

100 CATHOLIC WRITERS & ARTISTS

Our list brings together the brightest and best artistic whizzes, wordsmiths, musicians and players of the last century, whose Catholic faith – or loss of it – has defined their careers.
Edited by Olenka Hamilton

Living Top 10

Donna Tartt born 1963

American author Donna Tartt published her first novel, *The Secret History*, aged just 28 after receiving an advance of \$450,000 from her publishers. Described as a “murder mystery in reverse”, the book was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 13 weeks and has since become an international bestseller and cult classic, having been translated into 30 languages. A practicing Catholic, Tartt was a bookish child, born and bred in Mississippi. She had her first sonnet published aged 13 and studied writing at Bennington College, Vermont, where she became friends with classmate Bret Easton Ellis. Her much-awaited third and most recent novel, *The Goldfinch*, won her the Pulitzer prize for

fiction in 2014. She is five feet tall, shy and reclusive and lives alone, and does not take part in book tours or give talks.

Lady Antonia Fraser born 1932

Lady Antonia Fraser the author of multiple histories, biographies and works of fiction, including a series of detective novels. She converted to Catholicism of her own volition aged 14 following her parents, the Earl and Countess of Longford. As a pupil at St Mary’s School Ascot, she recalls insisting on “going to confession in front of the whole school”. She says that Catholicism has opened doors for her in her career. “I would never have written *Mary, Queen of Scots* had I not been a Catholic, or *The Gunpowder Plot*.” In 2019, she published her most recent history,

The King and the Catholics: The Fight for Rights, on the 1829 emancipation of Catholics, which won her the *Catholic Herald* book award. Her histories are eminently readable and meticulously researched.

David Lodge born 1935

The author, playwright and literary critic is famed for his trilogy of novels satirising academic life. After a stint of national service, he entered full-time academia, becoming a professor of English literature at Birmingham University. Though a self-described “agnostic Catholic”, Lodge drew inspiration from fellow English Catholics like Graham Greene. To read his novels chronologically, he once said, is to see an orthodox Catholic become “less and less so as time went on”. A close friend with Malcolm Bradbury, who greatly influenced his work, he was once asked to settle a bet by stating whether he and Bradbury were the same person.

James MacMillan born 1959

The Scottish composer’s works are permeated by his faith and include settings of the foundational liturgical and scriptural texts. He has composed several Masses, including for the visit to Britain of Pope Benedict XVI; oratorios, including his most recent *Christmas Oratorio*; a setting of *The Passion of St John* and another of *St Luke Passion*; and recently he composed a version of *Spem in Alium* after Thomas Tallis. He and his wife are lay Dominicans. He is eloquent in expounding his faith and has done his best to counter the secularism of contemporary music critics who ignore or downplay the religious component of the work of historical composers. His series on BBC Radio 4 on *Faith in Music* concluded with the work of the Jewish composer Leonard Bernstein. He is one of the most outspoken and articulate Catholics in British public life. He was made a knight bachelor in 2015.



Clockwise from top left: David Lodge, Michael Symmons Roberts, Piers Paul Read, Donna Tartt, Martin Scorsese, Jay McInerney, James MacMillan, Antonia Fraser and Bruce Springsteen



Jay McInerney born 1955

“I think I’ve been trying to prove I’m a really bad guy for 20 years, that I’m not a mother’s boy. But part of me is stuck with being a Catholic boy who is slightly shocked by things,” McInerney has admitted. Although celebrated books like *Bright Lights*, *Big City* are largely absent of his Catholic background, collections like *The Last Bachelor* dramatise lapsed Catholic lives (his characters often talk of residual faith, while the non-Catholic characters joke: “That’s what I’ve always envied about Catholicism. The idea that you can go into a little booth and cleanse your soul.”)

Thomas Pynchon born 1937

At Cornell, young Pynchon was described by close friends as “very Catholic”, and a regular Mass attendant who “confessed, though to what would be a mystery”. From his first novel, *V.*, through many of his other works, Pynchon exists as a Catholic satirist; a Jesuit jester of sorts. Staggeringly talented at the sentence level and endlessly creative, Pynchon has written of a Jesuit priest who ministers to rats in the sewers of New York City, and of a global postal conspiracy that might pass through the Vatican. “Why is everyone so interested in texts?” asks a character in *The Crying of Lot 49*, imbuing an exegetical sense to Pynchon’s labyrinthine plots – indicative of a writer who sees both divine patterns and absurdity in our existence.

Piers Paul Read born 1941

Paul Read has been a front-rank Catholic novelist ever since the 1960s. He attended Ampleforth, the setting of part of his 1969 novel *Monk Dawson*. The son of the critic Sir Herbert Read, his

mother was Catholic. He once shared a flat with Tom Stoppard in Pimlico. His novels such as *A Married Man* and *A Season in the West* all deal with Catholic and moral themes, with the confession scenes in the former (adapted for TV starring Anthony Hopkins) being among the best in modern literature. He is currently working on a history of the Roman Catholic Church. He is vice-president of the Catholic Writers Guild and has served on the boards of various Catholic charities including the National Catholic Library.

Michael Symmons Roberts born 1963

Poet, novelist and librettist Michael Symmons Roberts was born in Preston, Lancashire. He went on to study philosophy and theology at Oxford University, working as a journalist before joining the BBC where he became executive producer and head of development for its Religion & Ethics department. He has published eight collections of poetry, the most recent in March 2021, and has won the Forward Prize, the Costa Poetry Prize and the Whitbread Poetry Award. He has been described as a “lyric poet with philosophical and metaphysical concerns” and a “religious poet for a secular age”. The author of two novels, he also frequently collaborates with composer James MacMillan which has led to two BBC proms commissions, a number of musical theatre works as well as operas for the Royal Opera House among others.

Martin Scorsese born 1942

Scorsese has directed essential American films across four decades, among them *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Goodfellas*,

The Irishman and *Silence*, an adaptation of the Catholic novel by Shūsaku Endō. Few American directors have been so profoundly formed by – and developed their storytelling power through – the Catholic faith. His first film, from 1957, *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, included his mother's actual Madonna and Child from her bedroom—although Scorsese notes that his grandparents were more devout and Mass-going. When Scorsese began attending Mass himself, it seemed “theatrical” to him, and he became enamoured with the priesthood as a vocation, attending seminary for some months. His Hollywood vocation, though, is inextricable from his Catholic search: “It's always in you,” he has said. “My search for faith has never really ended from when I became aware that there was such a thing as faith and started to look at how it's acted out in your daily life.”

Bruce Springsteen born 1949

“Got down on my knees / Grabbed my pen and bowed my head / Tried to summon all that my heart finds true / And send it in my letter to you” – rock lyrics that are not merely analogous to religion, they are charged by a profound Catholic sensibility and a lifelong experience of faith. A cradle Catholic, Springsteen spent “eight formative years in Catholic school”, and felt the pangs of doubt—of the institutional church, “but not my faith”, which defined “my writing, affecting the language that I wrote in and the themes I wrote about”. From “Born to Run” and “Tunnel of Love” to “Letter to You”, he writes of love, loss and despair with an energy that feels downright liturgical. “I consider myself primarily a spiritual song writer,” he says. “I make music that wants to address your soul.”

Poets

John Berryman 1914-1972

“You have come to my rescue again & again / in my impassable, sometimes despairing years,” Berryman wrote, referencing his perennial struggles with alcoholism, “and I believe as fixedly in the Resurrection—appearances to Peter & to Paul / as I believe I sit in this blue chair.” A cradle Catholic who served as an altar boy and attended Catholic elementary school, Berryman had a particular affinity for Pope John XXIII, and wrote of weeping upon the pontiff's death. A devotee of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Pulitzer prize-winning Berryman never truly strayed from his faith, the lamplight in his struggle against addiction: “I would rather not be lost from You — / if I could hear of a middle ground. I'd opt: // a decent if minute salvation, sort of, on some fringe.”

