

## **Sermon preached by the Dean at Evensong**

**22 January 2012**

When I was elected Dean in 1999 a bishop remarked that it would be interesting to see how an iconoclast did as an Icon – it is now time for me to give an account of my stewardship over the past 12 ½ years.

The job of all clergy and of the Dean of St Patrick's in particular is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The Dean of St Patrick's has always had 3 purposes. Firstly, to see that St Patrick's is a place of worship that acts effectively as a shop window for the Church of Ireland and indeed for Christianity in general for the many thousands of visitors who throng its doors; secondly to point out often unpalatable truths to the Church of Ireland which covers the 32 counties of Ireland and thirdly to witness to the things of God in the Irish community as a whole.

Some members of the chapter would say that liturgy was not my strong suit – certainly I am not a supporter of post Vatican II Catholicism in so far as it is applied to the Church of Ireland. But I have introduced modern language liturgy to St Patrick's without too much bother. Dean Swift insisted on a weekly Eucharist in the cathedral (which was unusual in his time) while I have insisted on a Sung Eucharist on the three great weekday festivals of the church – the Epiphany, the Ascension and All Saint's.

The architect, the organist, the administrator and the Dean's Vicar have all been appointed (and some several times) during my tenure. New posts of cathedral supervisor, head vergers and education officer were created. I think each one makes his contribution to what St Patrick's is today. The standard of music is, I think, a very fine one in spite of the ever increasing difficulty in obtaining choristers. I was glad to

re-invent the girls' choir and our weekday sung matins is now the only one in the world. Keeping up the fabric of St Patrick's is like painting the Forth Bridge – it is a never-ending task which goes on ceaselessly under the careful supervision of our architect, Mr John Beauchamp. My predecessor restored the organ – I'll probably be known as the Dean who invented the loos in the tower!

A departing minor canon remarked on the climate of negativity to be found here – whatever about that; it is certainly true that the Dean often has to argue “no” to some proposals – usually involving the spending of large sums of money which emerge from the various committees. A new administrative block in Upper Kevin Street is one example. I have opposed the spending of €2 million to move the shop out of the cathedral and the spending of €5 million on St Sepulchre's assuming we got it for nothing, which is very unlikely. In my view whatever spare money we have should be spent on the fabric of the cathedral, preferably on large purposes rather than small. Some members of the cathedral board think that the Dean of St Patrick's should be a supporter of the establishment in both church and State and they would like the Dean to keep a low profile and express no criticism of the powers that be from whom we hope to get money. Needless to say I do not share that view, but in any case things don't work like that. My predecessor kept a low profile and indulged in criticism of no one. Very little State money was received in his time, while in my time some €1.24 million has been received from the State – not a large proportion of what has been spent on the fabric but nonetheless worth having. It is still true that 80% of our income comes from our visitors which now number over 300,000 people a year.

St Patrick's has long occupied a special position in the Church of Ireland – according to the constitution it no longer belongs exclusively to the See of Dublin &

Glendalough but “has a common relationship to all the dioceses of the Church of Ireland”. This position was resented by the previous archbishop of Dublin who challenged my position as Ordinary, declined to preach in the cathedral and abolished the cathedral parish. As befits a national cathedral, the chapter of St Patrick’s is drawn from the whole of the Church of Ireland – something that is of increasing importance when the church, small as it is, shows every sign of splitting into two camps – a sort of Catholic sect in the south with married clergy and a body indistinguishable from other Protestant sects in the north. Even the Dublin clergy seem strangely uninterested in learning more about the Christian religion. I had to give up courses of special sermons at Sunday evensongs in Lent because of the poor attendance. Professor Keith Ward, a well-known Anglican theologian, lectured in Dublin to the Irish Theological Association on a Saturday morning and the only Anglican clergy present were Bishop Donald Caird, Canon Kenneth Kearon and myself.

St Patrick’s should be a leader of ecumenism and in his contribution to *Irish Anglicanism* published as long ago as 1970. Fr Michael Hurley sketched out an ecumenical future for St Patrick’s. After two years deliberation only in 2007 was the General Synod asked by the chapter to agree to the addition of two ecumenical canons. I would have preferred the existing chapter canonries to be open to clergy of any church, but the chapter chose to create two extra canonries. Some see this not as a first step in the fulfilment of Michael Hurley’s vision, but rather as a final step. Can we overcome that inflexibility and inelasticity which Bishop Richard Hanson saw as a main characteristic of the Church of Ireland?

