



Pope John XXIII

OPEN HOUSE

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Homecoming Scotland 2009.

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EDITORIAL

Homecoming Scotland 2009

Ironic is hardly the word to describe the fact that possibly the only place in Scotland where St Andrew was not celebrated on 30 November was in the Churches. It was, of course, also the First Sunday in Advent. Without disputing that the Second Coming of Christ is more important than celebrating a dubious myth, it seems clear that the media chose to ignore that the feast had been transferred to the Monday. There was no coverage of the First Minister speaking at Mass in the capital's cathedral. Scotland is undoubtedly looking for new roots at this time but the church now has to battle for its share of the market. By Monday the moment had passed.

The Year of Homecoming is based on the 250th

Anniversary of Robert Burns which raises a comparable spectre of division between the renewed cultural aspirations of Scots and the habits of a universal church. Burns Day is also the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul whose Bimillennium we are currently celebrating. There are still many Scottish Catholics to whom the absence of a St Patrick's Dance, albeit in the middle of Lent, would be unimaginable but who have never been to a Burns Supper. They would stereotype this as a Masonic affair despite the fact that it is

now celebrated by women's groups and other obvious non-masons.

Burns' Masonry was a protest against intolerance, like that of Mozart who continued to compose Mass settings. While condemning the hypocrisy of *Holy Willie* he praised his own minister Rev John McMath as part of a *candid liberal band of public teachers an' manly preachers*. He was a friend of the

Popish Bishop (as he referred to him) John Geddes as a man completely free from social snobbishness. Many people have longed believed that Burns Suppers are rituals which compensate for the infrequency and exclusiveness of Presbyterian Communion services. Burns Suppers should fit very well into a Catholic parish with good liturgical awareness.



Robert Burns

So far not much else seems to have been programmed after 25 January so there is time for the Church to see what it has to offer in the way of welcome to returning Scots. At least older parishes are increasingly being asked to provide ancestor records, often by email. It might be the opportune moment to ensure that each parish has a website advertising a welcome back to emigrants who were baptised at its font and intimating times of services and when the buildings are open to visitors.

Happy Christmas to all our readers.

PROFESSOR IAN WILLOCK

Catholic Voters and the Church

The majority of Catholic voters in the American Presidential Election seem to have rejected the entreaties of their Bishops and voted for Barack Obama, despite his views on issues such as abortion. In Scotland there is a sign of Catholic voters making up their own minds.

Cardinal O'Brien may not be a voter in the Glenrothes constituency, but he made use of its being within his ecclesiastical territory. For the election on 6th November for the Westminster Parliament he urged constituents to use their votes, and wisely; and he highlighted the issues that he regarded as of the highest significance. His emphasis was on the life issues that appeared in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, then before the UK Parliament. But

he also mentioned the English anti-Catholic Act of Succession preceding the Union of 1707 and the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapon system.

They all have in common that they are the views of eight or so members of the Scottish Hierarchy over which the Cardinal presides. But that does not necessarily make them the views of lay Catholics. They can join a political party with which they broadly sympathise and play a part in framing its policies. But they have no such say in formulating the Catholic Church's social and political policies. Ministers and laity of the Church of Scotland can use the apparatus of Kirk Session, Presbytery and General Assembly to make policy often with a time-lag and sometimes to the point of

deadlock. They have two committees of specialists who can apply established principles to current issues.

There is something of a paradox here. Catholic voters are urged by their Bishops to support our policies, not yours. To take but one example There must be many Conservative Catholics and also some Labour ones who do not want the Scottish-based nuclear deterrent to be abandoned.

To generalise, there is a wider issue here as to whether Episcopal pronouncements may not be counter-productive and prompt non-Catholics to vote against them. The Labour majority at Glenrothes of 6737 certainly more than most observers expected.

MICHAEL L. O'NEILL

The First Mixed Race President

This year in particular, the proximity of Hallowe'en to the U.S. presidential election fitted the occasion perfectly. The ghosts and goblins of the stolen 2000 election here in Florida, and the Ohio events of 2004 (over a hundred thousand votes discarded; an anti-gay state constitutional amendment to hook the right-wing Catholic vote for Bush/Cheney) made even optimistic Democrats like me nervous. I spent four hours election day morning as a Barack Obama campaign volunteer outside a voting precinct, the legal hundred feet away from the entrance, surrounded by three campaign posters and a supply of water bottles for any thirsty voters or other passers-by, ready to observe and report any 2000-type shenanigans, and prepared to talk with anyone who stopped by. Because in Florida we had early voting for two weeks before the election, the traffic to the polling station was slow but steady, and I had plenty of time for my final pre-election meditation.

Until three weeks beforehand, I was afraid our man would lose. As 2000 and 2004 had demonstrated, the American

electorate is susceptible to negative TV political campaign advertising. Cloaked in a liberal interpretation of the first amendment to the U.S. constitution's "freedom of speech" clause as it affects political campaigns, such advertising is given license to violate what otherwise would be legally

actionable as libel and defamation of character, or qualify under the old catechism definition of "calumny and detraction". The Republicans chose their vice-presidential candidate, in the circumstances unfortunately a woman, specifically as an "attack dog" who would appeal to the rabid right wing of the party, or "barracuda" as she described herself, passing strange for someone from the frozen tundra of Anchorage, Alaska rather than the tropical waters of Key West, Florida. Until American capitalism imploded in September and October, thus diverting the electorate's attention away from Mrs. Sarah Palin's "American Idol" performance to the more pressing concerns of their jobs and finances, it looked like the disciples of Karl Rove, "Bush's Brain" for winning elections,

would win again in their latest gig as John McCain's campaign handlers using their master Rove's tactics.

Fortunately, among his other attributes Barack Obama was lucky that once again, as in 1932, the Republicans were going down with their "free market" Titanic, and the electorate finally realized the folly of such economic credulity. Obama also helped himself by showing some of his renowned "cool" as the storm of economic bad news and the necessity to bailout the "financial services industry" broke over Congress. McCain compounded his earlier admission of economic ignorance with a bizarre declaration that he was suspending his campaign and returning to Washington to lead his party's response, then neglected to read the original five-page proposal of the Treasury that Congress was asked to rubber-stamp, and remained silent during the subsequent meeting of the Bush Administration and Congressional leaders at the White House, where Obama at least asked intelligent questions, and was seen before and after consulting with

economic advisors that his adversaries could not pillory in TV sound bites as "inexperienced". The economic storm was the tsunami of this presidential election, to Obama's benefit.

Meanwhile, Catholic bishops and priests, as in 2004, were seen to be primarily interested in following the Karl Rove campaign playbook - fire up "social conservatives" to focus on opposition to abortion, same sex marriage, and stem cell research as the key political issues in a presidential campaign, so that the electorate would ignore the fact that the Republicans were outside the loop of Catholic Social Teaching, which until the 1980's was considered to be the Catholic political and economic playbook. The key symbolic event was the intervention, a week before the election, of the Republican partisan group "Priests for Life", who organized a teleseminar to train over three thousand activists to place anti-Obama leaflets on every churchgoing Catholic's car during Mass the week-end before the election.

The leaflet I picked up was brazenly identified as, "Paid for by the Republican Party of Florida". Even if the Catholic bishops claim they had nothing to do with this effort, they cannot claim they were ignorant of the plan, therefore they could not inform their parish priests to alert ushers against partisan political activity on church property, because it became public knowledge before the week-end.

My concern was that by mostly ignoring the absurd and vicious libels of his character Obama would lose. I remain unconvinced that without the extraordinary circumstances of this election, above all the "free market" implosion, he would have been ultimately successful. I reckoned the racist vote to be 20 to 25% of the electorate, at least in the Civil War South. While I believed that any objective evaluation of the Bush/Cheney administration, and the respective campaigns' response to the major issues of the economy, the wars, and the degradation of government, should have led to a landslide victory by Obama, racism alone would keep his winning margin to 5%. Unfortunately, I wasn't far wrong.

