Editorial

Call to conversion

As parishes and groups around the country prepare their autumn education programmes, Pope Francis’ powerful and widely acclaimed encyclical Laudato Si’ – recalling Francis of Assisi’s praise to God with all God’s creatures - deserves a place among them. The issues it addresses are urgent: ‘Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years’. Francis says bluntly that we lack both the culture to confront the crisis of global sustainability and the leadership needed to strike out on new paths. International political responses have been weakened by the pressure of special interests, and economic powers continue to justify a global system where priority is given to the pursuit of financial gain. Sister earth, he says, along with the abandoned of the world, cries out and pleads for us to take another course.

What Francis offers as the basis for such a change of course is a profound reflection on the relationship between human beings and all of creation, together with a framework for political and personal action which is deeply connected to the transcendent. His focus on ecology has extended Catholic Social Teaching. Where does the Church in the UK stand in this regard? Is the Pope too political for it or is care of the planet what real religion should be concerned about? Churches, for example, have large properties, in poor areas sometimes the only ones. Many Catholic churches now stand locked most of the time. Is this value for money? What is their carbon footprint? How can such buildings be better used for the good of all, as the Pope suggests?

Parishes could reflect on such questions with the help of the encyclical. Christian communities, Francis says, have an important role to play in environmental education which ‘should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning’. People have already started along the path of change with adjustments to their lifestyle. Francis finds nobility in these ‘little daily actions’ which not only help the environment, but also ‘call forth a goodness, which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread’. Reusing something, instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, he suggests, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.

But social problems, he reminds us, must be addressed by community networks and not just by the sum of individual good deeds. The ecological conversion we need in order to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion. Will the church take up the challenge?

That we may become wise

The 2015 German Kirchentag (‘Churches’ Day’), held in the centre of Stuttgart, had as its theme ‘That we may become wise’ from Psalm 89/90. English speakers know the psalm as the hymn ‘O God our help in ages past’. The week-long festival had 2,500 events participated in by 100,000 delegates. Chancellor Merkel, an Evangelical, spoke on the ethics of online data. State Minister Kretschmann, a Catholic, gave a lecture on Ecclesiastes.

This is a long way from Alistair Campbell’s diktat: we don’t do God. The 2015 General Election demonstrated the evacuation of religion from the UK public forum. All that Mr/Ms Average wants, it appeared, is a degree, a mortgage, a bank account and a nice body. The two main parties engaged in a bidding war to win this vote. Both promised to provide more, arguing that you couldn’t trust the other lot to deliver. The votes for UKIP in the north of England and SNP in Scotland suggest a significant number of voters had other concerns.

If the Anglican Church was the Tory Party at prayer, the Non-conformist vote belonged to Labour. That division has gone. Conservatives now depend on appealing to the status quo supported by the silent majority. Labour has acquired a rainbow coalition of protest not big enough to win an election. As they seek to recover their roots some Labour policy makers have looked at Catholic Social Teaching as a possible basis. Pope Francis has added a new dimension with his focus on ecology which challenges politicians and churches alike.

One of the events at Kirchentag was entitled ‘That we may become honest’. It was about the German inability to respond to Israeli treatment of Palestinians. The Germans are also embarrassed about their stranglehold on the Greek economy. The churches in Germany are publicly resourced. They expect to be challenged in the political forum.

Psalm 89/90 is the psalm that tells us that our allotted span is three score year and ten (‘or eighty for those who are strong’). Not everyone is enthused that Mr/Ms Average is going to live to 70 and 80. There is concern about the burden on relatives and the health service. There is little talk about a possible gain in wisdom with age. Do succeeding generations see older people as free to be more honest? We argue, for example, about what we should do with the gross amount of food we waste daily. Pope Francis suggests that Christians should not eat anything until first they have said a grace before meals in public. That would help focus minds.
Paul L. Younger

Laudato? Si!: an environmental engineer reads Pope Francis

The professor of Energy Engineering at the University of Glasgow assesses Pope Francis’ first social encyclical and finds it liberating and empowering.

On thoroughly reading the latest papal encyclical, the first thing that struck me was the complete mismatch with what I had been led to expect from the initial media coverage – not least in the Catholic press. Clearly most of the early commentators on Laudato Si’ had simply not read it. This is hardly surprising, as the main text comprises 177 pages of richly-referenced arguments that defy speed-reading. Shameless as ever, the pundits poured forth their instant uninformed judgements. The most common misrepresentation of the encyclical – as much by its admirers as by its detractors – was that it was ‘on climate change’. Textual analysis tells a different story. Here is a breakdown of usage frequency for the most common technical terms found in the text:

environment (158 times); life (112); poverty / poor (73); biodiversity / species / animal / plant (66); earth (58); land / soil (45); pollution (40); water (45); waste (28); consumerism (23); sustainability (22); lifestyle (21); climate (14); urban (11); air (9).

This breakdown speaks eloquently and accurately for itself.

Far from focusing on a single issue, the encyclical holistically addresses the great global sustainability challenges of our times, discussing these under five headings: pollution and climate change; water; biodiversity loss; human quality of life; and global inequality. It happens that I have dealt professionally with all these topics over the years, at least to some extent, so I am well-placed to assess their verisimilitude. I can report that Pope Francis has done a very good job of summarising many of the principal challenges that we must collectively face. There was no point at which I thought ‘oh no, he’s got the wrong end of the stick’. Sure, there is the odd minor point which seems to receive undue emphasis, such as the disapproving comment (n. 55) about the ‘increasing use and power of air-conditioning’; why not say the same thing about heating in northern countries? It is not until much later (n. 180) that the real point at issue here is properly addressed, where Francis encourages ‘the construction and repair of buildings aimed at reducing their energy consumption and levels of pollution’; it is extravagant and unnecessary use of energy that is sinful, not the impulse to keep the human body within a tolerable temperature range.

One specific point which has been criticised by the few neo-liberal commentators who got that far into the text (n. 30) is Francis’ hostility to the privatisation of water services. His principal argument – which he emphasises in italics – is that ‘access...
to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights’. Francis is clearly aware of the disastrous attempts to privatise the water utilities in Bolivia, which ended in a popular uprising (if you’ve never seen the 2010 film Even the Rain, watch it and you will immediately understand where the first Latin American pope is coming from on this issue).

Few of the points Francis makes are new. In the Catholic tradition, the same ground was first covered nearly 30 years ago by Sean McDonagh, To care for the Earth: a call to a new theology, (1986); The greening of the Church (1990). And more recently with great profundity in various reformed traditions such as Alister E. McGrath, The open secret: a new vision for natural theology (2008); Robert S. White (editor) Creation in crisis: Christian perspectives on sustainability (2009). Clearly Francis has been pondering these issues for many decades too. The principal non-papal source cited by Francis is a book by Fr Romano Guardini (1885 - 1968), The End of the Modern World, which was first published in 1950. Fr Guardini took a courageous stand against Nazism, which temporarily cost him his academic post. As such, he was understandably sceptical about the expansive claims of technocratic modernism.

Francis clearly believes that the same technocratic modernism still holds total sway today. From my own experience as an engineering researcher heavily engaged in public debates about what is technically achievable in decarbonisation of energy, I would say that we are now in just as much peril from a post-modern rejection of the foundations of the scientific method. This is the attitude that lies behind parents vaccinating for fear of ‘chemicals’, even as crippling childhood diseases begin to spread again. It is also behind many of the absolutist refusnik positions adopted in relation to energy technologies, despite abundant scientific appraisal of their pros and cons. At its most extreme, this post-modern rejectionism leads to misanthropic ecological advocacy by (as Francis puts it) ‘those who view men and women and all their interventions as no more than a threat, jeopardizing the global ecosystem, and [who] consequently [argue that] the presence of human beings on the planet should be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited’ (n. 60). It is this sort of ‘green fascism’ that recently got me a death-threat for publishing a research paper that quantifies the maximum possible vibrations due to shale gas fracking, which reveals that proposed rules governing that activity are 40,000 times stricter than those used for quarry blasting. It also prompted the comments of ecologist Dr Patrick Moore that Greenpeace (of which he was a co-founder) has now become an ‘evil organization’, as it has gradually abandoned both its respect for science and for its original humanitarian principles. To augment Guardini’s prescient warnings on technocratic modernism, therefore, I would warmly commend to Pope Francis the writings of Terry Eagleton e.g. The illusions of postmodernism (1996) and After theory (2003).

For myself, as a Christian who has spent his entire career attempting to conjointly address poverty and environmental degradation, this encyclical is liberating and empowering. It comprehensively legitimates the efforts so many Christians have been making throughout my lifetime to expand our engagement with the woes of the industrial world, first taken up by the papacy in Rerum novarum (1891), and greatly catalysed by Populorum progressio (1967), to embrace the devastating ecological consequences – however unintended – of the global rush to unbridled consumerism.

Like all great apostolic initiatives, Laudato Si’ is a radical call to conversion: in this case to ‘ecological conversion’ in which our encounter with Jesus is realised in a ‘vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork’ (n. 217). This ‘entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works’ (n. 220). However, personal conversion is insufficient: the ‘problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds’ (n. 219). Yet ‘on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views. But we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognize that … we can always do something to solve our problems’(n. 61). That’s clearly a mission to which a Christian environmental engineer can contribute.

1. The count excludes repetitive occurrences in titles and footnotes, and for each word given it also includes adjectives / adverbs etc derived from them.

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Much of your life has been spent bringing together matters of faith, society and politics. How do you see religion continuing to play a part in public life?

I think the state of the church at the moment is interesting and complex. I notice in my own children for example, brought up in it, a disconnection with church. There’s no hostility; it’s just not regarded as relevant. On the other hand there is deep concern for, and commitment to, social and political issues, matters of social justice, global concerns, fairness and equality. They care about these things and I think that describes a lot of people in our culture at the moment. Formal church may have little or no place in their lives but many of the human concerns we may broadly describe as ‘Christian’ do.

I also think people always experience a need to belong and identify with some sort of belief or values system. Religion has provided that for a lot of people through generations and it is hard to see how it will just disappear. If the church isn’t doing it something else has to. The problem with political or philosophical belief systems is that they don’t take us beyond ourselves. There is a lot to indicate that many people still experience a need for that too, a ‘spiritual’ search if you like.

