

# The Future of Media Commission

## Submission of the Family and Media Association FMA

It is significant that the Public Consultation phase of the work of the Future of Media Commission should be coming to a close just as the publically funded National Broadcaster, RTÉ has been forced to admit to one of its recent sets of breeches: of the Broadcasting Act 2009; of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's Code of Programme Standards; and of RTÉ's own nominal standards.

It is also significant that the outcry which finally forced RTÉ's decision and apology has come at a time when, as the Family and Media Association (FMA) is in a position to confirm, many Irish people had *already* silently disengaged from the Broadcaster and much of what is often called 'the mainstream media', in this country.

These often private 'disengagements' -- which would have had the effect of artificially muting the level of public outcry -- have been wrought by consistent and persistent [betrayals of trust by RTÉ](#) (and others) for which the New Year's Eve programme is simply *one* of the more recent and limited icons.

Taken together, the complaints made and the complaints not made can be seen as yet another warning shot, fired across the bows of a so-called "liberal" media establishment. An earlier shot of this type was sounded in an [excellent paper of Kenneth Woodward](#), former Religion Editor and Contributing Editor of Newsweek Magazine. His now prophetic paper, entitled: *After objectivity: what moral norms should govern news reporting?* also dealt with some of the broader implications of the issue of 'Newsroom Culture' and was delivered at a talk given to the 2006 Cleraun Media Conference, which that year had been opened by then Minister for Communications Noel Dempsey (the talk itself was chaired by then Managing Editor of The Irish Times Peter Murtagh).

Mr Woodward compellingly described how the failure of the New York Times to take seriously, those with conservative values, led to that paper, losing its influence over large sections of American society. This helped to give rise to Fox News and, with hindsight, we can now, of course, see other profound effects of the New York Times's effective 'abdication', most notably in American political life and in the changing shape of its media landscape.

RTÉ and most of Ireland's mainstream media have been indulging in a similar sort of abdication for many years now and this is already beginning to see their influence wane, in an analogous way.

The journalists gathered together to hear the 2006 paper appeared horrified when Mr Woodward pointed out, even then, that there was a significant number of people in the US who believed that 'if the New York Times says it, it isn't true' but our experience in FMA can confirm the same phenomenon now taking hold in Ireland.

In recent times, we have had occasion to point out that, as with the New York Times etc., *'just because RTÉ says it, (or even just because the Irish media says it) it isn't automatically untrue.'*

The problem is that on many occasions, it demonstrably *is* untrue and while there is much talk by mainstream media about 'fake news' in the alternative media there is practically no appetite to identify and correct the instances and even patterns of fake news in mainstream media.

In just one example, as recently as 6 days ago, while most attention, such as it is, was still on RTÉ's New Year's Eve broadcast, [an edition of the RTÉ It Says in the Papers](#) programme 'claimed without evidence' -- to use a phrase, here used correctly for once, which has taken root in RTÉ's own 'news' reports recently -- that on the front page of The Irish Times it was reported "that the incoming Dublin Catholic Archbishop of Dublin would back female priests", and that, in that paper, we were "told Archbishop-elect Dermot Farrell has said he would like this to happen". [The Irish Times](#) did not make these claims, of course, but as has now become the norm, we are not aware of RTÉ having corrected its error.

This was not an isolated incident. [The same programme in 2019](#) claimed that a *pro-life* group of doctors had welcomed abortion guidelines. This was of course not true but the claim was repeated in a subsequent edition and [again no correction was made that we are aware of](#) although the newspaper in question, the Irish Examiner, [amended the online edition](#) of its story to better reflect the truth. To paraphrase a recent RTÉ campaign, yes, the truth matters but *evidently* not *that* much to RTÉ.

Unfortunately, disregard for the truth has not been limited to RTÉ. A complaint made by FMA against the Ray Darcy Show in 2015 for first representing as true, and later failing to correct the record about, a fake news story concerning 50 Shades of Gray was, on a majority decision, not upheld by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), and this in spite of the BAI accepting that the story was indeed not true as we had pointed out.

Such incorrect and uncorrected 'reporting' only serves to increase the alienation of a large part of the viewing and listening public from RTÉ whose overall contempt for Christians and Christian values, one of which is the truth, is palpable for many people of faith in Ireland and even those not of faith but who nonetheless have a sense of fairness and decency.

The recent New Year's Eve broadcast is simply another confirmation of that contempt rearing its head in a more tangible way. But the more general negativity towards Christianity and people of faith which informs and permeates so much of RTÉ's coverage is more often less easy to 'nail down' or 'prove'. One wonders if, for example the makers of the infamous Prime Time Investigates documentary about Fr Kevin Reynolds had not made an easily refutable claim about paternity, would the praise which the programme received from the then Minister for justice have stood and would Fr Reynolds not now simply be another statistic of great RTÉ journalism unable to clear his name.

It is usually easy to discern the strongly held anti Christian views of the presenter/broadcaster on issues of faith or morals. Good challenging journalism does not

necessarily or even usually require this, as then Minister of Communications Eamon Ryan, citing Jeremy Paxman as an example, was once at pains to point out to Vincent Browne.

In recent months, RTÉ'S Ray D'Arcy has praised on air RTÉ's 'Truth Matters' / 'Quality Journalism Matters' campaign. This is very ironic, not only, in view of the example cited above but also in view of the multitude of complaints against the show which *were* upheld by the BAI and even culminated in a special warning. All this gives the RTÉ campaign a decidedly doublespeak Orwellian aspect, an aspect which should be considered very carefully along with the other concerns raised here, in view of attempts to introduce a new broadcasting charge for which the Taoiseach has recently indicated support.

To support a new compulsory charge for an organization and organizations which are widely seen as hostile to a large proportion of the people would not be wise and would further confirm the growing feelings of alienation in this country, at this time in particular, leading to increasing division when unity and the need for trust are more important than ever. Does anyone really want a situation in Ireland where so many of its people do not trust the political and media establishment? What will be the unintended consequences?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once said, “Having justifiably learnt to distrust Soviet propaganda, ... we naturally couldn't believe the Nazis wanted to make Russia their colony and us their German slaves.”