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Irish Baptist Historical Society
The Baptist Centre
19 Hillsborough Road
Moira, BT67 0HG
Northern Ireland
Telephone: (028) 9261 9267
Fax No: (028) 9261 0150
E-mail: IBC@thebaptistcentre.org

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About Our Contributors:

Jim Flanagan has been a member of the Coleraine Baptist Church for over thirty years, and an elder for the last fifteen. He was a language teacher in Coleraine Academical Institution, is now retired, and enjoying his four grandchildren. He is married to Norah and they have three sons.

Liam Goliher graduated from the Irish Baptist College, Belfast, in 1973 and took up his first pastorate in Rathcoole Baptist Church, Belfast. He has since ministered in churches in Canada and Scotland before taking up his present responsibilities in Duke Street Baptist Church, Richmond. Liam is married to Christine. They have 5 children and 1 grandchild.

Steven Singleton is Pastor of Thurles Baptist Church. He trained at London Bible College, and served for seven years with UCCF before taking up the pastorate at Thurles. Stephen has an ongoing interest and involvement in theological education, and is a member of the Irish Baptist College Board. He is married to Joan and they have 2 children.

Editorial

The papers published in this edition of the Journal reflect changes in three different areas of life related to the work of our Association of Churches.

Changes in local church life are reflected in the article on the Coleraine Church by Jim Flanagan. The church there has this year opened a new building, providing practical and comfortable new resources for the church to do its work of witnessing and glorifying Christ in a major provincial town in Northern Ireland.

Stephen Singleton's article addresses changes on a wider and very different ecclesiastical canvas. The Roman Catholic church in Ireland has witnessed profound unrest and disturbance among its adherents in recent years. Disaffection among its ordinary church members fuelled particularly by recent child abuse scandals, with consequent fall off in mass attendance and a growing a la carte approach to belief and church doctrine, must not be misinterpreted or misrepresented, claims Stephen, and he details in his paper the reasons why.

A major change in the life of the Irish Baptist College was marked last year by the invitation extended to a past student, Rev Liam Goliher, to address the annual Assembly which coincided with the occupation of the new premises by Association and College. Liam's paper is a personal reflection on his ministry experience as an evangelical pastor in his years since graduation. He pinpoints a number of vital aspects of change which throw up serious challenges to our family of Irish Baptist churches in particular, and to the evangelical world in general.

The Historical Society has enjoyed another year of God's blessing. We encourage our present members to recruit others to support and be involved in this important aspect of Association life.

COLERAINE BAPTIST CHURCH

1795-2004

THE BEGINNINGS 1795-1835

The date of the foundation of a specifically 'Baptist' church in Coleraine is a matter of some conjecture, despite the fact that 1795 has been cited since the late 19th century. Certainly it was a decade of great change in Ireland with the setting up of the Orange Order and the 1798 Rebellion three years later. It is reasonable to accept that an 'Independent' church was created in Coleraine about that time. It is known that James Haldane, co-founder of a theological college in Edinburgh with his brother Robert, visited the town in 1801 and soon afterwards one of their evangelists, Robert Delap, took on some sort of role in the fledgling church. In 1805 premises were rented in a disused Corn Store in Bellhouse Lane, just off the Diamond.

The initial church may well have been paedobaptist in its doctrine, but gradually there arose a growth of interest in believers' baptism. The first recorded immersion was that of Edward Gribbon in the river Bann in 1820. However, the Fellowship seemed to live with this duality for a number of years until around 1830. Although they then separated into 'Baptist' and 'Congregational', they enjoyed a period of 'intercommunion'.

Much detail of life in Coleraine of the 1830s has been preserved in an Ordnance Survey Memoir which refers at length to a 'congregation of Baptists'. They still rented the Corn Store for £5 per annum, counted 30 'regulars' in their membership together with 70 'not regular'. Dr George Ledlie Carson, son of Dr Alexander of 'Tubbermore', officiated every Sunday; meetings ran from 12 midday till 3pm and 5 till 6. The building also housed two public schools, the male one set up in 1823 and numbering 115 pupils, the female 71 girls. The premises were rarely unused as a Sunday School accommodated 150 scholars.

CONSOLIDATION 1835-1858

During the late 1830s there was no settled minister in the Corn Store. The flock 'was exhorted every Sunday by worthy Elders'. Soon it became apparent that both a full-time minister and a bigger building would be required and in that order. So in 1840 the Irish Baptist Society sent Rev W S Eccles as the first 'professional'. He had been a Presbyterian student influenced by Rev Alexander Carson and had been baptised 'in a tarn in the Derry mountains'. With the help of his senior Elder, Edward Gribbon, he organised the erection of the Abbey Street church in 1842.

Extensive records remain of this period. One document is a report of an Irish Society sub-committee of 28th May 1841 granting the land at a nominal rent of 1s. per annum for 99 years. Three of the original tenders are extant, and the one accepted was from Sam Kirkpatrick for £250. Articles of Agreement, still legible in their beautiful handwriting, were drawn up at great length. In a preserved subscription book it is recorded that the local congregation mustered some £160. Two local MPs gave £5 each. Mr Eccles travelled to Scotland to raise funds.

The opening service took place on Sunday 20th March 1842 and was addressed by Rev Alexander Carson, Tubbermore and Rev John Bates of Ballina. Rev Fred Trestrail from Cork preached the evening sermon. An observer reported that 'the walls of the house were still damp, and although the candles were lighted, such a mist filled the place that the preacher could hardly see the congregation'. On the Monday evening, seven ministers from as many denominations addressed the congregation on a wide variety of topics.

After Rev Eccles departure for Great Victoria Street in 1847, the Elders ministered in the congregation. This format persisted until 1860 when events were to change town and church life radically.

EXPANSION 1859-1869

The unforeseen event that was to change the whole religious scenario in the north of Ireland was the 1859 Revival, Coleraine was borne alone in its progress. The influence of the movement spread rapidly,

arriving in the Coleraine area by the beginning of June. Meetings were held on the Fair Hill and clergy spent day and night counselling those who were under deep conviction of sin. The new Town Hall had just been built and a grand opening ceremony planned, but this had to be shelved as the hall opened its doors for the first time to a flood of townsfolk who were seeking forgiveness of sins. It was reckoned that about one fifth of the town's population was converted as a result of the Revival.

Into this situation stepped Thomas William Medhurst, soon to be Pastor of the Baptist church. For three busy weeks he preached to crowded congregations and was unanimously invited to be Pastor, commencing his ministry in September 1860. Mr Medhurst was Rev C H Spurgeon's first graduate from the recently founded Spurgeon's College in London. Medhurst, a budding actor, was converted in 1854, (a date corroborated in the church membership book) through Spurgeon's preaching.

After a brief ministry in Kingston-on-Thames, he witnessed a rapid increase in Coleraine's membership, from 73 in 1860 to 165 two years later. In his first year he baptised over 50 people, and in 1861 there were frequently two baptismal services per week.

But in a way, Mr Medhurst was not the master of his own future, as C H Spurgeon advised his former students of suitable moves. He wrote to him on 26th July 1862; 'You know how cautious I must be about advising any removes; therefore act at this time on your own responsibility. I have a very strong feeling that you will go to Glasgow. I will not venture to say more.' He chides him for 'a very bad mannerism in speaking. You must not have a single flaw. Just come back to Old John Bull's way of utterance and be a Paddy no longer'. Mr Medhurst obviously took his mentor's advice and left for North Frederick Street church on 1st November 1862. Later he served in Portsmouth and Cardiff. He died on 18th February 1917 aged 83.

He was succeeded by another Spurgeon protégé, Alexander Tessier, who stayed until 1867, described in a memoir as 'a man of handsome presence, a good preacher and a faithful Pastor. He was a lover of the Word of God and was strong and forceful in public. He lived an hon-

ourable, blameless and useful life in Bromley for over 50 years'.

He was followed by the third 'C H product', Rev Percy F Pearce. Little is known about him except that he later became an Anglican vicar in Hull. So in less than ten years, the Coleraine church had three English Pastors, all trained at Spurgeon's and all in their twenties. But the scene was changing.

CHANGE 1870-1902

The euphoria of the '59 Revival gradually subsided and it is evident from the church membership book that quite a percentage of converts slipped back. Emigration reduced the numbers further. It was not long before members' names were being struck off for a variety of misdemeanours – non-attendance, drunkenness, immorality, debt, 'gone back to Presbyterianism'. The church lost some 50 members through similar circumstances. Tobermore was even worse; 'Out of 80 or 90 members received, scarcely one remains'.

