoted Catholic. Why do you think students are lapsing?



It's a really good question and I think there's a whole number of ways to answer that. One of the reasons that they're lapsing, if I'm honest, is because they were never there in the first place. If you, and this is the story in many places, are baptised as a baby and then you don't go to mass between baptism and first order communion, you receive your first order.

It's a really good question and I think there's a whole number of ways to answer that. One of the reasons that they're lapsing, if I'm honest, is because they were never there in the first place. If you, and this is the story in many places, are baptised as a baby and then you don't go to mass between baptism and first order communion, you receive your first order communion and you don't go to mass until you're confirmed and then you don't go to mass again until you're married, until you're getting married. I think it's not fair to say that you were a practising Catholic.

So one of the primary reasons that students are not practising is because they've never been, and what we're seeking to do is actually to propose personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in the church for the first time. It is to evangelise them; even those who have received the sacraments, many of them are not evangelised, and they don't know and have never heard the love of Christ for them.

However, there's also a poverty of our spiritual life, and we have to teach people how to pray, and we haven't really done this. The Christian life cannot be lived without prayer. It's not possible because it's God who attracts us. There's also a property about friendship. If you are practising when you come to university, you're the only person in your class who practises; it's actually quite hard to keep practising the faith.

Most fundamentally, if you like, one of the biggest challenges is simply student life. They rightly get involved in a lot of activities at the university, but they go to bed late and they get up late; life becomes quite busy and chaotic. When we say, 'Well, the Christian life does involve a certain order, that sounds kind of alien to them'. It takes a huge amount of courage to stand against that and say, 'Well, actually, I'm going to practise the faith'. So one of the biggest things for me, one of the biggest difficulties in this ministry, is that when I look out on a Sunday, I see very different people each week because they don't practice the faith every week. And that is a challenge. So one of the things we're trying to do is to get those who are there to practise to stay and to be consistent.

- How does food after the Mass help with this?



Well, this is to do with the creation of communion. So after Mass, every Sunday we have food, quite a lot of it, and increasingly more and more people stay.



- And surprisingly, students have started cooking for the society. It's a very, very interesting development.



- It is an interesting development. I'm laughing because considering the facilities, it's a bit of a miracle that we are still managing to have food. We're very blessed because there are two parishioners from the Catholic parish in Canterbury St Thomas's who are extremely generous and provide it: Claudine and Joy and her husband, Tony, who cook about once a month or more sometimes if I ask them. Because there's no facilities, they have to cook it at home and bring it to the university, which presents a challenge because sometimes there's around 40 people who are staying after mass. That's a lot of people to feed, and that's a lot of people to feed without any kind of kitchen, but we manage it! And this year some students have cooked. I was away this Sunday when one of the girls cooked, but it worked really, really well. That is really a form of, like, apostolic charity and a willingness. It's a sign of engagement. Then they stay around quite late into the night.

We have to have mass in a hall because we're too big for the university chapel. So that involves having to set everything up, but people gradually are taking part more and more. Although there's a lot of work to do on a Sunday, there's a kind of spirit. I get a bit annoyed because I get a little tired, but I think there's a very good spirit where people want to be together.

- What is the difference between Catholic and non-Catholic students? What's the line you can draw between those two types?



I don't think there is a line. **I think what unites students, whatever they believe in, is a desire for authenticity. It's a desire to be happy.** And so I spend a lot of my time talking with people about significant issues in their lives, not just spiritual issues but issues about their families, things which they're finding very difficult, and crucially, whether they're loved and lovable. I spend a lot of time talking to people about actually very serious issues which really impact them. Now one of the challenges at a university is that it's not like a parish. In a parish we would be building stably year on year. But here, effectively, every year is a brand new start. It's like starting a church, and effectively every week is a little bit like that. In a parish it's quite different. That's one of the big challenges about what does... And it's a question I ask myself a lot: what does growth in a university context actually look like?

- And what is your answer?



I have an answer from somebody else, actually.

A friend of mine said to me a few weeks ago,
"You are planting seeds which somebody else will harvest."



That requires us to be humble because I don't see the spiritual results, which I think the Lord will bring to fruit in the future. I think that's probably good for me. Father, in the frame of a dialogue between the students on campus and Catholic faith, could you describe the place of our outreach group? We are moving into a phase of visibility

I discerned that we have a very good leadership team of students, of which Marko is the president, and we have some others who are really very gifted, and we have formed a very good leadership team, and I think we all have discerned together that we had to get out. Now, the first part of getting out was moving out of the university chapel on Sundays. Because now we have mass in a very large hall in the middle of Elliott College, it is unmissable. People are walking through there all the time.

We have formed an evangelisation outreach group. So it's very simple. There will be a table and some beautiful banners. One of them will say, "Ask a Catholic anything." Also, we'll have some literature to give away. We've been very, very blessed with a very generous donation from the Word on Fire Institute from Bishop Barrow. We were very lucky this year because we had a training day by Brendan Thompson, who's the UK director of Word on Fire .

- We remember the 10 doors. 10 doors for evangelisation.



That was a really great day. There were about 14 students who came. We've also received some funding from Archbishop John's appeal. There's an archbishop's appeal for evangelisation, and we received £1500 from that appeal. So with that we've bought some banners and a table, and we will set it up outside the main concourse at the university on a Wednesday, and basically we will be there. We will answer questions, give away literature, invite people to mass, and hopefully from that we will form a discipleship group for people who are interested in exploring the faith in a more, let's say, interactive way.



- What do you mean by saying in an interactive way?



Well, in the church there's a kind of threefold model for evangelisation. There's something called the pre-catechumenate, a period of inquiry of people who are interested in exploring the faith. That is followed by the catechumenate, people who have been accepted by the bishop into a period of formal inquiry and teaching and that's followed by reception into the church.

- Invitation, proclamation, discipleship.



