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Scotland, some might remember, went to the polls twice last year. Or, more accurately, one third of Scots went twice. The turnout in May for the 2014 European Parliament elections (in which for the first time Scotland was a single constituency) was 33%. This compares with the 2011 Holyrood elections which got 50% and the 2010 Westminster elections at 64%. Scotland then went back to the polls in September for the Referendum when the turnout was 84%.

The question for the General Election in May 2015 is whether the turnout for the Referendum was a one off or not. If the turnout is smaller it will mean that politics has reverted to what we have been getting used to - between a third and a half of the electorate does not take part. In such a scenario it is possible that Labour will continue to give ground to the SNP. The SNP may even get more seats than Labour but only just. If, on the other hand, the momentum of the Referendum is kept up, then it is likely that a significant number of the extra 20-25% will be going to the polls to vote SNP. Although not all of them - in the Referendum the highest turnout was in NO constituencies. This could happen again as voters of all hues realise more than usual is at stake in May.

What everyone agrees on is that it can no longer be taken for granted that the majority of Scottish seats at Westminster will be occupied by Labour. It is truly the end of an era - although it is an era that only started in the 1950s. Open House readers are therefore invited to reflect on the irony of a large number of Scottish National Party members going to London. For what? There are, of course, ‘Nationalist’ MPs already at Westminster. Not only SNP, Plaid Cymru and Sinn Fein (even if they don’t attend) but the other Northern Ireland MPs who are used to manipulating the UK Parliament for Provincial reasons. Despite the mythology that the Celts are different / better, research indicates that Scottish, Welsh and Irish (including the Republic) political opinions do not vary all that much from ‘British / English’ prejudices.

So far Ms Sturgeon has only said she would not support the Tories but it is Mr Milliband’s unpopularity that is offering her seats. It might seem a difficult case to make that it is worth switching to SNP in Scotland only to prop up Labour in England. The other line in the sand that Nicola has drawn is that she will not support the replacing of Trident with another nuclear deterrent. This is a position in line with Catholic Social Teaching. If the Labour Party once took Scotland for granted it probably also took Catholics for granted. Next month Scots Catholics have choices that might not have occurred to their parents. The first is whether the right to vote is still a privilege which must be exercised if it is not to be lost. The second is, when we are encouraged to think globally but act locally, how local is local?

With a gender balanced Cabinet (and shadow Cabinet), a female First Minister and two other female party leaders in the Scottish Parliament the campaign for gender equality looks to be in good health in Scotland. On closer examination the picture is not quite so rosy. The proportion of female MSPs in the current Parliament is less than it was in the first Parliament. Only 28% of the candidates in the forthcoming general election are female. A gender balance in parliamentary representation may be only one test, but there is little comfort to be found elsewhere. Representation of women across Scottish society is woefully low. In a recent survey, the Scottish Review found that out of 486 places on public bodies only 35% are occupied by women and only 12 out of 52 boards are chaired by women.

Perhaps part of the problem is that gender equality has for too long been seen as a women’s issue, a fight best left to the feminists. If that characterisation is true then the campaign has failed to convince a wider population that the struggle for gender equality is one about fairness and equity. It is about employing the talents of all to benefit society as a whole.

Where persuasion has failed the Scottish government is now consulting on mandatory targets for board representation. An alternative to compulsion could be a more co-operative, grassroots solution, one that is closer to home. This is an opportunity to ask our husbands, fathers, brothers and friends to take on their share of the heavy lifting. If men are invited to be office bearers in voluntary or Church bodies, perhaps they should ask about the current gender balance or consider nominating a woman they know who would be just as capable of taking on the role. If men are asked to chair or be part of an all-male panel during the coming election should they consider declining? This is an opportunity to re-frame gender equality as a common problem and develop a solution where one half of humanity helps the other half for the benefit of everyone.
At peace

This is the first of four articles written between 2004 and 2013 by a father as he meditates on the death of one of his sons in the light of his faith in God. Here he recounts how his son's death deepened his understanding of two passages from Luke’s gospel and gave new meaning to the Easter greeting of ‘Peace’.

On the morning of 22nd November 2000, with the sound of unremitting rain drumming on our conservatory roof I sat and argued with an undertaker, resisting the inclusion of the word ‘peacefully’ in the newspaper announcement of the death the previous day of my beautiful younger son Hugh, aged nine and a half. He had fallen off his bike on the way to school on 15th November and banged his head. He never regained consciousness as we sat by his bedside for a week, the medical interventions ratcheting up as his life ebbed away. The increasing frequency of alarms bleeping, as the various monitors for his heart rate, blood and inter-cranial pressure predicted his impending end, was anything but peaceful as far as I was concerned.

The undertaker seemed more bothered about distressing those reading the announcement than accuracy and eventually I yielded. I was hardly at my strongest and it barely mattered. Now, I am ready to write is how two passages from Luke’s Gospel have sustained me, informed my thinking about Hugh’s death, and helped me find peace for myself. I have known and liked both for years, but, since Hugh’s death, my appreciation has deepened immeasurably.

Nunc Dimittis

The first is the Nunc Dimittis, one of the two canticles (‘short songs’) from Evensong, the Anglican Service of evening prayer. It is so called from its first two words in Latin. I became aware of it in my early teens after I discovered classical music in a big way and used to turn on Radio 3 as soon as I came in from school. On Wednesdays, following Games, I would soak in the bath and listen to Choral Evensong. I remember Marghanita Laski, a celebrated post-war intellectual and radio personality, once saying how she appreciated Choral Evensong as a
near-perfect work of art, despite her own atheism. That pretty much summed up my own attitude. I had been baptised as a baby but my parents were rather anti-Church, and apart from one family wedding and the odd school carol service, I knew nothing of what went on in churches. Nevertheless, I found listening to the chanting of the psalms and prayers and the singing, attractive at an aesthetic level.

The first canticle is the Magnificat, the Song of Mary, after Gabriel’s news that she will give birth to the Saviour. Its joyful tone and vivid imagery of God knocking the powerful off their thrones, and raising up the lowly has inspired composers to write beautiful and dramatic settings. However, from the beginning, I was more attracted by the second canticle, the Nunc Dimittis, with its mysterious first line ‘Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace’, in the words of the Book of Common Prayer. I couldn’t really catch the rest of the words but wasn’t that bothered: it was the general meditative tone of the music that I enjoyed.

I was 19 before I actually went to Evensong, while visiting King’s College Cambridge as a tourist. Three years later, after I moved to Norwich, I started attending Evensong at the cathedral intermittently, gradually becoming comfortable with the ritual. I was by now exploring Christianity in my reading (actually looking for get-out clauses). I discovered that the Nunc Dimittis comes from Luke’s gospel (ch 2:29-32), when Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to make the customary thanksgiving offering to God for his safe delivery. Simeon, an old man, who had been promised that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, took the baby in his arms and said:

Lord, now let your servant go in peace, according to your word for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for us before the face of all peoples, to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of your people Israel.

I loved the line about light in the gloomy winter evenings in the cathedral and soon learnt it off by heart. After I became a Catholic a couple of years later, I found that the Nunc Dimittis is said or sung at Compline, the short service of night prayer, and began to say it myself as I drifted off to sleep. It seems incredible to me now but I still didn’t register at any deep level that the poem was about death. It was just somehow vaguely comforting.

So it was that I came to say the Nunc Dimittis as I kept watch at Hugh’s bedside in Intensive Care on the night between Monday 20th and Tuesday 21st November 2000, when it was becoming clear that he wasn’t going to survive the damage to his poor little head. I held his hand and spoke aloud, hoping that somewhere deep within he was aware. As soon as I started the full import of the words struck me, and I couldn’t go on. I wasn’t ready to let Hugh go in peace.

Between Hugh’s death and his funeral, I barely slept and found myself one night lying in bed going through the few prayers I knew by heart. When I came to the Nunc Dimittis I remembered that the story of the Presentation was something he had written about in his school RE jotter. The next morning I checked and discovered it was written on his ninth birthday, 16th May 2000. He wrote: ‘My favourite story about Mary is the Presentation. When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple and the oldest man ever tells Mary that she and Jesus are going to suffer a lot’. The facing page is filled with a view of an enormous golden-domed Temple in front of which Simeon, bent with age and leaning on a stick, greets Mary and Joseph.

Clearly this had to be the Gospel reading at Hugh’s Requiem, but I was puzzled as to what had attracted him to the story in the first place, and was struck by the bit about ‘the oldest man ever’, which doesn’t come from Luke.

I googled ‘Simeon’ and discovered the tradition in the Eastern Churches that he was one of the 72 translators of the Septuagint, the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, in the third century BC. He was said to be responsible for altering the sense of Isaiah ch. 7 v. 14 by translating the Hebrew word for the young woman or girl, who would give birth to the Saviour, with the Greek word for a virgin. For prophesying the Virgin Birth, Simeon was rewarded with the gift of living until he saw his prediction come true, about 300 years later.

I asked Hugh’s teacher if this story had been mentioned in class or appeared in the RE textbook but it hadn’t. As an architectural historian, I was also interested in his picture of the Temple, knowing that there is a long tradition of modelling it on the Dome of the Rock, the mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Again I asked his teacher if Hugh’s temple had been copied from a book and again the answer was no. I am left wondering how he knew these things. And, not for the first time or the last, Hugh had deepened my knowledge of the faith I was supposed to be passing on to him.

That discovery of Hugh’s liking for the story of the Presentation has meant that the Nunc Dimittis is now an even greater source of comfort for me. I daydream that the first person Hugh met after he died was Simeon, and as I look forward to my own death I hope that God’s mercy will allow Hugh to meet me and lead me to the light that has enlightened the Gentiles.

The song of Zechariah

And that takes me on to the second piece from Luke (ch. 1, vv. 67-79), the Song of Zechariah after he recovers his speech having agreed that his newborn son will be called John. It falls into two parts, the first where Zechariah gives praise to God, and the second where he speaks to his baby son and foretells John’s role as a prophet, bringing the good news of
the coming of Jesus. The canticle, known as the Benedictus, is sung at Anglican Matins, but that service is rarely on the radio and I have never attended it, nor heard a musical setting which has had much effect on me.