After the departure of Pastor Pearce, the church appointed one of its own members, Alexander Carson, MA, JP, son of Dr Alexander of Tobermore, as Pastor on 1st May 1869. He remained till 1871. Then a period of seeming pastoral instability ensued with very short tenures and now untraceable names. On 13th January 1878 Pastor David Macrory began his ministry. He had been a Presbyterian Ruling Elder but had become Pastor of Derryneil Baptist church. He stayed in Coleraine for only two years when he removed to 1st Baptist church of Mount Washington, Pittsburgh, where he died in 1887. The 70's had been a very disturbed decade for the Coleraine church.

For the rest of the century the church seemed to be more stable pastorally. Rev John Scilley arrived on 1st November 1880, when the membership stood at 118. Most of the information extant from this period is thanks to the detailed reports sent in to 'The Irish Baptist' by Mr Henry A Gribbon, a very active elder cum acting Pastor at times of vacancy. He describes a Sunday school soiree of February 1884. 'Great interest was taken of four items – Tom Campbell read 'The repentant mouse'; Willie Campbell sang 'Where is my wandering boy tonight'; Joseph Baxter recited 'The wreck of the Hesperus'; a little

child about six sang 'Precious jewels, accompanied on the melodeon by her little brother'.

Mr and Mrs Scilley departed to Orpington, Kent in 1885. Some family names begin to occur in records of this time, which are still represented in the church today.

The annual meetings of the Irish Baptist Association were held in the church in 1887 probably just after the opening of the Jubilee Hall, so called in commemoration of Queen Victoria's 50 years on the throne. It was demolished in 1987 to make way for the new hall. At this time the pattern of an annual mission was established. Mr Gribbon himself was elected President of the Union in 1888, a post which he held for a second time later. Outstations were set up.

At last a new Pastor was appointed in 1891, the Rev John Dickson who had served in Lisnagleer for 25 years. Mr Dickson exercised a busy and fruitful ministry until illness curtailed his activities and he died peacefully on 29th September 1894. On the Sunday after his death, the congregation met 'with heavy hearts. The man they loved would never again minister to them the Word of Life'. His remains were conveyed to Ballymena by train and he was interred in Broughshane burial ground.

The church appointed Mr Peter Hector Blaikie, 'a good Scotchman' in 1895. He had entered Spurgeon's College in 1878, and ministered in Wishaw, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Wick. He set up manse in Lodge Road. He was obliged to resign in 1902 because of ill health. Upon his retirement he was 'presented with a purse of gold sovereigns, subscribed by all denominations in the town as a public expression of the manner in which he was esteemed'. He died in 1932, the fourth 'Spurgeon's man' to have pastored the church in just over 40 years.

So ended an era in the history of Coleraine Baptist. As H A Gribbon wrote; 'During the last 60 years the church has had twelve Pastors. It would be invidious to make any comments on their comparative merits. No doubt they all had many anxieties in connection with the church, which, like most Northern ones, was a bit down, and while

some made a deeper impression than others, they all preached Christ crucified as the only Saviour'.

'IN LABOURS MORE ABUNDANT' 1903-1940

The longest tenure of the Coleraine pastorate began on 4th October 1903 when the Rev John W W D Freeman commenced his ministry. From Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire), he had been converted in the hall in Corrig Avenue, baptised by Rev H D Brown in Harcourt Street, attended the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow and the Baptist College in Dublin. He served his first pastorate in Athlone where he met and married Minnie in 1899. A man of strong convictions, it was reported in the May 1896 issue of 'The Irish Baptist' that 'he spent seven days on a plank bed in Sligo prison' because of his open-air work in that town. His early tenacity was to stand him in good stead!

His first manse was in Esdale Terrace on Millburn Road. Membership of the church stood at 85, but this was to decrease considerably because trouble was brewing for the young Pastor. Reasons for the split are now somewhat obscure, but before long members were leaving to form a second Baptist church in the Town Hall in April 1905. The rift was sadly never healed, transfers between the two groups continued for several years and the Town Hall fellowship never prospered. A local journalist of the time commented; 'Surely one strong Baptist church in a town would serve the Cause better than two weak Churches and all the more so as in doctrine and policy there is no difference whatsoever'. Mr Gribbon, the leader of the breakaway group and a highly respected member of the local community, died in 1917. His passing was greatly mourned by the denomination.

Meanwhile the Abbey Street congregation pressed forward and contemporary minutes record appreciation of their indefatigable Pastor. In 1910 he was given a vote of confidence for 'his faithful ministry of the Word, his zeal for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom, his unflagging devotion to duty and his labours for the moral and spiritual uplifting of his fellow-men'. Another commentator states; 'They did not require to spur him on; they had more need to put a bridle on him to keep him back'. The church bought a new Manse at Ardbana Ter-

race, Mountsandel Road in 1912 for £300. Mrs Freeman sadly passed away in 1918, the Pastor remarrying four years later.

Mr Freeman traversed the area, evangelising and teaching. In 1913 five outstations were in existence; a newly formed church in Kilrea is mentioned in 1925; the following year a Fellowship was set up in Limavady where Rev Freeman acted as an unpaid Pastor till1929. He was the first minister in Coleraine to own a motor-car, a Riley Swift two seater; annual missions were held – Jack Atkinson, the 'boy preacher' and Gypsy John Hawkins being two of the evangelists; open airs were regularly held on the Fair Hill. Rev Freeman was banned from the town ministers' council for sponsoring a mission by Rev W P Nicholson. Considerable church refurbishment was carried out including installation of the pews, which were in much demand when the old building was pulled down a couple of years ago!

Rev Freeman's sudden death on Saturday 17th February 1940 was a devastating blow for the church, the denomination and the town. Several current members still remember what they were doing on that fateful day. The lengthy obituary in the 'Chronicle' catches the mood of sadness and also paints a vivid picture of the 'big man'; 'In the pulpit both his figure and voice were arresting and his deliverances were invariably characterised with a degree of evangelical fervour. He was big in his sympathies, and his visitations in the homes of his flock were always an especial comfort and encouragement. In the counsels of the Irish Baptist church, Mr Freeman loomed large. He had served on all its committees of importance. He lost no opportunity of proclaiming the Gospel. He interested himself in educational and philanthropic work. No matter from which standpoint judged, Mr Freeman was a good man. No greater tribute can be paid to his memory'. The newspaper also records pulpit tributes from the other Churches in the town, including one from Father J J MacLaverty of St Malachy's who spoke of his 'long personal friendship with him'. The funeral service was addressed by Pastor L E Deens who had known him since Athlone days 45 years earlier. He described Mr Freeman as 'a sincere Christian, an ardent evangelist, a devoted Pastor, an acceptable preacher, a tireless committee man and better than that, he was a big-framed, big-hearted, brotherly man'. He was 65 years old. The town closed in his honour and he was buried beside his first wife in Coleraine cemetery.

A plaque was erected to Mr Freeman in the church in 1950. It simply read: 'IN LABOURS MORE ABUNDANT' – a fitting summary to his life and work.

STANDING FIRM 1940-1974

The church did not delay long in considering a new Pastor. On the very day that a memorial service was held, a list of ten names was drawn up. Some guidelines were suggested; 'Any woman wishing to speak in the (selection) meeting should be given liberty to do so'. 'It is in the best interests of the church that we try to get a married man'. 'The salary should be £200 plus £30 for Portrush'.

The name of Rev A H Duff Stevenson, a recent graduate from the College in Dublin, and one who was described as 'a man of high Christian character and scholastic attainment' was considered. After a three month 'trial', the church unanimously decided to appoint him. He accepted in August 1940 on transfer from Antrim Road.

Following Mr Freeman was a daunting task but the young Pastor was soon exercising a positive ministry. Born in the Shankill area of Belfast in 1913, he attended Belfast Tech and was articled to a local firm of estate agents. His preaching gift was soon recognised and he entered the College in 1936.

It was wartime, the manse had been requisitioned as Officers' Quarters and several church people had joined up, some who still attend the church. They were prayed for every Sunday morning and gift parcels were regularly sent. It was decided that 'in the event of an air raid warning during any of the services, to carry on if possible but to make an announcement that anyone wishing to leave was free to do so'! When the local 'picture house' was opened on Sundays for HM's forces, all of the town churches made a vigorous protest. A letter was received from the Ministry of Supply indicating that the church railings 'would not be requisitioned but the church could present them voluntarily if they desired'. 'We did not feel led to do so', was the reply

On 27th February 1944 the church was filled to overflowing for a joint baptismal service with the American forces. The preacher was Chap-

lain Elder of New Orleans who brought greetings from the Southern Baptist Convention. He baptised a Sergeant Williams whilst Rev Stevenson baptised Miss Eileen McNaul.

