

NEWS

FROM BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Catholic and Anglican bishops poised to make history

Isabel de Bertodano

CATHOLIC AND Anglican bishops in England are to hold later this year what is believed to be their first formal meeting since the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850.

The event will commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the meeting between the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, and Pope Paul VI. It will also form part of a search for a declaration of common beliefs that could be endorsed by both Churches. According to the Church of England, the idea of a meeting arose from a private discussion between Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. At one of their regular confidential meetings they noticed that the fortieth anniversary of Archbishop Ramsey's historic visit to the Pope was approaching and both felt it ought to be commemorated.

The planned meeting, which forms part of the process being pursued by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), will be held at Hinsley Hall, the Catholic conference centre in Leeds, on 14 and 15 November. The work of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM), which is concerned with pastoral and mission themes rather



Pope Paul VI meets Michael Ramsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, at St Peter's in 1966

than doctrinal matters, will provide a focus for the gathering. A Church of England spokesman said participants would also reflect on the role of bishops in the modern world.

Catholic Bishops of England and Wales will discuss the historic conference at their Low Week Meeting, which begins on Monday at Hinsley Hall. They will also decide whether to mount a rescue plan to save their social justice body, Caritas. The organisation could be wound up if it cannot be put on a secure financial footing. It is £170,000 in debt, three

years after it was set up as an agency of the bishops' conference. It has two full-time workers, including the director, Sarah Lindsell, who said that Caritas hoped to clear the deficit by the end of the year. Asked whether she thought the charity's future was at stake, she said: "I do personally, yes. Our board has had a number of discussions about it." Caritas is an umbrella body representing Catholic charities including those for children and families, the elderly and disabled. It is primarily concerned with campaigning and advocacy.

The Bishop of Salford, Terence Brain, said one problem was that the bishops expected Caritas to generate its own income from its advocacy work. "The difficulty is you have to do the work before you see any reward from it. It is difficult to get people to fund something without any immediate reward," he said.

Another item on the bishops' agenda will be whether they should call for Britain's nuclear deterrent to be scrapped. Two weeks ago the Scottish bishops declared their opposition to plans to replace the Trident missile system. The Nolan guidelines on child protection, implemented five years ago and now due for review, will be discussed, and the bishops are expected to decide whether a replacement should be found for Plater College in Oxford, which closed last year.

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NORTHERN IRELAND

New role for frontline monastery

Chris Ryder

In Belfast

A BELFAST monastery, which straddles a traditional sectarian flashpoint, is to be handed over to a housing association and converted into 13 apartments for homeless people.

In its heyday, the 125-year-old monastery provided accommodation for 24 Passionist Fathers whose main task was running the busy Ardoyne parish. Today there are only four priests, and their superior, Fr Aidan Troy, believes the listed 25-room building could be put to much better use.

"There is a serious problem of homelessness in north Belfast and we see this project as breathing new life into the monastery so that it can go on for another 100 years and beyond," he said.

The Passionists will continue to run the parish and the proposed development includes the provision of a new house for the priests in the grounds of the adjacent Holy Cross

church, whose distinctive twin spires dominate the north city landscape.

Situated at the interface between the unwaveringly loyalist Shankill/Woodvale areas and the equally staunchly republican Ardoyne, the monastery, and its brave priests, have been in the centre of the sectarian storms that have for so long characterised the history of Belfast. When the Troubles erupted in 1969, Fr Marcellus Gillespie was prominent on the streets ministering to the community during the violent internecine rioting that preceded the deployment of British troops.

More recently, in 2001, Fr Troy played a prominent pastoral role in the Holy Cross School affair when headline loyalists forced the Catholic pupils to run a twice-daily gauntlet of abuse and violence for several months, necessitating the presence of a large force of police to protect them.

Over the years there have been a number of attacks on the building, including efforts to burn it down.

Amnesty warned against pro-abortion stance

Philip Crispin

CATHOLICS' HISTORIC links with the human rights organisation Amnesty International are threatened by Amnesty's move towards supporting abortion, the Bishop of East Anglia, Michael Evans, said this week.

Bishop Evans' warning follows a vote by the UK section of the organisation earlier this month to abandon its neutral stance on abortion as part of its support for what it calls "women's reproductive rights". The final decision on the issue rests with an international meeting of delegates in Mexico in 2007.

In a letter to the UK director, Kate Allen, Bishop Evans writes that he has been an active member of Amnesty International for 30 years but would feel obliged to withdraw his membership if the organisation decides to support abortion. The bishop says that he has encouraged Catholic parishes to affiliate their justice and peace groups to Amnesty. He points out that he composed the Amnesty Prayer which appears on cards and posters featur-

ing the organisation's recently adopted logo "Protect the Human".

