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Canadian House of Bishops criticised over communications policy

The editorial comment in last month's issue of the monthly, independent Canadian national Anglican newspaper, *Anglican Journal*, has cited "the trend within the House of Bishops to take segments of their meetings and their deliberations behind closed doors" as one example of how "the goals of effective communication are not always met".

The editorial recalled how last year's Canadian General Synod had commended a document entitled 'Vision and Principles of Communications', which had indicated that communication in the Church should be "respectful of others" and "should reflect God's mission and be timely, accurate and participatory". The communications process was seen in the document as enabling Church members "to respond, to converse, to reprove, to add and to enliven both the process and the product".

The *Anglican Journal* editorial said the document had also asserted, critically, that "in order to be effective and responsible, communication must be transparent, timely and accurate".

The leader comment indicated that the media – in particular, the *Anglican Journal* itself – had traditionally enjoyed relatively liberal access to meetings of the House of Bishops. In the last year, though, it said that the bishops had "drafted their meeting agendas with sessions that are closed to outsiders", instead choosing to



Anglican Journal editor, Leanne Larmondin (Photo: Saskia Rowley)

issue letters to the Church at the conclusion of their meetings.

The newspaper commented that, speaking in favour of taking part of their meeting behind closed doors and communicating those conversations later in a letter to the Church, Bishop Victoria Matthews of Edmonton had asked: "Do we speak for ourselves or let the press speak for us?"

The editor, Leanne Larmondin, commented: "The bishops are to be commended for wanting to communicate directly with the

wider Church. However, in choosing to open this line of communication, they are at the same time cutting off another line – the media, through which much of the wider Church habitually receives its information.

"While the House of Bishops is not an elected body ... and is therefore not accountable to the wider Church in the same way [as elected bodies], the bishops nonetheless do make decisions at their meetings that affect the Canadian Church and those meetings are covered by the national Church's budget ... If the

members of the Church are expected to understand and accept their leaders' decisions and actions, it is important for them to hear about the deliberations that led up to those conclusions. If they do not comprehend the context behind the bishops' decisions and statements, there are bound to be misunderstandings ... Transparency is the key."

The Church of Ireland House of Bishops is always a closed meeting and does not issue any accounts of its business following its meetings.

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Editorial

THE DOCTRINE COMMISSION

In 2004, the bishops of the Church of Ireland established a Church of Ireland Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine. However, as any distinction between, on the one hand, the bishops meeting as a group and, on the other hand, the House of Bishops, is difficult to keep clear, the move to establish the Commission was questionable from the outset. It became more questionable when it was announced that the Commission was to report specifically to the House of Bishops. Thus, the General Synod would not be part of any reporting procedure.

The faith of the Church is a matter for the whole Church. Certainly, bishops must guard the faith, yet it is not their faith that they must guard by their office but the Church's faith. The teaching and guarding of the Church's faith is a solemn obligation of all three sacred orders, and bishops have a special responsibility in this, as in the areas of Church unity, discipline and mission. Because the faith that is to be guarded is the faith of the whole Church, doctrine is very much a matter for the General Synod as a whole, that is, the House of Bishops and the House of Representatives - bishops, clergy and people - deliberating

together. The Doctrine Commission (as it is now widely known in 'shorthand') simply should not have been set up as it was.

So far, the bishops' Doctrine Commission has produced the document, *The Authority of Scripture* (2006). However, when one looks at this publication, one finds that it is a series of five essays written independently by members of the Commission. It is not an agreed report at all, however interesting the contributors' essays may be. Having said that, the document did have six agreed theses on the subject of Scriptural authority, but these covered less than two pages in the 167-page 'report'. Moreover, they were elementary theses and it is certain that the bishops did not need to go to the elaborate lengths of establishing a Commission in order to work them out.

The Doctrine Commission should be the subject of a major review and, if it is going to do more than advise the bishops, it should have a clearer synodical basis and should be expected to reach real consensus on the topics it addresses. A range of views on whatever subject - and as in *The Authority of Scripture* - can easily be found elsewhere.

Liturgical Notes

Revised Common Lectionary

13th JANUARY

THE FESTIVAL OF THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Liturgical colour: White

The Old Testament reading from **Isaiah 42: 1-7** describes the Servant of the Lord, God's chosen, in whom his soul delights. These are words echoed by the Voice heard by Jesus as he came up from his baptism by John, described in the Gospel, **Matthew 3: 13-17**. From this time on, Jesus would interpret his Messiahship in terms of the Servant depicted in Isaiah.

Psalm 29 proclaims that the voice of the Lord is upon the waters.

In his speech recounted in the second reading from **Acts 10: 34-43**, Peter makes clear that the ministry of Jesus as the true Messiah began with his baptism by John.

ANGLICAN CYCLE OF PRAYER

Pray for the Anglican Church of Australia.

Phillip John Aspinall is Archbishop of Brisbane and Primate of Australia.

20th JANUARY

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Liturgical colour: White

Friday 25th January is the festival of the
Conversion of St Paul; White

The Old Testament reading from **Isaiah 49: 1-7** describes the calling of God's Servant to reveal the Lord as a light to the nations.

Psalm 40: 1-12 reflects the calling of the Messiah in willing obedience.

In the first of a series of second readings from **1 Corinthians 1** - beginning with **1-9** - Paul gives thanks for the calling of the Corinthians to be Christians.

The Gospel reading, **John 1: 29-42**, is an account of the calling of the first disciples.

ANGLICAN CYCLE OF PRAYER

Pray for the Anglican Church of Kenya.

Benjamin Nzimbi is Archbishop of Kenya and Bishop of All Saints' Cathedral Diocese.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is also listed for prayer.

Lisburn parishioner and his special chair inspire new children's book

By Karen Bushby

A young boy with a life-limiting illness is the star of a new book aimed at giving children a better understanding of disability.

David McCarter, who is nine years old and a parishioner of Christ Church, Lisburn, Diocese of Connor, is the inspiration behind *David and his Wheels go to the Park*, written by his mother, Heather.

Illustrated by Gemma Ramsden, the book was launched shortly before Christmas in Ceara Special School in Lurgan, Co. Armagh, where David is a pupil.

Mrs McCarter, a classroom assistant, wrote the book three years ago. She admitted she never thought that she would see it published; although she had always aspired to become a published writer, she said that it was "absolutely amazing to see your name in print in a bookshop, adding that the launch was "a very special day for David; his dad, Gary; and myself."

She continued: "It was written for children at school to help them better understand how David is and to make them feel that they can come



Heather McCarter, the author of *David and his Wheels go to the Park* (seated right), is pictured at the launch of her book with her son, David, and the Revd Paul Dundas and the Revd Diane Matchett, the rector and curate-assistant respectively of Christ Church, Lisburn.

up and speak to David when they see him. I hope to get the book into schools, because in mainstream schools there are children, like David and his friends, who are being bullied because children just don't understand."

She went on to pay tribute to her "brave little boy"

whom she described as her inspiration and her life: "He is the reason this book came about in the first place".

David was born with cerebral palsy and epilepsy and doctors did not expect him to live more than a year. "We know that David is life-limited, but, through this book, he

will be remembered forever," his mother said, adding: "I would like to write a series of books, so David can go on adventures here, there and everywhere to show other children that David can do anything; he just needs his wheelchair and a little help."

