

The Universe – Comment –

How the humble headscarf became a political tool

On Tuesday of this week, the European Court of Justice issued a non-binding ruling that employers can prohibit the wearing of a Muslim headscarf in the workplace, setting an important precedent for a continent already in the midst of a fraught political climate.

Strong anti-immigrant sentiment is already spreading into the political mainstream and right-wing parties are growing in popularity throughout Europe. This ruling is bound to inflame racialist sentiments, especially in France.

The court addressed different complaints from two Muslim women – one from France, the other from Belgium – who alleged that their respective employers had discriminated against them for wearing the Muslim headscarf, or hijab, to the office.

The judges concluded otherwise, however: 'An internal rule ... which prohibits the visible wearing of any political, philosophical or religious sign does not constitute direct discrimination.'

Courts in France and Belgium will be left to settle the particular disputes in question and those very disputes will, of course, become grist to the mill for extremists on both sides of the Western civilisation versus Islam debate.

Indeed, as *The Universe* went to press the Netherlands was about to vote in parliamentary elections, in which the far-right populist Geert Wilders has already succeeded in bringing his openly anti-Muslim views into the centre of public discourse.

In France, still reeling from the horrors of terrorist attacks in the past two years, perpetrated mostly by Islamic State militants or sympathisers with French and European passports, the far-right National Front party is similarly on the rise.

Marine Le Pen, the party's contender for president, is almost certain to qualify for the second and final round of the vote in May.

In a strongly secular Europe, home to a growing Muslim minority – especially sizeable in France and Belgium – the cases brought before the judges present the oft-contradictory natures of two distinct liberties: the freedom of religion and the freedom of free enterprise.

France itself is almost the mirror that reflects European tensions between the two and as the place of Islam in western society becomes a fixation across the political spectrum, and when sizeable sections of any society see Islam as a threat to Western civilisation, then such seemingly minor matters as the wearing of headscarves and the display of crosses will continue to be the touchstones of those who would seek to fan the flames of racialism and exacerbate those tensions for their own political ends.



A Pause for Hope service

Prayer can give cancer sufferers the hope they need to fight on

Professor Ray Donnelly MBE FRCS



We need a campaign of prayer to rid the world of cancer, to pray for the day when all cancers can be prevented or cured. In the meantime, we have to help people to pray when faced with cancer in their lives, either in their own life or that of someone close to them.

In my professional life as a surgeon I was privileged to look after hundreds of people with cancer, particularly lung cancer, and saw at first hand the devastating consequences of a cancer diagnosis and the suffering and distress that followed in investigation and treatment.

Many cancers can now be cured and survival rates continue to improve as earlier diagnosis is achieved through greater awareness and as new treatments become available. Nevertheless, for each person newly diagnosed, there is firstly a feeling of shock, which I have seen in the faces of many of my patients, no matter how kindly or gently I tried to convey the news.

The realisation of our own mortality can be hard to cope with and then, in the uncertainty of the weeks and months that follow, the mental and physical suffering is very real and is often compounded by financial and social pressures.

There is much about which to pray.

Many people do pray very hard when diagnosed with cancer but many don't pray at all and many would like to pray but don't know how to and need help. Most people, though, feel the need for prayerful support and it is here that Pause for Hope can be so effective, helping people to know that they are not alone and helping them to bring God more into their lives and to feel how much God loves them and is interested in every single thing that happens to them.

Then they can learn to trust Him and to accept His will for them, whatever that may be, and then to get on, in a positive fashion, with the management and treatment of their cancer.

We were all taught by our mothers when something unpleasant happened to us, to 'offer it up', usually for relatively minor upsets. The opportunities that cancer provides to 'offer it up' are huge and not to be wasted. I often think that, if all the suffering in the world caused by cancer could be offered up in reparation for all the terrible offences against God that are committed each day, such as the millions of abortions carried out each year, then it would have great value in His eyes.

On an individual level though, the sufferings of each person can be offered up for themselves, their loved ones or another private intention and thus be converted into a form of prayer and into something of considerable value. If anyone doubts the value of suffering they just need to look at the Cross of Christ. United to him, our suffering acquires an immense value and becomes a very effective instrument.

Pause for Hope tries to do all this and to complement the work of all those many others in the Church trying to do the same. We do this mainly through the ecumenical services we organise but there is also much information on our website.

The first service was held in St Francis Xavier Church in Liverpool in 1999. The response was so great that, the following year, we moved to the Metropolitan Cathedral and every year since then we have held services in one or other of the two cathedrals in Liverpool, led by Archbishop Kelly, Archbishop McMahon and Bishop Williams as well as Bishop Jones and other Anglican and Free Church ministers.

Pause for Hope has seen constant growth since the beginning and services have subsequently been held in Manchester, Chester, Glasgow, Paisley, the Isle of Man and several parishes around the country. The support and participation of the local bishops has been very encouraging and Archbishop Longley will be officiating at our first service in Birmingham on Sunday, 19th March at 3 pm in St Chad's Cathedral.

