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Imagine a democratic country where a ministers in one of the largest dailys publish an article by his own hand saying he wants to limit the freedom of speech for some of the citizens, eg those who motivates their political and social engagements from religious beliefs. That country is Sweden where the minister of Health, Morgan Johansson, did exactly that in Aril last year. He found the the thorough media focus on the Catholic Church during the final illness and death of Pope John Paul II deeply unsettling, since the Catholic Church is “fundamentalist” and “a threat to womens health”. Unfortunately the ministers inability to recognise religion as a positive influence to work for common good, solidarity, human rights reflects many swedes view not only of the Catholic Church but of religion as such.

The modern swedish state was in many ways founded in opposition to the Catholic Church, and the picture of the Catholic Church as something foreign, something that pose a threat to swedish independence is still very much alive today. Sweden regards itself as an important defender of the emancipation of women, wich reflects the picture painted of the Church also in media.

One of the most accute problems in my country is that not only we, but people who comes forward as being religious, no matter what religion, by other people is regarded as somewhat intellectually not reliable.

I wanted to give you this background to explain the situation where I work. It is very difficult for us to be pro-active in political and ethical issues. At least as a Church. We, I, try to help catholics who are experts in the field of economy, environement, immigrant issues etc to come forward, not as representatives of the Church, but as experts influenced by catholic ethos. That is a very important way to work, to slowly create a trustworthyness among ordinary people and in the highly influential media society.

What we have noticed lately is that the atheist have become, I do not hesitate to use the word extremely, active in media and in political lobbying. They even use famous people as formel ABBA-members to popularise their views to ordinary swedes. Why now? Probably beacuse they feel there has been a major backlash for secularism among swedes the past decade and in the world in general. There prime target right know is to put an end to all religious schools – childrens freedom of religion is interpreted as “freedom from relgion”- and all economical support to religious communities. This will no doubt in dew time be brought to the EU and other international organisations by swedish parlamentarians and lobbyist.

In my job I try to do what I can to broaden the view of the Church, and explain why the Church holds certain views by answering debate my self, foster journalist relations, and be as active as possible helping journalists out and give ideas about articles and so on. It is difficult though to deal with journalists who are complete novices when it comes to religion. ( are catholics christians? do you celebrate Christmas?). A main issue is to find a language to communicate, which is not only an issue for mediacommunications but for evangelisation in general. I even had to start a glossary for journalists to explain central catholic/christian words on our website. In my country it is also a sort of statement that the spokesperson and press officer is lay woman. Sometimes the Church forget that in this century, how ever bad we might find it, the person is very much the message.

The largest problem however I think is that the agenda is that religion, that has not adjusted to political correctness, shall be wiped out from as many forums as possible. How fight that? By showing that we have a genuine interest to contribute to the common good, stand our point and keep our integrity without being aggressive. The dream would be that all seminarians got some kind of media training and learnt not to be negative to the media, and that the Church in general thought more about how a message is presented and by whom.

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