His overwhelming lead in the

electoral-college vote in part disguised the less than 8% lead in the popular vote. However, any victory margin was welcome. The most significant factor in his campaign was his ability to energize a lot of people to organize and volunteer to support the campaign, a perfect riposte to Mrs. Palin's insulting his "community organizer" background. While opting out of public financing helped Obama to flood the airwaves with campaign commercials, McCain's disadvantage was more than compensated for by the deeper pockets of the Republican Party, and its auxiliaries responsible for the Rev. Wright commercials I saw the final days of the campaign, to which Obama's campaign, to my surprise, did not respond with the obvious - the anti-Catholic diatribes of the McCain supporter Rev. Hagee.

In spite of the help of some bishops and many priests, the McCain campaign failed to gain the support of the majority of Catholics who voted. However, I sensed an anti-Obama sentiment among the majority of the clergy and congregations I found myself among at Sunday Mass the last month of the campaign, reflected in church bulletins, and the Florida bishops' bulletin inserts. One week presented a bishops' statement that in one sentence said, "As Catholics, we are not single-issue voters..." but the only issue they then proceeded to mention three sentences later was abortion. The next week's statement supported an anti-gay state constitutional amendment that was an obvious Republican Ohio 2004-type tactic to hook the Catholic vote, as well as being inherently mendacious, since it harms the human rights of gays and non-gays, and does not just outlaw "gay marriage". It passed by over the necessary 60%. I suspect many Catholics like me have serious theological and ecclesiastical issues, going beyond presidential campaigns, with right-wing bishops and other Catholics who have taken the Republican cool-aid, and politicized what should be a "pastoral" and strictly personal moral, and non-political matter.

PUBLISHER'S NOTES

AQUINAS LECTURE

Monday, 26th January, at the Chaplaincy Centre (Strathclyde University), St. Paul's Building, John Street, Glasgow, at 7.30 p.m.

Speaker - Sr. Cecily Boulding, OP.
Subject - "Ecumenism and Catholicity: Are they the same thing?"

Sr. Cecily Boulding is a former lecturer in theology at Ushaw College and the University of Durham.

Enquiries about the meeting should be directed to The Dominicans 0141 311 0311
E-mail: jdoc10@hotmail.com
Postal Address: St. Columba's,
74 Hopehill Road, Glasgow, G20 7HH.
Entry Is Free.

LISTENING TO THE LORD'S CALL IN ADVENT

Michael McGrath, Director of the Scottish Catholic Education Service (Tel. 0141 556 4727; Fax 0141 551 8467) has recommended a series of Podcasts for Advent which are being provided on the Priests for Scotland website <http://www.pfs.org.uk/categories/Advent-Podcasts/>

The Podcasts offer a reflection on a piece of Scripture from the daily readings.

CHRISTMAS POETRY BOOK 2009 by Stephen Eric Smyth called "CHOICES" - 'Day-choice' and Other Poems

Contact Stephen Eric Smyth for copies.
E-mail: sesmythfms@clara.co.uk or
Tel. 0141 418 0751.

Postal Address:
46 Errol Gardens, Glasgow, G5 ORR.
Price £5 plus £1 for postage.

Profits this year go to "MARY'S MEALS"

"Mary's Meals" provides meals at school for over 350,000 children in developing countries. £8.40 provides a child with "Mary's Meals" for one year.

INSCAPE

INSCAPE is a new publication from Scottish Churches House, the ecumenical conference and retreat centre in Dunblane. It outlines an exciting and diverse House Programme.

Further information:
warden@scottishchurcheshouse.org
Tel. 01786 823588
Scottish Churches House, 1 Kirk Street,
Dunblane, FK15 OAJ

DAN BAIRD

50th Anniversary of the Election of John XXIII

In 1972 the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, a shrewd and well-informed observer of public affairs, told the American Catholic writer Garry Wills that, of all the changes he had seen in his life, "the greatest by far is the one in your Church". That change was brought about by the Second Vatican Council, called and inspired by one of the greatest of modern popes, John XXIII. Angelo Roncalli, Patriarch of Venice, then 75 years of age, was elected pope on 28 October 1958, an event whose 50th anniversary has passed without comment.

In contrast to his predecessor, the new pope seemed a disappointing choice. Pius XII had been not only the pope but, for many Catholics, the ideal of what a pope should be. He was revered within the Church and - in those days, before Rolf Hochhuth's play and the bizarre accusations that he had been 'Hitler's Pope' - widely respected outside. Pius was a man of wisdom and intelligence, ascetic and of great and obvious holiness.

John seemed different. Bishop B.C. Butler, considered the most intelligent and theologically able English bishop of his time, later recorded what was at the time a common impression: "... he seemed to many of us to

represent the makeshift decision of a college of cardinals that, for the moment, found itself unable to agree on a candidate of an age and a quality that would make him a worthy successor of [Pius XII]... We knew he was old and portly, and we soon discovered he was a 'character' and a wit."

"In a pontificate of less than five years, John brought about what has been called, without overstatement, a revolution."

However, if the Cardinals thought they had elected merely a genial 'stop gap' pope, un papa di passaggio, a surprise awaited. In a pontificate of less than five years, John brought about what has been called, without overstatement, a revolution. The clue to that revolution lay in the new Pope's biography. With Italy's entry into the First World War in 1915 Roncalli, who had earlier been conscripted for a year as a seminarian, served in the army, first in the Medical Corps and later as a military chaplain. Post-war work with students was followed by attachment to Propaganda Fide in Rome, raising consciousness in Italy about missionary work. While there, he lectured part-time on patristics to seminarians. Roncalli's spell at Propaganda was followed by 28 years in the Vatican's diplomatic service, a career in which he served in Bulgaria and Turkey, and on a mission in Greece, eventually becoming Nuncio in France. In 1953 he was made Cardinal and Patriarch of Venice.

Introducing himself to the people of Venice, he summed up his life and its

lessons: "Providence took me away from my native village and led me along the roads of East and West. It allowed me to come close to people of different religions and ideologies, and to study grave and menacing social problems. Yet Providence permitted me to maintain a calm and balanced judgement. I have always been more concerned with what unites than what separates and causes differences...."

Roncalli's life had been, in effect, a schooling in pluralism. With that had come a growth in humanity, evident to all who saw him when he was Pope. The twenty-year old seminarian conscripted to the peacetime Italian army, exposed to the blasphemy and casual obscenity of military life, had seen the army as "a running fountain of pollution, enough to submerge whole cities ... this flood of slime". In contrast, and with maturity and greater comprehension, he recognised in the courage and uncomprehending perseverance of the wounded and dying during World War I the virtues of "our dear and brave soldiers".

As a papal diplomat, he negotiated with Muslims, he came to appreciate the sensitivities of the Orthodox and he witnessed the problems of minority Catholic communities in non-Catholic countries. In 1943, while Vatican officials were privately expressing concern that sending Jewish refugees to Palestine might hinder Christian access to the Holy Places, Roncalli - the man who, as Pope, would have the reference to "perfidious Jews" removed from the Good Friday liturgy - arranged letters of transit and saved the lives of thousands. In fact this year, 2008, a Jewish leader has called for him to be declared "Righteous Among the Nations", the title given to those who took extraordinary measures to save Jews from the Holocaust.

