

Comment & Letters

THE IRISH TIMES

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The bishops in the Vatican

IT WAS, the Vatican press office statement made clear, a "failure of the Irish Church authorities" that they were discussing. The unprecedented meetings on Monday and yesterday between Pope Benedict XVI, his senior Curia advisers, and the Irish bishops provided "guidance and support to the bishops in their efforts to address the situation in their respective dioceses". Their efforts, *their* dioceses. The Irish bishops are out on their own?

Although the meeting acknowledged that "errors of judgment and omissions stand at the heart of the crisis", disappointingly there appears to have been no recognition either of the systemic nature of the "failure" or the possibility that Rome itself played its part either in creating or sustaining the culture of silence and impunity that the Murphy report highlighted, or in its responses to individual cases.

The important issue of the reform of church governance only arose as an aside at the press conference after the meeting and, it has to be said, the Vatican statement on the discussions is as revealing in what it does not say as in what it does. There was apparently no discussion of the need for the Vatican to open its correspondence to public scrutiny – indeed Vatican spokesman Rev Federico Lombardi afterwards was dismissive of the suggestion that the papal nuncio to Ireland should explain himself to a Dáil committee. Archbishop Giuseppe Leanza, as a diplomat, "has to respond to rules" about diplomatic privilege. "If this is not part of his duty, you can't expect him" to testify, Rev Lombardi told journalists. Nor was there any discussion of resignations, or of possible meetings between the pope and survivors.

The bishops made a welcome commitment "to co-operation with the statutory authorities – North and South – and with the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland" and acknowledged the significant measures which have been taken to "ensure the safety" of children.

And the pope spoke with pain of the "heinous crime" of child abuse, of the need to restore the moral and spiritual authority of the church, and urged bishops "to address the problems of the past with determination and resolve". He pointedly expressed the hope that the meeting would help to unify them, enabling them to speak with one voice. This suggestion was understood to

Letters to the Editor

Bishops' meeting with Pope

Madam, – I profoundly disagree with the opening sentence of your Editorial (February 15th) that the Pope is "genuinely horrified and repulsed by clerical sex abuse". This abuse has been widespread, systemic and long-lasting, and if the Vatican did not know about it then it simply didn't want to.

It is abundantly clear that the Roman Catholic Church is about power and the defence of its privileged position, especially in subservient countries such as Ireland. If innocent children suffer as a result, too bad. I suspect that if the Pope is indeed horrified it is because the whole appalling episode has reached the light of day. – Yours, etc., DAVID HERMAN, Meadow Grove, Dublin 16.

A chara, – The certainty with which newspaper editorials make sweeping statements never ceases to amaze me. The final paragraph of your Editorial (February 15th) is a case in point.

I regard myself as a practising Catholic, but the position of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in the wake of the Murphy report does not, under any circumstances, reflect my views. Nor does it reflect the views of many other practising Catholics – I know this from talking to many of my committed and practising co-religionists and not from what I want to hear.

The man has treated his assistant bishops and his priests abominably – courting popular opinion in the way politicians do all the time. The man would be far more suited to Leinster House than Archbishop's House. – Is mine, JIM MOLLOY, Glenbrook Park, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

Madam, – I refer to director of the Catholic Communications Office, Martin Long's welcome letter on behalf of the Irish Episcopal Conference (February 15th).

I respectfully suggest that the insertion of the word "some", before both "bishops" and "survivors", would more accurately have

church" response to this persistently painful tragedy.

As Ireland was preparing for the return of the bishops, it is the genuine prayer of the faithful, that they will (with notable and genuine exceptions), have learned much from this summons to the principal's office, (with the major members of staff having to be present) and that it will include a stated commitment from those now accepted to have a credible ministry ahead of them, to aspire to honours marks, not just passes or a replication of what all too often has been an accepted failure grade. – Yours, etc., FR PATRICK MCCAFFERTY, Lower Rathmines Road, Dublin 6.

