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Irish Catholic management buys paper, steers to greater independence

Desmond Fisher | May. 9, 2012

DUBLIN, Ireland -- At what appears to be a critical time for Irish Catholicism, Ireland's only Catholic newspaper, *The Irish Catholic*, has changed hands. Up until now, in the somewhat incongruous ownership of the *Irish Farmers Journal*, it has steered a cautious line between a majority of traditional Irish Catholicism and rapidly growing minority who are either leaving the church or rebelling against the way it has dealt with the clerical child abuse scandal.

The paper has now been bought out by a group headed by editor Garry O'Sullivan, who will probably steer it carefully in a more progressive direction.

"This marks a new exciting departure for the Irish Catholic," O'Sullivan told *NCR*. "We are living in very exciting times in the Irish and universal church. Catholics here especially want a forum and also want an end to the fractious debate/bickering that passes for debate between so called 'liberals' and 'conservatives,' which is often far from Christian in its lack of charity."

Stressing that the paper, with a weekly circulation of 22,000, is independent of the church, O'Sullivan said there is a "hunger for religious news, analysis and informative articles on not just the church as an institution but on how to be a Catholic Christian in the modern world and how to learn to be a better human being and grow a deeper understanding and relationship with God."

His aim is to provide a forum for "full and unfettered discussion and debate of the wide breadth of Catholicism. The truth should not be afraid of intellectual debate and rigor and we are reminded of Cardinal Newman's witness in this regard."

"Ireland"' he said, '"is crying out for a church that is participatory and intellectually engaged with its flock. Its leaders struggle in their vision of how to lead a church for a modern people. We aim in our efforts to assist both and help the process of mutual understanding and engagement."

He added: "We also ask Irish-American Catholics to support us through our website by reading the paper online."

The purchase price was not disclosed. A report about the buy-out by the British Broadcasting Corporation said *The Irish Farmers Journal* has owned *The Irish Catholic* since 2007. It was in private ownership before that.

The seven-strong staff will remain with the Dublin-based newspaper, the BBC report said.

[Desmond Fisher is a former editor of *The Catholic Herald*, London, and a former head of current affairs at Radió Telefís Éireann.]

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