His appointment to post-Liberation





Paris in 1944 exposed him to the complexity of politics and religion in France. The first problem was to negotiate over De Gaulle's demand for the removal of thirty bishops who had co-operated with the Occupation, or preached submission to the Vichy regime. Some of the bishops had, in fact, been misreported, while others had made initial political misjudgements but subsequently defended the Jews and condemned Wehrmacht atrocities. Following the negotiations, only a handful of bishops had to resign.

Roncalli's experience in France was a unique training for leading and reforming the Church in the postwar world. He saw at first hand the rise of the left-leaning Christian Democratic party, the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), Rome's crackdown on French Jesuits and Dominicans in the aftermath of the 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*, the controversy surrounding the worker-priest movement, and the debates over whether and to what extent Catholics could cooperate with non-believers. He himself made friends with men who were traditionally anti-clerical, among them the President of France, Vincent Auriol, who handed him the red biretta on behalf of the Pope when he was made Cardinal in 1953, before going to Venice.

In Venice, Roncalli demonstrated his social concerns. He frequently alluded to the disparities in wealth he saw around him and he caused consternation in clerical circles by welcoming in 1957 the Congress of

the Italian Socialist Party to the city. Coming from a North Italian liberal Catholic tradition, he had been an early supporter of Don Sturzo's Partito Popolari Italiano, the Christian party abandoned by the Vatican in the 1920s in order to placate Mussolini. And, unlike many Italian clergy, Roncalli had been consistently critical of Fascism.

His social concerns are evident in the social democratic ethos of his two major encyclicals when Pope, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*. The historian E.E.Y. Hales described the earlier attitude to the modern world in papal statements as "the tradition of reproach", stemming from Pius IX and reaching in Pius XII "a perfection of philosophical expression and a sad and beautiful dignity which raised it to the sublime atmosphere of great tragedy".

The rhetoric and outlook of Pius XII are absent from John's social encyclicals. Instead, much that had previously been frowned on or regarded with suspicion was now encouraged and approved. John praised the welfare state, worker participation in industry, trade union rights, a measure of social ownership, decolonisation and the self-determination of small nations, and the rights of women. The United Nations - previously distrusted because God was not mentioned in its Charter - was praised, as was its Declaration of Human Rights.

Gone was the world where we treated our fellow Christians with suspicion, where Catholics claimed toleration for themselves but were prepared to deny it to others, where Scripture reading was a specialist interest, where the Liturgy was celebrated in a language incomprehensible - and, often, inaudible - to the vast majority of worshippers, and where the Church was seen as the natural ally of so many unsavoury right-wing regimes. All that was changed by the reforms of the Council called by John XXIII, a Pope now insufficiently known and appreciated. In Peter Hebblethwaite's words, "in him the Church and the world were prodigiously blessed".

PREVIEW BY DAN BAIRD

Battleship Bertie: Politics in Ahern's Ireland by John Cooney

"Scottish-born Open House contributor and editorial board member John Cooney is a professional journalist in Ireland, where he is Religion Correspondent and a political analyst of the Irish Independent and a regular columnist for The Western People."

John is author of a number of books, the most recent of which, *Battleship Bertie*, is a compilation of his weekly 'Beyond the Pale' articles in *The Western People*.

Dan Baird, who writes for us this month on Pope John XXIII, will review *Battleship Bertie* in the February edition of *Open House*.

Contributors to Open House

Ian Willock; Retired Professor of Law, Dundee University; Member of many Law committees; An Editor of *Open House*.

Gonzalo Gonzalez; Priest of the personal prelature Opus Dei. He is a British citizen, Spanish born. Came to Britain in 1955. A passion for philosophy.

Joseph Kelly; Retired schoolteacher. Writer and Reviewer.

A Mary Lindsay; Retired United Reform Minister. Lives in Perth.

Bernard Aspinwall; Historian. Author of many books. Specialist in American History and Church History.

James McGarry; Retired Doctor. Writer, Reviewer and Author.

Gerry Carruthers; Historian. Lecturer in Scottish History Department, Glasgow University. Author and Reviewer.

Willy Slavin (Glasgow); Parish Priest. An Editor of *Open House*. Writer and Reviewer.

Dan Baird; Writer, Reviewer, Secretary of the Glasgow Newman.

John O'Connor O P; Writer, Reviewer, Member of New Blackfriars Board, and member of the Dominican Community in Glasgow.

Lynn Jolly; Film Reviewer, Civil Servant, Poet, Writer.

Michael O'Neill; Lawyer in USA, Former Priest from Lanarkshire.

It is confirmed that the opinions and ideas expressed by all our Contributors are their own and not accepted as the opinions and ideas of Open House.

Opus Dei in Scotland

Freddie Ayer (the philosopher A. J. Ayer) was strongly anti-Christian, and even more anti-Muslim, or at least tended to express himself or express his feelings that way. However in 1988, in an article in the *Sunday Telegraph*, he told the story that he had died in hospital for four minutes, as the result of an operation. He wrote: "I was confronted by a red light, exceedingly bright. I was aware that this light was responsible for the government of the universe." He died, finally, in the following year. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 1989.)

Many years before this adventure, his two deaths, or perhaps rather his "death" and his death, he asked me one day to explain Opus Dei to him.

I was quite aware that his knowledge of the doctrine of Jesus Christ lagged behind his knowledge of logic (his main strength), so I thought I had better find a simple explanation; I said that Opus Dei tried to see that its members became saints, and then let them do whatever they wanted. (For future reference, let us call this explanation "explanation X.") I do not now remember many details of that conversation, but most probably I did clarify that the women and the men of Opus Dei do not think that they are saints, but rather they are trying to become such. He was, to my surprise, quite happy with my explanation, and it turned out that he had no objection to it.

When the editors of a magazine with a lovely name (you guessed correctly, *OH*) asked me to write about what Opus Dei is doing in Scotland (and I must clarify that I am no director nor "representative" nor "spokesman" of Opus Dei, but just happen to be a friend of Willy Slavin, one of the editors), this anecdote concerning Freddie Ayer came to mind, because I think it can give an idea of how the faithful of the Opus Dei prelatore are very different from one another, and *do not act as a group*. This is an important point to bear in mind if we are to understand what Opus Dei "is doing in Scotland." To really know that, you might find yourself - I might find myself - having to go round interviewing them one by one.

However, I realise that this has to be somewhat clarified, and I shall now try to do so.

I said you might have to go round asking one by one. Or perhaps not, depending on the "level" of the answer. I mean by this that the request for information can be met at different levels. Imagine that you ask your parish priest about the parish, what he has in mind, or what is his main desire or intention, and that he replies: "That all the parishioners should love God more." This would be a very good answer, and it would be dangerous to lose sight of it. Your Roman Catholic bishop could give the same, or a similar answer, about his diocese: "That all my people should have the happiness of loving God and being loved by God," for example. This is then his desire or plan for the diocese. But then, admittedly, you could go on to ask the bishop: "But were you planning or doing this morning something you did not do or plan yesterday or last week?" He will now probably have to answer you, at another level, something like this: "Yes indeed: I have been thinking a lot about the



St Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei

improvement of the quality of the food of the young seminarians."

Several levels like this would apply to the activity of Opus Dei in Scotland. A first-level one could be: so that more people should love God, and as a result love one another. Or, again, at the same level: to see that many understand the meaning in their lives of the universal call to holiness, that is to say, the Christian message that everyone is called to become a saint. Up to this point, what Opus Dei is doing in Scotland is the same as what it is doing everywhere else where it is working, be it India, Finland or Mexico. But at the lower levels you are going to find today or tomorrow, this year or the next, an infinite variety.

Let us now go back to "explanation X." It does not explain everything, but it almost does, because Opus Dei is something very simple (not in the sense of "easy" but of

"uncomplicated"). If we keep the idea in view, with a little patience, we may find more light coming as a result of it.

