



Christian
Perspectives on
Public Affairs

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News and Christian Comment

Pre-Budget Report

As ever the Chancellor of the Exchequer was on top form offering walls of statistics and epic statements during his 10th and latest pre-budget report. Many expect it to be his last PBR.

"I can report not only the longest period of sustained growth in our history, but that the UK has enjoyed a longer post-war period of sustained growth than USA, France Germany and Japan." He continued, "10 years ago the UK was seventh in G7 for GDP per head, it is now second only to the USA with personal wealth up by 60%."

The Chancellor then stressed why the UK needed to be a competitive, well educated and stable economy – namely China and India.

China alone is currently manufacturing half the world's computers, half the world's clothes and more than 75% of the world's children's toys.

Brown once again highlighted the goal of education as the Government's number one priority and of the importance of innovation and training. Every year Britain adds 75,000 engineers and computer scientists to its workforce, while India and China add half a million. The UK adds 250,000 graduates a year, China and India 4 million.

The Chancellor quoted the Leitch report's claims that instead of today's 9 million graduates, the UK economy will need 14 million to compete. Mr Brown was also keen to stress his investment record, including tens of billions of pounds on housing, transport and public service infrastructures and buildings.

"If the focus of the past decade was in housing and public services, the next decade is for world-leading investments, in housing, in transport and science". The Chancellor also announced the long rumoured tightening of intellectual property laws which will help innovation and protect the UK artistic industries.

There was also promised investment in innovation including making the UK 'a world leader in stem cell technology'. As biotechnology moves further up the economic as well as the ethical priority list these will be increasingly important issues involving serious ethical dimensions.

On issues of international development, more work is being promised in terms of partnership between the Department For International Development and charities, perhaps a particular opportunity presented if Brown becomes the next Prime Minister.

Also announced on the day of the PBR was the interim report of the third sector review with the action plan for third sector involvement in the public services. This will be crucially important for many churches and Christian charities who are involved in social action, though developments

elsewhere pose serious questions about the tensions in Government in wanting to encourage religious charitable work whilst seeking to restrict their religious ethos. There will be more support for community ownership of assets including a £30m fund to encourage local authorities and the third sector to work together to expand community ownership of community assets.

The Chancellor also highlighted the Stern review on the environment, but came in for fierce criticism from Vince Cable the Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman. Regarding environmental taxation, Mr Cable claimed that Brown's figures only amounted to one tenth of the 1% of GDP that Stern recommended! Mr Cable also accused Mr Brown of not making the taxes revenue neutral. He wanted tax cuts for the poor.

The Chancellor also made commitments on the carbon emissions from homes insisting that within 10 years every new home will be a zero-carbon one. Of course, he is unlikely to still be around to answer for this target.

George Osborne the Shadow Chancellor attempted to shred Gordon Browns' wide-ranging speech with a withering attack. His deliberately short speech posed the Chancellor four questions. Firstly, didn't the European Commission state that UK growth was now 21st out of the 25 EU member states? Secondly, in the past year hasn't the UK recorded the largest rise of unemployment in any of the major developing world economies? Thirdly, isn't the UK set to have the largest structural deficit of any European economy? Finally, aren't real living standards in the UK falling?

Mr Brown chose the ridicule route, suggesting that "the Tories want to cut taxes, raise spending, cut borrowing, and have a fiscal rule (balance the budget) that requires him to cut spending". He reminded the House that David Cameron recommended something similar to Norman Lamont just before Black Wednesday!

Vince Cable then sought to accuse to the Chancellor that after 10 years income inequality was as bad as under the last Conservative government and that wealth inequality had worsened.

How is it possible to square all these eloquent and yet contradictory versions of our current economic situation? One answer is that we live in a very successful consumer economy. Thus, record levels of personal wealth are maintained by record levels of personal debt. Economic stability is therefore very vulnerable to interest rate control.

That the UK is spending more than ever yet we still experience rising social problems, suggests that no Government can actually solve even a fraction of society's problems. Hence such stress on the role of charities and volunteering in the midst of a supposedly dry national financial summary. Let us hope that the Government does not undermine charitable enterprise or the picture could worsen dramatically.