I became aware of it when I moved to Edinburgh in the early 1980s, a couple of years after I had become a Catholic. I lived near the Dominican friary, which serves Edinburgh University as its chaplaincy, and I gradually began to attend services there, including Morning Prayer, the equivalent of Anglican Matins. I found the Benedictus a strange mixture, with some appealing images such as ‘the lovingkindness of the heart of our God who visits us like the dawn from on high’, combined with a lot of obscure language about ‘horns of salvation’ being raised up to save us from foes.

I began to appreciate it more when I joined a Bible study group, where people took turns to lead discussions on passages of scripture which meant something to them. One week I volunteered to do the Benedictus and looked at some Bible commentaries to throw light on the obscurities. These opened it up for me by explaining that the word for ‘visit’ in Greek has the sense of a doctor visiting a sick patient. Also that ‘salvation’ was related to salus in Latin, meaning ‘health’ and could be translated as ‘healing’, and hence ‘heal’ could be substituted for ‘save’ and ‘healer’ for ‘saviour’. Another of those daunting theological terms, ‘redemption’, was explained as releasing from debt or setting free from slavery. Suddenly the Benedictus made some sense and gradually became as comforting a prayer as the Nunc Dimittis, especially after I changed the odd word to bring out the healing imagery even more strongly, because that was what I felt I needed more than anything. Here is my adaptation with major substituted words in square brackets.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, he has visited his people and set them free [redeemed them].

He has raised up for us a mighty healer [Saviour] in the house of his servant David As he promised by the lips of his holy ones those who were his prophets from of old.

A healer [saviour], who would free us from our woes [foes], from the wounds [hands] of those who hurt us. so his love for our forefathers is revealed and his holy covenant remembered.

He swore to Abraham, our father, that, free from fear and healed from our wounds and our woes [the hands of our foes], we might serve him in holiness and justice, all the days of our life in his presence.

As for you little child, you shall be called a prophet of God the Most High. You shall go ahead of the Lord to prepare his way before him. To make known to his people their healing [salvation] through forgiveness of all their sins; the lovingkindness of the heart of our God, who visits us like the dawn from on high. He will bring light to those in darkness, those who dwell in the shadow of death, and guide our feet in the way of peace.

It was the one prayer I clung on to when, several years later, I was struck by clinical depression, and gave up going to Mass. The healing images and the promise to bring light to those who dwell in darkness sustained me in my pain.

So it was natural that I should turn to it as Hugh lay in that Intensive Care bed on the last morning of his earthly life. About 6.45, I could see through the windows behind his bed, the first glimmer of light in a clear frosty sky. I began to say the Benedictus, again aloud in the hope that Hugh could still hear somewhere in the depths of his unconsciousness. When I reached the second part I realised that I was like Zechariah addressing his son, and that I was telling Hugh that he would walk before the Lord to prepare the way before Him, and make known to me my healing through forgiveness of all my sins. I cannot now remember if I got through right through to the end without breaking down. I didn’t want the words to have the meaning I was seeing in them.

Some time after Hugh’s death, saying the Benedictus in this new light, it struck me that Hugh had already played the role of prophet for me even while he was alive. It was only because he wanted to make his First Communion with the rest of his classmates at the age of seven that I had reluctantly been led back to going to Mass again in our parish church. I didn’t find it easy and, since he died, my attendance has become increasingly sporadic.

Perhaps it’s Hugh’s prayers that keep me from stopping entirely. I don’t know, just as I can’t know what caused him to fall off his bike, or if he was aware of anything while in hospital, or why he had to die. Such questions are unanswerable this side of the grave, though that doesn’t stop them spinning around my head. All I can do is carry on saying the Benedictus and Nunc Dimittis. When I feel myself sinking beneath the waves of despair, they are two planks I can cling on to from the wreckage of four years ago. They help keep me afloat, teaching me to trust that I do live all the days of my life in God’s presence, even if it doesn’t feel like it very often. And that some day I will reach land and be allowed to go in peace.

16 May, 2004 (Hugh’s 13th birthday)

Ian’s articles were published in Compassion, the UK journal of The Compassionate Friends, a charity run by and for bereaved parents and siblings. Friends encouraged him to find a wider audience and he hopes Open House readers find them helpful.

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I watched the Nazi occupation of Budapest from our nursery window: it was 19th March 1944. Thereafter restrictions for the Jews came thick and fast. We burned all incriminating letters from England, the enemy country. Whenever a gong was sounded, we would go out on to the balcony encircling the inner courtyard, to hear the proclamations: Jews to dismiss Christian employees; Jews to hand in all valuables; Jews to be put under curfew; Jews to be identified by a yellow star; Jews to live in starred houses only.

Our house was starred, so we did not have to shift. In the end 15 or so people were crammed into four rooms and the tiny maid’s room off the kitchen.

No sooner were we settled in than the Germans removed the star from our house and we were dispersed. We had two rooms on the second floor of a flat, shared with others, opening on to the courtyard. The sun never penetrated our premises and we had to use electricity all the time. It must have been summer 1944. Old Grandma had one room; the rest of us were in the other. In that one cramped room Little Grandma taught us many things: how to wash in a small bowl of water, dry ourselves on a flannel, how to catch the bed bugs which tormented us at night and drown them in a bucket, how to appreciate great literature, poetry, music (we had a wind-up gramophone), how to remain cheerful – and much else besides.

The Hungarian law-keepers were of two kinds: police and ‘Nyilas Keresztes’ or ‘Arrow Cross’. They were notorious Nazi sympathisers, trying to surpass the Nazis in their enthusiasm for Jewish persecution. Whenever they came to round up Jews, our grandmothers would retire to bed and pretend to be ill. Once, however, they were got out of bed to be hauled away at 15 minutes notice. We children were howling our heads off! The situation seemed hopeless and Little Grandma temporarily lost her wits and became suicidal in her despair: she wanted to throw herself over the railings into the courtyard but I managed to stop her. So a small suitcase was hastily packed, Little Grandma showed me where some jewellery was hidden in a hole in the larder wall and our grandmothers were taken away by the ‘Nyilas’. We children were left alone and I was in charge. I shall never forget the feeling of total desolation that overwhelmed me as I saw them disappear. I was eight years old.

Then a veritable miracle occurred, for some while later our grandmothers reappeared. Thereafter, however, it was obvious that we would have to go into hiding if we were to escape the increasingly ominous situation. In November 1944, the five of us moved into a ‘hospital’ situated on one of the boulevards. I do not know whether it was ever a real hospital. This must have been just a façade for a sheltered building hiding Jews under the guardianship of paid-off Hungarian Nazis.

Inside the ‘hospital’ life was bedlam. Children and teenagers of both sexes were accommodated on the 4th floor. The crowding, din, confusion was horrible. Some children, separated from parents, went berserk; one tried to commit suicide. Our grandmothers were on the second floor and we did not see much of them. Some of our relatives were lying in corridors. There was an armed guard outside the gate. Once I ventured downstairs and tried to look outside, but he scared me off by pointing his gun at me. I celebrated my ninth birthday in this place.

Little Grandma’s youngest sister, Terka, had obtained Christian documentation and was still able to travel freely. She arranged for a Christian woman to ‘rescue’ us. Little Grandma told us one day that a woman would come for us in the evening and take us away. We were to call her ‘mother’ and do exactly as she
told us. On 19th December 1944 this woman appeared at nine in the evening, and we said goodbye to our grandparents. Dressed in our warmest clothes and with ‘mother’ carrying our small suitcase, we slipped out of the ‘hospital’ into the darkness outside.

This was the first time we had been in the street for weeks and it was a strange experience: crowded with pre-Christmas shoppers. Our ‘mother’ got us on to a tram and we clung to each other, keeping our mouths shut. Eventually we alighted, somewhere near the Danube. She rang the bell at a gate with a plaque attached to it depicting a cross and something about Sweden. Then she handed us over and disappeared. It was not until the 1980s, when a friend showed me a Guardian newspaper article about the Swedish diplomat Raul Wallenberg and his activities in Budapest during World War II that I realised we had been hidden in one of the houses purchased by this truly ‘Righteous Gentile’ to hide Jews. Wallenberg is surely one of the really great men of the 20th century and abundantly deserves a place in Yad Vashem – where the Holocaust victims and heroes are commemorated in Jerusalem.

The house was like a nursery, mostly occupied by mothers and their small children. We were among the eldest and there were two others, a boy and a girl, aged about 12 years. The five of us had no relatives there and clung together for company. I took charge of my little brothers, Joseph and Louis, aged seven years. I was worldly-wise beyond my years, for I remember storing any food surplus to requirements in the storage space allocated to us for ‘rainy days’.

Meantime the bombs were flying and the little kids were terrified. We had to keep going down into the cellars. I became feverish and had to be carried down. Our house was destroyed and we remained underground for 6-7 weeks.

The siege of Budapest took place over the Christmas-New Year period and rumour had it the Russians had poisoned the water supply. Joseph and I crept outside to look for wood for the stove and collected snow to boil for drinking. Louis just lay on his mattress on the stone floor, lacking our vigour, depleted of energy. I climbed the broken stairs, looking for the food I had stored, but the women had taken it all...

I looked out of the broken window and saw a canon in the street below. There was street-to-street fighting and they brought down into the cellar the occasional wounded. Then the Russians arrived looking for watches, women and drink; and I remember witnessing a knife-fight between two soldiers. Twice the Russians came down into the cellar with torches and set paper bales alight accidentally. We huddled round the small stove to keep warm. Someone shoved a dish too many onto the stove and knocked a pot of boiling water onto Joseph’s arm, which got badly burned. We heard that Germans were retreating to Buda, blowing up the bridges over the Danube as they went. But all we children could talk and dream about was food, food, food.

Once the siege was over, the mothers and children gradually disappeared, older children were claimed by relatives, but no-one came for us. At the beginning of February I was separated from my brothers. Stefi, the former cook, took charge of me. We emerged from the cellar and walked the bombed and icy streets for two days before she found the State Orphanage. It was a boys’ only establishment and they were reluctant to take a little Jewish girl. But I was admitted, taken upstairs into a freezing corridor with broken windows and stripped by the matron. I was covered in lice, had an itchy, scurvy-like skin condition and suffered from threadworms. I was scrubbed down with disinfectant but my hair was not cropped, only treated for lice. All my clothes were burned and I was given a boys’ uniform. So it came to pass that I spent the next six months in that establishment as the only girl among 45 boys of all ages. Each time we went walking, two by two in a crocodile line, and met similar groups of children in the streets, I made enquiries about my brothers: had anyone come across little twin boys? Nobody had.

