**Elephant in the Olympic ring was God-sized**

**Katie's belief that her religious faith inspired historic victory has been largely ignored, writes Eilis O'Hanlon**

The most notable thing about Katie Taylor's gold medal-winning success at the London Olympics is that it has come about as a result of forces that Ireland has been urged throughout the modern era to abandon as archaic and old-fashioned.

Faith. Tradition. Self-discipline. Stoicism. Patriotism. Family. These values were sneered at as prosperity blossomed. Ireland couldn't get rid of them quickly enough. Now that prosperity has turned out to be as transitory as shadows, the older values have emerged again. They were there the whole time, we'd just forgotten about them, that's all.

Faith ought to get the first mention because that's the way Katie Taylor would want it. Her mother, Bridget, became a born-again Christian; when she found God, the rest of the family followed suit. Katie now credits her religious beliefs with inspiring her to victory, and in the process has forced secular liberal Ireland, generally suspicious of religious sentiment, especially anything that reminds them of the Catholic Church, to acknowledge the existence of feelings which they would rather were relegated entirely to the private sphere, shoved unceremoniously under a blanket like some ne'er-do-well being sneaked out of the back of a courtroom. Katie Taylor isn't hiding for anyone.

The reluctance to talk openly about God still continued last week. The Irish Times editorial celebrating her Olympics win didn't mention Taylor's faith once, simply praising her "modesty and humility" without asking from where such qualities might have stemmed. But at least the barrier of silence had been breached. Even the Old Lady of D'Olier Street will have to concede eventually that it's impossible to talk about the lessons that Katie Taylor's triumph can teach a battered nation without acknowledging the God-sized elephant in the room.

What makes Katie's beliefs relevant to her success is that discipline forms such an integral part of Christian thought. Religion is tolerated by liberal-minded secularists as long as it stays firmly in the woolly sphere of "spirituality" -- itself to what you might call metaphysics rather than ethics -- but Christianity is rooted in the notion that spiritual values entail moral obligations. You have to do certain things whether or not you really want to, and not do certain other things which you might desperately desire. That kind of self-discipline comes naturally to athletes, but has become anathema to society as a whole. Deferred gratification came to seem like no gratification at all. Instant rewards were all that mattered, and, the more we had, the more we wanted.

Rather than gaining self-respect and security through hard work, we came to believe

that everything could be easily had, that we could borrow and invest and wheeler-deal our way to lasting prosperity. Bankers thought money didn't really exist, it simply came into being out of nothing, ex nihilo. Trade unions made their members think that the future would be one unstoppable path to bigger wages and bigger pensions for less work, with someone else always picking up the bill. Politicians didn't have to make hard decisions because the money was rolling in and they simply had to roll with it.

While they were all rolling in the fat of the land, Katie Taylor was training hard, with little reward, in a gym in Bray with no toilet or running water. She had every reason to stamp her foot and complain about it, as a multiple World and European champion already, but while others were helping themselves to the country's largesse and delivering precious little in return, she just got on with it. The same stoicism meant that, when she did reach her goal, she didn't instantly use it to grab herself a place at the top table, instead she offered it up, to God, and to the country.

Last week Katie Taylor showed the true difference between patriotism and nationalism, and why the latter is so poisonous and the former so life-affirming. Nationalism is the creed that says one man, purely by virtue of belonging to a country which is supposedly superior to others, has certain entitlements from which he expects to benefit enormously. Patriotism is the creed that sublimates self-interest into gratitude for what the country gives a person and feeds the desire to give something back. Patriotism of that stamp made the Irish fans at the Olympics boxing arena cheer to the rafters for Team GB's women's boxer Nicola Adams, who also won gold the same day as Katie. Irish celebrations weren't belligerent or exclusionary, they were inclusive and confident. London saw the best of Ireland, not only from the new champion, but from the fans who cheered her all the way.

Family, though, is where it all comes together. For decades, left-wing ideologists have targeted the traditional family precisely because they knew it was the cornerstone of everything. Those who consider themselves progressive twisted themselves into knots of illogic in order to pretend that mothers and fathers are interchangeable; that there is nothing special in the role of either parent that any well meaning, properly trained professional couldn't do just as well, or, more to the point, that the State couldn't do on their behalf. The ideological assault on the family not only co-incided with, but paralleled, the attack on the church and the outmoded patriarchal values it was deemed to represent.

Fathers more than anyone bore the brunt of this cultural war. When people like John Waters tried to talk about what was being done to men in the name of liberal progress, they were ridiculed -- and worse -- by feminists. Fathers were not to be respected anymore, they were to be either recast as figures of fun, the better to be ignored, or else branded as figures of hate, whose role in the family, if left unchecked, could only lead to domestic tyranny.