Madam, – Martin Long writes (February 15th) "acknowledging the failures of the church and working towards healing and credibility in the critical area of child protection is an ongoing priority". If this is the case, the Catholic Church must now open up its archives relating to abuse allegations against its people, many of whom believed their depraved activities would go unreported because they wore the uniform of a priest.

The safety of future generations of Irish children and the sanity of victims of abuse may require a "truth and reconciliation" commission to move forward.

God-fearing men might come forward of their own volition begging for forgiveness, sparing their victims the torment of giving evidence and reliving the experience. Unfortunately, the reality is many of these paedophiles are not "God"-fearing and are confident they will get away with much of their crimes, because they have managed to maintain a hold on their victims, who even after 30 years are still unable to tell anyone about their abuse. – Yours, etc., RICHARD LANIGAN, Clontarf Road, Dublin 3.

Madam, – How does one address the problems of the past with determination and resolve and face the present crisis with honesty and courage? (Breaking

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Post: Letters to the Editor, 24-28 Tara St, Dublin 2
Fax: 01-6758035. Note: please provide name, postal address (at end of the letter) and telephone numbers. Letters may be edited or cut.

Exporting jobs to Scotland

Madam, – Political ineptitude has resulted in the export of 200 jobs to Scotland. We should consider exporting 83 politicians, to anywhere, and perhaps those remaining would only wreak hell the damage. – Yours, etc., ROBERT A SHARPE, Cootehill, Co Cavan.

Replacement in the Seanad

Madam, – Now Déirdre de Búrca has resigned, the Taoiseach could show real leadership by appointing a non-political businessperson/entrepreneur like Michael O'Leary to the Seanad and immediately invite him to become Minister for Enterprise in the Government – our Constitution allows it. At least he would not be missing Cabinet meetings to attend funerals like so many of the current regime. – Yours, etc., MICHAEL J McNAMARA, Thorndale, Ballyclough, Limerick.

Plus and minus of calculators

Madam, – The Engineers Ireland Task Force on Mathematics and Science Education is calling for a ban on calculators in Junior Cycle (lower secondary) mathematics classes and examinations.

In another recommendation, the task force strongly endorses the use of technology (including computers) in school mathematics, citing the benefits as "gains in student achievement, increased student motivation, and improvements in students' higher order thinking and problem-solving ability".

Ironically, the available research on the effects of calculator usage on school mathematics confirms that, if used well, a simple piece of technology, the

An Irishman's Diary

Frank McNally

PROPERTY SELLER goes into matchmaking business"; (Headline in *The Irish Times* Property supplement, February 11th, over a story about how the slowdown is forcing estate agents to diversify, in one case by setting up a dating agency).

Just imagine. Liam, 47, Dublin 6. Mature male in much sought-after location, close to Luas green line, schools, shops, and all amenities. Presented in superb condition, following recent upgrading work at gym. Non-smoker, GSOH, W/LTM female 36-45 for fun and friendship. Viewing by appointment. Box no. 1062.

Katie, 38, Dún Laoghaire. Utterly charming, bijou female (4ft 11, extending to 5ft 2 with high heels), located in cosy bedsit close to sea, Dart, etc. Katie is lovingly maintained, with many surprise features. Currently double-glazed, pending laser eye surgery. Would like to meet male, 35-45, with view to friendship and maybe more. Viewing highly recommended. Box No 1761

Sean, 39, Navan. Good-looking, semi-detached male (divorce proceedings pending), likely soon to be homeless. In excellent condition, located very close to fitness and only a 20-minute daily run from athletics. W/LTM similar female, but with own house. On view, O'Malley's Bar, every night from 9pm. Or contact Box No 2074.

Margaret, Leixlip. Curvy fortysomething female, firm-bodied but deceptively spacious. GSOH. Social drinker, loves dining out, socialising, and having fun!! W/LTM male with energy rating certificate B1, or higher!!! Box No 3546.

Brian, 50s, Clontarf. Imposing double-fronted businessman, full of character, situated in leafy corner of prestigious Dublin suburb. Returning to the market for the first time in decades and might benefit from some modernisation. But a small investment by the right female would repay handsome dividends! Box No 2351.