Meanwhile Joseph and Louis were dumped in a monastery, but the religious did not want two starving, lice-ridden, dirty little Jewish boys. Joseph remembers them eating well in a large dining room; the twins got something to eat in the kitchen and chairs to sleep on. The next day they were walked to a nearby orphanage.

Fortunately the boys remembered the address of relatives and someone went to notify them. Sometime in March a distant male relative tracked me down. Eventually, Little Grandma also turned up – with food and a toothbrush! She was also saved by the woman who had taken us to the Wallenberg house. Old Grandma survived in the ‘hospital’.

After the siege, she found her way back to the last starred house we stayed at, and that is where Little Grandma eventually found her.

My brothers were transferred to my orphanage and we were reunited. In August we got transferred to a Children’s Rehabilitation Camp.

We stayed there till Christmas when we joined our grandparents in Budapest.

Correspondence was re-established with our parents in London. Little Grandma worked day and night to get us released by the occupying Russians. In October 1946 we left Budapest by train for Vienna. After two days we boarded an aeroplane for Blackbush Military Airport in England and from there travelled by coach to London, where Father met us. Mother welcomed us in our new house, in Golders Green.

I had to wait until December to meet my four-year-old English siblings John and Eva (also twins), with whom I lacked a common language. They were born during the blitz and were evacuated to a Jewish nursery school in Knutsford.

So that was how, by the grace of God, we survived the war and were reunited in England as a family.
MIKE MINETER

Hope for the future of the church

On 14 March about 110 people from 20 parishes across the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh came together for an event called ‘Sharing vision – the future of church’. The day was hosted by the Vigil Group, which meets monthly to pray and reflect on renewal in the Catholic Church. The group collated this account of the day from the contributions of those who took part.

The day of reflection was timed to meet a need that was made urgent by Archbishop Cushley’s proposal to close some two thirds of the parishes in the archdiocese to match the anticipated number of priests.

The objective of the day was to share and reflect on the visions that each of us has of what church is, and what it can become. To give everyone time to be heard, much of the day was spent in small groups. In the morning the emphasis was on listening and receiving what was said with a moment of silence rather than discussion.

The day began with Anne Hughes reflecting on the signs of the times. She asked whether the ‘crisis’ in the church is the Spirit shaking us into being something new. This led us into a time of prayer, around the cure of the blind man from chapter nine of John’s gospel. We were taken slowly through the passage to allow the developing story to address us personally.

In our listening groups, we then looked at the things which gave us life in the church today and then moved on to what was more draining. Using this balance enabled people to own their thoughts and feelings about what they felt was wrong in the church and to be forthright about them, while being held by the receptivity and silence of the group. Each group distilled their thoughts onto flipcharts. There was time to wander to read the flipcharts and have further conversation.

The afternoon continued with a talk by Mark McHugh Pratt on how we can bring about change. In proposing ideas we should seek to preserve community, emphasise the positive, and be prepared to act on the ideas ourselves. We were invited to write answers, not for sharing, to two questions. If I desire real change, then what do I want to do? What am I going to do?

After a plenary session that included a reminder to blow the dust off the Archdiocesan consultation Now is the favourable time, we closed with prayer for the continuing renewal of ourselves and the church, including Ephesians 3, which is used daily by Vigil Group members.

Themes that emerged during the day included the following:

• The Church, and our parish communities, give us life when they are outward looking, focused on Christ, are not individualistic, are supportive and welcoming, and are responding to local issues (often ecumenically).

• There is need for better integration of hierarchy, ordained priesthood and laity - marked by openness, by mutual encouragement and appreciation of gifts, and re-energised structures (archdiocesan assembly and parish councils with active lay participation).

• Our understanding of church is in an exciting and challenging state of flux, as we seek to better express a theology of holiness, of God in all things, of inclusion, of the Spirit active everywhere, both in and beyond the Church.

• We can make progress now, by forming more small faith communities

The shape of the day was set to give ourselves an experience of what Church can be when we pray, trust the Spirit, trust each other, share our deepest desires, have structure that enables but does not dominate, and are willing to listen and grow. We were also being held in prayer by people not able to attend.

Comments about the day included:

‘What struck me most was how open-minded, uninhibited, and imaginative so many contributions were. To me this shows that many of the laity care deeply about the well-being and future of the Church, and are open and willing to embrace real change in how we do things in order to achieve what is truly important’.

‘The discussions were inspiring and so hopeful. Let’s hope they continue.’

‘We came away with renewed hope for the future of our Church in our Archdiocese. It was refreshing to have the opportunity to have a free and open discussion with other Catholics and feel able to express our thoughts and have them listened to.’

‘We began to realise Catholics are out there willing to participate more in the running of the Church. The argument we often hear from the clergy is that they cannot get lay people to do things. Perhaps this because in some cases the direction of the requests come from the clergy and the laity are not included in their planning and therefore do not feel included.’

It is striking that what was drawing us, and what was concerning us, expressed joy in the Gospel, and resonated with Pope Francis’ words. At the start of the day Anne had closed her reflection with a quote: ‘Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not be robbed of missionary vigour!’

(Evangelii Gaudium, para. 109)

A fuller account of the day is on the Vigil group website: http://www.ethhevigilgroup.org.uk/

See Notebook, page 16
Priesthood in the 21st century

In response to the proposed closure of churches in St Andrews and Edinburgh and elsewhere, a lifelong Catholic, who has asked to remain anonymous, proposes a new way of managing priesthood.

One of the distinguishing features of the Catholic Church is the place it affords to Tradition as a joint source of Revelation along with Scripture. The church has always held that the mind of God for the church, and the world, is revealed through prayerful and divinely inspired reflection on Scripture in the light of historical circumstances and actuality. This discernment of what the Spirit is saying to the church has led over the course of history to the development of the corpus of knowledge and belief expressed most essentially in the formulation of the creeds and, flowing from that, in the whole body of theology, liturgy and church practice. It has also led to the church in every age formulating policies and practices and adopting programmes, sometimes radical, to deal with the challenges that each age has presented. This is an essential implication of the incarnation and of the church’s self-understanding.

A good example is the action taken by the Council of Trent, as part of its radical reforming programme, to establish the system for the formation of priests. This was hugely successful in raising the spiritual and intellectual standards of the priesthood and in creating a corpus of clergy of professional standing and authoritative status which has served the church well. But in the unique living organism which the church is, no policy or practice can be immutable or the last word; the Holy Spirit has more to say and always will, until the fulfilment of the last days.

Thus it was that, in spite of what Trent had achieved, in the aftermath of World War II Pius XII recognised the need to revisit the question of priesthood and ministry to address the growing alienation of the masses from religious practice. His bold experiment, conducted in France, was to have priests immerse themselves as workers in the daily existence of those they sought to evangelise – the Worker Priest Movement. The history of the experiment has been well documented: the point is that it stands as an example of the church responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through the realities of the time.

Being an orthodox Catholic, I believe that the Holy Spirit is speaking to the church still. In relation to priesthood, especially in Western societies, I think that the Holy Spirit is speaking loudly. We have seen an inexorable decline in religious practice. His bold experiment, conducted in France, was to have priests immerse themselves as workers in the daily existence of those they sought to evangelise – the Worker Priest Movement. The history of the experiment has been well documented: the point is that it stands as an example of the church responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through the realities of the time.

Perhaps we should look to Pius XII for a clue. The Priest Worker Movement was part of the church’s response to the post-war crisis of faith in the industrial working classes. It sought to address the challenges by taking priests and making them workers. I believe the Holy Spirit is telling the Church in our time is to take workers and make them priests. Every parish community contains individuals ranging across the whole spectrum of work and social function who are dedicated members of the faith community. They have gifts and skills which they would be willing to put at the service of the church in their parish community. They could be given a process of training and formation to serve in a role appropriate to their ability and individual charisma. St Paul envisaged that this is exactly how parishes should work: ‘There is a variety of Gifts but always the same Spirit...’ (1 Cor 12: 4-30).

What might be new is how to apply Paul’s analysis in our circumstances. We need to look again at the priesthood bequeathed by Trent as it is exercised today. It would appear that our management of the role of the priest differs from Paul’s. The priest is a one-man-band. Until relatively recently he did everything. He managed the parish finances and buildings, organised anything that was to be organised, youth work, school work, care of the elderly and the ill and, especially, the celebration and provision of the sacraments. In more recent times, especially since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a move to decentralise the more obviously secular of these functions – finances, maintenance etc – and even some of the more ‘priestly’ ones – liturgy committees and the like. But even this degree of devolution never let authority or responsibility move very far from the shoulders of the priest. In the present crisis of vocations, it really does seem like rearranging the deckchairs on the bridge of the Titanic. We need to act on an altogether different level in a way that is based on a clear sighted and honest recognition of the needs of the
local church, the parish and diocesan community, the People of God. This will call for courage, as it may require us to move beyond the comfort zone of the church organisation with which we are familiar.

The role of priest in the church as currently managed can only be performed by someone who has undergone a lengthy and rigorous training in a range of key disciplines. But what if we were to manage it differently? It is clear that a person could not be licensed to preach unless they had a thorough grounding in the necessary branches of theology or administer the sacrament of confession without a thorough grounding in the necessary disciplines. But what about conferring Baptism? The Church teaches us that anyone can baptise. And what about funerals and marriages? In the latter case, the sacrament is conferred by the marriage partners; the role of the priest is official witness. What about the Sacrament of the Sick and Confirmation? And, at the heart of all this, what about the celebration of the Eucharist; acting as president of the local eucharistic community? Does carrying out these roles on behalf of the faith community require in every case six years training in philosophy and theology and a full time commitment, including celibacy? I think the answer is no, and I believe that the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us that.

If we were to reconfigure our thinking, not about the nature of priesthood but about how we manage it, we could envision a structure with a smaller cadre of full-time priests who concentrate on preaching and the sacrament of confession. They would perform those functions within a defined area such as a deanery, and would also carry out other pedagogic functions - in schools, with adult education groups - where a high level of technical knowledge and communication/counselling skills is called for. They would have undergone the necessary length, depth and rigour of training commensurate with their role. The other functions in the local parish community, including sacramental functions, would be delivered by members of that community who had been identified as suitable in terms of their ability and quality of life and who would be given formation and training appropriate to their role. Those performing sacramental functions would be ordained for that role and would carry out that service for the local faith community as and when required, blending it in with their other duties in life.