For all those reasons I think the church, religion, will continue, in some form, to have a role in public life and debate but it won’t be as it has been for generations. It is changing radically, at least in our culture, as the institutional aspect of religion dies out in its current form.

The future in that sense for religion in the West is uncertain but I see that as creative rather than deadening. In a strange way the weakening of the institutional churches may provide for greater freedom in theological discussion, for groups like the Iona Community and publications like this one to create space for public debate. Catholic Social Teaching, for example, is a rich resource for all traditions to draw on in terms of faith and practice, social justice and community, and the institutional church to date hasn’t done it justice. It also provides us with a call to vocation in the broad sense which much modern ‘spirituality’ does not.

What I mean is we run the danger sometimes of what Bonhoeffer called ‘cheap grace’. We get the good God stuff without the cost! It seems to me that the Christian gospel always asks for self-sacrifice and we don’t always want to hear that. That might be where church in some form remains necessary.

You’ve had a career at the heart of government in Scotland. Everyone agrees this is a time of change politically in the UK as a whole. How do you see Scotland developing politically in the next few years, independent or not?

Well, like many people I voted Yes in the referendum and was also astonished by the extent of the SNP gains in the General Election. Without doubt Scotland is certainly
shifting in its political allegiance and the view it takes of itself. I think the relative closeness of the referendum vote has created a tension that, like all tensions, has the power to become very creative. So much that was vibrant and positive came out of the whole referendum campaign: the grassroots movements, the local gatherings, the energy and sense of possibility across communities. At the moment it looks as though the surge of support for the SNP is partly a way of holding on to that. The greater hope would be that the Labour Party in Scotland finds some energy and renewed identity of its own so that it becomes a full participant once again. That’s vital for the political health of Scotland I think. One party dominance is never good and it is still Labour who can provide a meaningful alternative to the SNP for most Scottish voters. At the moment I think we’re in a place of re-adjustment and the outcome is not clear yet.

The big questions facing the whole of the UK will impact hugely in the immediate future I think. The referendum on Europe will be very significant and either way the outcome of that will create a different mood within the UK and in terms of Scotland’s relationships within it.

I’m sceptical about the idea that’s put about that Scotland is more left wing than England. I don’t really think we are but I do think we are a more coherent nation, perhaps just for being smaller and less diverse. I think there is a greater sense of what we might call community in Scotland. It’s not about being left wing or right wing: it is just a sense of being part of something together, shared. In that respect I think a principle such as ‘the common good’ has a greater kind of clout in Scotland and that is something we need to work hard to nourish and preserve, however we vote.

You’ve mentioned the global challenges. In Europe at the moment the impact of a global refugee crisis is causing unrest and would appear to have difficult and complex implications for the future. As a grandfather how do you look upon that and the other global problems likely to be inherited by younger generations?

(Groans!) Well, you certainly are forced to think we haven’t made a great job of much of it and will leave them with a lot to sort out. I do observe what many other people have said that mine is probably the first generation that has left things more difficult for our children and grandchildren. I see that. On the other hand I also think we have all prospered enormously at the expense of other parts of the world and that too, at some stage, has to be changed. The fear of course is that with that comes violence and destruction because generally people don’t give up what they’ve acquired very easily. The question makes me think of a very particular period when I had a sabbatical while I was leader of the Iona Community. My wife, Ruth, and I went to Atlanta where I was attached to a seminary for a semester and we also volunteered in a homeless centre downtown. I made links there with the universality of the kind of issues the Iona Community has always tried to address: poverty, discrimination, injustice, migration, homelessness. I saw these in a new way as the flip side of so much of globalisation.

These are the issues we share across the world and need to find a global as well as local ways of addressing. I suppose what I’m saying is we see the impact of things among our own families first but then quickly see that they connect us with families everywhere and that we are still among the very privileged.

There’s a positive too for the younger generations. My children had travelled and experienced so much more of life by the time they were in their twenties than I had. My grandchildren, one of whom is half Peruvian, have so much more of a relaxed global view. Partly this is a result of technology and their ease with it and with so many forms of communication. There are opportunities ahead for them that I couldn’t have imagined so it’s by no means all gloomy and they have the chance to make something better again of the world and their own lives.

Finally, as someone who seems always to have brought together theology and social engagement, who has influenced you most in terms of reading, meeting and thinking?

Oh that’s very difficult. There have been so many and in lots of different ways. I would find it hard to single people out. I mean my family, friends and colleagues in the Iona Community for sure but I wouldn’t like to pick individuals – my wife of course! And my father in law, the Very Rev Dr Hugh Douglas, was a big influence on me. And my own parents. That’s a difficult question. Let me think.....it’s maybe easier to think just professionally. If I go back to my days in the Scottish Office I would name both Willie Ross and Bruce Millan. Not because I always thought they were right but because of their commitment to public service, the way they worked and listened. They seemed to embody a different kind of politician to many of the ones we have now. I learned a lot from them. At the moment, in terms of reading, I’m feeling quite influenced by Gerry Hughes’ book, Cry of Wonder. I’ve recently enjoyed too the theologian Eugene Peterson and the novelist Penelope Fitzgerald whose own religious background provides an interesting angle to her fiction. But it’s really hard to select people. I think I’m quite eclectic in that sense. Anyone can have an influence and many have.
150 people came to Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Dunfermline to hear Fr. Mark Latcovich speak on how some of the United States dioceses have been trying to develop their mission while experiencing difficulties similar to our own. The meeting was organised by St. Andrew’s and St. Margaret’s Deanery Pastoral Council.

Fr. Mark is a regular visitor to Fife and is rector of St. Mary and Borromeo Seminaries, Cleveland, Ohio. He holds a doctorate in sociology, serves currently as chair of the pastoral theology department, has previously directed a doctor of ministry programme and at the moment is directing a doctoral thesis on the question of what has proved valuable in questions of parishes working together, amalgamating or merging.

He showed how the question of the future is not simply numbers of priests to parishes and people, but how to live in the situation we find ourselves in dealing with the shortage of priests and parish personnel, changing demographics, and a general drop in numbers.

At the centre of his presentation was the need for a diocese to have an understanding of the situation it was living in, in order to develop a clear vision of what it was trying to do about it. It was clear from how he talked about successful collaborations, mergers and amalgamations that there is no easy, quick solution. Much hard work, prayer, study and action is necessary for those involved in developing clusters or new parishes.

Parishes need to learn how to assess how vibrant they are by evaluating themselves through a variety of headings such as evangelisation, liturgy, stewardship. In doing so, parishes can see where they need to develop and how they may find it useful to collaborate with other parishes. It may be also that a parish will come to the conclusion that it cannot go on its present form.

Fr. Mark emphasised the usefulness of Appreciative Inquiry in helping people give thanks for the good things they have as well as being a help for looking at necessary changes for the future.

The role of the bishop is vital. He has to work with all levels of the church community in developing a vision of the future, while at all times taking great care to communicate and to encourage communication within the whole diocese. Solutions cannot be imposed from the top down. The Church’s canon law provides a good, freeing framework for this consultative process, challenging bishop, priests and laity to make sure that everyone has a chance to be involved either individually or through the various councils of the Church’s life.

Fr. Mark thought that as Catholics carrying out this process we work through the Church’s structures. If these structures are not as responsive as they might be we should not give up but persist in finding ways to help them work. There is a danger that if we bypass the structures we engage in congregationalism and perhaps end up with a break-a-way parish or congregation.

By their baptism all Catholics are involved in the mission of the church. If a searching look is taken at the situation of our parishes, priests and people, and greater collaboration takes place, the same number of priests as we have had in the past will not be necessary. This means taking on the challenge of providing better ways of training for those willing to be involved in lay ministry.

After a brief opportunity for participants to share thoughts with one another there was a time for questions. The purpose of the question time was to provide an opportunity for people to reflect on how the content of the talk could be developed within our situation in the diocese. This did not happen directly and the time was taken up by people making statements, in a sometimes vehement manner, about what they thought was happening or had not happened in the diocese up until now. Fr. Mark, in response, continued to emphasise the need for communication, for following proper means of consultation, and for working from within the Church.

The purpose of asking Fr. Mark to speak was to help the deanery reflect on how the situations he had studied might encourage deeper thought on our own situations. The organisers hope that the evening helped people to...
do this. They thought perhaps 30 people might come along. The large attendance shows the depth of concern about the future development of the diocese.

Much of what was said was not new to the diocese. Previous studies and reports identified some of the ideas and suggestions, but somehow they didn’t bear fruit. It was valuable that Fr. Mark presented them to us again from within a lived experience of how they can be put into action.

After the meeting Fr. Mark suggested that it might be worthwhile looking at some dioceses where clusters of parishes with ministers other than priests living and working in them had been developed in rural areas. Given the difference in scale between Cleveland and St. Andrews and Edinburgh, some of the ideas developed in American rural areas could be applicable in our towns.

The participants were challenged by Fr. Mark and by his material to deepen what has been done so far to develop a good way for Catholics in the diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh to prepare for a future which is going to be quite different from the one we have been used to. I felt stimulated to look at the importance of communication, of what is going on and is not going on at every level of my ministry, and to realise how we have to help one another embrace change. I also want to develop my understanding of consultation and collaboration, to realise that any process is going be lengthy and often arduous, to keep on challenging and being challenging by the church at every level, and to keep to the forefront of my mind that all process has to be rooted in a praying and worshipping Church.

Fr. Mark gave examples of good and bad practice from his own diocese and others and has made available a bibliography and a much shortened one. These can be had from Fr. Hand admin@stpaulsandstmarys.co.uk.

Notes on the evening made by Patricia Carroll can also be had from patricia.carroll@staned.org.uk.

Learning from the past

Fr Mike Fallon, parish priest of the South Edinburgh cluster of parishes, makes a plea to learn from the experience of a previous consultation on the future of the archdiocese.

In January of this year, some seventeen months after taking up his appointment, Archbishop Cushley set in motion a process of consultation in regard to the reconfiguration of the archdiocese in the light of a falling number of priests.

However, the process of strategic planning for the future provision in the archdiocese was well under way many years before. There will be many examples of good practice of parish and faith communities working towards a plan for the future.