Roy Campbell 1901-1957

Ignatius Royston Dunnachie Campbell – better known as Roy Campbell – was a South African poet, literary translator, war poet, and satirist. He moved to Oxford from South Africa aged 18. Highly rated by his peers who included TS Eliot, Dylan Thomas, and Edith Sitwell, it is thought that he is less well-known because of his support for unfashionable causes. His *The Georgiad*, for example, was a scathing attack on the Bloomsbury group, whom he called “intellectuals without intellect”. The same book, however, addressed Campbell's rejection of post-war pessimism

and placed him beside others such as Eliot and Waugh who were similarly seeking glimmers of philosophical light amidst the gloom. Campbell converted to Catholicism in Spain just before the start of the civil war, but escaped with his wife unscathed.

Seamus Heaney 1939-2013

Indisputably one of the major poets of the 20th century, Heaney was a native of Northern Ireland, brought up Catholic on a farm in County Derry. Life in rural Ireland and Irish political struggles inspired much of his work, as did Irish mythology. He was the author of over 20 volumes of poetry and criticism, and edited several widely used anthologies. He won the Nobel prize in literature in 1995 “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past”. Heaney taught at Harvard and Oxford universities.

Elizabeth Jennings 1926-2001

Elizabeth Jennings was an artist born in Boston, Lincolnshire. She moved to Oxford when she was six, spending the rest of her life there. Her intensely felt Catholicism marks her work, and intensified as the years progressed. After she won the Somerset Maugham award for her book *A Way of Looking*, published in 1955, she spent the prize money on a three-month trip to Rome, adding further religious elements to her writing. Drawing on personal themes, including a bout of severe mental illness, her poems dwell

on love, religion and death. A prolific poet, she was dubbed the “bag lady of the sonnets” by the tabloids and was honoured by the Queen in 1992.

Patrick Kavanagh 1904-1957

Patrick Kavanagh was an Irish poet and novelist. Mary Kenny wrote in this paper that he was “probably the most identifiably Catholic of modern Irish writers... a quixotic Bohemian who drank, gambled and caroused around Dublin during the 1950s. Kavanagh draws deeply on the poverty, and the holiness, of his native Monaghan soil. His autobiography *The Green Fool* depicts a world in which the Rosary, the Litany of the Saints and the Hail Holy Queen accompanied human preoccupations, including money, cattle and neighbourly malice. Kavanagh, despite (or because of) a rickety life, remained a committed Catholic all his life, and after he died, three priests (Fathers Tom Stack, Austin Flannery and Cyril Barrett SJ) blessed his sculptured replica by the banks of Dublin's main canal.”

Robert Lowell 1917-1977

“You were a road over a dark stream,” Lowell wrote to the priest who offered spiritual instruction on the way to his conversion in 1941. He became a daily Mass attendant and was devoted to recitation of the Rosary. His Pulitzer prize-winning volume *Lord Weary's Castle* (1947) is steeped in his Catholicism. For some time, Lowell was the most visible—and perhaps most influential—poet in America. He later drifted from Catholicism, returning to the Episcopal faith of his childhood. One of his Catholic poems was read at his funeral, including the



lines: “What can the dove of Jesus give / You now but wisdom, exile? Stand and live, / The dove has brought an olive branch to eat.”

George Mackay Brown 1921-1996

George Mackay Brown was a Scottish poet, author and dramatist whose work has a distinctly Orcadian character. The youngest of six children, he lived most of his life in the town of Stromness in the Orkney islands, which he hardly left, and suffered bouts of ill health after surviving tuberculosis. He drank heavily. Nonetheless, he achieved international renown in his lifetime and was admired by the likes of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. He was very much concerned with

“Edith Sitwell became a Catholic in 1955, with Evelyn Waugh as her godfather. She had been driven to despair. Conversion made her happier

his religious beliefs throughout his life and was received into the Catholic church in 1961. He was also an accomplished novelist (shortlisted for the 1994 Booker Prize for *Beside the Ocean of Time*) and a master of the short story.

Hope Mirrlees 1887-1978

A translator, poet and novelist, Mirrlees is best known for her fantasy novel *Lud-in-the-Mist* and *Paris: A Poem*. The 600-line poem traces a walk in the streets of Paris, complete with posters and plaques, in the aftermath of the First World War, and is described as “modernism's lost masterpiece” by critic Julia Briggs. A close friend of Virginia Woolf and TS Eliot, scholars cite her as an influence on their work. While studying at Cambridge, she studied under and became the companion of renowned classicist Jane Harrison, living with her from Harrison's retirement in 1922 until her death in 1928. Prior to going to Cambridge, she had been presented at court and dabbled in acting at RADA.

Siegfried Sassoon 1886-1967

Sassoon is best remembered for his angry and compassionate poems about the First World War, which brought him public and critical acclaim. Avoiding the sentimentality and jingoism of many war poets, Sassoon wrote of the horror and brutality of trench

warfare and contemptuously satirised generals, politicians and churchmen for their incompetence and blind support of the war. He was also well known as a novelist and political commentator. He converted to Catholicism in 1957, the same year he was awarded the Queen's medal for poetry. His collection *Sequences* was said to “constitute some of the most impressive religious poetry of this century”.

Edith Sitwell 1887-1964

Edith Sitwell was a poet, eccentric and critic, the eldest of three literary siblings – her brothers were Sacheverell and Osbert. Some of her poetry was abstract and some set to music by, among others, Benjamin Britten. She was a striking figure with her angular features, bold jewellery and distinctive costume and was sometimes regarded as a poseur. Her personal life was unhappy and she wrote in 1948 that Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* “may prevent me from committing suicide”. She became a Catholic in 1955, with Evelyn Waugh as her godfather. Until that point she had been driven to despair by the illness of her brother and alienation from the modern world; conversion made her happier than before.

Above: Edith Sitwell. Below from left: Alfred Noyes, Siegfried Sassoon, Hope Mirrlees, Robert Lowell and Seamus Heaney





Novelists, short story writers, and children’s authors

Peter Ackroyd born 1949

The poet, novelist and biographer had a strict Catholic upbringing before hitting his literary stride in his twenties. Ackroyd’s first publication, *Notes for a New Culture* (1976), echoed TS Eliot’s *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, written 22 years prior. Later in his career, he would come back to Eliot, writing his biography in 1984. It was a subject he returned to time and again and it featured prominently in his biographies of William Blake and Charles Dickens, much as in his poem *London Lickpenny* and his novel *The Great Fire of London*. A reluctant novelist, he admitted in an interview in 1989 to never wanting the gig. “I can’t bear fiction. I hate it. It’s so untidy.”

Brendan Behan 1923-1964

The writer and dramatist Brendan Behan described himself as a bad Catholic, though on other occasions he would say he was a Communist by day and a Catholic as soon as it got dark. He was raised by devout parents and educated first by

nuns, who occasionally featured in his journalism, then Christian Brothers. He was denied the Sacraments when he was in Borstal for attempted terrorism as a teenage IRA recruit, and bitterly resented it. Catholicism permeated his language, as it did that of ordinary Dubliners of his day. It also informed his poem in Irish, *Repentance*, about a dying man who calls on the Virgin to save him, as his sins gather like dogs to devour him. In the event he died in hospital in Dublin at the age of 41, having had the last rites from the hospital chaplain.

Anthony Burgess 1917-1993

Burgess was a novelist and composer, best known for his novel *A Clockwork Orange*, which became even better known as a film by Stanley Kubrick. He was a cradle Catholic from Lancashire and his most overtly Catholic work was *Earthly Powers*, about a homosexual Catholic Englishman’s relationship with a future pope, which famously began: “It was the afternoon of my eighty-first birthday, and I was in bed with my catamite when Ali announced that the archbishop had come

to see me.” He also wrote the TV mini-series *Jesus of Nazareth*. He lapsed as a teenager but declared that Catholicism was “a kind of nationality one is stuck with forever”. He enjoyed teasing celebrity convert novelists by pulling rank as a cradle Catholic, and he took a dim view of liturgical changes after the Second Vatican Council.

