

A new vision



Reading a few American blogs, it strikes me that the US Church has rather painted itself into a corner, what is inevitable the Church will continue to wrestle with the Obama regime. I have to admit here, I would have struggled if I was an American voter. I certainly could not have voted for someone as fundamentally toxic towards Family and Life issues as Obama but then Romney was no friend to the poor, to immigrants, to those on the edge of society.

What has happened in the US is also happening everywhere else in the West: the willful destruction of the family, the promotion of a contraceptive based libertine culture, the great growing gulf between rich and poor and the real plight of the poor, of families who are working, if they have employment, and still not maintaining a minimal lifestyle, and then there is massive unemployment too, Spain has 45% youth unemployment, 25% of the population are without work. A Greek friend was telling me that the Orthodox Church feeds a 10,000 people a day in Athens; that children are being abandoned, families breaking up, married women seeking abortions, because they simply can't afford another mouth to feed. Alcoholism, drug taking, crime, prostitution, suicide are all on the increase. Greece is at the extreme edge but many other western nations are following, even parts of the US. The infra structure of so many cities is falling apart.

The Pope speaks of hope in the present financial situation; it strikes me that many people have given up on a sense that the future will be good place, that their children will be better off than they themselves. In Italy and Spain in particular but in the rest of Europe and maybe in the US too, we have become dependant on immigration to maintain tax revenues to afford, not only old age pensions but also the social support structures we have at least in Europe expected the state to supply. The centre is not and will not hold, Capitalism, at least as we know it, is crumbling. Not only is it crumbling but we are increasingly becoming disillusioned with it.

It is easy for the Church to adopt a harsh hectoring tone criticising new social initiatives, such as Cameron's redefinition marriage or Obama's healthcare initiative based on abortion and contraception, I do it myself because it is easy but how effective it is, I wonder. For those in the Church, as the voting statistics in the States seem to suggest, the devout take notice but most simply ignore the bishops and clergy, as they do everywhere, presumably shrugging their shoulders saying that they would say that wouldn't they.

What is needed is a new vision of what society could be and the Church really should be able to make that vision visible. Perhaps we should have had a national campaign before "equalities legislation" robbed us of our adoption agencies to get Catholics, and maybe others, involved in adoption and fostering. Maybe we ought to have combatted "civil partnership" by pressing the right of adult siblings who live together having the same rights as homosexual couples. Perhaps we should be championing a "fair wage" rather than minimum wages, or even a cap on extreme wages, the Church could begin by ensuring its own employees could raise and house a family on one person's wage, and that it is always a fair and just employer. I wonder if the Church ought to be demanding people like me who live in huge houses should be taking in lodgers, or even the homeless. Shouldn't every parish have some kind of social care project for the poorest in their area? A friend of mine has a vision of one London church that specialises in the spiritual care of people in Debrett's starting to serve consomme and canapes to the homeless by cassocked clergy, assisted by Dowagers in furs. To start with shouldn't we insist that all Catholics give away 10% of their income to those less well off than themselves, and give at least 10% of their time and skills?

Humanae Vitae has social and economic consequences. We can't expect people to implement unless we change the structures of society and make a society that welcomes and supports the family. We cannot treat it as stick to beat individuals with, we should treat it as a visionary document that is a cornerstone of our social teaching.

There was a commendable initiative by our own Bishops to share something of Catholic social teaching too businessmen and politicians recently; could we not ensure that our social teaching was actually taught in all its Christological sharpness in our schools? Should we not be promoting rights of women with a feminism that sprang from an orthodox Catholic perspective, with emphasis on a woman's right to have a financially socially secure family.

One last thing, I could never imagine an English bishop being photographed and filmed at dinner, even with the Prime Minister at the Ritz, is it really appropriate for Cardinal Dolan to give dinner to the presidential candidates at the Waldorf Astoria, especially in the present economic situation, aren't there

soup runs they could have gone to? It just gives the impression of a smug, wealthy Church, the stands alongside the powerful. A picture is worth a thousand words, what did the picture say to the worlds poor?

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