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Our Lady and the Eucharist

Summertime and the Livin’ is Easy

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George Orwell’s dystopian classic *1984* ends when the hero, “the last man”, Winston, finally succumbs to the dictator’s torturers and abandons his principal that: “Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four?”:

“His thoughts wandered again. Almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust on the table: \(2 + 2 = 5\).

With the abolition of objective truth, freedom also dies and there is nothing left but the party line: four equals five if the party says it does. The dictatorship only reaches total power when there is no longer any “guardians of the human spirit” to uphold the “freedom to say that two plus two make four”.

On May 22 the majority of voters in Ireland’s same-sex “marriage” referendum reached their own Orwellian conclusion that: a man + a man = a married couple. With simple pen-strokes on ballot papers the recognition of motherhood and fatherhood was obliterated from the most fundamental document of our society. There is no way of avoiding the conclusion that a nation has just signed up for an Orwellian nightmare; significantly the destruction of the family is presented in *1984* as a fundamental goal of dictatorship:

“… in the future there will be no wives and no friends. Children will be taken from their mothers at birth, as one takes eggs from a hen. The sex instinct will be eradicated. Procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card.”

There has been a national apostasy, not from the teachings of the Catholic Church, but from the structure of reality itself: the electorate has taken the truly Promethean step of abolishing the divine language written into creation by the Creator. The aboriginal binary engendering of mankind is to be replaced
with whatever now springs from the human mind and heart during the sleep of reason. In taking this step Ireland has passed a point of no return – at least no foreseeable return until the social calamity it will inevitably bring has run its course. The alternative to the rule of truth as embodied in creation is the “dictatorship of relativism”, as Pope Benedict famously warned in 2005. Gender ideology – the rejection of nature’s structuring of man as male and female – is now written in to the Irish constitution.

A recurring feature of all ideology is what Arthur Koestler call its “terrible compulsion” to follow its own internal logic through to its final and terrible consequences. This phrase appears in his novel *Darkness at Noon*, a fictional account of the Moscow show trials of the 1930s. Here the disgraced Rubashov writes in his diary about his own behaviour as a communist leader:

“As we have thrown overboard all conventions and rules of cricket-morality, our sole guiding principle is that of consequent logic. We are under the terrible compulsion to follow our thought down to its final consequence and to act in accordance to it.”

Few adherents of ideologies could imagine at the outset what dreadful effects the relentless application of its warped logic would produce in time, and there is no reason to believe that the gender ideology now sweeping the West will prove an exception to the rule of “terrible compulsion”.

Both Orwell and Koestler present an insatiable appetite for assent, internal as well as external, as another feature of totalitarian systems. It is not enough for Big Brother that Winston says under torture that 2 + 2 = 5; he must believe it. Similarly Koestler’s Rubashov muses: “We resembled the great Inquisitors in that we persecuted the seeds of evil not only in men’s
deeds, but in their thoughts. We admitted no private sphere, not even inside a man’s skull.” This insight allows us to understand what drove those busy little Inquisitors from bakery to bakery in Belfast placing orders for same-sex “marriage” cakes, until they finally ferreted out the owners of Asher’s bakery and uncovered their Thoughtcrime to the world.

Another salient feature of ideology is the magnetic appeal it exerts on the young, easily stirred as they are by their admirable idealism. It was the young who more than anyone else were drawn in their droves to the hammer and sickle and to the swastika in the twentieth century, as it is once again now idealistic young Europeans who slip off to Syria and Iraq, drawn by the black flag of IS. Young Irish people campaigned and voted overwhelmingly in favour of same-sex marriage: 98% in the case of Trinity College Dublin. While their guardians were distracted with other things, the Pied Piper of gender ideology came and stole Ireland’s young people away.

Perhaps the most salient feature of societies in thrall to an ideology is their conformity to the party line, usually with fear as a significant constraining factor. The almost total conformity amongst the media and politicians to the prevailing orthodoxy was most remarkable and worrying. While almost 40% of voters wished to retain the traditional definition of marriage, certainly nothing even remotely approaching 40% of senators, TDs and journalists did so. Nowhere on the planet, outside of North Korean style dictatorships, can such conformity be found today. What was it about the intellectual and moral formation they received during their formative years that left them so devoid of critical faculties and moral courage, in a word, spineless?
Where to from here?

Ireland has been undergoing a profound spiritual crisis for decades, and the referendum result marks a further milestone in the trajectory of that crisis. The way out of this crisis is the same path the countries Central Europe walked into their during half decade under communism up till 1987. The communist dictatorships in these countries unwittingly created some of the greatest men and women of the twentieth century: heroic churchmen, intellectuals, artists and ordinary workers who refused to accept the Marxist obliteration of the truth about the human person. Among them are the likes of Saint John Paul II, Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac of Croatia, Cardinal József Mindszenty of Hungary, and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia.

In September 2009 Pope Benedict made an Apostolic Visit to the Czech Republic. En route he spoke to journalists about the example Czechs who opposed the post-war communist dictatorship had given the rest of the world:

I will now make a leap into the present: in the last century, the Czech Republic suffered under a particularly rigorous communist dictatorship, but it also had a very sophisticated resistance movement, both Catholic and secular. I am thinking about the writings of Václav Havel, of Cardinal Vlk, about personalities like Cardinal Tomášek, who truly sent Europe a message about what freedom is, and how we must live and work in freedom.

This message about the true nature of freedom is now specially relevant here in Ireland, for what is being trumpeted as a colossal victory for freedom is in fact nothing of the sort. Already we are getting a preview of how civil liberties will be one of the principle victims of the anti-marriage regime. As Pope Benedict pointed out, the deep understanding of the true
meaning of freedom elaborated under the cruel conditions of Czech dictatorship is all important:

As I have said, these countries suffered in a particular way under dictatorship, but in suffering they also developed concepts of freedom that are relevant, and that now must be further elaborated and realized. I am thinking, for example, about something that Václav Havel wrote: “Dictatorship is based on lying, and if lying could be overcome, if no one would lie anymore and if the truth would come to light, there would also be freedom.” And in this way he elaborated this nexus between truth and freedom, where freedom is not libertinism, arbitrariness, but is connected to and influenced by the great values of truth, love, solidarity, and of the good in general.