GK Chesterton 1874-1936

Chesterton is the most Catholic of Catholic writers, though some of his most important works of Christian apologetics precede his reception into the Church in 1922. He wrote novels (ideas given a context of fiction), poetry, apologetics, biography, detective stories – the Fr Brown short stories – and an enormous quantity of journalism. His biography of St Thomas Aquinas, though containing very few facts, not all of them correct, was a dazzling exercise in compressing dense theological ideas into captivating prose. He helped formulate the idea of “distributism” – giving land to the people. As a controversialist and debater, he was one of the best of his day. There was an element of anti-Semitism in some of his work but he was an eloquent opponent of Nazi ideology. His book *Orthodoxy* remains one of the most compelling accounts of Christian belief of the 20th century.

Arthur Conan Doyle 1859-1930

The writer and creator of Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle was baptised and educated a Catholic. He parted with the Church at Stonyhurst, repelled by an Irish priest who declared that unbelievers were damned, though he had kind memories of another Jesuit teacher. He rejected

the Christian faith entirely when he went to Edinburgh University where rationalism was in fashion in the medical faculty – Darwin and Huxley in particular. He later embraced spiritualism. Yet he had kind words for “the old faith”. In his new faith, he argued for Christian Spiritualism – that is, that spiritualists should follow the precepts and example of Christ.

Frank Cottrell-Boyce born 1959

A children’s author and film director, Frank Cottrell-Boyce was born in a suburb of Liverpool. He credits his local church and cinema with making him the man he is today. “The door to the church was the door to the imagination,” he says. “As a writer the debt I owe to my Church is profound and ineradicable.” He is the author of *Goodbye, Christopher Robin*, about the creator of Winnie-the-Pooh, and the film *Millions*, about a boy who loses his mother and has visions of saints. He collaborated with Fr Christopher Jamison OSB on a youth initiative, Million Minutes, and compered the Hyde Park prayer vigil during Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to the UK in 2010.

Don DeLillo born 1936

“There’s no escape from the Jesuits,” DeLillo joked—perhaps an acknowledgment that his 16 years of parochial education created lifelong influences. Born to an immigrant Italian family and raised in the Bronx, DeLillo has noted that Catholics are especially aware of their mortality—which “removes a hesitation that a writer might otherwise feel when he’s approaching important subjects, eternal subjects”. The novelist was highly influenced by the Latin Mass of his youth, and was drawn

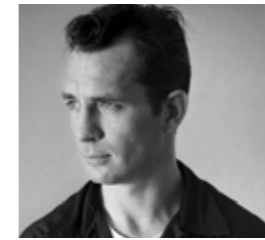
to both the theatre and syntax of those celebrations—and even as his faith practice waned, DeLillo remained nostalgic for belief. Among his novels, *Underworld* and *White Noise* arrive with a Catholic, and especially Jesuit, sensibility.

Louise Erdrich born 1954

Erdrich fondly recalls her education from Franciscan Sisters (including a nun who would hit home runs at recess); she inherited a synthesis of Catholic and traditional Chippewa religions from her maternal grandfather. Since her 1984 debut *Love Medicine*, Erdrich has regularly depicted Catholic life—including fascinating depictions of nuns and priests, as in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. A recent novel, *Future Home of the Living God* follows a dystopian plot but is narrated by a Catholic convert with a particular fondness for the Virgin Mary. Erdrich said that she had to “cut hundreds of pages of Catholic inquiry” from earlier drafts.

Rumer Godden 1907-1998

Rumer Godden was the author of more than 60 books, fiction and non-fiction. She was raised in colonial India, though educated in England. She set up a dance school in Calcutta in 1925 that she ran with her sister for 20 years, during which time she published *Black Narcissus*, her erotically-charged 1939 bestseller about a cadre of nuns, each struggling to impose their will on the Nepalese palace they had made their convent. In 1948, after her return to England three years prior, she ended an unhappy decade of marriage to her first husband. She first expressed an interest in the Catholic church in 1950, and wrote



Opposite: GK Chesterton. From top: Jack Kerouac, Graham Greene, Peter Ackroyd, Ernest Hemingway and Louise Erdrich

numerous sympathetic portrayals of Catholic nuns and priests before her final conversion in 1968.

Graham Greene 1904-1991

Graham Greene was – after, or with, Evelyn Waugh – the greatest Catholic writer of his time. He converted to Catholicism in 1926, influenced by his future wife Vivian, but he ended up embracing it on his own account. It profoundly changed his outlook as a writer, with the actions of his characters having an eternal dimension. *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*, based on his experiences of the civil war in Mexico, which gave us the whisky priest, were novels about salvation and damnation. In fact, all his novels have an element of his conviction that no one is closer to God than the sinner, unless it is the saint. His genuine faith became by the end of his life something closer to agnosticism, but he always carried a picture of Padre Pio in his wallet – to introduce, he said, an element of doubt into his scepticism.

Radclyffe Hall 1880-1943

Radclyffe Hall was best known for her novel *The Well of Loneliness*, one of the first openly lesbian works published in England and the subject of a famous court case. She converted to Catholicism in 1912, influenced by her then lover, Mabel Batten. She left Batten for her cousin, Una Troubridge, who also became a Catholic. The two set up home in Rye where they attended the church of St Anthony of Padua, for which Hall bought the roof, the pews, the Stations of the Cross and a rood screen and initially had a cordial relationship with the parish priest. Her faith

had a profound influence on her work, especially *The Master of the House*, a modern adaptation of the life of Christ. *The Well of Loneliness* ends with a passionate appeal to God to acknowledge and defend others like her.

Ernest Hemingway 1899-1961

The iconic Nobel prize-winning novelist converted to Catholicism before his marriage to Pauline Pfeiffer, although he allegedly received extreme unction on the battlefield while injured during the First World War. Jake Barnes, the central character and narrator of *The Sun Also Rises*, is a bad Catholic – much like Hemingway described himself (he disliked to be labelled a Catholic writer, but admitted that he “cannot imagine taking any other religion seriously”). His short story *Today is Friday* is a fascinating and farcical take on the evening after Christ’s crucifixion, and suggests that his self-effacing talk of religion masked a deeper, more paradoxical faith.

James Joyce 1882-1941

The prodigal son of 20th-century Catholic literary Ireland. His *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Dubliners* set a new literary standard and *Ulysses* was “devoured” by TS Eliot when it first came out in serial form in 1921 (the book was banned on the grounds of obscenity). Joyce had a complicated relationship with both his Irish heritage and Catholicity. Although he renounced his faith and the Jesuits did not claim him as one of their own, Joyce has come to be seen as a writer whose Catholicism forms an integral part of his work, as well as him being one of the literary high priests of modernism. Towards

the end of his life he became reconciled to his Jesuit formation and his portrait hangs, today, in Dublin's Belvedere College.

Jack Kerouac 1922-1969

Kerouac said that he was "actually not 'beat' but strange solitary crazy Catholic mystic," and thought "beat" was more accurately conceived of as "beatific". He referred to himself as a "lay Jesuit". The cradle Catholic affirmed "all I write about is Jesus" and that his quintessential *On the Road* "was really a story about two Catholic buddies roaming the country in search of God". Kerouac was a nearly perfect nexus of American literary Catholicism: raised by immigrants whose French blurred into his English, steeped in Marian devotion, paradoxically drawn to both rebellion and tradition.

Dean Koontz born 1945

Perhaps one of the best-selling living Catholic writers – he's sold over 500 million books – Koontz converted to Catholicism in college, inspired by his future wife's faith. "Catholicism permits a view of life that sees mystery and wonder in all things, which Protestantism does not easily allow," he has said. "As a Catholic, I saw the world as being more mysterious, more organic and less mechanical than it had seemed to

me previously, and I had a more direct connection with God." Koontz affirms that his violent thrillers are about "our struggle as fallen souls, about the grace of God, but I never get on a soapbox about it. I'm first and foremost an entertainer."

Elmore Leonard 1925-2013

A prolific writer of punchy crime fiction ("not mysteries," he would clarify), Leonard attended Catholic schools from first grade through to college, mostly in and around Detroit. He drifted from faith practice during the 1970s, but wrote several books with Catholic themes and characters, among them *The Hunted* and his 36th novel, *Pagan Babies*, which includes a priest of dubious provenance. His works were regularly adapted for television and film, including *3:10 to Yuma*, *Get Shorty* and *Justified*.

