

Applause for Bishop Newman speaking in St Mary's Cathedral

By ALAN ENGLISH

MOST REV DR Jeremiah Newman, Bishop of Limerick, became the first Catholic prelate since the Reformation to preach at St Mary's Cathedral when he gave a sermon at a Choral Evensong service, part of Church Unity week, last Sunday.

Dr Newman thanked Very Rev Dean Maurice Sitt of St Mary's for extending the historic invitation. The last Catholic bishop to preside at the magnificent cathedral, built in 1168, was Cardinal Rannucci, Papal Nuncio to the Confederation of Kilkenny.

Church Unity week has been an annual event in Limerick since the last Vatican Council and its popularity is growing, as evidenced by the packed congregation for Sunday's service. Many of those present were making only their first or second visit to St Mary's, or any Protestant church.

Dr Newman said that he hoped to reciprocate the invitation next year when Rt Rev Edward Darling, Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, would preach at a similar service at St John's Cathedral.

Shortly after 7 pm, Dr Newman emerged side by side with the Right Rev. Darling at the tail of a sizeable procession. Abbot Celestine from Glenstal Abbey led the prayers. The theme was "Building Community: One Body in Christ". Readings were

given by the Rev. Tony Davidson and Fr Des McAuliffe before Bishop Newman ascended the pulpit.

Dr Newman said that his presence was an indicator of the ecumenical spirit prevailing in Limerick in spite of the problems ecumenism was encountering worldwide.

In a frank and forthright sermon, Dr Newman said he had no wish "simply to mouth pious platitudes". Deep disagreements existed between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, he said; trouble had surfaced recently that was not widely evident in the past.

The three contentious issues he referred to were intercommunion, authority in the Church and, most importantly, the controversy over women priests and bishops. The latter had caused "heartsearching", he said, referring to the Pope's complaints of "sincere pain" over what he saw as a serious obstacle to unity.

Dr Newman did not offer a personal opinion on the matter, other than commenting that divisions like these should not cause shock or surprise. They were "part and parcel" of the Church's human side.

A coincidence?

"Do we think that it is a just a coincidence that, at a time when feminist demands have made themselves felt across the globe, there should be a campaign for women

priests and bishops? And is it not as well — nay better — that the Church should reflect such preoccupations? Because otherwise the Church would not really have a human dimension and would be but the pawn of the Holy Spirit," he said.

There was real hope for Christian reconciliation, Dr Newman thought, and Ireland may eventually lead the world in achieving it.

Noting the concern of Bishop Darling that St Mary's was in need of refurbishment and restoration, Dr Newman said that should Dr Darling decide to launch an appeal, "he and his people can take it that I will be behind them and trust that my people also will respond generously."

He concluded by saying that he would be "delighted" if he and Bishop Darling, and their successors, could one day rule the Diocese of Limerick in full unity. His sermon was greeted with spontaneous applause.

Included in the capacity congregation were Very Rev Dean Maurice Sitt of St Mary's, Very Rev Dean Ermon Perdue of Killaloe, Rt Rev Monsignor Michael Tynan, Rt Rev Monsignor Liam Boyle, Rev Fr Dominic and Rev Fr Patrick of Glenstal Abbey, Rev Patrick Harvey, Rev Michael Nuttall, Fr Albert Nix, Fr Gerry Slattery and Fr David McNamee. Diocesan readers included Alan Shaw, Ron Graham and Patricia Darling. Civic and political representatives also attended.



Dr. Newman makes his historic address at St. Mary's.

Pictures: OWEN SOUTH.



Attending the Interdenominational Service.

Dr. Newman's sermon:

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ. It is a privilege for me to be asked to address you during Church Unity Week in this historic Cathedral. Unless I am mistaken, it is the first time since the Confederate Period, when the Papal Nuncio Rinnucci presided here, that a Catholic Bishop has been afforded such an opportunity. I do appreciate the honour, and the gesture on the part of the Dean, and hope to reciprocate the invitation next year, please God, when Bishop Darling will, I hope, come to St. John's Cathedral for a similar service.