Siobhan, 42, Galway. Highly desirable female located in



Viewing highly recommended? How a property seller might describe you in a matchmaking service. Photograph: Michael Blann, Getty Images

male, or sincere toy-boy. No time-wasters please. Viewing by appointment. Box No 1623.

George, 60s, Rathgar. Old-world charm meets new world excitement in this lively, superbly preserved widow. Constructed in the late Edwardian style, with listed facade and many original features, he also offers all the modern conveniences, including full-time Lithuanian housemaid and chauffeur-driven Bentley. A bon-viveur, George enjoys all of life's pleasures, from the best Cuban cigars to vintage malts. A property simply boozing – er, oozing – with character, he would like to meet women aged 18-58 with a sense of fun. Short-term rentals considered. Box No 3429.

Angela, 29, north Cork. An ex-nun, her phased release onto the dating market for the first time represents the most exciting development in the Montenegro/St Luke's area for many years. Set on a dramatic, spiritually elevated site, she is presented in pristine condition throughout. Seeks soulmate. Age and looks of no importance. Unveiling Saturday noon-1pm. Box No 1262.

Stephen, Dundalk. Middle-aged accountant, currently located in career cul-de-sac, just around the corner from success. Enjoys pre-1963 designation, but in need of total refurbishment. Obvious potential for mix of residential and commercial activities. This is a superb investment opportunity for an imaginative female with the creative touch. Box No 1317.

Lucy, 37, West Dublin: Originally advertised in 2009

will be considered. Box No 3765. Mick, 32, Clondalkin. Just released (from a private, gated community boasting state-of-the-art security and 24-hour supervision), Mick is a high-spirited and adventurous individual seeking a new start in life. His characterful street-frontage belies an interesting, split-level interior, with hidden depths. Facade features a number of interesting relief carvings and many original tattoos. Viewing recommended. Box No 6103.

Debbie, 27, North Dublin. Former soccer-star groupie, blonde, currently resident in penthouse at Belmoyne apartment complex, where "gorgeous living comes to Dublin". Combines sunny, light-filled head, with state-of-the-art accessorisation. Is now a bit tired of gorgeous living and footballers, however. Would like something a little less exciting and more sustainable as, for example, the wife of a surgeon in Clontarf. Box No. 2445.

Alexandru, 28, Moldova: Ever considered investing in Eastern Europe? Alexandru, an up-and-coming businessman currently overlooking the Black Sea, offers guaranteed short-term returns to an Irish-resident female in return for instant marriage. Looks and age unimportant. Box No 2338.

Michael, west Cork. Location, Location, Location! That is the watchword with this superb late middle-aged man; now a picturesque ruin, but magnificently sited on his own property overlooking the majestic Bantry Bay. This is a

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin.

In his more general comments the pontiff returned to the well rehearsed theme of alienation in modern materialistic society, linking the crisis of faith affecting the church to "the lack of respect for the human person" in society. He argued that such weakening of the faith "has been a significant contributing factor in the phenomenon of the sexual abuse of minors". Others might well reply that the phenomenon of the sexual abuse of minors by clerics has been a significant contributing factor in the weakening of faith. Perhaps the two views are compatible, each process reinforcing the other. What the faithful in Ireland want is for their church to fully absorb that fundamental truth.

Greek failings

EURO ZONE finance ministers have set a March 16th deadline for Greece to show that it can meet its commitment to reduce its budget deficit by four percentage points in GDP terms this year. By next month, if the Greek government is not then on schedule to meet that target, euro-zone ministers will press Greece to take additional budget measures. In the meantime, and as a contingency, the Greek authorities have been asked to prepare more deficit reduction proposals, involving further spending cuts and some higher taxes, before next month's deadline expires.

Last week, the leaders of the euro-zone offered conditional support to Greece, provided its government does everything necessary to reduce its deficit. This week, the euro-zone finance ministers have further intensified pressure on Greece to deliver on its promises. But, as yet, they have not revealed how any EU-led bailout might work.