Damien Wilson, Group Editor of Johnston Publishing (Northern Ireland), publishers of the book, told guests at the launch: "When I first met David, I thought: 'How could I cope?' However, once I got to know the family, I realised they did more than cope; they have a very full life as a family, and this book is just a wee glimpse into that life."

The Revd Paul Dundas, rector of Christ Church, said that David was well-known in the parish, where his father was involved in the Church Lads' Brigade (CLB). "A year ago, the CLB presented some money towards David's wheelchair. On that day, there was not a dry eye in the church, when Heather spoke on behalf of David. He is very much loved," Mr Dundas added.

David and his Wheels go to the Park is available from Easons and other bookshops, price £5.99.)



Albert Smallwoods (centre) presents a cheque for £4,100 to Bishop Ken Good (right) for children's projects in India. Looking on is the Revd Derek Creighton of the Derry and Raphoe Board of Mission and Unity. The money was raised through donations from friends following Mr Smallwoods' recent visit to India; it will be sent to Bishops' Appeal and distributed through Christian Aid.



Pictured at the annual service of the Church of Ireland Men's Society (CIMS) held recently in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, are (from left) Archbishop Alan Harper, Bishop Alan Abernethy (who was commissioned as the CIMS's new chairman), Dean Patrick Rooke and Wilfred Young (CIMS honorary secretary).

Tribute

The Revd George William Browne

The following is an abridged version of the address of the Ven. George Davison at the funeral service of the Revd George Browne in Oughteragh parish church, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim, on Monday 10th December 2007.

George Browne was born just over 65 years ago on 11th October 1942. He was the eldest child of Samuel and Susan Browne and a source of great joy to them. Along with his sisters, Annie and Margaret, George grew up on the family farm at Corgar, where, indeed, he lived his whole life.

I would like to extend my sympathies to George's wife, Pearl – a tremendous support to him, not only in his ministry but also in every aspect of life for their happy and fulfilling twenty-two years together – to George's sisters and the whole family.

George spent the whole of his education locally here at Oughteragh National School. He was an able boy who loved to read, an interest he was never to lose and he devoured newspapers and books all his life. He obtained a scholarship which would have enabled him to attend Cavan Royal School. However, there was plenty of work to be done on the farm and Sam Browne felt that his son would be better employed working alongside him; so George's lifetime career in farming began at the age of 14.

George took a great interest in the farm, and particularly in his cattle. He was a quiet, gentle sort of a man and he had a great love for the animals which were in his care. That applied equally to all creatures, whether the latest, new-born calf or the family cat or even the pheasant or the pigeon which had begun to visit regularly, because a soft-hearted George could be relied on as a source of food.

He was a good neighbour and a well thought-of member of the community. As in all farming communities, neighbours mean a great deal to one another, and George appreciated the friendship and support of his neigh-



bours and was glad to be able to give a hand in return or to enjoy a chat with them when there was a moment or two to spare. As all of us knew, there was nothing George enjoyed more than a chat and the opportunity to catch up on the latest news!

When he was just 18 years old, George joined the little Orange lodge which met at Corgar. It was the beginning of a lifelong association with the Loyal Orders from which he gained so much in terms of friendship and interest. It goes without saying that he in turn gave a great deal in return, more than we could possibly mention today.

He was Co. Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Leitrim, a position he had occupied for the last 25 years. In addition, he was also Deputy Grand Master of the Royal Black Institution in Co. Cavan and a Past President of the Apprentice Boys Club in Cavan.

But though he took great pride in these positions, what meant most to him was the opportunities for friendship which he found in the various organisations. He loved to meet with others and he would travel the length of the country to attend a meeting or a service or a parade. I know from speaking to just a few of his friends in the Orders that he will be greatly missed there, as in so many other spheres of life.

George, however, had always something else on his mind. He had, from his earliest days, been a faithful member of this parish. He had been involved in all aspects of its life from Sunday

School to select vestry, and the faith which was nurtured there played such an important part in his life.

George felt the call of God in his life, not only to be a faithful follower, but also to be one who was a preacher of the Good News. It was over 30 years ago that he was first licensed as a lay reader by Bishop Edward Moore and in the years which followed, what service he gave to the parishes of this diocese!

It will not surprise you to know that George reckoned that he had led worship in every parish throughout the length and breadth of the diocese. In difficult days, when clergy were maybe even scarcer than they are now, George Browne would get in his car and drive here, there and everywhere, in fair weather and in storm, to play his part in making sure that the worshipping life of the people continued. His sincere and faithful ministry was appreciated by all.

It was my privilege as Diocesan Director of Ordinands to assist George through the process which led to selection, training and ordination. In this, as in so many other aspects of his life, George was very thorough and we spent many hours together as he prepared for interview, and then worked through coursework and essays, with Pearl sitting in the car outside!

It was with a sense of great fulfilment that George was ordained deacon in Kilmore Cathedral in June 2002. He had done his training placement in Florencecourt with the Revd Mark Watson and after ordination, he went to work alongside the Revd Sue Patterson in the Kildallon and Arva groups, taking over the care of the parishes when Sue moved to be Dean of Killala; latterly, he also worked with the Revd Geoff Wilson in Swanlinbar. And he blossomed! George loved his work as an ordained minister. As the folk in those parishes will vouch, he gave himself tirelessly in their

service and in the service of the God who had called him. Like so many of our non-stipendiary clergy, he worked long hours, and gave more of himself than would have been asked or expected, visiting, leading worship and sharing in the work of parish life.

And yet he still had a wider ministry in the diocese: the connections made over the years meant that he was a welcome visitor at harvests and other special occasions. On a personal note, George was a great help to me organising the duty rota for the diocese; on occasions, he would rearrange his own rota to free a reader to help me out, or, indeed, he would help out himself.

I think if I was asked to sum George up in one word it would be 'faithful'. He was so dependable – if he said he would be somewhere or do something, you could be sure that it would happen. And that was what endeared him to so many.

George worked continuously, and he even kept going when his health was not as good as it ought to have been. And yet he was in good form over this last little while – many of you will have been in his company at the senior citizens' party in Carrigallenon last Thursday, or at the Girls' Friendly Society/Boys' Brigade enrolment in Killeshandra on Friday evening.

His sudden passing the following morning, whilst working on the farm, has sent a shock through us all. What will we do? How will we cope? How do we face the future? Many answers will have to be worked out. George was a small man in stature, but he leaves a big gap in so many places.

George had a strong faith and a strong sense of calling. At this time, when we feel so great a sense of loss, the faith which meant so much to George teaches us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and that God is real, present and passionately committed to each one of us.

Christian culture becoming 'a thing of the past' – reaction to first-ever NI religious knowledge survey

By Karen Jardine

Levels of religious knowledge in Northern Ireland are even lower than in the Republic of Ireland, according to a new opinion poll conducted by Millward Brown Ulster on behalf of the Iona Institute, the Evangelical Alliance of Ireland (EAI) and the Evangelical Alliance (Northern Ireland).