G. W. F. Hegel wrote extensively about the self-movement of the idea (*Selbstbewegung des Begriffs*). It is I think a common experience that, as many ideas enter our mind from many different sources, it all seems to happen as if they move and connect themselves in orderly fashion with one another, of their own accord (even when we sleep!?). This self-movement brings about *conclusions* for which a certain passage of time to be taken into account seems often to be the rule. The "silent" activity of the ideas is a movement which is independent from any *conscious* intellectual activity of our own. A certain day, when you did not set out to solve the problem you experience the joy of suddenly discovering that it has been solved, because the solution, or partial solution, is right in the front of your mind. A light, perhaps

even a great light, "has descended," as the light that can descend after prolonged study, that Plato discusses in his 7th letter (341c-d and 344b). I think this is a good explanation why even if an idea does not say "everything," it should not be despised.

And what about Scotland, then. For information at the various "levels," I would recommend as the simplest way to just google

"Dunreath" (this is the name of the men's centre in Glasgow), from where you will be led to a website. There you will find information about activities which people of Opus Dei have organised, as any citizen can do in a free country, together with other faithful or cooperators of the prelatore, other Catholics, other Christians who are not Catholic, and non-Christians. There will be religious activities also, by which Opus Dei complements the work of local churches, classes, talks, retreats and pastoral care that can help people develop their personal spiritual life and apostolate. You will probably be able to read about the boys' club, the tutoring of children of immigrants in some "inner-city" part of Glasgow, etc.

There is also a website for the U.K. (www.opusdei.org.uk), and one for the whole world with many languages (www.opusdei.org).

To conclude, I would like to confess a certain trepidation which comes to me always whenever I have to write. It concerns the nature and limitations of human language, but it happens because I remember a story in the life of St Josemaria. I shall tell you the story because it is very relevant to the existence of OH, as open and fearless encouragement to good ideas wherever they come from.

When Josemaria was a young priest he was advised by an

acquaintance about the way he had to follow to succeed in life: first, not to work very hard, because this always tends to generate jealousy. Secondly, not to write anything, because what you write, even if you write carefully, is always misinterpreted, at least by some.

Fortunately the saint did not follow the advice. And, of course, nor should anyone.

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A. MARY LINDSAY

Advent Reflections (Advent should carry a Health Warning)

Advent - a time of expectation and anticipation. Like Lent, the Church festival of Advent was originally a time of solemnly joyful reflection on God's mysterious, wonderful gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

However, solemnity and joy are uncomfortable bed fellows. Christmas, grafted onto the Winter Solstice celebrations, which heralded the new birth of nature, soon became a joyous festival of feasting again. God's generous gift of His Son found expression in the new fashion of exchanging small gifts between family and friends, slowly causing the religious, Christ centred Advent expectations and anticipation to be shifted from the religious to the commercial, eventually escalating into our present frenzied pre-occupation with the latter rather than the first.

Even for those who do *not* need reminding that "Christ is the Reason for the Season" Advent has turned into the most stressful four weeks in the year as they get caught up in the rush and the worry to accomplish the 1000+1 things they have *convinced themselves simply must be done*. It is at this stage that the weeks of Advent should carry a health warning.


There is absolutely nothing wrong with times of joyous anticipation or positive forward planning. Such times are, in fact, spirit lifting and therefore health promoting BUT - and this is the important BUT - when we live in a *perpetual* state of 'Advent' focusing *exclusively* on 'that which is yet come' (or to be done), worrying whether we can cope with it, we are in serious danger of losing the precious moments of our

here-and-now; blind and deaf to the opportunities, the joys, the peace, the spiritual challenges and God's presence in the here-and-now of each day.

We can neither *live* in the past nor can we actively live the future. Our challenges, our joys our opportunities are in the here-and-now and that is where God lives, here-and-now.

The other danger of this *perpetual* state of 'living' in anticipation', focusing on 'how it will or is going to be' often creates a fiction which, all too often, is not matched by the eventual reality. Christ's coming and life bears testimony to that. For centuries the Jewish people hoped - and are still hoping - for a Messiah. When He came He did not fit their expectations of Him and became the victim of their 'blindness through anticipation,' leading to His death.

Maybe it's time we turned our back on the life and spirit destroying *constant* pre-occupation with to-morrow's self-imposed, materially orientated 'duties' and deadlines, *believed* to celebrate Christ's Advent, allowing us to be God-aware, Christ aware, seeing the Advent and the Event of His coming, as well as His already present reality with us, to-day and each new day as it is given to us.



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JOSEPH KELLY

Scottish Bishops

By 2013 only two of the present Conference of Scottish Bishops will remain in office, leaving six positions to be filled. Bishopwatcher - the Tablet's Tipster to the Pews in an October edition, forecast a possible treble in the prospective long running Scottish Episcopate Stakes. One has romped home so far. Does Bishopwatcher have inside information? Has he sneaked a peek at the ternus? Whatever the answer, he forecasts that there are five Episcopal races in the offing over the next five years, a mouth watering prospect for aficionados of Episcopal racegoing.

Surprisingly, the issue of diocesan succession has gone mainstream. In its edition of 22 November, a spread appeared in the Times, generated by the impending retirement of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Brien. Its tipster, Our Westminster Correspondent, seems not only to have sneaked a peek at an unacknowledged ternus; she provided pictures as well. The chief novelty among her suggested list of runners is that a dark horse has appeared - from Scotland. Exactly what the Papal Nuncio thinks of this public discussion of one of his main functions is not clear.

Rumour suggests that Pope Benedict is mulling over the possibility of changing the age of retirement for bishops from 75 to 78. Interest in prelatical longevities however diminishes rapidly when faced with the question of prelatical appointments. *L'evêque est mort, vive l'evêque*. The real question mark over the procedure is not why but how.

The process of selection of a bishop has been a roller coaster affair for two millennia. Over the centuries it has embraced within it the counsel given by St Paul in his letter to Timothy to the advice in the Didache to 'elect for yourselves bishops and deacons': from the selection of St Ambrose as bishop at a City Council meeting to rights of nomination or presentation of candidates to the Vatican by secular

states. In the Middle Ages, clergy serving in the local Cathedral elected their bishop and sent the name to Rome which in most cases rubberstamped their selection. Kings and emperors picked names out of hats (mitres?), extending their *droits de seigneur* even into papal enclaves for the selection of the bishop of Rome.

We are familiar with this history, but such interference with ecclesiastical procedure is dodoesque in our time. In their place there is an air of the mysterious, a black hole in the selection process and an exclusivity about the exercise that make it seem more esoteric than it should, or need, be.

The procedures are well known and documented in Canon Law, canons 377 and 378. The conditions for suitable candidacy for the episcopate expressed in canon 378 suggest a CV to which candidates for election to secular public office could hardly aspire. These are to be 'outstanding in strong faith, good morals, piety, zeal for souls, wisdom, prudence and human virtues, and possess those other gifts which equip him to fulfil the office in question.' Key features of the process stand out at once; the use of the word 'secret', the influence of the papal legate and the opinions...of lay persons of outstanding wisdom.

Vatican officials view the intrusion of any even remotely democratic process into this cosy order of things as out of the question. The chief reason is that any form of selection process would be divisive, with factions, pressure groups and reruns of 'I am for Apollos, I am for Paul' etc. Lay involvement is different. Who are the lay persons of 'outstanding wisdom'? That mysterious band, unknown and anonymous, labelled 'senior Catholics'? How knowledgeable are they about the strengths and weakness of possible candidates? Or does this elite group describe the kind of candidate they think their diocese needs? This aspect of episcopal selection should come out of the

shadows and be provided with guidelines to follow. Perhaps they are; who is to know? As a sop to the more forward looking, the use of 'lay persons' suggests that the compilers of Canon Law were not gender blind.