PQ from Westminster

Cabinet Tug of War

It would appear that Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Hain, has provoked at least two major rows by seeking to fast-track Part 3 of the Equality Act 2006 dealing with Sexual Orientation Regulations. One argument is with his Cabinet colleague, Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government who is the Minister responsible for equality. The other is with religious groups alarmed at Hain's exploitation of the current lack of democratic process in Northern Ireland and use of a parliamentary device that is likely to prevent debate on this far-reaching and controversial legislation by MPs and Peers.

Hain seems to be currying favour with Labour Party activists ahead of the deputy leadership election in 2007 by adopting a hard-line progressive approach on gay rights which appears to ride roughshod over the more softly softly approach preferred by Ruth Kelly, the latter being more mindful of the sensitivities on this controversial subject between Government and religious leaders.

The Regulations as they stand will come into effect in Northern Ireland on 1 January, though in the rest of the UK a consultation process is still under way until next year aimed at arriving at a fair balance of rights. Hain has, however, anticipated much of the debate, not least by introducing a controversial clause outlawing harassment. Legal experts claim its low threshold legal format will effectively constrain any exemptions in the Regulations aimed at enabling faith groups and believers to continue legally to practice their historic beliefs and could silence dialogue on the subject of homosexuality. The issue of harassment across all human rights strands had been due for public

consultation and review in conjunction with the Discrimination Law Review in 2007. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Hain views the imposition of the Northern Ireland Regulations as a virtual fait accompli for the rest of the UK. Certainly, that is how other vested interests are presenting it.

Government officials have sought to play down reports of a major Cabinet rift, though with Ruth Kelly already under public attack from the moment of her appointment from gay lobby groups, her position would appear to be under serious pressure. It is not insignificant that the senior civil servant responsible for the Regulations is former Stonewall executive director Angela Mason, whilst current Stonewall chief Ben Summerskill has just been appointed as a Commissioner in the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Recently, there have even been suggestions of one set of regulations for Northern Ireland and another for the rest of the UK. Faith groups fear they may become casualties of the political trial of strength involving the balance between gay rights and religious liberty. Observers have noted that to date no Human Rights Commissioner has been appointed with strong credentials for religion and belief.

A consensus has quickly built up among a broad spectrum of Christian groups and legal experts that, as they stand, the Regulations pose a significant threat to religious liberty. Christian groups are considering a legal challenge based on the lack of adequate consultation. The Evangelical Alliance is encouraging Christians and others to continue to highlight their concerns to Government and MPs in a constructive way and press for an effective freedom of conscience amendment.

'Breakdown Britain'

On 11th December Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice published its latest report 'Breakdown Britain'. The report covers the nature, extent and cause of social breakdown and poverty in Britain today. Policy recommendations to the Conservative Party are to follow in June 2007. The report identifies 'five pathways to poverty': family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependence, indebtedness and addiction.

In 1997 the Evangelical Alliance similarly published a report on social disintegration having surveyed 73 Christian action projects across the UK. The survey came to the same conclusions then as 'Breakdown Britain' has reached today: that the root causes of social breakdown lie with dysfunctional families and unemployment. What improvements have been made in the nine years since this report was written and Labour has been in power? 'Breakdown Britain' argues that the mirage of benefits and tax credits designed by Labour to lift children out of poverty and support working mothers have in actual fact encouraged single parents to the detriment of marriage and the further breakdown of the family which leads eventually to further impoverishment.

The report suggests that the benefit system favours single parenthood; a married couple draws less in tax credits or benefits than if they lived apart. And yet the report argues that single parenthood leads to poverty. The current system of tax credits is therefore seemingly encouraging single parenthood while at the same time increasing numbers of those living in poverty. In a different report published earlier this year by the think tank Civitas, it was claimed that of the major European countries, the British system of tax credits and benefits does the most to undermine marriage. Both the French and the German welfare systems acknowledge married couples by targeted tax relief and allowances for

married couples with children.

In October the Evangelical Alliance welcomed a speech to the Conservative Party conference by David Cameron in which he stressed the importance of marriage: "I will set a simple test for each and every one of our policies: does it help families?...I also believe that marriage is a great institution, and we should support it", Mr Cameron stated. Referring to this new report Cameron asked "If marriage rates went up, if divorce rates came down, if more couples stayed together longer, would our society be better off? My answer is yes". Certainly from an economic perspective Britain would be better off: the report concludes that family breakdown costs the country more than £20bn a year. Marriage and old-fashioned Tory values is the headline draw of 'Breakdown Britain'. Underlying it all, however, seems to be Cameron's determination to revolutionise the tax credit and benefit system: to incentivise marriage. The Conservatives call the tax credit system "dependency" and accuse tax credits for causing poverty instead of providing a way out of destitution.