Many commentators here and abroad are interpreting this result as yet another, if not the final, nail in the coffin of Catholic influence on social life and discourse in Ireland. But perhaps precisely the contrary is in fact the case: now the “official” minority status of the Church here frees it up to be the “creative minority” that Pope Benedict spoke of in that same interview:

I would say that normally it is the creative minorities that determine the future, and in this sense the Catholic Church must understand itself as a creative minority that has a heritage of values that are not things of the past, but a very living and relevant reality. The Church must actualize, be present in the public debate, in our struggle for a true concept of liberty and peace.

Now is the time for Irish Catholics, and in a special way Catholic intellectuals, to “actualise”: to be present in the public debate with the force of nothing but our arguments and the heritage of values we have received. They must be the creative minority, or in the words of George Orwell, the “guardians of the human spirit”. Although the dissenting voice of the creative minority is dwarfed by the immense financial
and social resources at the disposal of the nascent dictatorship, this creative minority is already proving the power of truth. It is an incredible achievement that almost 40% of the electorate voted as they did, against the intimidating machinations of the government, against all the main political parties, against all the media organisations, and against millions of US dollars. The creative minority is already at work as the final result actually proves.

We must remember that the message taught by the Church is the most inspirational message there is, just as the lives of the saints are the most inspirational lives ever lived. This newborn Irish creative minority must aim to find ways to inspire the young with their incredible capacity for idealism and self-sacrifice. The message of Saint John Paul II to Ireland’s young people in 1979 needs to be heard again by the youth of 2015:

A society that ... has lost its higher religious and moral principles will become an easy prey for manipulation and for domination by the forces, which, under the pretext of greater freedom, will enslave it even more.... Something else is needed: something that you will find only in Christ, for he alone is the measure and the scale that you must use to evaluate your own life. In Christ you will discover the true greatness of your own humanity; he will make you understand your own dignity as human beings “created to the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26) (Homily of Pope John Paul II at the Mass for the Youth of Ireland, Galway, 30 September 1979).
It’s over in Ireland. The Irish people, by something more than a 60 – 40 majority popular vote have redefined marriage out of existence in their State Constitution and have replaced it with a shallow charade which they will now call marriage. In fact, however, when we look at the overall result – including those who did not vote - we find that this radical constitutional change reflects the will of just over 37 per cent of the Irish electorate. We accept the result because that is the system we have chosen to work with. Nevertheless, we should not be deluded by it.

Marriage however, that primeval bond between a male and a female, still exists – and will exist so long as a man and a woman come together, as did Adam and Eve, to beget children. Long live marriage. The song remains the same.

But the reality now is that the future of natural marriage, the conjugal union of man and woman, in the story of mankind will be even more fraught with difficulty than it has been in the past. It has never had an easy passage – either because of the folly and selfishness of individuals or the pandering of their public representatives to that same folly and selfishness. The first big compromise on the part of the latter was divorce. Now we have this. Ireland’s story is just one piece of a global jigsaw
symbolic for all sorts of reasons, but still just a piece. *The New York Times* now triumphantly declares that Ireland has advanced to the vanguard of this deconstructive process.

Ireland’s electorate has now robbed natural marriage of its constitutional protection in the Irish State. The laws relating to family, children, and all those things which the State’s endorsement of marriage framed and supported are essentially cut adrift in a sea which will be stormy, treacherous and at times destructive of society’s common good and the well-being of individuals. Because of this foolish action, which they thought was just a matter of changing a name, broadening a definition to include something else, they are complicit in an act which is an attempt to change human nature itself. As one opponent of the decision described it, “grotesque nonsense”. Watch this space.

How did this all happen? We know the short-term story well. For an American and global perspective read *How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the ’90s*. This was a book published in 1989 by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen which argues that after the gay liberation phase of the 1970s and 1980s, gay rights groups should adopt more professional public relations techniques to convey their message. This they did with a success which all marvel at. The blueprint was then applied to Ireland.

For the Irish story, the account of how *Atlantic Philanthropies* promoted and funded the infiltration of Ireland’s state and charitable agencies to achieve last month’s referendum victory is by now well known.

But the origin of this social crisis – John Waters, Irish newspaper columnist of the first rank, described it as a social catastrophe – goes back centuries, indeed almost a millennium. Essentially it all began when sentiment and human emotions began to gain the upper hand over human reason. In *The Allegory of Love*, C. S. Lewis would have us believe, very convincingly,
that a radical shift in human consciousness and culture began with the sudden appearance of what we call “courtly love” in eleventh century Languedoc. Lewis explored this theme and thesis in this book, one of his masterworks, perhaps his greatest.

The dominant sentiment he explores is love. But it is love of a highly specialised sort, “whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love”. This all began with the love poetry specific to that time and that place, the love poetry of the Troubadours.

The characteristics of this sentiment, Lewis tells us, and its systematic coherence throughout this poetry as a whole, “are so striking that they easily lead to a fatal misunderstanding. We are tempted to treat ‘courtly love’ as a mere episode in literary history – an episode that we have finished with....” But we have not finished with it. He sees an unmistakable continuity connecting these love songs with the love poetry of the later Middle Ages, and thence, through Petrarch and many others, with that of the present day. If the thing at first escapes our notice, he argues, this is because we are so familiar with the erotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural and universal and therefore do not inquire into its origins. As Lewis says, it seems to us natural that love should be the commonest theme of serious imaginative literature. He looks back at literature preceding this southern French explosion, from the earlier Middle Ages back into antiquity, and finds that “what we took for ‘nature’ is really a special state of affairs, which will probably have an end, and which certainly had a beginning in eleventh-century Provence.” He continues:

*It seems – or it seemed to us till lately – a natural thing that love (under certain conditions) should be regarded as a noble and ennobling passion: it is only if we imagine ourselves trying to explain this doctrine to Aristotle, Virgil, St. Paul, or the author of*
Beowulf, that we become aware how far from natural it is....

French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched....

Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature. There can be no mistake about the novelty of romantic love: our only difficulty is to imagine in all its bareness the mental world that existed before its coming – to wipe out of our minds, for a moment, nearly all that makes the food both of modern sentimentality and modern cynicism.

The death of marriage, as we knew it in our language and our laws, came late in the evolution of our culture, infected as it was, slowly but surely by this creeping dominance of sentimentality over reason. First came the advance of divorce. Divorce now comes, for many, as soon as “love” and sexual attraction fade. Then a sizeable proportion of couples abandoned marriage in the name of love – which was all that mattered to them. They didn’t need it. Cohabitation became a new norm. Then came the demand for social acceptance of homosexual love. Its lobby demanded that marriage be redefined to provide them with society’s badge of acceptance – even while society’s concept of what marriage really is was already in its death throes as a result of earlier and successive redefinitions.

