

**RELAUNCH OF SCOTTISH CATHOLIC OBSERVER
ADDRESS BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN
BALMORAL HOTEL EDINBURGH
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INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a privilege for me being here with you this afternoon speaking at the relaunch of the Scottish Catholic Observer.

I speak wearing various different hats! As a Cardinal I am a member of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications; I am Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh and at present, President of the Bishops Conference of Scotland; but I also speak as a weekly reader of the Scottish Catholic Observer and have been since shortly after my family came to Scotland some 60 years ago.

ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC PRESS:

Before considering the Scottish Catholic Observer in particular I want to make some background points regarding what I see as the role of the Catholic press – particularly in a small country like our own.

Basic to any consideration of what a Catholic newspaper should do is that **command of Jesus** to his followers near the end of the Gospels: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature”.

That is part of the mission of each one of us as a Christian – and it is the role of our Catholic media.

Just three years ago in January 2005 on the Feast of St Francis de Sales, the Patron Saint of Journalists, the late **Pope John Paul II** issued an apostolic letter to those responsible for communications. He then held up high ideals to those involved in the vast field of communications stating:

“The incarnate word has left us an example of how to communicate with the Father and with humanity, whether in moments of silence and recollection, or **in preaching in every place and in every way**”. And he went on to add:

“Communication permeates the essential dimensions of the Church which is called to announce to all the joyful message of salvation”.

Obviously in that document the **basic role of the media is spelled out: Preach in every place and in every way; announce the joyful message of salvation!**

Our present **Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI** is intensely aware too of the role of the media as he himself wrote:

“There is no area of human experience, especially given the vast phenomenon of globalisation, **in which the media have not become an integral part of inter personal relation and of social economic political and religious development**”,

In our own country of Scotland year by year our Church through our National Communications Commission has issued a particular message for each Communications Sunday.

At this present time **Bishop Tartaglia, Bishop of Paisley, is President of our National Communications Commission** and just last year in a very timely way he spoke of the high standards expected of those involved in the media when he wrote:

“Analysing the ethical implications of how information is transmitted would help the media avoid becoming spokespersons for a secular and humanistic agenda. It is crucial that those who work in this field seek to understand the moral and ethical view of humanity shared by those of us who believe in God”. And the Bishop went on to add:

“We each have a responsibility to help in this task. We are all consumers of the mass media and when we are misrepresented or maligned we must speak out, likewise when our values and ideals are represented and respected we must praise and commend”.

METHODS USED BY THE MEDIA ESPECIALLY THE PRESS:

Following on the Gospel message and the ongoing teaching of the Church I think that we all should realise now something of the role of the media and apply it to the Scottish Catholic Observer whose relaunch we celebrate today.

First of all I would ask you to consider the **content of this newspaper**.

I see with regard to content, various roles of what should be contained in the Scottish Catholic Observer.

A high ideal is presented by Jesus himself when he speaks of “teach all nations”; when we realise that Jesus himself “has left us an example of how to communicate with the Father and with humanity” and of the needs of having the highest ethical standards in what is printed.

There must indeed be that **teaching role in a Catholic newspaper** – the truths of the faith must indeed be handed on in a very attractive way, along with any interpretation of those rules by those in proper positions of responsibility in the Church.

This teaching role must be accompanied by an **information role** regarding the situation of the Church both in the country in which it is situated as well as throughout the world.

However if the Scottish Catholic Observer was only to be a teaching and information document it would fail abysmally in the common market. Accompanying that very important teaching and information role there must be **many items of local interest reflecting the situation of the Church at both national and local level**; it must appeal to peoples of differing intellectual abilities, different backgrounds and to peoples of all ages; and it must reflect something of the family of the Church in our country.

I would say also that whatever is produced in our Scottish Catholic Observer must have a **solid foundation in prayer** – realising that prayer and instruction in prayer and in methods of prayer must be at the root of all apostolate.

Second, I ask you to consider the **methods used** to convey the content with regard to the ‘production’ of a newspaper and especially the Scottish Catholic Observer the newspaper itself must be **bright and attractive** to the purchaser; it must make full use of modern methods of production including the use of photographs and particularly colour photographs. Professionally it must be of the highest standard and avoid through careful scrutiny misinformation, misspellings and items which might in any way be a cause for disharmony.

Third, I see the ‘**sale of the Scottish Catholic Observer**’ to be vitally important as well. There is no use having a paper of excellent content and fine production if it is not sold in sufficient numbers to really help in the evangelisation of our country and of course if it is running at a loss to the publishers.

I see the value of the sale of the Scottish Catholic Observer overseas as being vitally important with subscriptions to members of ones family overseas or to missionaries abroad carrying valuable news of our own country to those who are often hungering for such news – and in this respect I speak of my own family.

In Scotland itself we realise that we have perhaps three quarters of a million Catholics out of a population of approaching 5 million and perhaps only one third of that population attend Mass. Could we say that there might be 50,000 families attending Mass each Sunday in our country. And these are the target buyers of the Scottish Catholic Observer.

Consequently to achieve its purpose the Scottish Catholic Observer must reach out to our parishes, our schools and universities and our homes in every way possible to sell what must be an attractive publication with very suitable content for the education and entertainment of the Catholic community in Scotland – while hopefully also having an outreach to those of other faiths.

CONCLUSION:

In writing what I have above, one might almost say that there is an impossible task facing the Editor and her staff in the Scottish Catholic Observer, with a small but dedicated staff with extremely heavy responsibilities. However, a tremendous challenge faces them all and I know that they are responding to that challenge through this relaunch. Their efforts must indeed be rewarded and they can best be rewarded by each one of us encouraging priests and people to see to the sale of the Scottish Catholic Observer in whatever outlets we can, either through our own parish sales or through local newsagents.

I have given some background to you all regarding the purposes of a Catholic newspaper such as the Scottish Catholic Observer; and have indicated something of what I consider as being the ways in which the Scottish Catholic Observer can fulfil its role.

I conclude my words by congratulating all those who have brought the Scottish Catholic Observer to this particular day while thanking all those who have contributed in any way to the publication in the past. I am sure that the present owners along with the Editor, Ms Liz Leydon will take to heart those stirring words of Pope Benedict XVI in his message on the occasion of the relaunch of the SCO when he said: “The task that Catholic journalists are called to accomplish is truly a participation in the Church’s mission to spread the Gospel of salvation”.

May you all be inspired on the occasion of this relaunch and may the Scottish Catholic Observer go from strength to strength in our country.