

Thomas J. Winning

The death of Cardinal Winning, Archbishop of Glasgow, on June 17 (the feast of Corpus Christi) came as a great shock, notwithstanding that he was 76 and that he had had a heart attack the previous week. Such were his vitality and presence that it was easy to imagine that he would remain in office for a number of years yet. Indeed, he was taking a keen interest in the diocesan five year plan on the day of his discharge from hospital. As it is, however, his death leaves a significant gap in the fabric of British public life, and a major one in that of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain - and beyond. The number, source and manner of expressions of appreciation delivered in the hours following his death offer testimony to this.

Archbishop O'Brien of St Andrews and Edinburgh and vice-President of the Bishops Conference of Scotland described him as "a giant among Church leaders, and in many ways the voice of Christianity in Scotland". The First Minister in the Scottish Parliament, Henry McLeish, spoke of "his sense of pride in his country, his enthusiasm for life, his continued concern for the ordinary people of Scotland and - perhaps above all - his down-to-earth sense of humour". Sir David Steel, Presiding Officer of the Parliament, noted that Winning would be remembered "for his robust contributions to public debate" and for trying "to lift the eyes of Scots from our own problems to the third world". The Secretary of State for Scotland, Helen Liddell, spoke of him as "a man of great vision and immense social conscience ... particularly concerned by the problems of poverty and working tirelessly to help those in most need". From Westminster Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor singled out Winning's "humour, dedication, utter loyalty and unstinting defence of the Catholic Church". The Queen cited his "very distinguished contribution to the Catholic Church in Scotland and to Scottish public life over many years" and noted that "he will be much missed". Downing Street observed his "strong moral leadership and commitment to social justice [and] his energy, commitment and passionate defence of the core values of the Catholic church and faith"; and in a personal statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown said "Cardinal Winning will be sorely missed. He was a great Scot and a great Christian. I was proud to know him and his great achievements will be remembered for many years to come".

His combination of religious fidelity and social conscience were similarly praised by Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist and Conservative leaders, by the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth Jonathan Sacks (who spoke of him as “a man of principle and moral courage who never bent his messages to the wind of political correctness”), the Moderator of the Church of Scotland and other religious figures north and south of the border. This, too, was the theme of the Pope’s message to the Catholic Church in Scotland: “This zealous pastor encouraged the communities he served in faith and Christian living, and was particularly outstanding in defence of life and commitment to the poor”. Without question, Scotland without Winning will be a poorer country, and perhaps one without a universally recognised Christian voice.

The fifty three years of his priesthood saw enormous changes in the economy and culture of Scotland and in the position of Catholicism within the nation. The circumstances of his own upbringing, his quickness of wit, strength of will, and lack of pretension all endeared him to the straight talking, no-nonsense people of the West of Scotland and induced universal respect if not affection from politicians nurtured in the same rigorous environment. More significantly, perhaps, Winning made friendships across the range of politics and across the breadth of the country. As a man of the political left it is perhaps unsurprising that he should have been admired by the likes of the sometime Communist union leader Jimmy Reid, or by the former Secretary of State (and now Northern Ireland Secretary) John Reid, but Winning also liked, and was liked by, the nationalist leader Alex Salmond and by the Conservative Lord James Douglas Hamilton. These last three were, I think, the major Scottish politicians for whom he had most time.

On the religious front, Winning had the satisfaction of seeing Catholicism move from the position of being regarded as alien, sinister and superstitious to that of being viewed by many as the major form of Christianity in Scotland. Those informed of the minutiae of denominational difference overlook the fact that for the unchurched, who have no background nor special interest in institutional religion, the Christian faith may come to be identified with a contemporary individual and his or her actions and pronouncements. For many in Scotland outwith the diminishing enclaves of Orange Order Protestantism, Winning, and ipso facto,

Roman Catholicism was 'the Christian Church'. This was a cause of both humility and excitement for the Cardinal who recognised the power of his position and often sought to exercise it on behalf of specifically Catholic moral and social teachings as well as for the sake of general Christian charity.

Thomas Joseph Winning was born and raised in industrial Lanarkshire, now part of Scotland's 'rust belt'. He was the first of two children of a family of Irish Catholic extraction. His mother was one of sixteen children and was a model of traditional piety. His father had been a coal miner, but having returned from the trenches of the first world war to find himself without employment he set about making boiled sweets which he sold door to door. The difficulty in finding work was due in part to anti-Catholic bigotry which Winning Junior encountered on his daily walks to St Patrick's Primary School, Shieldmuir and later Our hool, Motherwell,. Thereafter he embarked on training for the priesthood at a series of seminaries: St Mary's College, Blairs in Aberdeen, St Peter's in Glasgow and Mill Hill in London. In 1946 he was selected as one of the first group of students to attend Scots College Rome recently reopened after the War. There he acquired the Italian language and a liking for its food and culture. Typically, though, his allegiance to West of Scotland pieties was undiminished and he honed his Italian by translating football reports on the performances of Glasgow Celtic - some say entering the Latinised names of its team members into the litany of saints.