Heavy blackout curtains had covered the windows. After the war the thrifty ladies of the Fellowship decided to turn them into female baptismal gowns. An onlooker at the subsequent service remembers how the material ballooned upwards on contact with the water. Weights were attached before the next baptisms!

Despite the restrictions the church continued its busy programme. The Pastor preached four times on a Sunday and twice mid-week, always clad even for visitation in his impeccable ministerial garb. He was involved in starting a flourishing CE Society and in the encouragement of the new work in Portstewart. In June 1945 he announced that he had accepted a call to Knightswood Baptist in Glasgow. He later served in Finchley Lane, Hendon and in George Street Baptist in Plymouth, retiring in 1979.

Shortly after Mr Stevenson's departure, the church called William J Rowell, then ministering in Lisnagleer. Mr Rowell was a Dubliner, one of a family of ten, he went to work at the age of 14 to support his mother. He was converted at the age of 17 in the Dublin YMCA at the famous 8.30 service. He soon joined Phibsboro Baptist and was often invited to preach. He was a keen open-air worker from the earliest days and such a ministry was carried on when he came to Coleraine – in 1946 there were five known conversions through this work. His induction service was held on 5th November 1945 where he promised that he would 'strive unceasingly to further God's work'. This he did with the dignified assistance of his wife, Mabel, for the next 28 years.

Mr Rowell invested much time in the encouragement of the work in Portrush, an outstation that had stumbled along for a number of years. A site was purchased, plans were drawn up for a building, tent missions were held on the property and a building fund was commenced. Eventually the foundation stone was laid by Mrs Freeman in 1966 and the church was opened a year later, with Mr Oswald Young from Dublin appointed to work alongside Pastor Rowell with special responsibilities for Portrush. After Mr Young's departure in 1971 the church

became self- governing with Mr Keith Gilbert as its first full-time minister.

Throughout Pastor Rowell's time in Coleraine, missions were regularly held. Some of those invited were Currie Brennan, Willie Mullan, Albert Flaherty, Geoffrey King and Emile Guedj from Paris. Towards the end of his ministry in Coleraine his health was deteriorating. He had had a very demanding year as President of the Union in 1972. After two throat operations he asked the College to supply a student for the summer. He resigned on 31st March 1974. The editor of the church magazine spoke for the congregation when he wrote; 'One knew that in Pastor and Mrs Rowell they had what a good shepherd should have – a love and affection for their sheep. Pastor Rowell's Christianity did not end at the pulpit steps or Mrs Rowell's at the church door. They were like a father and a mother to the congregation and really delighted themselves to see their flock going on with the Lord. Pastor Rowell was known for his good deeds throughout the community'. Mr Rowell passed away in 1996 and is buried in Brannockstown, Co Kildare. Mrs Rowell still takes a keen interest in the church.

AN AGE OF CHANGE 1974-2002

The student recommended by the College was John M Hansford from Bromley in Kent who had given up a career in banking to study at the Irish Baptist College. He was inducted on 26th July 1974. The new Pastor's excellent teaching ministry was much appreciated throughout the Province and he was particularly popular in student circles.

Great changes were taking place in the Coleraine area with the arrival of the University and large industry, and what had been for many years a local congregation was having to absorb members from elsewhere with differing backgrounds and approaches to church life. Also in the 'religious' world, new trends were emerging, from styles of worship to the 'shepherding movement', from women's dress to Bible versions. This flux affected Coleraine Baptist as well as many others and led to both expectation and apprehension.

A new spacious porch was added to the premises. A larger manse was acquired, but the biggest building venture in Pastor Hansford's

time was the construction of a large hall to accommodate the expanding youth work. A building committee was set up in 1985 and a contract was signed for £130,000. The much-needed spacious premises were opened by Mrs A McCloskey, the oldest member, on 2nd September 1988. Campaigner Clans had been introduced in 1979 and the movement has flourished, regularly exceeding 100 young people. The Duke of Edinburgh's Scheme was adopted in the early 80s and most of the senior section of Campaigners have received awards, quite a number visiting St James' Palace and Hillsborough Castle for their 'gold' presentation.

In the later years of Mr Hansford's ministry, various important documents regarding church policy were drawn up. These included such matters as Mission, Divorce and Remarriage and Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child. Pastor Hansford resigned from the church in April 1994 to take up the Pastorate of Milltown Baptist, Belfast. He had served with vigour for 20 years.

After a two-year vacancy, Edwin G Ewart, BA, BD, MTh, a native of Magherafelt and a graduate in Social Work from Jordanstown, was appointed. He had previously ministered in Letterkenny and Mountpottinger. The induction service took place on 3rd May 1996. Pastor Ewart continues to exercise a very biblical and relevant ministry.

A major project has been undertaken since the start of the millennium in the shape of a new building on the old site. The much-enlarged premises were opened in September 2002 and the church now enjoys a beautiful and flexible location where many events have been held which would have been impossible in the 1841 building. But as Mr HA Gribbon hinted a century ago, it is the Lord who judges the 'success' of any church. Coleraine, like all others is made up of fallible people who make mistakes but our Lord is gracious and anything of lasting value that has been achieved is because of His divine intervention. May all future work of this congregation reflect the 'Chronicle' headline on the opening of the hall in 1988: 'For the glory of God'.

SUCCESSION OF MINISTERS 1795-2004

	— 1830	Mr Delap
1831 —		Dr Potter
	— 1838	Rev George Ledlie Carson
1840 —	1847	Rev WS Eccles
1847 —	1851	Rev John Brown
1860 —	1862	Rev TW Medhurst
1862 —	1867	Rev Alex Tessier
1867 —	1868	Rev Percy F Pearce
1869 —	1871	Rev Alexander Carson
1878 —	1879	Rev D Macrory
1880 —	1885	Rev John Scilley
1891 —	1894	Rev John Dickson
1895 —	1902	Rev PH Blaikie
1903 —	1940	Rev JWWD Freeman
1940 —	1945	Rev AH Duff Stevenson
1945 —	1974	Pastor William J Rowell
1974 —	1994	Pastor John M Hansford
1994 —		Pastor Edwin G Ewart

(This article is an abridged version of a fuller history, obtainable from the Coleraine church secretary, cost - £5)

Evangelicalism since the 1970s

Personal Reflection

This year I celebrate 30 years since my graduation from the Irish Baptist College and my entrance into my first pastorate at Rathcoole Baptist Church. It has been my privilege to live through some of the defining moments in evangelicalism of the 20th century. My own growth as a Christian has been intersected by developments on the wider church scene.

Evangelical Renaissance.

The resurgence of evangelicalism immediately after the Second World War reached its high point in the late fifties and early sixties. From a secular point of view this was an era of profound social change. Old values were being undermined. Changes in the world of work alongside new technologies were going to alter people's lives forever. But on the Christian scene it was within evangelicalism that the developments were most marked.

There were developments in evangelical thought.

This was the time of great leaders. Doctor Martyn Lloyd-Jones was preaching at Westminster Chapel; Donald Grey Barnhouse was at Tenth Presbyterian, Philadelphia while Harold Ockenga was ministering at Park Street, Boston. These figures were to have seminal impact on the evangelical movement worldwide. On the theological front men like Carl F. Henry and Donald Bloesch were writing important material. New publishers like Banner of Truth, Presbyterian & Reformed, Baker and I.V.P. began influencing the wider Christian public.

There were developments in evangelical activity.

Through the crusades of Dr. Billy Graham evangelicals were becoming more aggressive in their proclamation of the gospel. Crusades in large arenas gave us the vision to think outside the box – or at least outside of our church buildings. New ministries like TEAR Fund appeared

which took the evangelical movement into the realm of social action in ways more reminiscent of its pre-1900 period.

It was during this period I grew up. My childhood was still filled with a mixture of old style Scottish spirituality – we always sang a Psalm at the beginning of morning worship, for example – and the influence of American popular religion mostly through the coming of the 'Gospel Song.' I was converted early on but felt the need still to put my hand up during an appeal by a visiting evangelist. My father took me to see a Billy Graham movie 'Oil-town U.S.A' which sparked my immediate sense of call to be an evangelist. From that night (I was 12) I began to read everything I could lay my hands on about theology (I remember the first book I read was Carl Barth's 'Evangelical Theology'). One of the earliest books I bought was Bloesch's 'New Evangelicalism'. I discovered the Banner of Truth books and through them was introduced to the writings of Dr. Lloyd-Jones and the sermons of Spurgeon. The influence of these books and hearing some of the great preachers of that period combined with my own study of Scripture began to form my thinking and shape my theology.