It is sad that the Alliance's report nine years ago and 'Breakdown Britain' come to similar conclusions about the causes of social disintegration and that little has seemingly changed. However, this report should be commended for encouraging a culture of marriage. When the Centre for Social Justice makes its policy recommendations to the Conservative party in seven months time it is likely that tax incentives for marriage will be prominent. Whether this approach will succeed in increasing the number of married couples or the longevity of their marriages is yet to be seen, however, Cameron's commitment to the institution of marriage is a welcome start to removing obstacles to marriage.

PQ from Westminster

Illiberal Trends in Universities

Earlier this year a *Newsweek* edition devoted to trends in Higher Education concluded "[the university] will continue to be the engine of change for every nation; all citizens, from the richest to the poorest, will look within its walls for the keys to their future." If this is correct then increasingly illiberal attitudes to orthodox Christianity in some British Universities should be of great concern.

Birmingham and Exeter University Christian Unions have been suspended from their Students Unions for not changing their constitution to allow non-Christians to lead the CU. Their financial assets were frozen and the CUs are no longer able to use university buildings free of charge. Other student unions are taking similar action. Edinburgh University has banned the CU from meeting on campus to discuss sexual ethics. Why?

Because the orthodox Christian view is deemed offensive to homosexuals.

In attempting to apply an equal opportunities policy to Student Union clubs and societies these actions deny Christians the basic rights of freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of belief. Such rights are protected in law according to the Education Acts of 1986 (section 43) and 1994 (section 22) as well as European Human Rights legislation. By appealing to law, Christian students are following the apostle Paul who exercised his legal rights as a Roman citizen in order to remain free to preach the Gospel in the public square.

What the Christian Unions are arguing for is a more sensible 'open pluralism'. Students Unions fulfil a valuable social and educational function in regulating and supporting a wide range of student societies. These opportunities should be available to all regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political views, sexual orientation or any other distinguishing personal characteristic.

However, many student societies have aims and purposes which require differentiation. Members of the women's football team are required to be women. Leaders of Conservative students associations are required to be supporters of the Conservative party. Likewise, those who lead Christian Unions, whose identity and aims are determined by their theological position, are naturally required to be in agreement with this theological stance. Christian Unions are 'open to the public' in that their meetings can be attended by anyone. CUs often hold open discussions where the audience questions the speaker. But in order to preserve their particular religious viewpoint it is reasonable, indeed essential, that CUs have leaders in agreement with their doctrinal stance.

It follows that the aim of any equal opportunities policy must not simply be to require all societies to make no distinction at all. Rather it must ensure that clubs and societies do not draw distinctions that are irrelevant to their objects and purpose.

This approach is entirely lawful and also desirable. The general

good of the student body is served by exposure to a diversity of views and opinions. Freedom of speech is served by the existence of a market place of ideas in which each person or group is free to make the best case for their own commitments.

What is concerning about the current situation is the growing contemporary irrationalism towards any viewpoint that contradicts an aggressive secular agenda. Social critic Wendy Kramer bemoans how students are increasingly 'ban happy', responding to controversy not by conducting the argument but by demanding censorship and silence. She complains 'Self righteous intolerance of dissent remains distressingly common among supposedly progressive students on liberal campuses.'

Kramer concludes that the university is no longer a site for free thinking and the free exchange of ideas. It is becoming a laboratory for new forms of censorship and conformism.

By adopting such an approach agenda-driven secularists stifle the free speech and open debate they claim to promote. Tolerance has been traditionally defined as 'the policy of patient forbearance towards that which is not approved.' By seeking to ban the orthodox Christian voice on campus (whether on sexuality or any other issue) secularism displays its intolerance. This is a far cry from one of the pioneers of tolerance, Voltaire, who famously said 'I disagree with

what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.'

