

Alan Murphy

The Devils' Children?

It was a calm, cloudless few days in 1979 and almost inevitably an air of hushed anticipation pervaded the streets of Dublin. All along our road, posters and smaller photographs of "the Mighty One" were plastered on windows, facing outwards to receive that familiar wave with friendly jubilation. In another day, a moment of unity would supplant the general greyness of a moribund era as the whole of Ireland was ushered en masse into the hallowed papal presence. Pope John Paul *George* and Ringo the *Second*, yes, the Church's answer to Beatlemania himself!

As an impressionable nine-year-old I was somehow swept up in all the excitement. Whether it was due to some obscure feeling of piety or the sense of occasion - the urge to celebrate by waving a flag no matter what its colour or stripe - I found myself picking out a poster from a magazine (a sort of Catholic equivalent of a Playboy centre spread for the sexually inchoate religious fanatic) and, like a lovesick teenage girl, taping the image to my bedroom window, sunny side out. I cheerfully absorbed the jeers of my brother.

A moment later we rushed downstairs to survey my handiwork. As I paused in the doorway of 192, Niall sped past me into the garden and craned upwards. Suddenly, he collapsed in a fit of laughter and began rolling around on the lawn for what may have been hours.

As I looked upwards with pride and reverence in my heart, I began to realise the cause of his mirth. The picture was upside down.