

RC Politics Volume 9 Issue 3

Volume 9 Issue 3, 25 March 2008

Contents

[Last Chance on Embryo Bill](#)
[An Appeal From Fr. Gerard Wilberforce](#)
[Young Scots](#)
[Consent and Organ Donation](#)
[Bishop Defends Family](#)
[Not For Sale Sunday](#)
[Bills in Progress](#)
[Tackling Poverty and Economic Growth](#)
[In Brief](#)
[Papal Nuncio Meets Politicians](#)
[Consultations](#)

Last Chance on Embryo Bill

Cardinal O'Brien has sent a letter to Gordon Brown urging the Prime Minister to permit Labour MPs to have a free vote during the debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill.

The bill is expected imminently and the concerns about the creation of embryos by mixing animal and human cells, permitting eugenic selection of embryos and undermining the status of fatherhood have raised a storm of protest across the country but seem to be having little effect on politicians. The Prime Minister appears to be intent on not allowing a free vote among Labour members on the highly controversial provisions of the bill but he has, however, said that amendments which deal with abortion will be subject to a free vote. David Cameron has made it clear that Conservative MPs have a free vote on the bill but has said that he will support the law which allows the barbaric practice of late term abortions for children with disabilities.

The situation highlights the vital need for those who respect human life at every stage to get more involved in politics. Ultimately only more support from within the parliament can change the law. At present the only action open is to ensure Parliamentarians are made aware of the level of opposition to the bill and its provisions.

Jim Dobbin MP has stated openly that he will defy the Labour whip for the bill and the All Party Pro-life Group has established the Passion for Life campaign which has travelled around the UK with speakers, including Lord David Alton and Anne Widdecombe, to raise public awareness of the bill's proposals. An online petition is available at

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/embryovote/>

It is important that people contact their MPs immediately to let them know of their opposition to the embryonic stem cell research, the creation of saviour siblings and the undermining of the role of fathers. MPs should also be asked to oppose any measures aimed at liberalising abortion. Further information is available at

www.passionforlife.org.uk and www.ccfon.org

An Appeal From Fr. Gerard Wilberforce

I am writing as the great, great grandson of William Wilberforce, who campaigned

vigorously for the ending of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, which ultimately paved the way for the abolition of slavery itself throughout the entire British Empire in 1833.

I am often asked what would be the campaigns Wilberforce would be fighting if he were alive in 21st century Britain. I believe that there would be a number of different issues - among them human trafficking and the scourge of drugs. But almost certainly at the top of the list, would be the issue of abortion.

As the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill comes before Parliament over the next few weeks, the opportunity presents itself to amend the abortion Act. With the number of abortions having reached 200,000 per year in the UK alone, the time is right to tighten up the law that was designed to protect women by ending illegal abortion, but never to allow such a high degree of deprived life.

There are great similarities between the status of the foetus and the status of African slaves two centuries ago. Slaves were considered a commodity to do with whatever the vested interests of the day decided. Today, in our desire to play God in our embryology experimentation, with all its' unfulfilled promises of miracle cures, and our decision to abort in particular where that takes place without consent."

view higher than they placed the sanctity and value of human life.

Most people at the time didn't believe the evil of slavery could ever be defeated, as so much of the economy at the time was dependent on the trade. It's easy for us to think that is the case today with abortion, but I believe William Wilberforce would not take such a view.

Whilst our hearts go out to those who have chosen abortion, there should now be much greater emphasis on the alternatives that exist. Many of us would like to see far more support those who have made such a significant and difficult decision - but whilst we recognise the trauma many women have gone through, we also have a duty to 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves' (Proverbs 31).

The Psalmist says 'My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.' With abortions in the UK reaching 600 a day, it seems to me that the 'secret place', is one of the most dangerous places to be in modern day Britain.

As with my great ancestor, the battle took many years, even decades. But now, with the passage of time we look back in horror at how we devalued human life. I truly believe we will look back in years to come, repent and ask forgiveness for what we let happen to the unborn child.

There is something deeply depressing about a society in which abortion is so easy, yet alternatives such as adoption are made to appear so difficult.

Young Scots

The government released findings from a survey by YouthLink Scotland on attitudes, interests and aspirations of young people in Scotland.

2685 children and young people aged 11 to 25 years old throughout Scotland were surveyed.