In an attempt to encourage a gathering of information on the lessons learned over the years, I offer as an example a talk I gave in April 2006. Perhaps a group of people could be given the task of sifting through the lived experiences of the past decade and add them to the current debate and consultation process.

April 2006

A consultation document issued by Cardinal O’Brien disclosed some startling facts: that in less than ten years the number of active priests in the diocese will fall from 63 to 33.

It concerns me that our starting point always seems to be given as the falling number of priests, and the agenda is driven from that point. Given that model of reflection, we will always find ourselves in a perennial depression because our starting point is increasingly one of diminishing possibilities.

A much more positive and healthy starting point is to look at how we can energise and nourish the faith communities we have that we call parishes. I think we need to recognise that the church, as we know it now, in this and in the last century is not the church as it was in the beginning or indeed through its two thousand plus years of history.

After Jesus died and rose again, there were relatively few members of ‘the way’ as it was sometimes called; those people who had been touched by the message of Jesus and who wanted to follow his way.

In the early church everyone had great commitment. They lived their faith by caring for and sharing with others. As time went by the world became more sophisticated and almost inevitably, less intimate. Independence became a bigger priority

As people progressed in life they became wealthy and wanted to spend more time relaxing and enjoying themselves. They subcontracted out the bits of their lives that took up valuable time.

Like everything, the commitment to the ‘way’ of Jesus became a bit routine and familiar, and as usually happens people tended to become minimalist; they would do enough to tick over, enough to get by.

Up until this point the community had met in each other’s homes. Their meeting was social and spiritual. The proceedings were overseen by an elder who was elected to that role. With the growth of the church in numbers, and the growing sophistication and
therefore expectation of the people to have a good life, the priesthood emerged to take up the slack and fulfill the ‘duties’ of the ordinary Christian community members.

The locus of the gathering also changed from the home to a place apart: a church building. The priest became the go-between: the middle man, fulfilling a church member’s role of service and in time mediating God’s message back to the member. Up until the time the priesthood emerged, every single member of the worshipping community was a stakeholder who played an active part in the life of the community. The poor were fed, the sick were visited and cared for, the children were looked after, the widows were comforted and made to feel secure; and all of this was done by the ordinary person.

The emergence of the office of priest who took on these responsibilities for others was the beginning of the end of active community involvement. People’s participation lessened. And of course as time passed the priest became very protective of what he came to see as ‘his’ job.

In terms of the Mass, it eventually got to the stage where the priest was conducting almost a private dialogue with God and people were mere spectators, with servers indicating the points of importance by ringing bells.

It was the same with the administration of the community. Things had grown considerably and there was seen to be a need for control and uniformity. Again that got out of hand and control and uniformity became the end as well as the means. What started out as commitment by a group of individuals to a way of life based on a commandment of love, care, respect and hospitality has landed up as a huge, bureaucratic, multi-million pound, multinational corporation.

An honest look at history can tell us how we got here - but the important question is how are we going to reclaim our roots?

I think perhaps the best analogy I can find for what happens in our worship is to imagine an orchestra. Everyone in an orchestra has a vital part to play. The key to success is practice. You need to spend hours practising your instrument. When you come along for a concert, you are guided through the performance by the conductor. The conductor is the one who holds it all together. I believe that the priest’s role is similar: he is called to co-ordinate the ministries in the community.

I remember the late Fr. Eugene Walsh insist that if you ever want to reorder your church building the first thing you must do is empty it. Start with a blank canvas; an empty space. Then ask what is essential for this building to become a space for worship. What is necessary is a baptismal font, an ambo from which to proclaim the Word, a table for the Breaking of the Bread; and a chair for the person who presides at Eucharist. That is all you need by way of furnishings.

To relate that to our present quest for a way forward as a church I would suggest that the first question to ask is what the Catholic communities in Edinburgh need in order to grow as the body of Christ?

I suggest that they need to gather in order to celebrate; to celebrate one another and the faith we share; celebrate the Eucharist of Jesus. And when we have gathered and celebrated, then we must scatter; scatter to become a leaven in the world we live in. We are called to season our world with love, joy, gladness and hope; to season our world with the presence of God.

Only when we are doing that, only when we live out the command of Jesus by caring for others, lending a helping hand, giving words of encouragement; only then are we really ready to come back to gather, to celebrate and to scatter. It is a never ending cycle. In gathering, the community needs to be coordinated. That is where they need the presence of a priest.

In our diocese most parishes will not have a resident priest replaced. Priests will become resources that are shared by a number of parishes.

All of this change in the church in our lifetime finds its origin in the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. One of the constant sayings of the Council Fathers was Ecclesia Semper Reformanda. The Church must always be in the business of reforming and renewing itself; otherwise it will become redundant.

But let’s remember that the change is all about going back to where we came from; it’s about rediscovering our roots; putting Jesus and his way back into the central platform of our lives.

The role that only a priest can play in the life of the church is to preside at the Liturgy of Eucharist and at the Liturgy of Healing.

In the language of the past: that means celebrating Mass, celebrating anointing and celebrating forgiveness. That’s my role as a priest. And only that. The rest has to become your business. If the faith is to flourish and if the Catholic Christian community is to thrive and blossom in our corner of Edinburgh it will clearly not happen by the efforts of priests. The priest will only be able to coordinate the talents that are present.

2015

As I write this in 2015 I can honestly say that as a cluster of three parishes we have travelled a long journey. The history of how our cluster developed can be accessed on our website: www.southedinburgh.rc.uk - click on Cluster and scroll down to History and Context.

We haven’t got it fully right yet. It’s a work in progress. And there are as many ways to cluster as there are groupings of parishes. We have done it our way and it seems to work for us. There may be valuable lessons for others who have yet to start the journey. It would make so much sense to pool all the experiences and add it to the mix of consultation.

You can find articles and reflections by Fr. Mike Fallon on the current proposals for the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh on the South Edinburgh cluster website.

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For four years now, war has been going on in Syria. Neither of the two camps is in a position to win militarily and there is no political solution on the horizon. Regional and world powers, as well as the media, appear to be uninterested in this conflict, which they encouraged, financed, armed, and perhaps planned. They now have other preoccupations and are consequently leaving Syria to rot, to the detriment of the Syrians who watch their country being destroyed, its economy wiped out, its patrimony plundered, its élite exiled and its wealth stolen. Not forgetting the 250,000 dead, the four million refugees, the eight million who are internally displaced.

Even the most ardent enemy of the régime and the fiercest partisans of reform did not want war, and especially not this one. The Syrians suffer seeing the name of their country associated with international terrorism, namely that 70,000 people from 80 countries came to do Jihad in Syria as if Jihad was part of the tradition of Syria, as if Syria was a country of Islamic extremists! Syria was the example of tolerance and coexistence; Syrians, Muslims or Christians, consider themselves Syrians before identifying any religious affiliation.

Since the beginning of the war in 2011, Syrians have understood that what happened was not a revolution to bring greater democracy, greater respect for human rights and less corruption. They knew from the outset that the ‘Arab Spring’ was the new name of ‘constructive chaos’ of Condoleezza Rice and of the ‘new Middle East’ of the Bush administration and that, this ‘spring’ in Syria would result either in the chaos and the destruction of the country or in an Islamic state.

Unfortunately, the alternatives may both succeed.

Aleppo, the second city of Syria and its economic capital, is divided into two circles. The inner circle (where we live) along with two million people, one million of them displaced from the other side, is under Syrian government control. The outer circle with 300,000 people is under the control of the armed groups.

The situation in Aleppo is catastrophic. Water is provided once a week, electricity two hours every day. There is a shortage of essential products such as gasoline, fuel, medical drugs and products. The cost of living has soared; prices have risen by 5-10 times their pre-war level. People have become poorer; unemployment is scarly high. Seventy per cent of the Syrian population lives below the poverty line and 80% receive food parcels from NGOs to survive.

A rain of mortar and rocket shells fall every day on both sides of Aleppo killing dozens of people and wounding as many more. Snipers cause terror among pedestrians.

The deterioration of the situation has generated feelings of fear, despair and suffering among the people of Aleppo. In the face of these challenges, we cannot only offer just our compassion. We decided three years ago to offer our solidarity with these suffering men and women and so we founded the Blue Marists.

The Blue Marists are a group of consecrated brothers and lay Marists inspired by Marist spirituality and the charism of St Marcellin Champagnat to live the Gospel in everyday life with simplicity, modesty and humility. We are a team of three Marist Brothers and six lay people (three women and three men) and 70 volunteers. We take care of poor and displaced families, both Christian and Muslim. We have organised our action and activities on two themes.

First is aid and relief. The Blue Marists Aid project consists of three programmes serving 550 families, most of them displaced. We offer them monthly food baskets, clothing, fuel, school supplies, mattresses and blankets. We rent small apartments to lodge the displaced families. Every day we distribute a hot meal to 500 people.

We also treat civilian war wounded, at no cost - those victims who do not have the financial means to be cared for in private hospitals. Usually they are taken to the public hospitals (there are now only two, the others having been destroyed or put out of operation).
which cruelly lack doctors, nurses and medical equipment. We transfer the wounded to Saint Louis Hospital (the best in Aleppo) where they are operated on and cared for, with the best chances of survival. The doctors and surgeons (the most competent in the city) offer their services free. Since the beginning of this programme, over two and a half years ago, and in spite of our limited resources, we have treated hundreds of patients and saved dozens of lives.

The second theme is educational activities. The principal mission of the Marists is the education of children, especially the least well off. We have developed a programme of activities to respond to the enormous needs created by the war.

**I Learn to Grow** is a teaching and health education programme which serves pre-school children aged between three and six from poor or displaced families. Sessions take place every afternoon from 3 to 6 pm and 100 children attend.

**I want to learn** is a programme which involves 100 displaced children of school age. Aged between seven and thirteen, these children do not go to school for a variety of reasons and this programme teaches them the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

**The Tawassol programme** takes place four mornings a week and aims to provide young mothers with courses in English, computers and education. Apart from improving the mothers’ education it also allows them to follow their children in their lessons. English and computing are now taught in the school from the first grade.

**Skills School** is geared towards adolescents allowing the young people to discover themselves and develop their skills. Over 50 teenagers participate every afternoon.

**Oasis**, our spiritual formation centre for young Christians started organising retreats and seminars a few months ago which are becoming increasingly popular.