Evidently bright, though not conspicuously intellectual or bookish, Winning graduated from the Gregorian in 1949 with the Licentiate in Sacred Theology. He returned to Scots College the following year and began to study Canon Law receiving the DCL in 1953. Five years previously he had been ordained for the Diocese of Motherwell and on coming back to Scotland after his Roman education he began a series of parish and diocesan appointments. By 1961 he was back in Rome as Spiritual Director of his old College where he remained for five years becoming along the way an Advocate of the Roman Rota. This latter training equipped him for the office of Tribunal and Vicar Episcopal for Marriage in the Motherwell Diocese a position he held from 1966 until 1970 when he was appointed first President of the newly created Scottish National (Marriage) Tribunal. Such were the changing times and

circumstances that annulment was becoming an issue of more than academic legal interest. While faithful to the Church's teachings on the indissolubility of marriage Winning was appreciative of the difficulties in which people found themselves and he did much to humanise the process of interview and investigation. Then as later he was attentive to the distinction between objective values and principles and subjective circumstances, recognising this to be essential to sound moral theology and to pastoral practice.

Winning's appointment to the Tribunal was due in part to the Archbishop Scanlan of Glasgow in whose diocese the office was based. His relocation from Motherwell then allowed Scanlan to secure Winning's nomination as his Auxiliary. From 1971 to 1974 Winning served as Vicar General of the Glasgow Diocese and as Parish Priest of Our Holy Redeemer, Clydebank, nearby to the shipyard which by then was a site of industrial turmoil. Although Winning castigated some of the workers leaders for their ideological Communism he was strongly supportive of the rights of workers to representation and to fair terms of employment. On Scanlan's retirement in 1974 Winning succeeded him and brought to the position a reforming zeal and a liking for direct, unfussed plain dealing. His aims were not bureaucratic but pastoral. Having breathed the spirit of the Vatican Council and seen the effects of decentralised post-conciliarism in some European dioceses he sought to realise these in the city that was home to Scotland's largest Catholic population.

Like Chicago, Glasgow is ethnic, feisty and plain-speaking and Winning had about him something of the handsome priest-hero of an older style of American family film, yet like many a film-star he was physically smaller than his screen image suggested. As the city underwent a post-industrial make-over and acquired the slogan 'Glasgow Smiles Better' Winning's grin seemed well-suited to the circumstance. Tribute to his man-of-the-people status is paid by the story that he was once approached by a Glaswegian who praised him saying "Whit I like about you is that you hae nae dignity". While willing to deploy the authority of office, particularly in diocesan matters, Winning was in no way pompous and he was well liked by men who found him companionable, and by women who felt the attraction of his warmth.

As part of his pastoral plan Winning introduced various educational and spiritual initiatives along within a diocesan newspaper carrying the city's motto 'Flourish'. These and

similar projects enjoyed mixed fortunes, and their cost together with a lack of interest in the tedious but necessary details of financial administration contributed to a considerable diocesan deficit. In due course, however, with better management and additional loyal support from the laity this debt was cleared. What in the case of others might have established a black mark was, if anything, viewed as evidence of having one's heart in the right place - that being the kingdom of heaven and not the bank. He was widely and rightly perceived to be accessible and passionate with no time for impenetrable spin-doctoring. These qualities endeared him to his loyal staff though they also caused occasional difficulties calling for subsequent diplomacy. There were also times of real pastoral difficulty arising from the elopement of Bishop 'Roddy' Wright of the Western Isles, and from cases of sexually abusive priests. He found it hard to deal with such problems in part because he could not altogether understand them. Also he made the understandable mistake of assuming that when a fellow bishop told him that he had not had an affair and fathered a child, or when one of his clergy denied that they had abused children, they could be believed. Winning never quite got over these deceits or the chronic wrong-doing they concealed.

Following his appointment as Archbishop, Winning quickly moved from being a regional to a national and then international figure. He was President of the Scottish Bishops' Conference Justice and Peace Commission (73-77), Social Welfare Commission (74-84), Education Commission (77-2001) and President of the Conference itself from 1985 to his death. He served in the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith (78-84) and on the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union and of Europe more generally. In 1994 the Pope elevated Winning to the College of Cardinals and a tartan army of some 1500 Scots followed him to Rome for the receipt of the scarlet cap. If this was a mark of Winning's popularity, it was also a tribute to his identification with the people that he met every incoming Scottish flight at Leonard da Vinci airport greeting his folk - Catholic and otherwise - into the small hours. He was only the third Scottish Cardinal since the Reformation and only the second to reside in Scotland itself.