To come to grips with and understand this long revolutionary process, Lewis tells us that we need to conceive a world emptied of that ideal of “happiness” – a happiness grounded on successful romantic love – which still supplies the motive of our popular fiction. In ancient literature love seldom rises above the levels of merry sensuality or domestic comfort, except to be treated as a tragic madness, ἄν ἀνίη which plunges otherwise sane people (usually women) into crime and dis-
grace. Such is the love of Medea, of Phaedra, of Dido; and such the love from which maidens pray that the gods may protect them.

Medea murdered her two little children in her love-hate for Jason, the husband who deserted her. Dido murdered herself, driven mad by her love for another deserter, Aeneas.

At the other end of the classical scale, Lewis says, we find the comfort and utility of a good wife acknowledged in the sober but rooted love of Odysseus for Penelope. There are no big romantic displays of emotion here: *Odysseus loves Penelope as he loves the rest of his home and possessions, and Aristotle rather grudgingly admits that the conjugal relation may now and then rise to the same level as the virtuous friendship between good men. But this has plainly very little to do with ‘love’ in the modern or medieval sense; and if we turn to ancient love-poetry proper, we shall be even more disappointed.*

Plato will not be reckoned an exception by those who have read him with care… Those who call themselves Platonists at the Renaissance may imagine a love which reaches the divine without abandoning the human and becomes spiritual while remaining also carnal; but they do not find this in Plato. If they read it into him, this is because they are living, like ourselves, in the tradition which began in the eleventh century.

So what has all this to do with the Irish referendum? This: the Irish “Yes to Equality” rode home to victory on the on the shoulders of this very same “love” which emanated from the songs of the Troubadours of the eleventh century. It wasn’t that the young and old who voted “Yes” to “love and equality” had been reading courtly love poetry. No, they had been fed on the *artefacts* of 18th and nineteenth century romanticism, morphing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries into a voraciously consumed diet of pop culture expressed through sentimental Hollywood movies and ultra-sentimental pop songs –
not to mention soap-operas and the *chic lit* of Maeve Binchy, Cecelia Aherne *et al*.

The current West End production of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel* is moving to Dublin for a very short season next month. I watched some clips of the 1950s Hollywood version the night before the referendum. I love the show. But while watching it I had premonitions of what was going to happen the next day. How could any generation, I thought, fed on this and much inferior sentimental material do otherwise than vote for “love” over all the other values at stake.

The helplessly smitten Julie (Shirley Jones) sang:

> Common sense may tell you  
> That the ending will be sad  
> And now’s the time to break and run away  
> But what’s the use of wond’rin’  
> If the ending will be sad  
> He’s your fella and you love him  
> There’s nothing more to say.

There is nothing more to say, for the moment. This excepted: the crown is in the hands of a usurper but the King lives, and always will, albeit in the shadows. The marriage of man and woman is as indestructible as is human nature itself. No tyranny, not even a democratic one, can destroy it.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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There is a story told of an old woman kneeling quietly in the church saying her Rosary. The Lord looked down from Heaven and saw her bent over, the beads clicking gently in her hands. He was so moved. Gently He called to her, ‘Agnes, I'm here’; no reply. He tried again, ‘Agnes, its Jesus, I'm here’; still no reply. So He leant down a bit closer and called out for a third time, ‘Agnes, I'm here, its Jesus, can you hear me?’ This time the clicking stopped and a rather irritated Agnes looked up and said, ‘I heard you the first time but I was talking to your Mother!’

There is a gross misconception that when Catholics pray to Our Lady or to the Saints that in some way we are ignoring or neglecting God Himself and for those who are not Catholic and have only at best a very basic understanding of Catholic devotion that might seem a reasonable conclusion; after all there are five Our Fathers and five Glory Bes in the Rosary and fifty Hail Marys!
But Catholic devotion does not, and would never ignore God or replace Him with devotion to anyone else even someone as highly blessed as Mary. So why do we honour her? We honour her because Heaven honours her, God Himself honoured her when He chose her to be the Mother of His Son, and in His earthly life Our Lord honoured her.

The beginning of Saint John’s Gospel tells us that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. When God took flesh He didn’t appear on Earth as an adult, already formed and ready for mission; in the words of Psalm 139, He was knit together in His Mother’s womb.

There is an old prayer for Christmas, ‘Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary at midnight in Bethlehem in the piercing cold.’ God took on the lowliest of existences. He began as a vulnerable baby that needed the care of Our Lady and Saint Joseph. He was born in the middle of the night in the piercing cold in a shed in a town far from home. We know that the Angels and Archangels were gathered round, but they could do nothing; His only support was to be human beings, the love of His earthly mother and father. There was nothing comfortable about it; He was completely at the mercy of this world.

I often think that is why Christmas means so much to us. For the rest of the year we have the image of Jesus as a fully grown man, strong and fit but at
Christmas we think of Him in the Crib, we think of the Shepherds kneeling to adore Him, the Angels keeping a vigil around Him, the Wise Men calling Him Lord and Saviour – but for me the most profound image of the first Christmas night is Mary holding Him and singing Him to sleep.

If you think about it, the greatest series of supernatural events ever to be seen on Earth surround the birth of Our Lord. They begin years earlier when Mary was immaculately conceived in the womb of Saint Anne, then there is the visit to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, then the Birth with the multitude of Angels heralding the birth to the shepherds and the miraculous star leading the Magi from the East. All of these signs tell us that something spectacular was happening, it was something that had never happened before, God took flesh, our flesh, God Himself became one of us. What would be so important to God for Him to leave the radiant splendour of Heaven? Why would He enter this world as a squalling, tiny, vulnerable baby?

Why bring Himself down to the level of us mortals? Why subject Himself to the power of men? Love, simply love. But no ordinary love, given and then taken back when the situation changes. No, this love like all the rest was supernatural. It is a love that far exceeds the human capacity to love, a love, that will never be taken away, a love that became Emmanuel – God with us.