The poll, the first-ever conducted on this subject in Northern Ireland, was a follow-up to a similar religious knowledge poll conducted in the Republic of Ireland on behalf of the Iona Institute and the EAI, the results of which were released last April. This found low levels of basic religious knowledge in the population of the Republic of Ireland, especially among young people.

The latest poll allows a comparison between levels of religious knowledge both in the North and South of the country and between Northern Roman Catholics and Northern Protestants.

It found that, contrary to popular belief, Northern Ireland may be less religious

than the South. For example, Church attendance figures in the North were lower than in the South and now this poll showed that levels of religious knowledge were also lower.

The survey found that levels of religious knowledge among Northern and Southern Roman Catholics were roughly the same. However, in general, levels of religious knowledge among Northern Protestants were lower than among Northern Roman Catholics.

Some of the key findings of the new Northern Ireland poll were:

- Only 42 per cent of respondents in the North could say that there were four Gospels (Roman Catholics 52 per cent, Protestants 36 per cent).

- Only 55 per cent of respondents could name the Holy Trinity (Roman Catholics 65 per cent, Protestants 45 per cent).

- Only 60 per cent of respondents could name the first book of the Bible (Roman Catholics 54 per cent, Protestants 68 per cent). This was the one ques-

tion where Protestants were considerably more likely to know the answer than Roman Catholics.

- Only 31 per cent of respondents could identify Martin Luther as the man who started the Reformation (Roman Catholics 30 per cent, Protestants 32 per cent).

The poll also found a marked difference between the levels of knowledge among younger and older age groups. For example:

- Just 21 per cent of Northern Ireland respondents aged 16-24 could say that there were four Gospels, as against 54 per cent of over-65s.

- Just 17 per cent of respondents in the younger age group could say the First Commandment, as against 46 per cent of the older age group.

Responding to the opinion poll, Stephen Cave, of the Evangelical Alliance (Northern Ireland), said: "The results of this poll throw serious doubt on the claim that we are a 'Christian country'. Overall, the figures are not good, but the drop in knowl-

edge, almost halved within a generation, indicates that the Christian faith is becoming less meaningful to those under 25 years of age.

"The findings present a serious challenge to the Church and those involved in religious education, but it is all too easy to point the finger. Older people of faith must seriously consider how they are passing on what they know to future generations."

Seán Mullan, of the Evangelical Alliance of Ireland, commented: "Following our poll at Easter, this poll again shows that the notion of Ireland, both North and South, being a Christian culture is becoming a thing of the past. The notion that Christianity can be transmitted through the culture from one generation to the next is clearly no longer valid.

"These findings present a challenge to all those who believe that the message of Jesus Christ needs to be heard in Irish society. Communicating that message is not primarily the job of schools or state institutions; it is the job of those who still believe the message."

The Friends of the Charles Wood Summer School launched

By Tanya Fowles

The Charles Wood Summer School has been running successfully for the past 14 years.

The objectives of the Summer School are to promote the music of Charles Wood and his association with Armagh; to provide opportunities for people to develop and enhance skills associated with music in worship; and to present programmes of music to the highest achievable standards within both a concert and liturgical context.

Due to the project's long success, a support group – the Friends of the Charles Wood Summer School – has been formed. This will enable



The Mayor of Armagh, Cllr Charles Rollston (front row, centre), is pictured at a civic reception at the Palace for members of the Charles Wood Summer School committee at the launch of the Friends of the Charles Wood Summer School.

members to receive advance notice of all events, as well as invitations to receptions and pre-concert talks by the visiting conductor.

The annual subscription is £30 for an individual and £200 for corporate membership.

(Membership forms

are available from the Tourist Information Centre, Armagh, or from members of the Charles Wood Summer School committee.)

Dr Tutu hopeful for Kenyan peace



Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu says he has great hopes that a peaceful resolution can be reached between Kenyan parties engaged in a violent conflict after presidential elections.

"There is a great deal of hope since the ODM [the opposition Orange Democratic Movement party] and the government have indicated they are open to negotiations, with one strong condition on the part of the government that the violence will have to end first," Dr Tutu told journalists last week.

On the same day, Dr Tutu met President Mwai Kibaki. The former Archbishop of

Cape Town said the Kenyan leader had indicated he was ready for a coalition government if the opposition accepted his terms. The violence began after it was announced that Mr Kibaki had won in what was seen as a close vote in the election for president held on 27th December.

The South African cleric arrived in Kenya on 3rd January after a call from Mvume Dandala, a former leader of South Africa's Methodist Church and now General Secretary of the Nairobi-based All Africa Conference of Churches.

Dr Dandala is among Church leaders seeking to play a peacemaking role in the country's conflict.

Advertising Christianity

The Australian Bible Society says a national advertising campaign sponsored by several denominations aims to renew public interest in Christianity.

The campaign uses Internet and television advertisements to support evangelism by local Churches around the nation.

The Roman Catholic Church's first cinema advertising campaign began in 36 cinemas nationally on 6th December with 15-second advertisements screened alongside US comedian Jerry Seinfeld's animated feature, *Bee Movie*. The ads were also to be shown alongside the film

adaptation of Ian McEwan's book, *Atonement*, which shows from 26th December, the biggest day of the movie-going year.

Churches which participate in the campaign host events for their local community under the 'Jesus - All about Life' banner.

"The strength of the campaign is that the more local churches put in, the more they benefit. Our challenge is to get the local Church switched on," said Martin Johnson, communications manager for the campaign, adding: "We want to motivate quiet Christians to share their faith". [ENI]

Polish nun's 'dream' recipe

A Polish nun who thought up her best cake recipe in a dream and whose cookery books have become national bestsellers has now released a special DVD containing tips about her culinary masterpieces.

"When I first joined my order, I asked to work in the kitchen," Sister Anastazja Pustelnik, a member of the Roman Catholic Church's Daughters of Divine Love, explained to a recent specially-convened press conference at the Polish Bishops' Conference secretariat.

The nun, whose four rec-

ipe books have already sold 850,000 copies, was speaking at the launch of the *Sister Anastazja's Cookery School DVD*.

She said she had inherited some recipes from her parents and others from older nuns, but had thought up most of them herself, including the best, 'A Nun's Secret', which came to her in a dream.

"I made the cake in my sleep," Sister Anastazja told journalists. "When I woke up in the morning, I wrote it all down and then cooked it in the kitchen, and it turned out rather nicely." [ENI]

Jerusalem Bishop opposes alternative Anglican conference

The Bishop of Jerusalem says he has not been informed of a Holy Land meeting planned for June by a group which opposes some Anglicans over their tolerance of homosexuality, adding that he believes it will be divisive for the Anglican Communion.

"Regrettably, I have not been consulted about this planned conference," said Bishop Suheil Dawani in a 3rd January statement. "The first I learned of it was through a press release. We Anglicans who minister here have been left out in the cold."

A group of Anglican leaders who met in Nairobi in December announced they would invite bishops, senior clergy and laity from every province of the Anglican Communion to attend a 15th to 22nd June meeting. Called the Global Anglican Future Conference, it is scheduled for one month ahead of the Lambeth Conference.

