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Perspectives on  
Public Affairs

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News and Christian Comment

## History Repeating?

Ferenc Gyurcsány, the Hungarian Prime Minister, was commendably honest about his governing party's political abilities in a recent speech.

"We have obviously lied throughout the past 18 to 24 months. It was perfectly clear that what we were saying was not true." Not content with this outburst of honesty he continued "we did not actually do anything for four years. Nothing. You cannot mention any significant government measures that we can be proud of..."

Politicians in the UK are more tactful and less forthcoming about their political frailties. Certainly despite the latest and most serious political furore involving the Labour leadership, described as "the Great Name-Calling" by one broadsheet, Labour cannot be accused of not enjoying historic political success. As Jack Straw summed up, it is "shocking that a government that has dealt with huge challenges is caught up in a squall, not over policy, but over exactly when the most successful Labour Prime Minister in history stands down".

Despite Labour's undoubted success the teflon seems to have worn off the New Labour project in recent years. The latest twist in Labour's leadership transition threatens to damage the party irreparably.

It could be argued that Labour is at a cross roads. They could be remembered for their considerable achievements. Or they could start to unravel. Despite Margaret Thatcher's controversial but clearly defined leadership, it seems that 'fag end administrations' like John Major's, no matter how talented the politician, end up looking not unlike Hungary. 'Renewal' and 'a stable transition' are much more difficult to achieve than stagnation and factionalism.

In 1997 Labour swept to power determined to be everything the Conservatives were not, PR savvy, slick and pre-packed. Prime Minister Blair promised that his government would be 'whiter than white'.

It seems that the wheel has turned full circle, almost that history is repeating itself. Though many now don't remember the turbulent year of the last Labour government under James Callaghan in 1978-79, with power cuts and rubbish on the streets.

Margaret Thatcher, still an intensely controversial figure, seemed to be the nation's saviour. For her supporters she dragged the country out of political atrophy. She helped form their opposition into political action underpinned by doctrinaire determination. That led to the radical remodelling of the old Labour Party under Neil Kinnock and

the emergence of Tony Blair, resulting in what Anthony Giddens labelled 'the third way'. It seemed that Blair would build on Thatcher's legacy and ensure its survival, while also pursuing a socially democratic agenda of increased public sector spending and national devolution. Despite accusations that Blair has achieved little, the rise of David Cameron suggests that once again a strong leader has emerged to take up Blair's baton. Cameron has adopted the 'softer' style of Blair, but with neither disavowing the 'new political settlement' instituted by Margaret Thatcher.

The abilities of either Brown or Blair, should not, however, be underestimated. It is entirely possible that if Brown succeeds Blair he will be 'Blair part two', his own man, but nevertheless equally successful.

History however is rarely so kind. Not only is Gordon Brown associated with the most successful Labour administration in history; he is also the man at the centre of an intensifying debate about tax credits, about the wisdom of private finance initiatives and his widely criticised handling of private pension policy. And nine years of Labour in power has inevitably produced internal personality conflicts.

In short, if history is really to repeat itself, Gordon Brown could end up becoming the new John Major. Both men served relatively crisis-free as Chancellors. But as Prime Minister Major suffered Black Wednesday, and election meltdown in 1997 bequeathing a legacy of years of Tory drift.

Worse still for Brown, could Alan Johnston or John Hutton actually be serious leadership contenders? If Gordon Brown fails to win decisively in the opening leadership election ballots he may be damaged or even forced to stand aside and therefore mirror the fate of Michael Heseltine. If this happened another less experienced Labour minister could come through in the style of John Major. Whoever they are they will hope to be dealt a better political hand than the last Conservative Prime Minister.

If the leadership election turns nasty for Brown, even if he wins through he could be fatally weakened, with a divided party at the 'fag end' of a successful, but long Labour tenure in office, facing an election against a fresh faced young media friendly, centrist politician in the form of David Cameron.

Holding New Labour's political and electoral coalition together whilst at the same time trying to assert his independence could prove a bridge too far for Mr Brown.

# PQ from Westminster

## Preserving Marriage

At the end of July, the Family Division of the High Court ruled against a bid by a lesbian couple to have their same-sex marriage, contracted legally in Canada, ratified in the UK.

Repeating a well-known tactic of determined single-interest groups, Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson from Yorkshire attempted to change UK law by persuading the High Court that a ruling obtained under a foreign jurisdiction should be confirmed in this country. Many observers had predicted that the granting of legal same-sex civil partnerships only last year would merely represent a staging post for attempts to introduce full-blown same-sex 'marriage'. They forecast that campaigners would soon begin to express dissatisfaction with the law they had campaigned so hard to attain. But few expected that it would happen as soon as the Civil Partnership Act had become law.