And God still remains with us. Bethlehem means ‘House of Bread’ and at Mass the simple bread we offer and bless becomes the Bread of Angels, the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ Himself. We know that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we offer is the re-presentation of the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary. When Mary stood at the foot of the Cross she was at Mass, when we come to Mass we are at Calvary, we are taken right back to that hill outside Jerusalem and all the graces and blessings that Jesus won on that Cross two thousand years are being poured into our souls each and every time we come before the altar. Our Catholic faith teaches
us that at Mass we are at Calvary, but we are also at Bethlehem because when the Mass is offered in this church it becomes Bethlehem, it becomes the ‘House of Bread’. But like the first Bethlehem this church is not a house of mere ordinary bread – ‘I am the Bread of Life … I am the living bread come down from Heaven.’ And He came down from Heaven through the immaculate womb of the Virgin.

Mary’s role was not over when Jesus was born; she wasn’t just an incubator or a surrogate. Mary was to have a profound influence on the life of her Son, she and Saint Joseph were to nurture Him, guide Him on His journey through life. When Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple, the old man Simeon told them that Jesus was destined to be rejected and he told Mary that a sword would pierce her soul also. That came true thirty three years later as she stood at the foot of the Cross. And it was fitting that she was there because she had been with her Son at all the major events in His life.

If we were to try to picture Mary in our minds we can be steered to think of her as she appears in a lot of paintings, an attractive young woman with light-coloured hair, a milky complexion and rosy cheeks and we might imagine a quiet docile girl standing before Gabriel. A lot of statues of Our Lady have her head bent down in prayer and submission to God’s will. But if we think about it, she lived in the Holy Land and so it’s almost certain that her skin was darker and her hair a raven black and by the time Our Lord began His ministry He was about thirty so Our Lady was probably in her late forties and by the time of the Crucifixion she was probably pushing fifty.

She wasn’t a young girl and she was to play a central role in Jesus’ ministry; it was because of her that He worked the very first miracle, the water into wine, so to think of Mary as a quiet shy girl is wrong; she was a strong resilient woman and the strength of her character is clear when she stood at the foot of the Cross. She was going to be beside her Son to the last.
Our Lord’s mission wasn’t a quiet one, it caused a sensation and it became such a sensation that the Jewish leaders eventually decided He had to be removed. He challenged the prevailing attitudes of the day and had to be disposed of. We know that the faith is under attack in many ways but in the two thousand years of her existence the Church has always been under fire. Way back in 1862 Saint John Bosco had a dream in which he imagined the Church as a ship battling ferocious waves and the attack of other ships. In that dream the ship, the Church, was guided to two pillars which were her anchors; on the top of one was the Blessed Virgin, and on top of the other, taller, pillar was the Host. These are what will lead us and protect us through the maelstrom of this life.

We hear many of the Gospels’ stories so often that they tend to wash over us and we don’t really think about how the people who were there would have reacted. I mentioned the water into wine; the Gospel of the Wedding at Cana is one we hear over and over again at weddings and it has become so familiar that we don’t really take in the huge impact Our Lord’s miracle had. Does Our Lord grant the couple a long and happy life? Does He call down the strength of the Holy Spirit into that marriage? Of course He does, but that is not recorded. What we do know is that He spared the bride and groom from embarrassment and shows us God’s approval for marriage and earthly celebrations and that He was just like the rest of us when it came to enjoying a good party. And that must have been some party. On average at Jewish weddings there would have been about 100-150 guests. These guests had already finished all the wine already there and then Our Lord changed the water in the jars into more wine, 6 jars of 30 gallons, 180 gallons equals 818 litres, which is the equivalent of about 1100 bottles of the best wine. Of course, the Gospel does not recount for us how all the guests managed to get home!
The Gospel also tells us that Our Lady went out of her way to intercede with Jesus and He performed what Saint John tells us was His very first miracle because of His mother’s request. Now the big question: If this was Jesus’ very first miracle, how then did Mary know that Jesus could do it? She was setting Him up to be embarrassed among the wedding guests. So how did she know? Because she knew her child. She knew the hidden talents and potentialities of her Son.

And that brings up more questions: Did Mary know all those thirty years she lived with Jesus that she was living with a wonder-worker and yet she never asked Him to multiply her bread, turn the water on the dinner table into wine, or double her money to make ends meet? How come she never asked Jesus to use His miraculous power to help her out, but she was quick to ask Him to use it and help others? What are Mary and Jesus telling us? They are telling us that God’s gifts to individuals are not meant primarily for our own benefit but for the benefit of everyone. God blessed her with the precious gift of bearing the Son but He didn’t just come to redeem her, He came for us all.

Mary was there all the way from Bethlehem to Calvary; she was there throughout the three years when she saw her Son go from praised to mocked, worshipped to crucified; she was His strength. She had encouraged Him at the very beginning with the miracle in Cana and she was going to encourage Him and strengthen Him to complete the last and greatest miracle on Calvary. Again, the character of a strong woman, not a shy girl. Calvary was the end of the mission and yet Mary’s last recorded words in the Bible are at the beginning of the mission at Cana, ‘Do whatever He tells you.’

I often think that by looking at the image of Perpetual Help, as Mary’s eyes bore into ours, Mary is not telling us to blindly obey rules and regulations. She is telling us, like her, to take time to think about what God is telling us, saying to us. God is
telling us to be His witnesses, God is telling us to be His children, God is telling us to be the best possible version of ourselves – the best of friends, the best of colleagues, the best of neighbours, the best of children, the best of parents, be the best of mothers for those who are blessed with children.

As I said, Mary was not a young, quiet, shy fair maiden. She was, she is a woman of strength, of determination, a woman who stood by a Cross with her jaw set when all the men had fled in fear and as we picture the real Mary look at us through the determined eyes in this icon, picture that she is, as a true Mother, willing us to do whatever her Son wants of us. And what He wants is that we will be faithful to Him, we will be guided by Him, we will seek the protection and prayers of His Mother and we will live the life He has given us anchored on His Mother and on His most holy Body and Blood.
What do you associate summer with? When I was younger, and particularly when I was a school girl, the summer holidays stretched magnificently before me – a vast expanse of late rises and opportunities to laze about all day in my pjs, free from the shackles of timetables, homework and after school practices. In reality, that never worked out as my mother always had other ideas and rightly so. I can still remember polishing and dusting and folding laundry. Now that I’m a mother myself and a full time teacher, the summer isn’t about sleep, although we all do enjoy a little lie in now and again. For me, the summer months give me an opportunity to make even better use of my time and take advantage of free weekdays! I’m particularly looking forward to the summer this year. Although I’ve been on maternity leave, I’ll be going back to work for a few weeks in June and then back to full time rigour once again in September, so I want to make sure I get the best out of summer both for my family and myself. I’ve decided to set myself a few resolutions of all the things I would like to achieve by the strike of midnight on the first of September.