Our first service in Wales will be held later in the year and we go again to Chester in June. A parish service will



take place in St Michael and St John's Church in Clitheroe on 30th April and the Liverpool service on Sunday 15th October is in the Metropolitan Cathedral. The Knights of St Columba have been particularly active and supportive in Scotland.

We have recently been awarded a grant from the Bishops' Conference Day for Life Fund to develop a 'starter pack' for parishes and others to help them arrange their first service. This contains a model order of service, suggested prayers and hymns and advice on publicity, finding suitable speakers and other practical matters.

The aim of the services is to help people to pray together, for themselves, their families, their carers, their doctors and nurses and everyone else involved in their care, for those with responsibility for finding and allocating the resources to deal with cancer and, of course, for the scientists trying to find a cure.

Nor should we forget those people who have a very real fear of getting cancer.

The mood of the services is very upbeat, positive and full of hope although there is an opportunity to remember those loved ones we have lost to cancer. We often involve the local schools which helps to lighten the atmosphere and their contributions are always very well received.

The reaction of those participating is invariably positive in one way or another and, in this respect, I would like to quote from a letter I received from Sr Loyola Kelly after a service held in her church, St Teresa's in Glasgow: 'There is absolutely no doubt now that Pause for Hope is here to stay, and will get bigger as it becomes known.'

'I think one of the biggest lessons it has had for me is the realisation that cancer is such a lonely illness, and until Pause for Hope, the Church has sadly never thought to address the fears and the loneliness.'

'My brother was there, and I realised he looked different when he left the church, in comparison with the way he looked when he arrived. We have talked about it since, and I really think that the service has a healing power of its own – as does the music.'

Pause for Hope is now registered as a small charity and a national board has been established. We are currently seeking funds to appoint a development officer to promote the spread of Pause for Hope across the UK and, in time, abroad. Our first ambition is to see it firmly established as a national initiative with a presence in every diocese, perhaps with a dedicated Pause for Hope Sunday in October close to the feast of St Luke.

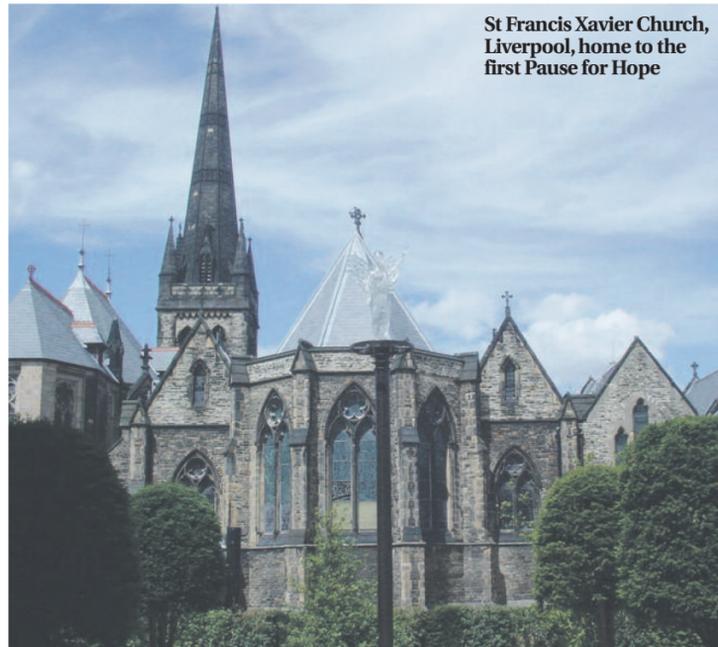
It appears that the need is definitely there and we will co-operate with anyone to meet it. At least one-in-three people will develop some kind of cancer during their lifetime and the effects on individuals, families and society at large are considerable.

Cancer will one day be put in the history books where it belongs but not before our researchers discover the solutions. God knows the answers already and we have to pray earnestly that he enlightens the minds of our scientists to see them clearly and finally.

Let us all pray together, therefore, that the day will quickly come when all cancers can be prevented or cured.

The harder we pray the more quickly that day will come.

Professor Ray Donnelly MBE FRCS is a retired thoracic surgeon. In 1990 he founded the Lung Cancer Fund which was later renamed the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation and is its current president. Among the books he has written are *Cinderella Cancer*, a personal history of the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation, and *With Jesus to Calvary*, *Reflections on The Way of the Cross*.



St Francis Xavier Church, Liverpool, home to the first Pause for Hope

The Catholic Universe

Editor: **Joseph Kelly**
Tel: **0161 908 5301**
Email:

joseph.kelly@thecatholicuniverse.com

The Universe Media Group Limited,
Guardian Print Centre, Longbridge Road,
Trafford Park, Manchester, M17 1SN

News items:
pool@thecatholicuniverse.com

Tel: **0161 908 5301**

Advertising:

Tel: **0161 908 5301**

Circulation/ Distribution:

Tel: **0161 908 5330**

Accounts:

Tel: **0161 908 5332**

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DELIVERY

Subscription rates: £57 UK, €90, £67 GBP (Ireland/Europe) £101 worldwide, £40 students and schools (term time). To subscribe, please use the order form in this issue or call 0161 908 5301