They identified good citizens as those who respect others, obey the law and care for the environment. When asked to identify those they most trusted and respected, encouragingly the vast majority put parents at the top of the list. This gives an image of youth quite different from the often tarnished image presented of a group with little value for respect and often at odds with their parents.

Volunteering as a mark of a good citizen has fallen down the list since last surveyed with 82% overall stating they never do voluntary work or fundraising. The figure for those who were still at school was somewhat better but still at the surprisingly high level of 61%.

Perhaps there is an issue about awareness of opportunities since school children in particular usually eagerly participate in such opportunities organised through schools.

A worryingly high level, 60%, of those in the 17 – 25 years age group stated that that believed there were too many immigrants living in Scotland but overall 32% agreed that we need to do more to help other nationals settle in Scotland.

The survey showed a large increase in those agreeing that they were proud to be Scottish the overall figure now at 70% and an increase in the 17-25 year age band since 2005 but more than half disagreed with the statement “I consider myself European”.

The survey also found a strong correlation between educational expectations and level of deprivation and also found that those from single parent families had lower expectation levels.

Only 7% of respondents stated they would be likely to attend church in their spare time and 4% would like to attend more.

Consent and Organ Donation

The Parliament debated the subject of organ donation on 5th March. It was in response to the recommendations of the Task Force on Organ Donation and gave an initial opportunity to air some of the issues before the government proceeds with any legislative changes.

Key recommendations are

- To establish a UK wide organ donation organisation
- Improve organ retrieval time with a specialist teams.
- Expand the current network of donor transplant co-ordinators
- Embrace organ donation as a usual, not unusual event in the NHS

The Church has long given support to organ donation as an act of charity, the Catechism states “it is to be encouraged”. But the Church has also given guidance on the morality of such donations to ensure that the human person is respected and not at risk of unethical exploitation. For example, organs can only be donated with the express consent of an individual or someone with authority to act on their behalf. It is never acceptable to hasten death by removal of vital organs and also the donation must be a free act of charity rather than an obligation.

An issue which will gain greater prominence as the issue proceeds in Parliament is that of presumed consent which the Church opposes.

During the debate Nicola Sturgeon commented “Although I am sympathetic to presumed consent, I believe that a move in that direction without widespread public agreement would be counterproductive. Lib Dem MSP, Mike Rumbles made the point that the terminology of ‘presumed consent’ is misleading since it cannot be consent at all if it is presumed.

The taskforce will continue to examine this issue as it was not in the scope of its original work. The debate coincided with the launch of an advertising campaign. Commenting on it Ms Sturgeon said: “[the] hard-hitting campaign is a very powerful weapon in the fight to increase the number of organ donors. I hope the emotive stories featured in the TV campaign will encourage Scots to sign up and save a life and discuss the issue of organ donation with their loved ones.”

The Taskforce is due to make its recommendations on presumed consent in the summer.

Bishop Defends Family

Bishop Joseph Devine has spoken out, during the influential Gonzaga lecture, against the forces conspiring against family life. His comments followed the publication of yet another government funded document aimed at promoting the homosexual lifestyle. The Bishop carefully analysed the incremental changes in law which have eventually overturned society’s understanding of family and marriage to the point that the Church’s teaching is not even tolerated. Needless to say his words were prescient as he immediately became a figure of attack.

The Government funded paper is the work of various homosexual lobby groups and their words confirm Bishop Devine's concerns. The document targets views and attitudes that need to be eradicated through education in schools and wider society. Attitudes no longer to be tolerated include the belief that sex between two men is wrong. The fact that much of the changes would require people to go against their deeply held religious beliefs is not considered in relation to freedom of religion which is a fundamental human right. The paper calls for high level government support to achieve the goals of the organisations.

Not For Sale Sunday

One of the most tragic and growing problems in Europe over the last few years has been the trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation. They are usually the most vulnerable of people, mostly women and children. The United Nations estimates that 80% of those trafficked are for sexual exploitation. One reliable source estimates that as many as 2000 women and children are trafficked into the United Kingdom every year for the sex trade. Many of them are in Scotland.

The 23 March 2008 marked the first anniversary of the United Kingdom's signing of The Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. There is Scottish representation in the United Kingdom Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group responsible for ensuring that the United Kingdom is compliant with the provisions of the Convention.

In Scotland the police forces have participated in Operation Pentameter 2, a UK-wide operation to combat human trafficking and identify and rescue its victims. The Scottish Government has also set aside some funding (£70,950) to assist the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA), a charity to widen its efforts in supporting adult female victims. Last year TARA was able to provide support for eight women in the Glasgow area. There have, however, been difficulties in bringing the organisers of this cross-border trade to justice. One such case indicted to the High Court recently, had its proceedings discontinued following a review of the available evidence.

