

Making the Catholic case

In his thoughtful article on challenging the secular status quo ("Voice that must be heard", 25 July), Archbishop Peter Smith recognises that it is not just bishops who need to speak up for the Catholic contribution to society and the defence of freedoms and rights, but the laity as well. However, having explained the why, the archbishop is silent on the how. As he acknowledges, the secularists are articulate and skilled in presenting their agenda. They are highly organised, passionate in their objective and relentless in their use of modern communications. One hopes that Archbishop Smith is right that the behind the scenes work undertaken on behalf of the bishops' conference will indeed impact on the final outcome of the Equality Bill, but one worries that the public space on this and other issues will continue to be filled by the talking heads of secularism, aided by a sympathetic media, with the token religious perspective only offered as a morsel when absolutely demanded.

We Catholic laity need to ensure our voice is heard with the power and resonance it deserves and that we develop the self-confidence and commitment which comes from the shared enterprise rather than suffer the isolation of the lone voice in the wilderness. We are privileged to share this community in our religious practice but how can we best release a similar commitment in our civic life from across all spectra of Catholic laity, and not just from our existing and already hard-working Catholic organisations and individuals? Developing more effective means of collaboration might be one step. I daily receive electronic communications urging me to take action of some kind or another but none about how better to speak up in the public space for the Catholic contribution to society.

Our bishops and clergy are already overburdened with diocesan, pastoral and parish duties, including the leading of their flock to act with charity in the service of others. But if the energy of the Catholic lay community is to be renewed in the public sphere and we are to play our full part in steering our society to the common good, then leadership, organisation, resource and dedication remain essential components. How and by whom will these be harnessed? With the steady march of secularism, we may not be able to wait for the inspiring Catholic parliamentary interns featured in the same edition to graduate at the university of public life.

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Archbishop Smith's article was informative and thought provoking. However, the threats to religious freedom come as much from legislation already passed as from the legislation



Fr Tadeusz Rydzyk, director of Poland's Radio Maryja: 'Does [Fr Rydzyk] realise that careless words cause pain and even death?' Photo: CNS

currently before Parliament that he warns of. Thus in 1994 a Catholic school RE teacher who had become pregnant as a result of a relationship with a local Catholic priest was held to have lost her job unfairly on the grounds of sex discrimination. The Catholic arguments were left to the school's secular LEA to argue whereas the arguments should have been better put by lawyers more steeped in Catholic ethos. A lesson for the English and Welsh Catholic bishops therefore is that the threats to religious freedom which come from secular legislation both now and to come, need to be defended or indeed on occasion attacked, in the secular courts through lawyers who empathise with, if not, share the religious practices being threatened.

Sadly we are already witnessing the demise of Catholic adoption agencies. Will Catholic schools be next?

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Radio Maryja's director

We, Redemptorist missionaries of the vice province of Fortaleza, Brazil, and fellow members of the global Alphonsian family, totally reject the mocking words and infantile behaviour of our confrère Fr Tadeusz Rydzyk, director of Radio Maryja in Poland (Church in the World, 25 July). Aware of our Redemptorist charism to proclaim the Word to all peoples with the greatest love and respect, we are left stupefied by Fr Rydzyk's flippant, racist remarks. Surely, the director of a powerful broadcasting station, dedicated to the Mother of the Redeemer, must be aware of his responsibilities to sisters and brothers throughout the world! Does he realise that careless words cause pain and even death?

As his Redemptorist brothers here in the north-east of Brazil we reject in the strongest terms the ignorance and downright racism displayed by Fr Tadeusz. We are ashamed, offended and, as a tiny portion of God's peo-

ple, we apologise to our sisters and brothers and seek their forgiveness.

(Fr) Brian Holmes CSSR

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Language of rights

I agree with Sir David Goodall (Letters, 1 August) that "right" has acquired an unhelpful, selfish connotation, so that to frame the debate purely in terms of competing rights is self-defeating. But this narrowing of the concept is recent, limiting and reversible. We are quite capable of recognising the rights of others, even that they may sometimes trump our own. "Duty" could be understood as recognising, and acting to advance, other people's rights.

I think this is Fr Jack Mahoney's point ("When fist meets nose", 25 July): not that the Pope is wrong to insist on the rights-duties complementarity, but that he risks misunderstanding by using "rights" in the narrow sense which immediately appears to put them in conflict with duties. If we widen our language away from "rights versus duties" to "recognising other rights as well as our own", it might help us to get away from our tendency to focus always on conflict rather than cooperation and common good.

Colin McDonald

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Music in the Mass

I was disappointed by your report on music for the new Missal (The Church in the World, 1 August). The music issued by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Icel) contains only those chants to be sung by the priest or deacon and requiring the response of the congregation. It might surprise some to learn that this includes the most important music of the Mass, for these dialogues and acclamations "are not simply outward signs of communal celebration but foster and bring about communion between priest and people" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 34).

However, whereas the Icel texts have been approved by the Roman authorities for use throughout the English-speaking world, the music proposed by Icel is only offered to bishops' conferences, and it is up to each to decide whether or not they wish to accept these settings. When the current version of the Icel missal was approved in the early 1970s, there was no agreement, for example, on the setting of the Lord's Prayer, and different versions were eventually published for the United States and England.

