



Parliament in View

End of Life Choices

The Bishops' Conference responded to the proposals in Margo MacDonald's assisted suicide bill with a strong message on the dangers that such a bill poses.

The popular MSP is herself suffering from a degenerative illness and she wishes to make assisted suicide and euthanasia available to those who want it. But her proposals will put a lot of vulnerable people at risk.

Fear of pain when in the face of death is obviously a concern for many but modern medical capabilities mean that no-one should die in a state of pain. Diane Pretty famously campaigned, without success, for the right to assisted suicide. Mrs Pretty had been extremely anxious about how she would die but in fact died a peaceful death.

The 'right to die' may appear the right answer for those who exercise strict control over their own destiny and have firm influence on what happens to them but for many vulnerable people, that right will soon become a duty to

die. Studies conducted in the Netherlands have shown how around one thousand patients are 'euthanized' without having made any request for it (ie murdered).

This is what arises from the belief that some lives are not worth living. Once doctors are made arbiters of who can die a mindset is created which en-



courages discrimination against the frail and sick. The Netherlands has not just progressed to killing those who don't want it but has also expanded the categories of people including handicapped babies. Campaigners for euthanasia are undeterred by the impact euthanasia would have on the safety of vulnerable people. Shock stories are

used to exert influence even to the point where some are advising elderly patients to dehydrate themselves to death. The horrific death that such a practice causes shows the callous disregard that such advocates for euthanasia have for individuals.

Little attention is given to the fact that 90% of people who commit suicide have some form of mental illness. The wish to die is a sign that a person is in physical or emotional distress, for which they need help.

In Oregon, assisted suicide is already practised and when doctors from Oregon testified to a House of Lords Committee they explained the high incidence of depression that was found among those wishing to die.

Now that Margo MacDonald's consultation has ended she will produce an actual bill which will need to get support from at least 18 MSPs for it to proceed. Hopefully all MSPs will see the dangers that her proposals present and refrain from giving any support.

Equality Issues

Fears have been raised that a new Equality Directive from the European Union will impinge on religious freedoms.

The Directive will be debated towards the end of March by the European Parliament and will then be considered by the Council of Ministers. The Directive declares its aim of augmenting the existing European framework on the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Fair treatment is of course commendable but we have already seen how interpretation of this has led to what is effectively the persecution of Chris-

tian adoption agencies which have wanted to follow their beliefs. The sexual orientation strand of equality legislation has been widely used as a pro-homosexual strand neglecting the majority of people who would be classified as having heterosexual sexual orientation.

The Westminster government is presently preparing an Equality Bill aimed at consolidating all equality legislation and the time is therefore long overdue for a proper understanding of equality which restores some common sense to this area. For too long such legislation has been used as a

tool for groups to advance their political ideology. It is a well worn tactic to claim to suffer offence and discrimination merely because others disagree with your point of view. If Catholics followed this pattern there would be a considerable number of discrimination disputes.

Equality legislation includes, as already noted, a religion strand. This needs to be used more effectively to ensure that the secularisation process which has tried to marginalise belief and impose atheism as the default position on public services does not succeed.

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Special points of interest:

- Government concerns over lack of moderation in drinking culture
- Significant figures announced on births and marriage
- Patients need to exercise rights to get chaplains
- Strong support for religious values in our laws
- Book recommendations for readers
- Ethical trading highlighted in fair trade fortnight

Births and Marriages



The General Registrar for Scotland has released the latest statistics on births, deaths and marriages in Scotland. The media took much interest in the fact that 50.1% of births were outside of marriage, the first time they have surpassed births to married couples. Some have

argued that this statistic shows that marriage's demise is imminent. However, one aspect of births not shown in the figures is that the majority of the registrations of births is carried out by two parents, while registration of a birth by a single parent has almost disappeared.

That couples are making some kind of commitment to each other and to their children is therefore apparent but sadly, a public declaration of this is not part of the deal. This would seem to point to a diminished sense of society rather than of the idea of marriage itself. Obviously it would be better if this were not the case and it is the urgent responsibility of our civil leaders to consider what this might mean. Many obstacles exist to make marriage a step too far for young couples. The immense cost of a typical wedding is perhaps central to this (some figures put this at around £20,000) while the taxation and housing benefit system can also make it more profitable for couples not to marry (as recent research has shown).