The first on my list is reading and lots of it. When I return to school in September, I’ll be teaching a new course at A level, the equivalent of the Leaving Certificate. There are lots of books for the course and while it is not compulsory to study every one of them, it’s a great chance for me to discover new authors whose work I have never read and to rediscover the joy of old favourites. I’m particularly looking forward to revisiting some plays by Brian Friel and my absolute favourite, The Great Pope Francis

Summertime and the Livin’ is Easy
by Siobhan Scullion
“Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald. During summertime, people usually do set aside time for reading especially when holidays call for typical beach reads and “chick lit”. My choice of reading may not fall into those categories but I’m looking forward to expanding my cultural horizon a little.

The next on my list is very much in keeping with this idea of enriching my appreciation of culture. Our little ones adore getting away for a trip in the car and thankfully they’re good travellers. At the weekends, we like to get away here and there but it’s been a while since we’ve had a proper day trip – the Balmoral Show being one exception. I’m looking forward to the chance to visit museums, beaches, quaint villages, sites of interest. No matter where it is, I’m more than happy to be a tourist for the day. A lot of places are very accommodating of children these days too with interactive play areas, dress ups and performances and age appropriate workshops. When I have my final “day trip” list drawn up, I’ll be keen to start ticking all the places off. But enriching our appreciation of culture doesn’t necessarily mean you have to pack the car up for a day.

There’s always radio programmes, podcasts, or courses and classes to take. I’m always impressed by a woman at work who takes a holiday language course every summer before she flies off on her foreign holiday.

Summer does of course bring foreign holidays and while we can always phone home, there are others ways of communicating. Nowadays communication is so instant, and that’s fantastic. Social media and email have the great advantage of making it possible to stay in touch 24/7. But every now and again it’s nice to receive some old fashioned snail mail, in the form of a letter or postcard. I think part of its appeal is because it’s such a rarity – usually the postman only brings the bills! So this summer, I want to make the effort to send a few letters and postcards to family and friends. I love to receive them myself and it’s a great way to let people know you’re thinking of them.

Finally, anyone who knows me will know how much importance I place on husband and wife taking care of their marriage by putting each other and their relationship first. I’m often on the receiving end of a bit of stick (all in jest mind you!) for compli-
menting my “handsome” husband often. But I’m certainly not looking at marriage through rose tinted glasses; every marriage has its ups and downs, because men and women are so fundamentally different. That difference is great and part of our complimentary nature but every now and then it needs a little tweaking – we just think differently! You know the old saying, men are from Mars and women are from Venus? That’s why I think it’s so important to take care of marriage, especially by carving out quality time to spend together. Summer is a great opportunity to rethink the concept of “date nights”. It’s a chance to rethink the age old dinner in a nice restaurant (which can stretch the budget a little too much) or film on a Saturday night (where I personally end up eating far too much popcorn!) Summer can bring evening walks, even just a stroll around the garden when the children are in bed for the night; picnics on lunch breaks if your children are school age; or getting up extra early before the children for a morning coffee together before the madness of the day descends.

Ella Fitzgerald once sang the Gershwin classic with the line that goes “Summertime and the livin’ is easy”, and it certainly is. I’ll be glad to slow down and relax but getting a good rest doesn’t always mean sitting about doing absolutely nothing; I find it makes me even more restless! I may have set my expectations a little high with my list of summer “to do’s” and I’ll be doing well to get through half of what I’ve planned. But as we all know, Ireland is not always gifted with the sunshine so maybe I’ll be glad to have a few activities tucked up my sleeve that aren’t the typical “lie in the sun” type. Wherever you are this summer, enjoy, and try not to keep all the sunshine for yourself!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Siobhan Scullion is an Arts graduate of Queens University Belfast and a regular contributor to Position Papers.
Francis Campbell, former UK Ambassador to the Holy See and a native of Co Down, recently challenged a modern myth about Catholic schools (The Tablet, 17 January 2015). He noted that in current reflections about the Northern ‘Troubles’ and their causes, Catholic schools in particular, because of their denominational nature, seem to be singled out for blame for fuelling sectarianism.

The reality, as Campbell argues, was very different. The Catholic Church – along with other Churches – was a very strong restraining force during the Northern conflict and strongly opposed political violence: “The myth of Catholic schools breeding sectarianism or fuelling the Troubles is just that – a myth. The schools and parishes I knew helped to keep a lid on the violence and to remind us all of the power of the Christian message and in very testing circumstances. They did not breed hatred.”

The Pro-Life Amendment of the 1980s, which added explicit protection for the unborn to the Irish Constitution, was also condemned as sectarian and much else besides (divisive, unrepresentative, unnecessary, “right-
wing”…) - in the national media at the time and since.

Time has definitely not cooled the ardour of the critics. According to a newspaper article in 2014, the Pro-Life or Eighth Amendment was motivated by an ideology that was “sectarian”, “paranoid” and … “apocalyptic” while words or expressions such as “misogyny”, “reactionary”, “moral civil war” and “moral crusade” have also featured.

It would not be helpful to respond in kind to such vehement critiques. I supported the amendment but would acknowledge the sincerity and strength of conviction of those who opposed it. The 1983 pro-life referendum is now part of Irish history and as such is subject to legitimate scrutiny – for those interested in the detail, Thomas Hesketh’s fair-minded The Second Partitioning of Ireland (Brandsma Books, 1990) is a good place to start.

This article offers a personal reflection on the Pro-Life Amendment that is based on my own experience at the time as a grassroots supporter. In my view, standard media accounts of the amendment constitute another Irish “myth” like the one identified by Francis Campbell. This is not merely a point of historical interest as it is likely that a serious effort will be made in the coming years to delete the pro-life amendment from the Constitution.

The case in the 1980s for underpinning existing Irish anti-abortion legislation with Constitutional protection arose in a specific context: the recent introduction of liberal abortion regimes in countries such as Britain without adequate consultation with the people and a disturbingly curtailed debate afterwards. In the US, while debate certainly continued afterwards, the Supreme Court established, in 1973, a virtually unlimited national right to abortion, in the process overturning anti-abortion laws in individual States. The abortion issue had not yet moved centre-stage in Ireland but abortion referral had been growing since the British Abortion Act of 1967. Nevertheless, there remained strong Irish op-
position to legalised abortion and it was to this anti-abortion consensus that the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) appealed in launching its campaign: had such a consensus not existed, few politicians would have taken the PLAC proposal seriously.