Meanwhile, the absence of positive father figures ate away at certain sections of Irish society like a cancer, breeding new generations of feckless young men with no sense of responsibility, whose failures as fathers and partners could then be used in turn to 'prove' that men themselves could not be trusted, so the vicious circle went on.

If nothing else, the presence of Peter Taylor at his daughter's side in London, urging her on, guiding her onto the right path, putting Katie first, as he has done quietly behind the scenes for years before, has reaffirmed the indispensable role that fathers can, and must have, within the family. His look of pride in his daughter, and her evident love and respect for him, is a living testament to the importance of men's place in the lives of their children, which has been too easily dismissed by enemies of the nuclear family.

It's easy in the flush of Olympics glory to overstate the lessons that Katie Taylor's story has for the country as a whole. Yes, she ought to be held up as a role model for young girls, an example of what hard work and talent and single-mindedness can accomplish, and she will be. But that will fade. Young women have too many other distractions -- footballers' wives and glamour models and "famous for 15 minutes" pop stars -- to hope that the Katie Taylor effect will transform a culture overnight.

But, if in the immediacy of her victory, the Irish are inspired enough to see that it is possible to feel the fear and do it anyway, to stand on their own two feet and make a difference, and set about the job of reclaiming Ireland's place on the world stage rather than whingeing about what we've lost and looking for scapegoats to blame for our troubles, then the legacy of that will be worth more than a thousand gold medals.

We're punch drunk right now; we've had our Round Two, when it all went a bit wrong and we started to wonder if we were fooling ourselves to think that we could compete with the rest of the world on an equal footing. What Katie Taylor showed is that you can turn it all around in Round Three, if you've got the right people in your corner and the right values and spirit to put what they're telling you into practice in the ring.

Basically, what we need to know right now is whether Enda Kenny, the man who bears the honorary title of Father of the Dail for being the longest serving politician in the current house, can be an equally effective and inspiring father to the nation as Peter Taylor is to Katie, because nothing less will do. Taoiseach, it's over to you.

 *Eilis O'Hanlon – The Irish Independent*

**Olympic athletes sought spiritual guidance, thanked God for their achievements**

SALT LAKE CITY — The U.S. armed services have had chaplains since the Revolutionary War. Law enforcement, hospitals, prisons and other institutions employ them to offer spiritual guidance in situations of desperation or pending death.

And since the 1988 Olympics, athletes have also been able to seek counsel and comfort from chaplains.

"The thing a lot of people don't understand is that in competition, there is a lot of fear and pain. It's a part of who an athlete is. And to get through that, to break through that, so that you can produce at your highest level, many of them pray for God's help," Madeline Manning Mims, a former Olympic gold medalist and a chaplain during the 2012 London Games, told CNN.

It was common over the past fortnight for athletes to thank God during media interviews following their victories. And with social media, the public is learning that many athletes were praising the Lord before, during and after victory — and defeat.

CNN's religion blog features a photo gallery of selected athletes who are used Twitter to express their faith.

Swimmer Ryan Lochte tweeted about his roller coaster performance: "The greatest athletes suffer the hardest defeats before the biggest and best moments of your life ... God has a plan for everyone."

Some are uncomfortable with the idea of God involved in an Olympic competition. Mary Elizabeth Williams wrote in Salon that athletes like gymnast Gabby Williams unnerve her because they reflect what Williams called 'The God of Parking Spaces.' It’s the deity that grants wishes to those who ask nicely."

But writer Timothy Dalrymple responded on Patheos that Christian athletes aren't thanking God just for the win, but for the opportunity to win.

"It’s not merely that God gives Gabby Douglas the victory; it’s that God gives Gabby Douglas life, the breath in her lungs, the lungs to breathe it with, the talent in her body and soul, the strength in her spirit, the family that supports and inspires her, the opportunity to compete on the highest level, and then (when God gives it) the victory. When God gives you the parking spot, it’s for his purposes, and not because you prayed in just the right way. And when God does not give you the parking spot, that too is for his purposes."

At Christianity Today, blogger Katelyn Beaty wrestled with the question: "Where was God when Lolo Jones placed fourth?" — referring to the woman hurdler who failed to medal for her second straight Olympics.

"For Jones’s part, she says she has never 'prayed to win a gold medal at Olympics and never will. The Lord is my Shepard (sic) and I shall not want. May His will be done.' I think we all could learn something from Jones — to trust God in the depths of Olympic despair as much as in the heights of Olympic glory. Call it a theology of the missed three-pointer. As more and more athletes speak openly about their Christian faith — and as all Christians continue to experience devastation, loss and heartbreak in this life — we need to develop one now more than ever."

