

Whistleblower's drunk row revealed at tribunal

GARDA whistleblower Keith Harrison was in an 'out of control rage' during a drunken row with his partner, in which he was allegedly 'roaring and shouting' at her, the Disclosures Tribunal has heard.

A 999 call was made to gardai on March 30, 2013, in which it was said there were children in the house and it was claimed Garda Harrison was 'slapping her about'.

But Judge Peter Charleton heard that Garda Harrison's partner, Marissa Simms, had since withdrawn the statement she made to gardai, in which she had said she was frightened of him and that he was 'in a complete out of control rage'.

By **Helen Bruce**

She said in that statement that he had banged the dashboard of their car with his fist with such force that she thought it would crack.

Garda Keith Harrison claims to be the victim of a five-year campaign of Garda intimidation that followed his arrest of a fellow officer for drink driving in Athlone in 2009.

He alleges he was targeted by senior officers and that social workers became involved after 'untrue' allegations of domestic abuse were made.

The tribunal is investigating contacts between members of the Garda and Tusla in relation

to Garda Harrison. The judge asked why Ms Simms was now saying her statement was incorrect.

He noted that statements were often withdrawn in domestic violence situations, either because the report was untruthful or because the relationship was now 'back on an even keel'.

The judge said he was concerned that the woman in the relationship appeared to be being blamed because she had had too much too drink on the night.

Hugh Hartnett SC, for Ms Simms, responded that there were some 'inaccuracies' in his client's statement.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

What we can all learn from the good thief

THERE are many beautiful stories in the Christian scriptures, but there is one that stands out for me. I was only a small child when I first heard the account of the 'good thief' who died beside Christ. It touched me then and it still moves me now.

As his fellow thief mocks Christ from the cross, the good thief defends him by saying that, while they deserve their punishment, the young Nazarene does not. Then, he asks that he not be forgotten when the saviour comes into his kingdom. Christ turns, perhaps even smiles, and promises the thief nothing less than paradise.

What a beautiful thing it is for one dying man to offer the other a gift of peace. A scene of horror is suddenly transfigured by a gesture of healing love. The good thief falls silent and dies redeemed.

That everyone knows who the 'good thief' is means he is not a minor historical figure. In defending Christ unto death, he has been immortalised down the ages. He proves that, even in their last agony, people can be saved.

For Christians, this unnamed criminal was the first person to enter paradise. It is a beautiful and consoling moment that teaches us much about the quality of mercy and forgiveness. There is, however, another dimension to it that is equally powerful.

Last weekend, I spoke at a conference in Trinity College on the Irish Benedictine monk John Main. It was a wonderful occasion that brought together hundreds of people whose lives have been deeply touched by Fr John's teachings. He died in 1982, but his message on the power of silence still resonates widely.

During his talk on contemplative healthcare, former HSE national director and consultant haematologist Dr Barry White, suddenly made mention of the good thief. Dr White co-ordinates a programme at the Royal College of Physicians for clinicians wishing to learn the practice of silent meditation. He considers this vitally necessary given the acute levels of burnout and stress in the medical profession.

If doctors are to fulfil their sacred oath to do no harm, they must cease putting the interests of health providers above those of their patients. They must remember, he says, that they 'are guests in the lives of their patients'. How-

ever, when stressed, fatigued or distracted, how can any doctor treat a patient with compassion?

Barry White also believes we need to radically change our definition of 'health'. For him, 'health' is not merely the absence of disease, but an 'inner journey' that ends in self-understanding. That is why he, and John Main's successor Fr Laurence Freeman, have developed a 'new paradigm' of contemplative medicine.

Essentially, this means that the 'increased insight and awareness associated with meditation enables clinicians to attentively listen to and observe the patient, understand both the physiological and behavioural factors at play, recognise their own limitations and errors, refine their technical skills, make evidence-based decisions, and clarify their values so they can act with compassion, technical competence, presence and insight'.

And just in case you think this is all pie in the sky, Dr White has undertaken a series of clinical trials on doctors which fully substantiate his claims.

IMAGINE the revolution in healthcare if Barry White's new paradigm became common practice. Not alone would the health service save a fortune lost to stress and misdiagnosis, but our medics would also rediscover the healing power of compassion. Instead of looking upon their patients as problems, they would see them as people whose greatest need is empathy.

Dr White is a shining star in the medical firmament. Yet, unlike so many in his profession, he realises that while doctors cannot always cure their patients, they can help to heal them. 'The thief on the cross wasn't cured,' he said on Saturday, 'but he was healed.' How is it possible to heal a person when they cannot be cured? Love, compassion and tender care. The good thief was beyond a cure, but he received love and died happy.

We all dread the words: 'There is nothing more I can do for you, I'm very sorry.' But wouldn't it be wonderful if, in that moment, we could all smile and say: 'You have nothing to be sorry for. Thanks to you, I am at peace and ready to go?'

There was no great miracle on Golgotha, no transfiguration or resurrection. But in the silence, something truly miraculous did unfold.

A dying man was made whole just when life seemed so empty.

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