



Parliament in View

Human Rights Argument Against Assisted Suicide

The member's bill aimed at introducing assisted suicide and euthanasia in Scotland has now been introduced for consideration in the Scottish Parliament. The Catholic Parliamentary Office has been working as part of an alliance called 'Care Not Killing' to oppose the introduction of this legislation. The organisation wrote to the presiding officer to identify human rights provisions which would be infringed if assisted suicide were made legally acceptable.

The European Convention of Human Rights recognises the right to life as inalienable, that is it cannot be removed by any authority or relinquished by any person. A bill to end life is therefore as compatible with human rights as one to introduce voluntary slavery. Under human rights laws governments have a duty to protect their people from threats to life; the bill therefore contradicts this principle by introducing a real threat that people will be helped to die. It is often wondered why the Netherlands and

some other countries can carry out assisted suicide or euthanasia. The situation is that these countries have not had these practices challenged before the European Court of Human Rights and therefore the court has not ruled on them.

The changing attitudes in society are unfortunately paving the way for assisted suicide and euthanasia to be socially and politically acceptable. If such attitudes are capable of altering our understanding of human rights to the point that the most basic of these can be re-interpreted then no-one will ever be definitively safe under the laws which were created after the second world war to ensure that certain values are always protected no matter who is in power in any country and no matter which groups are not favoured. The issue of abortion can be cited as some for the inability of human rights laws to be used to protect life but the

reasoning given by the European Court of Human Rights which permits abortion is that the unborn baby is not a human person and therefore not covered by the Convention. Although this is a terrible injustice in itself, it cannot be extended to permit assisted suicide or euthanasia because the legal position is quite clear that all people after birth are legally persons.

Opinion polls vary in what level of support they find for assisted suicide. This can be around 80% when a loaded question is used but around 50% for a more neutral question. They indicate that we all have a part to play in changing attitudes in our society before politicians are swept along by such views and make them law. The CPO website is therefore aiming to provide information to support individuals in articulating the arguments against any form of assisted dying. Please check the site regularly to keep abreast of the issue. www.rcpolitics.org

Religious Freedom Threatened by Equality Extremism

The Equality Bill is being considered in the House of Lords. The Bill has raised numerous concerns since it was introduced in spring of last year. In particular it threatens to further undermine the freedom of Christian organisations and individuals to maintain their faith in public life. Despite being intended to bring together existing equality provisions in law into one bill it goes further in several key areas. For example the government wants religious organisations only to be able to justify employing those who support their Church teaching if their job is mostly engaged in liturgical activities

or of passing on the doctrine of the faith. Pressure from the Catholic Church and other Christian organisations received a concession from the government that they could permit faith groups to require only their priests and ministers to hold to their particular faith. That is a bit like accepting that the leadership of the Labour Party could be expected to support the party's policies but members need not. The House of Commons gave little support in meeting the concerns for religious freedom but thankfully support did come from the House of Lords. Baroness O'Cathain tabled

amendments which were debated on 25th January. These successfully overturned the extension of employment laws in the bill and thankfully the government has conceded that it will not attempt to reverse the success at the final stage of the bill. Baroness O'Cathain praised in particular the work of the Christian Institute which has put great efforts into campaigning on this bill. www.christian.org.uk

Equality Laws have raised concern in this country for many years such that Pope Benedict has now commented on the unjust nature of equality laws

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Special points of interest:

- *New bill will provide wide scope for euthanasia*
- *Marriage commitment helps keep families safer*
- *Large rise in prison population in last decade*
- *Europe's powers to increase*
- *Papal warning on Nuclear Arms in Scottish Report*
- *Alerting parents to video game dangers*

Equality Extremism

(Continued from page 1)



Equality Law proposals go way beyond tolerance to the point of insisting support for same-sex relationships

Catholic views in such a debate. The intolerance of Catholic views, shared by many others, raises real concerns for many people for whom persecution comes in the form of being driven out of their employment. Recent cases have included a registrar who was sacked for refusing to perform civil partnership registrations, despite her colleagues being able to perform them, and Gary McFarlane who was sacked for refusing to counsel same sex couples for the organisation Relate. Such cases highlight the intolerant attitude which equality laws have fostered in the workplace. Lord MacKay of Clashfern has attempted to address such concerns by trying to amend the Equality Bill to permit conscientious objection and also tabled an amendment to protect organisations from having to abandon their religious ethos. These issues have yet to be voted on and may get attention at the final stage of the bill.