**The Marist Institute for Training (M.I.T.)** is a centre of formation aimed at people between 20 and 45 and helps them acquire new skills to add to their CV, with training in various fields. In nearly two years, we have already organised over 30 workshops, and over 20 seminars on topics linked to quality, communication and a variety of other subjects. The number of participants is limited to 18 persons per session but the conferences are open to all. All our activities are aimed at those most in need and are free of charge.

We believe that evangelism is not accomplished through speeches but by everyday life and example. We endorse what His Holiness Pope Francis said on July 5, 2014 ‘The witness of charity is the royal road of evangelization’. The Pope asked the Church to ‘infuse into society that supplement of spirit that gives hope’.

Our motto is that of all the Marist World: **Sow Hope**. Of course, there are times when we become discouraged and afraid. We often feel the danger around us, and we watch anxiously as many of our friends leave the country. We the Blue Marists through our presence, our support, strength and solidarity offer a glimmer of hope among the violence, deprivation, desolation, suffering and despair. Oh! You are still here; you have not have left like the others! And we will continue our work with the displaced, the poor, the children and the wounded.

**If you would like to donate to the work of the Blue Marists in Aleppo, you can do so through Open House. You can send a cheque to Open House (see back page for Treasurer’s details) and we will pass it on or deposit money in the Open House account: include Aleppo in the description.**

**Account Name:** Open House.
**Sort Code:** 80-73-31.
**Account Number:** 00735370

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**Children’s right to education**

*Scottish academic Stephen J McKinney considers the rights of children to an education.*

Human Rights legislation clearly articulates that all children have the right to education. This legislation applies equally to forcibly displaced children, including internally displaced children; it applies to all stages of displacement, including emergency displacement and extended displacement.

The realisation of the ideals of the Human Rights legislation can be severely tested in situations of forcible displacement. In some (very) rare cases, forcible displacement can enhance the opportunities for school education for the children. Smith Ellison (2013) cites the examples of Afghan girls displaced in Pakistan who had greater access to school in their new environment. In most cases, however, forcible displacement can result in the children experiencing serious challenges when they attempt to access school education. Refugees who have been forced to move have to negotiate the challenges of the disruption caused by re-location and change, without having time to prepare physically and psychologically for the adjustment to the relocation (Anderson, 2004). Often it is not safe for forcibly displaced children to attend school or they are not able to attend school: families that are forcibly displaced are impoverished and the children may have to work, or care for siblings to allow their mothers to work. If it is safe for the refugee children to attend school, and they are able to attend school, they have to adjust to different school structures, social norms, a different culture and sometimes a different religious context. Schools can play a crucial role in the social integration of refugee children,
helping the children cope with the feelings of loss and homesickness (including the awareness that they may be unable to return home in the immediate future, if return at all) and the anxieties of living in a new environment.

It is not, however, only the refugee children who have to adapt. In the country where the refugees have settled, the schools, teachers and pupils will also have to negotiate the arrival of the refugee children. The refugee children often require some kind of induction to facilitate the transition to the new school and structures, though this may not always be possible (Hamilton, 2004). It is important to note that the school education of forcibly displaced children is often dependent upon the financial support of international aid (Mundy and Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

The Syrian conflict has had a crippling effect on the schooling of children: more than two million children are not in school as a direct result of the conflict. The school enrolment figures for Syrian children are among the lowest in the world. Many children who remain with their families in Syria are unable to attend school because the schools have been attacked, damaged or destroyed, often deliberately, despite the targeting of schools being prohibited under international humanitarian law. The United Nations Children’s Fund reports that 160 children were killed during attacks on schools in Syria in 2014. The schools that still exist have often been seized or appropriated and used for purposes other than schooling including use by combatants. A significant number of the children in Syria have been internally displaced with their families and it has become common, since 2012, for many of these families to be housed in school buildings. There are areas in the largest city in Syria, Aleppo, for example, where a number of schools, with the support of the Jesuit Refugee Service, have become emergency shelters for internally displaced people. The children may receive some rudimentary form of education in these school shelters but it is hard to sustain any kind of quality education because of the cramped conditions, lack of suitable resources and classrooms doubling as living quarters.

School education for children who are forcibly displaced outside of Syria is similarly problematic. Many of these children are in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. In some parts of Lebanon and Jordan, the schools, struggling to cope with the influx of Syrian children, have introduced a split school day, where some children attend in the morning and others in the afternoon, to enable increased numbers of children to attend school. Nevertheless, large numbers of children are not in school. One in three Syrian children are in school in Jordan, but the problem is more acute in Lebanon. Only one in five Syrian children living in Lebanon are able to access school education. This means that children are not able to receive an adequate education and this greatly increases the possibility that the children become engaged in child labour and that some of the girls enter into early marriage. Watkins and Zvck (2014) state that there is also a real danger that children are recruited into radical groups: about a dozen radical groups including ISIS and Islamic State (Iraq) are actively recruiting the children from the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. There are over 800,000 Syrian children living in Turkey and around 600,000 of these are of school age. Towns such as Suruc in Turkey have created tent schools for the Syrian children. One of these tent schools educates Syrian Kurdish refugee children. The teachers, who are often refugees themselves, are only able to teach reading, writing and Kurdish and the classes are restricted to children aged between seven and ten. The parents, teachers and children consider this to be better than nothing, but this limited education is barely meeting the needs of a small number of children. On a more positive note, Unicef has supported the creation of new education centres for Syrian children, including one in Kahramanmaras in April 2015, which has capacity for 1,080 pre-school and primary school age Syrian children. The language of the new education centre will be Arabic and the Syrian curriculum will be followed.

The right to education is an ‘enabling right’: it is a right that enables a person to exercise other human rights and have authentic choices in life about work and participation in society and cultural life. The right to education is sometimes referred to as the fourth pillar of humanitarian assistance (with nourishment, health and shelter) that is deemed essential for those who suffer the effects of conflict or natural disasters. Any denial of this right (and any inadequate practical realisations of this right) to forcibly displaced Syrian children, during the current period of conflict, has serious consequences for the future development of these children but also for the future development of Syria, and for those countries that host the Syrian refugee families.

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Key references (a full list available on request)


GERARD CARRUTHERS

Catholic culture and Scottish writing from Alexander Geddes to Muriel Spark

This is the second part of a talk given to the Glasgow Newman circle on Catholic culture and Scottish writing by the Francis Hutcheson Chair of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow.

Alexander Geddes (1737-1802) was one of the most remarkable Catholic priests of any period in Scotland. He has emerged in academic study over the past 20 years as a pioneer enlightenment biblical critic, a philologist, political activist, poet and satirist. Geddes writes his treatise on the Scoto-Saxon Dialect (1792), which suggests that Scots is a rich rather than declining linguistic resource, superior rather than inferior to English. He is active in London reformist circles during the 1790s, visiting and giving good cheer to imprisoned radicals. His poetry is read in the French Assembly of Deputies during the 1790s to reassure beleaguered French revolutionary deputies that there is strong international, intellectual support for them.

Geddes needs a whole new edition for an extraordinary canon of poems, close to 200 in Scots, English, Latin and in Greek translation. In one sense he is heir to the tradition of Scot-Latinity, although without much interest in Jacobitism. His poems defend the freedom of the press and democracy, speak up for the oppressed – both Catholic and Presbyterian in Ireland - and are admired by the Ulster Presbyterian United Irishmen. Geddes attacks fanaticism in all religions and advocates complete freedom of religious conscience, at a time when such a view is almost unthinkable. In a long Scots poem prefacing his dissertation on the Scoto-Saxon dialect addressed to the Scottish Society of Antiquaries, Geddes lays claim to the poetic and cultural tradition of Gavin Douglas and Scoto-Latinity, but also at the same time has good things to say of John Knox. Here is a genuine populist Scots-language poet who has until fairly recently been written out of the supposedly populist Scots poetry tradition.

Like Burns, Geddes’s cultural plurality has to do with the Enlightenment. Burns is an enlightenment poet par excellence in knowing that there is more than one way of being Scottish: thus he can write historically celebrating the Covenanters and he can also write a song sympathetic to Mary Queen of Scots (a great Catholic Stuart sovereign, whose iconicity was limited even among the Jacobite cause). As well as continental writers like Schiller, it is Burns and Walter Scott who begin to portray Mary with some psychological sensitivity.

One of the things that happens in Scottish Literature from the 1690s is a debate about Calvinism – which easily lends itself to the charges of fanaticism and Puritanism. In the 19th century even Presbyterian writers such as James Hogg follow in this tradition. Hogg's brilliant novel, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) is inspired by Burns' Holy Willie's Prayer in its delineation of the psychological ruin of an individual by religion. In the poem, Robert Ringhim comes to believe he has been vouchsafed salvation at the beginning of time, that he is one of the Elect and so can sin without penalty. A bit like Burns' Tam o’Shanter, the novel has a Catholic ‘fragment’: a story that intrudes on the text.

This is the Auchtermuchty story, where Ringhim is given an opportunity to work out truth for himself: that the devil can appear in many guises including the self-delusion of being already saved. He hears the story of a satanic visitation, probably in the 17th century, in the town of Auchtermuchty, famed for its frenzied field preaching and all night sermons. The townsfolk are particularly enraptured of one itinerant preacher who tells them that they are the most miserable transgressors of God's law. However, Honest Robert Ruthven knows, because he has overheard crows say so, that this preacher is the Devil. So Robert crosses himself and goes off to the latest preaching at Auchtermuchty, where he rips aside the preacher's gown and behold, there was a pair of cloven feet!

The Auchtermuchty story is an opportunity for Robert to work out the truth and find self-realisation, but a number of things stand in the way of his free reception of the narrative. The Disney-esque crows represent one barrier, the fact that Robert Ruthven, though not a Catholic, crosses himself, is another (like George Mackay Brown later, Hogg depicts the sign of the cross as lingering on as a kind of detached folk custom in not necessarily Catholic lower class groups). The Auchtermuchty story represents the critique, and it is very interesting that the sincere, moderate Presbyterian Hogg should make it, that post-Reformation Scotland has lost a certain guiding iconography of evil, and also of...
that Bute was an eccentric maverick in modern reappraisal. As to wider antiquarian and literary essays await the later 19th century. His own face of the Scottish Catholic revival in Bute, who does so much for the public conversion of the third Marquis of gothic pile in the borders, when his respect, as are Vich Ian Vohr's religious without dismissal and with cultural in his family. This is portrayed by Scott sees the death hound, portending death politician. The night before he dies, he wedded to the ancient Stuart cause and clan leader, Vich Ian Vohr, is both 19th century: Walter Scott's Waverley writers with Catholicism, and not just show the continued fascination of some continuity.