Another aspect not taken into this account is that a majority of parents proceed to marry after the birth of their child.

The marriage rate has fallen slightly since last year's figures but interestingly the number of civil partnerships has collapsed by almost 50% since the first full year of figures published in 2007. There were 525 civil partnerships last year whilst there were almost 29 thousand marriages in the same period.



Patients' Rights

The Scottish Government consultation on patients' rights gave the Bishops' Conference the opportunity to emphasise the importance of chaplaincy work provided by many priests across Scotland. The spiritual support and sacramental nourishment chaplains give is a vital part of meeting the needs of patients.

The NHS has recognised the rights of patients to exercise their religious freedom and has accepted in various documents the official need to pass patient details to the appropriate chaplain.

The unfortunate phenomenon of hospital chapels being stripped of their Christian symbols illustrates the sad reality that our once Christian country is rejecting its own heritage but the rights of individuals to enjoy their human right to religious freedom gives the opportunity to ensure that those Catholics in hospital can gain the attention of a priest when most needed.

A useful means of alerting staff to the importance of this support is in making use of the declaration now distributed in Catholic directories in Scotland. This states:

I am a Roman Catholic.

While a patient in hospital, I wish to exercise my Human Right, as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 9, 1) of practising my Religion.

I request that the Roman Catholic Chaplain be informed of my admission to hospital, and that I receive a visit from the Roman Catholic Chaplain. I give explicit consent for this information to be made available to the Roman Catholic Chaplain and I would request that this document form part of my personal case notes.

Signed

Personal Freedom and Government Action

The Scottish government's new proposals to reduce the availability of cheap alcohol show a determination to tackle Scotland's drinking culture. The number of alcohol related deaths in Scotland is more than double that in England. But the proposals have provoked, from some, concerns over the extent to which the State governs our lives. We live at a time when personal freedom is the driving force of much social change. This ties in with a mindset that freedom to do what we please should not be impeded by moralising. The Catholic Church, due to its clear understanding of the principles that lead to happier lives and social stability is portrayed as judgemental simply because it presents a standard which can be used to guide our lives. As we see governments taking increasing measures to impose standards in some areas of life we see that government can only provide a blunt tool for making such impositions. They interfere with the legitimate freedom of all to tackle the excess of others, often a minority. In order to maintain some com-

munity cohesion such interference can be necessary but it has to be carefully approached and must always be proportionate to the situation.

Far better than have government impose restrictions on our behaviour is to have individuals who can control their own behav-



our. Internal motivation is far better than external coercion. Ironically it is the Church which promotes that vision of freedom. Successive Popes have challenged people to live lives using freedom for excellence. Ultimately when individuals do not exercise freedom responsibly governments can often find no response other than restrictive laws. Often these can appear rather heavy-handed.

It is too easy for policy practices to be inflexible and disproportionate to the required aim, thus we have seen increasingly tough positions on alcohol consumption, on smoking, on diet through the control of snacks and meals at school and even now on littering in the form of hefty fines from litter wardens.

The greatest of liberal attitudes has been in the area of sexuality but even here a lack of responsible behaviour has been challenged in the political arena. Tom Harris MP spoke out strongly about the impact on society of fatherless children, saying what would until recently been unthinkable for a mainstream politician. In his website Mr Harris asserts that the aim of his intervention was "to start to achieve a change of mindset ... so that we can stop feeling obliged to pretend that every lifestyle choice people make is beyond criticism."

His comments will hopefully encourage some serious public discussion on how we exercise our freedom in society and the responsibility we need to take for the consequences of our actions.

Current Legislation

Arbitration (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Lead committee (Economy, Energy and Tourism)) 18 March
Climate Change (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee) 18 March
Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Lead committee, Justice Committee) 17 March
Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Passed 11 March
Disabled Persons' Parking Places (Scotland) Bill (M) Passed 26 February
Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee) 25 March
Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Day 3) (Rural Affairs and Environment Committee) 18 March
Health Boards (Membership and Elections) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Passed 12 March
Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1 completed 18 March
Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Lead committee, Education, Lifelong learning and Culture Committee) 4 March
Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Lead committee – Local Government and Communities) 25 March
Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Day 2) (Justice Committee) 24 March
Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Introduced 25 February Lead committee – Health and Sport

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

Secularism Foundering

A poll by the BBC has found that a majority of people believe that our laws should respect and be influenced by UK religious values. In the age group 18–24 it was found that 77% believe that religion has an important role to play in public life.

