

Right Reverend Monsignor John Charles McDonald Barry DCL MA

John Charles McDonald Barry was born in Edinburgh in 1917. He was educated at the Fort Augustus School and then attended Cambridge University in England and the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg in Germany. On returning to the UK at the outbreak of the Second World War, he entered Oscott College, which is the senior seminary for the Archdiocese of Birmingham in England.



He was ordained a priest in 1944 and his first appointment after seminary as newly ordained, 27-year-old priest was to St Patrick's Kilsyth here in Scotland, where he was to serve as assistant to his Parish Priest, Michael Canon Downey.

After experiencing life in parish ministry and as soon as it was safe to do so after the end of the Second World War, Fr Barry was to return to further academic study in Rome from 1946 until 1949 where he was a gold medal winner and was awarded a doctorate in canon law. On his return to Scotland he took up another post as assistant priest in St Cuthbert's Edinburgh from 1949 until 1950 and then he was transferred to St Anthony's, Polmont for 4 years from 1950 to 1953.

After what was now a long period of experience in Parish life, Fr Barry was asked to return to academia - this time as a Professor at Drygrange Seminary from 1953 to 1960 and then as Rector of Drygrange Seminary from 1960 to 1977.

In the latter part of his career he returned to parish life serving as Parish Priest at St Mark's, Oxfords in Edinburgh from 1977 to 1989 and then as Parish Priest of Our Lady Star of the Sea in North Berwick.

He died on 19th July 2003, in North Berwick's Eddington Hospital, aged 85.

Good and faithful servant of God. May he rest in peace!

Monsignor John Barry

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Obituary - Monsignor John Charles McDonald Barry, priest. Written by Michael Turnbull

Born: 26 September 1917, in Edinburgh. Died: 19 July 2003, in North Berwick, aged 85.



JOHN Barry, for many years a leading canon lawyer for the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, was the oldest of five boys, whose family, originally of Irish stock, owned the rag merchants John Barry of Leith.

His parents were deeply involved in Catholic affairs, his father, John, being secretary of the Catholic Truth Society in Edinburgh, and his mother, Dorothy, founding the influential Union of Catholic Mothers in 1942.

Their eldest son attended the Abbey School, Fort Augustus, and went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1935, intending to enter the diplomatic service. But by 1937 he had resolved to become a priest.

After graduating the following year with a double first in French and German, he began his seminary studies at the Albertinum of Freiburg University, before going on to St Mary's, Oscott, in Sutton Coldfield. After his ordination in 1944, he first served as a curate at Kilsyth (1944-46) and then attended the Gregorian University, Rome (1946-49), where he was a gold medal winner and was awarded a doctorate in canon law.

Upon returning to Scotland, he became an assistant priest at St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh (1949-50), and then at St Anthony's, Polmont (1950-53).

When, in 1953, the diocesan seminary of St Andrew's, Drygrange, opened in the Borders, he was appointed as one of its professors and later became rector (1960-77), in which capacity he guided generations of students during the heady, but precarious, years after the end of the Second Vatican Council - this was a time when (in the words of the late Cardinal Gordon Gray) priestly celibacy was being attacked and authority questioned. In the late 1960s, every diocese in Scotland suffered heavy losses of men leaving the priesthood.

Fr Barry's role during the Second Vatican Council is not widely appreciated. In 1960, as rector of Drygrange, he had enthusiastically answered the Congregation for Seminaries' request to start discussions among his students, many of whom strongly supported the ecumenical movement.

When it came to compiling Archbishop Gordon Gray's suggestions for council debate (vota), Fr Barry advised him, for example, on whether to question nuclear weapons testing and stockpiling

(a subject close to the archbishop's heart) and also translated the archbishop's vota into elegant Latin.

In October 1962, he accompanied the archbishop to Rome as his canon law expert, but was obliged to return to his duties at Drygrange shortly thereafter. Throughout the council, however, he continued in his advisory role to the archbishop.



Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, Gordon Joseph Gray later Cardinal

During his time at Drygrange, Fr Barry also found time to launch and edit the influential journal *Canon Law Abstracts*.

When he retired from there in 1977, he went back to parish work, first at St Mark's, Oxfords, in Edinburgh (1977-89) and then at Our Lady, Star of the Sea, in North Berwick - it was at the town's Eddington Hospital that he passed away.

As a canon lawyer, who was often approached by ordinary Catholics for advice on their marital problems, Fr Barry was deeply aware of pastoral needs. He had warned Archbishop Gray in September 1963 that the clergy believed a marriage guidance council was an urgent necessity.

He continued to press the diocesan authorities on the subject and, by August 1965, staff had been selected for the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council and were ready to start their work.

For all his erudition, Fr Barry enjoyed telling jokes against himself. He chuckled as he recalled that he had once been described as "*like Morecambe Bay on a sunny day; bright but shallow*".

His boyish sense of humour masked the fact that he was an incisive thinker and always a challenging speaker, especially from the pulpit. He was a man of wide-ranging interests who revelled in debate and discussion. It was fitting, therefore, that he was chosen to take part in the examination of the cause for the beatification of the Edinburgh-born trade unionist and Poor Clare nun Margaret Sinclair. He was also for some years a consultant to the pontifical commission for the revision of the Code of Canon Law.



The Venerable Margaret Sinclair – a Poor Claire Nun

In the 1960s, having been a chaplain on a National Trust for Scotland cruise to Mull, Skye, St Kilda and Scapa Flow, he became a distinguished lecturer and cruise-leader himself on more than a dozen cruises. In his leisure time, Fr Barry endeared himself to the whole community of North Berwick through his informative and witty slide-lectures.

He was a frequent contributor to periodicals and in 1957 (along with Dr AT Macqueen) published his translation of Francois Leuret and Henri Bon's *Modern Miraculous Cures: A Documented Account of Miracles and Medicine in the 20th Century*. In 1967 the Stair Society issued his translation (from the Latin) of William Hay's (c 1470-1542) lectures on marriage.

In October 1994, while walking at Tollcross in Edinburgh, Fr Barry suddenly collapsed after a cardiac arrest. He was, in his own words, "clinically dead", but he was resuscitated by a passing first-aider and made a successful recovery. "*God gave me a second chance and I'm not going to waste it*", was his typical response.

The result was that his series of newspaper articles, *I am a Catholic Protestant*, were re-published in book form in 1997, giving answers to 57 topics which he believed often puzzled Catholics, such as "*Is God in Hell?*", "*Devotion to the Devil*", "*I am a Sacrament*" and "*Peter's Pence and the Vatican Finances*".

Another publication, *Naval Battles That Never Were* (1999), investigated a number of tragic incidents at sea where ships were sunk although no enemy vessels were within hundreds of miles. These included the Battle of May Island involving K-boats (steam-driven submarines), Tripoli Bay (1893) and Bloody Foreland (at one of the northernmost points of Donegal).

A man of great humanity and perception, Fr Barry was widely known and respected. He also understood very well the direction in which the Catholic Church in Scotland was heading. In 1997, bearing in mind the growing shortage of priests, Fr Barry had written with his usual mixture of controversy and prophetic common sense: "*Before long, we shall have priestless parishes and Massless Sundays. Lay people will conduct the Sunday liturgy and give Holy Communion. There will be plenty of opportunities of exercising your priesthood. That's vocation. That's God's call. God's blessing will be guaranteed.*"

See also an obituary on the Fort Augustus Abbey School Old Boys Association website giving a fuller obituary for Monsignor Barry here:- <https://www.corbie.com/obituaries/monsignor-john-barry-ma-dcl/>