In the event, the High Court, agreeing with the Government, ruled that marriage was by "longstanding definition and acceptance" a formal relationship between a man and a woman primarily designed for producing and rearing children.

Sir Mark Potter, President of the Court, added that "to accord a same-sex relationship the title and status of marriage would be to fly in the face of the European Convention on Human Rights as well as fail to recognise physical reality". He affirmed that rights to marriage specified in the Convention clearly refer to marriage as an opposite-sex institution. Sir Mark continued "It is apparent that the majority of people, or at least of governments, not only in England but Europe-wide, regard marriage as an age-old institution, valued and valuable, respectable and respected, as a means not only of encouraging monogamy but also the procreation of children and their development and nurture in a family unit, in which both maternal and paternal influences are available."

Despite same-sex marriage having been legalised in Canada, along with Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain, Sir Mark made it clear that Kitzinger and Wilkinson "faced an insurmountable hurdle" in attempting to have their same-sex union recognised under English law. Their 'marriage' was automatically deemed to be a civil partnership in the UK. This provided most of the rights of marriage to gay partners.

The couple expressed deep disappointment with the judgement, describing the new civil partnership law as "insulting and discriminatory". Campaigners committed themselves to carry on the battle.

Effectively the High Court confirmed that i) the majority of people across Europe consider marriage to be an institution whose purpose is to encourage monogamy and the procreation of children; ii) by refusing to grant same-sex partners the actual title and status of marriage, the Government declined to alter the almost universal recognition of marriage, whilst not in any way failing to recognise the rights of same-sex couples; iii) the European Convention on Human Rights has yet to recognise a childless, same-sex relationship as constituting family life; iv) the institution of marriage is afforded a particular status within the convention.

Progressive attempts to modernise the meaning of marriage towards a reductionist definition based on sexual relationship and mutual dependency whilst relegating the procreation and nurture of children to contingent status, have been dealt a significant blow. This is good news for those committed to a traditional understanding of marriage. But this case stands as a sharp warning. For the sake of the common good, it is now the task of Christians and others in society to reclaim marriage from its increasingly popular but flawed perception as an entitlement rather than an obligation with responsibilities.

## Opting Out of School Assembly

In July, the Committee stage of the Education and Inspections Bill in the House of Lords was marked by extensive debate about school assemblies and collective worship.

Under existing education legislation, all pupils in maintained schools are normally required to participate in a daily act of worship, which is usually of a broadly Christian character, though in practice this requirement may often fail to be complied with. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from such assemblies so that they need not be subjected to the teachings of another religion, or indeed any religion, if they do not wish it.

July's debate was prompted by Lords supportive of the British Humanist Association's campaign for 'inclusive' assemblies. Who would not support school celebrating as a community? However, the current buzz word 'inclusive' can mean two very different things in this context. On the one hand, it can aspire to a culture where people of all faiths (including humanist faith) are able to celebrate together. On the other hand, it can amount to celebrating some distillation of so-called 'shared human values' claimed to be common to all human beings. Unfortunately, such 'shared values' can often exclude, as the experience of Headteachers who seek to persuade parents to subscribe to the 'shared' values of the school only too frequently confirms.

Of course, one might wonder which view of 'inclusive' assemblies the British Humanist Association advocates. One of its vice-presidents, Professor Richard Dawkins, is well-known for his view that religious faith is a form of 'non-thinking', even a 'dangerous virus'. Whilst welcoming the concept of inclusive assemblies, the fear is that the model of inclusion put forward as the basis of any amendment to current

legislation would propagate a view of religion that results merely in being distinctive of the humanist faith.

In the event, the Government Minister, Lord Adonis, accepted an amendment to the Bill which would allow pupils who are older than compulsory school age (16+) to choose themselves to withdraw from daily acts of collective worship. The Government is currently consulting with faith groups on implementation.

Of course, since parents can already withdraw their children (evidence suggests very few do so in practice), allowing 6th formers to make their own decisions may not seem too drastic. But it is nevertheless vital to ensure that the legal requirement for schools to provide a daily act of collective worship is implemented, based on the widely held understanding of its educational importance and its role in pupils' spiritual and moral development. The obvious risk lies in a slippery slope knock-on effect for the rest of the school. If Parliament amends the law to allow 6th formers to withdraw themselves from collective worship it should simultaneously be made clear in guidance to schools that daily collective worship is part of normal practice for 6th forms too and must be offered by the school to all. Casual withdrawal must not be allowed to become the norm, therefore official permission from the Headteacher should continue to be sought, as at present, by means of formal letter. The Headteacher should remain free to seek a suitable explanation for the request, and alternative educational or community activities must concurrently replace the act of worship from which participation has been withdrawn.