which contradict natural law. The proponents of equality laws ironically have rushed to condemn the Pope and have attempted to silence him, despite his call for “respectful dialogue” and his recognition of “British traditions of freedom of expression and honest exchange of opinion”. The equality extremists do not wish to include any tolerance of

Prison Population

A just society needs to protect its citizens from crime but how it does that raises considerable challenges. The Church has traditionally emphasised concern for those in prison, recognising visiting prisoners as a corporal work of mercy. The principle of mercy is often in the minds of campaigners who campaign to have prison sentences replaced by community service or similar alternatives to custody. There is no definitive answer that the Church provides on how to balance mercy for those who transgress the laws of the nation with justice and concern for victims. These are issues which are at the heart of political concerns around sentencing policy.

The government is presently aiming to reduce the numbers of prisoners sentenced to short prison sentences. Issues of whether crime can be trivialised compete with concerns that prisons often make people worse and effectively create more dangers in society. It is an issue in which the Secretary of State for Justice, Kenny McAskill is seeking the input of the Church. In a private meeting with Cardinal O’Brien, Mr McAskill highlighted the importance of work like befriending newly released prisoners that can be carried out by Church groups to help support individuals from slipping back into a life of crime.

Scotland’s prison population is almost 8000 and has increased by 31% in the last ten years. The criminal justice bill aims to introduce provisions in several areas including sentencing policy. It aims to ensure that the public has a clearer understanding of the aims of sentencing and the factors that judges must take account of when sentencing. The Bill is presently being considered at stage 2 in Parliament

Domestic Violence—Marriage Matters

Domestic Abuse and Marriage

Being married is a strong indicator that a woman will not suffer domestic violence. Figures presented by the Scottish Government have revealed that the majority of victims of domestic violence suffer at the hands of cohabiting or former partners. In Scotland half of adults live with a spouse, yet the figures reveal that in 2008-2009 there were 8,325 cases of domestic violence in such relationships compared with 19,303 by an ex-partner and 12,167 by a cohabitee. Yet only 10% of adults are co-habiting. The Government’s figures also show a growing trend of domestic abuse. There has been a consistent year on increase from 5,126 recorded cases in 2000 – 2001 to 53,681 cases in 2008-2009. This is an increase of over 50% against a background of declining marriage statistics and an increase in other relationships.

The comparison is stark. The terrible problem of any violence needs to be opposed wherever it arises but is clearly many times more likely when the bond and commitment of marriage is not present. The Social Care Commission of the Bishops’ Conference brought politicians and campaigners together for an event to highlight domestic violence in the Scot-

tish Parliament. Further information for those who want to support the commission’s ongoing work in this area can be obtained by contacting the office at 0141 847 6137 Email: nacosoca@btconnect.com Despite a government determination to promote a range of positive life-styles such as healthy eating it is surprising that they fail to see the benefits of supporting marriage to the couples and families concerned and to Scottish society in general. The Scottish Government’s position on marriage was revealed in a debate on supporting families towards the end of last year where the Minister for Children, Adam Ingram, stated “I question the demand for preferential treatment for certain categories of families in the tax and benefits system”.

The issue of marriage has become a focal point of contention at Westminster. The Labour Government has remained emphatic that marriage is to be regarded as no better than any other relationship. Minister Ed Balls has insisted that to support marriage was to judge other relationships as second class and that this was not good for children. His comments seem oblivious to the strong link between marriage and good outcomes for children. The government was recently provided with statistics which highlighted that of parents who stay together until a child

was 15 years old, 97% are married. The importance of family stability is now incontrovertibly associated with the wellbeing of children. With an election looming the Conservative party are treading a tightrope trying to entice voters who recognise the importance of marriage whilst aiming to appear broad enough to keep in step with the liberal forces of society which are not so inclined to support traditional relationships. Nick Clegg leader of the Lib Dems in England called for Faith schools to be compelled to teach that homosexuality is normal and harmless.