What is proposed here is firmly located within the church’s understanding of itself and its mission. It is, in short, entirely traditional. The foundation has long existed in church practice, with the distinction between the power conferred at ordination and the right to exercise that power, which is controlled by the church through the local bishop issuing a faculty sheet, ‘licensing’ the ordained person to carry out the functions of priesthood in the local church. Historically, this control has tended to be exercised in the negative and disciplinary context of a priest being restricted in the performance of the role, for whatever reason. It could as readily be exercised in a positive fashion. This could be tried and reviewed on a pilot project basis.

The elephant in the room is the issue of celibacy. With the possible exception of the full-time cadre, celibacy would obviously have to be an optional feature of the other ministries.

The question of gender exclusion is another difficult and unavoidable issue, though its resolution is not a sine qua non for the changes envisioned above. It may well be that the differentiation of ministerial functions as suggested provide creative possibilities.

The reconfiguring of priesthood along these lines has other practical implications. New formats of training and formation will be required, just as they were after Trent. It will be necessary to identify, draw in and nurture persons with particular aptitudes and skills. Funding should not be such a problem as a number of valuable properties which would now be surplus to requirements can be released to the market (only the full-time cadre will need to be housed and supported financially).

I believe that the energy which such a programme of reform would unleash throughout the local church would be tremendous, a new Pentecost. People know the realities, they know the issues, they are ready for this; what they need is inspired and inspiring courageous leadership. The Holy Spirit is speaking to the Church loud and clear, as the Spirit always has. Those that have ears to hear, let them hear.
In 1995 I arrived in Southern Mexico. I knocked on the door of the diocesan offices of San Cristobal de las Casas. A lady opened the door and, confident she was the bishop’s secretary, I requested to see the bishop. He wasn’t there but I explained that I wished to see him with the purpose of volunteering to work in the diocese. I left happy that through the secretary I should soon be able to see the bishop.

In the next ten days I had a few visits but never finding the bishop in. However she introduced me to the vicar general, and also the vicar in charge of the pastoral work and it was good to talk to them. About a week later the secretary informed me that the bishop was still not around. He had been bitten by a dog and because of his diabetes the healing was slow. However she said I had been accepted to work in the diocese.

It was quite a while afterwards that I learnt that I was mistaken in thinking she was his secretary. She was a nun and in May the Diocesan Assembly had voted her in as chancellor of the diocese for three years. Others such as Fr Felipe Toussaint was voted in as vicar general, again for three years. Bishop Samuel trusted the Assembly and the Holy Spirit and ratified the choice of the Assembly. Three years later, Maggie, a member of a Lay Institute, was elected as the new chancellor.

There was a low intensity war being waged, and the Bishop had many more serious matters than me to concern him. I suspect I was a priest in his diocese for months before the chancellor and vicar general informed him that I had been accepted. Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia was a close friend of Archbishop Oscar Romero, and like him also a great prophet and defender of the poor. Not only did he allow the Assembly to choose the Vicar General and other members of the Curia, but he also trusted the people they chose.

The diocese has over 8,000 very active catechists. A number have no schooling but got friends to teach them to read so they could read Word of God. The average level of academic studies is probably at primary four. Some are exceptionally intelligent, the vast majority are very good people and many extremely wise. They receive no payment, and many have to meet their own expenses such as transport. There are also a number of married Indian deacons and laity delegated to administer sacraments of baptism, marriage and Communion.

Most here are denied access to a weekly Eucharist. However in spite of that, there is a strong vibrant Catholic faith nourished by the breaking of the Word. The eyes of the people sparkle when they divide up into small groups and share their understanding of the Gospel.

By and large we in Scotland have missed a great opportunity to implement Vatican II and really allow and encourage the participation of the laity. Every Sunday we have, to a very large extent, missed a wonderful opportunity of nourishment by not adequately sharing the Word of God.

In this South Mexican Diocese, we had a wonderful diocesan synod. From 1995 to 1999 there was a two way non-stop consultation and communication between the diocesan offices and our 2,500 mainly Indian rural communities.

Bishop Samuel Ruiz returned inspired from the Vatican Council. ‘The collegial Council spirit gave rise in our diocese to a search for structures of communion (in our Assembly, pastoral teams, councils and coordination), as being closer to the spirit of the gospel than top down structures… Visitors have noticed that here authority rather than being the domain of power, is shared and exercised as a service which takes into account the view of the humblest and most distant community… This is due to the option for participation, the ecclesial co-responsibility and the pastoral work of the gospel.’ (cf Foreword of Third Diocesan Synod).

More than once I heard people saying that no bishop in Mexico delegates his power like Bishop Samuel. And no bishop in Mexico has such moral authority.

Do you have a view on this or any other issue covered in this month’s Open House? Let us know with a letter or a short article for publication in the May edition. The copy deadline is Friday 24th April.

HENRY MCLAUGHLIN

A perspective from the South

Fr Henry McLaughlin is a priest of the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh who has been a volunteer missionary in Latin America for 34 years. Here he offers a perspective from Mexico on the debate prompted by the shortage of priests in St Andrews and Edinburgh.
Sociology, theology, Scotland

A Catholic sociologist who has spent the last fifteen years conducting ethnographic research in Fife summarises how particular class, social and national conditions can be integrated with Christianity, as well as model an original synthesis fit for the contemporary Scottish context.

While the 2014 Independence Referendum has come and gone, the May 2015 general election already looms large and the constitutional debate is set to remain dominant in Scotland’s politics and to command the attention of social researchers. My book _A Sociological Phenomenology of Christian Redemption_ (2014) emerges from my attempt to trace the social bases for the ongoing rise of nationalism among the working-class in particular. However, what probably makes my work distinctive is that it also attempts to model a fully-contextualised account of integral liberation i.e. a holistic account of working class experience and agency which includes elements such as social class, the geo-political and national, the cognitional, the psychological and, finally, the supernatural.

The book attempts to articulate a sociology of the living God and is thereby something of a rarity. As a student in Ireland in the 1980s ‘the seeking of God through sociological instruments’ (Flanagan 1996, p. 60) was an idea entirely unknown to me and no sociologist that I knew of had attempted an alignment between sociology, reflexivity and transcendence. However, as someone born in 1965 into a post-Conciliar context, central to my ‘being Christian’ has been the attempt to appropriate the great theme of ‘opening to the world’ that we associate with the Council. As an empirical sociologist a departure point for my work has been the situation where both laity and theologians accept that ‘socialised nature’ and ‘grace’ must be brought into alignment, but suffer from not having a fully-contextualised model of how to do so and certainly not upon the basis of a fully-contextualised account of Scottish human being.

This long-standing failure to articulate a fully-contextualised phenomenology of Christian redemption is a blood-relative of other failures that make up the current situation where ‘theologians barely know how to think about the proportionate nature of the human ens creatum any longer’ (Long 2010, p. 2). To make progress then requires giving a credible account of human being’s purely natural beatitude or happiness, but also an account of how human being brings into view and prepares for its dis-proportionate or super-natural beatitude by demonstrating the sociological constitution of human being’s natural end and its supernatural sanctification.

In my book I propose that the sociological imagination is indispensable in this task and for modelling firstly, a purely natural or social perfection or beatitude and secondly, a supernatural perfection of socialised human being. Philosophically stated, I articulate a ‘two-storey’ anthropology where human beings or (in my particular research context) fully-contextualised Scottish working-class dasein (‘being there’) has two distinct and separate ends: a natural or proportionate end vis-à-vis their human nature and a supernatural end or perfection that is dis-proportionate to their human nature.

More concretely stated, on the basis of conducting research among manual labourers I have attempted to articulate a Lonerganian journey of self-appropriation wherein the defining tension within the manual labourer is that between two very different worlds and two very different aspects of the self. On the one hand, the self to be appropriated is the situated labouring self that may care nothing for intellectual inquiry, and to complicate matters further there is the question of which self is to be appropriated. Lonergan’s (1990, p. 193) answer is that the self to be appropriated is ‘the rational, intelligent, experiencing man’, and so from the existential standpoint of a particular individual labourer this means he must embark upon the intellectual pursuit of himself and in doing so will need to break with an established ‘immediate’ relationship to himself and make the shift from being a worker to a worker-inquirer. The final three chapters are devoted to articulating this journey and the issues involved in successfully accomplishing this shift.

My research trajectory has led me not simply to making the inoffensive argument that socialised human being is capable of receiving the supernatural, but that the supernatural arrives as a result of exercising the sociological imagination and achieving a purely natural act of self-understanding. In constructing this non-theological or purely sociological account of Christian redemption I align myself with sociologists such as Robert Bellah and Niklas Luhmann for whom sociology has a role to play in explaining.
religious experience as I show how sociology ‘enters into the very constitution of theology’ (Baum 1989, p. 742) insofar as fundamental to theology is its ability to know and show how socialised human being is opened to what the Christian tradition calls ‘grace.’

If I arrive to the reality of Christian redemption, then, it is upon the basis of firstly describing mundane and non-religious realities such as manual labour and housing conditions before giving an account of a special ontology that comes into view in light of intellectual and supra-natural developments. I had every sympathy, then, with the view that the sociologist has no remit to speak of God until the moment my research into the Scottish working class led to a particular act of understanding of this socialised or situated ‘being there’ and which convinced me that socialised human being under its own sociological steam is able to open up to the supernatural. At this point I caught up with the insights of Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004) for whom sociology is able to pronounce a word upon human being’s spiritual destiny, and so at this point I saw my work as in alignment with the likes of David Lyon, Kieran Flanagan and Robin Gill with the latter having talked of sociology assessing theology, and I would sympathise with José Míguez Bonino’s insistence that ‘it is necessary to devote the first half of a theological book to “a discussion of sociological analysis”’ (Gill 1987, p. 147).