"Catholics will give full support to a campaign to stop violence against women, but this cannot be at the expense of moving away from Amnesty's more fundamental campaign to 'protect the human,'" writes Bishop Evans. "The prayer I composed and which was accepted and published by Amnesty International UK speaks of God leaving 'the invisible fingerprints' of his touch on each and every human being."

Amnesty International was founded by a Catholic convert, Peter Benenson, in 1961 and has historically focused on highlighting the plight of prisoners of conscience, exposing human rights abuses and miscarriages of justice around the world.

Another long-time Catholic member, the peace and human rights activist Bruce Kent, believes the organisation should stick to defined and consistent aims. Widening the range of objectives risked confusing the central message and dividing the membership. He warned that the losers would be the tens of

thousands who suffered torture and unjust imprisonment around the world.

Several Catholic and other pro-life members have expressed outrage at the decision which has developed as part of the organisation's ongoing campaign to stop violence against women. Some have accused the UK section of a biased presentation of the abortion debate.

A spokesman for Amnesty International UK said the issue had been debated at the recent AGM. "A resolution was passed indicating that the view of the UK section is that a woman's right to physical and mental integrity should include a right to information on the risks of abortion, and legal, safe and accessible abortion, should she choose to have an abortion. The resolution also called for further consultation of our UK members," he said. "While the resolution passed at the AGM sets out the current thinking of Amnesty International UK, it does not change policy for Amnesty International. All policy development is set at international level."

SCOTLAND

'It's never too late to become a priest'

Hugh Farmer
In Glasgow

A DVD aimed at stimulating greater interest in vocations for the Scottish priesthood is being released next week. In the following few days every priest in Scotland should receive a copy of *Take a Different Road*, with a further two copies going to resource or career libraries of every secondary school and university in the country in time for Vocations Sunday next week.

The DVD has been produced by Priests for Scotland, a group set up by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland to address a variety of issues including vocations to the priesthood. The DVD contains interviews with priests as well as suggestions for prayers. The introduction is by Bishop Vincent Logan of Dunkeld.

This year just seven men aged between 18 and 52 have applied for seminary training. The director of Priests for Scotland, Fr Andrew McKenzie, said that the Church needed to attract more applicants and some of these could be men considering a career change.

"Today men are seeking lives which will make a difference and give them satisfaction. It is why today we stress it is never too late to become a priest," he said.

IRELAND

Agreement with abuse victim's family

John Cooney
In Dublin

A MAN who committed suicide was telling the truth when he claimed to have been sexually abused as a child by his parish priest, said the Bishop of Limerick, Donal Murray, this week. Bishop Murray released a joint statement last Sunday with the family of Peter McCloskey. Earlier Mary McCloskey had accused the diocesan authorities of being directly responsible for the death of her 37-year-old son on 1 April, three days after mediation talks broke down. In 1979, as a 10-year-old altar

boy, Mr McCloskey was repeatedly raped by an alcoholic priest, Fr Denis Daly.

In the joint statement, Bishop Murray "completely accepted the truth of Peter McCloskey's experience of clerical child sexual abuse", and acknowledged the diocese's failure to inform itself properly of Fr Daly's unsuitability for ministry. Fr Daly had left the Archdiocese of Sydney "under a cloud of moral failure" yet had been accepted to serve in the Diocese of Limerick. Bishop Murray said that "the information available at the time should have prevented him from taking up ministry in Limerick". Fr Daly died in 1987.

Reprint after bishops' prison report sells out

A HARD-HITTING church report on prison reform is being republished after the first edition sold out. The latest version of *A Place of Redemption* includes a study guide for parishioners advising them how they can help prisoners and their families.

Bishop Terence Brain, the liaison bishop for criminal justice and prisons, said on Monday that the bishops wanted to spark a debate on such issues as whether prison was the best place for people who are mentally ill, addicted to drugs or illiterate.

"Prison puts people to one side. As a society we are dumping people on the Prison Service who are the responsibility of all of us."

The prison population has continued to rise since the report was first published in 2004 and there have been a number of high-profile cases in which prisoners released early went on to commit murders. Among these was Damien Hanson, 25, who killed the Catholic City financier John Monckton during a robbery. Bishop Brain emphasised the importance of properly resourcing early release.

Controversy over Charles Curran lecture

John Cooney
In Dublin

THE ARCHBISHOP of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, this week dissociated himself from the decision to invite a theologian barred from teaching in a Catholic institution to lecture at St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

The American moral theologian Fr Charles Curran was due to speak yesterday evening at a conference at the College's Faculty of Theology. The college is a Pontifical University.