Back to chaplain Mims. She told CNN that many athletes need consoling when they fail to achieve what they set out to do on one of the world's biggest stages for athletic competition.

"A lot of times athletes feel a lack of value because they have to be so focused on themselves," she explained.

Her counsel: "You're right where you're supposed to be, doing what God created you to do. It's OK. He's happy with you."

*Compiled by Matthew Brown, Deseret News*

**Rudisha will leave one pair of Irish eyes smiling**

WHEN HE met me at the gates of St Patrick’s High School in Iten, Kenya, rolling up in a large SUV, he lowered the tinted window and peered out with that instantly recognisable smile.

“Don’t worry,” he said straight up. “This car’s not mine. It belongs to David.”

As in David Lekuta Rudisha, world champion and world record holder over 800 metres, aged just 22, and the latest in the long line of great Kenyan runners discovered and coached by Brother Colm O’Connell.

Brother Colm’s story has been told many times, but tonight he hopes to write another wonderful chapter by being the coach of the first man ever to become the world, Olympic and world record holder in the 800 metres, at the same time – provided Rudisha can get across the line first here.

When he left Cork in 1976 and came to Iten as a missionary teacher he could hardly have imagined this – but having found himself appointed athletics coach at St Patrick’s, and gradually helping convert the nation into one famous for its distance runners, it might just be his proudest moment.

When I met them both in December, and Brother Colm showed me his modest house on the grounds of St Patrick’s where he watches all of Rudisha’s races, it was clear this was a truly remarkable coach-athlete relationship.

Nurturing Olympic medallists was how he first made his name, beginning with Peter Rono, Olympic 1,500m champion in 1988, then Matthew Birir, 3,000m steeplechase champion in 1992 – and two more Olympic steeplechase champions, Reuben Kosgei (in 2000) and Brimin Kipruto (in 2008).

He’s also coached 20 world championship gold medallists – possibly more, because he doesn’t actually keep count – and hundreds of his athletes have made their name at some level on the world stage.

Now Rudisha is on the verge of becoming the greatest of the lot: in 2010 he broke the world record, running 1:41.01, in Rieti, on August 29th, and ever since then has been the big favourite to strike gold in these Olympics.

Brother Colm is not making any great predictions about Rudisha, because he rarely does, about any of his athletes. There’s always been a natural modesty about Brother Colm which helps explain his success, and also why his reputation is as much about developing good people as it is good runners.

“Well, considering he’s now broken the world record twice,” he told me, “you would have to say David Rudisha is one of the best I’ve ever seen. But how much quicker can he go? Well it all depends, really.

“We’ll also need to get more stability into the running, making sure he can run championship races without pace setters and things like that.

“But David has come completely out of Kenya, a Kenyan background. So this is another new chapter in Kenyan athletics, really. Certainly with David, he’s the first official Kenyan, if I can call him that, to break the 800m world record.

“David is also different in that he’s a very powerful runner, comes off a very strong 400m base. He runs like a 400m runner, who keeps going for another lap.

“It was actually in the 200m that I first saw David run, in primary school. But I really didn’t get the idea he might be interested in training with our group until I saw him in the decathlon. The 400m is one of those events. That’s what David was doing when he first came to me.”

Rudisha was different all right, in many ways. A member of the Maasai tribe, whereas most Kenyan distance runners are Kalenjin, he was first steered towards the shorter events by his father, Daniel, who remains one of the select Kenyan athletes to win a medal in a sprint event (running the lead leg with the 4x400m relay team that won silver in Mexico City, in 1968).

And the young Rudisha didn’t actually attend St Patrick’s, but rather a neighbouring school.

“He wanted to be part of the St Patrick’s programme,” explains Brother Colm. “But he didn’t actually get into St Patrick’s, because he was a transfer student, to a neighbouring school. So he trained with us, became part of our youths programme, even though he wasn’t a student in the school.”

That was 2005, and Brother Colm began developing a long-term plan. In 2006 Rudisha ran his first serious 800m, and by the end of the season had run 1:46.3, and won the world junior title. Injury inhibited his chance of making the Olympics in 2008, and at the 2009 worlds his lack of experience told, as he was eliminated in the semi-finals.

Still, by the end of 2009, he’d run a season-leading 1:42.01, also in Rieti. With that, Brother Colm started planning – meticulously, as always – for a world record.

*Ian O’Riordan – The Irish Times*

***David Rudisha won the Gold medal in the Olympics and broke the world record again. Lord Coe described it as an “unbelievable” display and said Rudisha’s triumph in 1min 40.91sec would go down in history “as one of the greatest*** [***Olympic***](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/) ***victories”.***