

## Disputed liberation

RADIO 4'S "Thought for the Day" is meant to be a break from the hustle, bustle and political tit-for-tat that goes on in the *Today* programme. But on 26 August, the offering from the Revd Giles Fraser touched many raw nerves.

Reflecting on the news that Irish priest Fr James Chesney could have connections with the Claudy bombing in 1972, the Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral suggested that liberation theology may have inspired acts of IRA terrorism and that a seminal book by the father of the liberation theology movement, Gustavo Gutiérrez, was a "justification of bloodshed".

But Julian Filochowski, a former director of Cafod and a current director of *The Tablet*, has stressed that Gutiérrez could not have inspired the Claudy bombing because his book, *Theology of Liberation*, was not even published in Britain and Ireland until 1974.

"What is depressing is that you have presented liberation theology just as Ronald Reagan's CIA and the far-Right did, as essentially 'left-wing politics dressed up to look holy,'" he told Fraser in an exchange of emails. "What was revolutionary about Latin American liberation theology was that it was doing theology from the perspective of the poor ... and concluding that the struggles of the poor for survival and our option for the poor are critical to Christian discipleship."

Fraser, while saying he wished he hadn't upset so many people, unrepentantly added: "But I'd do it again tomorrow."

## Bed and boards

AFTER POPE Benedict XVI presides at the beatification of Cardinal Newman in Birmingham, he plans to travel to St Mary's College, Oscott, to have lunch and his customary afternoon rest.

This plan seemed straightforward enough until seminary staff checked the room he is due to stay in and found a problem with the floorboards. Experts found that the joists supporting the boards were loose, making the room structurally unsound. The necessary repair work has, thankfully, been completed.

"The Holy Father wouldn't have fallen through the floor," Mgr Mark Crisp, the rector of Oscott, assured us. "Of course, the strengthening of the room needed to be done, so the Pope has done us a favour."

The Pope will stay in the Episcopium, the room normally assigned to travelling prelates. But another change was also needed: the Vatican recce team told the seminary that the bed in the room was too high for the Pope, who at 83 understandably needs an easily accessible place of rest, so Oscott duly ordered a new one.



## Conclave baptism

WHEN cardinals gather for a conclave to elect a pope they are supposed to be completely shut off from the outside world. But during the conclave of 1830 an extraordinary exception to this rule occurred: one of the cardinals baptised his grandson through a hatch in the Sistine Chapel.

The baptism was performed by the English Cardinal Thomas Weld (1773-1837), a widower, whose daughter, together with her husband and children, lived with him in Rome. One of the cardinal's descendants, Nicholas Fitzherbert, told us the story after we reported how Weld loved to ride round the city in an open carriage with his grandchildren.

The cardinal's daughter had married Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, and the couple had seven children. Their fourth child, Walter, was born on 5 December 1830. Nine days later, however, a conclave was called after the death of Pope Pius VIII and it was then that the baby was baptised by his grandfather cardinal.

Mr Fitzherbert, the cardinal's great-great nephew, explained that Walter later became a Jesuit priest. Incidentally, his elder brother William became the Bishop of Clifton and another elder brother, Henry, won the Victoria Cross at the Battle of Inkerman, during the Crimean War, 1854.

## Keeping both sides happy

TONY BLAIR waited until after he left office to become a Catholic, and his much publicised new autobiography, *A Journey*, gives a hint as to why. When trying to broker peace between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, he became acutely aware of the suspicion with which Catholics were held. And of course brokering a power-sharing deal was one of the successes of his time as Prime Minister.

Blair recalls that a leading Unionist said, before Blair came to power, that Cherie, his Catholic wife, was "a painted Jezebel who claimed her allegiance to Rome".

Interestingly, Mr Blair at first thought the man was referring to "the seat of the Italian Government" rather than the Holy See.

Blair, who was received into the Church in 2007, also reveals that his Irish Protestant maternal grandmother warned him on her sickbed to "never marry a Catholic". Awkwardly, at this point, he had already started a relationship with his future wife. Despite his conversion, the former Prime Minister also admitted to having a "soft spot" for Ian Paisley, who at one point gave Blair a prayer book for his youngest son, Leo.

## Yellow, white and red

KNOWN TO many in Westminster as the Prime Minister's favourite thinker, Phillip Blond also appears to have friends in influential Catholic circles. Last week the Anglican theologian, who runs the think tank ResPublica, gave an address to the lay Catholic Italian group *Comunione e Liberazione* ("Communion and Liberation"), in the Italian seaside resort of Rimini.

In fact, it was the fourth time Blond had addressed a C and L gathering and this time he discussed ideas behind the Big Society. It is understood that a number of senior officials in the Vatican have been sent pieces written by Blond, known for his book *Red Tory*. It is even suggested that the Pope himself has read some of the thinker's work.

## Airwaves to heaven

A GOOD religious programme can easily catch an audience – just look at the success of the BBC2 sitcom *Rev*. In Germany, however, a Capuchin brother wants to take one step beyond and has decided to capitalise on the potential and set up his own TV station.

Br Paulus Terwitte along with colleagues from the Jesuits, Franciscans and other religious orders have created DOK TV & Media Ltd, which plans to produce films, documentaries and other media reports. Br Terwitte explained that he was fed up with German broadcasters neglecting spiritual matters.

"God, prayer, silence or the Gospel don't have a chance," said the Capuchin friar, who is no novice when it comes to taking to the airwaves. He was one of the Church's best-known media personalities in Germany, acquiring nationwide fame in 2004 with a film he produced about his pastoral work in German cities entitled *Die Manager Gottes* ("God's Manager") and he commented live for German TV from Rome on Pope John Paul II's funeral and Pope Benedict's election.