Grassroots supporters like myself thought it a very good idea in that context for Ireland to offer strong Constitutional protection for the unborn. We did not see ourselves as joining a Catholic crusade but as having a duty to do all we could to safeguard the right to life of our unborn brothers and sisters.

The amendment proposal was frequently described by the media as “divisive” but, thirty years on, this argument seems threadbare. Critics of divisiveness in 1983 did not raise this concern again when the Irish were asked to vote twice on divorce and twice on the Nice and Lisbon European treaties nor when it was decided to put same-sex marriage to a vote in 2015. While the amendment debate did cause division, it perhaps more significantly revealed existing divisions in Ireland that had been somewhat under the surface previously – divisions, for example, and using an admittedly rough shorthand, between more faith-based and more secularised world-views.

The term “moral civil war” is clearly emotive but there certainly was a collision of world-views at the time of this referendum debate. A curious aspect of this collision is that analysis of it at the time and since has been dominated by those on the minority rather the majority side of the referendum vote.

The issues surrounding religious faith and the amendment get generally sketchy treatment in the media, even though the “sectarian” charge is often made. In any debate, the starting-point for all Christians must be faith in Christ rather than support for any specific political initiative. In that sense, support for the amendment was not an article of faith for Catholics or other Christians. Nevertheless, many Catholics, listening to the
arguments and guided by their pastors, did eventually vote for the amendment while some Catholics opposed it.

Concern about historic links between Church and State in Ireland was clearly part of the context for the amendment debate and helps to explain its intensity. As Tom Hesketh’s thorough and nuanced study shows, Catholic organisations were actively involved in the initial promotion of, and in the campaign for, a pro-life amendment; but, as he also notes, organisational links between PLAC and the Catholic Church were minimal and PLAC had an explicitly non-denominational approach while its leading spokespeople placed a clear emphasis throughout on human rights arguments for the protection of the unborn.

It is true that the Catholic bishops strongly supported the amendment, though they did not initiate it, and that the leadership of the Protestant Churches opposed it and that significant differences between the Christian Churches on abortion, or at least on the merits or otherwise of the pro-life amendment, emerged during the debate. It is regrettable that the Churches were unable to reach a common position on such an important question, though clearly these differences between the Churches on abortion applied internationally and were not confined to Ireland. On the other hand, some of the Irish differences were about legal questions, such as the wisdom or otherwise of adding a Constitutional prohibition to an existing legislative prohibition, rather than about abortion per se. There were significant efforts at dialogue between PLAC and the Protestant Churches, and the amendment was supported by highly respected Protestant ministers such as Rev. Cecil Kerr, a pioneer of ecumenical dialogue in the North. Though the Churches did take different stances on the amendment, they continued to work constructively together in support of reconciliation and against sectarianism across the island in the 1980s and afterwards during the challenging years of the Northern Troubles.
A criticism linked to the sectarian charge was that of “unrepresentativeness” – that is, that the pro-life amendment was the brainchild of a small group of Catholics but did not enjoy wider support.

In reality, PLAC had the university professors of obstetrics and gynaecology among its patrons – that is, doctors with huge experience in, and commitment to, the care of mothers and their babies – and gathered support from one thousand Irish doctors, many pro-amendment lawyers and grassroots activists from all walks of life across the country. Ultimately, a referendum is a highly democratic endeavour and the question of representativeness could only be settled on referendum day. On 7 September 1983, there was a decisive two to one vote in favour of the amendment. While the overall “no” vote was substantial, and turnout at around 54% was disappointing, only five out of forty-one constituencies voted against, after a two-year debate that was viewed on all sides as probably the most intense in Ireland since the 1920s. Three years later, there was a fairly similar anti-divorce vote – which suggests that the electorate was not in fact tricked by an unrepresentative lobby in 1983 but that there was a reasonably stable pro-life/pro-family consensus at that time.

The pro-life amendment did arouse intense debate and any abusiveness on either side, or dismissal of opposing views, was regrettable. Nevertheless, in a democratic society, there is a compelling case for consultation of the people on issues of fundamental importance such as the right to life of the unborn. One of the benefits of the referendum debate was that it allowed pro-life arguments to be set out much more fully than they would have been in the absence of a referendum. Indeed, some of the media anger about the referendum debate seemed to have its roots in an elitist irritation that the people as a whole, and not just a small group of policy-makers at the centre, were to decide the abortion debate at that time.
The abortion issue has clearly moved on since the 1980s and any re-run of the Eighth Amendment debate will take place in a much changed context, including the Supreme Court’s highly contentious X-case verdict in 1992 and the passing of abortion legislation in 2013. This legislation was passed without prior referendum, and most of the country’s elected representatives were not permitted to conscientiously dissent from Government proposals. Nevertheless, the Pro-Life Amendment still offers some protection to the unborn and prevented, for a generation, the introduction of a liberal abortion regime in Ireland – which is why there are now repeated calls for its repeal.

For grassroots supporters like myself, a disconcerting feature of the 1983 pro-life referendum was the extremely biased coverage it received in the national media and the huge contrast between the intense, hostile media scrutiny of PLAC and the virtual absence – one Sunday newspaper article excepted - of major media investigation of the Anti-Amendment Campaign.

The media’s approach has changed depressingly little in the years since. To take one example, the *Irish Times* campaigned with great intensity against the pro-life amendment in the 1980s and its one-sided approach to abortion continues to this day, as Dr Ruth Cullen pointed out in a major piece for *Village* magazine in 2014.

In 1983, however, in a reflection on the eve of the vote about PLAC’s first press conference, an *Irish Times* journalist courageously dissented from his paper’s then editorial line on the pro-life amendment. This comment by Patrick Nolan, the paper’s religious affairs correspondent at the time, offered a calm rebuttal of the sectarian myth that is still being attached to that amendment thirty years later:

*My impression of the campaign patrons – leading gynaecologists and obstetricians – was that they were idealistic and sincere. Their case for the
amendment was based on human rights. Supported by influential legal opinion, they saw a case for changing the Constitution if abortion was not to be legalised, if the unborn were to be protected. At the outset, they said they were approaching the issue on a non-denominational basis and that they would be consulting the Churches. One of them was a non-Roman Catholic. I honestly could not regard that conference as the start of a sectarian campaign that would seek to impose medieval authoritarianism on the country. With all necessary respect to opposing opinion, I simply do not see it in that light today (Irish Times, 6 September 1983).