Toni Morrison 1931-2019

The Nobel prize-winning novelist converted at 12, when she took a version of St Anthony of Padua's name. Influenced by cousins who were Catholic, Morrison was at first interested in the "aesthetics" of the faith, but then began to take it "seriously for years and years and years". Morrison's was a Catholicism of the crucifix: of suffering, wounded black bodies and their audacious arrival at

joy. "I suffered greatly from the abolition of Latin," Morrison said of the postconciliar transition to vernacular Mass. A devotee of James Joyce and Flannery O'Connor, Morrison was also drawn to Pope Francis in her later years.

Cormac McCarthy born 1933

McCarthy was confirmed at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, later depicted in his novel *Suttree*, whose main character, although a self-described "defrocked" Catholic, stumbles through Knoxville with a Joycean apostasy. The crafter of brutal stories delivered in mythic language – *Blood Meridian*, *Outer Dark*, *All the Pretty Horses* – young McCarthy was a choir boy, singing in his Latin quintet at Midnight Mass. An elegiac, melancholy sense lingers through McCarthy's fiction – even the glimmers of hope in novels like *The Road* are like faint candles in the windy distance. Perhaps more than most contemporary novelists, McCarthy believes in the existence of evil, and suggests we might be one step from purgatory.

John McGahern 1934-2006

Described in his obituary in the *Guardian* as "arguably the most important Irish novelist since Samuel Beckett", John McGahern was the eldest child of seven

siblings who grew up on a farm in Knockanroe, County Leitrim. He wrote six novels based on his experience growing up in Ireland in the mid-20th century. His second novel *The Dark* was banned by the Irish censorship board for its alleged pornographic content, and he was subsequently dismissed from his teaching post, forcing him to leave Ireland for England. He later returned home. Colm Tóibín, who also appears in our top 100 cites McGahern as one of his inspirations.

Edna O'Brien born 1930

Edna O'Brien is an Irish novelist who has rebelled against her Catholic upbringing. After a "suffocating" childhood, complete with a heavy-drinking gambler father and controlling mother, she turned her back to "the stifling religion into which I was born". After qualifying as a pharmacist, she moved to London, becoming a reader at Hutchinson before bursting onto the literary scene in 1960 with *The Country Girls*. The first of a trilogy about two girlfriends leaving their convent school to find a new life in the city, it was burned in her native Ireland for its frank portrayal of sexual themes. While researching her 1994 novel *House of Splendid*

Opposite: Toni Morrison. Below from left: Flannery O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, F Scott Fitzgerald, Muriel Spark and Elmore Leonard



Isolation, about a terrorist on the run, she interviewed Irish republican Dominic McGlinchey, who she described as a "grave and reflective man". An accomplished short story writer, O'Brien won the Frank O'Connor international short story award, when judge Thomas McCarthy called her the "Solzhenitsyn of Irish life".

Flann O'Brien 1911-1966

The Irish novelist, playwright and satirist was a driving force in modern and postmodern literature. Though influenced by him, O'Brien dismissed the cult of James Joyce. Born Brian O'Nolan, he became a civil servant, serving as private secretary to various ministers, writing under pseudonym to preserve his anonymity. Not that it paid off much: his satirical column in the *Irish Times*, written under the name Myles na gCopaleen, and his writings as O'Brien were an open secret among his government colleagues. An alcoholic for much of his life, he suffered from throat cancer in later life, dying of a heart attack in April 1966 at 54.

Flannery O'Connor 1925-1964

"My audience are the people who think God is dead," O'Connor wrote in 1955. "At least these are the people I am conscious

of writing for." Her odd, comic, violent fiction teems with eccentric characters: hucksters, bombastic preachers and weary fools. "I can't write about anything subtle," she once quipped, and crafted exaggerated versions of those in her native Georgia to reach a "hostile audience". Her flawed characters lived in a Christ-haunted world. Classics from her *Complete Stories* include *Parker's Back*, *Revelation* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. Her letters and essays reveal a mind for whom dogma was a lived reality and generative source of creativity.

Frank O'Connor 1903-1966

Frank O'Connor was the pen name of Michael Francis O'Donovan. He was perhaps the best Irish short story writer of the 20th century. He deplored the institutional church but his depictions of individual clergy are full of humour and humanity – he produced an entertaining collection of stories about priests called *The Collar*. *The First Confession* is an hilarious account of a child's first penance, and *The Confirmation Suit* also gives a poignant, child's eye view of the world. His *Guests of the Nation*, based on his experience in the war of independence, remains an intensely powerful account of the conflict between ideology and humanity in war.

Andrew O'Hagan born 1968

Andrew O'Hagan has had three novels nominated for the Booker Prize. He followed Martin Amis to become visiting professor of writing at King's College London. Brought up in an Irish working-class Catholic family in Ayrshire, he played in a band that was once played on Radio 1 by John Peel. Aged 21, he arrived in London with just £60 on him and worked for St Dunstan's charity. His first book, *The Missing*, an investigation into missing people, resulted in letters from priests. His debut novel, *Our Fathers*, won the Winifred Holtby prize for fiction. His second novel won the James Tait Black memorial prize. His first wife was the columnist India Knight; he now lives with his second wife in London's Primrose Hill in a house whose ceiling is stencilled with Italian churches.

Walker Percy 1916-1990

While a medical student at Columbia University, Percy had some Mass-going friends who would "hang one of those garish Catholic calendars on the wall... I was offended by Catholicism. The offence is part of the clue, of course, part of the secret." Stricken by tuberculosis after performing an autopsy, Percy spent several monastic years at the Trudeau Sanatorium in the Adirondacks, and began attending Mass – complemented by deep reading of philosophy. *The Moviegoer*, his debut novel, won the National Book Award, and remains one of the most compelling portrayals of faith, despair and the errant signs of the divine.

JF Powers 1917-1999

A writer of fiction about the prosaic and profound moments of parish life, Powers won the National Book Award for *Morte D'Urban*, his debut novel: "Father Urban, fifty-four, tall and handsome but a trifle loose in the jowls and red of eye, smiled and put out his hand." Unlike the spiritual depths to which Graham Greene's whiskey priest descends, Powers's priests live in the daily, often dreary world: appointments, rote confessions, budgets, diocesan entreaties, and parishioners – necessary reminders of the brick-and-mortar foundations of the Church.

F Scott Fitzgerald 1896-1940

The acclaimed author of *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night* was raised Catholic and attended Catholic elementary schools in Buffalo, New York, before attending Catholic prep school in New Jersey. There he was mentored by Fr Sigourney Fay, who perhaps more than any other sent Fitzgerald down the literary path. Fitzgerald said that the priest "made of that church a dazzling, golden thing, dispelling its oppressive mugginess and giving the succession of days upon grey days, passing under its plaintive ritual, the romantic glamour of an adolescent dream." Fitzgerald dedicated his debut novel, *This Side of Paradise*, to the priest, and wrote a fine early story, *Benediction*, about faith and doubt.

Muriel Spark 1918-2006

The Scottish novelist, poet and critic became a Catholic under the influence of Newman, though her family was Jewish and her Edinburgh school was liberal-Presbyterian. Spark's first novel, *The Comforters*, was about a





Opposite: Malcolm Muggeridge. From top: Evelyn Waugh, JRR Tolkien, John Cornwell, Ronald Knox and Hilaire Belloc

Jewish Catholic convert like herself, and a very funny story, but it is *The Abbess of Crewe*, a satirical take on the Watergate scandal, which is most overtly Catholic, about succession intrigues at a convent. She dealt with the question of her own Jewish and Catholic identity in the *Mandelbaum Gate*, which takes place in Israel. Others of her novels have Catholic characters and themes. She spent much of her later life in Italy; the late Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor recalled her lively parties in Rome in which she would entertain seminarians from the English college and invite them to suggest titles for her books.