The onus is first on Greece to show that it can help itself. Only then would euro-zone ministers be willing to help it overcome any difficulties that arise in the deficit reduction process.

Greece has not sought a bailout. And the Greek government remains confident that it can meet its budget targets. That confidence, however, is not shared. Greece's major problem, given its record, remains one of credibility. Greece lied about its finances in order to join the euro. And, as the country's newly elected government has admitted, its national economic statistics have been falsified.

Such a dismal record greatly undermines the confidence of the other European Union member states and the financial markets in the pledges and promises made by the Greek government, under the duress of a possible default on its debt. This year Greece needs to raise €53 billion of debt, which is equivalent to one-fifth of its national output. It represents a huge challenge.

Euro zone ministers have now, wisely, bought time – four weeks – to test fully the resolve of the Greek government. That delay may prolong financial uncertainty. However, it also places Greece under maximum pressure to address a problem largely of its own making; one to which the Greek government will now have to contribute a large part of the solution.

It can best do so by meeting its commitment to achieve the budget targets it has set and that it has agreed with the European Commission and the 15 other euro-zone members.

Irish church and given a clearer indication as to why Pope Benedict found it necessary to summon the bishops to Rome for what is surely not a prizegiving ceremony.

It is to be hoped that a major part of the outcome of this important meeting will be a resolve to include word "all" in future communications of this nature and that it will reflect a unified "one

empty word. On the other hand, if Pope Benedict and the bishops faced the past with honesty and courage and the present with determination and resolve we might be getting somewhere. – Yours, etc, CAITRIONA McCLEAN, Weston Avenue, Lucan, Co Dublin.

Keeping employers in business

Madam, – I am becoming extremely frustrated with the lack of understanding shown by this Government, along with the lack of honesty.

It has partaken in a long campaign to deflect the blame for higher prices in Ireland away from the real culprit, which is this Government itself. It controls the higher costs of doing business in Ireland and yet it does nothing to help reduce these costs. In fact it allows county councils to create new licence fees to drain more funds from businesses in Ireland.

This Government shouts about patriotism, but the elected representatives do not understand the meaning of the word. If this Government is being honest about reducing unemployment it will have to start helping the employer by reducing, or eliminating some of these costs.

Only then will the employer have the opportunity to create more employment and reduce unemployment levels.

Recent reports claim the consumer is becoming more aware of the need to buy guaranteed Irish

goods..This can only be good for the economy. The next step is to force businesses in Ireland to support Irish producers and suppliers. This will increase employment further and reduce the increasing influx of goods sourced directly from UK and German suppliers.

Ireland has always been the most price competitive country in the EU, but also had and has the highest running costs for business. This forced the prices higher than they should have been.

If this Government can do the right thing and start helping Irish businesses then we will see a strong Irish economy emerge at the other end of this recession.

It is also up to every consumer in Ireland to force this to happen by pressuring their local TD and Minister.

I don't want patriotism for this Government. I want honesty and fair play for all Irish businesses and consumers. Only then will we see Ireland flourish. – Yours, etc,

ALEX CLELAND Jnr, Kilminchy Avenue, Portlaoise, Co Laois.

Controversy over Corrib gas

Madam, – In an otherwise excellent commentary on the Corrib gas dispute (Opinion, February 16th), Fintan O'Toole writes that the "terms under which Shell got ownership of the gas field are unacceptable: this has been tacitly acknowledged by the Government in the way it has altered those terms for the future", implying the wholesale giveaway of Ireland's oil and gas has been stemmed.

Unfortunately, the 2007 reforms by Minister for Energy and Natural Resources Eamon Ryan were virtually meaningless. The much-trumpeted change from 25 to 40 per cent applies only to very profitable fields, which are rare. Corrib would not have fallen into this category. And crucially, it is only the tax rate that is changing. The State share in these natural resources remains at zero per cent; royalties remain at zero per cent. And the companies can still write off 100 per cent of their costs before paying this tax.

