

The new moral absolutism

Alexander hotel

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A word on moral relativism

- There are no objective moral standards
- One person's 'truth' as good as anyone else's
- One lifestyle is as valid as any other



A word on moral relativism

- All beliefs, all lifestyles should be treated as equal
- Except for those which do not concede that all beliefs and lifestyles should be treated as equal



The rise of the equality agenda

- Relativism and the equality agenda go hand-in-hand 
- If all lifestyles are equal then they must be treated equally in the law
- They must also be treated as of equal status and dignity by ordinary people
- Hence the call to 'celebrate diversity'
- Hence public education campaigns

Equality agenda and Christianity

- Equality agenda challenges the Church in many areas:
 - Faith-based schools come under attack
 - Its view of men, women and sexuality comes under attack
 - Its view of the family comes under attack
 - Its role in public life comes under attack

Attack on faith based schools

- Their enrolment policies discriminate
- Their employment policies discriminate
- What they teach discriminates
- Publicly-funded schools violate Church/State separation



The attack on marriage

- If all lifestyle choices are equal, then so are all families
- Therefore it is wrong to favour marriage
- It is judgemental and intolerant to favour marriage



The attack on marriage



- We must celebrate and recognise family diversity
- This includes gay and lesbian families

The rise of equality absolutism

- State not morally neutral as it claims to be.
- State's agenda is increasingly the imposition of the equality agenda.
- It is better to call this 'equality absolutism'.

The rise of equality absolutism

- It subordinates all other social and personal goods to the ‘super-good’ of equality.
- It is monist in outlook, not pluralist.
- Pope calls it the Dictatorship of relativism.



Equality absolutism in Ireland

- Attempt to repeal Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act
- The general campaign against faith-schools



Equality Absolutism in Ireland

- The action against Dr Phil Boyle
- The refusal to include a conscience clause in the Civil Partnership Act
- The lack of a similar provision in the Equal Status Act, despite the Constitution



The false view of Church/state separation

- The view that religion shouldn't 'cloud' the judgement of politicians
- That religious values should be left outside the door of politicians' offices
- That belief in traditional morality is a 'discredited prejudice'

The false view of Church/ state separation

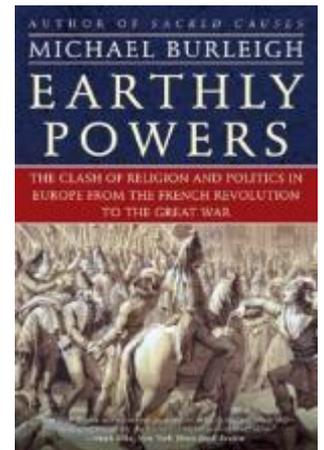
- That the Church has no right to “intrude” on “matters of State”
- That the bishops should stick to the “spirituals need of their flock”

Combating equality absolutism

- Define Church/State separation properly.
- It means Church and State should not be allowed to impose themselves on each other.
- It does not mean the Church cannot seek to influence society, including its laws.
- It does not mean separation of Church and society.
- It does not mean relegation of religion to private sphere.

Combating equality absolutism

- Separation of Church and State works both ways.
- State can be a threat to independence of Church.
- Church has often had to fight for independence and even its survival.
- Michael Burleigh – Earthly Powers.



Combating equality absolutism

- Relativise equality.
- Point out that it is one value among others.
- Point out that it can run counter to rationality and evidence.
- With regard to marriage and family evidence is that marriage works best.
- With regard to gay adoption, do children have a right to a mother and father, where possible?

Combating equality absolutism

- With regard to schools, does parental choice matter?
- With regard to ethos, what is the place of religious freedom?
- With regard to religious teaching, what is the place of freedom of speech?
- It isn't discrimination to treat different situations in different ways

Conclusion

- A new moral absolutism is taking hold
- 'Equality' is placed above all other values
- A great threat to religious freedom
- New absolutism violates Church/State separation
- Equality needs to be balanced against other values and rights. (Relativised).
- The absolutist nature of this agenda needs to be made plain and visible