

## **Leader of Catholic church in Ireland criticises social media stars for ‘hijacking Christianity’.**

<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/leader-of-catholic-church-in-ireland-criticises-social-media-stars-for-hijacking-christianity/a1292342467.html>

By Cian Ó Broin

Sun 22 Dec 2024 at 13:20

The leader of Catholic church in Ireland has criticised influencers and social media stars for “hijacking Christianity” on social media to “foment discord” instead of harmony.

Eamon Martin, the Archbishop of Armagh, said negative influencers needed to be called out on their actions on social media.

“You will often find that religion is hijacked by groups for their own purposes and the message of Christianity is distorted in particular dimensions,” he said.

Dr Martin was speaking at a Christmas carol service in Ardee Community School in the Parish of Ardee and Collon, Co Louth.

The Sunday Times reported that when he was asked about religious posts from celebrities like MMA star Conor McGregor and if they were affecting young men, he called for more positive role models within the Catholic faith in order to “out-influence the negative influencers”.

“Sadly, it has been the case for many, many years. We don’t have to look beyond our own country to see how sometimes religion or denominations can be used to foment discord rather than harmony,” he said.

In response to queries on Sunday by the Irish Independent, a spokesperson for Dr Martin said the archbishop was not referring to any Irish individual in his response to the question, nor did he mention anyone by name in his answer.

Earlier this month, a jury found McGregor had assaulted Nikita Hand after she took a civil case against him alleging, she was raped by him on a night out, and awarded her €250,000 in damages. The jury did not find his co-accused James Lawrence had assaulted her.

A judge ordered that McGregor pay his own and Ms Hand's legal costs, which will come to more than €1 million.

Since the jury's verdict, McGregor has written angrily several times on social media, including post in which he hit out at what he said was a "kangaroo court", leading the judge in the case to say he was considering taking action against the fighter for contempt of court.

He has also referenced his faith in several subsequent posts, saying in one: "Fight evil with the cross" with another saying: "I am in amazing spirits! God has chosen me and I accept! Thank you to all those who ... are supporting me in my fight ... As God as my witness."

Dr Martin stressed that most people are able to see through the use of religious references on social media. He said it was important that the church identifies statements to say that that is not what it teaches, adding that most people are aware of the message of Jesus Christ and the gospel. He described this as a message promoting harmony, reconciliation, forgiveness, love and charity.

The most senior figure of the church in Ireland added that the "cult of the celebrity" has now transitioned into the world of social media.

Dr Martin called for leading Catholic thinkers out in the world of social media who are not afraid to express their faith, to influence young people.

He cited Hollywood star Mark Wahlberg as well as American bishop and YouTuber Robert Barron as two positive examples. The archbishop added that the church is looking to create a new 'Share the Good News' online platform next year, which will be a digital hub for the church to spread its message. This, he added, will "be able to in some ways compete with the sometimes very negative and dark side of the web".

This article was updated on December 22, 2024, to reflect the response from Archbishop Martin's spokesperson.