We await the decision of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales regarding the use of these new musical settings. For the

priest/people dialogues, it would be sensible to propose a standard setting which could be used widely throughout Britain. Other settings for congregational use might be written for the Eucharistic acclamations (“Holy, holy”, the memorial acclamation and Great Amen), though there is much to be said for a standard simple chant setting for these too.

I look forward to new settings of Mass music which truly reflect the liturgy they express, to be sung by all who celebrate it, and which go beyond the “Clap-Hands Gloria” and “Israeli Mass”, which your report so unfortunately cited.

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Pagan police

Christopher Howse (25 July) is to be thanked for reassuring us that the paganism to which hundreds of our harassed policemen are apparently drawn is an invention of the 1940s. He might have added that the word “pagan” originally had only marginal religious significance. The Jews used “gentile” for anyone who was not a Jew, and the Christians dredged up “pagan” (etymologists are not sure from where) for anyone who was neither a Jew nor a Christian.

In scripture readings at Mass it has recently been substituted for “gentile”, perhaps to avoid offending Jewish sensibilities. But it is anachronistic – our Saviour had no concept of a person who was neither a Jew nor a Christian – and now runs the risk of offending police sensibilities. Nevertheless the mushroom growth of English Paganism has something to teach our bishops: as one policeman is now allowed to take the solstice and other festivals in lieu of Christian feasts, why not agitate for allowing Catholics to take the traditional Holy Days off work, instead of transferring them to days which have no connection with them either in Scripture or in tradition?

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Authority needs reason

Daniel Wade (Letters, 1 August) asks me to say more about my attitude to papal teaching on sexuality. The context, the issue raised by Fr Dick Cremins in the previous edition, was the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* published in 1968 by Paul VI. The crucial passage of this encyclical – section 14 – discusses three forbidden ways of limiting births.

Abortion has to be “absolutely excluded”; direct sterilisation “whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary”, must “equally be condemned”. And contraception is the third forbidden category – “similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual inter-

course, is specifically intended to prevent procreation – whether as an end or as a means”. Words like “equally” and “similarly” must be taken to mean that these three are of the same moral weight.

We are entitled to ask ourselves: does this make sense? Isn’t it plain that the Church rightly regards opposition to abortion as far more important than opposition to contraception and sterilisation? Indeed, I don’t think the latter has been mentioned again since.

Encyclicals cannot be read as if they were sealed orders handed to the infantry as they prepare to go over the top. Attempting to understand what they are saying and why – making sense of them – is a necessary faithful response. I had no trouble making sense of Benedict XVI’s inspiring *Deus Caritas Est*, which deals with sexual love. No matter how I approach it I cannot make sense of *Humanae Vitae*, and I am not alone. I do not understand the reasoning behind its central proposition against contraception, and much else.

The problem seems to come precisely where the encyclical separates out the procreative from the affective and unitive aspects of sex, and concentrates only on the former. In other words the genital dimension has been allowed to trump the emotional, spiritual and social dimensions. Pope Paul VI thought this was obvious even to non-Catholics, saying, “We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason.”

It isn’t obvious to me, nor to the great majority of the commission of experts that the Pope had assembled to advise him.

Clifford Longley

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Goat skins for whiskey?

Further to Fr Ignatius Fennessy’s observations on Skin-the-Goat Fitzharris (Letters, 18 July), might I add this; in 1882 James Fitzharris drove the members of the Invincibles to Phoenix Park where they killed Lord Cavendish and Thomas Burke. Fitzharris was originally charged with the murder but subsequently arraigned for being an accessory after the fact to the murders – found guilty and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

He served his sentence in Kilmainham Gaol and was released in 1899 and died in 1910. He is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery. In 1968 the sacrifice of the Invincibles was recalled when a memorial was placed over the grave of James Fitzharris. I believe the name “Skin-the-Goat” was given to him because of his use of a goat skin to cover he legs while driving.

Some sources say that he did in fact steal a friend’s goat in order to kill it and sell the skin to fund his whiskey habit.

Patricia Wilson (née Fitzharris)

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The living Spirit

Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires
of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.

Psalm 37: 4-5

Let us then, my brethren, understand our place, as the redeemed children of God. Some must be great in this world, but woe to those who make themselves great; woe to any who take one step out of their way with this object before them ... Let this be the settled view of all who would promote Christ’s cause upon earth. If we are true to ourselves, nothing can really thwart us.

Realizations: Newman’s own selection of his sermons

Ed. Vincent Ferrer Blehl
(Darton, Longman & Todd, 2009)

As faith may be viewed as opposed to reason, in the popular sense of the latter word, it must not be overlooked that unbelief is opposed to reason also. Unbelief indeed, considers itself especially rational, or critical of evidence; but it criticises the evidence of religion, only because it does not like it, and it really goes upon presumptions and prejudices as much as faith does, only presumptions of an opposite nature ... It considers a religious system so improbable, that it will not listen to the evidence of it ... On this account it is that unbelievers call themselves rational; not because they decide by evidence, but because, after they have made their decision, they merely occupy themselves in sifting it.

Cardinal Newman

Christian Classics Collection
(Lion, 2004)

[Newman] had a rare sense of himself in front of God: Creator and created, alone to alone ... for him, God is simply there. It is not the philosophers but the children, the simple and obedient consciences, who know God. We shall not discuss people into finding him. You face God, you do not need to argue.

Owen Chadwick

Spiritual Stars of the Millennium
(Continuum, 2001)