In the current conflict, Christian students have been stigmatised as intolerant and vilified as homophobic. Both accusations are false and dangerous. They are dangerous because they stifle free debate and in determining which ideas are acceptable and unacceptable Student Unions are repeating the tyrannies of the last century. Philosopher John Gray (not a believer) points out 'The role of humanist thought in shaping the past century's worst regimes is easily demonstrable, but passed over, or denied, by those who harp on about the crimes of religion. Yet the mass murders of the 20th century...were done by atheist regimes in the service of enlightenment ideas of progress.'

Historian John Coffey concludes 'If secular intolerance is relatively mild at present, it should not be underestimated.' If the university is 'the engine of change for every nation', how these conflicts are resolved matters. Christians must be concerned at the erosion of their freedom to express their beliefs in the public square, free from discrimination and censorship.

Tim Rudge
Director of Field Staff
UCCF: The Christian Unions

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PQ from the Nations

Northern Ireland Rights, Righteousness & Relationships

Not many would dare breathe the words 'rights' and 'righteousness' in the same sentence. However the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) has no such qualms. 'Rights and righteousness' was one of the sessions at their recent conference on Human Rights in Northern Ireland.

At any conference everyone fears the 'graveyard slot', and Friday after lunch was a less than auspicious time to deal with this subject. However with animated input from the speakers and a lively discussion from participants, the only disappointment was that there was not enough time to fully explore the issues.

Donal McKeown, Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Down, questioned the assumption that the human rights agenda and religion naturally conflict. All human beings, he said, are made in the image of and likeness of God, bringing a radical equality between people that is universal, inalienable, inviolable and indivisible. Rights are neither conferred, nor earned but they cannot be isolated from responsibility. Ultimately relationships matter.

David Stevens, Leader of the Corrymeela Community proposed that the language around human rights is good but limited – it is thin and lacks depth. He went on to suggest that a culture of rights feeds in to a culture of victimhood and breeds rivalry. It is not a language of human rights that we require, he said, but a radical transformation of relationships.

For self-confessed 'radical atheist' Eamonn McCann, finding a language of human rights that would bring people together was

critical to a discussion of rights and righteousness. Linda Hogan from the Irish School of Ecumenics acknowledged that human rights language will never express what those in both the religious and non-religious require. It will never be enough.

So while the NIHRC is correct to raise the debate about the interface between rights and righteousness, to lose sight of the importance of relationship within the conversation would be to miss the point. For relationships bring with them the responsibility to consider other people – their views, their circumstances, their own stories, perhaps even their rights.

Simon & Garfunkel once sang 'I am a rock, I am an island; and a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries'. In such a solitary world neither rights nor relationships matter. But this is a far cry from reality and not how God has intended us to live. Everyday we interact with those who are not like ourselves. Everyday the choices we make have an impact on someone else within our family, our community or further afield. What we say and how we say it; what we buy, where we buy, who we buy from... these are not isolated decisions.

NIHRC plan to continue their journey of exploration into rights and righteousness. It is good for people of faith to be part of that conversation. But in a conversation about rights let us not lose the heart of relationship which takes as its starting point our relationship with God, a God of love, mercy and truth.

Scotland Erosion of Liberties

The main planks of the Executive's legislative programme this year have been the modernisation of the planning system, the establishment of a human rights commission and reform of the law on adoption and fostering. The Executive is also seeking to reform the law on prostitution, but has run into some difficulty in the Local Government Committee over whether the Bill will be effective in tackling kerb-crawling. Other measures introduced by backbench MSPs include a Bill to make St Andrew's Day a public holiday and measures to prevent large shops from forcing staff to work on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. The latter successfully completed Stage 1, but is likely to be amended at Stage 2 to delete New Year's Day after opposition arose from the business community.

It would be fair to say that there has been a deluge of legislation since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Some of the legislation is good and long overdue, others measures are mediocre or unnecessary, and some legislation is damaging to Scotland's social and moral framework. Arguably, the latest example of the latter was the decision of the Parliament on 7th December to allow same-sex and unmarried couples to jointly adopt children. Only 12 MSPs voted to block same-sex couples from doing so. However, perhaps of most concern was the Parliament's failure by 3 votes to explicitly endorse the rights of faith-based adoption agencies not to place children with same-sex or unmarried couples. The Scottish Parliament in a desire to be inclusive is now acting in

a way which may exclude Christians from providing social services. This, combined with the proposed sexual orientation regulations at Westminster and a climate where public bodies interpret equality and diversity policies at the expense of Christians, poses perhaps the greatest threat to religious liberty in 200 years.