That's right. The final process is a mystagogical period after a person has been received into the church. It's a period of consolidation and deepening of spiritual life. **Effectively, we are seeking to create a kind of pre-catechumenate process for people, and the evangelisation group is a way to invite them.** Now this requires courage, requires prudence, and it requires just getting over our natural fear. Also, it requires being willing to be out there, which is not easy, but we have some very good students who will lead it, and I will be there.

- Father, what signs have you seen that the Lord blesses this work?



I think there's a number of ways to look at it. One is, there's been, obviously, numerical growth, and we've been very blessed by that. On Sundays we bounce between like 50 and 70 students on Sunday and one just has to accept that bounce. There's a certain freedom in saying we don't have control over this, and many students go home at this university on weekends. Attached to that, I hear a lot of confessions, both on weekdays and Sundays. Today is Friday, and on Wednesday, I heard nine confessions just in the hour before Mass.

- What do you think this is about, this increase of confessions?



I think it's to do with the second sign, the most important sign that God is at work, which is about deepening..

- People open their hearts!



People open their hearts. They want to live the Catholic life in all its beauty. Now that is not easy, especially for students. It's not easy for anybody. It's not easy for priests. The primary sign for me is this deepening: people coming to adoration, people going to confession, people asking deeper questions, and people being willing to say, 'I don't understand this teaching of the Church', or maybe people will say, 'I don't believe it'. Well, I'm glad that they tell me that they don't believe it because that gives me an opportunity to present really what the church is teaching about something.

The most obvious example of this has been the first time I gave a talk about the teaching of the church and contraception and openness to life. There were shrieks of horror in the room. Somebody said to me, 'Father, you can't be serious; it's mad'. Fast forward a few months later, and one of those people is now a joyful, clear proponent of the teaching of the church and openness to life. Well, that's a deepening process. That's a person who has been on a journey. The key thing in a chaplaincy, and this is true for the priest and it's true for the students, is we have to get used to the fact that people are in different places. So I can't expect people to just say, "Okay, that's fine; I get it all", but that's also true for the students who are very faithful that they have to be very patient and prudent and kind to people when they say, well, actually, I just don't get this, so there's a whole kind of process of everybody being on a journey which requires patience and time and a willingness to grapple. **I say to people this often: God can do anything with us, provided we're willing to walk. But if we're not willing to walk with Him, He can't**

- How can people help our society?



-Well, the first thing, the most important thing that's required, is prayer. Soon we will launch a process whereby people outside the university can become prayer partners to pray for the work of the chaplaincy. That's really essential because it has to be supernatural. It has to be directed by God. The second thing is that people can donate either one-off, or they can donate regularly. We have a JustGiving page, so if you just go to JustGiving and you type in Kent Catholic Chaplaincy, you'll find our page. That would really help us a lot. We've gone through a process of beautifying the things we have for the liturgy and investing in music. So the second thing would be about funding. The third thing would be to encourage your children of university age and grandchildren to come to university here so that they can begin to help to build a Catholic life which changes at university.





The task of the church is multifaceted. Primarily, it's to call men and women to communion with God, but many men and women who are in communion with God want to transform a culture. Hence, one of the things we're doing here is to form a society, a culture, where young faithful Catholics are intent on transforming the culture

- Father, what is your message to the other Catholic societies? What is your message to the people who will read this interview?



I would say students are desirous of authenticity and the invitation to live greatly and boldly, and the Catholic faith uniquely offers the invitation to live courageously and boldly because it's the invitation to enter communion with God in the communion of the Church And I suppose for us the model is this: that we want to create courageous Catholics. Catholics who are bold, Catholics who love God and love their brothers and sisters and who want to call other people into this relationship with Christ. Therefore, we are courageous. We're trying to call other people to communion with God and with one another. We're trying to be Catholic and that's really what we're seeking to do here.

So the most important thing to do is to pray for this, because this is a great task. But God is more generous than we imagine and through Our Lady and St Thomas Becket and Thomas More, those two great saints of Canterbury, I think we can plant seeds which will harvest for the good of the whole church and for the good of society, for the good of the church in this country.

- What should we expect in the future as Catholics, as in our communities? And the second part of this question is, how would this ministry look in the future?



Well, I can answer the second question easily because the second question is up to the bishop. The bishop gave me this task, and I will do it until the bishop gives another task. **I love this task, and crudally, I love the students that God has given me..On Judgement Day Jesus is going to ask me about my care for you, and that is a thought which occupies my mind often. Am I doing everything I can to help them get to heaven? That's the primary question for me.** That has to be the focus because there are many other things that I do, but if I'm not seeking to do that, I'm actually being unfaithful to the task which God gave me when I was ordained and this task which God has given me through the hand of the bishop.



The first thing is if we want culture to change, if we want things like the tragedy of abortion to end, if we want people to continue to have the right to a fair wage, if we want people to understand their innate and intrinsic dignity. If we want people to have more children, if we want more people to get married, the people who have to lead on that are the Catholics, because nobody else is going to lead on those questions. If we are not transformed, the culture will not be transformed.

My image of the future is that I think it's going to get harder, but that means that we have to become more intentional. The relationship with Christ in his church with other people has to become the centre point of our lives. So when we go to our workplaces, we can begin to transform them. And that's how culture has changed. That's how it was in the early church. In the early church, the early Christians became known for their extraordinary works of charity, their extraordinary bravery, their unwillingness to bend, and their kindness towards the stranger, the unborn, the crippled, the orphan, and the widow. That changed a very violent culture, and that's what we've got to do again, and young people are in a unique place to do that.



The way maybe we could end the interview is by me saying this. Men and women who are transformed by relationship with Christ in his church are men and women who will transform a culture



- Amen

- Amen

“ Ad Orientem: a Catholic tradition making a comeback ”

Author: Mateusz Naglik

There is something quietly powerful about the act of turning toward something greater than our selves — towards God. In our faith, one of the most profound ways this was expressed for almost two thousand years is through a posture known as *ad orientem*, Latin for “to the east”. While it may sound like an ancient practice thrown out of use after the liturgical reform in 1969, it’s also becoming a powerful source of renewal for many Catholics today, especially among young priests and the faithful rediscovering the depth and beauty of the Church’s liturgical tradition. But what exactly is *ad orientem*, and why is it becoming a preferable alternative for many younger priests in some *Novus Ordo* parishes?

