

### **LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: MAY, 2017**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor and theologian executed by the Nazis in Flossenbug concentration camp in 1945. One of his most influential books is *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) in which he makes his famous distinction between “cheap grace” and “costly grace”, the one entailing a kind of belief that costs us nothing, the other, a kind that costs us everything. There are, it may be thought, “cheap” and “costly” versions of every one of the virtues: a version that requires us only to “talk the talk” and one that requires us “to walk the walk” and to do that at real risk to ourselves.

Thus one might postulate, e.g., a “cheap” and a “costly” courage. There is real courage, physical and moral, and there is what may be called a *mar dhea* courage, an *ersatz* courage, a kind of bravado we show when we attack where we know there is little if any chance of retaliation. The most cautious and cowardly of us will “speak truth unto power” once it is unmistakably clear that the “power” in question can be attacked with complete impunity.

The Catholic Church is the whipping boy of the day in Ireland right now. Though not quite out, it is, it seems, down, and those who would not have dared confront it when it was in its pomp, now put up the fists and challenge it to do its worst. For some, of course, this public Anti-Catholicism is a badge of their tribe, a membership requirement of their particular craft, the way to get in and to get on. Thus, for instance, no-one aspiring to join the commentariate, or to climb its greasy pole, can risk *not* belting a bishop, as it were. Besides, think of the delicious rush of self-righteousness we may enjoy, free, gratis and for nothing, when, knowing that, at least as an instrument of chastisement, the crozier is long de-commissioned, we can - as Newman wrote of Simpson, the controversy-prone editor of the Catholic periodical, the *Rambler* - “always be clever, amusing, brilliant and *suggestive*. He will always be flicking his whip at Bishops, cutting them in tender places, throwing stones at Sacred Congregations, and, as he rides by along the high road, discharging pea-shooters at Cardinals who happen by bad luck to look out of [a] window (Letter to Lord Acton, 5 July, 1861)”.

Education is, of course, one of the areas of Irish life in which the authority of the Catholic Church is contested nowadays almost as a matter of course. A Minister for Education in the past may have considered himself the “dungaree man”, obliged to ensure the machine was running smoothly, but in no wise desirous of driving it. More recent Ministers have evinced a more enlarged view of their powers, duties and functions. They are in charge, ready, willing and able to let all and sundry, Catholic authorities especially, know who is boss. Unfortunately, it seems that they are boss only of the easy bits. In the name of greater inclusivity they propose legislation on schools’ admissions but have not yet commenced all the provisions of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act. They insist (rightly) on the duty of Boards to protect children but still drag their heels on the judgement of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in *O’Keeffe v. Ireland*. They are daring, but only up to a point, and, maybe, our own Sir Humphreys know well that the best way to stop a Minister in her or his tracks is to intimate that what s/he proposes is “courageous”.

Fortitude is the Cardinal Virtue “that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good (CCC, 1808)”. It is also the name given that Gift of the Holy Spirit which “gives us a special strength ... to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross (*ib.*, 1303)”. Fortitude, “costly courage”, is a prerequisite of effective leadership at all levels in the Catholic Church in Ireland today. It is a *sine qua non* of effective governance, management and leadership in Catholic schools.