A study of Scottish literature would show the continued fascination of writers with Catholicism, and not just as the feared or despised ‘other’. Many examples come to mind through the 19th century: Walter Scott’s Waverley (1814), where the Catholic Jacobite clan leader, Vich Ian Vohr, is both wedded to the ancient Stuart cause and is a brave warrior and modern politician. The night before he dies, he sees the death hound, portending death in his family. This is portrayed by Scott without dismissal and with cultural respect, as are Vich Ian Vohr’s religious practices including going to Mass. Later, of course, John Henry Newman celebrates Mass at Abbotsford, Scott’s gothic pile in the borders, when his descendants have converted to Rome. Scott certainly is part of the atmospheric inspiration towards the conversion of the third Marquis of Bute, who does so much for the public face of the Scottish Catholic revival in the later 19th century. His own antiquarian and literary essays await modern reappraisal. As to wider Protestant Scotland it was still the case that Bute was an eccentric maverick in his conversion to Rome. Disraeli’s novel, Lothair (1870) written after his first term as Prime Minister, is a very interesting piece of the literature of Union where we have an English novel about harmonising relations between Scotland and England. A young, wealthy aristocrat – clearly based on Bute – has a Scottish Presbyterian guardian and a mentor in an English Catholic priest – a suave continental monsignor, no less; but in the end finds the proper cultural and confessional via media in the moderate, benign Church of England. The real Bute of course does no such thing, but Disraeli’s novel is an index of the way in which Roman Catholicism remained hugely feared in Britain long after the Reformation.

In the later 19th century there are many moments where Protestant Scottish writers come up against Catholicism. Two examples: Margaret Oliphant’s sympathetic treatment of the concept of purgatory in her short story, ‘The Open Door’ (1880) – or Robert Louis Stevenson’s approving portrait of the South Seas saintly missionary Fr Damian working among the lepers in 1890.

As we move in and out of the fine de siècle period we have some rather ‘odd’ Scottish Catholic writing. This would include Frederick Rolfe’s Hadrian the Seventh (1904) about a Scottish pope, by a disgraced former student of the Scots College in Rome. It is a bit ‘Father Ted’, and Hadrian is eventually assassinated by an Ulsterman. Another lost classic of Scottish literature, again by a student of the Scots College, this time ordained a priest, is John Gray’s Park (published in 1932). It references the explorer Mungo Park and is a brilliant anthropological study of religious system which sets out to demonstrate that dogma and discipline in religion can be intellectually liberating.

In the later 19th century the Celtic Revival does its part to make Catholicism in its Gaeltacht haunts more respectable. At the centre of the largely nationalist literary revival we find Hugh MacDiarmid wishing for greater emigration to Scotland from Ireland so that Scotland might be less puritanical – supposedly. We have texts such as Compton Mackenzie’s Catholicism and Scotland (1934), joining the thesis of MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir and others that Britishness and Protestantism had, more or less, been poisonous for the distinctively Scottish nation. Again in the 1940s we have Mackenzie’s Whisky Galore celebrating the attractive outsider-ness of the Catholic Outer Hebrides. Another Catholic convert, Tom Macdonald, writing as Fionn Mac Colla, writes a series of books, most noticeably the brilliantly written The Alambanch (1932), where a Scottish Catholic writer is so excoriating about Presbyterianism it is as though all the Scottish anti-Catholicism of three centuries is being paid back in triple measure!

A.J. Cronin creates Dr Finlay’s Casebook in the 1930s. Some viewers of the 1960s television series might have been horrified to learn that Finlay’s uncle was the Catholic Bishop and the good doctor also seems, like Cronin his creator, to be an alumnus of St Aloysius College.

Much of the work of Cronin, like Bruce Marshall, another writer of seemingly light comedy such as Fr Malachy’s Miracle, meditates time and again on authority – both man’s and God’s.

Into the 1960s, two of the most successful Scottish writers of fiction are George Mackay Brown and Muriel Spark. Both are also considerable poets, often writing about grace. Both are also especially brilliant short story writers. I would mention in particular Mackay Brown’s ‘Andrina’ and Muriel Spark’s ‘The Black Madonna’.

For me a proper, extended study of Catholicism in Scottish Literature wouldn’t be about proving theological superiority, but about demonstrating the Catholic cultural presence as a simple fact. Such a study might sometimes even be critical of the Catholic ‘view’. But, at all events, it would certainly help dispel a still pervasive myth in Scottish cultural history – the supposed invisibility and marginality of post-Reformation Catholicism in Scottish life.

This is a monumental work. At well over 700 pages it is monumental in length. It is also monumental in the range and quality of the bibliography that informs the author’s argument – the subjects or disciplines covered and referred to in the text include sociology, anthropology, phenomenology, psychology, philosophy, history, literature and theology. Also monumental are the scope and ambition of the author’s argument and the proposal he makes for Scotland’s future. This is nothing less than the recovery by Scotland of the sense of national identity it had prior to the Reformation.

Paul Gilfillan is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. But he makes it clear that he is an ethnographer, a type of sociologist who takes an active part in the social events he investigates and to this end, since he initially set out to write a study of ‘working-class nationalism at the time of its historic triumph in 1999’ (when the Holyrood parliament had its beginning), he spent some time as a manual worker, including two years with the East of Scotland Water Authority. He wanted to experience for himself the ‘worked body’, seeing this as an important part of the data, giving him access to working-class consciousness. Other parts of the data were the interviews he conducted with some of his fellow-workers as well as with some of the residents of his ‘natal village’ of Cardenden, an old pit village in Fife whose pit was closed in the late 1980s with consequences which form an important part of the book’s argument. The interviews and conversations are transcribed in the Scots vernacular (Fife variety, ken), complete with deleted swear words – this might be thought to limit the book’s readership since it would be hard to follow what is being said unless one had some familiarity with spoken vernacular Scots but the status of the Scots vernacular, its perceived inferiority to ‘proper English’, is another part of the author’s argument. Ethnographic data or evidence is highly concrete and particular and forms the basis for the author’s theorising; unlike some other approaches to sociological analysis, ethnography works from below upwards. And this author spent fifteen years conducting the fieldwork on which his book is based. Gilfillan’s experience of life in Cardenden leads him to depict two ‘ideal types’, the 1945 generation and the 1979 generation; the former consists of the older generation who knew the village when the pit was in operation, while the latter are the heirs of ‘Thatcher’ and the period after the pit was closed, the unions emasculated and the local culture experienced the full impact of ‘free market’ economics. A salient characteristic of the 45 generation, the author claims, is what he terms ‘the dictatorship of scarcity’ when the people were so needy that they could not think far beyond acquiring the means of survival, clung to the Labour Party as their natural political representatives and protectors, and viewed the whole business of nationalism and the creation of Holyrood as a completely unnecessary waste of money; the 45s spoke nostalgically of the village in its heyday when the pit was in operation and celebrated locality and community. And while the 79s witnessed a decline in the quality of village life, the loss of pride in locality and of the strong sense of community, the author claims that it was also liberated by means of ‘affluence and education’ and this liberation allowed them to analyse the new situation that Scotland found itself in during the decades that followed and to re-imagine what Scotland could be. This period saw Scotland return large numbers of Labour MPs to parliament but the Labour Party itself being out of office for nearly nineteen years. It also experienced the imposition of the poll tax and the closure of the pits, accompanied by what the author calls the ‘deindustrialisation’ of the central belt of Scotland where most Scots live. It began to dawn on the younger generation of the working-class that Scotland’s interests were subordinate to those of the English middle-class, that Scotland’s political will was frustrated by English Tory voters. At the same time the SNP shifted from being a party of the middle-class and became a left-leaning party that identified with the needs and aspirations of the working-class. In this way a direct line can be drawn from the rise of Thatcherism in England and the ascendency of the SNP in Scottish politics. The author finished his book shortly before the Scottish Referendum in September 2014, and he was fully confident of a victory for the independence ‘Yes’ vote. He must have been disappointed and possibly dumbfounded when this result did not transpire. I read his book after the General Election of May 2015 and for me it explained how it was that Labour lost so heavily in Scotland, overwhelmed by the surge in support for the SNP. Independence remains a strong possibility.

An independent Scotland is the author’s dearest wish, the *conditio sine qua non* for his proposal to be taken up. It is this proposal, however, that forms the most daring but, in my opinion, uncertain part of his argument. He considers the last three hundred years of British history to represent a wrong turning on the part of Scotland. He shrewdly observes, with support from other scholars, that it was the peculiar combination – of the Reformation in 1560, the union of the crowns in 1603 and the union of the parliaments in 1707 – that was this
combination that made it possible for a new identity – the unionist identity of being British - to replace and suppress the sense of national identity Scotland enjoyed before the Reformation. But today the forces that forged this sense of being British are much weaker than before – a shared Protestantism has lost much of its strength since in both Scotland and England Protestantism is not the powerful, assertive force that it was; the British Empire is a thing of the past; and an eviscerated Labour Party now means that working-class Scots have lost their trust in British, that is Westminster, politics. The conditions required for independence are now favourably disposed.

It is this strong possibility of Scotland becoming independent that encourages the author to put forward his daring proposal. Gilfillan is at odds with some of the major figures in the disciplines he inhabits, such as Marx, Durkheim and Freud, each of whom built their analyses on atheistic premises and identified modernity with secularism (and materialism in the case of Marx). It is this characterisation of modernity that the author most vigorously contests. For him modernity began in the twelfth century and was well developed in the thirteenth century by the Scottish Franciscan philosopher, Duns Scotus. He quotes a number of scholars who argue that it was in this period that there occurred a truly revolutionary turn in European and Scottish thinking as Scotus abandoned the fideism and supernaturalism of the early middle ages and began to study ‘public things’ such as society and sovereignty in their own right; instead of deriving the power of princes from God, he based it on the consent of the community, a point that was to influence the reasoning displayed in the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320. In short, Scotus recognised that human institutions have their own proportionate ends, perfections or beatitudes that are quite distinct from any supernatural ends or beatitudes; finite reality could be studied on its own terms as consisting of ‘secondary natures’ and ‘secondary causes’ independent of their divine origins. It was this breakthrough to secondary natures and secondary causes that opened the way for the natural and social sciences.