It is a relief to leave the obscure world of bishop selection to consider bishop behaviour, remembering canon 378. His functions in short are 'to teach, to govern and to sanctify.' If he takes time to read St Cyprian, he will find the opinion that "You ought to know that the bishop is in the church and the church in the bishop and if one is not with the bishop he is not with the church". Clearly there is a lot riding on the bishop for the good of the community for which he has been elected to serve. Much is expected of him.

Exemplars of good practice among bishops throughout the Church abound. Some have had a good press, time has made others less visible, others are perhaps obscured a little. The present writer's favourite has practically dropped out of sight and I am grateful to Peter Hebblethwaite's 'The Year of Three Popes' for reminding me of him. Bishop Luciani, bishop of Vittoria Veneto was seen everywhere in his diocese; he was always available to his priests; he consulted before deciding. He stated his priorities clearly and wrote weekly to his priests to share his thoughts and to keep the programme of the diocese before them. If I were to add to these virtues, I would suggest that the regular pastoral letter be revived, together with strict instructions to priests to ensure it was read to congregations. Most of all I would include increased presence and visibility, particularly in conferring the Sacrament of Confirmation. There is a risk that who a bishop is and what he does is losing ground in the Catholic community. We have moved far from Pope St Leo the Great's comment - he who is to preside over all must be elected by all.

BERNARD ASPINWALL

True Believers or Irreconcilables?

Hamish Fraser (1913-1986)

Presbyterian Scot Hamish Fraser, (1913-86), educated at Edinburgh Royal High and Edinburgh University, joined the Young Communist League, fought in the Spanish Civil War. Ironically he never merits attention in academic works dealing with British volunteers in Spain. A commissar and secret police (SIM) enforcer there, he witnessed the desecration and destruction of Catholic churches. On his return he promoted strikes on Clydeside in the early days of the Soviet-Nazi pact: it dictated strategy until 1941. Although admired by Edinburgh-born John Gollan (1911-77), the Scottish Communist Party secretary, by 1943-5 he was slowly moving from Marxism to Catholicism and his conversion in 1948. Four years later, after the death of his wife, he married Kathleen, a fellow school teacher and began a vocal career within the Catholic world to his death.

His activist spirit continued in his new faith: his working days were invariably sixteen hours a day. As he said on one occasion 'Scottish Catholics were Protestants who went to Mass.' Their lethargy appalled him. In 1952, addressing 10,000 at a rally in Paris, he outlined the methods of brutal Eastern European Stalinism. Prayer (especially the rosary) would convert materialist Marxists. During the Cold War, associating with the circle of *L'Homme Nouveau* and the Far Right Jean Madiran, Fraser was a popular figure touring America and later India. His writings reached Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In recent years his autobiography *Fatal Star* (1954) has been reprinted in at least two American editions. His convert friend Roy Campbell. (1901-57) would include him in his poem, 'The Flowering Rifle.' Rejecting both the Communist and the 'subversive' liberal state, he held rigidly to Papal encyclicals, confronting error and particularly after Vatican II,



Hamish Fraser

subversives within the Church (see *Approaches*, 47-48, February 1976 for two sample essays).

Hamish Fraser, the driven man made sure he was heard: 'No Surrender' to Modernism, socialism or novelty was his slogan. Mary, the Blessed Virgin, was the key to his outlook. The Mother of God made the Almighty more than an abstraction. Through her, universal brotherhood might be realised against the cold cash nexus of capitalist and worker, bureaucrat and lackey. Through her, in *Fatal Star* Fraser moved from Communism to Catholicism. Fraser believed that the social justice of the Ten Commandments and the Gospel rather than Marxism had to prevail. Not surprisingly then, he warmly espoused the anti-Communist 'Blue Army of Fatima' and had an intense devotion to the rosary. Inspired by this vision, he vigorously assailed Communism, urging bishops and laity to eliminate Communist trade union influences.

With Fr Michael McGovern at Laetare, Linlithgow, site of a Marian shrine erected by Polish exiles during the Second World War, he began his campaign. Following Communist experience and French Young Catholic

Workers (JOC) resistance to Nazism, he tried to galvanise young laity through workshops. Scottish Catholic activists were to play a part in the defeat of Willie Gallacher, the last Communist M.P. in the 1950 general election. Family demands (of eventually, seven children), financial pressures and some difficulties with Fr McGovern, meant the initiative faded. Returning to full time teaching and settling in Saltcoats, Fraser frequently contributed to *The Catholic Observer* and wrote a trenchant indictment of Saltcoats as 'rotten (Labour) borough.' A dependency culture was not social justice: greater upward mobility was preferable to suffocating state control.

Following the Second Vatican Council, Fraser moved within an international movement of disenchanted Catholics. The faith they loved seemingly destroyed, almost Communist style, by the machinations of a tiny group of theologians who knew what was good for the masses. Eternal truth was sacrificed to modern relativism.

In 1965, he began his magazine, *Approaches*, (continued today as *Apropos* by his son, Anthony S. Fraser), to challenge the new orthodoxy of Vatican II. He found many like minded friends including British Catholics like Fr Paul Crane, SJ, editor of *The Christian Democrat*, known from 1966 as *Christian Order*: Michael Davies (1935-2005), a convert, former Army man and school teacher; Leo Darroch of Durham, presently international president of *Una Voce*; Americans like Walter Matt (1915-2002) and his son Michael J., successive editors of the conservative *Wanderer* newspaper and subsequently founders of *The Remnant*, who were outraged by the alleged excesses of Vatican II; the traditionalists of the Latin Mass Society and *Una Voce* from 1965-66; and international figures like the respected philosopher and convert,

greatly admired by the present Pope, Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977), author of *The Trojan House in the City of God* (1967).

Convert novelists Bruce Marshall, the Waugh's and others were similarly sympathetic to the views of the disenchanted Catholics: the Latin Mass as the lynchpin of their faith, the rejection of the Kingship of Christ, the failure to apply rigorous Catholic judgements to politics, personal morality, education, birth control, homosexuality, and Holy Communion in the hand were all interpreted as pernicious neo-Marxism subversions of true Catholic doctrine; outrageous suggestions that women be ordained, falling attendances at Church, the decline of priestly vocations, acquiescence in homosexuals and paedophiles in the upper ranks of the clergy, all were attributed to 'the condom culture' of Vatican II 'cafeteria' Catholicism by the disenchanted Catholics; All these themes ran through the Fraser magazines *Approaches and Apropos* mentioned above.

Bishops, priests and laity resisted this traditionalist backlash in Scotland and across the globe. The Sixties' theologians achieved a revolution but left serious problems for the ordinary Catholics.

In the secular world in Britain enthusiasts for high-rise apartments in the sky, the elimination of the old community networks, and the ignoring of white working class concerns at mass immigration into their neighbourhoods, made the ordinary worker feel ignored and abandoned (see Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (Allen Lane, 2006 pp. 493-94). 'Their' culture was not considered. But as Peter Hennessy wrote: "There is much to be said for "better yesterday" as a politico-economic and social motivator. But of itself it is not enough. Societies need to be stimulated, not just to right past wrongs but to face future difficulties and developments' (*Having It So*

Good, p. 621.) How much more that applies to the Church.

Yes, the Conciliar revolution had gone through, but many ordinary Catholics had lost the focus of their lives. However, following *Humanae Vitae* (1968) most took control of their own. In ecclesiastical terms, the ordinary punter in the pew missed the colourful ceremonies, incense, choirs, organ, familiar statuary, stained glass and neo-gothic vestments. The bare ruined choirs were upsetting. (see Garry Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion* (Doubleday 1972)). Somehow antiseptic, puritan architecture - as Moyra Doorly argues in her *No Place For God: The Denial of The Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007) - and guitars and ageing congregations have failed to inspire devotion or inculcate old disciplines Both Innovators and Reactionaries are now at a loss.