Robert Stone 1937-2015

Stone, a Navy veteran, won the National Book Award for *Dog Soldiers* (1974), one of the finest novels about the Vietnam war. Among his novels, *Children of Light* and *A Flag for Sunrise* have arresting religious sequences. He went to St Anne's (later Archbishop Molloy High School) which was "somewhere between a boarding school and an orphanage", and stayed in Marist Brothers schools through his education. "When I stopped being religious, being a Catholic, it was devastating to me," Stone wrote. "It was a spiritual and moral devastation – shattering. And yet there was no trauma at the time; it seemed painless, it felt like ordinary maturation. But it left a great hunger." Stone could be as sardonic as his characters ("In Catholicism... the easiest and most successful thing you can do is die.").

Colm Toibín born 1955

Despite his writing often having antipathy towards the Catholic

“ Colm Tóibín's novella *The Testament* imagines Mary's later life after the death of Christ

faith, Tóibín writes long essays about Pope Francis – referred to as the "Heavenly Father" – for the *London Review of Books*. Religion – specifically Irish Catholicism – remains a central theme of his prolific literary career. He has written nine novels and is the Mellon professor in the department of English and comparative literature at Columbia University, and is chancellor of Liverpool University. His novella *The Testament* (based on a play) imagines Mary's later life – as a washed-up figure who disowns her son – after the death of Christ. He was brought up in a devout Catholic household after being born in Wexford. He studied at University College Dublin and lived in Barcelona between 1975 and 1978, writing two acclaimed books. *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe* followed in 1994. His novel *Nora Webster* (2014) won the Hawthornden prize.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien 1892-1973

JRR Tolkien was an English writer, poet, philologist and academic, best known as the author of the fantasy works *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which are set in a prehistoric era in an invented version of our world which he called Middle-earth. He was a scholar of the English language, specialising in Old and Middle English, serving twice

as professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University. His mother was a convert to Catholicism and her son remained devout all his life.

Meriol Trevor 1919-2000

One of the most prolific Catholic women writers of the 20th century, Meriol Trevor said she was an agnostic humanist before coming into contact with Catholic culture when she went to Italy as a relief worker in 1946. A graduate of St Hugh's College, Oxford, Trevor wrote biographies of Pope John XXIII, Philip Neri and James II, and a two-volume biography of John Henry Newman was awarded the James Tait Black memorial prize for biography in 1962. She was also the author of many historical novels, children's stories and books of poetry.

Evelyn Waugh 1903-1966

Along with Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh is arguably the most notable Catholic writer of the 20th century. Indeed he is one of the foremost English novelists of the period irrespective of religion. He was an incisive journalist, a brilliant, waspish diarist, an idiosyncratic and funny travel writer and a world-class controversialist. He became a Catholic in 1930 and the faith informed his outlook, his life and his work; certainly his novels and journalism, not least his *Sword of Honour* trilogy and *Brideshead Revisited*. Indeed, he wrote that while *Brideshead* was a memorial to a vanished social class, the *Sword of Honour* was a tribute, as he saw later, to a vanished church. He was devastated by the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Nancy Mitford recalled that everything with him was a joke. His faith was not.

Essayists, biographers and priests of letters

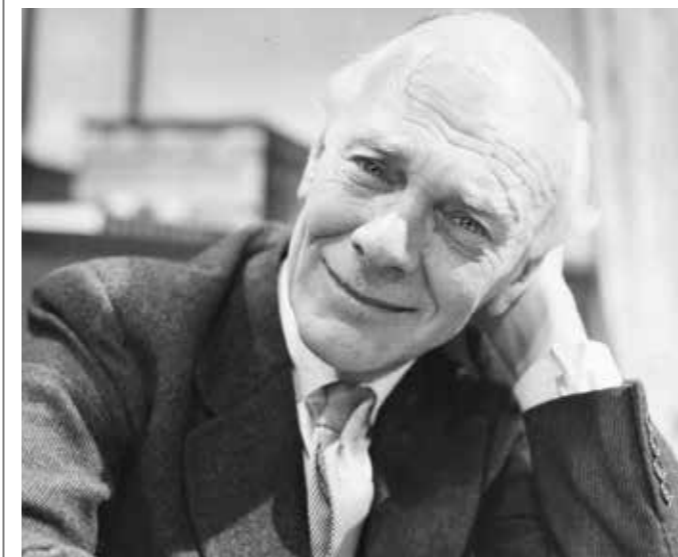
Hilaire Belloc 1870-1953

Hilaire Belloc was enormously famous in his day as a writer and controversialist and was a prolific journalist, essayist and historian. He is best remembered now for his immortal *Cautionary Verses for Children* (eg "Jim, Who Ran Away from his Nurse and was Eaten by a Lion") and his haunting poem, "Tarantella" ("Do you remember an inn, Miranda?"). His *Road to Rome* is still read with pleasure as an account of an extraordinary walking pilgrimage to Rome, enlivened by a good deal of singing and drinking in inns. He could be an enormously difficult man and his work has less

geniality than that of his friend GK Chesterton. He served as an MP and his book on the nature of the relationship between citizen and government, *The Servile State*, is still influential.

John Cornwell born 1940

The multi-award-winning British journalist, author and academic is best known for his investigative journalism, memoir, and his work in public understanding of science. He has written extensively on the Catholic Church and the modern papacy. Cornwell had intended to become a priest, attending seminary after leaving school. His memoir about the experience,



Seminary Boy, won him a nomination for the PEN/Ackerley prize for best UK memoir. Since 1990 he has directed the Science and Human Dimension Project at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he is also, since 2009, founder and director of the Rustat Conferences.

Fr Ronald Knox 1888-1957

Fr Ronald Knox was an Anglican bishop's son who converted to Catholicism in 1917. He was an erudite classicist, the translator of the Gospels into English (though the bishops obliged him to translate from the Vulgate, using the original Greek, as he said, as a crib), a writer of detective stories (who drew up ten memorable rules for writing detective fiction) and the author of a much-admired study of *Enthusiasm* in religion as well as notable satires and an account of a fictional Oxford college through time, *Let Dons Delight*. He himself was a chaplain at Oriel College, and later, after his ordination, he was for a time Catholic chaplain at Oxford. His friend Evelyn Waugh wrote a biography of him which is elegiac about the pre-war world he inhabited and full of admiration for his wit and learning. His published sermons remain well worth reading.

Thomas Merton 1915-1968

The Trappist monk's autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, remains an iconic and inspiring story of conversion. A poet, essayist, critic and mystic, Merton was inspired by the lives of the Desert Fathers – who cautioned that we replace their hagiographies with the recognition that they were "humble, quiet, sensible people, with a deep understanding of human nature and enough understanding of the

things of God to realise that they knew very little about Him". Merton might have described himself: in his published writings and journals, he emulated the spirit of Gerard Manley Hopkins: "I can think of nothing except God and it is not so much that I think of Him either. I am as aware of Him as of the sun and the clouds and the blue sky and the thin cedar trees."

Malcolm Muggeridge 1903-1990

Malcolm Muggeridge was an agnostic for much of his life before becoming an Anglican and entering the Catholic Church at the age of 79. He was the son of prominent socialist politician HT Muggeridge, An early sympathiser with communism, he became an anti-communist after reporting on the famine of 1932-33 from the USSR for the *Guardian*. His 1969 documentary *Something Beautiful for God* and his book of the same name, published in 1971, made Mother Teresa an international sensation. Every day while filming, Muggeridge attended morning Mass with her, and under her influence entered the Catholic church in 1982. His spiritual memoir, *Conversion*, in which he recounted his journey to faith, was the last work published during his lifetime.

Charles Scott Moncrieff 1889-1930

The Scottish writer and translator is best known for his translation of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which he published under the title of *Remembrance of Things Past*. The beauty of the English translation has formed many readers' idea of the original French. He also translated medieval works, including the *Song of Roland*. He converted to Catholicism in 1915, finding that

he was spiritually more at home in the little tin-roofed chapel in Winchester with an inarticulate priest than in the cathedral. At the front, where he was serving – he had a distinguished military record – he was approached by one of his men to request him to escort the Catholics in his unit to Mass, who asked him: “Are you a Catholic, sir?... I found I was.” He remained a devout Catholic – and an active homosexual – until his early death.

