

Catholics are again Scotland's oppressed minority

Catholics are again Scotland's oppressed minority. As we proudly welcome the world's oppressed, a campaign of harassment is being waged at home. In the post-Brexit chaos that has engulfed Westminster, campaigners for Scottish independence have gathered for a feast. A second referendum on independence is now inevitable following the UK government's determination to pursue a hard Brexit, while ignoring all requests from Scotland that its pro-European aspirations be represented in negotiations.



The attitude and actions of the prime minister since last June, in the eyes of many Scottish Nationalists, indicate that a hard border already exists between England and Scotland in the way each country approaches the plight of vulnerable people from other countries. Thus, Scotland is depicted, arms outstretched, as a benevolent angel seeking to gather up those from war-torn lands who are weary and overburdened, while hard-hearted England pulls up the drawbridge and says: "No More."

This divergence seemed to be encapsulated by the decision of Theresa May to close the Dubs scheme, whereby Britain would accommodate 3,000 unaccompanied children stranded in Europe. As she was doing this, in Scotland a number of refugee doctors were pledging their futures to the NHS after finding a safe haven from the terrors of their own countries. These 38 doctors had fled a variety of lands, including Syria, Iran, Iraq and Sudan. The project has received funding of £161,692 from the Scottish government. In Theresa May's England, they would not have been welcome.

The New Refugee Doctors Project seems to encapsulate all the attributes modern Scotland likes to think it possesses in abundance: kindness, compassion, equality and diversity. This is a country where minorities are treated like champions and where all discrimination on the basis of colour, gender, religion, age and ethnicity has been banished. During the second independence referendum, in hundreds of workshops up and down the country, people will be divided into pods and invited to reflect on this and to revile the fear and suspicion that has taken a grip of England.

Curiously, as Scotland lays palms before the feet of all new minorities and gathers the world's oppressed to its breast, a campaign of harassment and intimidation is being waged to silence and alienate the country's biggest minority: those who profess the Christian faith. As the numbers of

Christians have retreated, so it seems to have become easier to harry them.

A particularly insidious tactic has been used. Rather than campaign for an outright ban on Christian iconography or Christian gatherings, some long-held and benign beliefs have been targeted, distorted, misrepresented and held to have no place in modern Scotland. Thus, if you believe that an unborn child is fully human and deserving of protection under the Declaration of Human Rights you are liable to be called a woman-hating extremist.

Similarly, if you hold that the sacrament of holy matrimony can only be entered into by a man and a woman as an equal partnership, then you are deemed to be a homophobic bigot. And if you sincerely believe that state-approved euthanasia puts vulnerable sick and elderly people at risk of exploitation, you are held to be cruel and unrealistic. If you believe that stem cell technology can reduce a hospital to a human, spare parts body-shop you stand accused of rejecting science. Not long ago, a Christian was allowed to build a case for these positions; now, there is no room for debate and such views are deemed to be unjustifiable.

Lately, the attack has become concentrated on faith schools, which in Scotland are almost exclusively Catholic schools. Opponents have begun to move on from the discredited theory that they somehow exacerbate sectarianism.

They also failed to acknowledge that Catholic schools in Scotland are among the highest achieving in the country. In a recent study conducted by the University of Glasgow, 99 school inspection reports between 2012 and 2014 were examined. Of these, 51% of Catholic schools received “very good” or “excellent” marks compared with 30% in non-denominational schools.

So, having lost the arguments on social and educational grounds, opponents have identified a new strand of attack. Catholic schools must be forced to give equal status in religious education classes to non-traditional forms of sexual relationships. Furthermore, according to one hysterical newspaper columnist last week, they must not be allowed to teach children that every human life, including that of an unborn baby, is sacred.

Having failed to shut down Catholic schools by lies and anti-Catholic propaganda, they want to neuter them by forcing a state-approved Catholicism upon them. In a recent article, Ian Dunn, editor of the Scottish Catholic Observer, wrote: “Catholic schools were a crucial part of killing off institutional sectarianism by allowing the creation of a Catholic middle class whose economic muscle could not be denied a prominent place in Scottish life. These days, significant numbers of Catholic school pupils are the children of modern immigrants to Scotland, who hope their children can also take advantage of a superior education to secure a brighter future. These parents may be Muslim, Hindu or of no religion at all.”

Alex Salmond, as first minister of Scotland, also acknowledged the legacy of Catholic schools when he gave the annual Cardinal Winning lecture at the University of Glasgow in 2008. “Scotland’s diversity is a source of strength, not weakness. For too long, the attitude of some has been, at best, grudging acceptance of Catholic education and, at worst, outright hostility. All faith-based schools play a significant role in helping to shape, inspire and strengthen our young people to learn. It’s time to celebrate their contribution to Scottish education.”

In the first referendum on Scottish independence, a majority of Catholics voted for an independent Scotland, the only faith group where nationalism out-polled unionism. In 2014, Scotland's leading academic, Professor Sir Tom Devine, in an interview, said: "Irish Catholics in Scotland for the first time feel very comfortable in their Scottish skin."

Sadly, it seems, there are many still in civic and political Scotland who are uncomfortable with this.

Kevin McKenna - The Guardian