Ad orientem refers to the traditional posture of the priest, deacon, and acolytes during Mass, where both they and their congregation face the same direction—symbolically, liturgically, and (depending on the architecture of the church) literally toward the east. This direction is not arbitrary. In the earliest days of Christianity, facing east was seen as the direction of Christ’s return, the rising sun, and the new dawn of salvation. As early as the second century, Christians prayed toward the east, associating it with the light of the Resurrection and the hope of the Second Coming. In a more liturgical sense, facing one direction signifies a shared orientation toward God.



Rather than the priest “turning his back” on the people, as is sometimes mistakenly thought, he is actually leading them in prayer, together facing the same Lord. It’s similar to how a shepherd walks and leads the flock to their barn, though in the case of Holy Mass, the priest is leading the faithful to Calvary. The focus shifts from a conversation between priest and people, as is the case in Protestant sects that deny that the re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice is taking place, to a united worship directed toward God. As was briefly mentioned before, *ad orientem* was the norm for Christian worship for well over a millennium. Church buildings were often constructed so that the apse (the front of the church behind the altar) faced east. Even when church construction did not permit a literal eastern direction, the symbolic action persisted: the celebrant, along with the congregation, turned toward the apse to offer the sacrifice to God.

This posture remained virtually universal in both the Eastern and Western rites of the Church up through the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

The Council sought to renew the liturgy, encourage fuller participation of the faithful, and make the Mass more accessible to slow down or potentially reverse the dropping numbers of practising Catholics around the world. Nowhere, however, did Vatican II mandate that the priest must face the people (*versus populum*). In fact, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal still assumes the *ad orientem* posture in several places, indicating that it remains a legitimate and respected option. After the Council, significant changes were implemented. The Mass began to be celebrated in the vernacular rather than Latin, and many churches removed altar rails and/or redesigned sanctuaries. One of the most visible shifts was the widespread move to *versus populum* celebration. While well-intentioned to emphasise the communal nature of the Eucharist and the presence of Christ among His people, it also altered the theological focus of the liturgy for many, especially traditionalist Catholics, who saw this as a shift towards a Protestantised version of Mass. With the priest now facing the people, some began to perceive the Mass more as a communal gathering or "church service" rather than a sacred offering directed to God. Architecture and liturgical gestures began to reflect a more horizontal than vertical emphasis, even though the only "horizontal" approach should be taken during a sermon, which itself does not constitute a part of Holy Mass. In many places, the sense of mystery, reverence, and awe that had characterised Catholic worship for centuries began to fade.

It's important to note that *versus populum* is a valid and licit option, and the Church allows for flexibility thanks to Vatican II. But the near-exclusive use of this posture came not from the Council itself but rather from a wave of post-conciliar liturgical experimentation and, in many instances, misinterpretation.

Pope Benedict XVI, who had a profound love for the liturgy, encouraged the Church to rediscover this orientation. He once wrote that facing east, or at least toward a common liturgical direction, helps the congregation understand that we are all on pilgrimage toward the Lord. His influence has had a lasting impact on seminarians and priests who came of age during his pontificate. Priests who adopt *ad orientem* often do so with pastoral sensitivity, careful catechesis, and humility. They explain it not as a rejection of Vatican II but as a

way of more fully living its call for a deeper participation in the sacred mysteries. And far from alienating the faithful, many report that the change deepens their experience of the Mass. The characterisation of Catholic worship for centuries began to fade.



At its heart, *ad orientem* is not about nostalgia or aesthetics, though it certainly has a beauty that appeals to many. It's about restoring the vertical dimension of worship—the offering of praise, adoration, and sacrifice to Almighty God. In an age increasingly focused on self-expression and human-centred experiences, *ad orientem* reminds us that the Mass is not primarily about us. It's about Christ. As young Catholics, we're not bound to choose between tradition and renewal. The Church is a living organism, rooted in the past but always moving forward. Vatican II called for active participation, but that doesn't mean constant activity—it means deep, conscious engagement. *Ad orientem* can help us enter more fully into that call. Whether you attend a church that uses *ad orientem* or not, it's worth learning about this ancient posture and the reasons some are returning to it today. It reminds us that the Mass is not just a community meal or a gathering—it is the Holy Sacrifice, offered to God, through Christ. And in turning eastward, we, as a nation of Saints, turn our hearts again toward Heaven.

Saint Jerome in the wilderness

Author: Lucia Caitar, 3rd Year Art Student

It was in the year 375 AD when Saint Jerome had had a dream in which he stood before the Judge. Now, St. Jerome, deeply devoted to classical philosophy, had eagerly studied rhetoric, literature, history, and Greek and Latin. It was, however, during a mid-fatal illness that he had this dream in which, questioned before the Judge on his state in life, St. Jerome was accused of being a Ciceronian, not a Christian

Following this accusation, he was punished by the heavenly council and from then onward, had not only vowed never to possess so-called pagan literature ever again but had also emigrated to the desert to live the life of a hermit, where for five years he practised a life of constant prayer, mortification and study. While in the desert, he was plagued by the devil's temptations—visions of alluring women, terrifying beasts, and heaps of silver and gold. Nevertheless, he subsequently resolved to study Hebrew as a means of resisting this temptation. Immersing himself in the language, he undertook the direct translation of the Scripture. Not many paintings by Ercole de' Roberti survive – his life was short, and many of his works have been destroyed in the centuries since his death – however, this piece of St. Jerome has never the less persisted.



Ercole de' Roberti's "St. Jerome in the Wilderness"

Why exactly is that?

I believe it has much more to do with the enduring message of the painting than with any other historical factors.

This painting is not only about a man praying and fasting or trying to abstain from temptations - this painting is also about reaching Christ.