Despite the benefits of marriage to individuals and society politicians resist supporting it

Current Legislation

Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (Subordinate Legislation Committee) 9 February
Stage 1 (evidence, lead committee (Health and Sport Committee) 10 February
Budget (Scotland) (No.4) Bill (Ex) Stage 3 (debate, meeting of the Parliament) 3 February
Control of Dogs (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1 report (Local Government and Communities Committee) published 26 January
Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Day 1) (Justice Committee) 2 March
Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (evidence, lead committee (Rural Affairs and Environment)) 10 February
End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill (M) Introduced 20 January
Forth Crossing Bill (H) Stage 1 (Forth Crossing Bill Committee) 3 February
Home Owner and Debtor Protection (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 3 (debate, meeting of the Parliament) 11 February
Housing (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (lead committee (Local Government and Communities)) 3 February
Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 completed 13 January
Stage 2 amendments may now be lodged with the clerks to the Subordinate Legislation Committee
Legal Services (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1 (lead committee (Justice)) 9 February
Marine (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 3 (debate, meeting of the Parliament) 4 February
Public Services Reform (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Day 3) (Finance Committee) 9 February
Scottish Parliamentary Commissions and Commissioners etc. Bill (M) Introduced 27 January
Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Passed 27 January
Ure Elder Fund Transfer and Dissolution Bill (P) Preliminary Stage (evidence, Ure Elder Fund Transfer and Dissolution Bill Committee) published 29 January
William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill (P) Introduced 28 January
(Ex) = Executive Bill; (M) = Member's Bill; (C) = Committee Bill; (P) = Private Bill; (H) = Hybrid Bill.

Giving Hope for Good Health

Harry Burns, the Chief Medical Officer, has released a fascinating paper on the nation's health. It examines the trends of increased life expectancy for many and identifies the great threats to health. The paper highlights the distinction between those promoting health who focus on avoiding disease with those who provide resources for individuals to create good health for themselves. The paper inevitably identifies the features of a healthy life, such as adequate exercise and good diet. It also notes the importance of the motivation in people's lives to keep healthy and to avoid the lifestyles which threaten health. Those with low levels of hope for their futures are more likely to turn to drugs, alcohol and smoking. Having no job, living in poor housing and

living with threatening neighbours are factors identified as discouraging a favourable attitude to the future.

Life has many stresses of various types which can impact on physical and mental health depending on whether and how these stresses can be dealt with. Factors which influence how successful people are in dealing with stress include their childhood upbringing, their educational experiences and their occupational experiences.

Dealing with a stressful environment, it is pointed out, is dependent on gaining a "sense of coherence" in making sense of the demands on us. Three elements are important to do this: 1. Having motivation

to cope; 2. Understanding the challenges faced; and 3. Believing that resources are available to deal with the challenges.

Since socioeconomic factors correspond with levels of motivation they are therefore important in whether a person will be able to cope with the stresses of their life and consequently on the prospects of good health outcomes.

Failing to provide an adequate social fabric in communities is therefore strongly associated with poor health outcomes.

Having cause for hope in life is important throughout life and the paper also identifies suicide as an example of where people find life not worth living.

The full report is available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/12/16103619/0>

In Brief

The Chilcot Enquiry Committee is continuing to quiz senior figures responsible for the participation of the United Kingdom in the Iraq war. Details are available at www.iraqinquiry.org.uk

The European Union has declared 2010 as the "Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion". It aims to raise public awareness of the issue and encourage political efforts to tackle the related problems. Details at <http://2010againstopoverty.europa.eu>

The support for religious freedom which has been promoted by the Bishops' Conference for many years at a national level resonates strongly with the values promoted by a movement in the United States which is gaining worldwide support. The Manhattan Declaration aims to gather support of individuals who wish to protect religious freedom in society and its organisers promise to mobilise people to protect this value which is under threat in many western societies. Further information including a convenient study guide can be found at www.manhattandeclaration.org

The Government has amended its licensing legislation to ensure that Churches will not need to hold a license to hold car boot sales and jumble sales. The bill threatened to include Churches with other market operators and thereby put such routine fundraisers for Churches in jeopardy.

Nicola Sturgeon has affirmed that she wait 5 years before reconsidering whether to introduce presumed consent for organ donation. Donor figures have already surpassed previous figures for any of the last 10 years and the Cabinet Secretary for Health is hopeful that organ donation can become more routine without changing consent conditions. Schools are to be issued with packs to encourage understanding of the issue among pupils.