It goes without saying that any right of withdrawal from collective worship must not be extended to the study of Religious Education.

# PQ from Westminster

## Extending School

It was around five years ago that David Milliband, then Minister for schools standards, addressed a group of teachers about a vision for the role of the school in the local community. He referred to how, in the past, the church had occupied a position at the heart of the community. It was to the church that the community turned for guidance in areas of ethics, for education and health care and for social services. However in recent years he felt that the church had retreated from that position and that now there was a vacuum. It was his view that the school was ideally placed to fill that vacuum.

That view has grown into policy. In June 2005 the Department For Education and Skills published their prospectus for extended schools.

This was basically a blueprint to transform the role of the school in its community through an extension of its existing hours and curriculum. The extended school would be at the heart of all that was happening locally and the developing relationship with local groups would benefit children in a variety of ways including the raising of standards.

What then constitutes an extended school? Firstly it is open longer. Activities can start early (it is suggested schools are open from 8.00 a.m.), finish later (it is suggested that a 6.00 p.m. finish is the aim, but opening later for community access is also encouraged), and run over 48 weeks of the year.

Secondly an extended school is able to meet the demands of what is known as the 'core offer of services'. By using the phrase the 'core offer', the Government leaves open the opportunity for schools to innovate. The 'core offer' has five distinct strands:

- **Wrap around child care.**

The Government is keen to allow parents access to work. It is felt that in order for them to make the most of any opportunities for jobs child care needs to be available 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. This doesn't mean every school needs to provide a nursery or child minders. It does mean that every school should be able to signpost provision if asked. It may be that some schools feel that nursery provision on site is a good thing, particularly primary schools who can then set about establishing children ready for the first years of school. It may mean that more schools establish breakfast and tea time clubs for their own students. It may mean schools enter into partnerships with other service providers. Whatever it looks like a school will not be considered to be extended without this provision.

- **Swift and easy referral**

The Government wants parents to be able to have easy access to social services, educational advisors, health care professionals. Initially it was thought that this might mean offices on site for the various parties involved. Now it is more likely that surgeries will be held regularly and signposted to parents.

- **Parental support**

The Government recognises that often parents need help. A school can offer help in a variety of ways. Training in areas such as sex and drugs

education is seen as one means of support. Parental support workers available and more accessible than teaching staff can be appointed. These can be free to visit families in their homes or meet with parents in the playground. Practical advice on how to help in homework are all considered part of parental support.

- **Full programme of study support**

Students should be given access to a wide variety of activities after school that will enable them to grow in self confidence, in trust, in the ability to cooperate with others, in respect for others. The activities will also need to contribute to raising standards.

- **Full community access**

Similarly, for adults in the community, schools should be able to offer a wide range of activities in areas such as sport, the arts and IT that can help develop personal character.

Just looking at the vision it is clear that this is almost impossible for a school to achieve on its own. Staff are already hard pressed with delivering the curriculum. In fact this is recognised by the Government in its prospectus. Before any start is made on creating a programme there are some preliminary steps that need to be taken. Firstly, there needs to be an assessment of existing provision from local groups. Secondly, there needs to

be a realistic evaluation of the community's needs. Thirdly, there needs to be an analysis of what the schools can do to meet those needs. Fourthly, working partnerships need to be created that will ensure delivery of an agreed programme.

The faith groups of this country are seen as key players in any consultation. They are also seen as key potential partners. Churches, working with organisations such as Youth For Christ or Scripture Union are in a unique position to offer schools support in their service. Whether it is through the running of a breakfast club, the provision of mums and toddler groups, parental training courses or after-school programmes for young people and adults alike, the potential is enormous.

The timetable for change is tight. Half of all secondary and one third of primary schools should be extended by the end of July 2007, the rest by the end of 2010. In order to meet targets, schools will need to turn to groups, such as the church, with access to people who can help. The challenge is will the church respond? Is it ready to occupy a place at the heart of the school, which now lies at the heart of its community? To meet the challenge might mean change. It might mean a change in how we do mission, or youth work or even worship. It is not a challenge to be taken lightly nor is it one we can afford to ignore.

Nigel Roberts  
Youth for Christ

In June 2005 the Department For Education and Skills published their prospectus for extended schools. This was basically a blueprint to transform the role of the school in its community through an extension of its existing hours and curriculum.