"I am deeply troubled that this meeting, of which we had no prior knowledge, will import inter-Anglican conflict into our diocese, which seeks to be a place of welcome for all Anglicans," said

Bishop Dawani.

The conference's website described the meeting as providing "opportunities for fellowship and care for those who have decided not to attend Lambeth".

Canon Chris Sugden, of Anglican Mainstream, attended the Nairobi meeting, at which bishops and others from East and West Africa, Latin America, Australia, Canada and Britain, were present. Canon Sugden told ENI that the conference was not a specific challenge to the Lambeth Conference.

The Jerusalem confer-

ence is a new development threatening the worldwide Anglican Communion following the decision of the US Episcopal Church to consecrate an openly gay divorcee, the Rt Revd Gene Robinson, as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003.

On 1st January, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Revd Katharine Jefferts Schori, was quoted on BBC radio as saying the Church was "paying the price for honesty over sexuality". [ENI]

Bill of Rights plan - political responses to *Gazette* editorial

At the time of going to press, official comments on the *Gazette*'s 4th January editorial have been issued by Sinn Fein's Martina Anderson, MLA and the Democratic Unionist Party's Arlene Foster, MLA. The Ulster Unionist Party issued a Party Statement.

**MARTINA ANDERSON,
SINN FEIN**

Sinn Fein's Equality and Human Rights spokesperson, Foyle MLA Martina Anderson, said that the *Gazette*'s "negative comments" on the Bill of Rights needed "to be put into perspective from a human rights and equality perspective".

Ms Anderson said there was "no hidden nationalist or republican agenda in seeking a Bill of Rights", and continued: "We are all trying to develop a Bill of Rights that protects the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. We are working with the parties and with civic society to put the legacy of a conflict behind us so that collectively we can bring about a society truly based on respect for human rights and equality for all."

She added: "We would ask people from all sections of our society to reject well-meaning but ultimately destructive views around the Bill of Rights potential and to ensure as

the Bill of Rights consultative process develops that they take ownership of it themselves by expressing their own views and opinions."

ARLENE FOSTER, DUP

DUP MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Northern Ireland Executive member, Arlene Foster, welcomed the intervention of the *Gazette* into the debate concerning the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Mrs Foster said: "This issue has been discussed on the floor of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the combined representatives of the pro-Union community, from across the Unionist spectrum voiced their concerns regarding the process and the personalities involved in the drawing up of a Bill of Rights for the Province. The intervention of the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, a publication not known for making political utterances very often, is reflective of the wider concern that exists within the Unionist community over this issue."

Mrs Foster said there were some individuals involved in the drawing up of the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland "who seem determined to use the exercise as a Trojan Horse for some of their political demands which have nothing to do with a rights

agenda at all". She added: "Any Bill of Rights must be able to command significant cross-community support."

The leading DUP MLA concluded: "The DUP welcomes this timely intervention and hope that those directing the Bill of Rights process will sit up and take notice."

**ULSTER UNIONIST
PARTY STATEMENT**

"The *Church of Ireland Gazette* has made an important contribution to the debate over suggestions made by some for a Northern Ireland 'Bill of Rights'. That such a respected Church newspaper should draw attention to the grave uncertainty felt by many in our society about Bill of Rights proposals should be a wake-up call to all involved in discussions on the subject.

"As stated by *Gazette* editor, Canon Ellis [BBC interview], Northern Ireland already possesses extensive human rights and equality legislation. Above all, as part of the United Kingdom, the Human Rights Act already gives us a Bill of Rights, securing fundamental rights and liberties for all citizens. To move beyond this in order to enshrine a particular social or economic agenda is incompatible with parliamentary democracy – a point made in the Government's own recent Green Paper on

constitutional reform. Elected representatives, not judges, should be taking these decisions because elected representatives, unlike judges, are accountable to the people.

"It is also important to note that the Belfast Agreement does not require any additional Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland beyond the already existing Human Rights Act. The Agreement merely requires that the 'scope' for supplementary rights is considered. After a decade of deliberation and debate, no consensus has been reached on this matter. The case for supplementary rights therefore remains unproven, with significant sections of political opinion and important groups in civil society unconvinced of the need for rights additional to those already enshrined in UK legislation.

"The Ulster Unionist Party has actively participated in the Bill of Rights Forum, ensuring that the concerns shared by a broad swathe of our society in Northern Ireland are robustly raised in the Forum's proceedings. It is very clear from the Forum's deliberations to date that the consensus necessary for extensive supplementary rights (such as previously proposed by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission) does not exist."

• Report, back page

Letter to the Editor – Combating HIV

A *British Medical Journal* article by five AIDS experts (10/04/04) argued that in Uganda, where HIV in adults fell from 15% to 5% in a decade, each component of the ABC approach (Abstain, Be faithful, use a Condom) was needed. Debate was often polarised between those who emphasised A or C, they said, and B was "the neglected middle child". It seems obvious, but there would be no global AIDS pandemic were it not for multiple sexual partnerships.

Martin O'Connor's article (*Gazette*, 30th November, 2007) focuses on the plight of women who contract HIV from

unfaithful husbands. Logic suggests that these husbands have ignored ABC; and that all teenage boys should be taught that such behaviour is morally wrong.

But Martin describes an alternative which "challenges" ABC, preferring SAVE – Safe practices (abstinence, condoms, transfusions), Available medication, Voluntary testing, Empowerment. The crucial "middle child" of marital faithfulness is not just neglected, but abandoned.

Christian Aid's website claims that wives who get HIV from their husbands have been "betrayed by a 20-year-old slo-

gan" - ABC. It claims to be "abandoning ideology in favour of practical, accurate information". HIV is "a virus, not a moral issue". But are there not some dangerous half-truths here (and perhaps a little ideology too)? HIV is a virus, but the spread of HIV by sexual promiscuity is surely a moral issue. These women were not betrayed by ABC, but by their husbands, who ignored ABC. And will SAVE, by preaching 'empowerment' of women but not promoting marital fidelity, not increase the vulnerability of wives? True empowerment of wives comes from teaching their husbands faithfulness.

The components of SAVE do have a place in addressing the AIDS crisis strategically, but the best protection for wives is the stark message for their husbands in a Ugandan poster included in the *BMJ* article: 'Zero Grazing'. That moral message must not be sacrificed on the altar of political correctness. It would be tragic if the remarkably successful ABC were replaced by SAVE rather than being sensibly augmented by it.

Dermot O'Callaghan

27 Monument Road
Hillsborough
Co. Down BT26 6HT



Continuity and change

Garrett Casey examines the relevance for the Church of Ireland of some of the recently-released facts and figures on religion from the 2006 Republic of Ireland Census.

When preliminary results of the 2006 Census in the Republic of Ireland were released last year (*Gazette*, 20th April 2007), there was general satisfaction in the Church of Ireland that it (the Church) had bucked the trend since before independence and, as in 2002, had shown an increase in numbers, both actual and as a percentage of the overall population. Considerable interest was also shown in the fact that an increasing proportion of Church of Ireland members were of non-Irish nationality.

Recently, the Central Statistics Office released much more detailed results from the Census on religion which give a snapshot into the Church of Ireland population in a changing and increasingly diverse society.