Tim O’Sullivan is a regular contributor to Position Papers and published in the 1980s a small study on newspaper coverage of the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign: Fair and Accurate?, Veritas, 1984.
In 1894 Lord Alfred Douglas published a poem called ‘The Two Loves’. In it he dreams of walking in a beautiful, flower-filled garden where he meets two others ‘walking on a shining plain of golden light.’ One seems joyful, the other sad. Wondering at his sorrow, the poet asks him:

‘Sweet youth,
Tell me why, sad and sighing, thou dost rove
These pleasant realms? I pray thee speak me sooth
What is thy name?’ He said, ‘My name is Love.’
Then straight the first did turn himself to me
And cried, ‘He lieth, for his name is Shame,
But I am Love, and I was wont to be
Alone in this fair garden, till he came
Unasked by night; I am true Love, I fill
The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame.’
Then sighing, said the other, ‘Have thy will,
I am the Love that dare not speak its name.’

and the day when such relationships had to be spoken of in euphemisms has long passed. I imagine few could regret that the time when people thing for people who believe what the Church has taught on this subject since the time of Christ to understand or accept.
Some see the result as a disaster. I don't think it is quite right to see it in such bleak terms. It was always clear that it was never likely that the 'no' side would win. With the majority of the political establishment and the bulk of the mainstream media behind this change, as well as a lot of foreign money, the support for it was incredibly strong. The only real chance of defeating this was that the overwhelming level of support would make 'yes' voters so complacent that they simply didn't bother to turn up at the polling station, allowing the 'no' side to win by default. And that didn't happen.

All this makes what the 'no' side achieved remarkable. It was far from the overwhelming 'yes' vote that was predicted in the early days of the campaign. While a 62 percent vote in favour is significant, almost 40 percent voted against the change. This is far from insignificant. One might almost see it as near miraculous that so many said 'no'. This was, after all, a campaign during the course of which most people were afraid to express how they intended to vote, if that vote was no, until shortly before polling day.

However, though not a disaster, the result is a bewildering one for people who see the faith in traditional terms. How have we come to the point where what Sacred Scripture has to say about such relationships is considered evil by many; where Church teaching on this issue is viewed as the equivalent of hate-speech; and to believe what Christians have believed from the time of Christ is seen as vile homophobia?

Truthfully, I don't know. Part of the answer lies, I think, in the fact that most people no longer believe (or perhaps that might be better phrased no longer wish to believe) in things like sin, the devil, and hell. To the modern mind these have become metaphors from a bygone time used by knaves as a tools of control and dominance that only a fool would take literally. They can not believe that we wish to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them out of love. A love of God that is reflected in a loving obedience to his word; and a love of neighbour that shares that word with them so that they
can not only experience the joy of living out the Gospel in this life but enter into eternal life in the next.

The importance of love in all this can not be overstressed. Christians are commanded by Christ to love all people. Because we love him, we are obedient to that command. And because we love them, we want what is best for them, we want them to love God the way he asks to be loved, and to see that love reflected in the way they lead their lives so they may at the last go to heaven. And if love on occasion requires us to firmly but gently remind them of what Christ taught so that they might enter into eternal life, then we love them enough to brave their anger and outrage to do so.

Ironically, this is now the love that the world around us sees as being a shameful thing; this is the love that is in danger of not being able to speak its name. But we must. The referendum is over; our work now, as it always was, is to proclaim to the nations that God so loved the world that he sent his only beloved Son into the world so that all might be saved.

That because of that same love Christ suffered and died for our sins. This is the love that God has for his children and, because they are our brothers and sisters and we love them, we can not but speak its name.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev Patrick G Burke is the Church of Ireland rector of the Castlecomer Union of Parishes, Co Kilkenny. A regular contributor to Position Papers, he was formerly a broadcast journalist with the Armed Forces Radio and Television Network. He blogs at thewayoutthere1.blogspot.ie, is a frequent correspondent to the letters page of the Irish Times and other national newspapers, and can occasionally be heard on RTE Radio One’s 'A Living Word.'
Gabriele Kuby is a German sociologist and publicist as well as one of the most renowned authorities on criticizing the today’s Western relativism. For example, it is thanks to her that the Federal Minister for the Family, Ursula von der Leyen was forced to remove from circulation the sex education book Body, Love and Playing Doctor, which amongst other aberrations encouraged parents to engage in sexually orientated games with their children.

The Global Sexual Revolution has the same subject as two of her previous publications: Gender Revolution (2006) and Nationalization of Education. On the Way Becoming New Men (2007). As the title of this latest publication states, we face a worldwide revolution, which, as the subtitle indicates (Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom) claims to radically change people and society by leveraging on a will to power, of a clearly Nietzschean inspiration. It is from this interpretative key that Kuby tells the history, the methods and the consequences of a powerful global agenda which seeks to modify the constitutions of countries, educa-
tional institutions and social norms of people with one unique aim: the construction of a global society where people are completely (or almost) manipulated.

A reader might think that it is the usual book about plots and intrigues but it is sufficient to see the quantity of documents analysed, the facts and statistics gathered to understand that this a book which has been objectively and rigorously written. Despite the vast quantity of information material, the reading of the book is far from being boring and each page is filled with suspense and startling revelations. The reader is informed about the backstage, the means, and the intricate web of government organisations and non-governmental organisations involved in this global agenda.

In the first part of the book (chapters 1-4), Kuby briefly describes the historical framework of today’s sexual revolution: the French Revolution as the beginning of the fight for equality, and the feminist movement in 1968 as the preliminary stage towards gender ideology. According to this movement, Humanity is no longer made up of men and women but of a mass of equals who have the right to construct their own sexual identity. In other words, gender theory recognises not two sexual identities but many gender identities: lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transsexual men and women. The author states that the connection between the 1968 movement and ideology of gender is Malthusianism, i.e. the attempt to diminish the world population, above all the poor in the Western world and in developing countries. The author quotes numerous renowned writers such as Margaret Sanger, Alexandra Kollonti, Wilhelm Reich, Eddie Bernays, Simone de Beauvoir, John Money, Judith Butler and others who support this point of view. The global impulse of the sexual revolution does not proceed solely by ideas but also through conferences organised by the United Nations (Peking, Cairo, etc.) which deconstruct human rights and deregulate norms of sexuality and the family. As a consequence, various slogans have
reached the four corners of the world such as abortion is a woman’s right, “gender” should not be imposed but should be chosen, etc. In spite of the past centuries, the methods of the global sexual revolution are the same as those used by the old French Revolution: the use of terror. Today, however, the guillotine is not used to cut off the opponents’ heads but simply their jobs, or their academic or political careers.