My text, then, gives the reader a step-by-step account of integral liberation and a description of the performative advent of the supernatural upon an empirical or purely sociological basis and in a way which does not rely upon religious belief, and so meets theologian Timothy Radcliffe’s injunction that anyone who would set himself the task of giving an account of Christian redemption ‘cannot bring to that task a ready-made perspective’ (cited in Gill 1987, p. 170). Ever since this performative development within myself my position has been that it is not be the sociologist’s role to be unrealistic by refusing to study this reality, and that the sociological imagination has its own internal reasons for transcending secularist and naturalistic positions that would trap sociology into what I term ‘scarcity era’ metaphysics. A sociology that is fit for the purpose of being able to recognise the full range of what socialised human being is capable of achieving and receiving has to break with naturalism. Hence, rather than embodying freedom from superstition, secular humanism today is just as likely to be viewed as the dominant and majoritarian accommodation to the power of social determination (and therefore a form of unfreedom). Insofar as ‘Scotland’ sets the sociological imagination the task of articulating an original account of the integral liberation of fully-contextualised Scottish working-class human being, the devout atheist or agnostic should be able to read the first seven chapters without raising any great principled objection as my argument is built solely upon an empirical and ethnographic basis. In the spirit of asking questions such as whether the ethnographic data can bear the full weight of integral liberation, and whether the exercise of reflexivity can take us to the brink of our redemption upon a purely natural basis, I hope my account will stimulate discussion of these questions but avoid pre-fabricated philosophical answers to these questions, so that instead of a hackneyed ‘dogmatic dance’ or dialogue of the deaf, raising such questions and giving my own answer might stimulate fresh discussion as to what integral liberation might look like in contemporary Scotland.

Dr Paul Gilfillan is a senior lecturer in Sociology at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. His book, A Sociological Phenomenology of Christian Redemption (2014), will be reviewed in a future edition of Open House.

References


**Ascensional reflexivity**

Paul Gilfillan uses the phrase ‘ascensional reflexivity’ to suggest how the researcher draws on various levels of ‘the self’ in order to access more and more specialist data, and to take the analysis of the data higher and higher. So the body is used as a source of data-gathering, and this new data accessed by the body informs the development of what might be called an embodied reflexivity. Using the body helps the researcher rely on more than purely discursive sources for data – compared with reliance on interview transcripts, for example. Next, the intellect or particular acts of understanding might be used as a source of data-gathering, and this new cognitional data or act of intellectual liberation informs the development of what he calls cognitional agency or cognitional reflexivity as the researcher reflects on acts of understanding.

Next, the soul might be used as a source of data by the researcher as the means of accessing a ‘higher’ level of data (the supernatural) and once again informing a further level of reflexivity. So, the idea of ascensional reflexivity is basically the ordered progression of reflexivity deployed by the researcher to access more and more higher and higher levels of data to ascend to higher levels or take his or her analysis higher and higher.  

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Many children throughout the world are affected by war. The collapse of the social infrastructure in war-stricken countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and the Central African Republic has a significant impact on the lives of the young. Children can be refugees; internally displaced; suffer from food shortage and malnourishment; experience lack of security and adequate health and social service care. Some children are orphaned by war and in the absence of adults have to act as the head of the household for the younger children in the family (Rwanda). Often the children have no access or intermittent access to schooling. In some contexts, schools have been bombed or attacked and have been damaged or destroyed. Sometimes schools are occupied by armed forces, and the children used as human shields in armed struggle (Somalia). Children have witnessed their teachers being attacked and killed. In these situations, many teachers are too scared to go to work and parents feel that it is not safe to send their children to school. Schools are no longer perceived to be a safe public space for learning and teaching and play, and have been closed down.

Children, however, can be affected in other significant ways by warfare: by being recruited or being forced into becoming child soldiers. Historically there is not a great deal of evidence of the use of child soldiers in armed conflict. If children were involved it was in a support capacity. There was some use of child soldiers during the Second World War, but the contemporary phenomenon of the child soldier emerged with the use of child soldiers by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1970’s. The introduction of lighter, more manageable, weapons has helped to accelerate the use of child soldiers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

International human rights prohibit the recruitment of children for the purposes of warfare. This was established in the 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva Convention and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both of these documents set the threshold for recruitment at the age of 15, though an optional protocol to the Rights of the Child recommended the age be raised to 18. There is increasing pressure for this age limit to be enforced internationally, but this is currently not recognized in practice by armed forces or separatist groups in parts of the world such as Chad, India and Thailand. Under international criminal law, it has been a war crime since 2002 to conscript or enlist children under 15 into armed forces or to use children as active participants in hostilities. The 2007 The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups aims to protect children from being unlawfully recruited into armed forces. These principles have been endorsed by 100 states.

There are an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 child soldiers throughout the world involved in armed conflict. It is further estimated that between 30% and 40% of these child soldiers are girls. Many child soldiers are below the age of 15 and some are as young as eight years old. It is estimated that as many as a further half a million child soldiers are in armies that are not currently at war. While some children are forcibly recruited by armies, most of the children volunteer. Children volunteer because they are in poverty, orphaned or displaced (refugee camps are effective recruiting grounds for child soldiers) and volunteering is the best option available to them. It is highly questionable if the children really understand the full implications of their decision to enlist.

Children are used for different functions in warfare - to support the troops and to engage in hostilities. Children are used to support the troops in a number of ways: as
lookouts, messengers, cooks or porters, carrying equipment and ammunition. Combat related duties include engaging in armed struggle, being used as spies or human shields on the front lines to protect the older soldiers. Children and young people are increasingly being used as suicide bombers (Afghanistan, Pakistan). The use of child soldiers is distressingly widespread in the contemporary world and has taken place in Syria, Philippines, Pakistan, Mali, Colombia, Sudan and Iraq, and many other countries, over the last ten years.

Girls are especially vulnerable during warfare and can be used for sexual exploitation or forced into marrying soldiers. In April 2014, the militant Islamist group Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from a secondary boarding school in Chibok in northern Nigeria. This was highly publicised and condemned at the time, but is part of a pattern of abduction that has been ongoing since 2009. It is less well publicised that Boko Haram abducted another 60 school girls in October 2014 and the overall figure since 2009 is estimated to be well over 500. Some of the girls are abducted while on their journey to school, from their homes or while working on farms. Fifty-seven of the girls from Chibok have managed to escape, as have others, but many have never been recovered. The motivation for the abduction appears to be a combination of the rejection of the western education offered by the schools and also to acquire the girls for sexual purposes or to be married to the soldiers. Many of the girls are Christian and are forced to convert to Islam. Human Rights Watch points out that the girls who have escaped have been offered very little support. The Chibok girls who escaped from Boko Haram have received some limited counseling and medical attention but other escapees have received no psychological or physical care.

If child soldiers escape or are captured by government troops or authorities they can face suspicion, interrogation, detention (sometimes in very poor physical conditions) and even torture and imprisonment. This raises serious debates about whether child soldiers should be prosecuted for war crimes and at what age they would they be eligible for prosecution. This is further complicated by the recognition that child soldiers facing charges of war crimes are both perpetrators and victims. Being a child soldier does not simply deny a child their childhood, their family and community and their school education, it scars the children and has serious implications for their physical and psychological wellbeing and future lives. Many of the child soldiers have been wounded, possibly maimed, and require medical attention and often suffer serious psychological trauma. They will have witnessed violence, killing and atrocities including sexual violence and may have been forced to participate. Organisations working to reintegrate child soldiers back into their families and communities include the International Rescue Committee, which works in areas like Northern Uganda. The IRC helps the local schools accommodate the children and helps the child soldiers acquire vocational training. Children and young people are among the most vulnerable victims of warfare. They can be affected as victims of war and they can become involved in war as child soldiers, whether in a support capacity or engaged in armed combat. Despite international legislation prohibiting the use of child soldiers, this practice continues in the contemporary world.

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St Andrews and Edinburgh pastoral letter

Archbishop Leo Cushley issued a pastoral letter to the priests, religious and people of the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh on Palm Sunday entitled We Have Found the Messiah: the Future of our Archdiocese. In it he restates the message sent to deans in January about the need to reduce the number of parishes, although he does not say by how many (Open House 247).

By 2020, he points out that the archdiocese will have about 33 diocesan priests, while it presently has 111 parishes; and that an estimated 28,000 people go to Mass on Sundays out of a Catholic population of 113,000. He argues that ‘pulling together into fewer but more concentrated parish centres will enable us to intensify our spiritual and evangelical activity’.

In his covering letter, Archbishop Cushley asks everyone to read and reflect on the pastoral letter, so that the future can be discerned in a ‘calm, informed and charitable fashion’. The first phase of the discernment process ends at Easter when the deans and clergy of the archdiocese submit their initial thoughts to him. These will form the basis of a ‘wide-ranging and far-reaching consultation’ and the archbishop promises to visit every parish cluster and hear from everyone who wishes to have their say. He adds that no decisions have yet been made.

To read the pastoral letter in full go to the Archdiocesan website at www.archdiocese-edinburgh.com

Interreligious dialogue

Archbishop Mario Conti, who is Chair of the Scottish Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Inter Religious Dialogue, has sent a letter to the Jewish community in Scotland to mark the two great religious festivals of Pesach (Passover) and Easter. This year the first day of Passover took place on Good Friday.

The archbishop writes: ‘Let us pray, as we worship at our great foundational festivals, that we grow in our respect for the dignity and freedom of one another and live out our loving commitment to each other’s welfare by continuing to dialogue with one another and work for a society in which our voices are respected and honoured’.

Meanwhile, a letter from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Jain community for the festival of Mahavir Jayanti, which commemorates the birthday of Mahavira, their founder, will be read out when the Jain community in Glasgow celebrates on 12th April.

Cardinal Winning Lecture

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Society for Promoting New Evangelisation, gave this year’s Cardinal Winning Lecture at the University of Glasgow on the theme of ‘The Church in Contemporary Society’.

Archbishop Fisichella discussed the challenges facing the Catholic Church in a society driven by the search for novelty. The New Evangelization is nothing less, he pointed out, than an opportunity for all the baptised to carry out what should be their primary mission: the proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. Setting his key themes in the context of the traditional Christian countries of Europe, the Archbishop quoted Goethe’s observation that Christianity is the ‘mother tongue’ of Europe. As the Christian faith of Europe seems to fade away, how can the Church re-engage with its children?

Archbishop Fisichella made special mention of two areas. First, critical thinking on what ‘New Evangelisation’ means cannot remain isolated in universities. It is necessary for the Church to transform this way of thinking into a firm culture of humanism - a culture which can meet the hopes and expectations of all people. In this way, the Church acts as a servant for humanity.

A second issue is the Christian response to the phenomenon of ‘new media’. What is needed, the archbishop suggested, is radical thinking on how the Church can evangelise a culture which has been shaped by new media. How can we evangelise the digital generation and transmit the faith to them? How can we transmit a culture rich in humanism to a culture where technology reigns supreme?

Archbishop Fisichella spoke passionately of the need to tell people about Jesus, to encounter them in the street and to raise our eyes from the touchscreen of new media to meet the eyes of those who pass by.

