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## **PRESS WATCH - Martin McGuinness helped broker peace, but he lacked the moral courage to publicly repent**



**The passing of Martin McGuinness  
represents difficult territory for the Catholic  
Church in Ireland, Fr Alexander Lucie-Smith  
writes in The Catholic Herald**

Mr McGuinness was a family man, blessed with four children and several grandchildren, and was devoted to his wife Bernie, though his family never enjoyed a public profile as is the case with some politicians.

He was also a regular Mass-goer and communicant. He was the Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Ireland devolved government. As such, his funeral will be something of a public event. It is also going to be, one assumes, a Catholic event, a Requiem Mass in a large church, given that so many people will want to attend. In keeping with Irish custom, it will probably take place by the end of this week.

But Mr McGuinness was also a leading member of the IRA and one who was personally responsible for acts of violence that still make us shiver. Of course, he had 'moved on' from being a hard man of violence, but there are many, especially among the relatives of those murdered by the IRA, and those who survived their attacks, who failed to detect any true repentance and remorse for his career in the IRA.

It was probably always too much to ask a former IRA man to renounce the entire strategy and

raison d'être of the IRA; in other words to admit that he so called "Army" was in fact a terrorist organisation. The sort of regret that Mr McGuinness expressed from time to time, without ever renouncing his past, was, in practical terms the best one could hope for. And clearly that is not enough to satisfy the likes of Lord Tebbit, who has said following McGuinness's death the world is now "a sweeter place", and nor should it be.

Perhaps Mr McGuinness in the depths of his heart admitted the truth to himself, and before God repented that he had, for example, approved the horrible maiming of Lady Tebbit and the deaths of those killed at Brighton. But he certainly did not have the moral courage to admit it to the rest of us, unless, of course, there is some posthumous confessional autobiography to come out. Nevertheless, one should not assume that things were ever easy for Mr McGuinness: politically he had a narrow path to tread, supporting reconciliation (exemplified by that handshake and smile with the Queen) while at the same time never "selling out", in the usual phrase beloved of Republicans.

Preaching at the funeral of Mr McGuinness is going to be hard. He was in certain senses a

great leader, but he was always morally ambiguous. The question of where the funeral takes place could also be hard. No one could possibly object to it happening in his own parish church, which is the natural place for it, with his own parish priest celebrating, or with some priest who knows the family well presiding. But given his position as Deputy First Minister, the funeral may take place in an important church and some members of the hierarchy may well be present: if they were to stay away, it might be interpreted as criticism, and if they are present, as approval, of the deceased.

Whichever way, people are likely to forget the basic truth about a funeral: it is about interceding for the deceased, and not about celebrating his life, or canonising him. Let us hope that this Requiem truly is a Requiem. For there is one thing we can all agree upon: every passing soul needs prayers.

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First published in The Catholic World Herald,  
March 21, 2017

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