

Jailed: the conman who posed as Garda detective

By Ciaran Murphy

A MAN who was the subject to a nationwide hunt following an appeal on RTÉ's Crimecall for impersonating a detective and stealing from the elderly has been jailed for 20 months.

Described by gardai as a 'career criminal', John 'Buddy' O'Brien, of Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick, was jailed for theft, impersonating a garda and driving with no insurance.

The charges stem from incidents where elderly people who live alone were targeted, with O'Brien posing as a plain-clothes Garda detective to gain access to their homes before stealing money. O'Brien had



TV appeal: John O'Brien

been sought in relation to a number of incidents in Cork, Clare, Mayo, Donegal and Waterford. He has 103 previous

convictions, a string of them for burglary and theft. In these cases, O'Brien posed as a plain-clothes garda, gaining entry and stealing from his victims.

Judge Kevin Staunton at Waterford District Court said that O'Brien, of 11 Hillview Drive, Abbeyfeale, carried out 'despicable' acts in 'preying on elderly people'.

He handed down two ten-month sentences, to run consecutively, for thefts of €150 and €170 at addresses in Waterford and Kilkenny in January.

O'Brien received two six-month sentences, to run concurrently with the theft terms, for impersonating a garda on both occasions.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Compassion is in accepting imperfection

THERE are many sources of compassion, but one of them is not perfectionism. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the perfectionist is often the least sympathetic person. That is because he can rarely empathise with those who can't live up to his impossibly high standards.

From the start, let me confess that perfectionism is something I have battled with all my life. You begin by seeking to do a good job, but soon find that you have become enslaved to exactness. You desire everything to be just right: no blemish, crease or wrinkle.

But life consists of wrinkles and creases, of failure and foolishness. What I have come to understand is that only a puritan will seek to iron away the wrinkles and deny the foolish. Only a fanatic will strive to impose his picture of perfection on the rest of this, our struggling humanity.

The terrorists that rampaged through London at the weekend were perfectionists of sorts. They had an ideal to which, they believed, we all must subscribe without qualification. Should we fail to live up to that ideal, then we ought to die.

The religious perfectionist is dangerous because he believes he is governed by a divine mandate. That mandate is to force others to be as perfect as possible. In this case, perfection is defined as acting in complete accordance with the stipulations of Scripture.

Of course, there are Christian perfectionists as well as Muslim perfectionists.

However, Christians have never believed that earthly perfection is possible. Those who come close we call 'saints', but the rest of us must be satisfied with confessing our sins.

To confess, or to say 'sorry', is an acknowledgement that you are not perfect, that you do fail and that to be human is to err. Being unable to seek forgiveness suggests the pride of perfectionism. Believing that you have no need of forgiveness means you have succumbed to the delusion that you are always in the right.

What sorted me out, as always, were my children. You simply cannot be a perfectionist around children. Well, you can try to be one, but you will soon end up with egg on your face.

My boys make a mockery of my

lingering attempts at perfectionism. No sooner have I put the final perfect touch to something than they come along and send it flying. They don't do this intentionally, of course, but simply because they are at ease with the world.

A perfectionist is never at ease with the world, himself or with others. In everything, he sees our faults and failings, our inability to ascend to the heights of excellence. This is why he views his fellow humans with contempt rather than compassion.

Think of Hitler and Stalin, both of whom were political perfectionists. Their primary aim was to perfect society, to eradicate all its perceived defects.

For them this meant seizing control in order to create 'Heaven' here on Earth, the result of which was misery, mayhem and mass murder.

What I noticed down the years is that I, too, could be as impatient and as intolerant as the most passionate perfectionist. Being a father, however, taught me the importance of failure. I began to see how many opportunities for growth I had lost due to my intolerance.

My boys are at home in their skin. This is not to say that they don't worry, but that they don't fret about silly things. They simply accept that we are not robots or gods or angels.

WE are human and we make mistakes. We have limitations, imperfections and all sorts of deficiencies. However, we also have the amazing capacity of learning from those mistakes.

To accept our limitations is not an expression of failure. It is to acknowledge that while we can strive for perfection, it is not a disaster if we don't get there. If anything, it is the moment when contempt surrenders to compassion.

To look in the mirror and see a human being, makes it much easier to see the humanity in others. We see them, not as we would like them to be, but as they are. We see beauty where once we saw only imperfection.

To learn this is to see that each person does the best they can. It is to see that limitations are not really limitations at all, but rather those wonderful quirks of personality that make people unique and lovable.

It is to see that perfection robs us of love.

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