A video of the lecture and questions will soon be available on the website of the St Andrews Foundation for Catholic Teacher Foundation at the University of Glasgow. http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/standrewsfoundation/standrewsfoundation/

Catherine Hepburn

Rev Catherine Hepburn, Minister to the Parish of West Mearns, died on March 7th. She was a long time member of the Iona Community and contributed to the development of the Scottish Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in its early days.

We will have an appreciation of Catherine’s life in next month’s Open House.
The future of the church

I don’t often take to writing/emailing editors, but I felt that there was so much excellent material/articles in the March edition of Open House, and may I say, so much common sense, that I felt it was important to record my gratitude. I thought Joe Chalmers’ article on Teresa of Avila and Mike Mineter’s on monoculture particularly good and apt. Sometimes, I see the church today as so different from the community in Bellshyre, Dumbarton, that inspired me to be a priest. I didn’t sign up for clericalism (although at the time I probably thought that) but to be the animator within a parish family, and so few these days appear to share that same vision. March’s Open House certainly shares that vision and enkindles hope. Keep up the good work and thanks.

John G Campbell, Sacred Heart Presbytery, Cumbernauld

I wish to compliment you on the content of the March issue of Open House. The articles by and about women were truly stimulating. I sincerely hope that they succeed in giving a boost to serious consideration to increasing the influence of women in all levels of our Church. Then I found the three articles ‘Cultivating a monoculture’ by Mike Mineter, ‘Lines drawn in Edinburgh’ by Mary Cullen, and ‘A tale of two Archdioceses’ by Dan Cronin about restructuring the dioceses. The stimulation caused by these articles is completely different. They portray administrative processes in which it seems that there is no place for women.

They also describe processes that are in control of the clergy. That brings to my mind a question that has long lain dormant in my head. Who owns our churches? This question jumped into my head at the end of a plea from the pulpit at Sunday Mass in the 1970s of the director of finance of the parish, who told us that there had been a drop in income and the parish needed more money. It was done in a professional way, he was a professional accountant and his committee was responsible for the health of the parish finances. He gave the strong impression that he and his committee were in control and not the parish priest. That was a surprise to me coming recently from the West of Scotland to this parish in Connecticut. Later as part of my contribution to the diocesan management committee I studied the salaries of all the clergy in the diocese including all the Christian churches that I contacted, in an effort to put the wage structures of all priests and employees of the Catholic diocese into an acceptable order in accordance with the strictures of Vatican II. I found that the laity felt responsible for the administration of the parish and the diocese, as if they owned it.

When will we in Scotland begin to feel that we own the churches and are responsible for how they are administered? If we reached that level of participation would we allow a drastic restructuring of the parishes in one diocese to be organised without a formal review of the experience of other dioceses in Scotland? Elsewhere, who have experience or ideas to offer, from which we could benefit? When there is a shortage of priests why are priests using their time on this sort of activity? It seems time to look seriously at the experience, ability and willingness of the lay people, including the women, to replace the priests in this sort of work. Then we may find out that the ownership of the church belongs to us and we should then act as owners.

Eddie Cardiff, Paris

Re Dan Cronin’s ‘Tale of Two Archdioceses’ in March’s Open House. While I share his concern about the proposals for closing parishes in St Andrews and Edinburgh, I am not sure that the Archdiocese of Glasgow’s consultation is much better, as Pat Baird pointed out a year ago in Open House 237. In the same edition, Fr William McFadden wrote of the approach taken in Galloway Diocese, which prompts the question: do the dioceses not share their experiences?

Edward Gallagher, Glasgow

Never again

This year sees the 70th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima - which most of us will ignore. Because we are unrepentant of this war crime, and live in a state of chronic denial, that we are prepared to repeat Hiroshima - and unimaginably worse - with Trident.

Trident is a first-strike, offensive weapon, not a deterrent. A weapon’s function is determined by its technical specifications, not by a label attached to it by the deployer. It was designed at the height of the Cold War, in order to meet the ‘Moscow Criterion’, that is, to enable Britain alone to devastate Moscow.

Moscow is the only city in the world defended by an anti-missile missile system, called Galosh. Trident’s combination of extreme accuracy and high kill-power (Hiroshima x 8) might seem puzzling at first. But it was specifically designed to excavate the missiles buried deep underground.
in the Galosh system, hence the need for accuracy. It is a first-strike (ie. offensive) system.

The one man who probably knows more about Trident than anyone else in the world explained this to me personally over a glass of red wine at a memorable al fresco soirée in Glasgow, many years ago. Robert Aldridge was head of the design team at Lockheed-Martin working on Trident. He grew to realise he was developing an offensive, first strike weapon. So he quit, and now campaigns against Trident.

The idea of our bomb being offensive might seem incredible to many. But the shocking truth is, it always has been. As far back as March 1944 General Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project (which produced the A Bomb) said ‘from two weeks after taking up the post, there was never any illusion on my part that the main purpose of the project was to subdue the Russians’. In July 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared, ‘with atomic weapons a nation must be ready to strike the first blow if needed’. The resultant war plan singled out for obliteration 20 Soviet cities from Moscow and Leningrad, to Tblisi and Tashkent.

Only 51 days after the surrender of Japan, the Pentagon’s Joint Intelligence Staff drew up war plan ‘Totality’, which envisaged an air attack with atomic bombs on 20 Russian cities. Other plans followed. The Russians had no nuclear weapons at all then, and didn’t get one till seven years later.

These early plans for launching a first-strike nuclear attack show the colossal lie hidden behind the pervasive dogma that the West’s bombs have always been purely defensive. The whole demonology of deterrence is fictional.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Trident was given a new role in the UK. In November 1993, Malcolm Rifkind, in a speech in King’s College, London, explained that Trident could fire a single missile ‘in order to convey an unmistakable message of Britain’s willingness to defend her vital interests’.

The fact is that we are prepared to actually use Trident, use it first, and against a non-nuclear country that steps out of line. In this way was born the new doctrine of ‘tactical’ or ‘sub-strategic’ Trident, which still operates today.

Thus, it was not till 6th January 2003 that the Ministry of Defence admitted for the first time that British ships carried nuclear weapons to the Falklands War. At the time, some enthusiasts openly advocated ‘a second’s sunburst over Buenos Aires’.

When it explodes, an H-bomb creates a temperature hotter than the surface of the sun. It - literally - brings the sun to earth. It releases radioactivity, which lasts indefinitely. Today, there are people born deformed through genetic mutation inflicted on their grandparents at Hiroshima. This is what Trident does when it does the only thing it is designed to do. And because we have already unleashed this evil on other human beings, we are prepared to do it again.

Its devotees talk of the UK’s ‘minimum credible deterrent’ as if 1000 Hiroshimas were acceptable. But we can’t even imagine one Hiroshima - how can we imagine 1000? And how can we even consider doing this to other human beings?

Brian Quail, Glasgow

Letters for publication in the May edition of Open House should be sent to the editor by Friday 24th April by email or post to 66 Cardross Rd, Dumbarton G82 4JQ

LIVING SPIRIT

Even now, even after Easter, still we insist on trying to find you among the tombstones, among long-dead dogmas, in old, decaying fears and hurts, in the guilts and resentments we inhabit like a coffin.

But the angel said:
Why do you look for him among the dead? He is not here!

Lord Jesus, help us to lay down the graven image, roll away the stone and come out into life, Here and now.

We will find you, among the living, ahead of us, going to the Galilee we seek. You have wrestled death to the ground, and now there is nowhere we can go, no darkness we can enter, which is not God-encompassed.

From Looking in the wrong places, by Kathy Galloway. In Talking to the Bones, SPCK, 1996

Christ was lately dead, Men were afraid With a new fear, the fear Of love. There was a laugh freed For ever and for ever. The Apostles’ Creed Was a fireside poem, the talk of the town … They remember a man who has seen Christ in his thorny crown.


And for all this, nature is never spent; There lives the dearest freshness deep down things; And though the last lights off the black West went Oh, morning, at the brown brink Eastward springs – Because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Conscience in Context: Historical and Existential Perspectives
Stuart P Chalmers
Peter Lang, 2013.

The television drama Wolf Hall highlighted the following of one’s conscience even if it led to the scaffold. Today it is a given that one ‘does what one thinks is right’ one ‘follows one’s conscience’ but the context is very different since the concept has lost a secure grounding in objective moral truth. We live in a society where there is a multiplicity of traditions and no universally accepted meaning for moral terms. There is a tension within the very concept of conscience. Is it simply rule-following by another name, or justification for subjective decision-making? What is its place in a healthy moral and spiritual life?

Against this background Father Chalmers explores the origin and development of conscience with the intention of re-contextualising it fruitfully in the lives of modern people. By way of its Scriptural and historical development and the difficulties it has encountered over time, the author leads us to an understanding of ‘conscience’ as a naming of our ability to perceive the truth and to act in accordance with that perception.

Whereas secular Greek usage understood conscience principally in terms of guilt concerning past actions, St Paul introduced the Christian understanding of it as a human act of critical reflection on, and judgement of, moral action within the context of a law, available to all, written in the hearts of the people.

The author undertakes a detailed exploration of the term in the mediaeval period. Conscience, this human capacity, involved in the making of moral judgements, is firmly fixed within the perspective of the whole of the relationship of God with God’s people. It is integral to the ethical life that leads to union with God. What we now call ‘conscience’ is shorthand for two elements in the mediaeval understanding. It is a portmanteau word indicating both what the human ‘good’ is, and the reflective, reasoned discerning process which enables the making of right judgements leading to that good. This is our telos - our intended destiny.

Such a conclusion strikes firmly against a modern subjective understanding of conscience as following one’s own convictions. If ‘conscience’ is separated from the idea of objective truth it is the perception of the individual that defines the morality of the act.

The early writers recognised that conscience can err: reason can judge to be right something which is in fact wrong. Must one do what conscience dictates?

The author goes on to discuss the milieu in which conscience is most likely to lead to the right decision - the virtuous life. It is by living thus rather than by following rules or weighing up consequences that one makes the right moral choices.

This is the nub of the author’s vision, his ‘context’. Conscience should operate ‘within a graced life with the potential for virtuous acts’. He discusses the virtues, moral, intellectual and theological, their nature and relationship. Virtue is a ‘habit’, the result of repeated acts that lead a person to behave in a certain way. By this process the basis for a life of good moral choices is established. Prudence functions in such a way as to help reason make the right decision. It also, with the moral virtues, strengthens the will to follow this right path. Illuminating all are the infused ‘theological’ virtues of faith, hope and charity. It is by doing the good that one learns to love and desire the good.