It also convinced me that I wanted to study at an evangelical institution. At that time I do not hesitate to say that the Irish Baptist College was in the forefront of Conservative Evangelicalism in the UK. I was grateful to be able to study under people whose theological insight and spiritual experience were an inspiration.

Evangelical Renewal.

The 1960's saw a cultural revolution in the Western world. We have been learning to deal with it ever since. Initially it severed the generations causing untold grief to an older generation who suddenly found their children impossible to communicate with. I lived through this and was part of the new wave. From the beginning I understood exactly what the new music was saying and appreciated it for what it was. I was able to weather this period while remaining close to my parents because of their wisdom in dealing with me. As a Christian growing up in that generation I longed for the ability to express my Christian faith in the genre of the new era. I longed to have songs I could sing along to a guitar instead of an organ. I longed above all to see my generation

reached for Christ.

Then along came the Jesus Movement. I believe it was the nearest thing to a genuine Revival I have witnessed in my lifetime. Through this movement tens of thousands of my contemporaries were won for Christ. One church in California saw 10,000 young people baptised in one year. My own experience was on a smaller scale. With a friend of mine we persuaded the owner of a coffee shop to let us use it one night a week as a drop in place for our friends. It became the number one place to hang out in the evenings. Over the space of one year we saw 80 young people converted and drawn into our church. They are going on with God to this day. I myself had the opportunity to speak to over 5000 people at a 'Jesus March' in central Glasgow. It was an exciting time to be alive.

As I think of that period of the sixties two particular areas were affected.

There was a new emphasis on experience.

This was the contribution of the charismatic movement. I heard many of the more substantial leaders of this movement early on in its life. I was serious about going on with God and therefore wanted whatever God had for me. I appreciated the emphasis on experience – not as a substitute for the mind and truth but as the natural application of truth to ourselves. God wants to be understood and loved. Though I rejected the charismatic way of describing some of the phenomena I nonetheless embraced the desire for 'feeling' a sense of God's presence – something that had always been there among those who truly loved the Lord. Never again would I be content with a merely cerebral relationship to Jesus Christ.

There was new emphasis on ecclesiology.

In the early part of the 20th century Evangelicals had become strong on individual salvation and weak on the church. My own background made me suspicious of the organised church. But in the movements of this period came a new appreciation of the church as the body of Christ. Along with this came a new understanding of the broad outline

of church government and life to be found in Scripture. I found some of these biblical principles still in force in Irish Baptist churches long after they had been lost among UK Baptists. The danger is always of institutionalising what we find as a dynamic model of church in the NT. It was while in Rathcoole that the first thoughts about the shape of church leadership and the way a church might govern itself so as to be moveable to act quickly and decisively in its reactions to the world were born.

Among Irish Baptists at that period I found a safe place to think about the application of the Bible in a modern world. Older pastors and members were very encouraging towards a young upstart. I remember writing to Louis Deens asking whether he was going to carry an article in the Irish Baptist about the forthcoming Lausanne Conference in 1974. He wrote back saying 'no' but later referred to my letter when, following the success of that event, he wrote a long piece describing the Lausanne Covenant that was to have a lasting impact on the world evangelical scene.

Since then I suppose that in every church I have pastored I have tried to implement the principles I arrived at during my reading and study while in Rathcoole. I went to Canada and ministered there for a few years before returning to Scotland. During my 15 year ministry in Kirkintilloch God was pleased to give us a time of unparalleled blessing. I still look to that as being the high point of my ministry.

Evangelical Fragmentation.

If the 60's and 70's saw evangelical renewal the 80's and 90's saw evangelical fragmentation. Perhaps the rot started in 1968 when the evangelical Anglicans and Free churches pulled themselves apart. Perhaps it was the rise of the new churches. Certainly the individualism of our popular culture has made for an increasingly individualistic approach to church life – a case of 'you in your small corner and I in mine!' Post-modernism has also had its impact. The view that there is no such thing as objective truth has led many to talk about 'what is true for them.' As I survey the scene going into this new century two issues lie before us as an evangelical movement.

Ghetto-ism

There is still a tendency for conservative evangelicals to get into their own corner, circle the wagons and bunker down! All these mixed metaphors are saying that we need each other. The society we live in is no longer simply amused by our quant old fashioned ways. All the evidence is that our society is now actively hostile to biblical Christianity. We need to overcome our isolationism if we are effectively to get the gospel out in our generation. One of the exciting things about being in London has been the opportunity to be on the steering committee responsible for starting the South East Gospel Partnership – an alliance of conservative evangelical churches committed to raising up a new generation of gospel workers through trainee schemes in local churches; and the reviving or planting of gospel churches throughout the South East where there are over 18 million people.

Post-evangelicalism.

This new movement is in fact the old 19th century liberalism in modern guise. The reality is that it is the major threat to the evangelical movement in our time. Teaching the 'Openness of God' this movement questions God's active government of our world; asserting the 'Wideness of God's Mercy' it challenges our traditional understanding of salvation and judgment and hell. Its advocates are everywhere within the popular evangelical scene. Often they are motivated by the highest aims – of making the message more communicable to our contemporaries. But they are in fact surrendering the gospel in the process.

In my first charge at Rathcoole I slipped rather more by accident than design into expository preaching (I simply had four talks to do each week). Now, more than ever before, we need to preach the word from the Bible with authority. Now, more than ever before, we need to focus on faithful leaders whom we can teach 'the form of sound words' and to whom we can 'hand on the deposit of truth.' As I look into the next phase of my ministry I regard this as the priority. I am privileged to have a church (Duke Street, Richmond) that has, over the last few years, been able to move into having a staff team. We now embark on taking on at least four trainees. I see our future as God's people bound

up with a new generation. If we can be faithful to them as my heroes were to me in passing on the gospel them we shall be doing succeeding generations a great service.

As I look at God's sovereign hand upon me I am driven to cry 'sola de gloria' - to God alone be glory!

Recent Developments in Catholicism:

A Survey of Catholicism in Modern Ireland[1]

It is an impossible task in the space permitted to attempt to survey the changes that have taken place within worldwide Catholicism. It would make a fascinating study to examine the role of cultural and societal factors on the Church[2] in both historical and contemporary terms. However, to allow progress to be made, I have decided to focus on the situation in contemporary Ireland (and from this point forward when I refer to Ireland I mean the Republic of Ireland), examining the trends and issues that are facing the Catholic Church in a modern western country.

Many people are under the impression that the Catholic Church is a monochrome monolith in its theology and practice, a Church that is always the same. It is open to debate whether that was ever the case, but an examination of the Catholic Church in Ireland will demonstrate that it is certainly not true. Some of the changes are little more than surface and cosmetic; but underlying those changes are more profound (and perhaps more significant) developments, which if given full expression in the future, could well change the nature of the Catholic Church as we know it. Whether that will ever happen, we will simply have to wait and see.

The Catholic Church has already experienced such changes in other parts of the world. In fact, it may be more accurate to talk about the Catholic "Churches", some of the situations are so different. One only has to compare the situation in England, where the Church finds itself in a minority, to Ireland or other Southern European countries, where the Catholic Church is very much the majority Church. In some cases it is hard to believe that the Churches both belong to the same Catholic community.

The fact that some of these changes are now becoming increasingly evident in Ireland can be seen by noting the number of recent works published by a wide range of authors on the challenges facing the Catholic Church in the "new Ireland"[3]. Virtually all of the authors are advocating significant changes, though the nature of the changes de-

pends on where the authors are coming from.

In considering Ireland I have chosen to describe the place that I know best. Some of the changes seen in Ireland will of course be reflected to various degrees elsewhere in the world. At the outset it is important to recognise that Ireland is somewhat unique in the mixture of religious and cultural influences it has been through. That uniqueness shows up in the history of the nation and in the way the nation has been changing over the past 15-20 years, and continues to develop now into the 21st century.

It goes without saying that there are differences between the Republic and Northern Ireland, and many of those differences exist also within the Catholic communities of the two countries. It is far too simplistic to think of a unified Catholic community on the island; the Republic is a different nation, subject to a different development, and resulting in a community that is different from Northern Ireland. Recognising these differences does not mean that this paper will have no relevance for the Catholic community in the six counties. The Catholic Church in Northern Ireland has faced and is facing similar trends and issues, but because of a different mix of factors it has not responded in exactly the same way.

