RELIGION AND POLITICS

As Linus from Peanuts once memorably put it, “There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people...religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin.” Well today we can forget about the Great Pumpkin as another interesting analysis appeared recently in the Economist about Scotland, politics and religion following the recent Westminster Election results.

The article argues that over the past 200 years there has been a steady decline in religion as the main focus of people’s public loyalties; this being replaced by secular nationalism. The recent landslide for the SNP suggests that Scotland with its history of religious conflict is a good example of this. Many Protestants, Catholics, Muslims and atheist Scots voted in early May for the re-establishment an earthly rather than a heavenly kingdom.

According to the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey of 2012, Scottish people are even less religious than English people.

Some other statistics from the survey:

Those identifying with the Church of Scotland: 20%

Those professing "no religion": 54%.

Those believing Protestant-Catholic tensions are still a problem: 88%

Those believing there has been an improvement in recent years: 47%

Religion is "an important part of who you are": RC 72% Protestant 45%.

Scottish Catholics, account for about 16% of the population, and no longer fear a privileged Protestant Church in an independent Scotland. The proportion of Catholics supporting independence is higher than the share of Protestants who feel the same way, as the Catholic Church has been more successful at retaining the loyalties of young people; who are more likely to be pro-independence.

While the Catholic Church maintains its traditional position on abortion and the family it also opposes nuclear weapons and opposition to nuclear weapons is strong amongst left-leaning Christians of most denominations, so the SNP was the obvious choice there

It is also significant that no religious authority warned their flock against voting SNP. The SNP with its social democratic and progressive ethos became the obvious home for many Catholics whose identity is no longer anchored in religious faith. The same was probably true of Protestants who in the past saw their Presbyterian identity as a mark of difference from England, but now that difference can be demonstrated in other ways.

All this brings closer the prospect of an independent, secular Scotland with no established or state religion, but whose flag is an ancient religious symbol, a cross associated with Andrew, the "first-called" among the Christian disciples.