

Bishop Campbell did not close down *Protect the Pope*

BEGINS:

'Back in 2010 Deacon Nick Donnelly set up the *Protect the Pope* website/blog, as a direct response to the campaign of hostility and ridicule from sections of the media and lobby groups against Pope (Emeritus) Benedict XVI's historic visit to the UK in September of that year.

Protect the Pope was particularly successful at this time in articulating a strong defence of the Petrine Office, the Catholic Church, and its teachings against certain secularist and anti-Catholic activists. In the last couple of years, however, *Protect the Pope* appears to have shifted its objective from a *defence of Church teaching* from those *outside* the Church to alleged internal dissent *within* the Church. With this shift, *Protect the Pope* has come to see itself as a 'doctrinal watchdog' over the writings and sayings of individuals, that is, of bishops, clergy and theologians in England & Wales and throughout the Catholic world.

Protect the Pope makes it clear that the site is a private initiative and is in no way officially affiliated with the Diocese of Lancaster. The fact, however, that its creator and author is a permanent deacon of the Diocese of Lancaster and holding some responsibility here fosters in the minds of some people that Deacon Nick Donnelly is somehow reporting the views of the Diocese.

It is my view that bishops, priests and deacons of the Church – ordained and 'public' persons – are free to express themselves and their personal views, but never in a way that divides the community of the Church i.e. through *ad hominem* and *personal* challenges. Increasingly I have felt that *Protect the Pope*, authored as it is by a public person holding ecclesiastical office (an ordained deacon), has, at times, taken this approach its own posts - but has also allowed for this by facilitating those who comment online.

I note that Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, speaking at a media conference in Rome on 29 April, said: "We adhere to the best and highest standards"—indicating that this doesn't only pertain to the latest in technological advancements which are "critically important," but also to "the way we use that technology," because "how we say something is just as important as what we say."

Cardinal Dolan also noted the importance of never caricaturing or stereotyping those who oppose the Magisterium. He exhorted that even when confronted with those who attempt to distort what the Church says, or who issue "mean, vicious, and outward attacks," we must "always respond in charity and love."

On several occasions, I asked Deacon Nick, through my staff, for *Protect the Pope* to continue its good work in promoting and teaching the Catholic Faith, but to be careful **not** to take on individuals in the Church of opposing views through *ad hominem* and

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personal challenges. Unfortunately, this was not taken on board. Consequently, as a last resort, on 3 March 2014 and in a personal meeting with Deacon Nick Donnelly, I requested, as his Diocesan Ordinary, that Deacon Nick 'pause' all posting on the *Protect the Pope* website so as to allow for a period of prayer and reflection upon his position as an ordained cleric with regards to *Protect the Pope* and his own duties towards unity, truth and charity. The fact that this decision and our personal dialogue was made public on the *Protect the Pope* site and then misinterpreted by third parties is a matter of great regret. In fact, new posts continued on the site after this date – the site being handed over and administered/moderated in this period by Deacon Nick's wife Martina.

On 13 April 2014 Deacon Nick requested in writing that he be allowed to resume posting again from the date: Monday 21 April 2014. I did not accept this request as the period of discernment had not yet concluded. Again, the fact that this decision was forced, misinterpreted and then released publicly on the site – and miscommunicated by certain media outlets and blogs – claiming that I had effectively 'closed', 'supressed' or 'gagged' *Protect the Pope* was regrettable and does not represent the truth of this situation. To be clear: **I have not closed down *Protect the Pope*.**

I am certainly aware of the need of the Church and the Diocese of Lancaster to engage positively with the new media, social media, blogs, and the internet for the sake of spreading the Gospel to the people of our age. Indeed, our Diocese has a good track record of such engagement in reaching out to a much wider audience through our active use of the new communication technologies. I have a weekly blog myself.

I am, of course, also conscious, that no bishop can ever 'close down' or supress blogs and websites – such a claim would be absurd. Bishops can and must, however, be faithful to their apostolic duty to preserve the unity of the Church in the service of the Truth. They must ensure that ordained clergy under their care serve that unity in close communion with them and through the gift of their public office: preaching the Truth always - but always in love.'

ENDS

There will be no further comment from the Diocese of Lancaster on this matter.

+Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster

2 May 2014



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Diocesan Twitter Account: [@LancasterDioces](https://twitter.com/LancasterDioces)

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