The seed-bed of belief has gone. Scandals across the Church, including Scotland, have fed scepticism and further eroded authority. Rearranging the furniture on the Titanic will not help. Internecine conflict is foolishly unproductive.

Atrocities committed in the name of religions in recent years does not help. A.N. Wilson, in his *God's Funeral* (Norton 1999) showed fading belief among nineteenth century elites, but today, as Professor Callum Brown has revealed in his *The Death of Christian Britain* (Routledge, 2000) and *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Longman, 2006), the changing role of women, who once were heavily committed to the 'christianising' of children, has created a huge vacuum among the masses. Belief is remote from most lives today. 'Quo Vadis?' or 'Quare repulisti Me?' are unlikely questions today. How or why we got here is immaterial, what is to be done is more important.

LYNN JOLLY

The Other Steve McQueen

Director of 'Hunger'

Most people (or maybe it's just me) associate the name Steve McQueen with the epitome of poised male sexuality, possibly the coolest, most relaxed posture ever seen on a human being and, ultimately, the motorbike scene in 'The Great Escape'. Well, the other one is a British artist who has just turned his hand to film directing. The result is the Cannes award winning 'Hunger', a rendering of the early nineteen eighties IRA hunger strike and, specifically, the death of Bobby Sands.

From the outset the director's artistic identity is evident as it becomes clear that this is a film whose primary medium will be visual. The opening silent sequence follows a man dressing for work, eating breakfast, checking his car for planted bombs and pulling slowly out of his



Steve McQueen, Director

suburban driveway. The taughtness of his body language, his void facial expression and the banality of the scene all serve to let you know that this is someone very accustomed to a bad day at work. The further implication, communicated through a close-up of his skinned knuckles, is that his bad day means a worse one for someone else.

Spare of dialogue and relying heavily on circumstantial sound effects, 'Hunger' manages to avoid any note of partisanship or even of political comment. This is slightly mitigated by a skilful use of contemporaneous speeches from the UK Parliament. Margaret Thatcher's voice is heard condemning the 'cruelty' and 'violence' of the IRA prisoners. Juxtaposed against a scene in which the same prisoners are being subjected to the appalling brutality of the Maze prison officers, the effect is one of horrible irony as we are left to ponder the democracy of cruelty and violence, the pitiless steel of Thatcher's tone placing her also firmly in the frame.

Given the subject matter the tightrope of distance walked by this film is no mean feat. The hunger strike is treated with ambiguity, it's moral, religious and political implications all challenged and scrutinised through the longest discourse in the film, a conversation between Sands and the prison chaplain, a sage, sceptical and compassionate priest. No blessing is given here, and we are left to wonder if this is the closest McQueen comes to stating a position. Do the actions of Sands and the nine others render them the heroes of a struggle, sorry victims, or the perpetrators of further acts of ungodly violence, this time self-destructive. There is no conclusion other than your own and you probably went in with it.

The achievement of the film lies in that very avoidance coupled with an extraordinary visual impact. If you can make the washing of dried shit from a cell wall into a nauseating but compelling graphic you may be doing something more powerfully humanising than any political messaging can achieve. For my money the resistance of slogan and the ambiguity said it all this time. The de-humanising brutality of ideologues and of the institutions, movements and cultures they create, comes in all colours. Think of the war paintings of Peter Howson. Who's right and who's wrong may be the argument but it's not the subject. The pointless savagery of war is. Artists and poets have always said this better than anyone.

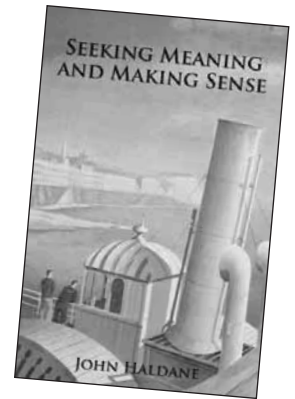
Book Reviews

JOHN O'CONNOR OP

Seeking Meaning and Making Sense

by John Haldane,

(Imprint Academic: Exeter, 2008). Pp. 148+ viii, £8.95 pbk



In the past twenty years John Haldane has established himself as a philosopher who has something to say to the non-specialist. Through articles in British Catholic weekly newspapers and Scottish daily newspapers he has assumed not only the mantle of a Public Intellectual, but a Catholic Public Intellectual, an altogether rarer breed.

Seeking Meaning and Making Sense collects twenty pieces of Haldane's journalism of the past decade. That this represents only a part of Haldane's newspaper output during this time is clear from the fact that he has also published this year another collection of articles, *The Church and the World*, where Haldane's Catholic interests are much more to the fore.

Yet there are points of continuity. A philosopher is interested in ideas, and bringing one's Catholicism to one's philosophy not surprisingly helps make one receptive to ideas from the past, especially from classical and medieval thought. To this Haldane brings the analytical rigour of Anglophone philosophy, along with a desire to challenge those currents of contemporary thought scornful of the past, as if unaware that modernity has its own vulnerabilities. From the first of the essays Haldane makes his general perspective clear. There are, he claims, three options. The first two are rejected: Romantic Reaffirmation, with its attempt at recreating the past; and Self-Conscious Irony, where intellectual enquiry is treated as a highly sophisticated form of play (p.6). Haldane's position is that of Reform and Renewal: "rearticulating and where necessary amending older conceptions of human nature and human values so as to show their coherence,

plausibility and contemporary relevance" (p.138).

Unlike in *The Church and the World*, where Haldane's interests are principally Catholic, here Haldane's spirit of reform and renewal takes the form of a proud Scot calling his compatriots to appreciate the richness of their nation's intellectual heritage, reminding them that this great tradition lives on - to some extent. Of course, Haldane would doubtless point out that the fact that an academic philosopher such as he is published in the daily Scottish press reflects the continued strengths of Scotland: "As one moves north, the soil of moral community grows deeper. Cross the border and one enters another country with its own religious tradition, and its own education and legal systems. Until recently moral philosophy was more or less compulsory in Scottish universities and it is still pursued by large numbers of first year arts students." (p.35). Alongside such affirmations are many passages exhibiting a certain elegiac tone, sadness that his nation risks betraying its heritage. Haldane points out that the Scottish university whose Chair of Moral Philosophy was once occupied by the philosopher, Thomas Reid, the "philosopher of common sense", awarded a Doctor of Letters to Billy Connolly in 2001, that other great exemplar of common sense. Haldane is tantalisingly reserved about what he thinks about this particular case, and good-naturedly does not stoop to moralism.

Throughout these essays Haldane shows a keen appreciation of contemporary British life, not least its moral and intellectual health, which he sees as

closely related. When addressing such questions, the spirit of renewal and reform is not just about taking on board older conceptions of human nature and human values, but challenging a society whose moral sensitivities risk becoming coarsened and corrupted. This is most evident in two of the essays, on the status of the embryo and on the ethics of war. Here contemporary ethics stands accused of preferring inferior conceptions to past wisdom, manifested in its unexamined utilitarianism and the ease with which it dilutes moral principles foundational within human morality. On abortion: "An embryo is not a potential human being but a human being with potential. To kill it is to kill a human being." (p.55); and on war: "Ironically, however, had the scholastic doctrine of just war been better known, it might have been that an artefact of medieval ethical theory would have inhibited contemporary consequentialist

strategies of war, and saved our leaders from incurring harms to their own people as well as inflicting terrible and longstanding suffering upon the people of Iraq." (p.61).