Catholicism has had a long history of being syncretistic, able to swallow up cultural and world views around it and 'Christianising' them. That means if we are ever going to be able to get to grips with Catholicism in modern Ireland we need to understand something of the cultural forces and social attitudes that currently exist within Irish society. And, of course, Catholicism has had a major hand in fashioning many of those forces and attitudes. If we fail to do that we are liable to misunderstand and under-estimate the continuing pervasive influence of Catholicism today. This will become evident as the study proceeds.[4]

In order to more fully appreciate and understand some of the developments within contemporary Irish Catholicism I will present a multi-level analysis along the following lines :

the first stage will suggest a conceptual model for examining and understanding Catholicism in Ireland, a framework that will prove helpful in trying to understand the developments that have been

and are going on with Catholicism.
the second stage will be to examine some of the changes that can be seen 'on the ground', the sort of things that could be observed by anyone living in Ireland.
the third stage will build on the first two and examine some of the theological developments within the thinking of the Church itself.
a final stage will outline some of the challenges this analysis poses for Baptists in Ireland today.

1. Thinking about Catholicism

As a first stage I want to suggest a conceptual model for thinking about Catholicism in Ireland, a framework that will help understand and explain some of the things that will be examined later in the article. The model is derived from a sociological examination of the decline of the moral authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Tom Inglis in his *Moral Monopoly*[5] suggests a 'typology of Irish religiosity' that helps explain the religious expression and morality within Irish Catholicism, what he terms *habitus*. According to Inglis, Catholic religion and morality can be expressed in three ways. These means of expression and modes of morality are not mutually exclusive, but can exist together without contradiction in the minds of Catholic practitioners. What follows is an adaptation of Inglis' typology.

1.1 Magical-devotional practices

This includes two particular types of practice:

a) things drawn from a pagan, non-Christian origin (including folk superstitions), such as not walking under a ladder, putting up horseshoes, keeping a lucky penny; fairy rings in fields; charms; fortune tellers; faith healers, holy wells etc.

b) sacred objects and practices approved by the Church and used to obtain favours and blessing from God, or the saints: charms, medals, relics, holy water. These things have a background in rural Irish culture, but have been brought into the orbit of the Church and legitimised.

The inclusion of these sorts of practice within Catholicism is part of its syncretism, something that now extends to modern ideas and myths. All sorts of religious activity sanctioned by the Church can be done for magical ends, for example, a rosary to bring rain or sun. 'As long as the practice is engaged in under the auspices of the church it is tolerated.'[6]

1.2 Legalist-orthodox religious behaviour

This has been the dominant expression of Catholicism in Ireland and still remains very prominent. The Church dominates the religious and moral aspects of virtually all of society. In other words, what the Church says goes. 'Questions of morality and salvation are left in the hands of the experts – bishops and priests.'[7]

The end result is that Catholicism determines private and public morality, within the home, in families, schools, healthcare, politics, and more broadly in the community. Through the first half of the 20th century the Church had vast resources (especially personnel) to maintain this control. In this mode of religious practice, what was important was keeping to the rules and regulations of the Church and being seen to do so.

It was through this sort of religious expression that the identification, to be Irish = to be Catholic, developed. To be successful in Irish life you had to be a Catholic in good standing with the Church. All of this led to a form of legalism: what the Church said was the rule of life. Irish people were to lead a life of 'simple faith', which basically meant unquestioned submission to the Church and its rules. If people wanted to make a moral decision they would ask the Church. The Irish way of life came directly from Catholic thinking, even down to the sexual behaviour of married couples.

What needs to be noted is that when this legalist-orthodox behaviour was at its height, the Church was the one thing that brought comfort to the people. Times were hard and oppression was going on; there was little or no consolation in everyday life. People looked for and found solace in the Church and in their adherence to the rules and ways of the Church.

1.3 Individually principled ethics

The wane of the authority of the Catholic Church has led to a third means of religious expression, namely individually principled ethics. In this mode of spiritual expression people take responsibility for themselves. They may interact with the teaching of the Church, but interpret it for their own lives and for the way they want to live. This represents much more of a modern mentality (even perhaps a Protestant-like way of thinking).[8]

Up to mid 1970s the Church's teaching was accepted unquestioningly, so much so that people did not even think to check it in the Bible.[9] The Church said it, it must be true. Today, that is an increasingly diminishing reality.

In the above definitions it might appear that these typologies represent a chronological development within Catholic spirituality. It is fairly easy to think in terms of development from one to the other, but the reality is much more complex. Today in Ireland there is a very definite trend towards individual decision making, as we will see, but that does not mean that magical views or the legalistic ways of the Church have been left behind. Far from it. They are simply incorporated within a more complex and multi-faceted religious response from Catholic adherents, a response that the Church appears to be willing to accept.

It is vital to keep that perspective in mind when examining contemporary Catholic practice, otherwise it is possible to be fooled into thinking that Catholicism is a spent force in Ireland. That is definitely not the case, and the unique history of the Republic in terms of the overlap between religion, politics and national identity, probably means that the Catholic Church will remain a major part of the Irish landscape for a considerable time in the future.

2. Catholicism on the ground

Inglis' typology is helpful in understanding and categorising the various changes that are evident within Catholic practice. However, in order to understand some of the developments within Catholicism it is impor-

tant to try to analyse what is happening "on the ground".

What follows is a range of trends that have been well documented over the past number of years:

2.1 Decline in mass attendance

There is simply no argument with the published figures, mass attendance is dropping rapidly, especially in urban areas.[10] In the results of nationwide survey published in the autumn of 2003 mass attendance had dropped below 50% for the first time. In rural Ireland, mass attendance figures are significantly higher than in urban areas. In County Tipperary (where I live and work) mass attendance is somewhere between 70% and 80%. It is worth noting that the mass attendance figures for Ireland are significantly higher than any other European country.[11]

The drop-off in mass attendance has been most marked among the younger generation. That fact is hardly unexpected, but it does mean that the decline in religious observance, particularly mass attendance, is likely to accelerate into the future.[12] The various proposals for the renewal of the parish system hardly seems to be sufficient to redress the current trends[13]; something much more radical is needed.[14]

These figures need to be interpreted carefully. It may have been true that 'the opium of the masses was, fittingly, mass'[15], but the drop-off in attendance at mass may not be indicative of such a decline in Irish Catholicism as might appear at first sight. Decline in mass attendance does not necessarily mean a corresponding decline in Catholic beliefs. If anything, the figures probably point more to the new individuality of morality, and the new, increasingly common and popular definition of being Catholic which does not include going to mass regularly - a definition very different from that officially defined by the Church.

A move away from mass attendance cannot be assumed to be a move away from Catholicism, or a move away from the Church. Despite the fall-off in mass attendance, the commitment to the core beliefs of Catholicism remains very high. People who do not go to mass want their children to go through first communion and confirmation, which is an

integral part of primary school life. People want to be married in the Church and buried in the Church, and not simply because they want the institution.

One of the questions that is being asked is: will Ireland follow other Catholic areas of Europe and see further and more substantial decline? It is very hard to say, because there are lots of factors that make Irish Catholicism and the way it works unique. The Catholic Church has had a massive impact on Irish history, society and culture and that cannot be quickly overturned or removed. The Catholic Church has shaped the Irish nation and it still has a huge impact on society. The Catholic way of life in Ireland has certainly not disappeared. It is for this reason that mass attendance may not be a completely reliable measure of the spiritual commitment of Irish Catholics, and why gospel witness so often remains difficult.

Just to highlight the interplay of the three types of religiosity highlighted above, it was estimated that over 3 million people turned out all over the country to welcome the bones of St Teresa of Lisieux. The Shrine at Knock was the top visitor attraction in the country last year with over 1.3 million visitors.[16]

This decline has been a process, rather than a reaction to a particular event. One of the most significant factors that has influenced this decline in religious observance has been the enormous changes seen in the economy of Ireland.[17] We have already mentioned that the Church functioned as a comfort for the people. The Church also taught Irish people how to live with frugal means; it taught them self-denial. Some would argue the Church actually positively propagated this. To a nation that felt itself oppressed, the Church offered a way of hope. Economic growth has brought many things, one of those is a growing materialism. People in modern Ireland do not need comfort for the future any more, they can buy it now.[18]

2.2 Decline in the "religious"[19]

The traditionally strong Catholic Orders are in the process of steep decline. The Christian Brothers (a lay teaching order) are nearing the

end of their input into education and have been handing over to lay teachers over the past decade or so. In recent years they have had no new members. What is true in the Christian Brothers is reflected in most of the religious orders.

In the past 15 years six seminaries have been closed. Maynooth is now the only seminary for diocesan priests, and numbers there have fallen dramatically. To date the actual number of diocesan priests has not fallen to any significant degree, but the age profile is climbing rapidly. In the Ross diocese (Co Cork), the average age of diocesan clergy in 2000 was 65; in 2010 it will be 75. There has been talk [ ] of priests coming from other countries to fill the gap. That is a vast turnaround for a nation that has exported spirituality all over the world; it now seems as though the export of 'Celtic culture' and the 'Irish bar' has replaced that.

