

The Most Reverend Leo Cushley  
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Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2014

Your Grace,

I am writing in connection with your letter of 11<sup>th</sup> July to Mr Arthur Skelton of the Edinburgh Circle of the Newman Association, a copy of which has been sent to me. I have not written before because I wanted to allow time for members of the Newman Association to discuss the situation with you. However, I am sure you understand that this has serious ramifications for my own theological vocation and indeed for my position as a lay Catholic woman in good standing with the Church. I am therefore writing to you in a personal capacity, independent of any discussion you might have with the Newman Association, to express my concern about the position in which I find myself.

You say that 'Professor Beattie is known to have frequently called into question the Church's teaching.' From this, I assume that you are familiar with my work and can explain the basis for this claim. Respect for due process entitles me to know. You suggest that this relates to an approach to you from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Is this part of a wider action against me sanctioned by Rome and, if so, what are the grounds for that? Again, I am assuming that you must have established that such grounds exist, before acting against me in the way you have. I am surprised – and shocked to be honest – that you have chosen to deal with two well-respected lay theologians in this way. I had hoped that Pope Francis had brought about a new spirit of dialogue and collegiality in the Church, including greater lay involvement and participation at all levels of the Church's life.

I do not know how familiar you are with the background to this situation. In 2012 the Bishop of Clifton, Declan Lang, was instructed by the CDF to cancel a lecture I was due to give at Clifton Cathedral as part of a series on Vatican II. I was told this was because I had signed a letter to *The Times*, along with twenty six others including several priests and theologians, saying that Catholics could in good conscience support same sex civil marriage. As far as I know, I was the only one of those signatories singled out for censure. This was at a time when Cardinal Keith O'Brien was one of the Church's most vociferous opponents of same-sex marriage. Many Catholics felt alienated by the way in which he

and some other members of the hierarchy expressed their opposition. I believed then and I believe now that there is scope for Catholics to enter into a more reasoned and nuanced public dialogue around such issues than the official hierarchy was willing to allow. Catholics do not all think exactly the same way, and many of us felt compromised by the pressure to support unquestioningly a position about which we had varying degrees of uncertainty or disagreement. I hardly need to point out that subsequent events involving Cardinal O'Brien did little to allay these reservations.

I went to see Bishop Declan about the letter he had received from the CDF, and he expressed his sincere regret that he had been told to cancel my lecture. He has been supportive of me in many ways. My cancelled lecture was published along with the others in a book based on the lecture series, I am a member of the Clifton diocesan theological education team, and I regularly contribute to the diaconal formation programme and other diocesan events. (My continuing involvement with Clifton Diocese dates from when my family home was in Bristol).

Subsequent to the Clifton incident, a visit to the University of San Diego was cancelled by the President of that University in October 2012 on the basis of my alleged 'dissent'. This did not as far as I know involve the CDF but was a local decision prompted in part by conservative bloggers with links to the Catholic hierarchy. The cancellation of that visit generated a storm of protest against the President of the University, including calls from faculty and students for her to resign, and it attracted widespread media coverage here and in the United States. I received more than five hundred letters of support from academic theologians, priests, religious and many ordinary Catholics from around the world, and Bishop Declan was supportive throughout.

That is by way of background information that you may or may not already know, Your Grace. However, your intervention is likely to inflame this controversy once again, and you need to be aware of that. Of course there are people who disagree with me on many issues, just as there are many who agree. Such disagreement, when informed by sound theological principles and critical fidelity to church teaching, is a sign of intellectual vitality in the Church. It proceeds by way of dialogue and debate, not by way of one side seeking to silence the other by invoking the authority of the CDF. However, there is also a vociferous minority of those who are quick to report people like myself to Rome, often on the basis of distorted claims or false accusations. They would no doubt applaud you for taking a firm stand against me, but that makes it all the more important that you establish the facts and are able to justify your decision. I am happy to furnish you with any publications or evidence you require, if I am told the exact nature of the complaint against me.