Actually, some years ago, a very good friend of mine, the former Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, Edwin Owen, preached during the week of unity in St. Joseph's Church.

I have no doubt that my presence here this evening in this pulpit is a sign of the times, a good sign in particular of the ecumenical spirit which prevails in Limerick, even though, as we all know well, ecumenism on the world stage is having a rough time at the moment.



The Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Newman (left), and the Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, Rt. Rev. Edward Darling, surrounded by members of the choir at St. Mary's Cathedral prior to the Interdenominational Service.

Difficulties

There is no point in our pretending otherwise, even though national and local levels in Ireland things generally are not bad at all in that respect, especially in contrast to other parts of the world. A decade or so ago I foresaw, as no doubt others did, the considerable difficulties which faced the movement, and in my forthright way — perhaps too forthright — I gave expression to them in a sermon in St. Michael's Church, there were those who did not like what they heard. Such are the risks that we have to take.

This evening I propose to offer you a few equally candid observations and trust that they will be useful towards mutual understanding. I have no wish simply to mouth pious platitudes.

Which brings me back to the fact that ecumenism has run into difficulties. Even between churches like our own — the Roman Catholic and Anglican — trouble has surfaced during the past few years that was not widely evident before. In spite of the best efforts of ARCIC (the joint Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission) there are deep disagreements about intercommunion, about the nature of authority in the Church, and about ministry.

As regards the latter, we are only too painfully aware of the extent to which the question of women priests and bishops has caused heartsearching. We have the example of the Pope, at the end of the year address to Cardinals, complaining with "sincere pain" that the matter poses "serious obstacles" to unity. We also have the example of Bishop Graham Leonard, Anglican Bishop of London, in a letter to the Minister for Defence, Mr. Noonan, paid tribute to the local groups who helped the project.

Officer at Arus de Valera centre

By LEADER REPORTER

A COMMUNITY welfare officer has taken up duty at the redeveloped Arus de Valera Centre, Buncrana.

The centre, part of the old school which was attended by the late President, was converted with local support to a health centre, at which medical facilities are already in place.

Mr Martin Duffy, Health Board Community Care Programme Manager, in a letter to the Minister for Defence, Mr. Noonan, paid tribute to the local groups who helped the project.

Gerard inspires fellow students

By LEADER REPORTER

A 17-YEAR-OLD Askeaton musician and athlete is the only County Limerick student nominated to the national Don Bosco Youth Club Awards.

Gerard Mulqueen, of Ballinamona, will attend the National Concert Hall on this Saturday for the jubilee ceremony which encompasses all of the Salesian colleges and youth groups in the country.

Gerard, who is a third-year secondary student at Pallaskey, plays five instruments and has taken several regional and national honours in wheelchair athletics.

He is nominated both for the overall achievement award and the sporting prize. Son of Wyeth employee, Bernard Mulqueen, and his wife, Bridget, Gerard has four brothers and a sister.

Childhood

His childhood was a difficult one, and, from the age of four, involved major surgery to his knees and feet. His brittle bone disability did not stem his determination to succeed, however.

Musical was discovered to be one of his natural aptitudes, and he has developed a proficiency at guitar, tin whistle, mouth-organ, accordion and a variety of keyboard instruments.

His wheelchair sports also reflected a success determination on Gerard's part, and he has won six County Limerick Community Games medals, as well as two national golds and

'I am sure that there is real hope for entire reconciliation'

optimistic in face of them. I would like to put three considerations before you, one theological, one sociological and one historical, in the hope that they may help us all to look to the future with confidence.

Theology

The theological consideration brings us back to the New Testament. I am thinking especially of Christ's own perception of his Church as he saw it evolving over time. There are many things in the Gospels to which one could refer that indicate the possibility of future division amongst his followers. One has only to think of the wrangling between the disciples as to who would be the greatest (Mark, Ch. 9, V. 33), who in today's language would be Pope or Patriarch or Primate.