Gilfillan favours a ‘two storey’ model of the relationship between nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, arguing that each belongs to a different order. In this he finds himself opposed to the views of twentieth century theologians such as de Lubac and Rahner. But though they belong to different orders of being, nature and grace are related in the sense that nature is preeminent to grace; grace does not replace nature but builds on it and brings it to a higher level of perfection. The author takes this fact very seriously and proposes that sociological analysis can provide the theologian with an account of socialised human nature achieving its proportionate end and thereby being opened to the supernatural upon that basis. Human beings have two ends, one natural and the other supernatural, one proportionate to human nature and the other disproportionate but nevertheless activated by the purely human thoughts and actions of men and women; while redemption is ultimately a gift from God, a grace, it does not stand apart from the actions of human beings in the concrete circumstances of their existence as they pursue the ends proportionate to their natures as rational and loving creatures; grace is gratuitous but not adventitious. A sociology that is to do justice to the whole person must be open to the notion of the supernatural, must be what he calls ‘an integral sociology’. In many ways Gilfillan’s book is not just about what he terms ‘working-class dasein and mitsein’ but is a discussion about sociology, of the legitimate methodology of sociology, of the true purpose and scope of the discipline he works in. As he says in the Epilogue, during his long period of fieldwork he changed the ground on which he stood more than once; in order to make sense of the data he gathered he found his thinking developing and what began as an investigation of the rise of working-class nationalism became in time an effort to set out what a working-class project of modernity might look like. In developing his thinking and extending his reading he inevitably pondered issues of methodology.

A thinker who has obviously influenced Gilfillan’s ideas and his crusade to replace the ‘modernisation is secularisation’ paradigm dominant in present sociological theory is the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan. Not only do the author’s remarks about cognition and ontology chime with what Lonergan has said but he also adopts Lonergan’s project of using one’s self as a source of data. In Insight Lonergan invites readers to appropriate their own cognitional processes; in a rather similar way Gilfillan invites the working-class worker to become a worker-inquirer-knower by means of an act of self-understanding. Such an act of self-understanding would be therapeutic, causing the worker to recognise his subordination and his sense of cultural inferiority; it would be liberating since the worker would then be aware of his former unfreedom. It would also free the worker to appropriate the Christian tradition and to acknowledge the supernatural as that which completes the natural. In order to regain a true sense of Scottish identity Gilfillan suggests that it would be necessary to reach back to a time before the Reformation and proposes a ‘nationalism ... as a release and resumption of twelfth-century exigencies and resources among a younger generation.’ He invites Scots to wipe away the past 300 or 400 years and reclaim their medieval patrimony. This is a difficult book made all the more difficult by the author’s prejudice against the full-stop: many of his sentences roll on and on for fifteen or twenty lines of print. The author creates many vivid phrases but tends to repeat certain words and phrases over and over; he also manages to get a fair number of his Latin phrases ever so slightly wrong. While the argument is an intellectual tour de force, the book would have benefited from strong and clear-headed editing and a glossary of some of its key terms, and if he wishes his ideas to get wider circulation the author might consider writing up different elements of his argument in shorter article form. Having got these points off my chest, I must also admit that I learned a great deal from this work and feel enriched by my encounter with its argument. As for the likelihood of his proposal being taken up, that is by no means guaranteed and I suspect that there will be many attempts to hold Britain together as a political entity – perhaps by means of federation if other approaches fail – rather than resorting to out-and-out nationalism.

Joe Fitzpatrick is a writer and retired Inspector of Schools. His most recent book is The Fall and the Ascent of Man, published by the University Press of America, 2012. He is the author of many studies of Jesuit scholar Bernard Lonergan.
As a sociologist interested in the question whether Scottish Catholics have a preferential constitutional option for their nation, I undertook some empirical research before the 2014 Referendum among older working-class Catholics in a Fife parish within the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh to gain some answers to a series of questions:

- Do Catholics see any religious or spiritual significance in the Independence Referendum?
- Insofar as history involves a relationship between God and humanity, do Catholics have a particular historical consciousness which informs their answer to the question, should Scotland be an independent country?
- Do Catholics understand themselves as the ‘cradle’ of the nation?
- What are the alignments, if any, between social class, Christianity and the constitutional debate?

Deus Absconditus: Godless Catholics

My research involved conducting semi-structured interviews in the Spring of 2013 and re-interviewing informants again in the Summer of 2014. Prior to the referendum campaigns beginning in earnest, most of my informants told me they were not in favour of independence, and when exploring the question whether the referendum had any spiritual significance, informants not only answered no, but frankly asserted that they do not see God at work in their local parish and nor in Scotland, so that in this regard I would propose that my informants were not even aware of the traditional alignment of their politics with their faith i.e. their traditional politicisation of class as being more or less aligned with their Catholicism via voting for the Labour Party. While most voted Labour and obviously knew why they voted Labour, they did not articulate any Christian basis for this political option when I discussed with each informant whether their faith and politics mixed.

If the normal democratic process means informants are familiar with deciding between the different social policies of political parties but not particularly relating these political choices to their Christian faith, when we discussed the question whether ‘the nation’ or the constitutional question had any religious or spiritual significance, my informants were more or less at a loss as to how they might begin to answer this question.

My research question, then, was not whether informants would vote Yes or No in the Referendum but whether their Catholicism was in any kind of relationship to their mundane lives; whether it is socialised, contextualised or acculturated. I was interested in whether, for example, their Catholicism acted as a leaven in their lives to transcend or resist their social and geo-political reality; or whether their Catholicism has helped them accept their social and political subordination and accommodate themselves to established power and the status quo. Upon the basis of my informants being at a loss to even understand the sense of my asking them whether the Referendum had any religious or spiritual significance, I presumed they would have similarly been at a loss if I had asked them if being working-class had any religious or spiritual significance for them. My conclusion was that as a consequence of Scotland having been a stateless nation for so long, my informants were immersed in a thoroughly privatised, constitutionally subservient and a ‘well-behaved’ Catholicism that ‘knew its place.’
Viewed objectively, then, the Church in Scotland has not prevented a Nietzschean ‘religion of slaves’ from arising in light of the fact that articulating the relation between transcendence and the present historic moment has little existential purchase upon an older generation of Catholics. It seems my informants have no specifically Catholic historical or national consciousness that is any different from that of Scots of no faith, and they did not represent themselves to me as being tasked with the work of evangelization that has conscientised or politicized them as a result of having brought their faith into contact and conflict with social and economic and cultural realities. Instead of any politicisation of religion or a religious-based politicisation of the ‘social structure’ or ‘the nation,’ for instance, my informants can be fairly represented as being entirely innocent of the question of the relation of the supernatural and Scotland. As one of my informants, retired construction worker Jim (born 1940), told me when I asked whether the 2014 Referendum had any spiritual or religious significance: ‘Well it’s never been mentioned!’

Unsurprisingly, then, when asked whether they would describe themselves as a Scottish Catholic or whether God uses nations to mediate or work out the ‘salvation of souls,’ the answer of informants was a clear ‘no’ on both counts. Both Yes and No-minded voters neither articulated nor adverted to the existence elsewhere of any relationship between their faith and their Scottish context, and even those informants in favour of independence did not give any indication that deciding upon the proper or desirable constitutional form of their nation was in any way an exigence of being Christian, so that their politicisation of the nation or national identity was not the result of pressure exerted from their ‘being Catholic’. What emerged quite clearly is that most informants have a weak theological consciousness and a weak political and historical consciousness, and these weaknesses are aligned with each other so that the compound effect was that the constitutional crisis was not being lived through in a profound way where informants’ deepest identities were being brought to bear upon the great question of the day.

Despite this lack of awareness of any relationship between Catholicism and the movement towards Scottish independence, however, at the level of political practice there is well-established evidence that an alignment between Catholicism and the independence movement is on-going, so that if both Yes and No-voting elderly informants share in their non-alignment with their national context, it seems a common cause among both Yes and No-voting members of the younger post-conciliar generation is to overcome this non-relationship and develop a post-conciliar Scottish Catholicism that is self-aware and consciously part of the on-going cultural and political ferment characterising Scotland today. In a future article, then, I hope to address the question of a younger generation of Catholics raising their de facto alignment with the independence movement to explicit awareness as part of the wider post-Conciliar task of developing and renewing a Scottish Catholicism.

Dr Paul Gilfillan is a senior lecturer in sociology at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. His book, A Sociological Phenomenology of Christian Redemption (2014) is reviewed on page 15.

After the death of my nine-year-old younger son, Hugh, in the year 2000, I had to square my belief in an all-loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing God, with the knowledge that this God did not intervene to save Hugh. I have shared how I found, peace, hope, and a deeper faith, in three previous pieces. I’ve wanted to finish the sequence with a piece on joy, which I’ve been tinkering with for years. It was almost there in time for his anniversary in autumn 2011, but I couldn’t quite let it go. I tried very hard again last autumn, but, ironically, I was overcome with grief around his anniversary, more so than for several years, and found myself trying to write about joy, while looking at the text on a computer screen through a veil of tears. It was a timely reminder that for those on the road back to life after their children’s death, there will always be the odd pothole. And it was a perfect illustration of what I am trying to say below.

It was only after Hugh’s death that I began to discover what ‘joy’ really meant. I doubt if I ever gave the word much thought before I began to think about becoming a practising Christian in my twenties. The only occasion I was likely to utter the word was singing Christmas carols – ‘tidings of comfort and joy’, etc. I
suppose I thought it was akin to other words like ‘jollity’ or ‘merriment’ – the sort of super-happiness most of us are obliged to pretend to feel at Christmas.