The human person, then, is a being with an in-built capacity to be called by God, to receive the revelation of God’s own design. The human mind is open to intelligibility, can make judgements, arrive at truth. This journey however is not easy, the goal is not reached without effort. Father Chalmers emphasises the necessity of bringing together the moral and the spiritual life. It is the spiritual practices of asceticism and prayer that train our consciences, habituate us to virtue. We are not, however, left to our own devices. In Yves Congar’s words, ‘our actions ... are elements in a chain of grace in which the Holy Spirit as Uncreated Grace takes the initiative and provides the dynamism until the ultimate victory is reached’. (I Believe in the Holy Spirit. 11,108)

Father Chalmers book is a scholarly work, assuming a competence in both philosophy and theology, that repays the assiduous reader with insights into the dilemmas of our time. We are not automatons, programmed to obey, but moral agents free to choose the good. To aid our decision-making we are endowed with consciences, creative, (in the sense that they can and must grow and develop) but not wantonly individualistic. The author’s reminder that we are not alone in the struggle but, sustained by the gifts of the Spirit, part of the supportive communio of the faithful, is a valuable counterpoint to the prevailing individualism of our society.

Elizabeth Kearney

Reformation, Descent and Diversity - The Story of Scotland’s Churches 1560-1960
Andrew TN Muirhead – Bloomsbury T & T Clark.

‘Tradition is passing on a flame not worshiping the ashes.’ This opening quote strikes the tone of this very welcome study of four turbulent centuries where Scotland’s churches have played a pivotal role in shaping Scotland’s history, development and the lives of its citizens. The aim the author set himself was to assess what was important in the past lives of our ancestors and to what extent they were influenced, perhaps even dominated by
the varieties of churches as they evolved over this long period. Addressing the various complex divisions and unifications of the churches, he also recognises these same churches, whatever their size and structure, were ‘the centre and anchor point of many lives’ and ‘claimed a tremendous loyalty.’ The approach is measured, patient and respectful seeking to balance the two extremes of the continuum between ‘violence, intolerance, unco-guindness and self-righteousness’ with courage, principle, a willingness to suffer what was right and an ever increasing commitment to social justice and tackling inequality.

His approach is non-academic so ideal for the general reader who wants to know more about what was happening not just on the surface with people, dates and events but identifying and assessing underlying themes, many of which are surprisingly constant. Such examples would include the relationship between the church and society, the changing socio-economic status of ministers, elders and congregations, geographical divides, land ownership and control and patterns of church membership and attendance. In addition, there were major society changes such as population growth, urbanisation, immigration and wealth creation which impacted significantly on all the churches while the truly crucial ongoing fundamental theme of tolerance, internal and external, ebbed and flowed constantly.

The book has an interesting structure with its twelve chapters divided into three broad groupings. The first contains broad historical sweeps called ‘overviews’ with the second constituting denominational change and schism. The third grouping consists, unfortunately, of only two chapters, but are arguably the most stimulating and creative. One ‘looks at the way churches had an impact on individual lives’ and the other is what the writer calls geography, defined widely, tantalisingly touching on architecture and the influence overseas of many of our various churches. Noting that ‘differences between churches were not just social and theological and geographical but also architectural’ the reference to looking outwards is brief and does not refer to our traditional national heroes such as David Livingston or Mary Slessor but does ensure that the book is not solely parochial or insular. Despite its comparative brevity (only 245 pages including index and reference), there are numerous arresting incisive ‘facts’ slipped in which your reviewer will bravely suggest might be new to many readers and arouse their interest. Examples include presbytery being the last not first part of the reformed Church of Scotland’s structure in 1581. Another is that already by 1650 there were no less than 16 names used to define religious loyalties. By the census of 1751 this had moderately expanded to the form of 20 denominations plus 58 ‘isolated congregations.’ In 1784, a decision to send a Scottish bishop to the United States of America ensured that the American Episcopal Church can and does trace its ancestry to Scotland. There are various surprising references to church attendance over the centuries suggesting that the much lauded 19th century had at the very most one third attending church.

The easy readability of this work is in part due to direct quotations being few and limited to contemporary primary sources. The author has a close affinity to the subject which is not surprising given his background steeped in the Church of Scotland. As one son of a manse commenting on the work of another, I strongly commend this book to anyone who has a love for the churches in Scotland and an enthusiasm for expanding knowledge and understanding.

Dan Gunn

ART EXHIBITION

Late Rembrandt

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Holland in mid-March is surprisingly cloudless and bathed in warm sunshine. All roads however lead not to the beach but to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Late Rembrandt exhibition.

Having wisely booked tickets in advance we follow the large crowds into the hall. The exhibition was opened by King Willem-Alexander of Holland in February and is the first ever retrospective and exploration of Rembrandt’s final period of painting and demonstrates the energy he gathered during his last few years.

The artist was born in Leiden in 1606, the son of a miller, and embraced History painting at an early age. This involved recreating scenes and events from the Bible or the past and required skills in reproducing landscapes, still life and human figures. He moved to Amsterdam in 1631 where he lived and later produced all of the work on display.

What is surprising is that Rembrandt’s later years were highly burdened and controversial. He lost his wife and three of his four children. His output and income were considerably reduced and he was declared bankrupt. Despite these setbacks he began to pursue a new style of painting and etching from the 1650s until his death in 1669. One of his specialities was group painting, then unknown outside Holland. The Night Watch is probably the most famous group painting in the world.
Another, and a good deal more gruesome, is The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Deijman which is part of the exhibition and shows the good doctor dissecting a corpse surrounded by his attentive trainee surgeons. The corpse was a newly executed criminal.

Many of the walls are lined with his small etchings and having peered at these it is a surprise to look up and find The Syndics, Rembrandt’s painting of the wardens of Amsterdam, occupying an entire wall, or the perfect light of A Woman Bathing in a Stream or the beautiful Young Woman Sleeping. There are 40 paintings, 20 drawings and 30 prints collected from all over the world including the tender Jewish Bride, beloved of Van Gogh and two from Scotland – An Old Woman Reading, from the Buccleuch Collection, and the famous Man in Armour from the Kelvingrove Art Gallery. There is work also from the Louvre and the British Museum and several distinctive self-portraits from the last two years of his life, honestly recording the aging of those famous ruddy cheeks and slightly bulbous nose.

The crowds move slowly through the beautifully lit rooms taking in the last works of the greatest of the Dutch Masters of whom it was recently said that even three and a half centuries after his death, Rembrandt continues to astonish and amaze. His technical notions and profound insights are as fresh and relevant today as they were in the 17th century. Departing by canal allows for real views from the water of Rembrandt’s city and of his life. The house where he lived, painted and taught his pupils is now itself a museum, restored in his memory in 1906 and containing several hundred of his etchings. He was buried in the Westerkerk and decidedly not in the Jesuit church of St Francis, where the Vigil Mass is in English and boasts a classical cellist who doubles as cantor and a thoughtful sermon from the young celebrant strongly urging the Church to show more understanding towards its gay and divorced members. Rembrandt would have approved!

A perfect Amsterdam day is completed with chilled jenever and succulent duck in an old Dutch Restaurant in, of course, Rembrandtsplein.

Lewis Cameron

**FILM**

**Jimmy’s Hall (2014)**

*Director: Ken Loach*
*Writers: Paul Laverty, Donal O’Kelly (play)*
*Stars: Barry Ward, Simone Kirby, Andrew Scott*

How much worse off was Ireland than other countries which were affected by the Depression that followed the Wall St Crash of 1929? Those whose Irish history comes from films like Angela’s Ashes might think a lot worse off. But weather records reveal that not even in Limerick it rained as much as that. Following the First World War the Allies set about breaking up the Imperial consensus that they believed had caused it. Ireland entered into the spirit of the age by being the first country to leave the British Empire even though Churchill conspired to keep a rump of it. Ireland was not only destitute. It owed money. There were two things that made it different: better writers and that bugbear of the English since the Gunpowder Plot, the Catholic Church. If communism is an indicator of desperate poverty the Party reckoned it had about 100 members. This is not the total number of Irish communists as a glance at the surnames of prominent members in other countries would show.

For their final film (they say) English director Ken Loach and his Scottish screenwriter Paul Lavery have chosen one of these, Jimmy Gralton, who was chased out of Ireland during the post-Treaty mayhem between the parties led respectively by Collins and De Valera. After a decade as a member of the Wobblies in the bitter industrial strife in the USA of the Twenties Gralton returned to his ageing mother in Leitrim. In 1932 he was persuaded to reopen the ‘Pearse-Connolly’ (what a combo!) hall he had built which had been boarded up when he emigrated. He introduces jazz and preaches Marxism. The parish priest (played by the bishop of Father Ted) opposes both of these: one, he alleges, corrodes Irish culture and the other depends on Soviet atheism. According to him the State exists to defend the nation’s values. In Ireland the State owed the Church. Without the voluntary labour provided by church personnel the Free State would have descended into O’Casey’s ‘state o’ chassis’.

The film has not garnered any of the expected prizes and has gone already to DVD. The public mood is to forget what the church did but not forgive what it shouldn’t have done. Jazz has proved compatible with ceilidhs. Communism had proved to be a hallucination. A Catholic country that gave more room to Communism was Spain. Does the offspring of the Scots who joined the
International Brigade (most Irish volunteers supported Franco) ever wonder what would have happened had Spain become a Bolshevik satellite? Irish history remains essential for English speaking countries and Jimmy’s Hall adds to that awareness. Not long ago Ireland was going to be held up as an example to Scotland of successful independence before the Celtic Tiger was disembowelled. The state of Ireland today demonstrates the truth of Voltaire’s dictum - when it comes to money everyone is of the same religion.

Norman Barry

MUSIC

Gràs

Mairi MacInnes

Puffin Recordings, PUFFIN01CD (www.mairimacinnes.com)

South Uist-born Gaelic singer Mairi MacInnes is a former winner of the Mod Gold Medal and has been a recording artist since 1989. She has been working on this, her sixth album, ever since the fatal storms in 2004 that struck South Uist and swept away three generations of a single family. The recurring theme of the album is that of love and consolation in the face of suffering. The album contains a selection of traditional Gaelic songs plus two of Mairi’s own compositions, and Mairi is accompanied here by some very fine musicians, including Hamish Napier (piano, harmonium, flutes, whistles), Aaron Jones (bouzoukis, guitar, bass guitar). James MacKenzie (Highland bagpipe), James Mackintosh (percussion). The backing vocalists include Karen Matheson and Paul McCullum.

