

# 'Outrage' over delay to mother-and-baby report

THE Government has agreed to a request from the inquiry into the mother-and-baby homes scandal for a one-year extension to 2019 before publishing its final report.

In its third interim report, published yesterday, the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Babies homes sought more time to allow it to investigate key issues.

The inquiry was established in 2015 after The Irish Mail on Sunday revealed claims that 796 children were buried in a septic tank in the Galway town of Tuam. Research by local historical Catherine Corless showed that the children at the Tuam home had no burial records.

By Alison O'Reilly

And now, the announcement of the delay yesterday has been met with fury from survivors and relatives of those buried in Tuam. A number of members of the Coalition of Mother And Baby Home Survivors have released statements about the latest report, saying they were 'outraged' at yet another delay in the investigation.

Paul Redmond, chairperson of the CMABS, said: 'This is yet another delaying tactic by the Government to deny survivors truth and justice. The current inquiry is already too limited and excludes many survivors. This delay will now ensure that

thousands more survivors are denied justice by death.'

Clodagh Malone of Beyond Adoption Ireland also expressed outrage at the news, saying: 'This is utterly shameful. Our community is heartbroken and devastated. Tears are flowing.'

The commission is investigating 14 mother-and-baby homes and four county homes, and had been due to publish its final report in February 2018.

In a statement yesterday, the Minister for Children Katherine Zappone said: 'This additional time will ensure the investigation can comprehensively address the wide range of public concerns referred to it.'

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# The miracle that comes but once a year...

**T**ODAY is the feast of St Nicholas of Myra, otherwise known as Santa Claus. He died on this day in 343 and is buried in Jerpoint Abbey in Co. Kilkenny.

Isn't it astonishing that the mortal remains of Father Christmas rest here in Ireland?

I have previously written of the Dooleys' pilgrimage to that hallowed site.

For our boys, this great saint epitomises all that is beautiful about the Christmas season. Renowned for his charity, especially to children, St Nicholas symbolises all that we should aspire to be in these sacred days.

And yet, only recently, a Catholic priest hit the headlines for suggesting that we should drop the word 'Christmas'.

'We need to let it go,' said Fr Desmond O'Connell, because 'it's already been hijacked, and we just need to recognise and accept that'.

It has been hijacked by a secular society that identifies Christmas with 'Santa and reindeer'.

The philosopher Roger Scruton calls this the 'Disneyfication of faith'. We take the most sacred features of our religion and commercialise them.

Instead of sanctity, you are left with kitsch.

Poor old St Nicholas is, perhaps, the greatest victim of this process. In so many ways, he has become a caricature of the noble saint he is. But isn't this what happens when the secular seeks to make sense of the sacred on its own terms?

Fr O'Connell has a point: why do we still get so het up about Christmas when so many of us no longer believe? Why not simply have the courage of our convictions and stop celebrating this pivotal Christian feast?

Unless we can rescue 'the reality of Christmas for believers... secularisation and modern life will continue to launder the Church', argues Fr O'Connell.

Yet, even now, as the shops blare their hackneyed carols, as fairy lights festoon every lamppost in the land, isn't there still a sense of something special in the air? It may be tacky and tiresome at times, but who will deny that Christmas - even as it is - is a minor miracle in the seasonal cycle.

It is true: this is Advent, which means we should wait patiently for the feast.

But now we have no time for wait-

ing, for watching, for taking stock. If this is Christmas, then let's have it here and now.

But even the hustle and bustle signify that people are preparing for family, friends and, most of all, their little ones. They are preparing their homes for great acts of generosity, preparing to make tender dreams come true. They are stocking up, not to hoard, but to share.

And then, at a certain point on Christmas Eve, it will all stop. People everywhere will retreat to their homes in a spirit of peace and goodwill. The frenzy will subside and, as the Vigil bells toll, the churches will welcome secular strangers who come but once a year.

I have seen avowed atheists weep during the Christmas Vigil. For that is the miracle of Christmas: our world was touched by love and, even as we reject all the rest, we can't repudiate that. It may be only for a day, or even a week, but it is the one time in the year that we give generously of ourselves and our time.

**I**T is the one time when we turn towards those who matter most in our lives. They say it is 'family time' - a time to love, enjoy and play with those who give meaning to life. It is a time when we dig deep for those without a home, or a family, or even a little love.

St Nicholas lived a life of extreme generosity.

All the legends tell of a man who gave without measure.

His appearance may have changed, but it seems that little separates this ancient saint from his modern incarnation.

And we honour him here in the Dooley household, because, for us, he points the way to the reality of Christmas.

That reality is revealed where people give and care and love without measure, if only for a day. It is revealed when we spend freely so that the burdens of others will be eased by our generosity.

Secularism may have done much to diminish the sacred. But, somehow, Christmas can still make even the most sceptical souls shine.

Let us therefore keep it, not only for a day, but all year round. For if family and friends, love and joy are its fruits, why worry that its true message has been usurped by Santa?

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