

# Sharp contrast with the past as Pope's visit inspires apathy

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Published on 16 Jan 2010

**What a difference a new century makes. The first and last time a Pope visited Scotland, in 1982, the build-up was tremendous, and the day itself went down as one of the defining moments of modern Scottish history.**

Even die-hard Protestants were wooed by the thrill of this unprecedented visit, and watched the coverage of that day's events with pride. In what was widely and correctly perceived as an age increasingly dominated by a secular agenda, here was Christianity taking centre stage: gloriously, joyfully, and prayerfully.

For the Catholic community in Scotland, despite the occasional and predictable outburst of anti-Catholic feeling, Pope John Paul II's trip was an unforgettable and emotional meeting of pontiff and people.

Few who were there will forget the touchingly personal note John Paul II struck with his Scottish flock. One suspects that the cases of heatstroke dealt with by the first aid outposts throughout Bellahouston Park might have had as much to do with the excitement of seeing the Pope in person as with the sun's glare.

Before that visit, some were no doubt anxious that such a huge public celebration of Catholicism would inflame sectarian grudges, which are notoriously easily triggered. Yet, as the event itself demonstrated, the benefits of the day far outweighed a few complaints.

Today, however, with society more keen than ever to stamp out religious bigotry of all kinds, it is possible that a desire to keep in step with a multi-faith Scotland might lie behind the alleged apathy of Scottish Catholic bishops over Pope Benedict XVI's visit later this year.

Already the reception for this behind-the-scenes visit has been soured by a reported lassitude on the part of the Scottish Catholic hierarchy, whose methods of liturgy and pastoral care are very different from those Pope Benedict would like to see practised.

The conceptual gulf between the Scottish Catholic Church and the Vatican that this outlook suggests is perhaps not wholly surprising. Benedict, as a retro, revivalist Pope, is keen to reintroduce a degree of formality – and Latin – to the celebration of Mass, and to dealings between priest and parish. His ambitions are those of a first-rate intellectual who grew up well before Vatican II, and its populist-minded changes.

Before his elevation to the papacy, Joseph Ratzinger was a renowned academic, a professor of theology who had written a vast number of books. Born in Bavaria in 1927, he was the oldest papal appointment since the 18th-century Pope Clement XII.

Theologically conservative, he has been a staunch supporter of bringing back the Tridentine, or Latin Mass. His papacy so far has shown him as a man of strong pastoral sensibility, but he has also courted controversy. On one occasion he offended the Islamic community with what were seen as derogatory remarks about their beliefs, and the revelation that as a teenager he had been a member of the Hitler Youth also caused concern.

If there truly is scepticism over his reforms among the bishopry, this may stem from the inherent resistance of priests working daily in the complex and far from easy setting of modern Scotland.

While no faith wants to lose its distinctiveness, ecumenism is seen by many across the religious spectrum as the holy grail, a civilised way to ease tensions, rather than entrench them.

Given the liberal, laid-back tone of many services, the argument seems to be that the more low-key the rituals and pomp associated with the Catholic Church, the more widely the Christian message is likely to be heard and sought.

In Italy, or indeed any predominantly Catholic country, a shift towards greater ceremony is more easily accepted, one presumes, than in countries on the margins of the faith, where the Church is under perpetual, corrosive assault from apathy or disbelief.

To be told what's best for their parishes, when they know first-hand what works, might well be galling for Scottish Catholic leaders.

The restricted nature of Pope Benedict's visit to Scotland indicates that the religious fervour that made 1982 so remarkable may now be deemed more trouble than it is worth.

Either that, or it indicates the loss of fervour itself.

## Reactions spark online debate

Concerns about the Scottish leg of the Papal visit have ignited a fierce online debate. A number of the comments are repeated here:

- Perhaps it is true that the Scottish Bishops can't be bothered with the visit. Perhaps it is true that the Church in Scotland is not in a great state. But the one thing being overlooked in all this is the feelings of the long-suffering Catholic laity in Scotland.
- Real Catholics know what the word 'Catholicism' actually means. They know that the Catholic Church's aim must be inclusiveness if the church really wants to live up to its name.
- I feel we should be more worried about the whole Papal visit itself; given those who have been appointed to co-ordinate it; Their Graces should NEVER have been so thoughtlessly irresponsible.
- The truth is that the Scottish Bishops with their English counterparts have lost their faith. They surround themselves with the usual unnecessary bureaucrats and play King of the Castle. It is not just Church attendance. The majority of children in Catholic Schools are not Catholic but they do not give a hoot. Just keep up appearances using the usual soundbites, "Catholic ethos", "they are doing a wonderful job" etc. And of course they must be seen to be open-minded, warm and friendly by everyone. It is all part of being King of the Castle.
- I've talked to various priests over the last 30 odd years, all have been quite content to go along with the post Vatican II "Celtic Supporters Mass".....like a Polyester Mass, but offered up to John Wayne's Quiet Man character, to be shure, to be shure.

## Scottish pastors must put on proper show for Holy Father

**By Damian Thompson**

For some time I've been aware that plans for the Pope's visit this year are not as joyful and imaginative as my Scottish friends had hoped. Pope John Paul II's 1982 visit was greeted with an enormous outpouring of enthusiasm – but that is not my sense of the mood among the hierarchy and clergy this time around.

That's understandable up to a point, as it will be a shorter visit and Pope Benedict is a less exuberant personality than his predecessor. But what worries me is that he'll be greeted with the sort of tired folk music and drab 1970s-style worship that he dislikes, rather than the beautifully planned liturgies which greet him elsewhere in the world.

It's true that Scotland has some first-rate bishops, so it's puzzling that the church in Scotland hasn't yet responded to the challenge. So far, the Pope's visit to Scotland has been in the headlines only because it was proposed he address the Scottish Parliament. I'm relieved that this won't be happening, as it could so easily have gone wrong: imagine the embarrassment if the Holy Father had been heckled by MSPs opposed to what he stands for.

Instead, the Catholic Church in Scotland should be concentrating on staging the sort of inspiring worship the Pope enjoys.

But most bishops remain deeply tied to the outdated yet "trendy" models of worship they believe least offensive to non-Catholics.

What was acceptable when John Paul II visited Scotland and may even have seemed fresh and exciting now looks very drab and grey 30

years on.

Last year, when the relics of St Therese of Lisieux toured the UK, the Scottish bishops were offered them at no cost but refused, denying huge numbers of Catholics the opportunity to pay tribute to one of the most venerated saints.

It seems that many Scottish bishops are close to retirement and have been doing things the same way for decades. They see the papal visit as simply making trouble for them.

If that's true, Scottish Catholics need to put their pastors under serious pressure to pull their purple socks up. It would be shameful if a great occasion was ruined by apathy and laziness.

- Damian Thompson is an authority on the Catholic Church in the UK.

<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/sharp-contrast-with-the-past-as-pope-s-visit-inspires-apathy-1.999098>