Detail from "St. Jerome in the Wilderness" by Ercole de' Roberti, 1475, tempera on panel, The Getty Museum

The way in which this work centres on Christ is, of course, first seen through the turning of St. Jerome's head and the direction of his gaze towards the crucifix (it is interesting to note that the artist turns the saint's head and casts half of the face in shadows in such a way as to keep the mystery and, in a very skilful manner, to prevent the audience from deciphering exactly what it is that the saint is experiencing in the moment) as well as through the landscape. Now, the landscape is barren; despite the blue sea in the background, what we are presented with is a ruin in the desert – this construction and this "church in the open air" showcase the austerity and severity of ascetic life.

Really, this ruin is more than just a heap of rocks; it is an entire theology. The architecture of the "church" not only encloses the Saint from the rest of the world and creates a much more intimate atmosphere between him and Jesus, but it also provides a mystical sense of what it means to be a part of the Church. This intimacy is not exposed to the world; it is most hidden and becomes most sacred. Therefore, not only is the crucifix and the symbolism of the rocks and the bell, as well as the small tabernacle in the back, a physical representation of the church, it is the Saint himself through whom the presence of the Church is illuminated and carried on, and so this space becomes further sacred.

It is also very important to note that this concept of the desert as something that purifies is present in such places as the Old Testament, where Moses had gone, but also in the New Testament, where St. John the Baptist had gone, and afterwards too, where many other great saints had followed suit. Of course, the wiry limbs, gaunt eye sockets, and sun-worn skin vividly reflect the harshness of ascetic life on the saint, but it is this desiccated sanctuary that represents everything within its rightful context – there is nothing there, and yet that is exactly where everything is.

The dried-up dead trees, the inanimate landscape denote the fact that the saint no longer cares for that of this world which has died for him, for he too has died to the world and has been brought back to life in Christ. If the walls of the church have crumbled, then the entire world, with all its nature, deserted or not, becomes a church.

Another remarkable aspect of this work is the artist's ingenious depiction of the dual realms—the material and the spiritual—alongside the Saint's humility, masterfully conveyed through his almost seated posture on this "throne". A foot, garbed in a sandal, is raised onto the platform of this seat while the other, naked, rests atop the parched ground. The symbolism behind this naked leg touching the ground is not only profound but is also executed so elegantly that it is not noticeable without proper meditation on this work.



Detail from "St. Jerome in the Wilderness" by Ercole de' Roberti, 1475, tempera on panel, The Getty Museum

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action further enhances a sense of mystery and what is also exciting to observe is how the curved lines of the limbs contrast with the straight lines of the stumps, creating a dynamic motion that enhances the ambiguity of the action.



The ambiguity behind this action further enhances a sense of mystery and what is also exciting to observe is how the curved lines of the limbs contrast with the straight lines of the stumps, creating a dynamic motion that enhances the ambiguity of the action. This gives an impression of levitation, as St. Jerome is not truly seated and therefore subtly alludes to Jesus' ascension. As for the sandal-clad foot, it is fascinating to note that the straps almost look as if he is "tied" to this upper realm, as if he has "tied" himself to Christ – and yet it is still the foot touching the ground which is freed and rising. Naturally, this painting is by no means exhaustive, and though at first glance it may appear to be convoluted due to its gritty lines and arid hues, what it represents is how God will always make out of every place a church, and out of every person a saint if Christ's example is followed.



The physical isolation and spiritual struggle represented through the contrast between the stark, wilderness and the saint's contemplative demeanour ultimately underscore the theme of spiritual purification through our death to this world, to our attachments and to ourselves. The best way to truly connect with this painting is by joining in St. Jerome's example and making the crucifix the centre of our life.

Who has the authority to terminate life once it has begun?

Author: anonymous

At the moment of conception, changes at the cellular level and biochemical pathways immediately determine the sex of the child; the zygote formed is a new living being with a soul who is genetically distinct from the mother and father; the zygote formed possesses a completely unique set of DNA and identity in a process known as gastrulation; Hox genes are activated, allowing skeletal muscles, vertebrae and major structures dictating the body plan, including organs and the nervous system, to begin to form.

Does the life of unseen organisms such as bacteria and yeast cells diminish merely because they are invisible to the naked eye? Abortion has been practised since 1550 BC by ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, who had methods to induce abortion, which remains a deeply polarising issue. Whilst pro-abortion activists argue for women's rights to bodily autonomy, pregnancies which have been terminated through abortion have had detrimental effects on women's overall mental and physical wellbeing, many of whom are suffering from regret, depression and anxiety. That is to say, direct abortion is contrary to moral law and gravely wrong at every stage of pregnancy, as Thomas Aquinas writes that it is a 'sin against nature' to reject the gift of new life from God. Catholic doctrine on the sanctity of life reminds us of the inherent rights of unborn children despite their age and lack of mental and physical ability to form rational conclusions. Denying the right to life to those with disabilities or cognitive impairments is as morally grave as abortion.

Hours after fertilisation, cell division through mitosis increases the number of cells; this allows the embryo to develop into a multicellular structure which will form a blastocyst consisting of cells which form the embryo and cells which form the placenta. Here, cells begin to specialise for differing roles in the developing child. At approximately week 3, the inner cells in the embryo differentiate into three germ layers, which each develop into specialised cells at a later stage, such as cells which develop and form the nervous system, skin, hair, circulatory system, and crucial organs, including the heart and liver

In short, the zygote and newborn baby are not different in kind but in level of maturity. The sanctity of life is a core principle of Catholic doctrine from a theological and ethical standpoint. Life holds intrinsic value and begins at conception, as supported by science. Pope John Paul II's 'Evangelium Vitae' confirms that at conception, life should be treated with the same level of respect as at any other stage of human life: it is not a potentiality but a reality from conception.

A survey published in 2018 by the Pew Research Centre found 42% of American adults believe the embryo 'becomes' human at a later stage in pregnancy; 23% did not view an embryo as human life at any stage before birth. Over 60% of people believe in protecting the embryo only after a certain stage of development; this is as if the embryo's dignity grows in time rather than having inherent worth from conception.