In 1986, after a seven-year investigation, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) declared that Fr Curran had dissented from church teaching and was no longer eligible to teach Catholic theology. The then prefect of the CDF, Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger, is now Pope Benedict XVI.

Dr Martin said he had "in no way" been involved in organising the conference. He said Fr Curran was a priest in good standing but drew attention to the outcome of the CDF's investigation. The President of Maynooth, Mgr Dermot Farrell, said he had not approved the invitation and that a sub-committee had organised the conference, entitled "The Risks of Theology".

Fr Curran's difficulties with the CDF centred on his disagreement with the Church's teaching on moral issues including contraception, homosexual acts and pre-marital sex. However in an article in *The Tablet* on 15 April he said he had been "pleasantly surprised" by the first year of Pope Benedict's papacy.

Schools to hear creationist message

ONE OF the world's leading proponents of creationism has launched a UK tour taking in churches, universities and schools.

John Mackay, an Australian geologist, is also leading what is billed as a family creation conference lasting four days next week at a holiday park in Powys, Wales. Planned events include some for children as young as five.

Mr Mackay leads an organisation called Creation Research, which describes itself as "an international ministry dedicated to making the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ known by

standing against the philosophy of evolution".

A former schoolteacher, Mr Mackay has spent 15 years touring and producing "evidence" for the literal truth of the Genesis account of the Creation, for Noah's Flood and the Tower of Babel.

The current tour focuses particularly on schools with one three-day booking during May at an unnamed state secondary school near Blackpool, Lancashire. According to Creation Research's latest newsletter, Mr Mackay will also speak at a number of other schools.

Don't vote for BNP, say Church leaders

CHRISTIANS ARE being urged not to vote for the British National Party (BNP) in local elections to be held on Thursday. Catholic, Anglican and Methodist clergy have expressed distaste for the views of the BNP, which is strongly anti-immigration and is hoping to increase its foothold in parts of east London and the north of England.

The Catholic Bishop of Hallam, John Rawsthorne, has put his signature alongside those of Anglican and Methodist leaders in a

letter addressed to the editors of Sheffield's local newspapers this week. It asks people to take pride in the diversity of Sheffield, reject racist policies and not to vote for the BNP.

Bishop Rawsthorne suggested that although there was significant immigration to Sheffield, poverty could also influence the decisions of voters.

"There's a certain amount of poverty around and we're conscious that it is hidden here under our noses," he said.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

50 YEARS AGO

Bouquet for the Bride. Those who switched on their televisions for the Monaco wedding last week [of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier] found themselves watching a serious girl who took her vows and followed the Mass with a simplicity and deliberation better than an eloquent commentary. It was a strong faith which made the participants almost entirely forgetful of the intrusive cameras. Particularly impressive witness to the Faith was the family Communion when the bridal couple were joined by their parents at the altar rails. And no Catholic preacher in Europe can have had a bigger audience than the bride's parish priest from Philadelphia for his excellent little homily on Christian marriage. Altogether the Catholics of Europe have every reason to be grateful to the Kelly family. Technically the transmission was something of a triumph for Radio Monte Carlo and the cameras were handled with general discretion.

Coincidence. An American couple were married the other day at the Altar of the Chair, in St Peter's, Rome. We are told that this has never happened before and is not likely to happen again. The bride was a lady from Chicago called Miss Santopadre.

The Tablet, 28 April 1956

100 YEARS AGO

Vaccination and Women's Suffrage. Mr Lupton brought forward a motion for the protection of the conscientious objector in the matter of vaccination. He pleaded that vaccination should not be obligatory on those who regard it as useless or dangerous. The motion was seconded by Mr Robertson, who objected strongly to the way in which the law was overridden by magistrates, and to their insolent dealing with conscientious objectors. The President of the Local Government Board was considering what amendment was needed to secure certificates of exemption.

The next item was a proposal brought forward by Mr Keir Hardie that sex should cease to be a bar to the exercise of the parliamentary franchise. Mr Cremer opposed mainly on the ground that if the door were once opened to female enfranchisement in any form it could not be closed till adult suffrage had been granted. Mr Long asked what the attitude of the Government was, in reply to whom Mr Gladstone explained that the present like the last Government left the matter an open question. Mr Evans having risen to continue the discussion, there were shouts from the Ladies' Gallery, and a flag was displayed through the grille.

The Tablet, 28 April 1906

A CYCLE OF CONFERENCES "A living mystery"

9 May 2006

'Burning desire: Give me someone who loves! Desire in the spirituality of St Augustine'

Most Revd Rowan Williams Archbishop of Canterbury

6 June 2006

'He destroyed the wall of hatred which separated them : pardon and reconciliation as the road to peace'

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