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Recommended Reading

The issue of motivation has been identified by the Chief Medical Officer. It ties in with hope which is the subject of Pope Benedict's second Encyclical, "Spe Salvi" which is the recommended reading for this issue.

An interesting short novel is that of the great Alexander Scholzenitsyn, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" which gives an account of a prisoner's daily struggle for survival in a Siberian gulag and instructs us on the grandeur of the human spirit.

Video Nasties

A motion in the Scottish Parliament by Elaine Smith MSP has identified concerns about the level of violence in the video games that children are exposed to and has called on parents to be alerted to the potential damage to emotional and psychological development of children. However Joe FitzPatrick tabled a counter motion to that of Ms Smith contradicting her concerns. Mr FitzPatrick states that "although there is a correlation between playing violent games and aggressive behaviour, there is no evidence to suggest that one causes the other".

Whilst some concerns about the violence in video games have gone beyond the realms of common sense, claims that there is little to worry about also run counter to common sense. The devastating evidence making front page news on the case in Edlington of two boys who sadistically beat two other children is an unusually brutal case but it has rightly raised concern about the influences on children. Anyone with children of their own can avow to the fact that children learn so often from mimicking whether it be from those who live in the same house or the words and actions of those they watch for hours on television or encounter in electronic games.

Like most things a sense of balance is necessary but that can often come from looking at other times and cultures to give us an idea of the extent of the decline that our society may have gone through in terms of recognising good and evil. Whilst many children may be unharmed by violent images it is hard to be confident that they are not being de-sensitised to violence and cruelty which will inevitably impact on the way they behave.

Nuclear Arms

The Scottish Government has released the report of the working group created to examine the issues around the location of Trident in Scotland. It examines the economic, safety, political and legal aspects of continuing to have the nuclear armed submarines on the river Clyde.

An important consideration is the moral one which in the report cites the principled concern of Pope Benedict to the existence of nuclear weapons in the world. The report includes his statement for the World Day of Peace in 2006 which states: "*What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries?*"

Along with countless persons of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims. The truth of peace requires that all—whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them—agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. The resources which would be saved could then be employed in projects of development capable of benefiting all their people, especially the poor."

The full report is available at

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/288148/0088043.pdf>

Consultations (with closing date)

- A Strategy for Self Directed Support (30/04/2010)
- Consultation Paper on Death Certification, Burial and Cremation (21/04/2010)
- Consultation on the Transposition of Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (20/04/2010)
- Consultation on a Risk Based Reservoir Safety Regime for Scotland (18/04/2010)
- Draft Code of Practice on the Welfare of Privately kept non-human Primates (23/04/2010)
- Inquiry into Future Support for Agriculture in Scotland (05/03/2010)
- Consultation on the method of distribution for the UK's share of the €300 million EU Dairy Fund (17/02/2010)
- Permitted Development Rights for Domestic Micro-Wind Turbines and Air-Source Heat Pumps Consultation (01/02/2010)
- Consultation on the Draft Code of Practice for the Welfare of Game birds Reared for Sporting Purposes (09/04/2010)
- Scotland's Higher Activity Radioactive Waste Policy (09/04/2010)
- Social Care Procurement Scotland: Guidance - Consultation draft (05/04/2010)
- Consultation on options for future charity appeals route in Scotland (05/04/2010)
- Glasgow City Centre College Merger (12/02/2010)
- Control of Potato Cyst Nematodes: Further Consultation on the Implementation in Scotland of Directive 2007/33/EC (31/03/2010)
- Consultation on Regulating Will Writers in Scotland (19/02/2010)
- Public Information Notices (12/02/2010)
- Consultation on Regulations to Reduce Primary 1 Classes to a Maximum of 25 Pupils (29/01/2010)
- Revised Code of Practice issued under section 60 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act (02/03/2010)
- Consultation on draft Guidance on Allied Health Professionals and Education Partnership Working (04/02/2010)
- New practical fire safety guidance for small bed and breakfast and self-catering premises (18/02/2010)
- Consultation on the Councillors' Code of Conduct (18/02/2010)
- A national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people (26/02/2010)
- Consultation on Options for the Implementation of the Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) (26/02/2010)