



FAITH AND REASON SOCIETY REPLIES FROM CARDINAL WINNING TO FAITH AND REASON SOCIETY

Do Catholics have a particular role in proclaiming truth in public policy?

Yes, of course they do. For a Catholic in public life it is an obligation to stand up for what is true and just. We have to support the truth and the common good. That is especially true for those called to the noble vocation of politics, and for those who speak in the name of the Church – especially bishops and priests.

Does Sacred Scripture not remind us to "preach the truth in season and out of season, popular or unpopular ...?" In the current climate in the Western world, "tolerance" seems to have replaced truth as the fundamental value on which society is to be founded. This is a very serious development. It means, at its most basic level, that anyone who dares assert that there is such a thing as "objective truth" is regarded as, at best, quaintly out of touch, and at worst, a dangerous fanatic.

The teaching of the Holy Father in *Veritatis Splendor* is particularly enlightening on this topic. In some ways, his insistence in that document on the reality of objective truth is the ultimate sign of contradiction to today's "anything goes" society.

Has the Church sometimes failed to give leadership in recent times?

I think it would be unduly idealistic to assert that, at all times and in all places round the world, the Church has always given the moral lead it should have in recent years. In today's society, taking a stand against the politically-correct consensus is a painful business – as evidenced by our recent battle over the promotion of homosexuality in schools in Scotland!

Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that no institution has done more than the Catholic Church to give leadership on the great moral issues of the day. I think of the Holy Father's defence of human rights and freedom against the might of Communism, mirrored by the courage and martyrdom of many bishops, priests, religious and lay people in Communist countries over the last 50 years.

At the same time one has to admire the courageous stance taken by various episcopates around the world against the onslaught of secularism. I think of the leadership given by the Italian and Irish bishops against moves to legalise abortion and divorce in their countries; I recall the courageous pro-life work of many members of the American Church; the leadership of Cardinal Sin in the Philippines during a period of great danger for his country, and many many more cases.

Of course that is not to say that there have not been occasions of failure too. Individual Church members are weak vessels of clay. Sometimes there have been sins of omission on the part of the Church where it has failed to give the moral leadership expected of it. The Holy Father touched on these during his great "mea culpa" on the occasion of the Day of Pardon celebrated earlier in this Jubilee Year.

2 (b) The basis of the Church's opposition to the abolition of Section 28

Section 28 was a law introduced to prevent the "*promotion of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship*" by schools and local authorities. As laws go, it had been a successful bulwark against some of the excesses of homosexual promotion. There was no public support for its removal from the statute books. In a referendum in Scotland, 87 per cent of those voting wanted the law left in place.

As a Church leader I felt duty bound to state the teaching of the Catholic Church on this issue, namely that, while homosexual persons should be treated with the greatest of respect and support, nevertheless, homosexual acts were wrong. As the debate wore on I became increasingly aware of the issue turning into a battle for the family against those who would seek to re-define it to include same-sex relationships.

It became necessary to refer to the "marriage-based family" to make clear what the Church meant by the term "family" as the debate progressed. I was shocked to note the level of hostility on the part of politicians and some journalists to the notion that marriage offers the most effective building block to stable and caring society.

What started out as a debate about a relatively unknown piece of legislation ended up a battle for the soul of Scotland.

In the end the law was repealed, but the combination of public outrage, relentless pressure on the part not only of the Catholic Church, but also from some evangelical Christians and the Muslim community, and the financial intervention of a leading businessman who funded a campaign to fight for family values, led to the Scottish Executive putting in place a series of safeguards to mitigate the effects of the law's deletion. These safeguards give parents rights to withdraw children from inappropriate classes to be consulted on any classroom materials being used and a guarantee that the importance of marriage will be taught in the classroom.

It also forced the Scottish Executive to put on record the fact that it has no intention of legislating for so-called same-sex marriages.

In effect a line was drawn in the sand. Politicians must now know that any further attempts to undermine the marriage-based family will face stiff opposition.

2 c) The pro-life initiative.

I set up what was to become known as our pro-life initiative in 1997. It had become clear to me that the abortion debate in the UK was becoming sterile. Two opposing camps hurling statistics, claims and counter claims at each other, while little changed. I felt that the bogus claims of the "pro-choice" groups needed to be challenged head-on.

Partly my inspiration was the great pro-life encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*. In it, the Holy Father asks for concrete efforts on the part of the Church to help women facing crisis pregnancies. I felt that by offering women real choice – the choice to keep their baby instead of killing it – we would be able to save human lives, and show that it was really the Church that was "pro-choice" not the abortionists.

Our initiative is open to any woman, of any background, religion, race or class who wants help to keep her baby. Sometimes the help is simply a shoulder to cry on, it might take the form of advice about housing or state benefit entitlement, sometimes financial support is needed. Most of those helped have been from Scotland, but inquiries have come from as far away as Cuba!

To date 210 babies lives have been saved. We have funded it through totally spontaneous donations totalling several hundreds of thousands of pounds, and lately, an unforeseen side effect of the initiative has been the birth of a new religious community, the Sisters of the Gospel of Life, who will work in this field.

Of course, we were criticised for our efforts. They said we were "bribing" women to have babies they didn't want. But I have been heartened by the support of people from the most unlikely backgrounds ... from Pope John Paul on the one hand and Germaine Greer on the other!

3) Can Catholics expect respect when expressing a Catholic voice in public debate?

I think it is quite essential for the Church to recognise its mission to make its voice heard in public debate. It would supremely ironic if those who champion "tolerance" were to seek to silence the Church's voice. Yet that is very often what happens. In recent months it has become clear to me that there are none so intolerant as those who champion tolerance!

In these circumstances it requires greater courage than ever for Catholics to enter the public policy forum with a coherent viewpoint based on the Church's teachings. In a way such people face a kind of martyrdom. Not the martyrdom of imprisonment or torture, but the more subtle martyrdom of ridicule and name-calling. Courage is required in standing up for what is right. But we can take consolation from Jesus' reminder to us that in the world we would have trouble, but not to lose heart, because He has conquered the world.

A message to students waiting to proclaim the message of the Culture of Life.

My words are the same as those of the Holy Father: "Do not be afraid." It was with these words that he addressed the world on that October night 22 years ago when he was elected Pope. Those are words he has repeated down through the years. In his letter to young people, written in 1985 he took as his theme the words of his predecessor, the first Pope, St Peter: "Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you ..." (Pet 3:15)

When the going gets tough, these are the words which can console us and give us the strength to continue to proclaim the gospel of life in the face of a culture of death.