Gary Wills born 1934

Raised Catholic, Wills attended a Jesuit high school, and even was a Jesuit seminarian for a time before receiving a pair of masters degrees from Jesuit universities (followed by a Yale doctorate). The Pulitzer prize-winning historian is as prolific as he is provocative – his doctrinal deviations and criticisms of the priesthood are simultaneous with his affirmations of faith: “I am a born Catholic. I have never stopped going to Mass, saying the rosary, studying the Gospels. I have never even considered leaving the church. I would lose my faith in God before losing my faith in it.” An essential author to read and engage in order to understand the complexities of American Catholicism.

Opposite: Andy Warhol. From below left: Edward Ardizzone, Eric Gill, Adam Dant, Antony Gormley and Graham Sutherland



Artists

Edward Ardizzone 1900-1979

Edward Ardizzone was one of the best-loved illustrators of children’s books with a lyrical and unmistakable style. His best known works are his Tim and Ginger books, but he was a prolific illustrator and was one of the war artists who recorded the war at home and abroad. He painted the murals in the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Faversham on the life of the Virgin in his inimitable style, with great charm.

Harry Clarke 1889-1931

Harry Clarke was Ireland’s greatest artist in stained glass – though Evie Hone ran him close – and a fine book illustrator. His work illumines both Catholic and Protestant churches around Ireland. He was drawn as a boy to the stained glass workshop in his father’s church decorating firm and went on to study at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. He was tall, good-looking, amusing, a wonderful mimic. After graduating, he travelled to France to study medieval cathedral stained glass. Among his best-known works are the exquisite Eve of St Agnes window, which combines the art

of book illustration with stained glass, and a window showing Judas, in remorse, about to hang himself; both belong to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. He died of tuberculosis in his early forties in Switzerland in 1931.

Adam Dant born 1967

Adam Dant is a prize-winning British artist, likened to Hogarth by critics. He is famous for his elaborate and intricate pen-and-ink drawings, which include map print that form observant imaginings of city life and witty pictorial social commentaries. Dant cites Pieter Bruegel the Elder, JMW Turner, George Cruikshank, Edward Burra and Saul Steinberg among his greatest artistic inspirations. He studied at the Liverpool School of Art before doing an MA in printmaking at the Royal College of Art. His work has been displayed in the likes of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and can be found in the collection of the Tate.

Eric Gill 1882-1940

Eric Gill was an English sculptor and printmaker. His early work

drew on medieval Christian and Indian temple sculpture. Becoming a Catholic in 1913, he principally worked for Catholic clients and eventually became a member of the Dominican Order. After the First World War, he created a number of war memorials. The memorial he designed for the University of Leeds depicted Jesus casting out money-changers from the temple, reflecting his view that “money men” had helped bring about the war. His diaries revealed a gross fascination with sex, describing numerous extramarital affairs and the sexual abuse of his daughters, his sisters and his dog.

Antony Gormley born 1950

Antony Gormley is an internationally renowned sculptor best known for the *Angel of the North*, a public sculpture displayed close to Gateshead in the north of England. His style is contemporary and most of his work takes the human body as its subject, and he often uses moulds of his own body in the process. He won the Turner prize in 1994 for *Field for the British Isles* and was behind the fourth plinth commission which invited members of the public to pose in Trafalgar Square for an hour. Of German and Irish descent, Gormley was raised Catholic, attending Ampleforth College and Cambridge University before going on to study at Central Saint Martins and the Slade.

Herbert James Gunn 1893-1964

Sir Herbert was a Scottish landscape and portrait painter who devoted himself exclusively to portraits as his career progressed. He painted many prominent figures including King George V and Harold Macmillan, and his portrait of Queen Elizabeth II can be found in the Royal Collection. He was knighted for services to painting in 1963.

Evie Hone 1894-1955

The Irish painter and stained glass artist was born to an aristocratic family and lost her mother when she was just two days old. She contracted polio at the age of 11, which left her with a lame hand. An Anglican by birth, she joined a convent in 1925 before converting to Catholicism in 1937, after which her work took on a more religious tone. Commissioned to work on over 50 churches in England and Ireland, her masterpiece is the stained glass window of the Eton College chapel, representing the Crucifixion and the Last Supper.

Gwen John 1876-1939

Gwen John was a Welsh artist who lived and painted in France for most of her life and was known for her self-portraits, quiet domestic interiors and portraits of other women. Although she was overshadowed during her lifetime by her brother Augustus John and her lover Auguste Rodin, her reputation has grown steadily since her death. John was received into the church in Meudon, in southern Paris in 1913 after the breakdown of her relationship with Rodin. She left notebooks in which she wrote about her struggle to live a pious life and her art as an expression of



her faith. It is believed she starved herself to death in 1939.

Gertrude Martin 1911-1952

Gertrude Martin was a master mosaicist most famous for her work on the mosaics of Westminster Cathedral. She studied mosaics in Ravenna, Milan and Venice and worked on many prestigious commissions with her sister Margaret, such as the two-arched panel in the Central Lobby in the Houses of Parliament. Designed by Robert Anning Bell, the mosaic depicting St Andrew was completed in 1923 and St Patrick in 1924. Between 1928 and 1932, the sisters worked at St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, designing and producing mosaics.

Paula Rego born 1935

Dame Paula Rego is a Portuguese-born visual artist who is particularly known for her paintings and prints based on storybooks. Her work has been exhibited in all the major

galleries around the world, and she was the National Gallery’s first artist in residence. Rego’s style has evolved from abstract towards representational, and she has favoured pastels over oils for much of her career. Rego has described herself as a feminist and as having become a “sort of Catholic” later in life, but says that her father’s hostility towards the church had got in the way of her beliefs while she was growing up.

Tim Rollins 1955-2017

A conceptual artist and teacher, Rollins made art with at-risk middle school students in the South Bronx. He asked the student-artists, who were known as the Kids of Survival, or KOS: “If you could express everything your people have survived – and everything you have survived – as a wound... what would that wound look like?” Raised Catholic in Maine, Rollins’s religious sense influenced his conception of art-as-service, as well as creation as a collective activity – a communion.

Work from the collective is featured in worldwide collections

Graham Sutherland 1903-1980

Sutherland was one of the best known British artists of the 20th century. He became a Catholic in 1925 under the influence of his wife, Kathleen Barry, but said that he had found it “quite natural” to become a Catholic; that it was “like coming home”. He was well known for his landscapes and portraits but Catholicism helped form his artistic sensibility and framed his specifically religious work, notably the Christ on the main tapestry of Coventry Cathedral. He observed that: “The Church objectifies the mysterious and unknown. It gave my aspirations towards certain ends a more clearly defined direction than I could ever have found alone. It gave me a conception of a system whereby all things created, human and otherwise... are integrated.” The crown of thorns recurs repeatedly in his post-war work.

Andy Warhol 1928-1987

Andy Warhol was an artist born in Pittsburg in 1928. The son of Slovakian immigrants, he made his name as the pioneer of the 1960s pop art movement, working in various mediums such as painting, silkscreening, photography, film and sculpture, attracting the rich and famous to his Factory studio in New York City. Some of his most famous works are the Campbell’s soup cans, the Brillo pad box sculptures and his portraits of Marilyn Monroe. A practicing Catholic throughout his life (something which he was private about), Warhol’s later works depicted religious subjects and many religious paintings were found posthumously in his estate.

Composers and musicians

Dave Brubeck 1920-2012

The jazz pianist and composer became a Catholic in 1980 – he was careful to note that he wasn't a convert, since he didn't arrive from another faith practice. In fact, Brubeck had been a seeker for some time; *The Gates of Justice*, a 1969 production, was a cantata that infused Scripture with the speeches of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Brubeck's religious journey culminated in a revelation that followed his composition of the Catholic Mass in *To Hope! A Celebration*. Brubeck thought the purpose of religious music was "to reach people where it's truly going to be the survival of humanity or the destruction of humanity".

Edward Elgar 1857-1934

Elgar was one of England's best known composers. In spite of his image as a quintessentially English composer, most of his influences are European, notably Berlioz, Handel and Dvorak. Born to humble beginnings, of which he was painfully aware, he was a self-taught composer. Encouraged by his mother and later his endlessly supportive wife, the daughter of an army officer disinherited for marrying the then-unknown Catholic composer, Elgar eventually shot to fame in his forties with his *Enigma Variations*. Devastated by his wife's death in 1920, he lost heart in composing, and while it didn't stop him, he spent many of his later years overseeing recordings

of his work using the moving-coil microphone.

