

## Letters

Monday, September 19, 2011

### What Ireland has lost by a stupid ban

Bishop Edward Daly's call to end mandatory clerical celibacy to ease problems facing the Catholic Church (Irish Examiner, Sept. 13) echoes an ancient refrain in Ireland. This issue has been smoldering ever since the middle ages and is best expressed by that Limerick poet, Brian Merriman in his *Cúirt An Mheán Oíche*, c. 1780, where the women of Ireland put their men and priests on trial for their lack of love-making and failure to marry:

**"But oye, my heart will grow grey hairs  
Brooding forever on idle cares,  
Has the Catholic Church a glimmer of sense  
That the priests won't marry like anyone else....  
It passes the wit of mortal man  
What Ireland has lost by this stupid ban."**

*(The Midnight Court, trans. by Frank O'Connor, 1945)*



Illustration by Brian Bourke

It is true that the ban on marriage was introduced "to make sure clergy committed themselves to God alone", but the compelling earthly reason that it was introduced by Pope Benedict VIII in the 11th century was to ensure that there would be no claims on church property by the priest's offspring.

The distinguished Dr Daly, who acknowledges that he is "not engaged in a popularity contest", might take comfort to know that he travels in some very ancient and honorable company. Perhaps, his book and public statement might cause other bishops, including the primary bishop in Rome, to similarly ponder "what Ireland has lost by this stupid ban".

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