

A REBUTTAL OF THE CALL BY VINTNERS' GROUPS FOR THE END OF THE GOOD FRIDAY BAN ON THE SALE OF ALCOHOL



INTRODUCTION

The Licensed Vintners Association and the Vintners Federation of Ireland are once again calling for an end to the Good Friday ban on the sale of alcohol, describing it as “archaic and discriminatory”, in this briefing we respond to their claims one by one.

#Claim 1

IT WILL HARM TOURISM

#Response

TOURISM AND COMMERCE CANNOT HAVE THE FINAL SAY IN EVERYTHING

Restrictions on trading are commonplace around Europe. Germany and Switzerland have very strict controls on Sunday trading. Other countries also have less strict controls, but Sunday trading is still restricted, for example in many parts of France.

Germany is the most powerful economy in Europe. Switzerland is very wealthy. In these and other countries, tourists are ‘inconvenienced’ far more regularly than here by trading restrictions but these countries believe something more important is at stake, namely the principle that not every day should be dominated by the dictates of commerce. Tourism or commerce cannot have the final word in everything.

In New Zealand, they also ban the sale of alcohol on Good Friday, shops close and TV advertising is not permitted.

#Claim 2

THE SALE-OF-ALCOHOL BAN IS DISCRIMINATORY

#Response

DIFFERENT TREATMENT OF PUBS AND SHOPS IS COMMONPLACE

It is true that shops can open on Good Friday in Ireland but pubs cannot. But the opposite regime applies in the other countries mentioned, that is, the shops cannot open but the pubs can open.

In Britain on Christmas Day, some pubs and restaurants open, but the big shops stay closed. Does this discriminate against shops?

Pubs and shops are different kinds of businesses. It would be discrimination if some pubs were allowed to open and other pubs were not, without good reason. Likewise, it would be discrimination if some department stores were allowed to open but others were not, again without good reason. (Sunday trading laws in some European countries allow shops to open in named tourist areas, but not in non-tourist areas).

In addition, many countries place all kinds of restrictions on the sale of alcohol that they do not place on other products. This is not commonly considered ‘discrimination’.



#Claim 3

PEOPLE STOCK UP ON ALCOHOL AND DRINK ANYWAY ON GOOD FRIDAY

#Response

THIS IS TRUE, BUT IS ALSO TRUE OF CHRISTMAS DAY WHEN PUBS ALSO CLOSE

People always stock up on drink during a public holiday break. This is true of Easter and it is true of Christmas. On Christmas Day pubs stay closed, just like on Good Friday. Is this law also 'archaic'? Should we also allow pubs (and perhaps shops) to open on Christmas Day? But what would this do the character of the day? Would it remain a pre-eminently family day?



#Claim 5

EASTER IS A PARTICULARLY BUSY WEEKEND

#Response

TRUE, BUT IT'S ONLY BUSY BECAUSE IT IS A RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY

The Vintners are really trying to have it both ways with this claim. The reason Easter is a long weekend is because it is originally, and for many people still is, a religious holiday. This is why Easter Monday is a Public Holiday. If the Vintners want Good Friday to be a completely normal day, then maybe the whole weekend should be made normal also?



#Claim 4

THE GOOD FRIDAY BAN 'IMPOSES' RELIGION

#Response

THERE ARE GOOD REASONS OTHER THAN RELIGION TO MARK OUT SOME DAYS AS SPECIAL

The Sunday trading restrictions in various European countries are religious in origin and religious groups often defend the restrictions. But they are also frequently defended by trade unions who can see sense in the argument that not every day should be treated the same and not every day should be equally commercial. The same logic applies to the Good Friday rules here.

CONCLUSION

DON'T MAKE EVERY DAY A UNIFORMLY COMMERCIAL DAY

As we have seen, various countries restrict trade, mostly on Sundays and sometimes on Good Friday as well. They do this sometimes for historical, religious reasons, but whether the origins of the restrictions are religious or not (keep in mind also that most holidays are religious in origin also, hence 'holiday', as in 'holy day'), there is a rationale for them, which is that some days should be marked out for special treatment and not every day should be equally commercial.

About the Iona Institute

The Iona Institute promotes the place of marriage and religion in society. We defend the continued existence of publicly-funded denominational schools. We also promote freedom of conscience and religion.



The Iona Institute

23 Merrion Square, Dublin 2. Tel 01 6619 204

Email: info@ionainstitute.ie Web: www.ionainstitute.ie