However, when I became a Catholic, I had to take joy seriously. As part of the ceremony of being received into the Church, I was given the sacrament of Confirmation, which Christians believe confers the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including joy. Not only that, but the day chosen for my reception was the Third Sunday of Advent, just before Christmas. It is known as ‘Gaudete Sunday’, from the opening words of the Second Reading at Mass, from St Paul’s Letter to the Philippians – ‘Be joyful (= Gaudete in Latin) at all times’. However, most modern versions of the Bible translate those words as ‘Be happy at all times’. Unfortunately, some Christians try to take this literally – the so-called happy-clappries, because of their relentlessly upbeat services and fixed smiles (older readers might remember the Salvation Army had a pop group in the 1960s called the Joystrings, which says it all). I do not doubt their sincerity, but how can anyone be told to be happy at all times?

For me this was impossible: I am not naturally the life and soul of the party, being a bit of a worrier and prone to bouts of depression. Although I did feel happy the day I was received into the Church, it soon wore off, leaving me with the burden of now feeling guilty that I wasn’t happy all the time. One of the prayers said at every Mass in English until a new translation was introduced in 2011 included the words ‘as we wait in joyful hope for the coming our Saviour Jesus Christ’. Increasingly, I fastened on this prayer, feeling that I was anything but joyful most of the time.

Many years after my reception, clinical depression returned in a big way, for which the one Sunday Mass (an obligation for Catholics) at our parish church was no remedy but actually made things worse, since the liturgy was exactly that happy-clappy type. I stopped going on Sundays, although I sometimes used to sit at the back of quiet weekday Masses at churches near where I work where no one was trying too hard to be happy. There was music at Hugh’s Requiem in our parish church but it was chosen by Margaret, my wife, and I with his life and death in mind, and the Mass celebrated by our very sympathetic parish priest, who had known and liked Hugh and had cried with us at his bedside after his death. It was a truly consoling experience, the church packed with friends and relatives and even complete strangers touched by his death. I felt strangely elated throughout the day - in the church, at the cemetery, and at the reception afterwards - but remember thinking at the time how weird it was to be happy at my son’s funeral.

That euphoria soon evaporated once everyone had gone back home. Hugh died on 21 November and we have always found significant that next month of increasing darkness until the winter solstice on 21 December. However, the grief was not completely unremitting. One evening, a couple of weeks after the funeral, during a TV supper with Margaret, and our surviving son, Thomas, we all laughed out loud at something on The Simpsons. It was a token of hope that we might feel something like happiness again in the future. But I was still bothered by joy: even less than before could I accept that we should ‘be joyful at all times’ if that meant being happy. Not a few well-meaning people told us we shouldn’t be sad at Hugh’s death because we now had our own personal saint in heaven. What I wanted to reply, but never did, was that if Jesus could weep at the death of his friend Lazarus, so could I for Hugh.

The natural world has always been a source of consolation for me, but, after Hugh’s death, my sensitivity to it seemed heightened. Even the afternoon Hugh died, I remember the spectacular sunset, as the three of us, Margaret, Thomas and I, drove back home, leaving Hugh alone in the hospital. And a week later, glimpsing the sea through the bare trees of the cemetery. Part of me was struck by the immensity of the universe, which rolled on, apparently indifferent to the death of one small boy, and yet I couldn’t help appreciating its beauty. On both occasions, I wondered if I wasn’t merely distracting myself from the pain I should be feeling. However, shortly before Hugh’s death, we had acquired a puppy, and having to take it out for walks at least twice a day, usually along the beach behind our house, became our salvation. Several times that winter and many times since, I was moved to tears by landscapes and seascapes. Some have certainly been tears of grief for the loss of Hugh, with whom I will never be able to share these experiences, but, gradually, I recognised that some of the tears are of what I have come to identify as joy at the sheer loveliness of creation. Their source is, I believe, a wellspring bubbling deep within me, like a stream of oxygen, preventing me from drowning in despair, continually keeping me alive, however little I had realised it before. The trauma of Hugh’s death stripped bare the outer layers of my being, which had insulated me from the deeper realities of life, both good and bad, allowing me to perceive things more clearly. As a Christian I can recognise this spring as God within me, although I wouldn’t deny that those of other faiths or none can share the same experience.

The acquisition of a car some time later allowed Margaret and I to return for Sunday Mass to the church where we first met, which offers us a choice of services where we can avoid music altogether if we wish or hear something which does not deny that the Christian story includes darkness as well as light, and which is the only way we can be true to ourselves.

Hugh’s death has allowed me at last to come to terms with joy. Joy is not the superficial super-happiness I mistook it for but a deeper interior state, full of peace. The good news is that I do not have to disown the desperate sadness, which sometimes it is perfectly natural to feel. I know that it will pass and that it does not touch me at my core. I can be joyful at all times without always feeling happy.

This is the last of four reflections by Ian Campbell on the death of his son Hugh, written between 2004 and 2013. They were first published in Compassion, the newsletter of The Compassionate Friends, an organisation which supports bereaved parents and their families after a child dies (www.tcf.org.uk). We would like to thank Ian for sharing his journey through grief.
National Pilgrimage 2015

This year’s National Pilgrimage was switched from its usual venue of Carfin to Keith, the birthplace of St John Ogilvie, for the 400th anniversary of his martyrdom. After a heatwave during the week the day started with heavy thunderstorms but the sun returned just in time for the Mass to start at the ground of Keith Football Club where in 1976 Ogilvie’s canonisation had been celebrated. Archbishop Cushley who led the Mass with a large number of priests recalled being present then as a student. There was a good attendance in the stand and enclosure. The Aberdeen Diocesan Choir sang the Mass in Latin. Bishop Gilbert spoke at length about the life of the saint, acknowledging the presence of some of his descendants.

This swelled the presence the following day for the annual Mass at ‘the Scalan’, Scotland’s first post-Reformation seminary. It lies in the Crown Estate of Glenlivet and on the edge of the Cairngorm National Park. Considerable efforts have been made to improve access and it is now possible to park on the other side of the Crombie Burn which runs past the old College. Bishop Gilbert was again the preacher and spoke of the importance of the Gordon enclave for the revival of Catholicism in Scotland. Fr Jim Thompson, President of the Scalan Association, urged the congregation to recruit new members to support the development of the site. Next year is the 300th anniversary of the opening of the College.

Homeless Jesus for Scotland?

Anyone interested in helping bring the Homeless Jesus statue to Scotland? The possibility of locating one of the sculptures in Glasgow is being explored.

The statue depicts a homeless man clad in a blanket and lying on a park bench, with bare feet showing the wounds of crucifixion. It has received a seal of approval from Pope Francis, who gave one of the statues his blessing in St Peter’s Square (see Open House 249); another has been accepted by the Methodist Central Halls in Westminster. Several have been installed in cities across North America.

The artist, Tim Schmalz is a convert to Catholicism. His intention is evangelical. Someone said of the statue: It is easy to sidestep a vagrant. It is not so easy to sidestep your beliefs. The total cost of installation is in the region of £25,000 and contributions are being sought. One way of realising such a sum would be to have 25 people who would each pledge to raise £1,000. It must be money that is not diverted from the region of £25,000 and contributions are being sought. One way of realising such a sum would be to have 25 people who would each pledge to raise £1,000. It must be money that is not diverted from helping the homeless directly. Any reader interested in the evangelical potential of such a project is invited, in the first instance, to contact the Editor.

Towards a Common Vision

The Joint Commission on Doctrine (Church of Scotland-Roman Catholic Church in Scotland) is to hold a day conference on a recent document from the World Council of Churches, entitled The Church: Towards a Common Vision. The conference, which will take place in Edinburgh on 3 December, is one of a series held by the Joint Commission since 2009. It is working on a response to the WCC document and the conference will be a way of sharing the document and the churches’ response, as well as reflecting on the influence that growing doctrinal consensus can have on the way the churches relate to one another.

The main speakers will be Dame Mary Tanner, former European President of the WCC, Rev Professor William Storrar, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and Dr Geraldine Smyth.

If you would like to attend, contact rmilne@sofscotand.org.uk by 30 October.

New book for pilgrims

Sister Margaret Minards recommends a guide book for pilgrims in Scotland.

Having spent many wonderful weeks in Scotland over the years on pilgrimage on the Islands and on the mainland, I was thrilled to get A Pilgrim Guide to Scotland by Donald Smith.

It is not a book to be read cover to cover. It is a book to be used as a valuable resource, for anyone planning to retrace any of the various pilgrimage ways that criss-cross Scotland.

Use it as you plan your way, along with maps etc. and use it as you go along, allowing it to nudge you to little places that you may not have known about. Use it too on the way, as you start the day, stop along the way, and look back at the end of the day on the richness of what you have experienced. The reflections and prayers are ideal for this kind of inner journey.

I remember coming across stone engravings around wells, on my wanderings, with the Jesuit inscription ‘AMDG’ on them marking the Jesuit missionary work in Scotland, but the book did not mention them. Perhaps they are too recent, but there is plenty within this book to keep a pilgrim interested.

A Pilgrim Guide to Scotland (Paperback, 2015) is published by St Andrew Press.
**LETTERS**

**The Editor of Open House**
email:editor@openhousescotland.co.uk

All correspondence, including email, must give full postal address and telephone number.

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**The point of bishops**

June’s edition was excellent. The origin of *Open House* had been a mystery to me so Jim McManus’ piece was welcome illumination.

Jim Lawlor’s plea was an excellent masterclass in restraint. The link between the two articles was the apparent lack of engagement of our bishops - from the revelation that only one bishop subscribes to *Open House* to the passive, almost uncooperative approach to the questionnaire for the October’s synod.

I would find it truly astonishing if the bishops do not read *Open House*. It is but one source of what the engaged community of souls is thinking but is not an insignificant one given the breadth of its input. In any event, understanding is improved through others’ perspectives.

The bishops’ apparent absence from the questionnaire process raises the question: what is the point of bishops? Certainly, if they have not properly consulted as they were required to do, what is the point of taking part in October’s meeting? Perhaps it is deliberate, a passive aggressive resistance to potential questioning of long settled positions? Beyond enforcing internal discipline and wielding administrative ‘power’ (and receiving the appropriate level of admiring attention), as far as the dwindling congregations are concerned are they not just increasingly less than impressive décor? The issues raised for discussion and consultation in October are of tremendous importance to many individuals. They deserve respectful treatment. Why do the bishops appear to care less than the credible and courageous Jim Lawlor?