POPULATION SPREAD - COUNTIES

Firstly, the new figures show that the growth which was the cause of comment earlier in the year was spread fairly evenly across the country.

The numbers describing themselves as members of the



The entrance to St Patrick's church, Greystones, Co. Wicklow. According to the 2006 Census in the Republic of Ireland, Greystones has the highest proportion of Church of Ireland members (9.77%).

Church of Ireland increased in every county. The highest percentage growth was in the west where, in counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, the

region (Wicklow, Kildare and Meath) which grew by 1,885, from 16,126 in 2002 to 18,011 in 2006.

As has been the case his-

'The numbers describing themselves as members of the Church of Ireland increased in every county'

Church of Ireland population grew by 18.7% from 2002 to 2006. The largest numerical growth was in the mid-east

torically for many years, the Church of Ireland population, while it retains a presence throughout the country, is slightly more concentrated in the east and the border counties than the population as a whole. Some 58% of the Church of Ireland population lives in Leinster (compared with 54% of the national population) and 10% in the counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal (compared with 6% of the national population).

NATIONALITY

On the issue of nationality, the Census results flesh out the initial figures released last April. 73% of Church of Ireland members hold Irish citizen-

ship or joint Irish citizenship. The overwhelming majority of the remainder (19%) holds UK citizenship, a large proportion of whom probably come from Northern Ireland. The next largest nationality among Church of Ireland members is Nigerian (1,404), followed by German (1,156), Lithuanian (578) and South African (537). 2% of the Church of Ireland population in the Republic is from an African country, compared with 0.8% of the population as a whole, according to the Census.

POPULATION SPREAD - TOWNS

According to the report, the town with the largest Church of Ireland presence as a proportion of the population is Greystones, Co. Wicklow (9.77% Church of Ireland), followed by Wicklow (5.32%) and Malahide, Co. Dublin (4.74%). Other towns in other parts of the country with substantial Church of Ireland presences include Passage West (3.98%) and Bandon (3.76%), both Co. Cork, and Westport, Co. Mayo (3.67%).

The local authority area with the largest number of Church of Ireland members as a proportion of the population is Wicklow (6.88%), followed by Cavan (6.21%), Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (5.68%) and Donegal (4.47%). The Census also confirms that the Church of Ireland still has a strong presence in the countryside, with 47% of the Church of Ireland population living in rural areas (48% in 2002), compared with 39% of the national population (40% in 2002).

OCCUPATIONS

Unsurprisingly, given the

Church of Ireland's strong presence in the countryside, farming features prominently among the occupations in which Church members are

represented in the DEFG categories (manual, non-manual, semi-skilled and unskilled) - 31.8% to 41.5% nationally.

AGE

On the subject of age, the Church of Ireland population is older, on average, than the population as a whole. 14.86%

involved. 9.46% of Church of Ireland members over 15 years of age are farming, fishing or forestry workers, compared with a national average of 4.42%. The Church is also well represented among managers and executives (8.96%), compared with the national average (6.36%).

By contrast, the Church is significantly under-represented among the Gardaí and members of the defence forces, with only 0.25% of Church of Ireland members of working age in these fields, compared with 1% nationally. They were also less likely to be working in central or local government (1.44% than average (2.97%)). Unemployment amongst Church of Ireland members is slightly lower than the overall population, at 4.12% compared to 4.45% nationally.

Overall, in terms of socioeconomic groups, compared

of the Church of Ireland population is aged 65 or above, compared with 11.04% of the population as a whole, while 23.8% of the Church of Ireland population is aged 19 or younger, compared with 27.23% of the population as a whole.

'... a lower proportion of Church of Ireland people are single than Roman Catholics'

with the national population, Church of Ireland members are over-represented in the ABC category (employers,

The differing age structures may explain why a lower proportion of Church of Ireland people are single (47%) than

Roman Catholics (54.37%). 2.65% of Church of Ireland members are separated and a similar percentage (2.7%) divorced. The figure for separations and divorces are highest amongst those who said they had no religion (7% separated or divorced).

VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The 2006 Census also included a new question on participation in voluntary activities in recognition of the importance of this sector in the economy and society. Respondents were asked whether they had participated in voluntary work in a number of categories in the four weeks prior to the date of the Census. The results showed higher than average participation by Church of Ireland mem-

cultural organization (1.26%) than average (1.38%).

CARERS

The vital role of carers in society was also recognised with a new question in the 2006 Census which asked each person whether or not they had provided regular unpaid personal help to a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability. 4.79% of Church of Ireland members over 15 years of age said they had (the national percentage was 4.8%). Interestingly, Church of Ireland carers were mostly female (61%), which was also the case for most other groups surveyed. The exceptions were Muslim carers, who were 62% male, and carers who said they had no religion, who were 53% male.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Readers will draw their own conclusions on what these figures represent and their implications.

Undoubtedly, as the editorial in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* said when the preliminary figures came out, the large number of immigrants in the country poses profound challenges for both the Church and Irish society as a whole. Other parts of the Census, however, emphasize the continuity of established patterns.

Perhaps one of the 77 Church of Ireland members of French nationality (according to the Census) might put it thus: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

Garrett Casey is Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Communications Officer.



Co. Wicklow is the county in the Republic of Ireland with the highest proportion of Church of Ireland members (6.88%).

Dear Mr Adams,
It is with regret that I tender my resignation as Principal of St David's National School with effect from your receipt of this letter.

I am doing this for the good of the school in which I have served for so many happy years.

I do not wish to discuss with you my reasons for this decision, and ask you not to try to contact me or visit me.

I wish the school well for the future – as I also wish you well in your ministry in St David's.

I would ask that you respect my wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Emily Wilson.

Tears slipped down Emily's cheeks as she signed the letter and addressed the envelope.

Thirty-seven years was a long time to spend in the one school. Not only a long time, but a lifetime!

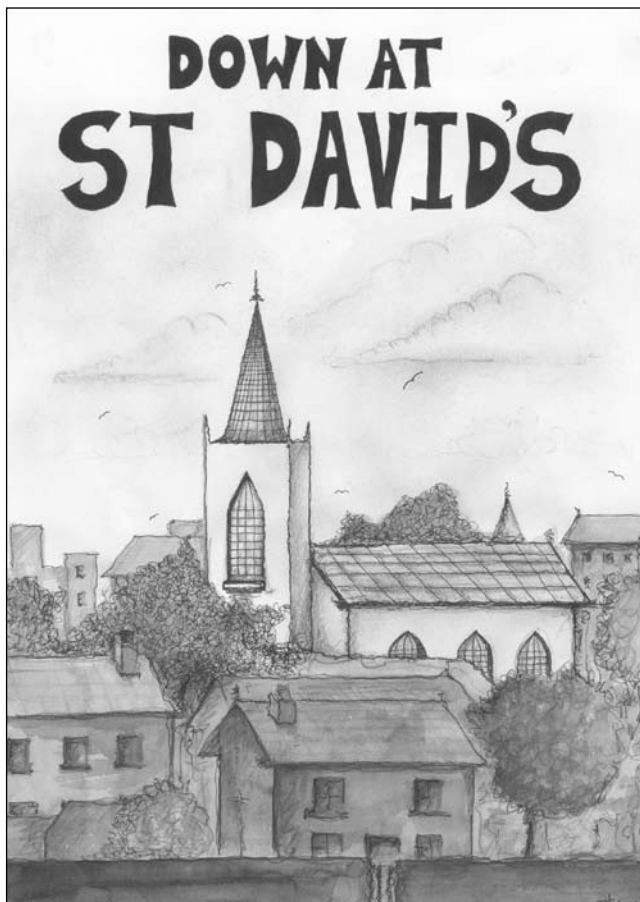
Emily had come to St David's National School when it had been just a two-teacher school and she was the assistant.

