

'DEVOUT AGNOSTIC' SEES SIGNS OF HOPE

You may or may not have heard of Nick Cave, but his new album "Wild God" has caught the attention of Guardian columnist and self-described devout agnostic, John Harris, writing for the newspaper's Religion section.

Cave, an established rock artist and some-time bad boy, is becoming known for his renewed interest in his Anglican upbringing, having found that the modern world, with its arid lack of real human interaction, offered no solace when he lost two sons in separate incidents. The album is we're told an attempt to come to terms with all that. He is currently best-known for his transcribed interviews with Sean O'Hagan called 'Faith Hope and Carnage'. The new album addresses issues of spirituality, and this is well interrogated by Harris, who then ponders on the role of the Church, saying;

"Once, for all their inbuilt hypocracies – and worse- churches at least offered somewhere to ritualistically consider all of life's most elemental aspects"

As Harris no doubt hoped, letters to the editor followed. Here's an observation from a Priest, commenting on the potential for revival;

"This is hindered by those 'culture warriors' whose purpose for Christian revival is their loathing of Islam, and those who marginalize gay people and women'.

Harris had also commented that the 'militant atheism' of Dawkins and Hitchens now seemed out of date, and ends his piece with a prophecy;

'Those pews in other words may not stay vacant for ever'.

He is referring of course to a huge upsurge in mental illness, to our obsession with digital communication at the expense of real contact, and to materialism, and to the possible answers that the agents of faith may hold to all of this.

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds are back touring shortly; watch them if you can. It will be interesting to learn who this 'Wild God' is. If they can provoke that sort of response from an agnostic writing for a newspaper that's ordinarily no friend of organized religion, there is hope for us all.

We face a mental, social, and spiritual crisis in the West, which the Church, with its 'ritualistic consideration of life's most elemental aspects' is well-placed to meet. Harris concedes that visiting empty churches is a favourite pastime. Let us seize this opportunity. The pews will not stay vacant for ever. Curious agnostics welcome.

- Richard Swarbrick