Why is an embryo or foetus not seen as 'human enough' to deserve the same care and protection? Interestingly, Pope John Paul II explains that humans are stewards of God; therefore, we don't own any of God's creation but are merely entrusted by God to care for his creation, so humans cannot decide when to take innocent life, as it strongly undermines divine authority. Decisions to end life serve as a fundamental rebellion against God; as a society, it is essential that we take responsibility to protect vulnerable members. This is our duty to strengthen moral integrity. To live in a culture which has caring and inclusive qualities requires individuals to recognise the intrinsic worth of the unborn and born. Through this, the family bond extends to reaching all parts of life; this should be encouraged so that laws foster a commitment to life and do not promote a culture of death as seen in abortion.

Abortion offers a 'quick fix' for unsupported mothers unable to provide a stable life for their child. Institutions and states may therefore see this as an opportunity to ensure the short-term wellbeing of mothers, minimising the need for the organisation to intervene with financial and emotional support. Many children with disabilities or challenging life circumstances are born and still find immense joy despite adversity. It is morally wrong that a potential future of suffering should be a reason to end a life, most certainly if suffering is an essential, inescapable fact of life. The way in which one chooses to respond to suffering can be either good or evil. Suffering provides an opportunity for character development in strength and empathy. In the Journal of Religion and Health, studies have suggested suffering offers an opportunity for spiritual growth with God

Yet, through abortion, mothers are misled into believing that the suffering of the foetus or future child can only be solved through ending its life. Of course, this is not to say that one should seek out suffering at every turn; rather, it means the opposite – a life should not be taken merely because it may face suffering or is experiencing it.



Unsurprisingly, research suggests that abortion has significant psychological effects on women, usually leading to depression and anxiety, particularly on women who face difficult and unsupportive circumstances, as echoed in a study by Fergusson, Horwood and Boden in 2006. In the British Journal of Psychiatry, Dr Priscilla Coleman ran a meta-analysis of 22 studies involving over 877,000 women; this showed that women who had abortions had an 81% increased risk of mental health issues compared with those who hadn't had an abortion. Additionally, Gissler, M published in the British Medical Journal ('Suicides after pregnancy in Finland') data examining the rates of suicide associated with different pregnancy outcomes and found that women who had abortions had higher rates of suicide compared to those who gave birth and even those women who had a miscarriage. In Sweden and Norway suicides of women who had a reproductive history of a recent pregnancy account for 15%-16% of all deaths among women of childbearing age (15-44). This proportion is comparable to Finland, where



again 15% of deaths in women were suicide, while the study found women who had given birth had a lower suicide rate which suggests childbearing might have a protective effect against suicide for women. The general suicide rate refers to the average suicide rate for the entire population of women within the specified age range regardless of pregnancy status or reproductive history. The suicide rate associated with birth was found to be half of this general rate, suggesting that giving birth may have a protective effect against suicide, yet, the suicide rate after an abortion was three times higher than the general rate, showing a increase in suicide risk in mothers who had an abortion. Interestingly, US, Australia and southern European nations report lower female suicide rates ranging from 1-12% in some nations. This data could reflect the differences in social or healthcare factors influencing mental health support across the globe. The emotional aftermath women may face after having an abortion consists of social withdrawal and feelings of regret all of which can worsen existing mental health conditions.

To counter argue, ignoring the fact that life begins at conception, some might argue that choosing abortion can be less emotionally and financially demanding than the long-term challenges of raising a child. Consequently, Catholic support agencies such as the Gabriel Project, Mary's Mantle and St Vincent de Paul society offer single mothers financial support, food and clothing internationally so mothers can be supported close to home. In particular, The Gabriel project reaches out to mothers with community resources by providing baby essentials, food and often financial aid for housing expenses. St Vincent de Paul's society provides emergency financial aid for large expenses mothers may face such as food, baby supplies, rent.

Mothers facing homelessness can be provided with housing from SVP, ensuring the house is safe and secure. Moreover, volunteers offer emotional support, giving mothers the opportunity for a social life for those who may be isolated. Assistance in providing information on prenatal, childbirth and postnatal support is also offered. Furthermore, SVP provides faith guidance and support for mothers who are interested, as it is proven to provide hope and guidance for mothers. Life Charity, based in the UK, provides free emotional support and assistance to women who have found themselves in unexpected pregnancies or pregnancy loss; the service includes providing housing support through 'Life houses' and baby supplies.



Ultimately, no woman wants an abortion, but circumstances and inadequate health care services often mean she is at high risk of getting one. Women who find themselves in such situations are often victims – largely of men, who do not want to face up to responsibility. As a society, it is our duty to form laws which support young mothers whilst upholding respect for the defenceless and vulnerable, including the zygote, embryo and fetus (which is Latin for offspring). To claim that some live human beings do not deserve respect or should not be treated as persons based on changeable factors such as age, condition, location or lack of mental and physical abilities is to deny the idea of inherent human rights. At all stages of life, these are the creation and work of God, deserving serious protection and care, as human life has inherent dignity and is a gift from God. As Pope John Paul II writes, "The direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral."

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William Doyle - unsung hero of the Great War

Author: Edward Hopley, Military History, 1st Year

The First World War saw death and destruction on a scale never seen before. Many people, both civilians and soldiers, lost their lives. Fighting in this war dragged on for four long years. The conflict was characterised by trench warfare. Waves of soldiers being sent forward to be massacred by enemy machine guns for minimal gains in territory.

Soldiers would live in mud-filled trenches, miserable and damp, sharing with rats and dead bodies, in constant fear of being shelled by enemy artillery. Soldiers would see their friends die with nothing they could do about it. Despite all of this darkness, the light could shine through in many forms, most importantly through faith in Jesus Christ



One example of this would be Father William Doyle. Doyle was born in Dalkey, Ireland, in 1873, the youngest of seven children. He was educated at Ratcliffe College. He began his religious life after reading St. Alphonsus' book. Instructions and Considerations on the Religious State. It inspired him to enter the priesthood. In 1891, he became a Jesuit, entering St. Stanislaus College, a Jesuit College, the same year. Having completed his novitiate, for his regency he was assigned to teach: he taught at Belvedere College, Dublin, and at Clongowes Wood College, County Kildare, between 1894 and 1898. He then studied philosophy at Collège Saint-Augustin in Enghien, Belgium, and Stonyhurst College, England. From 1904 to 1907, he studied theology at Milltown College (a Jesuit community) and University College Dublin. He was ordained a Catholic priest in July 1907, then took his final vows in February 1907.

