

YOU CAN FIGHT THE CULTURE OF DEATH AT YOUR COMPUTER

Writing letters to papers is surprisingly effective way to defend the vulnerable

Ann Farmer

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As we face an apparently endless barrage of campaigns seemingly designed to challenge our most fundamental beliefs, we often complain that our religious leaders do not lead. But in Britain there is a historical legacy of suspicion about power-hungry priests manipulating gullible Catholics against progressive reform and modern life in general. As I found from my research into the abortion movement, campaigners who suspected the Catholic Church of sinister, subterranean plotting were merely seeing their own faces in the bottom of the well.

In fact, it was a backhanded compliment: an organisation so huge, they reasoned, must be hugely powerful. If only that were true! For however strong our faith, as St James said, faith without works is dead. It is not enough to pray about social problems and complain about the state of the world: the man and woman in the pew have a vital and indeed unique role to play in working for social justice. We need to make our voices heard, and writing to the press is an excellent way to highlight the plight of the weakest, to remind people of injustices that are in danger of slipping out of the news because they are no longer new.

For this very reason, the best way to deal with injustice is to prevent it happening. Abortion has been with us for more than 40 years. There is now a huge vested interest in death as a way of life. If assisted suicide and euthanasia are legalised, like abortion, divorce and birth control they will radically transform society. The unthinkable will swiftly become the do-able and then the socially responsible, creating a Gordian knot near impossible to undo. Legalising same-sex marriage will not, as promised, affect only a handful of people: one human rights' ruling from Strasbourg will prevent Catholics from providing services to the public or working in any profession where conformity on the issue is demanded - especially teaching. Once on this slippery slope, we will still be allowed religious belief - but only in the privacy of our own heads. Thus we will be prevented from handing on the faith. Injustice goes unchecked where people are prevented from speaking out. As Edmund Burke held, all that is necessary for evil to flourish is for good men to do nothing. You may not feel like an expert, but you undoubtedly know much more than you think you do. Many remain ignorant of how abortions are performed, and fail to appreciate that "assisted dying" means killing disabled people - no one else needs this sort of "assistance". "Withdrawal of treatment" can mean starving and dehydrating vulnerable patients to death.

Organisations like [SPUC](#), [ALERT](#), [LIFE](#), [Comment on Reproductive Ethics](#), [the Family Education Trust](#) and [Christian Concern](#) have excellent websites providing information and regular email updates on abortion, contraception, euthanasia/assisted suicide, same-sex politics, reproductive technology, the family, and more. But the most effective tactic in the "culture of death" movement has been to portray its campaigns as positive, and opponents as narrow, bigoted and lacking in compassion, summed up most succinctly in the Voluntary Euthanasia Society's name-change to Dignity in Dying. We need to reverse this process.

Courteously, and with well-chosen facts, we must highlight the dangers to civil liberties, to the vulnerable – to wider society – in "going with the flow" of these apparently benign social currents.

Although ours is a Catholic perspective, it is important to use secular, common-sense arguments, where possible based on personal experience. The British are suspicious of joined-up philosophies – although, unfortunately, not of secular joined-up philosophies like eugenics and population control. But if the religious angle can be dismissed as sanctimonious special pleading, but we can chip away at the virtuous gloss on the less-than-virtuous tendency to save money and hoard compassion. Most progressive campaigns emphasise "freedom" and "choice". But it is the freedom to choose evil and it covers a multitude of sins, mainly of omission: the failure to care, the failure to share. Paradoxically, we have one truth and many arguments, each one of which can chip away at the veneer of virtue that covers the ugly reality of greed and selfishness. Many of these campaigns emphasise compassion, wrong-footing opponents by caricaturing them as cruel and uncaring. But in so doing they reverse reality, portraying the relatively strong as being victimised by the weak. Their "freedom" involves the freedom to kill the innocent, and as Christians we know that if you can kill the innocent, nobody will be safe.

Our task is to sow seeds – to plant doubts – rather than denouncing wickedness or bludgeoning readers with endless lists of facts. As Benjamin Franklin said, a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. Better to aim for the heart than hammer away at the intellect. People need to feel that abortion is wrong before they are moved to do something about it.

When writing to the press, it is important not to delay – by tomorrow the news focus will have moved on. It helps to write down what you want to say, and then re-write it in good English. Shorter letters have a better chance of publication, and word limits are good discipline, focusing the mind on the most important point. Stick to that point – sadly, there will be plenty of other opportunities to write; your other points will remain just as valid. There is much competition, but the only sure way not to be published is not to write.

If we look on letter-writing as a religious duty – as much a part of being Catholic as fasting, praying, giving alms and going to Mass - there will be less risk of burn-out; and we are in for the long haul. Each "progressive" campaign is merely one battle in a much longer war to undermine Christianity. But unusually in battles, the Christian must also strive to save his enemy; thus we must be motivated by love, not hate. Every letter is one "bullet" in that battle. Fire away!

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About Ann Farmer

Ann Farmer is married with three children and three grandchildren. She has a Masters Degree in Jewish-Christian Relations from the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge. She was awarded the 2000 Jewish Christian Relations Essay Prize and contributed online student guidance.

She was Chair of the Labour Life Group, and edited Labour Life Group News.

As well as published books, she authored 'Population Control and Democracy – an Uncivil Partnership' in the forthcoming The Purple Book (Ed. D. Lindsay). For many years she contributed homilies, articles and cartoons to Redemptorist Publications, and research for the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children.

A full-length work on G. K. Chesterton, 'Chesterton and the Jews: a fully rounded Portrait', is under consideration by a publisher. A major study on Winston Churchill, eugenics and religion is in progress.