You say that I am 'known to have frequently called into question the Church's teaching'. Known by whom, in what context, and with reference to which of my published works? Never in my published writings or talks have I questioned any of the doctrinal mysteries of the Catholic faith. On the contrary, I have consistently argued in defence of even the most frequently challenged doctrines of the Church, seeking to interpret these in a way

which illustrates their relevance for contemporary faith. These include the Marian dogmas, original sin, the Resurrection of the Body, the Real Presence – in other words, those revealed mysteries around which the Catholic Church weaves a faithful tradition amidst the challenges and complexities of daily life. In the ‘hierarchy of truths’ to which Pope Francis repeatedly refers, these are the truths that determine the shape of our faith. I have also written positively in support of the Church’s social teaching.

The recent questionnaire distributed in preparation for the Synod on the Family shows that there is a crisis in the reception of the Church’s teachings on sexuality, marriage and the family. Many faithful Catholics experience a profound sense of dissonance between the teachings of the official magisterium and the lived realities of modern marriage and family life, as is acknowledged in the report on the questionnaire published by the German Bishops’ Conference, for example. The Church’s moral teachings have always been shaped by a process of prayerful reflection, theological debate informed by philosophical reason, and historical development by way of which the Church has retained her relevance and her capacity to speak meaningfully to people across different times and cultures. Today, it is clear that a rupture has occurred so that for many faithful Catholics that is no longer true. This has resulted in a shared quest to discover ways of interpreting our faith anew by seeking to ask what it means to be followers of Christ in a time of radical and far-reaching change. I see my work as part of that process, which is why so much of my time is spent speaking to parish groups and religious communities (mostly voluntarily), as well as representing a Catholic point of view in the media and public debate.

This process of theological reflection and engagement is deeply rooted in my own experience of marriage and family life. I have been married for thirty nine years, I am the mother of four adult children, and my first grandchild is due very soon. I believe in the family, and I believe in the sacrament of marriage. (This seems to be true of the majority of respondents to the questionnaire on marriage and the family). However, as an academic theologian working in a secular university, I have a responsibility to contribute to public dialogue and debate. This role of Catholic advocacy entails not mindless repetition of everything that comes from Rome, but a faithful endeavour to show that the Catholic theological tradition has rich intellectual roots and a mature capacity for reasoned debate and diversity. It was those qualities that first attracted me to the Catholic Church as a convert in my early thirties, and led me to study theology as a mature student.

None of this is to deny that I make many mistakes. Of course I do, and there have been times when I should have exercised better judgment about how and where to express my views. However, until I understand what lies behind accusations issued by the CDF and repeated by you, I can neither offer explanation nor seek reconciliation, but find myself condemned without a hearing.

Pope Francis has spoken repeatedly of his desire for a Church that takes risks and is not afraid of messiness and doubt. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he speaks eloquently and

passionately of the need for greater participation and collaboration at all levels of parish and diocesan life, he condemns a culture of clerical elitism and doctrinal authoritarianism, and he recognizes the need for women to play a more significant role in the Church. The situation in which I find myself seems to violate all these principles.

I have kept this situation confidential for the time being, but I dedicate a great deal of time to speaking in parishes, schools and other Catholic institutions. I am Scottish by birth, my mother lives in Scotland, and I have many links with Scottish church groups. If it is true that I am now banned from your archdiocese, I ask that you make that decision public and explain your reasons, so that people know not to invite me. I would not want any organization to experience the kind of anxiety and embarrassment that the Newman Association has had to endure because of this. From many years of involvement, I know that this Association is a network of faithful and committed Catholics who have dedicated themselves to keeping alive a sense of theological enquiry and intellectual debate among the laity at times when the institutional Church has offered few such opportunities.

I hope that, instead of the drastic measure of publicly banning me, you will see this letter as a request for dialogue. Not only might this help me to understand what is going on, but it might help us to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to a situation that could easily become yet another unpleasant public controversy. I am sure we would both prefer to avoid that. I note that you are scheduled to speak a few weeks after me at the University of Saint Andrews Sunday service in St Salvator's chapel during the Candlemas Semester next year. I very much doubt that the chaplaincy team and the other preachers on the programme would be sympathetic to your decision to ban me from your archdiocese.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours truly,

Tina Beattie

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