At the outbreak of the war, he volunteered to serve in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department of the British Army at the age of 41, twice the age of the average soldier at the time. He was appointed as a chaplain with the 16th (Irish) Division. He was assigned to the 8th Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers, and posted to the Western Front in June 1917 at the Battle of Messines. During the Battle of Loos, Doyle was caught in a German gas attack; despite this, he continued to

minister to the soldiers in the midst of the battle, displaying a total disregard for his own safety. For this conduct was mentioned in dispatches. A recommendation for a Military Cross was rejected as "he had not been long enough at the front". Instead, Doyle was presented with the "parchment of merit" of the 49th (Irish) Brigade. He served on the Somme in the battles of Guillemont and Ginchy in September 1916, winning a Military Cross for his bravery. He saw action again.

William's concern for the men was apparent in his letters and diaries:

"I found the dying lad – he was not much more – so tightly jammed into a corner of the trench that it was almost impossible to get him out. Both legs were smashed, one in two or three places, so his chances of life were small, and there were other injuries as well. What a harrowing picture that scene would have made. A splendid young soldier, married only a month, they told me, lying there, pale and motionless in the mud and water with the life crushed out of him by a cruel shell. The stretcher bearers hard at work binding up as well as they may, his broken limbs;

Around about a group of silent Tommies looking on and wondering when will their turn come. Peace for a moment seems to have taken possession of the battlefield, not a sound save the deep boom of some far-off gun and the stifled moans of the dying boy, while as if anxious to hide the scene, nature drops her soft mantle of snow on the living and dead alike."

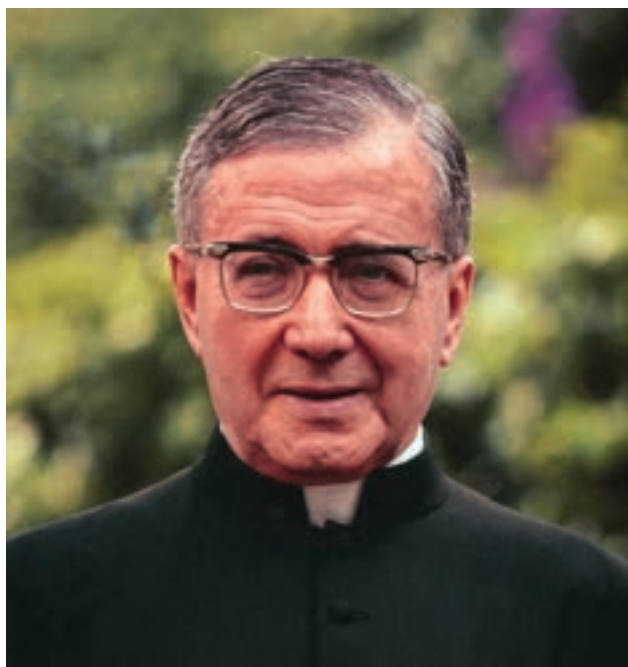
The 8th Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was in support at the beginning of the attack, which went badly. The assault battalions suffered heavily from machine gun fire from German blockhouses as they advanced and were then driven back across the swamping ground to their starting lines by determined German counterattacks. The following day the 8th Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was holding the line. William had been cheering and consoling the men and attending to the many wounded when word came in that an officer of the Dublin's had been badly hit and was lying out exposed in no-man's land. William, as ever, unchecked by fear ventured out to retrieve the wounded man. He brought the man back to the British lines but was hit by a shell along with a number of officers and killed. Father Willie Doyle was given a hasty battlefield burial behind the 'Frezenberg Redoubt', but after the war no grave could be found, so his name is listed among the missing on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Panel 160.

He was posthumously recommended for the Victoria Cross and the Distinguished Service Order but was not awarded either. According to Patrick Kenny, anti-Catholicism may have influenced the British Army's decision not to grant Father Doyle both awards. Father Doyle's body was never recovered, but he is commemorated at Tyne Cot Memorial. The book *To Raise The Fallen* by Patrick Kenney is a brilliant book which describes his actions and contains personal letters from the front.

We should use Willie to remember that no matter what is happening, Christ is always present and that we should keep faith in him despite whatever you may be going through.

The saint of the ordinary

Author: Anna Taylor



St Josemaría Escrivá is generally described as the founder of Opus Dei, the Work of God, which finds its principle in that people can find God right in the middle of their everyday lives. Nevertheless, Josemaría would repeatedly claim that he did not found Opus Dei but that it was “God’s doing” and that all he did was to “get in the way”. This Spanish saint had a powerful vision: that deep spirituality could infuse every aspect of people’s lives, and they could love and serve God in their everyday work, with their families and in their friendships. St Josemaría was a priest who spent his life teaching ordinary people that living for God is not just for priests or nuns.

“Be holy as my heavenly Father is holy. And he says this not just to those who wear these things (pointing to his tunic) but to everyone, to everyone!”

“To husbands, to wives, to single people, to workers, to students, to farmers, to everyone!”

Who was St Josemaría Escrivá?

I believe it has much more to do with the enduring message of the painting than with any other historical factors.

This painting is not only about a man praying and fasting or trying to abstain from temptations - this painting is also about reaching Christ.