This is, of course, to enter into controversial territory. However, such conclusions are preceded by disciplined argument, where rigour is trusted more than the emotional heat that so often derails proper debate. Throughout, accessibility to an educated daily newspaper reading public is seemingly effortlessly achieved without avoiding difficult concepts or argumentative precision.

There is a breadth to this collection that is highly impressive: bioethics, aesthetics, the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, the British Union, the problem of evil, the intellectual achievement of Elizabeth Anscombe and the change of opinion on the existence of God of the erstwhile atheist,

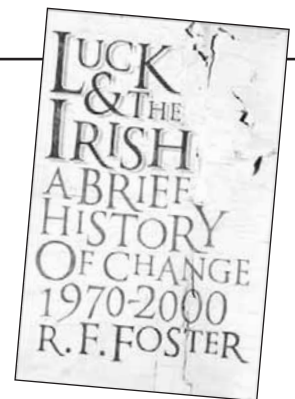
Anthony Flew. Yet, there is arguably something missing. Haldane's writings on the state of contemporary Catholicism, applauded by some and dismissed by others, are surely the part of his journalistic oeuvre that has elicited most comment and controversy, and distinguishes him most from other conservative commentators writing for the quality press. Publishing those pieces in a separate collection may make this one more acceptable to the general public, but simultaneously undercuts its *raison d'être*: to acquaint us properly with an outstandingly lucid voice whose Catholicism is central to the perspective from which he views the world. It is an acquaintance well worth making: He is a man of conviction, who respects the reader enough to lay his cards on the table, presenting his own beliefs to the same scrutiny to which he submits those of others.

JAMES MCGARRY

Luck and the Irish

A brief history of change 1970-2000

by R.F. Foster. Penguin Books 2007. £8.99



Roy Foster is Carroll professor of Modern Irish History in Oxford. He has accepted the challenge, daunting for any historian, of writing about very recent events: in particular, writing about a country which has changed more than any European country, as Ireland has done. He has succeeded brilliantly, by judicious selection of illustrative topics, by his opinionative comments, and by stylish lively writing.

The scene is set by recalling a precedent. Thomas Davis, in 1845, wrote that Ireland was changed by British Whig government interventions and by economic stresses, saying "The knowledge, the customs, the superstitions, the hopes of the People are entirely changing. There is neither use nor reason in lamenting what we must infallibly lose... we cannot resemble our fathers". The extent of change between

1970 and 2000 was greater, it happened more quickly, it involved changed moral codes, population increase, investment from abroad, benefits from Europe, transformation from poor to rich, being placed first by international comparison for "quality of life", being identified as the "location of happiness", an increasingly fashionable concept among sociologists and economists. In the course of this almost anarchic change, the moral monopoly of the Catholic Church was shattered, and Ireland's view of the North profoundly altered.

What force is strong enough to transform a country quickly? Natural disaster, violent revolution, money, cover the range of ineluctable realities. For Ireland, it was money.

History, tradition, culture, each lacked the power to change or to resist the

impact of unimagined wealth. Their role, with political parties and religious leaders, was to sustain a sense of identity, as change swept through. Politicians and prelates were vital as change was accommodated by Irish civil society. Both politicians and prelates were diminished by the rapid pace of change, but they mirrored, even exemplified it, in their divergent ways. Foster writes engagingly about the part played by Europe, and by America, in making Ireland rich, and touches neatly on the fact that Ireland never having been seriously industrialized, did not have to dismantle its past to embrace new opportunities. "The miracle of the loaves and fishes", is his title.

Two aspects of change are covered in "How the Catholics became Protestants", the arrival of Irish television, and the advance of women to political leadership

and power. When the publicly controlled television channel was launched in 1961, the fears among religious leaders were acute: they were not resisted. On the first evening, the Primate, Cardinal D'Alton in uniform, filled the screen, to reassure viewers that they had nothing to fear from the guided broadcasters. Television, however, proved as potent in Ireland as anywhere. The much more significant change was the emergence of women: it was a new public voice for Ireland. The family planning debate was an example, the symbolic rail-trips to Belfast for contraceptives led the way, but as time passed, the decline in the number of marriages, low attendance at Mass, the drought of vocations for the priesthood, and for nunneries, made Ireland seem as secular as almost any state in Europe.

The two lengthy chapters about party politics in Dublin, and about the savage violence in the North, are probably the essence of this book for historians. The politicians deserve to be assessed, praised, and criticized, and they are. These, however, are the less engaging parts of the book, though necessary. The outcomes of these thirty years of change seem more surprising than the details of the politics, namely, Ireland a rich popular admired state, and most surprisingly of all, the virtual disappearance of the desire for a unified Ireland, summed up in a sentence, "The unintended achievement of thirty years of Republican strategy was to entrench the border more deeply than ever before."

The concluding chapters strike a

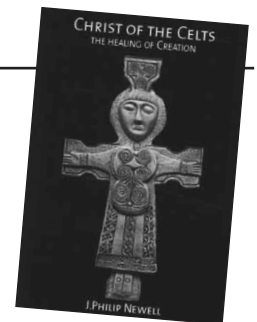
tentative note, wisely, because events are so recent.

The fame of Irish rock-stars, and the acclaim of such shows as "Riverdance", the conscious promotion of the unique experience for tourist visitors to Ireland, the new uses of land, for golf clubs, for motorways, and for housing for car owners, are potent examples of change. The profusion of new writing, much of it fiction, which explores and reveals the essence of new Ireland, the debate about the Irish language are covered open-mindedly. Finally, it is suggested that Romantic Ireland has not been eliminated by globalization, but it is noted that all the evidence points to the opinion that "living in the present" has emerged as being better than living in the past. Time alone will tell.

IAN D WILLOCK

Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation

by J Philip Newell. Wild Goose Publications. 2008.



This is a small book packed with insights which challenge and might even replace all or some of what we are accustomed to regard as orthodox Christianity. The author sees it as everywhere in a gradual but steady decline, evidenced not just in numbers, but in dwindling influence and relevance. The surprising thing is that he finds the origin of this decay not in recent events such as the two World Wars, but in the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire in the fourth century. This led to certain scriptures being proclaimed as authentic and others dismissed as spurious. But on the periphery, free from this authoritarianism, there were, and still are, traces of an alternative Christianity, which we may call Celtic.

The two most profound repudiations which the author, a former Warden of the Iona Community, makes are to replace original sin by original love which draws us all towards unity; while the Cross

demonstrates that love in its fullest form, not God's judgment on our sinfulness. Newell does not claim this realignment as his own. He prays in aid of the Welshman Pelagius, who really said it all in the fourth century, followed down the years by Columbanus and Erlugena, then into Benedictinism with St. Adred, then the mediaeval mystic Mother Julian of Norwich, and concluding with two 20th century independent thinkers, George MacLeod and Teilhard de Chardin, both scarred by their experiences in the First World War and both challenging their Presbyterian and Jesuit inheritances respectively.

The book, though profound, is quite easy to read into, for its core is eight chapters with titles, such as The Rhythm of the Earth, the Sound of Love, and the Hymn of the Universe in which Newell draws on his own experiences and those of his family; and these chapters are summarised in a Prelude and looked

back upon in a Postlude.

However one recurrent metaphor, perhaps ironically by its very commonness, does give rise to some puzzlement. That is the word 'heart' Newell uses it first in a literal sense. He wants to give primacy to the Apostle John, he who laid his head on Jesus' breast and so must have heard his heart-beat. A short step and the heart becomes the love which is the heart of life. More mystically the heart is the centre of God's Being from which emerge both Christ and all created matter. And we make peace with one another by offering our hearts. One hesitates to ask where, if at all, does the familiar Roman Catholic doctrine of the Sacred Heart fit into all this.