It is likely that the next Scottish Parliament will again be asked to consider the issue of physician assisted suicide. Jeremy Purvis MSP has indicated that if re-elected he will seek to re-introduce his Dying with Dignity for the Terminally Ill Bill. Whilst for the moment the Executive has refrained from introducing hate crimes legislation based on sexual orientation, this issue is likely to be revisited after the election. Previous discussions on this issue have considered the possibility of introducing a new offence or copying the 'aggravation' measures which apply in relation to sectarianism. Both suggestions raise concerns regarding freedom of religion, but a new offence in particular may have significant implications for churches seeking to teach Biblical truths.

As we approach the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections next May, Christians would be well advised to bear these issues in mind when deciding how to vote. In addition, they should raise concerns on these matters with Parliamentary and Council candidates both in the run up to the elections and afterwards with those who are elected.

PQ from the Nations & beyond

Wales The Welsh Economy, the Assembly and Campaigns

The people of West Wales and environmentalists alike held their breath this past week as news broke of a major collision between a tanker and a jetty in Milford Haven harbour. The concern arose because the collision occurred right next to the site of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) berth in the same port.

LNG is gas that has been cooled so that it can be carried by tankers instead of pipelines. Plans for an LNG terminal to be built in Pembrokeshire were announced in August 2004 that would eventually supply 20% of the UK's energy needs.

The project met with immediate opposition, with Friends of the Earth among the most vociferous. Highlighting research into LNG conducted in America, campaigners stressed that terminals should be erected away from populated areas because of the extreme dangers that this type of fuel posed. The potential threat to national security was also emphasised.

Although the arguments are well-rehearsed now, there was widespread ignorance of the facts until fairly recently. Indeed, in the 2005 General Election, what should have been a political hot potato for candidates in the marginal seat of Preseli Pembrokeshire turned out to be a damp squib as the public couldn't engage with the issue on an informed level and candidates conceded that they knew very little about LNG.

Although the Assembly is taking great strides to involve the public

more in decision-making, there are times when unpopular courses of action need to be taken, arguably no more so than when it involves the Welsh economy.

Faced with many factors such as an ageing population, increased competition from countries such as China and India and the certainty of higher energy costs in the future, the Assembly is desperate to attract inward investment and to see the Welsh economy of the future both vibrant and competitive. Their policy is to move towards innovation and away from a risk-averse culture.

In the light of this, decisions such as the LNG terminal make sense to political leaders, the promise of 700 jobs to the area being too much to resist. Were the issue less complex and easier to engage the public in, campaigners against the terminal may have won concessions. Lucid, convincing arguments themselves, however, appear to mean nothing when the Welsh economy is at risk: recent Assembly support for a super-casino in Cardiff, for example, extolled its economic benefits while virtually ignoring any negative socio-economic impact.

Wales may never be a Celtic tiger in the same way that Ireland is, having at present too many subsidiary companies and low-skilled jobs, but successful campaigning will often have taken into account the Assembly's present predisposition to take risks for the sake of the Welsh economy.

Religious Liberty Bethlehem 2006

Christians in the Middle East are often marginalised and discriminated against because of their faith in Christ and some suffer from military activities in their areas. As our thoughts turn to events in the Holy Land 2000 years ago, Palestinian Christians today continue their exodus to such an extent that some analysts fear there will be few Christians left by 2025. The conflict and resulting economic pain is felt by both Christians and Muslims, with curfews, unemployment, a drop in tourist numbers, street fighting and closures. Fear of the violence has kept tourists away, and with them has gone the financial lifeblood of Bethlehem and the surrounding area. However, Palestinian Christians also speak of problems buying land, arson attacks and a sense of being pushed out.

Attorney Justus Reid Weiner states that 'In-depth research demonstrates that the precipitous decline in the Christian population is primarily a result of social, economic and religious discrimination and persecution within Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza'. Reid Weiner published a report in November 2005 via the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs that says Palestinian Christians frequently underreport violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, rape, extortion, and in the case of one Muslim convert to Christianity even murder. Yet this situation is not known to Palestinian human rights organisations, as Bassam Eid, of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, says 'Our organisation has never received information about discrimination'.