2.3 Dissatisfaction with the hierarchy

There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.[20] One of the main reasons for this is the negative perception of the way in which the hierarchy has responded to the various challenges of the past 30 years. The scandals that have come to public attention in the past few years (abuse, non-celibacy, the orphanage scandals, baby export scandal, as well as the official position on birth control) are obviously issues here. But there is also a general perception that the leadership which for so long has been very domineering and controlling is out of touch with the general population.[21]

The leadership of the Church by and large still works with the mentality of the legalism-orthodox framework. The public response to the child abuse allegations is evidence of that (although that might change in the future): no comment and no admission of fault (in case of possible legal battles and compensation payments).

It was interesting to read an editorial in one of the national broadsheets recently that urged the hierarchy to take on more of the attitude of Jesus and the NT in responding to the victims of abuse, rather than reacting like a secular institution. This highlights a new reality in Ire-

land. The moral monopoly of the Church has been broken; the new moral voice in our society is the media. Inglis observes, "Catholics appear as likely to be more informed and guided in what is right and wrong by what they hear discussed in the media, as by what they are told by priests and bishops." [22]

However, along with this, it is vital to note that satisfaction levels with local priests is usually very high, reaching something near 95% in a recent survey. People may be fed up with the hierarchy and their attitudes and leadership, but generally they have no thoughts of leaving the Church. This sort of figure highlights the local community loyalty that the parish system has fostered within Ireland.[23] At the parish level, the Church operates as a social force, a force that is very difficult to break away from, particularly in rural communities.

The reality of the situation is that despite the collapse of the authority of the Church and the hierarchy, there is a very strong loyalty to local Catholic Church and parish, a loyalty that means people are prepared to tolerate far more than is often realised.

2.4 Decline in influence in family, over women in particular

In first half of the 20th century the Catholic Church had a grip on family life. It virtually controlled how families lived; it controlled how husband and wife related, all ultimately for its own purposes. That influence has now been broken.[24] The sexual scandals have had a major influence on that. People feel that the Church cannot be trusted any more with family matters. In the popular mindset, the child abuse and orphanage scandals have fostered the perception that when the Church had children in its care, they not were protected.

With regard to women it has been argued that the Church controlled their sexuality.[25] This was achieved by various means

- not permitting good education about female reproductive biology;
- the virgin Mary being set up as the role model for female spirituality;
- sex being regarded as something dirty and certainly not for

pleasure inn its own right;
- the power of the confessional over this area of human behaviour;
- the encouragement to have many children because *Humanae Vitae* ruled that contraception was unacceptable to the Catholics.[26]

The consequence of this was that the Irish mother became the religious leader of the family, and the priest replaced the father as the male religious authority in family life.

However, when women realised that the Church could not and did not deliver on its promises about family life and as a result could not be trusted, they started to take control back to themselves. There are other factors at work in this too: education, increased opportunity in the work place, a work place no longer dominated by conservative Catholic values; and the general empowerment of women that is part of the European agenda.

The interaction between women and the Church can perhaps be encapsulated in a an incident that occurred a few years ago. President Mary McAleese went to a Church of Ireland service and, as a practicing Catholic, took communion. [ ] When she was criticised by the Archbishop of Dublin, the vast majority of people sided with the President. President McAleese is the second of two women presidents who have advocated and promoted new role models for women in Irish society. It is just an accident of history that both have been called Mary, but that fact prompts the suggestion that the changing Ireland has a new Mary role model.

2.5 Declining influence in politics, health care, education, media[27]

The influence of the Church has declined to varying degrees in these areas. Significant changes have, and are continuing to take place.

In the field of politics, it was once essential to be on good terms with the clergy to be a successful politician Nowadays, that it not so important. In fact in some cases it could even be regarded as a disadvantage.

There has been a significant decline in the Church's influence in education, although this has not gone completely, and will probably remain a factor for some time. Catholic catechism is taught as part of the school curriculum, which makes Catholicism part of the way children are educated. The Catholic Church is the patron of the vast majority of schools in the country. The influence of early education on the rest of life is well-known; what is learned in primary/national school tends to endure for life.[28]

Therefore the Catholicism taught in school remains the means by which people assess anything new in the religious field. Inglis observes; "It would be wrong to think that Irish Catholicism is dying, especially when the Church has such control in education".[29] In fact because of the influence of Catholicism from a young age it "lingers in the individual personality as well as the social system and can be reactivated at short notice"[30], especially when people are presented with an alternative.

It is important to note the role that the media has had in these developments. "The media have driven a stake into the heart of the institutional Church from which it will recover, but never fully."[31] Kenny's observations from within the media match this: "The Press coverage of the Catholic Church in the last years of the century was ferocious; it would have been difficult to have found anyone in the secular press with a good word to say."[32] It is as though the Church now comes to the media to confess its faults and failures. Media gurus (presenters and DJs) have become the "priests" of the new Ireland. The media has replaced the Church as the symbol of domination and moral authority for contemporary Irish society, and this has all sorts of implications for the sort of society which is emerging. "It is now the media more than the Church that form and inform consciences and expand or limit how people perceive the world."[33]

2.6 A move towards individualism

The term "*à la carte*"[34] Catholicism has been coined to describe the new approach to religion in Ireland. People pick and chose what they will accept and what teachings they will practise, without reference to the Church hierarchy or laws. It is important to be aware, however,

that such "*à la carte*" Catholics are still loyal to the Church, even though they redefine the Church for themselves. They "retain the touchy-feely harmless bits of a belief but omit the rules that might actually impinge on one's life, such as those relating to sexual continence outside marriage for example."[35]

The shift towards theological individualism which this represents is the most thorough form of the individually principled ethics mode of religious practice. As Inglis observes, "the institutional church is losing its ability to determine the way Irish Catholics are religious."[36]

The Catholic Church once claimed for itself the right to be able to regulate and control all areas of life in Ireland.[37] The Church knew how people should live, and it kept a strict and tight control on them. However, when people began to discover that the Church was not being consistent, and proved by its actions that it did not really know how to handle these things, people started to take control back into their own hands. What was once ceded to Church is now back in the court of the individual. There are other factors involved in this shift, including the development of the Celtic Tiger economy, and the growing tide of the liberal European agenda. The Church now seems to have accepted this new situation. It certainly shows no signs of drawing hard and fast lines to prevent this individualistic redefinition. When it has tried it has faced a huge backlash from the media in particular and from people in general.

Part of the new individualism is the questioning of the old authorities. When it appears that those old authorities cannot argue their case in the new climate, but still expect a knee-bending compliance, then the old ways are sidelined as no longer models for today. That is going on swiftly within Catholicism in Ireland today . A picture of a "new" Catholic has emerged "whose practice of religion had increasingly little impact either on behaviour in the public sphere or on many areas of private life."[38] Inglis comments that while 30-40 years ago the whole of the Catholic Church (bishops, priests, nuns, orders etc) tended to speak with one voice, "over the last ten years a dozen different voices seem to speak on behalf of the Church" which are "increasingly at odds with one another".[39]

Perhaps one somewhat extreme example will highlight the extent of this criticism of the hierarchy. Tony Flannery, a Redemptorist priest, in his *From the Inside* writes the following about the present Pope: "He has been far too autocratic in his style of leadership, and one of the serious effects of his long reign has been deeply to divide the Church. . . His treatment of alternative points of view and the silencing of theologians. . . was scandalous. His style of leadership has been such that in certain circles a person's Catholicism is judged not by his faith in Jesus Christ but by his loyalty to the Pope." He denies that loyalty to the Pope is a central tenet of the faith, and concluded that in Ireland people "have tended to elevate him beyond human level to a sort of semi-divine status."[40]

A new era has emerged in which "the old interchange ability or shorthand equation of Irish and Catholic is no longer valid. Strict Catholicism is a characteristic of the Old, not the New Irish Psyche."[41] Inglis, too notes the emergence of a new Irish Catholic, but he also shrewdly points out that "it would be a foolish Christian who did not believe in the power of the institutional Catholic Church to resurrect itself."[42]

This is a snapshot of what is happening on the ground today, and it is what Baptist communities face as they witness to the good news of Jesus in the Republic. It is widely recognised that the contemporary climate is one of unprecedented openness to new ideas; but that openness must not be misinterpreted. Exactly where it will lead in the long term, no one really knows. It is, however, not without significance that O'Connell suggests the new modes of Catholic expression are "not at odds with a rising New Age mysticism and they do not contradict the claim that people will be more concerned with expressions of individual spirituality and idiosyncratic philosophy and less with unyielding doctrines."[43]

3. Theological trends

It is difficult to paint the scene theologically except in fairly broad brush strokes. In attempting to describe a general situation almost all of the points made may be open to negotiation, further clarification and refinement. However, while recognising that, it is possible to present

something of an overall picture that will help locate some of the developments outlined above within a wider frame of reference.[44]

To understand the present it is important to understand something of the past. Ever since the Counter-Reformation in the 16th century the Catholic Church has been extremely conservative in its own way on theological matters. In fact, the Counter-Reformation Church defined itself by a theological conservatism. The Catholic hierarchy controlled the Church, and controlled the thought life within the Church. However, as new ways of theological thinking began to arise in the 19th century, the Church responded in what could only be called a hyper-conservative way - the promulgation of papal infallibility at Vatican I. For a "top-down" institution it was a way to combat the forces of modernisation.[45]

It is important to understand this background, because even though modernist views were regarded as heretical by the Church hierarchy, they were still being advocated especially in some of the more liberal academies (particularly in Germany).

