



Media comment

Alf McCreary reviews the churches year in The Belfast Telegraph

Church changes bode well but there's still a lot to do

This has been the year of two Popes, an Archbishop, two church women, a [Belfast](#) Lord Mayor, and much else besides.

It also has included murderous attacks on Christians worldwide, and the relentless opposition of bigoted secularists.

Sadly also, the West is still sleepwalking into the disaster of a militant Islamist crusade to dominate the world.

Pope Benedict created a major surprise when he announced he was stepping down – only the second time this happened in the history of the Papacy.

In doing so he demonstrated he had had enough of high office, but his resignation begged important questions about age in the context of electing a Pope.

Most people had believed that the Pope, like the Queen, would be in the job for life.

Benedict's successor Pope Francis is a breath of fresh air.

He shows a more liberal and human face to the Papacy, but he has not yet had enough time to change the attitude of the Vatican Curia which has seen Popes come and go, while they steadily plough on in the way that mostly suits themselves.

Pope Francis is a good man, and I wish him well, but he still has much to do.

This has also been a year of major change in the [Church of England](#), with the consecration of Dr Justin Selby as Archbishop of Canterbury. He succeeded Dr [Rowan Williams](#), another academic like Pope Benedict – who clearly was not quite up to the top job.

Dr Selby started well, and appeared to bring a fresh perspective to the Church of England, but I fear he may also become ground down by internal politics.

Watching the televised Christmas Eve service from [Westminster Abbey](#), I was surprised how high-church it has become, with more incense wafting in the air than during the Pope's Christmas Eve Mass in Rome.

The major achievement of the Church of England this year has been to open the way for the appointment of women bishops, after a long period of dithering.

It was the Church of Ireland which showed greater initiative than any other Anglican Church in the British Isles by appointing the Reverend Pat Storey as the new Bishop of Meath and Kildare.

This was an imaginative and healing appointment in a diocese that has known much hurt recently.

The Methodist Church also showed initiative by appointing the Reverend Dr [Heather Morris](#) as its first female President, thus leaving the Presbyterians as the only major church in Ireland not to have appointed a female leader.

It is only a matter of time until they do so, but don't hold your breath for such a development in 2014.

The [Belfast](#) Lord Mayor Mairtin O'Muilleoir made the right headlines by appointing members of the main churches as his chaplains.

For this important cross-community act alone, he rates highly in my list of contenders as 'Person of the Year'.



However there should be nothing but praise for Dr [Richard Haass](#) and his colleague Meghan O'Sullivan who spent so much time trying to help our so-far inadequate politicians to reach an agreement which is so badly needed by all of us.

They are second on my list, but my person of the year is once again [Queen Elizabeth](#), who has shown

immense professionalism and devotion to duty while unashamedly declaring her deep Christian commitment as a true defender of the faith.

She will go down in history as one of the greatest monarchs since her namesake Elizabeth I. Long may she still reign.