Over the years, the school had grown and when the principal resigned, she had applied and been appointed as the new principal – all of thirty years ago.

Emily had never married. Her family had been split over 'mixed marriages' and when her brother married a local Roman Catholic girl, her father never spoke to his son again and had never even acknowledged his grandchildren.

The whole episode had broken her mother's heart and had certainly broken her parents' relationship.

And Emily found that it had also affected her relationships with men. Any time she went out with a fellow and found out that he was Roman Catholic, she just backed off. She couldn't help it.



By Ted Woods

It was then she had begun to drink. It helped her cope with her singleness. It was not by choice that she had remained unmarried, but, having been hurt even by

agencies, when things got really difficult. Like, trying to deal with complaints from demanding parents, of whom there was an increasing number lately.

'... she had retreated into herself and consoled herself with alcohol'

some of her co-religionists – "charming cads" – she had retreated into herself and consoled herself with alcohol.

Not that she had let it interfere with her job as teacher and principal – at least not until now.

She had a bottle of vodka in her desk drawer – locked away with a bottle of mouthwash. But it was only there for emer-

Whereas in her early days, parents sided with the teachers, now they always sided with their children against the school, however badly their little 'darlings' may have behaved.

But Christmas this year had been very trying. Just before the holidays, she had been notified by the Department of Education and Science that the school was going to have a 'Whole

School Evaluation'. A team of inspectors would arrive and assess every aspect of school life.

Now, it was acknowledged by everyone that Emily ran a good school. Her staff was loyal and the Board of Management was supportive. But it would mean that all the school policies would have to be revised and updated. It was a prospect that filled her with dread – Health and Safety, Admissions – already there were a few appeals in the pipeline – Ethos, Outings, Mobile phones. The list of policies to be revised was endless.

The more she thought about all that would have to be done, the more she panicked and the more she drank.

Her sister had called to see her just after Christmas, but had got no answer. And then she got suspicious as Emily's car was parked outside. And through the glass door she could see post accumulating in the hall. Emily hadn't mentioned she was going away. Her sister went round the back and saw the kitchen in a mess – discarded cups, dirty plates and empty bottles of vodka and whiskey.

Becoming alarmed, she called the police, who broke in and found Emily comatose in bed, with more empty bottles lying everywhere on the floor.

An ambulance had been called and she had been taken to hospital.

And it was from the hospital ward that Emily had written her letter.

School had reopened after the Christmas holidays with no principal. She had contacted no one. Her shame was too great.

The only thing left was to do the honourable thing and resign.

But where she was going to go and what she was going to do when she got out, she hadn't a clue. And it scared her.



Edward Vaughan

From slavery to freedom

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to preach at a large, inner-city church in Sydney. From memory, I think I might have preached on a passage like Galatians 4, which speaks of our liberation from slavery to sin.

Afterwards, a man came up to speak to me. He had recently been released from prison, after serving a long sentence for a serious crime. He wanted someone to pray with him, because he found life outside of prison so hard. While jail life was in many respects awful, it also had certain benefits.

In jail, life was stable, predictable and comfortable. On the outside, he had to deal with unemployment; find his own accommodation; learn skills like budgeting, shopping and cooking; as well as deal with people's attitudes of condemnation. Ironically, prison was a safer and more comfortable environment for him. He didn't really want to go back to prison, but he found it surprisingly difficult to live as a free man.

Paul's message to the Galatian Church is similar. You have been set free – now, don't let yourselves slip back into slavery.

When Paul writes to the Church in Galatia, he does not write as a remote academic theologian, nor does he speak as an authoritarian apostle motivated by a desire to impose his will upon other people. Paul writes as a pastor who passionately and deeply loves his people. The strength of his language comes from the depth of his love for these people.

Their relationship was born in testing times. If I understand Galatians 4: 13 correctly, he means that an illness meant that he stayed some time in Galatia and, therefore, had the opportunity to teach the people there. It sounds like his illness was

something to do with his eyes. The Christians in Galatia reached out to him with compassion in his time of vulnerability. If it were possible, the Galatians would have torn out their eyes and given them to Paul!

At the end of the letter, which Paul has dictated to a scribe, Paul signs his own name, in the large letters which sight-impaired people use. I have often wondered if this visual impairment is the "thorn in his flesh" which he begged the Lord to remove. Certainly, it is a reminder to us of how much the issue of weakness is at the heart of Paul's ministry.

What is striking here is the warmth of Paul's relationship with the Galatian Church. He is clearly a very passionate and loving man. He talks of this Church as his very own child, and himself as its mother. He is

'It hardly seems patriarchal to remind a group of people that you feel about them like their mammy!'

caught up in the throes of childbirth, and he feels the pain of labour as he waits for it to grow into the likeness of Christ.

This is not the only place where Paul uses the language of motherhood to talk about his relationship with a Church. In 1 Thessalonians 2: 7, he also describes himself as a "mother caring for her little children", and then goes on to say that he was like a father who encouraged, comforted and urged the believers on to living godly lives.

It's ironic that Paul, who is so often vilified as patriarchal, is so comfortable in stepping outside gender-based categories to describe his relationships. It hardly seems patriarchal to remind a group of people that you feel about them like their mammy!

The reason Paul is so maternal for the Galatian believers is that he is concerned for them, because they are allowing themselves to fall back into slavery again. They have tasted the freedom and the liberation of the Gospel, but now are in danger of slipping back into slavery.

A group of people have visited the Galatian Church and started teaching beliefs and practices which cut across the Gospel which Paul delivered to it. This group of people say that faith in Jesus is important, but it needs to be supplemented by a range of religious practices which would prove that they are "real Christians". One of these practices is circumcision. Another is "observing special days and months and seasons and years", by which he probably means placing themselves under the Jewish calendar of festivals and religious observances.

Paul's response may be described as jealous. These people are zealous in their desire to persuade the Galatian Church, but they are actually zealous in their desire to separate Paul from those he loves. It is as if Paul's little baby is about to be abducted by sinister people of evil intent. His response is not cool and detached, but passionate. He will fight for his children, and seek to remind them of his love, which comes out of a desire for them to know the truth.

Paul's words stand as a challenge to those of us who have responsibility to minister to God's people - would we describe ourselves like mothers who care so much for their children? The message of the Gospel is reflected in the manner in which we minister the Gospel. The message of God's passionate love for his creation comes via the passionate love of those who are called to minister in his name.



Alison Rooke

Smile!

“Editor,” I said, “I think the time has come for a new photograph for my column. It’s been a long time and I expect I look different.”

“Fine,” he replied graciously, “just send me the new image.”