Christ heard them and told them off. It was he and his Father who would decide, as Persons of the Blessed Trinity, in union with the Holy Spirit.

But he saw difficulties in store for his Church. In that connection, it is clear that on the night before he died, at his last meal with the Apostles, he was very much aware of the divisions that would take place after he had gone. Why otherwise would he have prayed to the Father "that they all may be one, as thou Father in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John, Ch. 17, V. 21)?

There is a lot of theological discussion at present regarding

the extent of the human knowledge of Christ. As a man, a Jew of his time, would he know anything about microchips or the like? It is an innate question because it begs an answer to the mystery of the Incarnation, which implies that, as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Christ had the knowledge of God and foresaw the future of his followers.

He had not left his immediate followers long before Peter and Paul had a disagreement. It arose over the place in the Church of the Jews and the Gentiles, particularly relating to whether the prescriptions of the Jewish law were binding on Christians. The problem was smoothed over at the Council of Jerusalem, where the question had been sidestepped, so to speak, by a simple decision that salvation is through the grace of Christ. But shortly afterwards the matter was to surface again at Antioch, where Peter and Paul came face to face once more and where it became clear that, in their concern for practical unity, they had neglected the theological truth that, in later terms, both faith and good works are necessary. The air was cleared, though the two parted, not to meet again until their martyrdom, or so we are told. Their difference was not to be the only occasion that such a scene would occur in the history of the Church.

For the time being, at least, Jews and Christian converts were reconciled. We can only wonder what Christ was thinking, he who had once uttered the enigmatic statement: "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold. These also I must bring" (John, Ch. 10, V. 16). What did he have in mind? Who were those and who are they? Hindus? Buddhists? Moslems? Shintists? Pagans? One might even muse about interplanetary space!

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Sociology

The second consideration that I would like to put before you is much more down to earth: I mean the sociological consideration. That means that the Church has a human side to it which makes it subject to the styles, stresses and strains of the world in which it exists. I say this in the certainty that I am preaching orthodox Christianity. For it is an accepted part of that orthodoxy that grace does not destroy nature, in other words, that the Church reflects both the calm and the tensions of human society as such.

Do we think that it is just a coincidence that, at a time when society everywhere is seeking more independent participation by people in the working out of their own temporal destiny, the Church should be subject to pressures that would curb traditional authority?

Do we think that it is just a coincidence that, at a time when feminist demands have made themselves felt across the globe, there should be a campaign for the women priests and bishops? Do

we think that it is just a coincidence that there should be a universal concern about peace when the world is in the grip of terrorism? There are other questions in like vein.

And is it not as well — nay better — that the Church should reflect such preoccupations? Because otherwise the Church would not really have a human dimension and would be but the pawn of the Holy Spirit. God did not create humanity to be His puppet. He endowed it with intelligence and free will, which gives it the opportunity — should it so decide, whether collectively or individually — to spurn Him.

What I mean, basically, is that we should not be too surprised or shocked about the divisions that rift the Church. That is an inevitable part and parcel of its human side.

Life, my friends, whether of persons or communities, is not something that can be written in black or white. Rather it is grey, as distinguished novelists such as Graham Greene have portrayed it. We should be aware of that and register it in our minds, because it is inextricably related to the ecumenical situation. At the same time, we should not be too surprised or shocked about the divisions that rift the Church. That is an inevitable part and parcel of its human side.

These facts, as are the other of God. As I have referred to earlier, to end on a somewhat unusual yet meaningful note, may I say that I would only be delighted Bishop Edward and his successors, with me and my successors, were in a position to rule the Diocese of Limerick in full unity. These things remain in the hands of God. As I have referred to earlier, to end on a somewhat unusual yet meaningful note, may I say that I would only be delighted Bishop Edward and his successors, with me and my successors, were in a position to rule the Diocese of Limerick in full unity.

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