The survey found considerable variations across the UK, for instance in Northern Ireland 84% agree that our laws should be influenced by religious values compared with 57% in Scotland. 61% of Scots polled did still assert that religion has an important role to play in society.

It is also notable that among Muslim, Hindu and Sikh respondents to the survey support for the influence of “UK religious values” was between 74 and 79%.

There has of course been considerable effort to ensure that the benchmark for political policy has been atheism or agnosticism to the point where religious values are sometimes not tolerated. The Lib Dem conference in Scotland this month for example has provided another case of the constant efforts to undermine the Catholic school system.

In response to the survey the BBC themselves noted that “our poll tallies with other research findings - that the proportion of people identifying themselves as atheists has not grown from its low base.”

These generalised findings may be encouraging but they set a challenge as to how religious values can positively influence our laws and way of life and also be presented

well to show that they are beneficial to all members of society. Unfortunately religion is often caricatured as a burden and threat to freedom. The contribution that the Catholic faith in particular has made to freedom and civilisation is rarely recognised. A good response to this is found at:

www.catholiccomehome.org/epic/epic120.phtml

The BBC poll was raised in a debate in Parliament on the role of Christianity in Public life on 11th March. This provided an opportunity for MPs to recognise the immense contribution that Christianity has and does make in society. The text of the debate can be found by searching for “Christians in public life Hansard 11 March” on a web search engine.

In Brief

Gordon Brown has given forthright support to homosexual rights campaigners. Hosting a special reception at Downing Street to celebrate ‘LGBT History Month’ the Prime Minister commented that the democratic vote by Californians to overturn a court decision which imposed same-sex marriage on the State was “unacceptable”. The reception also highlights the special treatment that homosexual campaigners have been given at the highest level of government and the assistance they have been given to redefine sexual relationships. Unfortunately fewer and fewer people have access to any other source of moral teaching other than State laws and these so often reflect the preferences of cultural elites. The LGBT History Month leaves little room for real tolerance as those who disagree are portrayed as bigots. This has even led to parents facing prosecution for refusing to have their children attend school lessons which contained pro-homosexual propaganda. More details at www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5863871.ece

The Coroners and Justice Bill contains provisions to tighten up the law on suicide following the spate of suicides in the Welsh village of Bridgend. The bill will provide for the offence of encouraging or assisting someone to commit suicide. Offenders need not be known or identifiable by the victim, thus will cover those who create websites promoting suicide.

Jamie Hepburn, MSP convener of the Cross Party Group on Human Rights tabled a motion raising the issue of Britons allegedly tortured whilst held at Guantanamo Bay. Former Tory leader William Hague has also backed the need for an investigation into the claims that torture has been used on individuals and which he stated “undermine the laws and values on which our democracies are built”.

A recent booklet, “Overdose: Bereavement. What Happens Now?”, published by the Scottish Government, is aimed at family and friends of an individual who has died of a suspected overdose. It is expected that the booklet will help support people who have been bereaved in this way. It explains some of the procedures that can take place following an overdose, coping with grief (what you may experience and what can help) and sources of additional help. The booklet can be found on-line at www.scotland.gov.uk/publications.

The UK Government is using the Coroners and Justice Bill to remove a free speech provision (Clause 58 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act) which was initially introduced to protect Christians from being prosecuted for stating Church teaching on sexuality. An equivalent provision is already in place to ensure freedom of speech is protected for those voicing opinions about religious views. The removal is therefore concerning as it suggests that no such protection should exist.

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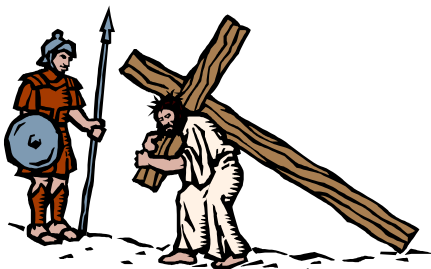
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**"If any man would come after me, let
him deny himself and take up his cross
and follow me" Mt 16:24**

Fair Trade

More Scottish towns and cities have achieved Fair Trade status. In a recent response to a Parliamentary Question, Linda Fabiani stated that all of Scotland's six cities are Fair Trade cities and the number of towns in Scotland achieving Fair Trade status is growing annually. Since 2003, thirty-seven towns have now achieved the status, with seven towns joining the group last year.

