

2nd December 2021

Open

"Some attitudes may be named ... which are central in effective intellectual ways of dealing with subject matter. Among the most important are directness, open-mindedness ... whole-heartedness and responsibility."

John Dewey, Democracy and Education, 'The traits of individual method'

John Dewey was a US philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer in the Pragmatist school of American philosophy in the 20th century. I confess to knowing little of his work, but, inspired by the quote above, I'll read some more. For his words chime exactly with my own sentiments.

Yesterday, I mentioned my late uncle John who owned a fish shop in Fort William. "Johnny Gordon's Fish Shop" was a singular feature of Fort William's High Street. It was an "old fashioned" fish shop, with a veritable cornucopia of fish on display on a white, marble slab, the whole emporium being entirely open to the street. Health and safety may not permit it now, but the openness of my uncle's fish shop was what made it distinctive.

Among Dewey's list of attitudes worthy of being named, directness, whole-heartedness and responsibility have their central – and effective – place. But today, I want to give a shout-out for open-mindedness. For this is an attitude and attribute which we should all value and practice.

During October, November and December, the Church of Scotland is debating in its Presbyteries a piece of legislation which will permit ministers, if they choose, to "solemnise the marriage of a same-sex couple" – in other words, to officiate at their wedding. I'll not rehearse here the history of this in my denomination, nor the passion I have for this permissive legislation to be passed. But I simply plead and pray for open-mindedness: openness to the needs and expressions of love in *all* people; openness and understanding of differing views; openness in the embrace of new things, societal changes, and even aspects that we may not yet fully understand; openness that leads to more acceptance and inclusiveness.

My uncle John's shop was open to the world, and he stood proudly facing the street and its people in a spirit of welcome. Pray God that we in our Church might be open, and face the world with welcome and pride.

A prayer for today

Your love, ever-present God, is open and evident.

Might the openness of my service to others be the same? Amen