Finally, the reforms are not retrospective: all licences already granted are not affected. Tragically for a nation close to bank-

ruptcy, most of our gas and oil fields have already been given away. It's not too late to change this. – Yours, etc, EILIS MURPHY, Ballyhaunis, Co Mayo.

Madam, – Here we go again with the Corrib gas saga (Fintan O'Toole, Opinion, February 16th). Bord Pleanála has not yet given a decision, only sought further clarifications in their letter to all interested parties dated November 2nd 2009, a process which is ongoing.

It is amazing that Mr O'Toole in referring to the Garda involvement in enforcing the law and the Ombudsman decision in one case, sees fit not to mention a word about the protesters, one of whom a Circuit Court judge described only last week as being involved in vigilante-type activity, describing another as a thug and a bully.

They are not protecting free speech or the right to protest – they break the criminal law of the land. The application for the onshore pipeline meets the best international standards and practices, and the official in Mr Ryan's

all of these benefits at a relatively little financial cost, and at no cost to students' computation skills or mathematical understanding. – Yours, etc,

Dr GERRY SHIEL, Dr SEÁN CLOSE, Dr THERESE DOOLEY Dr MICHAEL O'LEARY, St Patrick's College, Dublin 9 & Dr ELIZABETH OLDHAM, Trinity College, Dublin 2.

Cold comfort in Paris

Madam, – I, like Larry Flanagan from Moate, Co Westmeath, stood in the cold at Stade de France, on Saturday, and felt the passion of the *Marseillaise* enveloping the whole stadium ("No rancour this time in Stade de France", February 15th).

With those other Irish fans around us, it felt like France were already ahead, before a ball was kicked. It's true, passionate singing of the national anthem will not compensate for other deficiencies (France were magnificent!). But might I suggest that Ireland's call should henceforth be *Ambrán na bhFiann?* – Yours, etc, Dr RAY O'DONNCHADHA, Eanách Mheáin, Co Galway.

● We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters, or discuss the merits of individual letters.

department had great courage to point this out in his letter to An Bord Pleanála in the best traditions and independence of the civil service.

What is at issue here is the technical advice available to the board as against the contrary advice of Advantica in 2005, and the best practices which are applied here. No one can ever guarantee an accident or earthquake won't happen.

Every day I see transatlantic aircraft pass over the general area of this project as there is a tracking station at Glengad. Would anyone contend they should be banned lest they crash with fatal consequences, a scenario which is analogous to what some people seem to imply?

At this time in our economic woes the bar should not be set so high for Shell or any other company trying to set up here as to scare potential investors away. This is view of our group, an unpaid voluntary organisation. – Yours, etc,

BRENDAN CAFFERTY Pro Gas Mayo, Ballina, Co Mayo.

spectacular, secluded rear (south-facing). One of the most stunning properties to come on the Galway market in years. Would suit discerning mature

greatly reduced reserve, and even lower expectations. Would still prefer to meet a single, heterosexual male, with working pulse. But all reasonable offers

on a timeless classic. But act now, while he's still standing. Box N 4035.

● fmccally@irishtimes.com

A biology lecturer scorned

Madam, – I read Ann Marie Hourihane's article (Opinion, February 15th) with disbelief. Did she suggest that Amy Bishop, who allegedly killed three people in cold blood, was justified in doing so because she was about to lose her job?

Many people in Ireland today are under severe pressure; Ms

Hourihane's article is irresponsible, and insulting to those who soldier on and take the hits, and go home to care for their families. Should we buy guns instead? – Yours, etc,

SEAN MALONE, Avondale Lawn, Blackrock, Co Dublin.

Kenyan honour for Irishwoman

Madam, – I am delighted to see a letter (February 16th) highlighting the wonderful award Elaine Bannon is receiving from the Kenyan government. It is such an honour for her. I have become aware of her great work over the past year. So rarely do you find someone who is selflessly giving up everything for the good of others. She is building wells, schools, clinics and helping the people of Rombo attain a better standard of living.