Stephen Hough born 1961

Stephen Hough is a contemporary pianist, composer and writer, a brilliant solo performer. He is a Catholic convert and his works include Masses written for Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral and a Missa Mirabilis. He is also a writer and his novel *The Final Retreat* deals with a priest battling despair. He has written about his homosexuality and religion, and his recent collection of short essays, *Rough Ideas*, deals with Catholicism as well as music and art. In 2007 he published *The Bible as Prayer: a Handbook for Lectio Divina*.

Sean O'Riada 1931-1971

Sean O'Riada was a composer and arranger of Irish traditional music. Through his incorporation of modern and traditional techniques, he is credited with being the most influential figure in the revival of Irish traditional music in the 1960s. He was born John Reidy in Cork, changing his name to the Irish equivalent in the 1950s. He attended St Finbarr's College, a Catholic school, where he learned the violin, piano and organ. He composed several choral settings of the Catholic Mass in the late 1960s, one of which was written in Irish Gaelic after the Second Vatican Conference relaxed restrictions on the use of local languages.



Singer-songwriters

Frank Sinatra 1915-1998

A nearly mythic figure with a transcendent voice and presence, Sinatra was born to Italian Immigrants in Hoboken, New Jersey. Baptised and raised Catholic, Sinatra could be critical of the church, pointing out religious hypocrisy, mentioning Bertrand Russell in interviews, and claiming "religion is a deeply personal thing in which man and God go it alone together, without the witch doctor in the middle"—and quoting as evidence "Matthew, Five to Seven, the Sermon on the Mount". Perhaps the greatest American showman, Sinatra could transcend genre and medium – he won an Academy Award in 1954, and was awarded 11 Grammys. Sinatra warmed to the church after his mother's death in 1977, and remained a practicing Catholic for the rest of his life.

Madonna born 1958

Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone has prodded and pondered and provoked the church in which she was raised for her entire

career, from "Like a Prayer" to profane, rosary-dangling stage performances. Crossing the line between sensuality and sexuality in the religious sphere, Madonna is one of the most undeniably Catholic pop stars. "Catholicism feels like my alma mater," she has said. "It's the school I used to go to, and I can go back any time I want and take whatever I want from it because I suffered all the oppression, and all the abuse – and also enjoyed all the pomp and circumstance, the drama and the confusion and the hypocrisy and the craziness."

Robbie Williams born 1974

A hugely successful English singer-songwriter and entertainer, Robbie Williams first found fame as a member of the pop group Take That from 1990 to 1995, but achieved greater commercial success with his subsequent solo career. He has since released seven UK number 1 singles and won a record-breaking 18 Brit awards. Williams lives in London with his wife and four children. He has suffered with depression and addiction to alcohol and drugs.

Theatre and screen

Robert Altman 1925-2006

Altman, raised Catholic and Jesuit-educated, is among the prototypical American directors who were raised in the faith, stopped practicing, and retained a Catholic sensibility within their storytelling. Catholic culture and ritual appears in *MASH*, *Nashville*, and *A Wedding*. His tendency toward Catholic satire arises not from without, but within, in the Joycean mode of parodying one's own formation. Altman claimed his childhood Catholicism was "restrictions; it was things you had to do. It was your parents. It was Mass on Sunday and fish on Friday," although he acknowledged Catholicism "gives me shape" as an artist.

William Peter Blatty 1928-2017

Jesuit-educated in school and college, and raised in a devout Catholic home, Blatty's 1971 novel *The Exorcist* – and subsequent Oscar-winning film – was a watershed moment in popular Catholic storytelling in America. Although the earlier *Rosemary's Baby* featured a Catholic main character, Blatty's tale synthesised theology and story, resulting in a

profound battle over a child's soul. A pair of priests battle a demon, leading them to wonder why a girl has been chosen as the victim. "I think that the point is to make us despair," Father Merrin says. "To see ourselves as animal and ugly. To reject the possibility that God could love us." Blatty called his story "an argument for God", an "apostolic work, to help people in their faith".

Frank Capra 1897-1991

George Bailey's dark night of the soul – and his later redemption – make *It's a Wonderful Life* a profoundly Catholic film. Raised Catholic, he wavered in his faith, but ultimately saw the art of filmmaking as an opportunity for spiritual revelation: "Mankind needed dramatisations of the truth that man is essentially good, a living atom of divinity; that compassion for others, friend or foe, is the noblest of all virtues," he wrote. "Films must be made to say these things, to counteract the violence and the meanness, to buy time to demobilise the hatreds." Capra won six Academy Awards, three times for best director.

Kenneth Clark 1903-1983

Clark once gave a lecture in which he said: "To enter the Louvre is like entering the Catholic church. It would find itself in some pretty queer company but at least it would be sure it had a soul." KC, as he was known, was one of the most important cultural figures of the 20th century, best known for his 1969 *Civilisation* TV series which celebrated Western art and philosophy. He was a brilliant art scholar, a protege of Bernard Berenson, and an international public intellectual. Yet he could also be shy, needy and aloof with a "glass wall" around him, according to Henry Moore. Clark sent for an Irish priest so he could receive the "proper rites" as he lay dying at the Hythe Nursing Home in 1983. After being given Extreme Unction a "beatific smile came over his face", writes biographer James Stourton.

Rupert Everett born 1959

"My life," Rupert Everett once told the *Tablet*, "has been led in such a Catholic way. Even a fallen Catholic is a Catholic." The British actor has performed many prominent films including *Shakespeare in Love*, *An Ideal Husband* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*. Brought up in a Catholic military family, he attended Ampleforth College, which he left aged 16 to train as an actor at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Everett is opposed to marriage, is openly gay and lives with his boyfriend, a Brazilian accountant.

Julian Fellowes born 1949

The actor, novelist and screenwriter has written many world-famous theatre, film and television scripts, including *Gosford Park*, which won the Academy Award for best original screenplay in 2002, and the award-laden *Downton Abbey*, which he also produced. Early in his career, he wrote the script for the musical *Mary Poppins* which was turned into the famous Disney film with Julie Andrews. His novel *Snobs* was a *Sunday Times* bestseller in 2004. The son of a diplomat and Arabist, he was born in Cairo and educated at Ampleforth College and Magdalen College, Cambridge, where he was a member of Footlights. He was elevated to the peerage as Baron Fellowes of West Stafford in 2011 and sits as a Conservative peer in the House of Lords.

John Ford 1894-1973

Born to Irish-Catholic immigrants in Maine, Ford received six Academy Awards, including four wins for best director. His most lauded films include *The Grapes of Wrath* and *How Green Was My Valley*, and he engaged Catholicism directly in films *Mary of Scotland*, *The Informer* and *The*

Opposite: Frank Sinatra. Below from left: Julian Fellowes, Alec Guinness, Rupert Everett, Robert Altman and Francis Ford Coppola



Fugitive, based on *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene – and the movie of his oeuvre that Ford thought was “perfect”. “One can be a fervent Catholic and hate sermons,” Ford said, lamenting that often those in the church “forget that Christ was a human being. A man.” He died holding his rosary beads.

Francis Ford Coppola born 1939

The winner of five Academy Awards for films including *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola has often mined his Catholic background for metaphor and material. “I decided to include some Catholic rituals in the movie, which are part of my Catholic heritage,” Coppola said of his decision to include the infamous baptism scene in *The Godfather*. In another of his acclaimed films, *The Conversation*, Coppola depicts his Catholic main character going to confession and wrangling over his guilt. The disparity between belief and action seemed, to Coppola, “very Catholic to me, to do one thing and yet believe another”.