The Scottish Government has also taken on board the Fair Trade message. Last year it spent 4.1% of its total catering budget on fair trade and ethically-traded products. It has also awarded the Scottish Fair Trade Forum an additional £20,000 for 2008/9 to assist with high visibility advertising and marketing to reach a broad number of people and further increase the public awareness of Fair Trade and Scotland's Fair Trade Nation Campaign. Other public agencies are working towards Fair Trade status and to date, eight of Scotland's local authorities have achieved Fair Trade zone status. The fair-trade culture is catching on such that its market share has steadily climbed to attract big companies, for example Nestle and Cadbury are now signed up to produce products which will carry the Fair Trade brand. MSPs recently praised the launch of Fair Trade Fortnight in parliamentary motions and congratulated universities across Scotland for completing two weeks of promoting the purchase of fairly traded products. The growing mindset may help address the problems of consumerism in developed societies.

Get Reading

The Scottish Government has received the help of SPL footballers in promoting reading amongst children and adults. Presently one in five people have difficulty in reading and the initiative hopes that the creation of an "inspirational reading list" will help improve literacy levels.

Books are invaluable in passing on ideas and exploring the range of human experience.

'Parliament in View' plans to join in the spirit of promoting reading by recommending books to read in this and forthcoming issues.

One recommendation will be a novel which we think will give enjoyment to readers and a second recommendation will be for a book more directly related to the aims of this publication - but still enjoyable!

This month's first choice is the modern classic 'Brideshead Revisited' by Evelyn Waugh which is the fictional account of Charles Ryder's encounter with an aristocratic family and the subtle but determining influence of their Catholic faith (not to be confused with the recent film which turns the central theme on its head).

The second choice is 'Letters to a Young Catholic' by George Weigel which gives an inspiring and eclectic tour of the Catholic world and its culture, presenting an antidote to what he describes as the 'debonair nihilism' of modern culture.



Consultations (with closing date)

Scottish Planning Policy (12/06/2009)

Scottish Planning Policy Environmental Report (12/06/2009)

Future Status of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (19/06/2009)

[Control of Potato Cyst Nematodes: Consultation on the Implementation in Scotland of Directive 2007/33/EC](#) (29/05/2009)

[Reform of the Marketing Standards Regulations for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables](#) (24/04/2009)

[Consultation on Regulation of Energy Efficiency Under the Pollution Prevention and Control \(Scotland\) Regulations 2000](#) (22/05/2009)

[Commission Proposal to Replace Directive 93/119 with a Regulation on the Protection of Animals at the time of Killing](#) (22/05/2009)

[Transposition of Council Directive 2007/43/EC on the Welfare of Meat Chickens](#) (15/05/2009)

[Changes to the Identification of Equidae](#) (24/04/2009)

[Consultation on Draft Guidelines for Saltire Prize Competition](#) (30/04/2009)

[The Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan](#) (29/04/2009)

[Consultation on draft Designing Streets policy](#) (23/03/2009)

[Quality Standards in Paediatric Audiology](#) (20/04/2009)

[Science in support of Rural Affairs, Marine, Environment and related policies of the Scottish Government: a Co-ordinated Agenda for Marine, Environment and Rural Affairs Science \(CAMERAS\)](#) (20/03/2009)

[Interpretation and Legislative Reform \(Scotland\) Bill - Proposals for Reform](#) (12/04/2009)

[Achieving Smoke-Free Mental Health Services in Scotland: A Consultation](#) (06/04/2009)

[Implementing the Water Environment and Water Services \(Scotland\) Act 2003: Restoration of the water environment](#) (03/04/2009)

[Implementing the Water Environment and Water Services \(Scotland\) Act 2003: Scotland's Waters - Future Directions](#) (03/04/2009)

[Wider choice and better protection – a consultation paper on the regulation of legal services in Scotland](#) (03/04/2009)

[Revision of Circular 12/1996: Planning Agreements](#) (29/03/2009)

[Supporting a Smarter Scotland](#) (30/04/2009)

[Forced Marriage: A Civil Remedy?](#) (27/03/2009)

Revised guidance on the provision of equipment and adaptations (31/03/2009)