The album is skilfully sequenced to counterpoint happiness and sorrow. For example, Bu Chaomb Leam Bhith Mire (How I delight in being with you) is a traditional love song that tells of the parting of a young woman and her sweetheart, as she leaves to go to Australia. Mairi’s crystal-clear vocal is tenderly accompanied by piano, bouzouki and whistle. As soon as that sad song draws to an end, Mairi moves immediately into an uplifting song of consolation, Bheir Soraidh, Soraidh Bhuam /Latha Siubhal Beinne Dhomb, and the effect is like dawn dispelling the dark, creating an almost physical sense of release and relief. (This listener burst into tears).

We are given some finely-crafted song-portraits of human dignity in adversity. Na Gillean Nach Maireann (The boys that were) is a soulful and very beautiful duet for voice and piobaireachd (ceremonial Highland piping), with male voices chiming in at the end of a phrase, like an echo of the spirits of the departed. The song tells of the many Highland and Hebridean soldiers who perished at St. Valery, France in World War 2. Mairi’s great uncle Angus John MacMillan fought at St. Valery and was captured there. Mi’n Seo Nam Onar (I am alone) is a 1972 recording of Angus John singing a traditional song. Over 40 years later, Mairi thought it would be nice to add her voice to his, and sing a belated duet with him: a moving tribute.

The songs of comfort and joy that Mairi has chosen include Leanabachd (Childhood), an exhilarating, accelerating set of puirt à beul (mouth-music songs for dancing) in which Mairi’s crisp, rhythmic vocal is delightfully complemented by bouzouki, whistle, piano and subtle percussion. Iomaraibh Eutrom Ho Ho (Rowing together) is a traditional song from the Isle of Skye, originally a rowing song and later a women’s work song for fulling the tweed. It’s one of those old Gaelic songs that has a Native-American quality to it, arising from the elemental combination of strong rhythm, call-and-response structure and an ancient modal melody.

Gràs (Grace) is Mairi’s own musical setting of an old prayer from Gaelic tradition.

Tha mi lùbadh mo ghlin
An sùil an Mhic a cheannach mi, An sùil an Spioraid a ghlanach mi, Le càird agus caoimh.
Tre t’Aon Unga féin a Dhè, Tabhair duinn tachar ‘n ar teinn, Gràs Dè, Grádh Dè.

I am bending my knee
In the eye of the Father who created me,
In the eye of the Son who purchased me,
In the eye of the Spirit who cleansed me,
With friendship and kindness.

Through Thine own Anointed One, O God,
Bestow upon us in our need,
The grace of God and the love of God.

With gently rippling piano arpeggios, like water lapping at the shore, and with elegant flute and whistle, like fulmars and seagulls overhead, there’s a restful, meditative quality to Mairi’s softly-sung incantation ‘Gràs Dè is Grádh Dè’ (The Grace of God and the Love of God) with which she brings the album to a close.

Paul Matheson

Reviewers

Norman Barry is the long time film reviewer for Open House.

Lewis Cameron is a retired sheriff and has contributed to Open House on the subjects of law and human rights.

Dan Gunn retired as Head of Operations for the Scottish Prison Service and is an elder in the Church of Scotland.

Elizabeth Kearney has a doctorate in systematic theology from Glasgow University. She is a member of the Board of Open House.

Paul Matheson is an equality and diversity officer for the police and a music reviewer.
Obituary

The real Father Ted

Fr. Theodore (‘Ted’) Martin Hesburgh of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, the most famous and most important Catholic university president in the history of the American Catholic Church, died on 26th February.

Born in 1917, the same year as President John F. Kennedy, Ted Hesburgh was the longest serving President in the history of the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. This was the era of postwar American economic prosperity, thanks to the Roosevelt New Deal and American political, military and economic supremacy in much of the world. Except for native and African Americans, and other minorities like farm workers, this prosperity was shared across economic classes, thanks in great part to the labor movement, which was still a strong countervailing power to the traditional supremacy of the white financial and business classes.

This era was also, institutionally, the golden age of the American Catholic Church, in terms of the numbers of Mass going members, priests and religious, thriving parishes and schools, and colleges, universities and hospitals run by religious orders and dioceses. Even in sports, Catholics throughout the U.S. took great pride in the fact that the most famous name in college football was the University of Notre Dame.

Hesburgh was born and brought up in Syracuse, New York, one of five children of Theodore Bernard Hesburgh of Luxembourg and Anne Murphy of Irish descent. He entered the Holy Cross seminary at Notre Dame in 1934, was sent to Rome to study philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University in 1937, but had to return to the U.S. after two years of philosophy when the war started. He did his theology at Notre Dame, was ordained in 1943, and completed a doctorate in theology in 1945 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He returned to teach theology at Notre Dame, becoming head of the department in 1948, then executive vice-president and assistant to the president of the university in 1949, before becoming president in 1952.

At that time, Notre Dame was a small male Catholic college better known for its football team than its academic prestige. He set out to change all that while respecting the football tradition. In the process, he became a larger than life public figure not only in American higher education but in the public life of the United States and around the world.

He used his public reputation to promote social justice. He cultivated personal relationships with leaders who could do something about issues of poverty and racial discrimination, as much as he engaged in the more traditional role of fundraising to increase his university’s financial endowment and fund centres of excellence like those in American Catholic history and world peace.

As early as 1954, President Eisenhower named him to the National Science Board, and in 1957 made him a charter member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, where he became chairman in 1969. He was fired from the post by President Nixon in 1972, after he had denounced Nixon for making a ‘phony issue’ out of opposition to the use of school busing as a means to promote school racial integration. Civil and human rights were Hesburgh’s forte. By 1964 he had received from President Johnson the Presidential Medal of Freedom for distinguished service on the Civil Rights and other national commissions, and later, on the recommendation of the U.S. Congress, he received from President Clinton the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation’s highest civilian award. When he retired as President of Notre Dame, a survey of university presidents named him the most effective college president in the country.

He endorsed Vatican II’s promotion of the role of the laity in church institutions by going to Rome with Fr. Paul Reiner SJ, president of St. Louis University, and receiving the Vatican’s permission to allow their institutions to be governed by lay boards of trustees. Previously all Catholic institutions of higher education had been owned and governed by bishops or religious orders.

In 1980 he persuaded Fr. Richard McBrien, then head of Boston College’s school of religious studies and education, to become the head of Notre Dame’s theology department. McBrien in theology and Fr. Andrew Greeley in social science research were the most qualified and prolific popularisers of Vatican II reforms in the American Catholic Church.

At the public memorial on campus, the evening following his funeral liturgy, the people chosen to speak spanned the range of Fr. Hesburgh’s influence. A former President of Princeton University described his academic fame and his personal kindness. A former student told of an article he wrote in the student paper criticising the university’s slow pace in promoting racial diversity, his subsequent encounter with Fr. Ted, and his later employment in promoting diversity at the university. The old football coach Lou Holtz spoke of his admiration for Fr. Ted as did three Republican politicians. Condoleeza Rice gave an emotionally moving tribute to her mentor, both when she was Provost of Stanford University and until his death. Barack Obama apologised by video for not being there in person, and seemed more sincere and real in what he said honouring Fr. Ted (they all used that title) than he sometimes does on the political stage.

Finally, and appropriately, Rosalyn and former President Jimmy Carter spoke of his work on behalf of poor, oppressed and deprived people. Rosalyn and Fr. Hesburgh led the international effort of the UN on behalf of the people of Cambodia who survived the Khymer Rouge ‘killing fields’, and she went with him to Cambodia in that cause. President Carter, an obvious kindred spirit, added a lighter touch by recounting the story of how Fr. Ted persuaded him to allow him, at the age of 62, to go up with an Air Force pilot in a super-secret stealth plane to experience supersonic flight, and momentarily they exceeded the speed record at the time of 2193 miles per hour.

Michael L O’Neill

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Moments in time

We walk along the banks of the river Esk, which flows through the centre of the old town of Musselburgh. Canada geese and mute swans are swimming in the river, which is swollen after the recent heavy rain. We reach the open sea which is calm today as there is little wind. To our left, the coast stretches towards Edinburgh with the distinctive silhouette of Arthur’s seat. The cloud obscures the distant coast of Fife.

The path is part of the John Muir Trail, which runs from Helensburgh to Dunbar. We turn east and walk along the shore, looking at groups of eider ducks, bobbing in the waves, the drakes looking very smart in their black, white and green plumage. This is a desolate area known as Musselburgh lagoons and was formerly used for dumping ash from the coal-fired Cockenzie Power Station, which closed a few years ago. The area has been landscaped with grass and shrubs and is a good place to see ducks off-shore and migrant birds, which have flown across the North Sea.

We turn inland past an ornamental pond, then take a path to a hide concealed behind bushes. This overlooks one of the lagoons which is full of waterfowl, mostly teal and wigeon. Unfortunately it is raining and the hide is constructed of concrete with no roof in order to deter vandals, who would need explosives to cause any damage here! We continue along the coast towards the bulk of the disused power station. Suddenly, a skylark rises up from the grassy sward, singing its joyful song, the first we have heard this spring.

A notice explains that there used to be a harbour here, now filled in with waste material. Gannets are flying out to sea; we are not far from their huge breeding colony on the Bass Rock. We come to Prestonpans, famous for the battle in 1745, but containing some interesting buildings. The first we encounter is the Gothenburg pub, built in 1908 as a social experiment in which 95% of the profits are spent on local cultural activity. Recently the pub funded the Prestonpans Murals, which feature local history and the rich industrial heritage. From here, we walk to Preston Tower, a well preserved four storey castle dating from the 14th century with ornamental hedges and a lectern – shaped doocot in the grounds. Prestonpans is clearly worth another visit to explore its many interesting features.

Tim Rhead
Tim Rhead is a pastoral assistant in the Episcopal Church.

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Open House is published ten times a year. We welcome letters and contributions, which should be sent to the editor by the last Friday of the month before publication. Articles should be no longer than 1200 words long, and reviews no more than 800 words. Letters and articles may be edited or held over for future editions.

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