

Injustice in the Church

The Catholic Church seems badly in need of what they call “joined-up thinking”. While Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna can so admirably embrace our “culture of freedom” and state that “freedom is the best starting point for the convincing, believing and strong Church of the future” (“Schönborn says new age is dawning for the Church”, *The Church in the World*, 21 January), how is it that Bishop Bill Morris of Toowoomba can be forced to resign by the Vatican employing a process described by an experienced judge as “unfair ... and in breach of the principles of natural justice” (“Rites and wrongs”, 21 January)?

And how can Archbishop Timothy Dolan, investigating clerical sexual abuse in Ireland, respond to this crisis by calling for the segregation of lay students and seminarians at Maynooth and the wearing of “appropriate clerical attire” (*News from Britain and Ireland*, 21 January) when it becomes ever more clear that it is precisely this separation – and the cultivation of such a clerical caste – that lies at the heart of both the problem of abuse and its scandalous cover-up?

Peter Cornwell
Bath, Somerset

What struck me about the story of Bishop Morris was the extreme unkindness of it all, amounting in my view to bullying. The policy of “non-disclosure” can only encourage the vindictiveness of people with a personal dislike of a man who has clearly given a lifelong devotion to his people. I worry about the number of young people who turn their backs on the Catholic faith, but who can blame them when this is an example of following the Christian doctrine of “love thy neighbour”, which, I assume, includes bishops.

Jo Fletcher
Lower Failand, Somerset

The model of church governance revealed by the dismissal of Bishop Morris owes more to autocrats like Louis XIV than to the pattern of authority as service, seen in the New Testament and reaffirmed by Vatican II. That council decreed some practical correctives, such as the collegial governance by bishops and the explicit affirmation of the principle of human rights. The sequel to the council has been a disappointment. Collegiality was suffocated at birth and the principle of human rights was significantly omitted from the 1983 Code of Canon Law. As a result of



‘The manner in which the Pope exercises his power does not have to be that of an autocratic dictatorship’
Photo: CNS

these decisions, the Church has a system of justice which is inferior to that of modern democratic societies, where principles like the independence of the judiciary and the presumption of innocence are taken for granted.

If the Catholic Church is to rebuild its moral reputation in the world, it will have to re-fashion the manner in which the Vatican operates. We all agree that the papacy is essential to the Church, but the manner in which the Pope exercises his power does not have to be that of an autocratic dictatorship.

(Dr) Michael M. Winter
London

Cuts and the poor

This week, I heard Iain Duncan Smith, good Catholic that he is, talking on BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme about the benefit cap the Department of Work and Pensions is proposing. In his view, with £26,000 there is no reason why a “family” should consider themselves poor in today’s society (“Cuts must not harm children”, *Leader*, 14 January). There was no definition of a “family”, except when he said that they know who “these people” are, and can target them. It will be at the discretion of Jobcentre staff, overworked and underpaid, to decide who is capped and who is not, opening the way to error and misjudgement.

MPs receive £20,000 a year just as their second-homes allowance. How do they consider themselves qualified to set up in judgement about people who struggle, with no hope of any change, to feed and clothe their children adequately on low pay or on state benefits? This is a punitive, mean attempt to make the very poorest people pay for the wasteful, greedy and dishonest actions of the very richest and most powerful in recent years.

Organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul (to which I belong) know what poverty is. Mr Duncan Smith should perhaps

examine his conscience and consult people in his own parish who could enlighten him on the true meaning of “poor for the sake of the Gospel”.

Joanna Waller
Whitstable, Kent

Your editorials, “Thank God for immigrants” and “Cuts must not hurt children” (14 January), while thought-provoking and conscience-pricking, failed to address matters of common concern, in the former case the capacity of communities to absorb large influxes of immigrants; in the latter, the disastrous housing policies of successive governments.

Clive Flynn
Halifax, West Yorkshire

The meaning of celibacy

Sr Deirdre Mullan’s article (“Infinite harmony of total surrender”, 14 January) does not mention one vital question: do the same benefits accrue to the celibate life when it is embraced not as a willing offering but as the Church’s imposed price for permission to follow the insistent call of God? Indeed, is it not possible that there may be other, less welcome consequences when this is the case?

When she refers to celibacy as “other-centred”, she does less than justice to matrimony, which is, by definition, other-centred and gravely defective if it is not. Celibacy can, of course, be utterly self-centred.

I would suggest that there are perceptions specific to matrimony and parenthood that enable us truly to share the joys and sorrows of others who are married or parents, i.e. most of the world’s population. I would also add that when Genesis refers to God creating man male and female in his own image, it suggests that in the matrimonial union of a couple at its best, we get some hint of the eternal family bonds in which Our Lord shared as the Second Person of the Trinity.

Patrick Bryan
Wolverhampton, West Midlands

After working for the De La Salle brothers last year and meeting many Religious in my gap year, I am familiar with the concept of celibacy in religious life. However, I have found it progressively hard to understand.

I know that priests not marrying has its good points, but I am surprised that the Church does not allow people who are already married to become priests, especially if they have found God later in their lives, and allow ones who choose celibacy to stay celibate. This, I believe, would give a greater diversity to the priests who chose the priesthood.

I know of many young people, myself included, who have considered the priesthood at times in their lives. However, maybe due to the consumerist nature of today’s society or pressure from parents and peers to get

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married, for many it is easy to get distracted. A future Catholic Church with a mixture of celibate and married Religious working together in parishes and the wider community could give people a refreshed image of what is seen as a conservative, old-fashioned Church, and allow them to see it as the worldwide community of followers of Christ that is living among them as equals, not superiors. Priests working in the community could give what they earned back to the Church, increasing the Church's income, allowing it to improve church buildings and facilities, eventually allowing it to begin further evangelising projects.

