# Irish voices reflect on Church legacy, EU challenges and energy future



The Irish Examiner has published a series of letters to the editor that reflect on recent events and ongoing issues relating to the Catholic Church, Ireland’s relationship with the European Union, and energy policy in the country.

In one letter, Fr Peadar O’Callaghan of Carrigtwohill, Cork, draws attention to the symbolic significance of Pope Francis’s choice of burial site at the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Fr O’Callaghan highlights the ancient legend connected to the basilica’s dedication, involving a vision to Pope Liberius in the fourth century, where the Virgin Mary signalled where the church should be built by marking the site with snow during the summer heat. “We need not believe the legend that it was a dramatic climate change (snow in summer) that first marked this basilica’s boundary. But we cannot ignore the evidence of science and our own contemporary experiences of what is happening now to planet Earth,” he wrote.

He underscores the symbolic nature of the basilica as Pope Francis addressed the challenge of climate change notably in his 2015 encyclical Laudato Si’ and his 2023 apostolic exhortation Laudate Deum. To coincide with the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si’, Fr O’Callaghan is exhibiting a collection of his oil paintings at Cobh Library from 6 to 30 May, under the title The Earth is not a Background Only. He explains, “It just happened that the library’s beautiful exhibition space became unexpectedly available in May,” and aims to inspire people to appreciate the natural seasonal colours of their local environment.

Another letter, from Brendan Butler of Drumcondra, Dublin 9, reflects critically on Pope Francis’s legacy within the Catholic Church. Butler describes the Pope as “the man from the ends of the Earth” who faced substantial resistance from conservative factions within the Church, which inhibited structural reform. He expresses the view that Pope Francis missed an opportunity to open the diaconate or priesthood to women, which he considers a lost chance to restore the Church’s credibility among women. Butler acknowledges the Pope’s efforts to include marginalised groups but notes that traditional doctrines excluding them remain fundamentally unaddressed. He adds that although Pope Francis has appointed enough cardinal electors to influence his succession, the unity of these reform-minded figures may not be sufficient to counter conservative forces within the Roman Curia.

John O’Brien from Clonmel, Co Tipperary, highlights the diplomatic role of the Catholic Church. He recalls the 2019 historic visit of Pope Francis to the Arabian Peninsula, during which the Pope signed a declaration of fraternity with the grand imam of al-Azhar. O’Brien stresses the Church’s extensive global reach, noting that 20% of the world’s population identifies as Catholic and pointing out that the Holy See maintains diplomatic relations with nearly every country. Reflecting on the Church’s influence, he writes, “The Church’s diplomacy is deep and it is wide, but often it is invisible to the naked eye. The Holy See has a unique convening power that will play out at today’s papal funeral.”

Turning to Ireland’s relationship with the European Union, Seamus Ward of Dundalk, Co Louth, offers an open letter expressing deep dissatisfaction with the effects of EU membership on Ireland. Citing decades of austerity and economic hardship, Ward laments the closure of factories and industries, including sugar, flour, footwear, vehicle and locomotive construction, boat-building, coal mining, and recently peat-briquette production. He argues that much of Ireland’s natural resources and industries have been lost or diminished, often replaced by imports from other European countries. Ward criticises successive Irish governments for failing to protect rural communities, public services, and the healthcare system, with negative impacts including increased emigration of medical professionals and young people unable to afford homes.

He also expresses disillusionment with the EU, feeling Ireland has been exploited as a “European doormat,” and critiques the decision to transform the European Economic Community (EEC) into a European Union, a move he says was made without Irish democratic consent. Ward writes, “Yes, Ireland always paid its debts, but at what cost?... The Irish people have been failed time and time again by our own governments, with no accountability at all. Very sad and disappointing.”

Lastly, Anne Baily of Carrick-on-Suir, Co Tipperary, addresses Ireland’s future energy security, particularly focusing on the need to reconsider nuclear energy. Baily points out that while offshore wind energy in Ireland is abundant, challenges persist in harnessing it effectively to meet demand, especially beyond 2030 when there may be insufficient gas generation capacity. She notes that many advanced countries are revisiting nuclear power due to its potential as a clean energy source and urges Ireland to stop ignoring the option of nuclear energy, including developments in small modular reactors. “Isn’t it time that Ireland had a look to see why that might be?” she concludes.

These letters collectively provide a diverse snapshot of public opinion on religious, political, economic, and environmental matters currently engaging Irish citizens.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/poor-welcome-popes-casket-st-mary-major-where-simple-tomb-ready> - This URL supports the symbolic significance of Pope Francis’s choice of burial site at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, reflecting his devotion to Mary. It also details the funeral procession planned for the route from the Vatican to the basilica.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXkHIiF6F3c> - This video provides a visual overview of the Santa Maria Maggiore basilica, explaining its importance as a special place for Pope Francis, where he often prayed before and after his trips.
3. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pope-francis-funeral-stations-burial/> - This article details Pope Francis’s desire to be buried at Santa Maria Maggiore, highlighting his devotion to the Virgin Mary and the basilica’s historical significance. It also touches on the funeral rites and their simplification.
4. <https://www.basilicasantamariamaggiore.va/it.html> - This official website for the Basilica of Saint Mary Major provides historical context, highlighting it as the first Marian sanctuary in the Western world and a significant pilgrimage site in Rome.
5. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html> - This URL points to Pope Francis’s encyclical Laudato Si’, which emphasizes environmental stewardship and connects with Fr O’Callaghan’s mention of climate change and the Pope’s environmental advocacy.
6. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/640162/EPRS\_BRI(2019)640162\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/640162/EPRS_BRI%282019%29640162_EN.pdf) - This URL provides background information on the historical transformation of the European Economic Community (EEC) into the European Union, supporting Seamus Ward’s critique of EU membership effects on Ireland.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMic0FVX3lxTFAtYklPOTlQV0IxLVA5RUE4bkh0RjFacmxielpNRW10aUZfTHNNM3BhUkpQQVFBV3JhUFJUeUVRSHFQdkRVbkJ5Z2liYXlHZ05ucGcyaWNCbHRLVW1QQkV1Z2pOVGRWam5aeGUwRmNxNGlDeTg?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data