The church to which a large majority of Christians in Ireland belong is the Roman Catholic Church. At the official level that church has not given a lead in the

ecumenical task. Cardinal Connell and Archbishop Martin have both refused to appoint a Roman Catholic chaplain to St Patrick's and in this they were supported by their Anglican colleague. Although this is something which is common place in cathedrals no further away than England. While I have been happy to welcome the present Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin as a preacher here I have to say that there has been no reciprocal invitation to the Pro-Cathedral. Contrary to what has been asserted elsewhere I find ecumenism in Dublin to be years behind what I experienced in Kilkenny 25 years ago, where I preached in every church in that city. Ecumenism here seems to be equated to fellowship between the 2 archbishops: that should merely be the first step. The demoralised state of the Roman Church in this country may have something to do with its lack of ecumenism. I myself think that given the fact that so many Irish people still look to the church it is only a matter of time before this should be reflected in ordinations – but the old triumphalism will have to go. Some members of the Church of Ireland think that our church should benefit from the present state of the Roman Church in Ireland. I do not agree with this – my view is that we all have to swim in the same water and that her troubles are our troubles.

In fact we were lucky that there was no enquiry into sexual abuse within the Church of Ireland – if there had been, I doubt if we would have been found to be blameless. But the trouble with the institutional church is much wider than the abuse uncovered by the Murphy Report and others. Timothy Ratchiff, the former Master-General of the Dominicans, lecturing in Dublin put his finger on it when he said that clericalism was at the root of the church's ills – the instinct – not confined to any one church – to defend the institution at all costs – that is something that is alive and well in the Church of Ireland as it is in all the churches.

Of course St Patrick's has a mission to the wider community and in my installation sermon I spoke of the need to engage not only with our many visitors but also with the homeless and drug-ridden who are all around us here in the Liberties. After 2 successful appointments the Church Army withdrew its outreach worker from the staff of the cathedral – though what could be a greater outreach than engaging with our 300,000 visitors and a multitude of homeless people? Still, we have developed and we maintain close links with Trust our nearest charity which deals with people sleeping rough on our streets. We give it the candle money which amounts to about €10,000 a year (when I came here the candle money just went into general funds). Of course we give all our Eucharist offertories to charity as we are instructed to do by the Book of Common Prayer.

The danger of taking money from the State was well illustrated when soon after my installation I received an invitation to attend a State reception in honour of the bestowal of a red hat on Archbishop Connell of Dublin. Since the invitation was in the names of the then Taoiseach and his then mistress I declined to go and informed the media why I was doing so. But the then Dean of Christ Church, who had just received some €800,000 from the Taoiseach, attended the reception. Finding himself caught in the cross-fire the Cardinal was reduced to reading a lecture on the sanctity of Christian marriage to the guilty pair. The affair was well summed up by a priest friend of mine at Maynooth who said to another priest there “isn't it great to see the Protestants standing up for what we once believed in”.

On a rather broader canvas, I was the only cleric of any denomination to speak to the thousands upon thousands who filled the streets of Dublin to protest against the Iraq War. The Dean of St Patrick's still has a ready access to the media and I have, for instance, taken a public position on the provision of paediatric services in Dublin.

As a member of the Board of the Rotunda Hospital, I was in a minority of one in opposing the move of the hospital to the Mater site.

I introduced elections to the Board and in return it passed a note of no confidence in me and attempted to muzzle my public utterances. This was to the amazement of the wider community which expects the Dean of St Patrick's to voice an opinion on the issues of the day. Indeed dealing with the Board and Chapter has shown me how unchristian the institutional church can be. Fortunately, neither has the power to get rid of the Dean and neither has supported me. Read all about it on wikipedia.

In my installation sermon I took as my text the words "Why this waste" – those are words from St John's Gospel uttered by the scandalised by-standers when they saw the box of alabaster ointment being lavished on Jesus. I argued then and I still believe that the only justification for the continued existence of this great church is the extent that it enables people to see Jesus and all that he stands for more clearly. So I cannot do better than end with the words Dean Armitage Robinson originally wrote for Westminster Abbey:-

O Everlasting God, in whose Name are treasured here the memorials of many generations: Grant to those who labour here such a measure of thy grace and wisdom, that they may neglect no portion of their manifold inheritance, but so guard and use it to thy glory and the enlargement of thy Church, that the consecration of all human powers may set forward thy purpose of gathering up in one all things in Christ; through whom in thee be glory now and evermore. Amen.