I wholeheartedly support the work she is continuing in Kenya – she is an inspiration to us all – Yours, etc,

GILLIAN DOYLE, Hampton Wood Crescent, Finglas, Dublin 11.

Madam, – At last, recognition for a modern day saint! Elaine Bannon is receiving a very prestigious award, called the Order of the Grand Warrior, from the Kenyan government for her work with the people of Kenya.

Irishwoman Elaine Bannon has given up everything she had in Ireland to work with poor children in Kenya. Once a manager of a successful commercial lighting company, she swapped her executive lifestyle for life in the bush, her posh car for a jeep, her colleagues for Maasai warriors, her bath for a bucket of water. When Ms Bannon

invited me to Kenya, myself and my wife travelled out to stay with her for a week and it was a very interesting experience.

A typical day in her life starts with a knock on her door at 6am. All morning people call to her asking for help. It could be help with a water problem, a child that needs medical treatment that does not have the 50 cent for treatment, a village in need of a school or a family in desperate need of food. She often retreats into her little house and comes back with her empty purse. She will suggest a course of action that will involve writing to the Kenyan officials, Irish friends back home or whatever she things will resolve the problem.

The Maasai people respect her and have given her the Maasai name of Naraku (meaning brought by children).

She works closely with the Kenyan government officials in her area and with various companies, organisations and individuals that admire her work. Information about Ms Bannon and her Light of Maasai registered charity is on www.lightofmaasai.com.

Well done to *The Irish Times* for picking up this wonderful piece of great news. – Yours, etc, MATT PORTER, Mount Prospect Avenue, Clontarf, Dublin 3.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary

Madam, – We are used to an author's 50th and centenary anniversaries being feted. Now apparently we have the phenomenon of the "70th anniversary of the author's death".

It was wonderful to see the excellent work of Mikhail Bulgakov being discussed in your paper (Arts, February 12th) but the ending statement ("To mark the 70th anniversary of the death of Mikhail Bulgakov, Vintage Classics is republishing five of his

novels") inspired the raising of an eyebrow sympathetic to Bulgakov's own cynical take on the materialism of the world.

The 70th anniversary of a writer's death now marks the point where the work published in his lifetime goes out of copyright. – Yours, etc,

PATRICK COTTER, Artistic Director, The Munster Literature Centre, Douglas Street, Cork.

Giving up the mobile for Lent

Madam, – The call by the Bishops of London and Liverpool for all of us to do without technology (including iPods and mobile phones) for a day during Lent gets my vote (Breaking News, February 16th). But why for one day, why not make it 40?

Am I alone in being irritated by the constant inane chatter – on public transport particularly – of individuals using mobile phones. The use of iPods, with their infernal racket, is a further addition to the noise pollution and makes life on crowded commuter trains and buses more intolerable than it already is. Hats off to the bishops. – Yours, etc, FRANK GREANEY, Lonsdale Road, Formby, Liverpool, England.

Slán agus gan bheannacht

A chara, – Lá 'le Pádraig eile ag teacht. Tréimhse gan ár d'Aoiseach, ár dTánaistí, agus cuid mhór eile Teachtaí Dála imithe uainn le haghaidh cúpla lá... gan eagla orthu ar bith faoi coup d'état anseo. Slán, leads, agus ná bíodh aon deifir orthaibh abhaile. – Is mise, MICHELE SAVAGE, Glendale Park, Dublin 12.

Ditching 'Pigs'

Madam, – Why does the Irish media insist on using the ridiculous and insulting "P-I-G-S" acronym in its financial reports, when referring to Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain? The term has been actively denounced by the Portuguese and Spanish press, and perhaps we should follow suit.

It seems the acronym is more aptly suited to the British and American bond and currency traders who coined the term. – Yours, etc,

JOSEPH O'CONNOR, Ashtown, Dublin 15.

Social & Personal

Lace of Bray — closing down sale, all stock must go. Ph (01) 2828560 email: info@lace.ie