
THE BULLETIN

News and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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Homosexual Marriage and the Registration of Civil Partnerships in Churches

On 15 February 2011, Affinity, in conjunction with The Christian Institute, Christian Concern, Reform and The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, released the following public and press statement on homosexual marriage and the registration of civil partnerships in churches.

There has been speculation in the press about the Government's proposals for civil partnerships to be registered in places of worship. There has also been speculation, and indeed confusion, over the separate issue of scrapping the definition of marriage in order to allow two people of the same sex to hold a marriage certificate.

Government proposals to allow civil partnerships in churches implement changes made in the 2010 Equality Act. However, there has been no announcement from the Government that it has any plans to introduce full same-sex marriage.

The definition of marriage

The thousands of churches that our organisations represent hold firmly to the clear teaching of the Bible that marriage is the lifelong, exclusive union of one man and one woman. This is the definition that has long been recognised in English law and, indeed, by almost all cultures for all of human history.

Marriage was ordained by God for the good of all people and is a holy institution. It was also designed to represent something of the relationship between Christ and his church. There are two partners to a marriage because there are two sexes. Marriage is a complementary covenant involving the bringing together of the two sexes not only for the purposes of procreation but also to reflect more fully the image of God.

We are also concerned about the effect of declaring that the institution in which children are raised does not require both a mother and a father.

For all these reasons we, and many others, would firmly oppose any efforts to eradicate the definition of marriage and impose a new definition on everyone in order to satisfy the demands of gay rights groups.

Civil partnerships in churches

We reiterate our long-held opposition to allowing civil partnerships to be registered in churches. It is a breach of undertakings made by Government ministers during debates on the Civil Partnership Bill. Parliament was persuaded to pass that Bill, in part, because it was made clear that civil partnership was a civil rather than a religious institution and would not take place in religious premises.

However, there are a small number of religious groups who are not content with being able to carry out civil partnership blessing ceremonies, as they currently do, but who want the legal registration itself to take place in their premises. In response to the demands of these groups, the Government is embarking

on a course of action that is bringing it into conflict with thousands of evangelical churches and the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

In any legislation, churches must be protected against the possibility, now and in the future, of any kind of legal action being brought against churches which conscientiously disagree with civil partnerships.

When it comes to equality legislation, permission often turns rapidly into coercion. In a country where faith-based adoption agencies have been forced to close or cut their religious ties by equality law, where Christian marriage registrars can be dismissed for their religious views on marriage and where Christian B & B owners are forced to pay compensation to same-sex couples, Christians will need a great deal of reassurance that the Government is not about to do something that will make their situation even worse.

Issued on behalf of: Affinity, The Christian Institute, Christian Concern, Reform and The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches

In the light of the circumstances which led to the issuing of the above Statement, and the public debate on these two subjects which will be taking place over the coming months, churches are urged to pray:

- (a) That gay marriage will never become a status recognised under British law;
- (b) That the apparent demand by some “churches” to be able to conduct civil partnership ceremonies on their premises will turn out to be much lower than is currently thought;
- (c) That no church will become either obliged to permit civil partnership ceremonies on their premises or liable to legal penalty for failing to do so.

Christian Concern Petition

The following are the terms of a petition launched by Christian Concern. Those wishing to sign it will find it on the Christian Concern web site (www.christianconcern.com)

“Recent equalities legislation and its interpretation in the courts has led to several individuals who hold to mainstream Christian teaching being barred from different areas of public life and employment, running counter to our country’s long heritage of freedom of conscience, and creating a serious obstacle to the Christian community’s full and active involvement in the Big Society initiative.

We call on the Prime Minister to act decisively to address this situation, securing the change necessary to ensure that the law provides a basis for widespread involvement in serving society whilst properly upholding the dignity of **every** individual, including those who seek to live with integrity to Christian conscience and teaching. “

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK

The Evangelical Alliance and Christian Research have recently published the results of a survey of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians.

The survey is based on 17,000 questionnaires returned from a range of evangelical festival venues, including Keswick and Spring Harvest, and from 35 EA churches. Only one of the 35 churches sampled appears to be in fellowship with Affinity. The survey gives an insight, therefore, into the beliefs and habits of our fellow evangelicals who do not belong to Affinity. The results of the survey give us an important insight into the challenges facing us as evangelical Christians and churches.

Here are some of the results of the survey:

Beliefs and Doctrines

- 93% strongly agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God.
- 54% strongly agree that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error.
- 91% strongly agree that Jesus is the only way to God.
- 26% agree that evolution and Christianity are incompatible.
- 37% strongly agree that hell is a place of conscious eternal punishment.

The Christian Life

- 96% attend a church service at least once a week.
- 82% read, or listen to, the Bible at least a few times a week.
- 96% pray at least a few times a week.
- 77% pray every day.
- 88% say their faith is the most important thing in their life.
- 83% agree that it is a key factor in their decision-making.

Moral and Ethical Issues

- 62% strongly agree that sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong.
 - 59% believe that homosexual actions are always wrong.
 - 42% believe that assisted suicide is “always wrong”.
 - 37% agree that “abortion can never be justified”.
- The result on abortion is probably unreliable because of the way in which the question was asked. Respondents were asked to reply to a statement that “abortion can never be justified.” Faced with this absolute statement, those who believe that an abortion is justified in the small number of cases where the mother’s life is at risk would have been unsure how to answer. In its report on the survey findings, the EA itself has rightly qualified the response to the abortion question, warning that: “Until more research is conducted to explore the circumstances where evangelicals find abortion justifiable, it is unwise to interpret the findings in any great detail.”