Alec Guinness 1914-2000

The Oscar-winning actor, most recognisable as Obi Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*, began his career on the London stage. After a stint in the Royal Navy in the war, during which time he considered entering the Anglican clergy, he made it to

“While filming *Father Brown in Burgundy*, Alec Guinness was mistaken for a priest by a local boy, who took him for the real deal

the silver screen, where he worked frequently with director David Lean in numerous films, including *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, for which he won his Oscar. While filming *Father Brown* in Burgundy, he was mistaken for a priest by a local boy, who took him (in full garb as he was) for the real deal. Moved by the trust the boy had in him, he wrote that it allowed him to shake off his “long-absorbed prejudices” about the faith. When his son Matthew was taken ill with polio in 1956, he prayed daily for him at a local church. On Matthew’s recovery, he and his wife converted.

Alfred Hitchcock 1899-1980

Alfred Hitchcock was a director, producer, screenwriter and one of the greatest filmmakers of all time. He was born to a disciplinarian father and a cossetting mother in east London, both recurring figures in his work. The guilt and

fear of his psychological thrillers play alongside the recurring theme of imprisoned innocent, public virtue and private dysfunction, toying with the Catholic psyche. But the moral universe that his films occupy are wholly secular. His staunch lifelong Catholicism, heavily influenced by his Irish heritage and the Jesuits who schooled him, he kept utterly private.

Neil Jordan born 1950

Neil Jordan is an award-winning Irish film director, screenwriter, novelist and short-story writer. He won an Academy Award for his psychological thriller *The Crying Game* (1992). He is known for his atmospheric and often violent films, examining themes of love and betrayal. Deeply religious in childhood, Jordan has described himself as neither a good or bad Irish Catholic. But his work is littered with the heritage of Catholic thought. The “dark Catholic guilt” he portrayed in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) and *Byzantium* (2012) complement the lavish and tempestuous HBO series *The Borgias*.

Peter Morgan born 1963

Peter Morgan is a controversial British screenwriter and playwright most famous for *The Queen* (2006), *Frost/Nixon* (2008) and the hugely popular ongoing Netflix

series *The Crown*. His mother was a Catholic Pole and his father a German Jew. He was raised Catholic and attended Downside School. Morgan was appointed CBE in the 2016 New Year Honours. He has five children with Lila Schwarzenburg, from whom he is now divorced.

Paul Morrissey born 1938

Morrissey was a member of Andy Warhol’s Catholic-rich inner circle, along with Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni, Fred Hughes, Christopher Makos, Vincent Fremont and Bob Colacello, who said he has “never met anyone more stereotypically Irish Catholic”. He attended Catholic schools, elementary through to college, and says that parochial education was “the best thing that ever happened to me.” His reserved, conservative views might have seemed a contrast to the artists who surrounded Warhol, but as a director, Morrissey relished experimentation in film, pushing boundaries of style and sexuality. He disliked the post-conciliar turn of Mass: “It’s appalling to see the hippie service they give with all that English and holding hands and the chalice of wine.” Yet still, Morrissey affirmed of his Catholic rearing: “Now I see it was wonderful. I still

Opposite: Orson Welles. Below from left: Eugene O’Neill, Alfred Hitchcock, Neil Jordan, Tennessee Williams and John Patrick Shanley

believe every word of what they told me then.”

Eugene O’Neill 1888-1953

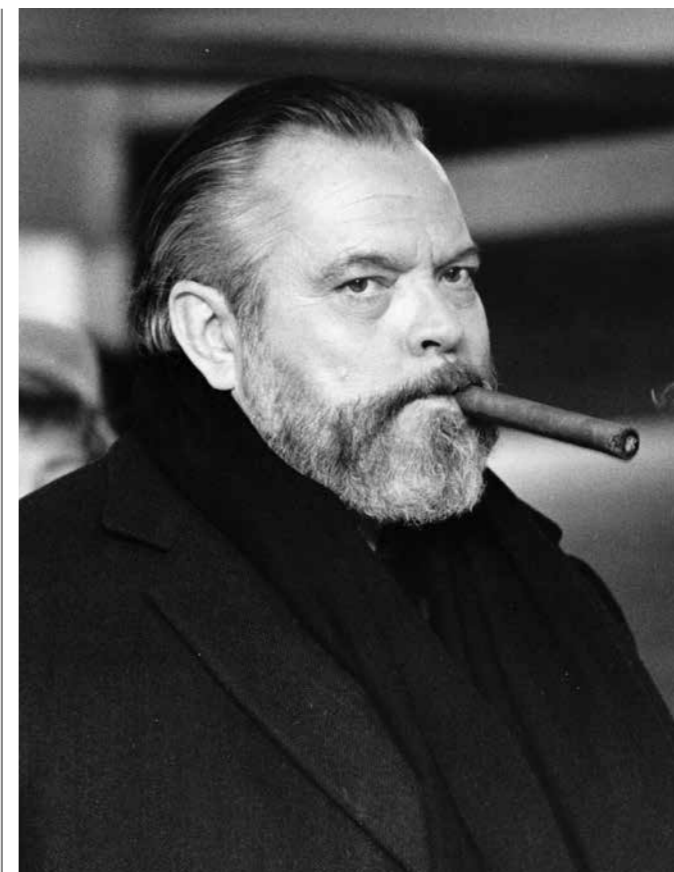
Winner of the Nobel prize, and a four-time winner of the Pulitzer prize, O’Neill confessed to a nun in a letter that “for the past 20 years almost, (although I was brought up a Catholic, naturally, and educated until 13 in Catholic schools), I have had no Faith.” O’Neill accepted his identity as a lapsed Catholic, yet affirmed that his artistry was sustained by the “search for God”. The author of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Beyond the Horizon*, and *The Iceman Cometh*, O’Neill depicted Catholic characters in *The Fountain*.

Allan Scott born 1939

A former whisky executive, born in Elgin on Scotland’s Moray coast, the award-winning screenwriter and producer has worked on dozens of films and TV programmes over a nearly 60-year career. Scott most recently came to fame with the Netflix hit *The Queen’s Gambit*. The series, which nabbed two Golden Globes, about the chess prodigy Beth Harmon and her struggle with drug and alcohol dependency, strikes a Catholic note in its examination of sin and redemption.

John Patrick Shanley born 1950

Catholic raised and schooled (St Anthony’s Grammar School and then Cardinal Spellman High School), Shanley had much fodder for *Doubt*, his play which won a Pulitzer prize. Shanley said one of the reasons he wrote the play was that “debate has become the form of communication... There is no room or value placed on doubt,



which is one of the hallmarks of the wise man.” He received an Academy Award for *Moonstruck*. Shanley recalls attending Mass as a child, and wanting to interject his own interpretation of the Gospel reading during the priest’s homily; “Very basic objection, or desire to put my two cents in – is kind of the drive that led me to become a playwright in the first place.”

Charles Sturridge born 1951

The English director and screenwriter made his name internationally for his work directing the 11-part television adaptation for the BBC of *Brideshead Revisited*, which won 17 awards, including two Golden Globes and six Baftas. Educated

“Although Tennessee Williams was more drawn to the aesthetics of the religion than the ‘tenets’, he remained a Catholic until his death

at the Catholic boarding school Stonyhurst College and University College, Oxford, he started out as an actor with the National Youth Theatre.

Orson Welles 1915-1985

The celebrated director of *Citizen Kane* had a complex relationship with his cradle-Catholic identity. “I try to be a Christian,” he said, a few years before his death, although he quipped “I don’t pray really, because I don’t want to bore God.” Growing up, his mother’s Catholicism contrasted his father’s agnosticism. Welles was drawn more to his mother’s view: “I have a natural sense of veneration for what man has aspired to beyond himself... It comes easily and instinctively to me to feel reverence rather than a gleeful scepticism.” Welles found comfort in paradox: “I may not be a believer, but I’m certainly religious. In a strange way, I even accept the divinity of Christ. The accumulation of faith creates its own veracity.”

Tennessee Williams 1911-1983

The Pulitzer-winning playwright of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *The Glass Menagerie* was raised Episcopalian, but was influenced by his brother, who had become a Catholic. “I have always loved the richness of the Catholic ritual, the aroma of the incense, the splendour of the art,” Williams said. He converted in 1969, although the Jesuit who handled the prebaptismal confession called it “the shortest confession in history”. Although he admitted being more drawn to the aesthetics of the religion than its “tenets”, Williams remained a Catholic until his death, and was given a Catholic funeral. CH