One is also bound to ask if the contrast between sin and love is not pitched too sharply when located in centuries-old schools of theology. The Catechism of the Catholic Church does specify "a great many kinds of sin" (1852) but they are "a

failure in genuine love for God and neighbour" (1849), which is later elaborated upon in the Ten Commandments (2064). Switching to popular devotions, here is a verse of a song from the 1990s, 'Lord, you have come to the seashore'

*Lord, take my hands and direct them,
Help me spend myself in seeking the lost,
Returning love for the Love you gave me.*

Philip Newell in the Prelude writes of "the new longing for peace today and the growing consciousness of the earth's oneness". The back cover refers to Christianity's "potential for its rebirthing as a spirituality relevant for the 21st century". Certainly the collapse of Communism has left a space for Christianity to draw towards united action in the parts of the world where in

its various guises it still has influence, here and there in association with Islam. Climate change and the world-wide economic up-heavals are two such areas. But more love and forgiveness and less condemnation would, as Newell suggests, make Christianity more acceptance.

GERARD CARRUTHERS

St. Aloysius Garnethill, A Century of Celebration 1908-2008

by John V. McCabe, No publisher, 2008 £7.00

(At the Church Book Shop) Phone orders for the Booklet to Fr. James Campbell S J

This is an attractive and well-written booklet, forty pages long. It includes a fascinating account of the foundation by the Society of Jesus of their mission and church in Glasgow, with glimpses of the indefatigable work of the likes of Fr William Kay, Fr Joseph Egger and Fr Francis Bacon establishing the Jesuit presence and, indeed, charism in the second city of the empire in the late nineteenth century. Sodalties, retreats, St Aloysius college and the presence of the Sisters of Mercy are also briefly touched upon, along with some quite excellent photographs, especially that of Archbishop Macguire laying the foundation stone of St Aloysius church, as we know it today, on 4th October 1908. There is much interesting material too on the redrawing of Cowcaddens and its surrounding parts in Glasgow in the middle of the twentieth century, essentially decimating the number of 'official' parishoners attached to St Aloysius. Of course, due to the Jesuit presence, their college and the fact of being a city centre church, St Aloysius has remained until the present day one of the most vibrant centres of Catholic Scotland.

Precisely because this booklet is well produced and thought out,

however, one might wonder why a more substantial, full monograph-length publication did not appear to mark St Aloysius's centenary in 2008. The post-reformation history of the Jesuits in Scotland deserves to be told generally, but their Glaswegian activities especially ought to be fully documented and in scholarly fashion. How has the scale of the society's vision, so consummately achieved in its institutional accomplishment (both parish and school), been received by non-Catholic Glasgow? What was the complexion of order's relations with the secular clergy of the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What did the magnificent neo-baroque conception of St Aloysius church say to the world, Catholic and otherwise, in the early Modernist period? St Aloysius has pulsed as a centre of worship touched by events much further afield, two world wars, Vatican II, and the murder of Jesuits in South America to take several obvious examples. It is surely time for someone to work on a PhD on the history of the Jesuits in Glasgow and the west of Scotland since the nineteenth century. Perhaps one of the numerous, well educated retirees who are devotees of St Aloysius?



YOUR LETTERS

Dear Editors...



Dear Editors

POST-ISMS AND CHRISTIANITY

By Kristof Vanhoutte

As I was leafing through the September 2008 issue of *Open House* to get some ideas about the issues that were important to the Scottish Catholic community, I was struck by the title of one of the items - 'Some Signs of Post-Christian Living'. I immediately wondered what *Post-Christian* meant? Maybe the writer had no particular or specific theoretical expectations when choosing this title, but I struggled to understand the meaning of the term 'Post-Christian living'?

Because the use of the word *Post-* as a prefix is part of fashionable contemporary philosophical jargon, I began to ask myself if Catholics really needed to engage in the fad of *Post-isms*? Personally speaking, I would prefer they didn't. Not that Catholics are any better, but why should we play this language-game?

A second question is more philosophical: the meaning of 'Post-Christian'. Some explanation of post-Modernism as it is understood in philosophy is necessary.

Literally, Post-Modernism refers literally to an era 'after' a modern one. Post-Modernism considers itself to be a reaction against this earlier modern era and its principles. Basically, it is a sceptical reaction against that previous modern era and its 'essentialist' principles. Post-Modernism came to full development in Continental philosophy in the late 1970s with a book by the French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard, however, was not the first philosopher to use this particular concept). His book was meant to provoke debate about the end of the great narratives, the *meta-narratives* ('meta' meaning all-embracing) as Lyotard called them (elsewhere known as 'grand narratives'). I prefer to call them meta-narratives or great narratives as I believe these definitions to be more helpful.

The great narratives were the big meaning-providers. That is, they were the universal stories that explained why something could be seen as true, meaningful and valuable. Some examples of *meta-narratives* are the 'Science' or 'Christianity' but also less expansive meaning-providers such as 'Capitalism' or 'Marxism' might well be included. What makes a narrative a *meta-narrative* is its having a fixed and limited set of rules and values that can explain and morally define almost everything.

The Post-Modern era was supposed to usher in an age of unbelief towards *meta-narratives*. These grand meaning-giving stories had now, in Post-Modern times, lost their power, and above all, their function. In the Post-Modern epoch what mattered was no longer 'meta' but simply 'local'. This 'locality'

meant, however, that Truth could no longer be seen as a metaphysical issue but only as a local one, that is, Truth is part of a simple language 'game'.

In my view, using the philosophical concept Post-Modernism (as in 'Post-Christianity') is just a way of washing our hands over the underlying problems! Are signs of moral decay such as drunkenness, the spiraling proliferation of sexual diseases or the abuse of drugs really signs of Post-Christianity?

I would prefer to ask if there really is anything new under the sun? Surely drunkenness and the other 'vice-crimes' have existed since the birth of humanity? How can these be signs that Christianity has lost its meaning? Couldn't these just be evidence that we have to get back to basic Gospel values?

Instead of referring to Post-Christian living, shouldn't we realise that there are far bigger issues and responsibilities in question? Drunkenness is not the real problem, nor soaring sexual diseases nor the abuse of drugs, but our own self-satisfied obtuseness and puritanism?

There is nothing fundamentally wrong with Post-Modernism as long as you don't promote it in its most extreme form. After all, Post-Modernism would then just become another *meta-narrative* and simply undermine itself theoretically and practically.

Post-Modernism, however, does have its positive side. It persuades us to be a bit more humble about our scientific and non-scientific claims. However, referring to *Post-whatever* can only be done judiciously. The practical implication of this label for Christians today is that it makes us realize that, in using the term 'Post-Christian', we are simply repeating Pontius Pilate's hand-washing refusal to accept responsibility. But we know enough today to be quite certain that it wasn't just the Jews or the Romans that nailed Jesus onto the cross!

Dr. Kristof Vanhoutte of the Pontifica Università Antonianum, Rome, is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at Edinburgh University's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH). Whilst in Edinburgh he is working on his research project entitled "Did we by accident 'kill' the 'humanities' by 'killing' God?"

Dear Editors

Love and warm wishes from India. May the Good Lord bless you, yours and your oneness apostolate.

I am extremely happy to bring to you kind notice that I am in receipt of "*Open House*". Thank you very much.

The magazine *Open House* has a new face lift. I like both the form and matter of the magazine. I wish you God's blessing in your press apostolate. My prayers and wishes are always for you all.....May this magazine open every house and the heart and enrich them in every possible day.

God bless.

With love and regards
Your friend in India
Fr. John Joseph

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WITHOUT THEM WE COULD NOT CONTINUE.

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