

# Evening Echo

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## Next move on city centre?

FOR the moment, the heat has gone out of the Cork city centre traffic controversy.

Given the mutiny by traders over the partial daily closing of Patrick Street, the City Council had little alternative but to back off the implementation of this aspect of the City Centre Movement Strategy.

The intention had been that the bus prioritisation measures on Patrick Street would become permanent, but for whatever reasons, even the partial application of the car ban led to panic by shopkeepers who declared that it had led to the public, and specifically shoppers, deserting the city centre.

The Council's plan was to follow international best practice and free up the city centre for pedestrians and for rapid public transport.

The only logical conclusion following the mass protest meetings of traders is that not enough preparatory work had been done before the main street started to be closed off to cars from 3pm to 6.30 pm each day.

Last Friday the Council voted unanimously to pause the Patrick Street car ban with immediate effect until August 9.

This is to allow for further communication with the business community and to facilitate a comprehensive promotional campaign around the city centre.

Can this be done by August? What work is already underway? Because it's not just a question of communication and promotion.

What is being done to make the city ready for such a radical change in the traffic strategy?

What is being done about making it easier for people to access the city centre? Are the public transport improvements adequate?

What are the longer term plans for bus services and even light rail?

What progress is being made towards increasing the number of Park and Ride facilities to more than one single base?

It seems some of the traders would be happy if the whole idea of banning cars from Patrick Street was abandoned.

But that is not necessarily in the interests of the wider public. Of course the traders are a vital interest group, but they are not the only section of the community whose interests must be looked after.

And they have a responsibility to engage with the development of the city centre towards the most progressive and advanced infrastructure and traffic arrangements so that locals and visitors can use and enjoy it to the full.

They can't be expected to put up with empty streets, but they can't stop progress either towards a more user-friendly city centre.

We are all going back to the drawing board. Let's get in the same room quickly and start working together on a plan that everyone can buy into.

The wellbeing of Irish citizens is of far less concern to the Catholic Church than sustaining their dying empire... so says UCC lecturer, publisher and writer James O'Sullivan, who responds to the Bishops' pastoral letters on the 8th Amendment



**T**WO Irish bishops recently issued pastoral letters voicing their concerns over the forthcoming abortion referendum.

According to Bishop of Cork and Ross, Dr John Buckley, and Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Dr Denis Nulty, should the electorate choose to repeal the Eighth Amendment on May 25, euthanasia and eugenics would emerge here in Ireland.

The former draws parallels between the termination of a pregnancy and that of a living individual, arguing that "if a society decides that human life is disposable at its beginning, it will not be too long before it decides the same for human life at its end". His counterpart suggests that we are "walking with our eyes closed into an era of eugenics".

The history of this island is one of repression, much of which has come from the clergy. Since the foundation of the State, we have suffered religious interference in medical affairs. To take one of many examples, the first coalition government's attempts to introduce free healthcare for women and children brought about their demise — they wanted to provide access to gynaecological care and birth control, dangerous ideas in a country where hospitals were largely controlled by conservative bishops, dictating political policy from their palatial surrounds. When Dr Noël Browne, the minister responsible for the controversial scheme, resigned from office, he published correspondence showing how his Taoiseach, John A. Costello, had capitulated to the demands of the Church.

The great injustice of that particular debacle was that Dr Browne was seeking to combat Ireland's extremely high rate of child mortality — children were dying, largely of tuberculosis, but the Church strangled his "Mother and Child Scheme" for fear it would lead to Irish women gaining access to birth control.

Almost 70 years later, the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church persists — the wellbeing of Irish citizens is of far less concern to our dominant religious order than sustaining the remnants of their dying empire.

The abortion referendum is not about abortion — it is about choice, about respecting the wishes of all Irish citizens, whatever their moral position. Why is it that the Catholic Church, after all the atrocities that they have exacted upon the Irish people, still seeks to dictate our future? Here is a land where there is no more cherished a value than freedom, and yet, we allow our fiercest oppressors to retain their influence.

It is a source of constant anger and frustration to me that I have to routinely justify, and in many instances, hide, my view of the Catholic Church. Ireland, despite all its freedoms, is not a country in which anyone can simply speak out against the Church — the repercussions, particularly within the domestic sphere, are still considerable. I have always respected the belief systems of friends and family — attending Catholic funerals and weddings when required — but have rarely seen this respect wholeheartedly reciprocated. Suggest that you would never mark your wedding with a religious ceremony, and you find yourself portrayed as the

# A time for honesty... here's what the church means to me



The Catholic Church has a 'dark' past. Picture: Stock

"maverick", eyes cast to the heavens as you continue your contrarian crusade.

Sometimes, it is easier to grit your teeth and do what keeps everyone but yourself happy. But these are times for honesty, and let me be clear on what the Church represents for me: it is an organisation that stood over the system-

atic abuse of children. That is not an opinion, it is thoroughly documented fact. I don't care if "it wasn't all of them", it was enough of them — how many children being sexually abused is an acceptable number, because it appears as though, for a great many Irish people who still flock to the chapels when occasion calls, there is an acceptable number.

One can be spiritual without associating with an organisation with such a history of abuse, but we have forgotten this, because Irish people are driven by tradition, and tradition is a dangerous thing.

The infuriating aspect of the pastoral letters circulated by the bishops is that they are deeply hypocritical.

Dr Buckley writes that "there is no cause more noble than to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves", fine words, if they had only been considered by so many of his peers. How dare these men lecture us on the rights of children, when it was their institution that raped so many — the Church would do well to give a thought to the thousands of young lives it destroyed, before worrying about the lives of the "unborn".

That we continue to allow the Church a measure of control over vital state systems, that we continue to abide their attempts to influence legislation designed to improve healthcare and grant autonomy to the people of Ireland is a deeply saddening trend, and raises significant issues about the morality of this nation.

My position is clear: I do not think it is acceptable to sexually abuse children, or support an organisation that enabled such behaviour. I do not think it appropriate for members of such an organisation to offer such strong and misplaced comments on matters relating to children. Sadly, I am sure there are those who would disagree, and I do wish that I could understand why.

■ Dr James O'Sullivan (@jamesocsullivan) is a lecturer at University College Cork. He has previously held faculty positions at the University of Sheffield and Pennsylvania State University. His latest collection of poetry, *Courting Katie*, is available from Salmon Poetry. For more, see [josullivan.org](http://josullivan.org).

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