# PQ from the Nations

## Northern Ireland November Draws Nearer

Traditionally the summer is a predictable time in Northern Ireland. Schools are out from the beginning of July and so life takes on a slower pace as people take time to enjoy the holiday season. Others hold their breath until the marching season, generally accompanied by the odd riot, passes off for another year.

The past couple of months have been quite different. For a start, despite visible tension there was no significant civil unrest during the parades this summer. The people of Northern Ireland have had other issues with which to occupy themselves as the implications for next year's rates rises hit the doorsteps. The machinery of Government has been busy with consultations not only on rates, but also on adoption and the 'Getting Equal' proposals around outlawing discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services.

Despite the fact that everyone in Government (perhaps apart from the direct rule Ministers themselves) knows that Northern Ireland shuts down for a good proportion of the summer it has ploughed ahead in seeking the public's views on a range of issues which could have a significant impact on how people go about their daily lives. There is, it appears, on the part of direct rule Ministers, a basic misunderstanding about what makes people in Northern Ireland tick. For those who have withstood more than 30 years of violence, being bullied into submission is not something to which they will take kindly.

Meanwhile civil servants continue to weave their way between

direct rule Ministers pushing for action on a range of policies on the one hand and local political parties finding it difficult to find consensus on the other. Even if it might be idyllic, it is frustrating to think that had the Assembly been up and running some of the proposals within recent consultations (for example, allowing same-

sex couples to adopt, or suggestions that churches should be required to hire out their premises to groups which would not fit their ethos) would have faced stiffer opposition and perhaps would not have made the light of day.

However, a functioning Assembly on 25 November at any price is not the solution to Northern Ireland's myriad of problems. Some would say that it is perhaps too conspiratorial to suggest that Peter Hain and his colleagues are pushing through reforms and proposals to pressurise local parties to come to some sort of agreement ahead of 24 November – the date when the lights will officially go out at Stormont. Whatever Peter Hain and his colleagues try to do to force a deal they must realise that the end does not, certainly in this case, justify the means.

Without integrity in the process from all sides any deal that is forged will be without foundation and will fall at the first hurdle.

More intensive talks have been organised for mid-October, this time in Scotland. A change of scenery might be just the catalyst that is required for a breakthrough. But while you might be able to take the politicians out of Northern Ireland, it is probably nigh on impossible to take Northern Ireland out of the politicians!

**For those who have withstood more than 30 years of violence, being bullied into submission is not something to which they will take kindly.**

## Scotland

We hope to resume articles from Scotland in next month's edition of PQ.

# PQ from the Nations & beyond

## Wales Equality for Christians

Freedom of speech and religious freedom in general promise to be issues that remain in the spotlight over the next few months in Wales.

With summer almost over and the new political season not yet upon us, Stephen Green, National Director for Christian Voice, was arrested for distributing leaflets at Cardiff's Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras festival. Recipients of the leaflet – 'Same-sex love – , same-sex sex' – objected to its content and complained to the police, who duly arrested Mr Green.

The leaflet emphasised God's intention for heterosexual marriage and it was the contents of the leaflet that led to the arrest of Mr. Green (who acted in a peaceful manner according to police). He was charged under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 which outlaws the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour.

When the case was brought before Cardiff's Magistrate's Court, interestingly the prosecutor asked for a pre-trial review – standard procedure when other aspects of a case needed to be taken into consideration – and highlighted the human rights issues involved.

While the tabloids tended to sensationalise the case, referring to Green as 'the anti-gay Christian lobbyist', the broadsheets were more even-handed, with many focusing on the wider issue of attack on freedom of speech.

Meanwhile, the outworking of the Equality Act (featured previously in this magazine) should be interesting. The inclusion of religious

belief, to accompany sexual orientation, gender, age, race and disability, as an equality strand, will give Christians opportunities for engagement that they have been denied in recent years.

While many believe that the Government had other 'minority' faith communities such as the Muslims and Hindus in mind when drafting the Equality Act, evangelicals could be unexpected beneficiaries.

Research is beginning to show evidence of prejudice against evangelicals in societies that are in a process of secularisation. Now however, with religious belief as an equality strand, there should be more of a level playing field as committees and organisations are increasingly required to demonstrate a willingness to listen to Christians.

While the Equal Opportunities Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, according to its clerk, has never covered a faith-related issue, there has now been an invitation to table a topic for a future agenda and to inform its members of data and papers that will help give an understanding of the evangelical constituency in Wales.

Similarly, in a recent conference on European funding in Wales, organisers expressed a desire to include religious groups that felt they had been disadvantaged in funding applications.