Much more needs to be done to combat this exploitation. One international group CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe) has been actively campaigning to combat human trafficking. They are celebrating a second annual "Not for Sale Sunday" on May 18th, 2008. This is aimed at inspiring and informing churches and communities throughout the United Kingdom to become more involved in the fight against this exploitation. They have relevant resources including DVDs and books available for interested organisations and can be contacted by phone on 0845 456 9335 or by e-mail: notforsale@chaste.org.uk. Their website is www.chaste.org.uk.

Bills in Progress

Creative Scotland Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Finance Committee) 18 March

Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Local Government and Communities Committee) 19 March

Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Passed 28 February

Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (evidence, lead committee (Justice)) 18 March

Public Health etc. (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 report (Health and Sport Committee) published 18 March

(Ex) = Executive Bill; (M) = Member's Bill; (C) = Committee Bill; (P) = Private Bill.

Tackling Poverty and Economic Growth

The Scottish Government has released a discussion paper on tackling poverty. The document

offers the opportunity to comment on the objectives and principles underpinning future economic strategy of the government. It states that the overarching purpose of the government is “to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.”

Three “golden rules” are proposed in the paper, Solidarity, Cohesion and Sustainability. The paper explains the government’s understanding of these terms. In building on the principle of solidarity the plan is to raise the proportionate earnings of those in the bottom 30% of income.

Cohesion will involve working to increase the economic activity of those not presently employed.

The sustainability golden rule is not explained in the same way as solidarity and cohesion but sustainable economic growth is repeatedly used in the document.

There is wide scope for communities and people inspired by their faith working on tackling poverty to comment. Many services such as soup kitchens, drop-in centres and refuges are run in local parishes and encounter first-hand the problems being faced by the most poor in society. This experience and expertise can be of great help to the formation of appropriate political interventions.

At another level the Church can comment on certain principles which help make society more just and caring. Catholic social teaching puts great emphasis on solidarity and stresses the need to respect subsidiarity which is to allow individuals and groups within society to benefit from their own endeavours without undue interference. These principles are not in opposition but complement each other. They act as a guide when deciding whether we are striking the balance between not doing enough to help people and stifling people’s own initiative by doing too much.

Political parties have a difficult task of tailoring their policies to ensure that society does show a preferential option for the poor. Differences between left wing and right wing economic policies tend to be a difference in prioritising solidarity or subsidiarity. Democratic society allows thorough debate to make that balance more likely to be found and that is why the Church also promotes the need for participation of all peoples to an appropriate level in the democratic process.

The importance of family life cannot be overlooked in tackling poverty. The stability of marriage and family life are often strong indicators of economic wellbeing and the government paper gives the opportunity for such issues to be explored by contributors to the consultation. The paper can be found at

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/01/30131443/0>

In Brief

Suicide

Despite a decline in suicide rates, Scotland still has the highest suicide rate in the United Kingdom. There were 765 deaths due to confirmed suicides in 2006. This was an average of more than two a day. Of the total number, three quarters were male suicides, with suicide being the main cause of death of males under 35 years, accounting for one in four deaths. The risk of suicide in the most deprived areas of Scotland was nearly double the national average. Nearly 75% of suicides were carried out by people who had not had contact with a health professional during the past twelve months. Much good work is done by such organisations and initiatives as Samaritans, Childline, Breathing Space and Choose Life. A recent Parliamentary Motion by Kenneth Gibson MSP urges that more needs to be done to make phone number hotlines better known. He also makes a case for increasing public awareness of such programmes by developing a national suicide prevention helpline accessible via the 999 emergency line.

Charity Status

The Charity Regulator in Scotland is examining the criteria to be used in deciding which organisations should be recognised as charities. The consultation paper identifies that some campaigning organisations can be a disbenefit to society and cite as an example an organisation set up to advance the position of a particular set of beliefs in political and public life. The consultation paper is available at <http://www.oscr.org.uk/OpenConsultations.stm> and responses must be made by 7 April 2008.

Terrorism

The government's plans for extending the limit for detention without trial as part of its anti-terrorism plans have caused consternation among MPs. The bill at Westminster would allow people to be detained without trial for 42 days. The use of such legislation has already caused considerable concern due to its alleged use for public order issues such as the stop and search of protestors under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000. The current bill, the Counter Terrorism Bill will proceed through Parliament in the months ahead.