The early years (1902-1928)

Josemaría's perception of God's calling began at an early age. Born in 1902 in a Catholic family in Barbastro, Spain, he would recite all his life the prayers his mother taught him since he was a toddler. As a child, he suffered many hardships. His three younger sisters died, and he himself was about to die due to an illness. The hard situation of his father's job made them move to another city where they had to struggle economically to get by. He had always wanted to become an architect, but, at the age of 15, he started feeling that God was inviting him to something greater. Hence, he became a priest to make himself available to God's will, which was at the moment not completely clear to him, and would often pray: "Lord, let me see what you want", until God showed him what He wanted during a retreat in Madrid. It was Opus Dei, a part of the Catholic Church that spreads the message that a person can find holiness in ordinary life. And so, Father Josemaría would dedicate his whole life to developing Opus Dei.

First steps (1928-1936)

The circumstances could not have been more challenging. Escrivá was a poor, unknown priest (no financial resources or helpers). 1930's Spain was boiling with anticlericalism; priests were under attack, churches and convents were burned. However, relying on prayer, he set out on a search for people that would understand this message and dedicate their lives to spreading it. Surrounded by political turmoil, which was often violent, Escrivá refused to take sides and taught his followers to understand pluralism and to love and respect freedom. Growth was slow; after eight years, less than twenty people had joined Opus Dei. Later on he would confess: "I had nothing but, youth, disposition and sense of humour".

Trial years (1936-1939)

The Spanish Civil War brought even fiercer religious persecution. Thousands of priests and nuns were murdered. Father Josemaría was forced to abandon his clerical dress and to go into hiding in Madrid, moving from place to place to avoid capture and death. Later, he and a few members of Opus Dei found refuge in the Consulate of Honduras. During this time, he still ministered to many people, at times, risking his life to do so, until he decided to try to escape to the Nationalist Zone, where religious activities were permitted. In the fall of 1937, Escrivá travelled incognito to Barcelona and from there, joined a group of smugglers for a series of dangerous night marches through the Pyrenees Mountains into Andorra. For the remainder of the war, he struggled to re-establish contact with the members and friends of Opus Dei.

The Roman years (1946-1975)

From the beginning, Escrivá had seen that Opus Dei would be for all people and for all time. In 1946, he travelled to Rome to seek Vatican approval so that international expansion could begin. He would live there for the rest of his life. By the 1950s, Opus Dei had begun its international expansion. The institution established itself in several countries across Europe, including Italy, the United Kingdom, and France. Opus Dei's presence was formalised in Rome in 1946 when Escrivá moved there, viewing the city as the global centre of Catholicism. From Rome, Escrivá guided the development of Opus Dei, overseeing its rapid expansion across various continents. By the 1960s and 1970s, Opus Dei had reached Latin America, the United States, and Asia, resulting in a total of 30 countries. This period of growth was marked by the establishment of centres and educational institutions, particularly in countries with strong Catholic populations.

Fr Josemaría wanted to personally teach members from all the new countries, so he oversaw the building of a large complex in Rome where young members could gather and study Christian doctrine and then return to their countries to spread it along with the message of Opus Dei. He referred to this study as a “battle of formation”. Today, Opus Dei operates in over 60 countries and has more than 90,000 members. Its members include both lay people and clergy, with lay people making up the vast majority. Opus Dei runs numerous educational institutions, universities, and schools, which reflect its commitment to promoting education as a path to personal and spiritual development.



On June 26th , 1975, he died suddenly of a heart attack and was buried in the church of Our Lady of Peace in the central headquarters of Opus Dei in Rome. Immediately, people around the world began to pray to him for all their needs. On October 6th, 2002, before an enormous crowd in St. Peter Square, Pope John Paul II declared him to be a saint, referring to him as the "saint of ordinary life" In 1982, Pope John Paul II made Opus Dei a personal prelature, giving it greater autonomy in carrying out its mission.

"Human life - your life - and its humdrum, ordinary business, have a meaning which is divine, which belongs to eternity."



A Faith That Unites

Author: Libby Pey, Electronic Engineering, 2nd year

My name is Libby Pey, and I have the privilege of serving as the president of the University of Nottingham's Catholic Society. Earlier this year, we were taken aback when we discovered that the university had placed a content warning on the module "Chaucer and his Contemporaries." This warning wasn't about adult themes, violence, or anything that might traditionally warrant a trigger warning. Instead, it was for the "expressions of Christian faith." I don't know about you, but I would



assume that students at one of the UK's top Russell Group universities would already expect a module on Chaucer to include Christian themes. After all, Chaucer was writing in a time when Christianity deeply influenced literature, culture, and society. So, what exactly was the university warning against? After meeting with the module convenors, our worst fears were confirmed. We were told that Christianity could be offensive to some people today and that it was "not an open and inclusive faith for all."



I was stunned. In my time as president of the Catholic Society, I have met Catholics from Nigeria, Ukraine, America, India, Poland, and many other countries. Few things in this world unite people from such diverse backgrounds as the Catholic faith. To suggest that Christianity is exclusionary while ignoring its global and unifying presence is not just misguided—it is deeply unfair. Determined to push back against this misrepresentation, I reached out to other Christian societies on campus,

hoping to issue a joint statement. Unfortunately, societies like the Christian Union—an evangelical society largely directed by the IFES—chose not to stand with us. But the response from fellow Catholics was overwhelming! With their encouragement and support, I knew backing down was not an option. Thanks to the efforts of Marko, your current president of the Catholic Society at the University of Kent, Christian Concern, and the University of Nottingham's Catholic Chaplaincy, we were able to secure a meeting with the head of the English department. After discussion, they agreed to remove the content warning.

