

WORKSHEET THREE: IRISH TIMES EDITORIAL, ‘THE BISHOP AND THE NIGHTIE’

Activity three: understanding and interpreting a primary source (editorial)

Read the following editorial (opinion piece) published in the *Irish Times* on 14 February 1966, the same day as the newspaper report on the Dr. Thomas Ryan’s complaint about the previous Saturday night’s edition of the *Late Late Show*.

The Bishop and the Nightie

The country is going to hell, but the bishops are on to it. For the second week the front pages of the Sunday newspapers give generous space to their lordships from the west; last Sunday Dr. Browne - in one paper only - and this week Dr. Ryan, with tremendous impact, in the columns of the two big rivals. In Dr. Ryan’s case several odd aspects will occur to most readers. One is how any bishop should think the Late Late Show worth his time on a Saturday night. Is Dr. Ryan a regular viewer of the Late Late? If so, one imagines he should know the form. What is the form? We learn that the show is top of the Tamratings [television audience measurement] along with “Tolka Row”. Teilifís Éireann was recently discussed in the Dáil, and the bishop will probably have read, as we did, that deputies on all sides gave it as their opinion that a good job was being done. The country, we regret to say, apparently shares the opinions of our elected representatives. On whose desk will the protests ultimately land? Mr. Eamonn Andrews, the chairman of Teilifís Éireann, is in the same line of business as Mr. Gay Byrne; he runs an interview show (on British Independent Television), and he too has been accused of questionable taste. Worse, he has been told by the critics that his show is bad. At least Mr. Byrne will be able to avoid the usual anti-TE stigma of foreign extraction. He is Irish of the Irish, accomplished and bland; has good manners, and often enough has managed to steer a live show away from obvious pitfalls. The bishop’s characterisation of the incident as morally suggestive will, of course, be heard with respect by his flock. The incident struck us as at most mildly embarrassing. One felt for the participants and wished that it were over; but it was an aberration [not what is normally expected], and, while Mr. Byrne may be criticised for not heading off the particular question, we do not have to stand in front of television cameras.

[This text is an edited version of the original, the full text is accessible [here](#).]

1. (a) What evidence is contained in the article to suggest that Catholic bishops were an influential force in Irish society in the 1960s?

- (b) What evidence is contained in the article to suggest that RTÉ was considered a popular and well-regarded television station by 1966?

The impact of RTÉ on the Catholic Church: ‘the Bishop and the Nightie’ episode, February 1966

2. According to the writer, what are Gay Byrne’s strengths as a television presenter?

3. What do you think the writer means when he says that the Bishop of Clonfert’s complaints about the ‘Bishop and the Nightie’ episode of the *Late Late Show* “*will be heard with respect by his flock*”.

4. Based on your reading of the article, do you think the writer is a supporter or opponent of the stance taken by Dr. Thomas Ryan, the Bishop of Clonfert? Give two pieces of evidence to support your answer.