Papal Nuncio Meets Politicians

The Pope's representative in the United Kingdom made an official visit to the Scottish Parliament in March.

Archbishop Faustino Muñoz had a reception held in his honour in the Scottish Parliament which was well attended by members of the Scottish Parliament and representatives of the agencies and commissions of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland. First Minister Alex Salmond welcomed the Apostolic Nuncio who was joined with Cardinal O'Brien, Archbishop Conti and the other Scottish Bishops.

The following day the Nuncio was welcomed to the Parliament by the Presiding Officer Alex Fergusson who hosted a lunch in the Archbishop's honour.

In his address to the parliament Archbishop Muñoz reiterated the importance of the role of politicians and explained the service which the Church provides, commenting: "I say without any hesitation that a noble task has been entrusted to you, dear members of this Parliament, by your fellow citizens—a task that has as its goal the total and complete good of your fellow citizens and your country. It does so because politics, in the vision of the church, deals with the good of people, individually and collectively, the primary subject of the political system is the human person. As a result, there are matters and issues that arise that the church considers are related fundamentally to the dignity of the human person. Those matters are life, family, education, religious belief, justice and protection for those most in need in society. The church's approach to such issues is based above all on the nature of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God. Consequently, you can understand why the church takes such an interest in those questions. It does so not in an attempt to impose its views or doctrines on society—and even less on any legislative body—but rather in a spirit of service to the common good and the nature of the human person, realities that transcend institutions but must rely on the good intentions of institutions to be protected and safeguarded. In that context, it is even foreseen that, at times, the church can offer its own expertise on those universal questions in collaboration with public authorities while always respecting the distinct competencies that each has."

Consultations

A Fairer Local Tax for Scotland (18/07/2008)

Consultation on statutory notification requirements for potatoes introduced into Scotland from EU member states (30/05/2008)

The Scottish Historic Environment Policy on the Marine Historic Environment (30/05/2008)

National Delivery Plan for Specialist Children's Services in Scotland (27/05/2008)
Permitted Development Rights for Domestic Microgeneration Equipment (12/05/2008)
Code of Practice - Station Infrastructure to meet the needs of Disabled People (23/05/2008)
Consultation on the proposed change to the fitness requirements for Providers, Managers and Employees in Care services regulated by the Care Commission (16/05/2008)
SPP 23 Planning and the Historic Environment (09/05/2008)
Glasgow 2014 - Delivering a Lasting Legacy for Scotland - A Consultation Paper (09/05/2008)
Modernising Planning Appeals (09/05/2008)
The Future of Flood Risk Management in Scotland (22/04/2008)
Better Cancer Care (05/05/2008)
Improving the Physical Health of those with a mental illness (14/05/2008)
Consultation on the Implementation of Detailed Rules on Electronic Recording and Reporting of Fishing Activities and on Means of Remote Sensing in Scotland (05/05/2008)
Scottish Court Service Consultation on Review of Fees (06/05/2008)
Consultation on the draft cat welfare code of practice (01/05/2008)
Consultation on the draft dog welfare code of practice (01/05/2008)
Partial Regulatory Impact Assessment on Proposed Bill to Reverse the House of Lords Ruling in Johnston v NEI International Combustion Ltd (04/04/2008)
Scottish Road Safety Strategy (25/04/2008)
Taking Forward the Government Economic Strategy: A Discussion Paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland (02/05/2008)
Proposals for a Scottish Climate Change Bill (23/04/2008)
Interest (Scotland) Bill (04/04/2008)
Choosing the Right Ingredients: The Future for Food in Scotland (25/04/2008)
Draft Quality Standards for Adult Hearing Rehabilitation Services (09/04/2008)
Scottish Government response to Sir Tooke Recommendations (31/03/2008)
Draft Regulations on Development Plan Examinations (04/04/2008)

Edited by John Deighan with contributions from Tom Higgins, Lucille McQuade and Tom Bradshaw



John Deighan
Catholic Parliamentary Office
3rd Floor 5 St Vincent Place
GLASGOW G1 2DH

Phone: 0141 222 2182
Mobile: 07930 405 313
Email: jdeighan@rcpolitics.org
Website: www.rcpolitics.org

To download this newsletter, click [here](#)

Created on 2008-03-25 14:42:45
Updated on 2008-03-25 15:23:52