An area bishop, who spoke to the *Jerusalem Post* on condition of anonymity, asserted 'there are many prejudices... for this reason, and sometimes to protect the family's honour, sometimes things are not reported'. Such issues can include 'property abuse', where a Muslim steals the property of a Christian. In September, Palestinians with guns and firebombs attacked five churches in the West Bank and Gaza, following remarks by Pope Benedict XVI that angered many Muslims.

Tensions were already high, as they have been since the radical Islamic fundamentalist organization Hamas won the January 2006 Palestinian elections, and the Palestinian Authority's constitution gives Islamic law

primacy over all other sources of law. This leads to many difficulties for Christians, for example, being forced to pay bribes to win the freedom of family members jailed on trumped-up charges. While locals and analysts doubt that Hamas will enforce a strict Shari'a religious law, the Christian community is proceeding with 'just in case' caution. Local Christians see themselves as part of a single Palestinian people alongside Muslims, but they are also an ever-shrinking minority, trying to fight for religious equality and opposing violence.

Palestinian Christian educator Dr Maria Khoury said 'since Hamas took over, I cover my head in Ramallah, I don't feel comfortable' and it seems people are observing self-censorship as a defensive measure. The *Jerusalem Post* on December 2 reported of a previously unknown group called the 'Just Swords of Islam' who issued a warning to Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip that they must wear the hijab or face being targeted by the group's members. In pamphlets they also claimed responsibility for attacks on 12 internet cafes in November and December, and said that its followers threw acid the previous week at the face of a young woman who was dressed 'immodestly' in the centre of Gaza city and destroyed a car belonging to a young man who was playing his radio too loudly. The group said that it would 'have no mercy on any woman who violates the traditions of Islam' and targeted these areas as they were 'distracting an entire generation of Palestinians from their duty to worship and jihad'.

On 11 December Bethlehem's mayor called for the Christian world to support Palestinians in the beleaguered town by visiting Jesus' traditional birthplace and not to forget Bethlehem this Christmas. Mayor Batarseh explained that the drop in tourism has been exacerbated by a freeze on international aid imposed on the Palestinian government since the radical Islamic Hamas movement rose to power in January elections.

Open Doors has launched a writing campaign for Christians in Gaza – for more information please visit www.opendoorsuk.org/help_email.php

Prayer, action and breaking news...

Prayer points: Africa Charity Banger Race



This festive edition of PQ prayer points are brought to you from the Evangelical Alliance itself. Gareth Wallace, Westminster Parliamentary Officer for the Evangelical Alliance and two of his friends are driving a dilapidated 30 year old SAAB from Plymouth to Banjul in the Gambia from Boxing Day!

They are raising money for Tearfund and Macmillan Cancer Support as part of the Plymouth to Banjul Charity banger race.

If you would like to sponsor or make a donation, more information about this fantastic (and slightly insane) venture can be found at: www.sanddodgers.co.uk

**WE ARE
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CANCER SUPPORT**



- Please pray for the 200 teams taking part in the rally, that they will be safe from unstable regimes, landmines, malaria, and any other exotic diseases during the 3 week race.
- Pray for energy and team spirit, that friendships will be strengthened not strained and that new friendships will be made during this 4000 mile adventure of a lifetime.
- Please pray for all the charities that the various teams are raising money for. Give thanks for the excellent work that these charities are doing at home and abroad.
- Pray for the Bibles that the Bible society have given to Team Sanddodgers to 'smuggle' into North Africa. Pray that there won't be any awkward questions and that if they are discovered the authorities might want copies for themselves!

HFEA submission

The Evangelical Alliance has responded to a consultation by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) on egg donation for scientific research. The Alliance is particularly concerned about the medical risks to women who donate their eggs and the question of financial inducement.

A copy of our response, submitted in December 2006, can be found at www.eauk.org/public-affairs/lifeissues/

Joint Committee on Human Rights

This committee of members of both Lords and Commons examines proposed Government legislation to ensure it conforms to human rights parameters. The Government has requested it to inquire into the meaning of 'public authority' under the Human Rights Act given the continuing trend to outsource public services and a perceived gap in the law affording human rights protection. The outcome could present serious implications for religious charitable work in receipt of public funding. The Evangelical Alliance's response to the inquiry can be seen on its website at www.eauk.org/public-affairs/humanrights/

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