**Michael Dean, Glasgow**

**Congratulations**

Congratulations on the production of an excellent 250th edition of *Open House* and thanks to all who founded it and those who keep it going. We need it more than ever to reflect the voices of lay Catholics in Scotland and encourage debate among all those interested in developing the vision of Vatican II which Pope Francis so powerfully invokes. The deeply clerical church of the past is disappearing, but what remains of it inhibits the development of a more communitarian model in which lay people can play a greater role. *Open House* has an important part to play in shaping the future.

**Edward Collins, Glasgow**

**Church without priests**

Those who are afraid that Scotland will run out of clergy should read Garry Wills’ *Why Priests*. That might help rid them of the proprietary mentality that Catholics cannot worship, pray, have liturgies, or enjoy the blessings of community, without the services of a male, celibate priest. The Vigil Parish movement in Boston, Mass., USA, has been showing the world for the last decade that lay men and women are perfectly capable of running a parish.

This grassroots resistance movement sprung up spontaneously as a way of keeping open parishes that Cardinal Sean O’Malley wanted to close in 2004 in order to raise money to pay off abuse victim settlements. Guided by the Holy Spirit, parish communities all around Boston occupied their churches and ran their own services, week in week out for 10 years, just as meaningfully and as lovingly as any priest could have done. Matter of fact, some of our female spiritual leaders gave better homilies than many a priest.

We all felt that we were re-creating the same ecclesia that early Christians held in their homes long before an institutional church or priests were invented. When a visiting Jesuit came to participate in one of our to be ‘a charism of the Holy Spirit’.

So to answer the fearful question – ‘what kind of Church would you have without priests or seminaries?’ - the answer from Boston would be that you could have healthier, more honest, more authentic churches, led and run by laity, occasionally ministered to by the few servant priests, but always witnessing a gathering of the faithful, regardless.

**Arthur McCaffrey, Boston**

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**LIVING SPIRIT**

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour; and bears a likeness of you, Most High. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

*From Francis of Assisi, Canticle of the Creatures.*

Divine Grace keeps faith with us when we have broken faith with her. Through the years of alien madness, she did not abandon us; she kept the planets turning, the seasons recurring, even struggled to put the upside down right side up, to cleanse the channels of the garbage, to blow the smog out to sea.


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.

BOOKS

Mental Health: The Inclusive Church Resource
Jean Vanier & John Swinton
Darton, Longman and Todd, 2014

This book is a collection of personal experiences, theological and practical resources, featuring first-hand accounts of mental illness and a theology of mental health by Jean Vanier and John Swinton. Jean is the renowned philosopher-theologian and famous founder of L’Arche organisation. John is Chair in Divinity and Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen and an expert in disability theology and pastoral care. He is a former mental health nurse and mental health chaplain. The Inclusive Church, which was founded in 2003, raises awareness about the way people feel excluded by the church. (see www.inclusivechurch.org.uk). Mental Health is the ideal handbook for churches seeking to be welcoming and open to all.

I was asked to write this review by my parish priest. My first reaction as I read through the pages was that my experience of mental illness was not like that. They don’t understand. The book is too bland. But as I took the time to digest what I was reading I had to admit it’s a pretty accurate account. The contributors, both those who shared their stories and Jean and John, do understand and describe the experience of mental illness well.

The tales of Paul, Liz and Mary are poignant and I can empathise with the trauma that they have suffered as a result of mental illness. Mary’s insight into her condition and her belief that mysticism and psychology are not mutually exclusive was of particular relevance to me. After almost 20 years of psychological estrangement I was lucky enough to be able to attend university and complete a degree in Psychology and English. The story of Louis with his mystical devotion to the Virgin Mary is one of a touchstone in a maelstrom which also struck a chord. I recall leaving my home at midnight on Christmas Eve and hitch-hiking on a 400-mile journey that would find me sheltering for months in a Salvation Army Hostel in London. I carried with me a crucifix in my rucksack. It was my security. It seems both unavoidable and regrettable that it takes so long to find a path to recovery. Healing eventually required professional intervention, faith, the grace of God and a lot of support from family and friends. My experience of the church during this deeply unpleasant period was of mostly well meaning offers of help and inclusion that seldom, if ever, touched or met the soul within me. I was treated as a social problem which I certainly was. I don’t think anyone within the church at that time was clued up on the nature of mental illness or knew anything about coping with it. I was equally ignorant of the nature of my illness and bereft of the opportunity to learn anything about it. I think it’s necessary to heal mentally before you can heal spiritually. Mental Health draws attention to those shortcomings within the traditional church and suggests ways in which it might improve. For example, the Inclusive Church itself and the recovery movement featured in Mary’s story would have been a great asset in those days.

The chapters on theology task the church and its response to mental illness with meeting, inclusion and belonging. The accent is on openness both in the church and in those who seek healing; that it is important to recognise both the person and the potential behind the illness. The concept of Shalom affirms that wholeness is not the absence of illness but the presence of God. Similarly, healing does not mean taking something away from the lives of those with mental illness, but adding something to them.

The book provides a structured account of the challenges mental illness presents to today’s Christian churches. The pages on additional resources proved intriguing, and tempted me to follow up with some extra reading. To sum up, professional help is crucial and psychosis generally responds well to psychoactive drugs. Mental Health asks the church to develop a spiritual competence educated by a respect for the nature of the illness and love for the individual behind it. There is a sound emotional and reasoning thread running through the pages of this book. Mental Health is an extremely educational resource and a good read.

Bill Devlin

FILM

The Priest’s Children
(Svecenikova djeca) (2013)

Director: Vinko Brešan
Stars: Kresimir Mikic, Niksa Butijer, Marija Skaricic

After the Irish referendum which approved gay marriage by a wide margin a wit remarked if the proposal had been to abolish the Catholic Church that would have been carried too. Possibly not. Some of those who supported gay marriage were practising Catholics. So they want the church. They just want a different church - a church which puts mercy and compassion foremost. They want a non-judgmental church, especially in matters related to sex.

The Priest’s Children was made in Croatia. Croatia is a Catholic country at the other end of Europe. It’s about the same size as Ireland. The film has not been well received by the critics but it is reported to be the most popular film ever in Croatia. The critics haven’t liked it because the beginning and end are very different and it doesn’t succeed in linking the two parts together. So why has it proved to be a crowd puller in Croatia?

The first part is Irish in tone. It is about a naive young priest who could have stepped out of Fr Ted. He is shocked that there are so many deaths in his new parish and not enough births. The old parish priest tells him not to get upset. But with the local pharmacist he conspires to put a hole in the condoms that are in demand by
everyone. Mayhem ensues. This is the church we love to laugh at.

The film ends quite differently. The old parish priest turns out to be a child abuser. He goes to confession to the young priest. This means it will remain a secret. ‘Going to Confession’ is presumably still part of the culture in Catholic Croatia. So it raises a real question. The Vatican has recently set up a tribunal to investigate bishops who have not reported paedophile priests. Some have complained this might be against the confidentiality of confession.

What does the ‘seal’ of confession mean? It was famously explored in Hitchcock’s *I Confess*. Secrecy is psychologically a deeply human trait. We all have our secrets. We would like to think if we shared one of them with someone else that person would not feel free to reveal them. The Catholic Church upholds that tradition with the inviolability of Confession. It is worth noting that it is unknown even for those who have left the priesthood to have revealed anything they heard in confession. Others might wish at times they had had such protection.

Today’s media lives off making public the private lives of individuals, especially in matters of sex. With regard to sex abuse the law is moving to make confidentiality a crime. Priests know that if anyone came to confess for any reason other than to express repentance they would have to warn them it would not be sacramental. They would not be protected by the seal of confession. However the priest who makes himself available to hear the confessions of the damned does run the risk that he could be bound to silence in a way that nobody else would. It is possible that a criminal could confess and assume that the priest would not tell.

Recently voices have been raised about the need for sanctuary even for child abusers. It is not difficult to imagine how hard it might be for them to face the consequences of their behaviour. It is possible to believe that the first step towards admission could be private confession without the immediate consequence of public denunciation. The law has occasionally been tempted to challenge priests about confessional secrecy, for example in matters related to terrorism, but it has not succeeded.

The idea of confession as something sacred creates a frisson of horror in those not used to it. It is the only sacrament unchanged by Vatican II which says something in itself. Where it survives it is often reduced to an infantile form. It is among Catholics often the butt of jokes, without much thought about secrecy. Where, as in Ireland, the church lost its moral authority the baby went out with the bath water. And yet, no Christian church could or should survive without a ritual of reconciliation. Sometimes confidentiality is required to get the process started. It is this challenge that *The Priest’s Children* is unable to grapple with.

Norman Barry

**Reviewers**

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

Bill Devlin is a parishioner of St Paul and St Mary, Glenrothes, and works in the retail business.

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Moments in time

We leave the main road at St Kessog’s Catholic Church in the small village of Blanefield in Stirlingshire and take a private road, which climbs past some large houses then emerges on to open hillside beyond a gate. There is a good view over beautiful Strathblane, so near to Glasgow; only twelve miles as the crow flies, but completely surrounded by hills. Immediately to our right lie the Campsie Fells with the isolated peak of Dumgoyne ahead.

The track follows the route of the pipeline built in the nineteenth century to carry the water from Loch Katrine to Glasgow. The pipes are buried below the ground except where bridges and aqueducts have been constructed to cross the steep defiles where burns flow down from the hills. A buzzard glides below us, and we hear calls coming from a group of tall trees which we think are young waiting impatiently to be fed. The path passes through belts of woodland, then an open stretch colourful with summer flowers; purple foxgloves, yellow monkey flowers and many thistles, which are attracting butterflies on this sunny afternoon. In one place we count over fifty orchids growing together, a magnificent sight.

When we approach a farm, swallows appear, hunting low over the ground and swooping into an outbuilding where they are nesting. We are well above most of the scattered dwellings but pass one cottage where a group of hens are foraging for food or enjoying a dust-bath. Now we can see far ahead the distinctive shape of Ben Lomond and the other hills around Loch Lomond. After a short break sitting on a log, we continue around the foot of Dumgoyne and see the distillery beside the main road. We hear a rustling noise in the bracken and see two roe deer bounding off up the hill.

We are now approaching Killearn where the track finishes. The village is dominated by the church spire and the enormous monument to celebrate George Buchanan, the sixteenth century scholar, who played an important part in the education of James VIth, one of Scotland’s most successful kings.

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

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