

Ireland Joins the World—and Leaves the Church

Fintan O'Toole on the cost of prosperity (Part II)

Toole, a former altar boy, was in his early twenties during the pope's visit, and like many of his contemporaries he was captivated by contemporary youth culture and its embrace of sexual freedom, much of it imported from America. During John Paul II's visit, he celebrated a Mass for youth in Galway, where he was treated like a rock star. At one point, the youthful crowd cheered the pope for fourteen uninterrupted minutes, a demonstration O'Toole was initially confounded by. "He was trapped in a feedback loop of adoration where every movement he made to signal that he was about to continue his sermon was received as if he were conducting the crowd." The cheering only subsided after the crowd was sternly told that "[t]he Holy Father has not finished his sermon." It was only years later that O'Toole recognized what had brought about such fervent emotion. "The crowd was not reveling in piety. It was reveling in itself, in its own youth and energy and unbounded vigor. It was taking over, inserting itself into the event, insisting on its own anarchic presence. It did not know or care about what it was actually doing; shutting the pope up."

That might seem like a tough judgment, but given the subsequent de-churching of O'Toole's generation, it's

Nevertheless, what O'Toole has to say about traditional Irish Catholicism, especially its puritanical attitude toward sex, rings all too true.

probably a fair one. Across his pontificate, John Paul's famous World Youth Days brought together millions of young people. Those "Catholic Woodstocks" were often heralded as harbingers of a rebirth of faith among alienated youth, a rebirth that now appears to have been a stillbirth. I remember the extraordinary hype given to World Youth Day in 1993 in Denver, where more than half a million pilgrims gathered to see and hear John Paul II. Even twenty-five years later, papal biographer George Weigel insisted on calling the event "a turning point in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States," evident in what he judged to be "the living parts of the Church."

But as O'Toole notes, it is not always clear what motivates those in attendance at such events, or how they understand the experience. If he is right, the young people in Galway that day felt themselves to be at the edge of a wave of change that would carry them into a future very different from the past. By a similar measure, the turning point Weigel perceived seems to have set the U.S. Church in an unanticipated direction. One in every three Americans baptized as Catholics has left the Church. Vocations have plummeted. In many dioceses, parishes continue to close. Catholic liberals and Catholic conservatives have dueling explanations for this exodus; one pushes for more reform while the other preaches retrenchment. As a fellow baby boomer, I find O'Toole's suggestion that the Galway crowd was "insisting on its own anarchic presence" to be persuasive. Much of the experience of coming of age in the 1960s and '70s was anarchic, and often found expression in mass celebratory gatherings. Those events, however, rarely helped to revitalize institutions, like the family and religion, that have traditionally been the glue that held a society together.

"The real effect of the loss of Church authority was that there was no deeply rooted civic morality to take its place," O'Toole writes about the endemic political and economic corruption that has rocked Ireland in recent decades. "The Irish had been taught for generations to identify morality with religion, and a very narrow kind of religion at that. Morality was about what happened in bedrooms, not boardrooms. Now, instead of moving from one sphere to the other, it seemed to

be lost somewhere in between.” This raises an awkward question: Now that we’ve given up on legislating morality in the bedroom, do we still have the ability to legislate it anywhere else? Our anarchic politics and the grotesque inequalities of our economic and legal systems seem to be telling us we don’t. The moral autonomy we now concede to the adulterer and the “ethically poly-amorous” is becoming harder to deny to the avaricious billionaire. In addition to its rigorous sexual rules, the medieval Church also had sumptuary laws restricting extravagant spending and consumption. Needless to say, neither set of prohibitions was strictly observed. But perhaps these prohibitions expressed a keener understanding of human nature and social reality than the one that prevails in our emancipated age.

Source: Commonweal accessed 22/03/24



Moonlight, Summer Moonlight

by Emily Jane Brontë

'Tis moonlight, summer moonlight,
All soft and still and fair;
The solemn hour of midnight
Breathes sweet thoughts everywhere,

But most where trees are sending
Their breezy boughs on high,
Or stooping low are lending
A shelter from the sky.

And there in those wild bowers
A lovely form is laid;
Green grass and dew-steeped flowers
Wave gently round her head.



Kathmandu Encounters

One of the things I have learned in many years of travel in Africa and Asia is that real inter-faith encounter and conversations start not on an intellectual level as much as in the daily life of people meeting.

I met these wonderful Hindu *sadhus* or holy man in Kathmandu, one of whom (top image) showed me the *vayu mudra* or yoga hand gesture which is said to benefit

breathing and balance.

A sadhu is a religious ascetic, mendicant or any holy person in Hinduism or Jainism who has renounced the worldly life. They are sometimes also called *yogi*, *sanyasi*, or *vairagi*. In their lives they follow a path of spiritual discipline. They are essentially outsiders, often seen as somewhat eccentric but to be respected and honoured. There is a little of the hippie about them and they are often open, good-humoured, and welcoming.

A sadhu's life is totally dedicated to achieving *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of death and re-birth, through yoga, meditation and contemplation. As here, sadhus often wear simple clothing, such as saffron-coloured cotton, symbolising their renunciation of world possessions. A female mendicant in Hinduism or Jainism is often called a *sadhvi* or *aryika*. The Buddha followed a radical form of this life in the years before his awakening.

Greetings from Nepal. P



Masses Times

Sundays: 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

Weekdays: 10am

Rosary following 10am mass

French Mass 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month

Collections Last Sunday

First Collection: €980

Share: €800

THANK YOU

Mass Intentions.

Special Intention

Alicia McCormack