In the early 1960s Pope John XXIII called a Second Vatican Council. Historians debate the reasons for this and there is no certainty about the matter.[46] What is clear is that John did have a concern for *aggiornamento,* bringing the Church up to date. However, that was not the only force at work within the Church at the time of the Council. There was also a significant pressure from the theologians of the "new Catholicism", Rahner, Küng, Schillibeeckx etc, to redefine Catholicism radically. The end result was a rather confusing compromise between the traditionalists and the radicals, a confusion that has been enshrined within the documents of Vatican II.[47]

Vatican II has set the course for Catholicism for the last 40 years. Numerous surface changes have been seen as a result, such as changes in liturgy and the involvement of laity. Those have been significant changes, but the radical impact of Vatican II is more far-reaching than any surface changes.

As well as reaffirming everything that had gone on before, namely Vatican I and the Council of Trent (the tradition Catholic dogma and

ways of thinking) the documents produced at Vatican II enshrined some of the views of the modernists alongside the more traditional views. Theologically the Church now has contradictions and ambiguities at its basis that have been, and are still being worked out in the life of the modern Catholic Church.[48]

Perhaps some examples will help to clarify this:

In the realm of authority, it appears that Catholics who are faithful to Vatican II can adopt either an external authority (the traditional position of the Church) or a more radical and much more subjective inward authority.[49] Theological individualism has, therefore, become a "Catholic" way of resolving questions of doctrine and morals, a position that undermines the controlling authority of the hierarchy and papacy, and of course relegates the authority of Scripture even further.

In defining the Church itself, there has been what has been termed a Copernican revolution in how the Catholic Church understands itself.[50] Again this position is stated alongside the more traditional position that asserts there is no salvation outside the Church. In the more radical position, typified by the thinking of Karl Rahner, some concept of the supernatural has replaced the Church at centre of theological definition. The Catholic Church, according to this thinking, is closer to the centre than other churches and world faiths, but it is no longer the only way of knowing Christ.[51] This has obvious implications for the Church's understanding of mission and what it means.

W McSweeney has examined the sociological impact of these changes in his *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance*. One of his theses is that the ambiguity that exists within the Vatican II documents has led to the fragmentation of the Church on a global scale, or perhaps more accurately, has brought the fragmentation of the Church out into the open. Vatican II has ushered the major characteristics of the secular world ("individualism, science and therapy"[52]) into the heart of the Church, and as such has authorised new ways of thinking which are directly antagonistic to traditional (Tridentine) Catholicism. What this means in effect is that progressives can say they are being faithful to the teaching of the Church; conservatives can say the same, and both can claim the support of Vatican II, especially if they choose the

right sections. According to McSweeney, "Catholicism can no longer be defined by the beliefs and ethics of its adherents; the structural conditions of doctrinal and moral unity no longer exist."[53] This is because "the Vatican Council legitimated dissent."[54]

What has this done to the theology of the Church? As well as the more traditional scholarship there is now significant strength of liberal/ modern views within Catholicism. When this is added to the theological individualism that is enshrined within some parts of Vatican II, an individualism that reflects the humanism of the modernists, all the ingredients required for an *"à la carte"* approach to Catholicism are in place. As McSweeney recognises, "the fundamentals of Catholic faith are reaffirmed but their meaning is largely optional, relativized to secular cultural experiences."[55]

Up until recently Vatican II had barely touched Ireland, apart from the surface cosmetic changes. However, the changes of the past decade or so have resulted in Vatican II ways of thinking taking a much deeper hold in the Irish Catholic Church. Questions about the nature of the Church and about Catholicism that would never have been asked 10-15 years ago are being increasingly voiced. An increasing number of dissenting and possibly even reforming voices are being heard from within the Church. It is not that such writers and thinkers are considering leaving the Church, but their dissent from traditional Catholic dogma can be argued to be fully consistent with Vatican II.[56]

When this theological individualism is adopted in the post-modern, pluralist climate of modern Ireland the end result is that objective truth disappears and experience becomes the arbiter of truth and morality. Theological reflection in such a context "does not easily leave itself open to the charge of heresy."[57] Such a point of view is far removed from the traditional authoritarian models of Catholicism that were so prevalent in Ireland up to relatively recent times. Where these trends will lead in the future is anyone's guess.

This paper has sought not just to examine recent developments within Irish Catholicism, but has also attempted to provide some means of explaining why these have occurred. There can be little doubt that the combined effect of the forces within contemporary culture and the

theological ambiguity enshrined within the official documents of the Church are clearly pushing adherents of the Catholic Church towards a radical individualism in which Catholicism may become little more than a sociological label. It will no longer point to a set of beliefs and doctrines, but it may still define part of the self-identity of the Irish nation. It is into that climate that the good news of the gospel needs to be proclaimed, a good news that opposes and undermines such radical individualism. Such a task is not an easy one, but then Jesus never said gospel witness to any community would be easy.

As an overall conclusion to this paper, the final section will examine briefly the sorts of challenges that the issues described above bring to Baptists working in Ireland (South and North) at the beginning of the 21st century.

4. Challenges to Baptists

1. The question of identity versus relevance – where do we draw the lines?[58]
   Any church has to face the struggle of identity and relevance. The more the church strives to define its identity, the more it loses its relevance; the more it seeks to be relevant the more it loses its identity.
   In the survey of Catholicism these issues have come to the fore more than once. However, we need to ask where we as Baptists draw the lines? A ghetto mentality, retreating from the threats of a hostile world, might be safest option, but it is hardly a biblical option. The world is God's world and we are charged with a commandment from Jesus himself to engage with it.
   What sorts of things should we be doing to effectively engage with our culture? How can we follow Jesus in this?

2. How are we responding to societal factors? There are all sorts of pressures and trends within our society, both South and North. Most of the issues that face the Catholic Church in Ireland we also face as Baptists. The way we respond will have every bit as much effect on those who will come after us as the decisions being made within Catholicism will affect its future in Ireland.

It is worth noting that as we engage with our culture, we are not always as able to see the challenges that our culture presents to us. Sometimes we cannot see our culture clearly because we have actually learned to see with it. Baptists are not exempt from this.[59]

3. How do we avoid the dangers of power & control, issues that have caused real problems for Catholic Church? In its own way the conservatism of the Catholic Church resulted in an authoritarian and controlling environment. Our theological conservatism can produce its own brand of authoritarianism and an atmosphere that verges on the intolerant, a result that is very far from the biblical orthopraxis that should accompany biblical orthodoxy.

4. The need for clear, honest and humble Christian thinking, so that we are able to take what we believe to the market place of modern ideas and justify it there with coherence and relevance, without sounding arrogant.

   Hierarchical thought control will almost always lead to collapse. Biblical orthodoxy implies, even demands, humility, especially in areas where the Bible does not speak. Theological conservatism does not demand conservatism in every area of life. In fact the biblical position appears to be that radical theological conservatism (a commitment to biblical authority) means a commitment to continual renewal and change in a whole range of areas of life.

5. Patterns of thinking about "elect people".
   This was one of the ways that Catholicism thought about itself and portrayed itself in Ireland.[60] Irish Catholics were thought of as the chosen people, exporting (Catholic) spirituality all over world. Ireland was regarded as a special nation blessed by God.

   That sort of thinking always leads to pride, and always produces arrogance and complacency. God is not on any nation's side as Israel found to their cost in the Old Testament. Such thinking, even if it not often expressed, is, unfortunately, not always absent from evangelicalism.

