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Politics and religion at Scranton book fair

Tom Roberts | Oct. 5, 2009 NCR Today

I spent a few days last week in Scranton, Pa., as a participant in that city's first "Pages and Places Book Festival." I was invited to take part in a journalism panel, "Scranton in the 2008 Presidential Election," (reported on here [1]) on the basis of a post-election story [2] I did last year.

Others on the panel were Dr. G. Terry Madonna of Franklin and Marshall College where he is director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs, and Kevin Merida, director of national news and an associate editor of The Washington Post.
I have a certain affinity for Pennslvania's gritty city's, having grown up in and started my career in one (Pottstown) and worked for a dozen formative years in another (Bethlehem).

All of these cities are in a decades-long and valiant effort to re-imagine themselves in the wake of the disappearance of heavy industry and manufacturing plants.

It was encouraging to see Scranton playing against type (and dealing good-naturedly with caricature supplied by the TV hit The Office). On Saturday, Oct. 3, numerous venues were taken over by authors, booksellers, publishers and assorted other bibiophiles, as well as discussions of politics and even religion.

There was no formal panel during the book fair on the state of the Catholic Church in Scranton, but quite a bit of informal buzz over the resignation last month of embattled Bishop Joseph F. Martino. I can provide nothing scientific, only anecdotal, but the overwhelming reaction I ran into was a combination of relief that Martino was gone and sadness over how it had occurred. Several people wondered if what had happened in Scranton said as much about the deficiencies of the bishop selection process as it did about Martino's troubled tenure.

The giant questions hanging over the church in Scranton now: Who's next? And who's doing the choosing?

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