So, as some of you may have noticed, the updated ‘me’ heads this column. Not, of course, that I have changed much in the past five or six years; some may even say younger looking! And who am I deluding?

Photographs at Christmas time are as much part of the tradition as plum pudding or brandy sauce.

“Just look this way – smile!”

Thus, granny clad in new jumper, papa sporting the pink paper hat are captured for another year. Children on new bicycles, clutching dolls or riding tractors look out from many a family album.

I suspect that each family has one member who is the keen photographer. In our family, it is the cousin who, for more Christmases/weddings/christenings/bigbirthdays and other major occasions than I care to remember, has taken responsibility to record the moment for us.

Periodically throughout the evening/afternoon/morning, the camera will appear. We will all groan

and she will organise us into groups; formally/informally; up the stairs, around the Christmas tree, by the front door, beneath the mistletoe, beside the flowers; glass in hand, posy in hand, present in hand – oh, we’ve had it all! And then, over the years, we have had variations on the same theme: the dreaded camcorder suddenly thrust into one’s face with the direction to “ignore me and just carry on naturally.”

It occurred to me this year that, despite the fact that cousin is always taking photographs, we don’t

away merrily, organising us, chastising us and, ultimately, holding us all together. That’s when Christmas is at its best in the family context; it’s about touching base, grouping, regrouping and then each going out to follow his/her separate path – sure in the support of the family framework.

Not that our ‘family’ experience was great fun this Christmas. It was a holiday punctuated by illness and, at its worst, by a two-day sojourn in hospital for one member with those dreaded and emotive words ‘pneumonia’ and

‘meningitis’. I do not wish to hear the words “I feel sick” from anyone for a very long time. So, not the best of

*‘I do not wish to hear the words “I feel sick”
from anyone for a very long time’*

often see the finished product. This she blames on the digital camera; she prefers the 35mm film, she tells me. So do I, for then at least we have something to look at as reward for our labours. She’s great this cousin – we love her. We give her a hard time, but she’s well able for it. She is the eldest cousin on one side of the family, a teacher – her position sure.

The rest of us – the sporty one, the practical one, the heedless one (me), the dreamer, the clever one, the boy – we all jockey for position while she snaps

times for us as a family, but infinitely more challenging and sad and terrifying for many others, I know. To tell you the truth, I’m quite glad this year to take down the decorations and consign this one to the memory book.

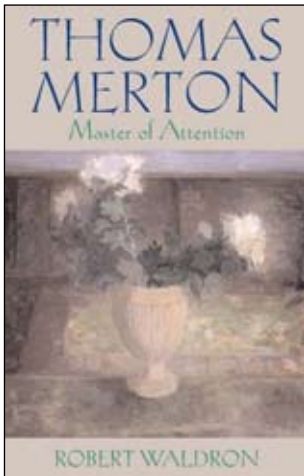
“Do you remember the Boxing Day we spent in A and E?”, we might say in the future. And, yes, I’ll remember it clearly, very clearly.

Despite it all, of course, cousin managed to capture a few of the more agreeable moments.

“Come on, smile ... thank you.”

**THOMAS MERTON,
MASTER OF ATTENTION**
Author: Robert Waldron
Publisher: Darton,
Longman & Todd; pp.144

MY son has just completed his M.A. on 'The Photographic Image'. Two things usually happen when I mention this to anyone: first, I bumble out some attempted explanation as to what he is up to; the other is that the person to whom I am talking usually asks: "What sort of a job will he get with that?"; the implication being that this is jolly interesting, but is he not really wasting his time!



From now on, I shall refer people to this book, *Thomas Merton, Master of Attention*, and especially to the chapter on 'The Camera and the Contemplative Eye'. What I find attractive in this book is not only that Merton's brilliance and inner-sight are revealed, but that its analysis is undertaken by another brilliant mind - that of the author, Robert Waldron.

This is a book of less than one hundred pages, but we are led through a superb analysis of the attentive genius of Simone Weil compared with Thomas Merton, and are called upon to live the contrasting turmoils and joys of a contemplative search for God. Some may find

the abstract and inclusive character of the search as missing the tread of their own path, but others will find themselves in the company of old friends - poets, photographers, artists of east and west - and all woven throughout by someone who himself understands how fragile and transitory are life and beauty.

This is a book which links the mind and the heart, as a soul seeks for God in all the experience of life. It just might lead the intellectual sceptic back to a living faith.

John Mann

RESURRECTION

Author: Alistair McGrath
Publisher: SPCK; pp.87
Price: £10.99

THIS is a strange little book, strange and powerful.

Strange, because physically it would not look out of place in the Children's section of the bookshop - glossy, hard cover, glossy pages, square format (eight inches square). It is short - of its 87 pages, only 58 are actual text; the rest is illustration or left artistically blank.

But it is also powerful, a profound meditation on the meaning and impact of the resurrection, expressed simply, clearly and beautifully. The author goes to the heart of the resurrection, allowing the original novelty and strangeness of it all to shine through, as it has personally for him in relatively recent times. He makes an eloquent plea that, regardless of the centuries of pious overlay, we allow ourselves to be taken by surprise once again.

Alistair McGrath is a scholar - he is Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford. But his is not an academic book; neither is it a conventionally devotional book. It is a wonderful mixture of all sorts of

things, allowing art, poetry, Scripture and personal experience all to speak. And it isn't really a meditation either, not in any conventional sense, in that it lacks the dreamy quality so often associated with meditation. He speaks with admirable clarity and simplicity, making this one of the most pleasurable readable books which I have come across in a long while. He speaks, dare I say it, with authority, authenticity and grace.

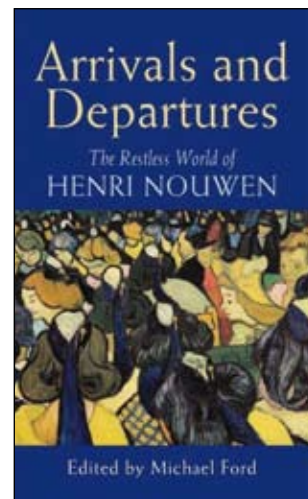
Maybe this is a new sort of book, joyfully defying category. And it is wonderful. For anyone who wants to get closer to the resurrection, both as an historical event and as a present reality, it would be hard to better. I really can't recommend it highly enough.

Timothy Kinahan

**ARRIVALS AND
DEPARTURES - THE
RESTLESS WORLD OF
HENRI NOUWEN**
Editor: Michael Ford
Publisher: Darton,
Longman & Todd; pp.144

THIS is an unusual book, struggling with the contradictions apparent in the pursuit of the truth which God wills us to find and learn.

It is sub-titled *The Restless World of Henri Nouwen* and through it we are introduced to the first and fundamental contra-



diction of the book, which lies in the driven, restless nature of Henri Nouwen himself, seeking the still centre of God - or, better, his still centre where he may experience the presence of God.

Taking examples of frenzied travel all over the globe undertaken by Henri Nouwen, and reflected in several of his books, the editor, Michael Ford, makes us face the dehumanising effects of technological thought - as opposed to reflective thought. It is a short book and can do little more than skilfully pose the questions arising from challenging situations in which Henri Nouwen has found himself, but nevertheless the questions do hang there, enticing our answers and response.