In the Old Testament Zechariah stated "who has despised the day of small things?" While there are many potential pitfalls ahead, let us hope for greater inclusion for the church in public life in the days ahead.

## Religious Liberty Algeria's New Law

On 28th February 2006 the Algeria government passed a new law which was signed by the president in March and is due to come into effect in September. Seemingly under pressure from other Muslim states and from their own Islamic extremists, the government appears to be trying to restrict the freedom of all those adhering to non-Muslim faiths.

Algeria is a country of more than 33 million people, 99% of whom are Muslims. Its sad history of civil war is well known, with a bloody war of independence from France (1954-62) and more recently violence between the government and Islamic extremists. However, despite these difficulties Algeria has had a proud tradition of tolerance, which was highlighted in 2005 by a US State Department report. There has been astonishing growth in the church over the last 20 years to the point where the Algerian government estimates that there are now some 43,000 followers of Christ in the country – mainly from a Muslim background. Until now these believers have had freedom to meet together, to form associations and to practice their faith openly. The new law could change all that.

Algeria is a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition its own constitution guarantees that its "citizens are equal before the law with no discrimination on the basis of birth, race, gender, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance" (Article 29) and have all "the liberties of expression, association and gathering" (Article 41). Indeed Article 4 of the new law reaffirms this position stating that "it is forbidden to use religious affiliation as the basis for discrimination towards any person or group

of persons."

However, the new law evidently contradicts these undertakings. It is clearly discriminatory and spells out in its preamble that "the present ruling has as its objective to fix the conditions and rules of exercise of religious worship other than Muslim". Articles 6-8 require all meetings open to the public, to have prior permission and to be in an approved place. Article 9 requires all religious organisations to be authorised by a new national commission of religious worship. Article 10 threatens a fine or imprisonment for any who resist the new law. Article 11 makes it illegal to try and persuade a Muslim to follow another faith and also outlaws the use of any printed religious material. Article 12 makes it illegal to take financial collections, Article 13 forces leaders to seek permission before leading acts of worship and Article 14 deals with the expulsion of foreigners. Finally Article 15 gives the authorities the right to dissolve and levy heavy fines on any unauthorised religious associations.

It is crucial at this time that the Algerian government appreciates that this law is unacceptable to the international community and takes action for the law not to be put into effect. Recently the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, of US State Department was able to bring up the matter with an Algerian delegation. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office has also expressed an interest.

The Christians in Algeria have asked us to both pray for them and to make representations to those with influence. More information can be found at <http://www.righttojustice.org/algeria/> where you can also download sample letters to your MP and the Algerian Embassy.

# Prayer, action and breaking news...

## Prayer points: Jim Dobbin MP



*Jim Dobbin,  
Labour/Co-Operative MP for  
Heywood and  
Middleton*

**J**im Dobbin is the Labour/Co-Operative Party MP for Heywood & Middleton. He was first elected to Parliament in 1997 and is a member of the European Scrutiny Committee. He is Chair of the All Party Pro-Life Group, a cross-party group of MPs who campaign on pro-life issues within Parliament and work to uphold the sanctity of life from birth to natural death. He is married to Patricia and has four children and five grandchildren. He asks PQ readers to pray:

- for the work of CARE, Life and

other organisations that provide support to women in crisis pregnancy situations

- for all those involved with caring for the dying, that God would sustain them as they seek to ensure everyone has a dignified, peaceful and natural death
- that society would recognise the intrinsic value of every human life and seek to uphold the God-given dignity of every person
- for Christians in the medical profession, that God would

grant them His peace and wisdom in every difficult decision they are faced with

- for all parents and carers of disabled people, that God would strengthen and uphold them as they devote their lives to caring for the most vulnerable of our society
- for all Christians in Parliament, that they would see their work as a God-given calling and have the wisdom and courage to bear witness to this on a daily basis

## The Gay Police Association Advertisement Supplement: Sponsors Lloyds TSB reply to criticism



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6 September, 2006

Dear Dr. Horrocks,

Thank you for your letter dated 31<sup>st</sup> August 2006. As we have previously advised you, we did not have any direct control regarding specific content of the supplement, including the choice of features or advertisements.

Our sponsorship of the supplement funded the front page branding; our own advertisement; and our editorial piece only. We are therefore disappointed to see that your newsletter states our sponsorship funded the GPA's advertisement, as this is incorrect and misleading. I am sure you will agree that you should therefore print a correction in your next newsletter to this effect.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Evans,  
Senior Manager, Group Equality & Diversity.

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