Edd Bartlett

Bracklesham Bay, West Sussex

Gaps in child protection

The reference to Rosminian schools in your leader ("Gaps in child protection", 21 January) is misleading. The principal Rosminian schools in England, namely Grace Dieu Manor Preparatory School and Ratcliffe College, have been under lay leadership for many years. Indeed, lay governors were appointed to these schools over 50 years ago and they have been completely under their own governance for over 20 years. During this latter period, Ratcliffe College has had rigorous child-protection and safeguarding policies in place, as commented upon in numerous Ofsted and Independent Schools Inspectorate reports. The current pastoral report for Ratcliffe College appears in its entirety on its website.

Your use of tense is also misleading: child-protection referrals have, for a long time, been passed from the Rosminian order to the diocese, which then deals directly with the appropriate agency; or directly to the appropriate safeguarding agency in the case of lay staff.

(Professor) Ewan Anderson

Governor, Ratcliffe College, Leicester

Soul searching

Recent correspondence following Jack Mahoney's article ("Humanity's destiny", 14 January) centres around the implications for church teaching on Original Sin. I have always thought that the real problem created by evolution is the basic understanding that

humans are unique in having an immortal soul, which animals do not share. So when did we acquire this soul? Did Neanderthal man have a soul? Or *Homo erectus* a million years earlier? Or only *Homo sapiens*? And how can we pinpoint exactly when *Homo sapiens* began? If anyone could direct me to any recent discussion of this problem, I would be grateful.

Janet Holbourne

Southsea, Portsmouth, Hampshire

Safeguards needed

That Baroness Scotland has resigned as head of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission for England and Wales (NCSC) after less than a year is not entirely surprising (News from Britain and Ireland, 21 January). We called for her resignation after her "drink and football" remarks last year which would apparently prevent priests from being lonely and becoming abusers.

The Catholic Church in England and Wales has been singularly inept in choosing its head of safeguarding services. It is clear that the Church does not really want an objective, strong, fully skilled individual who will bring radical overhauls into the services of both child protection and victim support – someone who will bring, too, the knowledge and experience of abuse that is so necessary to puncture the dark avenues of institutional denial, clergy cover-up, sex offender manipulations and gross inadequacies still rife within the Church.

We call for the appointment as head of NCSC of an expert in child abuse, someone willing to bring the Church into the realms of the reality of abuse and the damage done. A senior person should concurrently hold a newly developed post to build proper support for victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

We support the call from eight solicitors made in *The Times* ("Gaps in child protection", Leader, 21 January) for the state to hold statutory inquiries into abuse within the Catholic Church in order for full transparency, accountability and reform to take place.

(Dr) Margaret Kennedy

Founder, Ministry and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, Ireland

Help from the heart

How casually offensive is the remark by Fr Vittorio Dossi "that even young people from the island 'who say they don't believe in God'" came out to help survivors of the Italian cruise ship *Costa Concordia* (The Church in the World, 21 January). Offensive to innumerable idealistic young people who help those in need, without any reference to philosophical or theological position and offensive to innumerable atheists who act for the good of others, without the intricate scaffolding for moral behaviour that Catholic faith affords to many *Tablet* readers – like myself.

Jean Riordan

Edgbaston, Birmingham, West Midlands



The living Spirit

Stability roots us in whatever place or situation we find ourselves in; we are committed to facing adversity, not to run away at the first sign of difficulty. This might apply to a marriage or friendship, to our work life, or simply to the daily challenges with which we find ourselves confronted ... when we begin a new practice or renew our commitment to one, at first we may have no problem making time for prayer each day. But then as time goes on, we find our attention wandering or life events interfering. With the commitment to stability, we remember that the practice is to continue being present, beginning again and again.

Christine Valters Paintner

Lectio Divina: the sacred art
(SPCK, 2012)

Called and sent, we live our following of Christ in the power of his spirit outpoured, his presence in our lives, the object of our faith. No less the object of the profoundest faith is the presence of Spirit in our being sent. Unless we take this to heart and ponder it deeply, we shall spend a long time trying to do in our own power what we cannot do. We can, and must bring our natural gifts and acquired skills to our service of Christ and his Church but it is another thing altogether, to remember that we must submit them to the Spirit's anointing and leadership ... It is a wonderful thing indeed, to integrate all our natural talents into our Christian calling but even more wonderful to be open to those supernatural gifts which the Spirit alone can give for the building up of the Church.

Ambrose Walsh

Called and Sent
(New Life Publishing, 2011)

When God created the world he commanded each tree to bear fruit after its kind; and even so he bids Christians – the living trees of his Church – to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. ... I ask you, my child, would it be fitting that a bishop should seek to lead the solitary life of a Carthusian? And if ... the Religious involved himself in all manner of business on his neighbour's behalf as a bishop is called upon to do, would not such a devotion be ridiculous, ill-regulated and intolerable?

St Francis de Sales

(1567-1622)

Correction

In a letter published on 22 October 2011, Fr Willy Slavin referred to the Woolf Inquiry into the Strangeways Prison riots of 1990 and said "it was revealed that shortly before the outbreak a bishop had removed 'a troublesome priest' at the request of the governor". Fr Slavin's memory was unfortunately incorrect and no such revelation was made. We apologise to Mr Brendan O'Friel, the prison governor at the time, for this error and are happy to set the record straight.