Winning's official positions established the need, and provided additional opportunities for him to speak out on a range of moral and social issues. He was neither reticent to do so

nor unsure of what to say. Among the targets of his criticisms were Latin American dictatorships; the policy of nuclear deterrence; the Thatcher Government's welfare policies; the Falklands and Gulf wars, the 1701 Act of Settlement (preventing a Catholic ascending to the throne or the heir or sovereign marrying a Catholic); the 'woolly theology' of the Prince of Wales, the alliance of secular and Kirk opposition to Catholic schools; the 'sham' of Tony Blair professing personal opposition to abortion but voting to permit it, even up to birth in certain circumstances; the UK policy of allowing cloning of human embryos; the repeal of sections 28 and 2A prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality; and most recently the New Labour government's policy on asylum seekers.

Winning expressed himself in a variety of ways some planned and crafted others spontaneous and unguarded. His willingness to speak on matters of deep contention and to do so in terms that all could understand led to the tag "Cardinal Controversy" being applied by the press, but unlike some figures he was not an obsessive self-publicist and he did not seek to unsettle but to confirm Christian orthodoxy. No doubt greater prudence might have made it harder for his opponents and critics to misrepresent him as a reactionary bigot. The fact, however, is that the metropolitan cultural environment is increasingly anti-Christian and it is naive to suppose that accommodation will serve to protect Catholic interests and values, let alone persuade others to embrace them.

For anyone who took the trouble to read his more developed statements, such as in his *Spectator* essay "Why I Must Protest" (10 June 2000), or his *Herald* article "Are we Making Strangers Welcome?" (1 June 2001) in which he roundly castigated his fellow Scots for criticising asylum seekers and overlooking the extent of their own immigrant past, it was clear that Winning's immediate reactions were securely rooted in a coherent and well-articulated moral theology. The central pillars of this were the principles of beneficence, of non-maleficence and of equality: do good, do no evil, and treat each person according to their intrinsic value.

At the opening of the Scottish Parliament there was a rendition of Robert Burns' song "A Man's A Man For A' That". This tribute to the equality of human dignity beneath the

surface of soil and circumstance, written in 1795, is close to Winning's own passionate feeling for the oppressed:

Is there for honest Poverty,
That hings his head, an' a' that;
The coward slave we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that.
Our toils obscure an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The Man's the gowd [gold] or a' that.

Having been something of an 'Old Labour' man, in recent times Winning strongly favoured devolution and even tilted towards the Scottish Nationalist's aspiration to independence. He did so in part for immediate advantage in relation to matters such as Catholic schools, which the Nationalists went so far as to celebrate, but also because he believed the new centrist politics was largely opportunistic, unprincipled and directed towards satisfying material and hedonistic interests. More broadly, however, he saw in the idea of 'Scotland in Europe', as he put it in a much quoted speech, a possible realisation of the ideal of subsidiarity and the prospect of reintegration of a once Presbyterian and now increasingly irreligious society within the historic heart of Western Christendom.

Winning was a romantic idealist whose hopes were not idle dreams but expressions of a commitment to Christian values and a conviction that in God's good time and through our endeavours the values of the Kingdom might be more extensively embraced. In the central Scotland of his childhood a Catholic might easily expect to be discriminated against, socially excluded and even physically assaulted. Notwithstanding the sectarian bigotry highlighted in James Macmillan's account of 'Scotland's Shame', the fact of the matter is that Catholics now take their place in society, and some - such as Thomas Winning - even manage to be leaders of it.

In advancing the Catholic cause, however, he was not mindless of the fine historical and continuing contribution of the Kirk. On the day he died he was due to have delivered a sermon at Burntisland parish church. It was there in 1601 that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met with King James VI in attendance and proposed the idea of the retranslation of the Bible. Ten years later the Authorised version was published. Winning's words were read to the congregation to whom word of his death only arrived later:

“As a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church I do not hesitate to give thank for the beauty, the power and the language of the King James bible ... Here in Burntisland four centuries ago, a very significant step was taken in building a Christian civilisation which has weathered the storms of the years. But that storm still rages, and our society needs to hear God's word and be challenged by the values of God's kingdom and the person of Jesus Christ”.

Thomas Winning preached those words in season and out, and challenged new orthodoxies as well as old heresies. Scotland is a better country for his life and work and is a poorer one for his passing. His people ask others around the world to join them in praying for a fitting successor.

John Haldane