



THE CATHOLIC UNION *of Great Britain*

RESTORING FAITH IN PUBLIC LIFE

Introduction

A General Election is an important time in the life of a democratic country. We should all consider carefully the voting options available to us; what the political parties are offering and the sort of society we want to live in.

It is a time for reflection and careful consideration of how public policy issues will impact upon our common welfare and good. As Christians, we should weigh up the issues in the light of Gospel values and the teachings of the Church, before casting our votes.

Those who are elected have an even greater responsibility to act in accordance with an

informed conscience based upon sound ethical principles and considerations.

The Catholic Union believes that when people of faith become more involved in democratic issues they fulfill their basic rights and duties, not only to vote, but to engage with the candidates who are putting themselves forward for election and so make their voices heard in the political realm. On the whole, in the past, Christians have failed to involve themselves in political issues which often involve their religious beliefs. The result has been the erosion of religious freedom and the loss of traditional family values, and indeed of human rights.

It is expected that this time election results will be close, so the votes of faith communities could well be decisive.

Policy issues that have impacted upon Christians

(A) The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act was passed by Parliament despite strong opposition. The 650,000 signatories of a petition organised by Coalition for Marriage were completely ignored. Church teaching on marriage in Catholic schools is now problematic.

(B) Lord Falconer introduced the Assisted Dying Bill. Although there has been insufficient time in this Parliament for the Bill to pass, there is little doubt that it will be reintroduced in the new Parliament.





(C) The conscientious objection safeguard in the 1967 Abortion Act has been interpreted narrowly by the Supreme Court in the case of the Glasgow midwives, threatening the position of Catholic medical professionals in obstetrics and neo-natal care.



(D) Both Houses of Parliament have recently voted to allow three parent babies. Regulations to proceed will allow scientists to manipulate DNA in order to prevent parents from transmitting potentially serious inherited diseases. If the Regulations become law, the UK will be the only country in the world to allow genetic manipulation of embryos. Parliamentarians voted in favour of the Regulations without paying due regard to the call from faith communities and others for further research to be carried out. There are dangers inherent in such manipulation.

Much of this legislation never formed part of the election manifestos of any political party. Therefore, voters should be looking for greater transparency from would-be lawmakers and the need to confront candidates about their moral principles and values. Religion has ascended the political agenda. Without it becoming necessarily party political, it has moved to the forefront in many policy issues. There are even some who seem to wish to reduce those of religious faith to second class citizens by

denying them the right to act in accordance with their religious principles.

Issues that could affect your vote

Candidates who seek the votes of members of faith communities must be willing to respect our contribution to society and our right to religious liberty. Christians should not remain silent, but must speak out so that their voices can be heard by legislators. Politicians who would ignore or deprive us of religious freedoms should be challenged, so that Christians can participate fully in our society with its Christian heritage.

The following are some of the issues which we need to reflect upon and ask our candidates questions about before placing our vote:

The value of human life and respect for it.

New laws have been introduced which have tended to undermine respect for human life, including that of the elderly and infirm. Pressure is being applied to legalise assisted suicide and forms of euthanasia.

- (1) If there is a free vote, will you vote in favour of policies to protect human life? For example, will you vote in support of legalising assisted dying (suicide); the Bill is currently in Parliament.





- (2) Do you think the 1967 Abortion Act is working as Parliament intended or is it being abused and is in need of amendment?
- (3) Do you believe in permitting the deliberate termination of the life of the terminally ill or do you support holistic care at the end of life?

Religious freedom to act in accordance with Christian values

- (1) Do you support church schools?
- (2) Sometimes legislation has been interpreted as preventing Christians in the workplace from wearing a symbol of faith, exercising conscientious objections or manifesting their religious beliefs and practices in other ways. Do you support such religious freedoms?



- (3) Can you tell me in what way you would show your support for religious freedom? Can you give me some examples?
- (4) Catholic church schools have been targeted for following a curriculum in support of their faith and have been restricted in the manner of pupil admission, to the detriment of families of their faith. Do you support the freedom of Catholics to school their children in the ethos of their faith?
- (5) ONS statistics show that over two thirds of the population identified themselves as Christians.

Do you accept that Christianity is therefore still of major significance in the life of the nation?

Traditional family values since equality legislation



- (1) We have seen the closure of Catholic adoption agencies or their transfer to secular establishments. We have seen the redefinition of marriage and exposure to discrimination of those who support traditional marriage or who show conscientious objection to that redefinition, in their workplace. Yet research overwhelmingly supports traditional marriage as the safest environment for the nurturing and upbringing of children. What are your comments on this?
- (2) Proposals have been introduced to impose sex education in schools which may include informing children about how to access





abortion services. Education in human sexuality has to be taught in the context of love, marriage and family life, social development and personal responsibility. Is the right of parents to make choices in these matters being eroded?

- (3) Do you accept that parents have the right to insist that their children be taught according to their own religious and sexual ethics?

Solidarity with Catholic social principles

Solidarity with those who suffer — the poor, hungry, and underprivileged, both in the UK and abroad — is at the heart of Catholic social teaching. This includes the need for education, healthcare, clean water and sanitation and importantly, justice in terms of the distribution of wealth and land.



in society today is a result of the failure to support and promote traditional family values over the years?

- (5) Given our ageing population, how will you and your party help the elderly and infirm? Do you believe in rationing healthcare by age?
- (6) What do you want your party to offer the long-term unemployed? What will you do about those who have never been employed and are totally dependent upon benefits?



- (1) What would you do about human trafficking? How would you prevent the abuse of illegal immigrants who are in the UK and possibly being subjected to gross cruelty and slavery?
- (2) Do you support legal and hard-working immigrants?
- (3) What would you do to relieve the housing shortage?
- (4) How would you react to those who claim that society is broken and that the general malaise



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on behalf of the Catholic Union of Great Britain
www.catholicunion.org.uk Contact email: info@cuct.org*