This experience reminded me of Jesus' words:

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

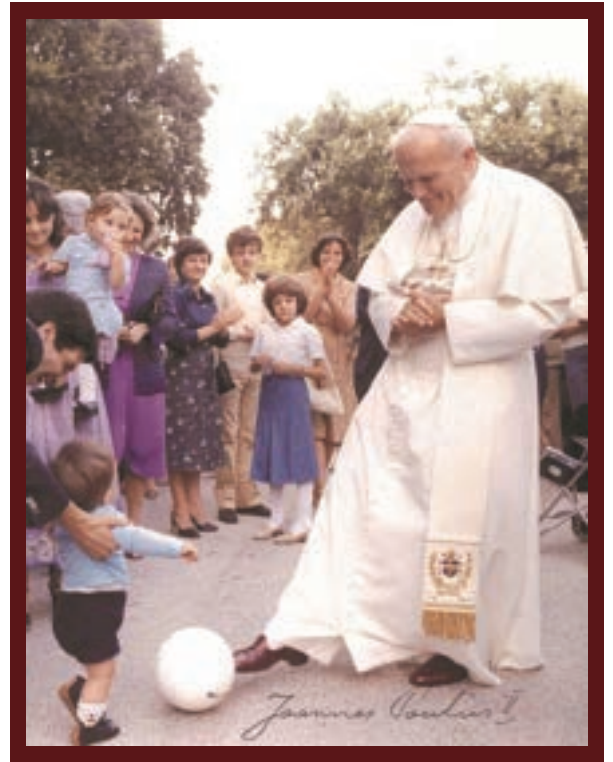
Facing opposition for one's faith is not just inevitable—it is a blessing. It calls us to stand firm, to rejoice in adversity, and to trust that God is always with us. To all who find themselves in similar battles, stay steadfast, and never be afraid to defend the truth.

God bless,
Libby Pey
President
University of Nottingham Catholic Society

Sport

Author: Nathan Fernandes Sports Science, 3rd year

Football, known as “the beautiful game”, is more than just a sport – it is a global phenomenon that transcends cultural, social, and economic boundaries. It unites people from diverse backgrounds, creating a shared sense of individual ideology and communal harmony. This article explores how football interacts with Christianity, highlighting how faith influences the sport’s values, its players, and its role within the communities worldwide. Modern football traces its roots back to 19th-century England, where it evolved from various forms of folk football. The establishment of its rules in 1863 marked the birth of the sport as we all know it today. From these beginnings, football was spread throughout the world.



Christian institutions, particularly in the UK, played a significant role in the early promotion and organisation of football. Churches and Christian schools used this sport as a tool in cultivating discipline, teamwork, and moral values in young people. Mainly early football groups integrating faith with physical activity to nurture both body and spirit.

In the spirit of Christianity, fair play is not only about abiding by the official rules but also about showing respect and humility towards others, whether they are teammates, opponents, officials, or fans. Just as the teachings of Christ emphasise love, kindness, and honesty, these virtues are echoed in the way footballers are expected to conduct themselves. A commitment to fair play extends beyond following the letter of the law and encourages players to display sportsmanship, showing qualities such as graciousness in victory and humility in defeat.

The adherence to rules in football also helps foster a sense of community and unity. When teams play fairly and with integrity, they create an environment where mutual respect thrives. This is particularly important in international tournaments where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds come together. Christian footballers, in particular, often see these moments as opportunities to bridge divides, proving that the spirit of the game is rooted in fairness and respect for all, no matter their background.

Moreover, the value of discipline in football mirrors the Christian teaching of self-control and perseverance. Just as Christianity encourages believers to maintain discipline in their faith and actions, the rules of football require players to remain disciplined in their movements and decisions. By following the rules of the game, footballers not only enhance the integrity of the sport but also reflect the broader Christian principle of striving to live a righteous and just life.



Over the decades, many players have highlighted their Christian faith as a huge force, helping them navigate the intense pressures of fame and competition. Icons of the game such as Pelé and Kaká have openly shared how their beliefs influence their approach to both victory and defeat, impacting the way they carry themselves on and off the field. For these athletes, football is more than just a career; it's seen as a "gift" that comes with a responsibility. Through their actions and words, they strive to use their platform to encourage and uplift others, viewing their success as an opportunity to positively impact the world around them.

Some well-known football players, such as Messi and Ronaldo, have been vocal or expressive about their Christian faith, showing how their beliefs shape their lives both off and on the field.

Lionel Messi thanked God for Argentina's 2022 World Cup triumph in Qatar. The Argentinian star said, 'I always say that it all depends on God and what He wants. He decides the moments; I always felt that way, that everything happens for a reason. I always ask God, and I thank Him for everything He gave me.' Known for his humble nature despite his global fame, Messi reportedly prays before matches and often acknowledges his belief in God's guidance.



Messi having a particularly meaningful connection with Pope Francis, who is also from Argentina. Their mutual respect has been a point of pride for many Argentinians, and it highlights Messi's alignment with Christian principles of humility, compassion, and hard work.



While Ronaldo is often celebrated for his discipline, fitness, and ambition, his faith also plays a subtle role in his life. Raised in a Catholic family, Ronaldo has been known to cross himself before games and occasionally speaks about his beliefs. Although he is more private about his faith compared to some players, he often expresses gratitude to God for his family, health, and career, reminding fans of his spiritual values.

For Ronaldo, faith is a grounding force amidst the demands and spotlight of an extraordinary career. He has also been known to support various charities and humanitarian causes, echoing values of compassion and generosity often associated with his upbringing. For many footballers, faith is a guiding principle. Private prayers before matches and public displays of faith, such as kneeling or pointing to the heavens after scoring, are common. These gestures serve as personal affirmations and are often embraced by fans, highlighting the shared connection between sports enthusiasts and athletes.



The relationship between faith and football encapsulates a rich tapestry of beliefs, narratives, triumphs, and challenges. As we have seen, this interaction has profound implications not just for players and clubs, but also for communities and fans. Through exploration of historical contexts, significant events, and influential figures, we witness the multifaceted dimensions of this relationship.



Faith, when embraced positively, can enhance the human experience within football, fostering values that resonate deeply with audiences worldwide. Simultaneously, it remains crucial to recognise and address the challenges that may arise within this intersection, ensuring that the beautiful game continues to be a source of hope, unity, and transformative power.

As we move forward, the dialogue around faith and football must remain open and reflective, paving the way for future generations of players, fans, and communities. Ultimately, it is through thoughtful engagement with both faith and football that we may discover deeper meanings and greater impacts across the global stage.

2024- 2025





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