

But the main thrust of the book tackles how we are always in need of reform and how the Church of Scotland is meeting the challenges of the time. Topics range from worship to the debate on human sexuality. There is much to interest readers who know little of the Church of Scotland, although they may wish there had been a glossary. The author, from his position in the administration of the church, has a clear and authoritative view of the changes in the church.

The most exciting aspect of this book is that here is an establishment figure encouraging us to dare. There was a fine tradition of the Highland liberal in church life in Scotland; evangelical, radical, concerned and caring. Finlay Macdonald in this book shows us that he has a concern for the past and an interest in the present combined with the wisdom to challenge us to do more in the future for the Church of Christ.

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*Faith of our Fathers: Reflections on Catholic Tradition,*  
**Eamon Duffy, London, Continuum, 2004, pp. 187, ISBN**  
**0826474799. £9.99**

How does one modernize a religion that has evolved throughout two millennia of history and is steeped in tradition? The answer is 'with great difficulty'. Eamon Duffy is Professor of the History of Christianity in the University of Cambridge. He grew up in the Irish town of Dundalk in the days before the Second Vatican Council and left for England at the age of sixteen. He is a devout Roman Catholic with first hand knowledge of the prevailing theology and piety both before and after the Council. Moreover, as a historian he has learned the lessons of history better than the average man or woman in the pew and indeed better than many a bishop and cardinal. Duffy explores the relationship between the old piety that has been swept away and the new atmosphere of 'aggiornamento'. His conclusions are bleak and his stance is polemical. Insufficient thought has been given to how to make changes while

preserving the best of the old. He leads the reader through most of the important aspects of Roman Catholic faith and practice, among them devotion to Mary and the saints, the papacy, the priesthood, death and dying, prayers for the dead, hell, tradition and authority. In too many cases the baby has been thrown out with the bath water.

This is a most entertaining book. Duffy writes with a light touch, with much wit and humour. He describes purgatory as ‘an outpatients department of hell’. He tells of the electronic dashboard Saint Christopher that is activated by excess speed to warn the driver, ‘O.K., Bud, you’re on your own.’ But Duffy’s aim is serious, indeed at times despairing. He feels that the liturgy has been sanitized, that the regular worship of high days and holy days has been thoughtlessly dispensed with, that prayer has been emasculated into a sterile blandness, that renewal has been confused with modernity, that the old has been scorned for insufficient reasons. The most vivid passages in the book are descriptions of the religious practices of his Dundalk childhood along with an appreciation of what these practices achieved in educating the faithful and in encouraging religious devotion.

Yet Duffy is no reactionary. He admits freely the inadequacy of pre-Conciliar Roman Catholicism and has no wish to return to those days. But he is equally ill at ease in the modernized church, which has too willingly dispensed with mystery, wonder, discipline and, as a consequence, is dwindling in number. He points out that abstaining from meat on Fridays was swept away without any deep theological reflection on the reasons why fasting is a worthwhile discipline. It is surely alarming that most Roman Catholics do not even know that they are expected to adopt an alternative Friday discipline in its place.

In a study of the many beauties of the church of San Clemente in Rome, Duffy comments: ‘The church yields its meaning only to slow meditation and close attention to the traces of the past which it contains, some of it half-buried and forgotten, and, as in the recent excavations, it is always being rediscovered, but only with labour and cost and love and a certain amount of luck.’ His warning to the Roman Catholic

Church today is clear. These are urgent alarm bells that we in other denominations ignore at our peril. Duffy continues, ‘We grow from our own past, and we only flourish when we are in touch with that past.’

All of our churches today are threatened by a new generation dressed in jeans and T-shirts, armed with guitars, drumkits and powerpoint projectors. They display such a cocky self-confidence about the modernity of the faith that they see no need to respect the long history of the church that nurtured them. They are like rebellious children who disown their mother. Duffy’s crisis is one that all of us face.

Duffy urges the bishops to begin the vital task of educating the faithful in theology. Yet even as he calls for action, one cannot help feeling that it is already too late, that the treasures of tradition will continue to be trampled on or swept into spiritual dustbins or mocked by trendy clerics who are possessed by a Blairite urge to be modern without any regard to the riches of our heritage. The bathwater has disappeared gurgling down the plughole and we are now searching in increasing panic for any signs of the baby.

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*Difficult Gospel: The Theology of Rowan Williams, Mike Higton, London: SCM Press, 2004, pp. 160, ISBN: 0334029414. \$14.99*

Who is the most important theologian writing in the English-speaking world today? Opinions will differ on the best answer to this question, but a case can be made for claiming that title for the present Archbishop of Canterbury. His theology is important not only because of the high office he holds and the prestige given to the incumbent of Lambeth Palace by the worldwide church, but also because it is based firmly on Rowan Williams’ experience of God.