

St. Patrick's Cathedral, Huguenot Commemoration Service,

Nov. 24, 2013.

Sermon: Canon Horace McKinley.

- In the Dublin parish of Whitechurch where I serve as Rector, there are significant Huguenot connections. For example, a discreet plaque on the interior church wall states this: *"Sacred to the memory of John David La Touche, Esq., of Marlay, born 7 January, 1772, Died 20 August, 1838..... 'O Thou that hearest the prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come', Psalm 65, v. 2"*...Outside, in the graveyard, is a large, souterrain burial vault, wherein lie several generations of the La Touche family of nearby Marlay House. John David's father, David La Touche, married Elizabeth Marlay, and he first named that family estate in her honour. Elizabeth's father was George Marlay, Church of Ireland Bishop of Dromore, (which was at the time a separate Diocese, unlike today, when it and Down Diocese, are united as one, at least in the Church of Ireland dispensation). Elizabeth Marlay, by the way, was a cousin of the patriot, Henry Grattan, who gave his name to "Grattan's Parliament".....When I first arrived in Whitechurch, in 1976, I was working at dusk with the then Sexton, clearing away a large pile of rubble, destined for the dump. We spied what we thought were five slates, but on closer inspection, it transpired they were five Whitechurch national school record and account books from 1827 – 1840! They may possibly be unique in the State and are now housed in the Museum of Education in the College of Education, Rathmines. They constitute an exceptional historical resource. The teacher's entry in one of the Ledgers quite regularly says this: "Miss la Touche came over.....to teach sewing"! John David la Touche was, of course, a son of the founder of the Bank of Ireland.
- In the early 19th century, the Whitechurch district received a whole new population, attracted by employment made available by the rapid proliferation of new mills. There were 14 of them built along the banks of the fast-flowing local rivers, the Owendoher and the Glin, that tumble down from the Dublin hills, before they merge as one and together flow on to join the Dodder. In response to that population change, a new School in Whitechurch was built in 1823 and a new church in 1827. The Vicar of the day, Lundy Foot, received absolutely vital support from John David la Touche for his plans for both new school and new church building. La Touche granted a land site of one rood and 26 perches from his Marlay Estate, as a new site for these buildings. It cost £420 to

build the School and its attractive Teacher's residence in 1823. I see from the relevant records that la Touche possessed what might be defined as the necessary 'financial contacts' to enable notable and very above average grant aid to be secured for both School and Teacher's residence! In 1827, a separate building, a Tithe Barn but locally long called 'the Stables', was built at the other entry to this site – built for horses to be tethered in, while attending church! It's good to report that the Church, School (now a community centre), the Teacher's residence and Stables are all in pristine condition. Each is a listed property and each has been the subject of major restoration projects, though at no small cost! They provide a really beautiful complex of buildings, though they still quite obviously proudly wear their early 19th century clothes, with the influence of J.D. La Touche still hovering over and leaving its significant residue.....

- One other local point – the nearby Vicarage I live in adjoins the Moravian Cemetery. With a locked gate, people regularly call at our house to get in to the cemetery, easily done via our garden. There are over 760 cemetery graves, the first burial taking place there in 1760. Only two days ago, I was showing a caller round the cemetery and for the very first time, my eye fell on this gravestone inscription – *“John la Trobe, died 1771”*. Now I do know that during the Evangelical Revival, a Trinity College student, Benjamin La Trobe, was instrumental in inviting over to Dublin from England in the 1740's the noted Moravian preacher, John Cennick. Cennick's mission meeting was held in Skinner's Alley in the Coombe and featured scenes of quite exuberant religious revival. It was only in 1960, too, that Dublin's Moravian Church, close by here in Bishop St., closed its doors for the final time. It had first been established in 1750. Cennick, by the way, is credited with co-authoring with Charles Wesley the words of the stirring Advent hymn: *“Lo, He comes with clouds descending”*.

I hope you'll forgive these musings of an all too amateur local historian! I end, back in a more traditional sermon mode! In last year's State Census, it indicated that 17% of our population (776, 770 people) is now of immigrant or international origin. The past advent of the Huguenots to our shores, and indeed the Moravians, by a much more circuitous route, was caused by enforced exile from religious persecution, a tragic and awful consequence of the two-way power play of forces unleashed by both the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

The recent and significant increase to the international dimension of our own population was spurred on in contrast by the high economic growth

that mushroomed here from the 1990's onwards. For the older, traditional Irish Churches, there are very significant recent statistics. A few years ago, for example, a Directory of Registered and New Migrant-led Churches on the island was completed. It revealed that in the period 2000 – 2012, over 370 such new Churches have been established on this island. Over 90 of those alone are located here in Dublin. Professional researchers indicate that we are now living through the period of the greatest ever global movement of people in human history, and, that this is here to stay, for good – one spin-off, it seems, of globalization.

So, are you aware of those statistics I've just given? And what do those statistics say to the traditional Irish Church's appetite and capacity to absorb in practice the Holy Spirit's New Testament charism or grace – of philozenia (Greek) – of welcome, extended to the stranger? Because what is currently and so rapidly happening to today's Irish Church is that it's caught up, whether it likes it or not, in a rapid double process; a vortex crossroads time of its own decline, but set in the context of a whole new christian diversity now living and worshipping in our land, not forgetting all the fresh plethora of options and brands now on offer, under the broad and decidedly elastic mantle of "spirituality".

So, what can we learn from today's Irish Church as to how the persecuted French Huguenots, in a very different age and context, were once welcomed and integrated in to this Church, the Church of Ireland? For from 1633 – 1816, the Huguenots worshipped by warm invitation in this Cathedral's Lady Chapel, while the visionary Archbishop Narcissus Marsh appointed the scholarly , French-born Huguenot Dr. Elias Bouhereau as Marsh's Library's first Librarian. It makes you ask another question: "How much is the Church of Ireland willing today to adjust its own structures and thinking and forward planning for mission, to integrate new comers today? And can we ever learn again about the potential of enrichment, how we were once so spiritually and culturally enriched by the Huguenots, an enrichment whose legacy lingers on, with benefit and with blessing, even to today?" – and not forgetting, too, even in the humble Dublin parish where I serve!