



BRIEFING - March 2010

Dear member

As the date for the General Election draws nearer enclosed are copies of a pamphlet for your use and that of your friends. This pamphlet sets out a number of questions, which should be put to Parliamentary candidates standing at the election. The purpose is to make the Christian vote count. The Union is counting on you.

The paragraphs which follow describe some of the more important work which has occupied the Union during the last six months or so.

Equality Bill

The main business before the Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee has focused on the free speech amendment of Lord Waddingham. This was to prevent vexatious prosecutions of Christians expressing traditional Christian moral beliefs. CU peers as part of a wide coalition were successful in achieving this amendment against government opposition during the final stages of the Equality Bill. An additional amendment was also secured by the same coalition, on employment of persons whose lives are lived in accordance with the ethos of Church employers. There was a full submission to the DPP consultation on guidelines to prosecutors in cases of assisted suicide. The DPP posed a number of questions which were answered directly though some appeared to be leading. In the event, the bulk of the 5000 odd replies that the DPP received also expressed our concerns. The final guidelines just released are an improvement on the original interim guidelines. In particular, all the references to sickness have been removed thus reducing the risk that sick persons might enjoy less protection under the law. The new emphasis is on the motivation of the suspect. There remain considerable evidential problems in discovering their motivation after the main witness has died. It remains to be seen whether there will be any prosecutions in the future, but it is probably the case that a suicide service, such as that provided in Switzerland will be prevented from emerging here. The committee has been concerned about the Liverpool Care Pathway, as operated in some hospitals.

Joint Medical Ethics Committee

The committee' made submissions to the General Medical Council on end of life care (July 2009) and to the Director of Public Prosecutions on assisted suicide (December 2009). The committee have submitted a response to the Bishops' draft guidelines for the spiritual care of the dying including their views on the Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP). The position currently subsisting in Holland is found to be that increasingly hydration is withdrawn but this is not classified as euthanasia. Back in the UK one in five deaths in hospital are now patients who have been on the LCP scheme. It used to be for cancer patients but now a slight majority are non cancer patients. There is increasing anecdotal evidence that it is being used to promote euthanasia and that there is a significant change in the attitude of society to euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Catholic Voices

Jack Valero and Austen Ivereigh are leading the Catholic Voices project. This project aims to recruit and train a team of about twenty young people between the ages of 20 to 40 to appear before the media and answer questions before and during the forthcoming visit by the Holy Father in September. They will be media trained and instructed how to deal with anticipated typical questions asked by the media on current affairs appertaining to Catholics

Children, Schools and Families Bill

Following the Government sponsored amendment to Clause 11 of the Children Schools and Families Bill the position concerning sex education is unclear. The Catholic Education Service (CES) maintains one interpretation while the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, the Rt Hon Ed Balls MP maintains another. At the time of writing the Bill is before the House of Lords and it is questionable whether this Bill will reach the Statute Book before Parliament is dissolved. Representations have been made to the Bishops' conference on the conflicting views on the sex education curriculum. Either the Secretary of State is right that Catholic teaching may not be presented as truth, or he is not. So far the Bishops have not commented and it is of great concern to parents using Catholic schools.

James Bogle
Chairman