The paradoxes are in the nature of God's work within us and amongst us, drawing us to consider what is real and meaningful in human existence: "God is the God who continues to offer us life wherever and whenever death threatens"; "Why do human beings learn so much, so soon about technology, and so little, so late about loving one another?"; "No mask can make people happy. Happiness must come from within ..." There are contrasts presented to us also between the freedom of international travel, with its expansion of our experience and knowledge, and the risk and constraint highlighted by security demands - which suggest that we may experience exhilaration and fear on the same journey.

Michael Ford could have gone on to discuss for the reader the nature of 'Sabbath' - a subject which keeps cropping up when Christians, reflecting on Scripture, are searching for a balance to their lives. The next Henri Nouwen compilation perhaps?

John Mann

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The Church of Ireland GAZETTE

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We are looking for an Office Administrator at the *Gazette* office, 3 Wallace Avenue, Lisburn. Eighteen hours per week (Monday-Thursday, 9.00am - 1.30pm). The post involves the management of accounts and general office administration, including the administration of emails and responding to enquiries from the public. Experience in book-keeping, payroll and VAT is essential. Must be IT proficient, familiar with Church of Ireland structures and in sympathy with the ethos of this Anglican weekly newspaper.

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**Fay Cuthbertson,
10 Scotland Drive, Dunfermline KY12 7SY,
or by email: fay.cuthbertson@btopenworld.com.**

Closing date for applications is 22nd February 2008.

**Interviews will take place on
14th March 2008 in Dunfermline.**

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**The Girls'
Friendly Society,
36 Upper Leeson
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Vacancy Central Secretary

The Girls' Friendly Society wishes to appoint a suitably qualified office administrator to the organisation. This will be a busy and varied role which will require a bright, friendly and flexible individual.

Good all-round secretarial experience, coupled with excellent computer literacy, including Microsoft Office and SAGE, are key requirements. The ability to work on one's own initiative, as well as integrating with a small team, are also prerequisites. A knowledge of the Church of Ireland ethos would be desirable. The position is part-time, 20-25 hours per week. Occasional Saturday work will be required.

Closing date for the receipt of applications is Thursday 17th January 2008, and should be forwarded to The Central President, GFS House, 36 Upper Leeson Street, Dublin 4, or emailed to: florence@girlsfriendlysociety.ie.

Gazette editorial on NI Bill of Rights plan raises public debate

Following last week's *Gazette* editorial which called for plans for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights to be dropped, an extensive debate on the subject ensued in the Northern Ireland media.

On the BBC's *Sunday Sequence* programme last Sunday, the Revd Dr Samuel Hutchinson, the retired Clerk of the Presbyterian General Assembly and a former Moderator, who represents the Irish Council of Churches on the Bill of Rights Forum, said his primary concern was not with what he described as the "political aspects" of the proposed Bill of Rights, but with "humanitarian" aspects. He said a Bill of Rights was an "overarching" type of legislation that was more entrenched than ordinary legislation and that the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights were not adequate for Northern Ireland.

Dr Hutchinson said that every country had to have a good reputation when it came to human rights, and not a "tarnished" one.

In the same Radio Ulster discussion, Mary O'Rawe, a barrister and a senior lecturer in human rights at the University

of Ulster, said it was necessary to "up" the status of human rights in every jurisdiction. She said there was a backlog of cases in the European Court and that a better system was needed.

The *Gazette* editor, Canon Ian Ellis, responding in the live debate to Dr Hutchinson and Ms O'Rawe, said that Northern Ireland already had good human rights provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act as well as anti-discrimination laws in Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. He added that if there was a backlog in the European Court that was a matter for the European Court to address and did not mean that a Bill of Rights was needed in Northern Ireland.

Canon Ellis said that the *Gazette's* editorial had not been against people having rights or justice, but had been against a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, which would be "a kind of written constitution for Northern Ireland".

He continued: "A Northern Ireland Bill of Rights is to be followed by harmonisation with rights legislation in the Republic

and a Charter of Rights for the Island of Ireland. So, the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights would be 'Part 1' in a process that clearly would compromise the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, possibly tending towards the 'joint sovereignty' concept."

However, maintaining that the issue the *Gazette* had raised was about democracy itself, not party politics, Canon Ellis said: "Let me make this clear: if there were a majority of people in Northern Ireland who wanted the North to join with the South, I for one would be saying very clearly that the *status quo* could not be maintained against the will of the majority - but as things stand that majority simply isn't there and the existing majority's will must be fully respected, as indeed the Belfast Agreement makes clear."

The 1998 Belfast Agreement provided that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission would be "invited to consult and to advise" on the scope for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, but did not require such a Bill. Subsequently, a consultative Forum was established to advise the Secretary of State.

In last Monday's *News Letter* (7th January), a spokeswoman for the Church of Ireland was quoted as saying that the Church of Ireland had not held an internal consultation on the subject of a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights to ascertain a consensus and as agreeing that any formal statements issued by the Church of Ireland had been "cautious".

The Chair of the Church in Society Committee, Bishop Michael Jackson, was reported by the *News Letter* as in the past having strongly emphasized that the work of the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum would have to be "credible to all parts of Northern Ireland society" and that it would be better "to engage society deeply and at length in consultation and development of consensus around the key components of any possible Bill, rather than to rush that process". The *News Letter* said Bishop Jackson did not wish to add to the previous statements.

• Political reactions to the *Gazette* editorial are on page 7.

Dublin university students reach out to local inner-city communities

The Revd Neal Phair, the chaplain of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) campuses at Mountjoy Square and Portland Row, invited some 30 pupils from a local inner-city primary school - St Vincent's on North William Street, which is situated in one of the most deprived areas in Dublin city - to come to the Mountjoy Square campus for a special pre-Christmas party.

The pupils engaged in some arts and crafts by making Christmas cards, etc. and were then treated to a special Christmas party, before Santa Claus arrived with a present for each one of them. Mr Phair was assisted by 14 students from both DIT campuses who had spent a number of weeks planning the event.

This was the second initiative by Mr Phair to reach out to the local community since his appointment as chaplain last autumn. In September, he contacted the local O'Connell's Secondary School and initiated



One of the students from the Dublin Institute of Technology with children from St Vincent's primary school at the pre-Christmas party

ed a programme whereby the school would bring each week to the Mountjoy Square campus several pupils with poor literacy skills who would then be engaged in one-to-one learning with students from the campus.

The chaplaincy, in co-operation with Peace Corp, which works with inner-city communities in Dublin city, is planning an outreach project for the local area in early spring, details of which will be announced later.

APPOINTMENTS

The Revd A. V. George Flynn, formerly Rector of the Clonenagh Group of Parishes, Diocese of Ossory, to be Rector of the Aughrim Group of Parishes, Diocese of Clonfert.

The Revd Alan N. Peek, Curate-Assistant of St Peter's, Much Woolton, Diocese of Liverpool, to be Rector of the Grouped Parishes of Derg and Termonamongan, Diocese of Derry. Institution: St John's church, Castlederg, on Friday 11th April, at 8.00pm.

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