In the second part of the book (chapters 5-10), Kuby continues her analysis of organisms and documents, which try to introduce gender theory. Among these is are the twenty-nine principles of Yogyakarta (on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) which were formulated in 2007 by a group of “human rights experts” without any authorisation or legitimacy in a private meeting in the town of Yogyakarta in Indonesia. In March of that year, these principles were presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The media gave the impression that it was an official
document when it was nothing of the sort. From this, the European Union accepted immediately these principles and sought to implement them in various institutions, hospitals and tribunal courts, etc... and in nurseries and schools. Kuby explains that the reason for this lies in the attempt to destroy the values on which the family is based and in order to do this, it is necessary to undermine the heterosexual union (an immense task to fulfil when the majority of adults are heterosexual). Children and adolescents, on the other hand, are easily influenced and we can imagine the consequences if the ministry of family policies shares the same ideology. In a hyper-sexualised society, children are sexualised by the entertainment industry, the media and compulsory sex education programs. The latter is used to undermine parental authority. Children are sexualised through games, stories and plays in schools and nursery playgrounds. Children are exposed and encouraged to engage in deviant sexual practice and as such their personality can have irreversible changes. In this way, children’s innocence is taken away from them. By implementing gender mainstreaming, “language is corrupted in the service of political mass manipulation”. Pornography too plays a decisive role in corrupting the values of the family today. Not surprisingly, Kuby defines them as the new global sore of society. The creation of neologisms like “gender” and substituting words like parent A (father) and parent B (mother) are simply ways to corrupt words and give them the origins to “new realities”. As ideologists of each era have always thought “it is not the truth which makes us free, but freedom which makes the truth”.

In the last part of the book (chapters 11-15), Kuby analyses the weapons which a totalitarian agenda uses to fight its rebels: intolerance and discrimination. As the author explains there is a paradox (see subtitle of book), i.e. the idea of taking away freedom in the name of freedom. In order to fight against this ideology which makes sex an instrument to impose a new anthropological conception, the
author strongly advises the reader to look deep and hard into themselves, to their conscience to seek the “true, faithful, life-giving love … for it is a battle for the dignity of man, the family and our children”. In other words, Kuby’s antidote to gender ideology is to educate about love and not about sexuality.

As Spaemann writes in the preface, Kuby has to be thanked for having the courage to speak up against this new ideology by offering an illuminating essay that reveals the importance of linguistic, pedagogical and academic changes which, at first sight, seem to be only a little bizarre. What in actual fact we find out is that there are many governments, parties, organisations, groups and associations which are all involved in the construction of a new humanity.

I think that this book deserves to be translated in various languages and would like to make two suggestions to the author. The first point is to review the last chapters to give a better form to the ideas in order to avoid repeating them. The second point is to give a better definition of the two types of feminism: those who fought for and continue to fight for the recognition of political and social rights of women, i.e. the equality of woman as a person, and the other more radical type which imitates the degenerated masculine sexuality for which sex is simply for sexual pleasure without responsibility or consequence. In this way, I think it would make clear what constitutes to be the feminine genius: the act of self-giving; the assertion of which is far from being an obstacle to love but rather its premise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Antonio Malo lectures in Philosophical Anthropology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome).
Thomas Hardy's 1874 novel about romantic entanglements in the English countryside returns to the big screen in "Far from the Madding Crowd" (Fox).

In this fourth film adaptation of the classic work, director Thomas Vinterberg aims squarely at the "Downton Abbey" fan base while remaining faithful to his source. A top-rank cast, lush cinematography and high drama -- both above and below stairs -- combine into a treat that's suitable for teens as well as grownups.

The setting is England's bucolic West Country, some 200 miles away from the "madding" -- that is, frenzied -- population of London. Life may be quieter along the Dorset coast but the living is also hard, as shepherds tend their sheep and farmers hope for a good harvest.

At the heart of the story is Bathsheba Everdene (Carey Mulligan). This proto-feminist is spunky and independent-minded. She casts Victorian conventions aside, speaking freely and joining in the farm work on the homestead of the aunt (Tilly Vosburgh) and uncle with whom she lives.

Gabriel Oak (Matthias Schoenaerts), a kindly shepherd, admires Bathsheba's spirit. He impulsively proposes marriage, but she turns him down.

"I'd hate to be someone's property," Bathsheba confesses. "I shouldn't mind being a bride at a
wedding, if I could be one without having a husband."
Famous last words, of course. But before any further romantic complications set in, Bathsheba's world is turned upside down by an entirely different kind of development.
Her uncle dies and leaves her his land, along with the family fortune. Suddenly Bathsheba is a powerful woman in a world run by men, but she's determined to make her own way.
"It is my intention to astonish you all," the new boss tells her bewildered staff.
As she achieves success, matters of the heart resurface in a big way. Suddenly Bathsheba, who seemed destined for spinsterhood, has not one, but three suitors.
First, Gabriel -- who has suffered financial reverses and come down in the world -- returns to the scene when Bathsheba hires him to tend her sheep. Gabriel still carries a huge torch for Bathsheba, but now assumes the role of her guardian angel.
Second, there's William Boldwood (Michael Sheen), a "mature" bachelor who owns the neighboring farm. Prosperous but lonely, Boldwood sees marriage to Bathsheba as his last chance to acquire the wife and family for which he longs.
Last but not least, a cad is thrown into the mix: Frank Troy (Tom Sturridge), an army sergeant with a questionable past. Dashing in his red uniform and handy with a sword, he awakens previously unknown feelings in Bathsheba.
Whom -- if any -- of these candidates will our heroine choose? Suffice it to say, there are many twists and turns in store, with a lesson in true love and commitment thrown in for good measure.
The film contains brief violence, some sensuality and a single disturbing image. The Catholic News Service classification is A-II -- adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 -- parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph McAleer is a guest reviewer for Catholic News Service.
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