6. The best way to really understand Catholicism is to get to know Catholic people, and ask them what they believe. We may be aware of the general Catholic framework, but we need to listen carefully to understand. As the "*à la carte*" approach becomes much more widespread and more readily accepted, we need to listen even more carefully because we simply will not know ahead of personal interaction with real people what they actually believe. (This is the way we should approach any person in an evangelism encounter.)

7. We need to work to build a credible alternative to Catholicism, and that has many implications for the sort of churches we are aiming to see established in the Republic, from the way they are structured and governed, right through to the way they are built. As Baptists working in the Republic we need to be wary of any sort of cultural imperialism: importing models unquestioningly from a different culture will not help build credibility.

It is always easier to analyse another community. However, it is important for us as Baptists to realise that many of the issues we face are the same or very similar to issues facing the Catholic Church. As we examine the developments within the Catholic Church and identify how the Church has responded to both internal and external pressures, we need to learn from what is going on, otherwise we are in danger of imprisoning ourselves to repeat the same mistakes.

Notes:

[1] Delivered at the Irish Baptist Historical Society, November 2003

[2] I have used "Church" throughout this article as a shorthand way of referring to the Catholic Church. Where "church(es)" appears it is a reference to the general concept of church as expressed in the Bible (unless it occurs in a quote about the Catholic Church, which I have not changed).

[3] Virtually all of the authors are agreed that Ireland as a nation has changed and is continuing to change. One of the areas where that change is marked is in the way the country thinks about and responds to the Catholic Church. The interesting thing is that some of the reflections are emanating from within the Church itself; and some of the proposals being made, if they were carried through would bring some very significant changes to the Church.

[4] There is a possibility that evangelicals may think that, unlike Catholicism, they are immune from being subject to contemporary trends within society. However, David Bebbington's study, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1989) has shown that evangelicals are far from immune to the effects of contemporary culture. In fact Bebbington suggests that

as evangelicals we are far more influenced by our culture that we ever assume, which is a salutary discovery, especially as we tend to think that we deliberately set ourselves against cultural trends. Bebbington, a fellow-Baptist, is well worth a read.

[5] T Inglis *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (UCD Press, Dublin, 1998)

[6] *Ibid.*, p.29

[7] *Ibid.*, p.30

[8] *Ibid.*, p.257

[9] *Ibid.*, p.37

[10] For further details of actual survey results see, for example, M O'Connell, *Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche* (The Liffey Press, Dublin, 2001), especially chapter 5, "Confessions of a Lapsed Catholic Nation", and the essays by J S Donnelly, Jr, "The troubled contemporary Irish Catholic Church" and N Barber, "Religion in Ireland: Its state and prospects" in B Bradshaw and D Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story*.. Many of the other works cited here contain similar statistical evidence of decline.

[11] O'Connell, *op. cit.*, quotes T Fahey: "Irish commitment to institutional Catholicism remains quite exceptional by western standards", which he then describes as "a polite way of saying weird", p.59

[12] See O'Connell, *op. cit.*, p.73

[13] This is the solution proposed by D V Twomey in *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, (Veritas, Dublin, 2003)

[14] Donnelly, *op.cit.*, suggests for example "a thorough-going repudiation of clericalism in its various non-spiritual dimensions", p.286

[15] O'Connell, *op. cit.*, p.60

[16] *Irish Independent*, (25th) August 2003; I am not 100% sure of the actual publication date

[17] O'Connell, *op. cit.*, p.65ff.; Inglis argues that the Celtic Tiger economy was only really possible because of the declining influence of the Church, and a breaking away from some of the models (*habitus*) it has advocated; ch 10 of his work makes this point most clearly.

[18] This is a factor that has affected not only Catholic Ireland, but evangelicalism in Northern Ireland. Materialism (which is based on greed) is idolatry; the trouble is that it is not often recognised as such because it has become such an integral part of the culture.

[19] For some examples of figures of decline, see Donnelly, *op.cit.*, p.284f. and Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.211ff.

[20] Mary Kenny documents some of the media coverage of this lucidly in her *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* (New Island Books, Dublin, 2000), chapter 14 "Decline and Fall"

[21] Donnelly, *op. cit.*, p.277 observes, "Had the Irish bishops been more willing to relax their authoritarian style and to give the Catholic laity a more meaningful role in church governance, perhaps they would have been able to avoid the costly errors in handling issues of sexual morality."

[22] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.241

[23] The influence of the GAA in this local loyalty should not be overlooked. The GAA is organised within the parish system, ensuring that the Church and sports community overlap significantly. Obviously, this is more pronounced in rural areas.

[24] See Inglis, *op. cit*, p.238ff.

[25] See Inglis, ch 8 "The Irish Mother" and pp.238ff.

[26] Flannery From the Inside devotes a whole chapter to the issue of contraception and the effect of the Church's strict rules on its moral credibility. He quotes a former Taoiseach, Garrett Fitzgerald, writing in the Irish Times: "The institutional Church lost virtually all moral credibility. . . by its insistence on elevating the issue of the possible impact of contraception on sexual mores to the level of an absolute that must take precedence over all other considerations – including the maintenance of normal relationships by many married couples, and in extreme cases the safety of a man's wife." p.118. Flannery argues that the issue of contraception and the way it was handled led to hypocrisy and a serious loss of moral credibility for the Church.

[27] See relevant sections in Inglis, ch 9

[28] When I learned subtraction at school I learned "10 to the top and 10 to the bottom"; our daughter learned "go next door and borrow one". It took a significant rethink and adjustment on my part to help her with her elementary maths homework! The point is equally applicable to the sphere of religion.

[29] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.244
[30] *Ibid.*, p.244
[31] *Ibid.*, p.257
[32] Kenny, *op. cit.*, p.306. Interestingly in the light of what has been argued above, she goes on the say that "many of the fiercest critics are now women."
[33] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.246. Both Inglis and Kenny describe the evening on *The Late Late Show* in November 1995 in which Cardinal Cathal Daly was jeered and subjected to public humiliation by audience and priests alike as he sough to defend the Catholic Church.
[34] O'Connell, *op. cit.*, p.72
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.205
[37] This is what Inglis refers to as *habitus* (see further comments at the beginning of section 1 in article)
[38] Barber, *op. cit.*, p.288
[39] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.241
[40] T Flannery, *From the Inside: A Priest's View of the Catholic Church* (Mercier Press, Cork, 1999), p.169f.
[41] O'Connell, *op. cit.*, p.73
[42] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.244
[43] O'Connell, *op. cit.*, p.72
[44] For a fuller treatment of some of the current theological trends within Catholicism and their background, see J D T McCauley, *Recent trends in Roman Catholicism*, (Tentmaker Publications, Stoke-on-Trent, 1997)
[45] It was that modernisation of theological thought that became the dominant force within Protestant theology in the form of 19th century liberalism. These trends were strongly resisted within official Catholicism.
[46] A Hastings, *A History of English Christianity* (Collins, London, 1986), p.519 describes John XXIII as "a safe elderly conservative who could be counted upon not to disturb the status quo unduly while the search went on for a suitable younger man."
[47] See for example the assessment of D Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (Tyndale Press, London, 1973), especially ch 2
[48] For further details see Wells, *op. cit.*; and H Carson, *The Faith of the Vatican* (Evangelical Press, Darlington, 1996)
[49] See Wells, *op. cit.*, ch 3
[50] *Ibid.*, ch 5
[51] Not everyone would go as far as Rahner's "anonymous Christianity"
[52] W McSweeney, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1980), p.238. The summary and conclusion section of this book are well worth a read and careful thought
[53] *Ibid.*, p.240
[54] *Ibid.*, p.244
[55] *Ibid.*, p.238
[56] Flannery, *op. cit.*, is a good example of this
[57] McSweeney, *op. cit.*, p.255
[58] D A Carson *Gagging of God* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996) is insistent that to be faithful to the biblical revelation lines must be drawn, even when drawing lines is regarded as rude in today's culture. However, it is just possible that some aspects of our culture is all too ready to draw lines, perhaps in places where we should be a little bit more reluctant to start.
[59] See the already mentioned work by Bebbington, note[3] above. Os Guinness, "Mission in the face of modernity", in M Eden & D F Wells (eds), *The Gospel in the Modern World* (IVP, Leicester, 1991) describes it as his 'gravedigger thesis', which he summarises as: "*The Christian church contributed to the rise of the modern world; the modern world, in turn, has undermined the Christian church. Thus, to the degree that the church enters, engages and employs the modern world uncritically, the church has become her own gravedigger.*" (italics his).
[60] See the critique of Twomey, op. cit., especially Ch 1 "The Irish Catholic Identity" and Ch 2 "How Catholic is Irish Catholicism?"