Church Life and Giving

- 71% agree that women should be eligible for all roles within the church on the same basis as men are.
- 60% practise tithing, half of these giving at least 10% of their household income to their church.

75% of the over-65 age group practise tithing.
53% in the 25-34 age group practise tithing.
Twice as many in the over-65 age group support missionaries compared with those in the 16-24 age group.

Evangelism and Witness

51 per cent of the over-65s talk to a non-Christian about their faith at least once a month.
77% in the 16-24 age group talk to a non-Christian about their faith at least once a month.
Overall the survey revealed that younger Christians are less likely than older believers to be guided by the Bible in their beliefs, views and behaviour and decision-making, to give financial support to Christian causes, and to pray and read the Bible every day. Younger Christians are, however, more active in witnessing to their faith.

Identity

An interesting subject covered by the survey was the extent to which people professing to be Christians regarded themselves as “evangelical” Christians.
87% of those in the over-65 group regard themselves as “evangelical” Christians.
67% of those aged 16-24 regarded themselves as “evangelical” Christians.
The EA recognises this as a significant issue, and acknowledges the uncertainty as to whether this means that younger people are identifying less with the word “evangelical” or whether evangelicalism itself is in decline.

While this survey did not include many people from Affinity churches it is likely that at least some of the issues identified also affect, to some extent, people in our churches.

Good Bible teaching and effective discipleship training are always a priority. The spirit of the age is insidious and inevitably affects the way Christians think and behave.

Older Christians have received a lifetime of Bible teaching which has established them in the things they believe and their devotional lives. They seem, however, to have little contact with the non-Christians among whom they live. Younger Christians seem to be more in touch with their non-Christian contemporaries, but are less clear on what they believe and how they live their Christian lives. Their contact with non-Christians is important for evangelism but carries with it the danger of imbibing non-Christians beliefs and behaviour.

We face a challenge on two fronts. We need to train and encourage Christians to understand and to be committed to the truths of the faith and to live authentic Christian lives which are compatible with those truths. At the same time, we need to equip Christians to be effective witnesses to the people around them who need to know God and Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

The survey report makes fascinating and important reading, and reflects the professional competence both of the EA and of Christian Research. You can find the full report at <http://www.eauk.org/articles/faith-survey-launch.cfm>

Peter Milsom

But some are more equal than others

An award of damages against Christian hotel owners in Cornwall has caused increasing and widespread concern that discrimination laws in Britain may have gone too far.

Peter and Hazelmary Bull, owners of Chymorvah House at Morazion, which is the couple's home as well as their hotel, were ordered by Bristol County Court on 18 January to pay £3,600 to a same-sex couple, Steven Preddy and Martyn Hall, whom the Bulls had refused to allow to occupy a double room in the hotel.

Judge Andrew Rutherford found this refusal to be in breach of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.

Ever since they were first drafted, evangelical Christians have been concerned about these Regulations, for three main reasons:

- They drive a wedge between the intellectual belief element of faith on the one hand, and conduct consistent with that belief on the other. For evangelical Christians, the two are indivisible, and it is therefore impossible for them to comply with the law without either compromising their faith, or being penalised. The Regulations have divided these two elements of religious adherence, in spite of the fact that the European Convention on Human Rights, in Article 9 (see below), clearly links them together.
- The provisions of the law are inequitable and inconsistent, since they promote the rights of one minority – same-sex couples – and diminish the rights of another minority – people who want to live by legitimate Christian principle. In the zeal for inclusion, they legitimise exclusion; and while trumpeting diversity, they make no provision for difference. This distinction is reflected in the financial implications for the two sides in the Bull case. The same-sex couple had their legal costs met from public funds by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, while Mr and Mrs Bull were dependent on the financial support of The Christian Institute and Christian friends.
- The legislation is monstrously disproportionate, in that the maximum gain it can achieve for Steven Preddy and Martyn Hall, aside from the damages they have been awarded, is to enable them to book double rooms in 100% of the hotels in the country, instead of only 99%. On the other hand, the detriment it can inflict on the Bulls is to put their entire business at risk, in addition to the cost of the £3,600 damages award.

Now, in response to the publicity surrounding the Bulls' case, it isn't only evangelical Christians who are taking issue with this oppressive law.

In a leading article on 19 January, the *Daily Mail* asked: "Why is it (society) so intolerant of people like the Bulls? Is there no place for a good-natured couple, approaching old age, to live by the orthodox beliefs of the religion to which Britain owes its identity?"

On the same day, *The Daily Telegraph* stated in a leading article: "The right to hold religious beliefs, and to act in keeping with one's faith, is being set against the right not to be offended – and is losing. This is a dispiriting trend in a free society. The views of the Bulls will seem to many to be old-

fashioned, even distasteful – but they have every right to hold them. A pervasive climate of political correctness, however, is driving such beliefs to the margins; the law is out of kilter. It no longer protects the freedom of the believer in the way that it defends the interests of those who consider themselves discriminated against. As we have argued before, this is an unhealthy imbalance that needs to be redressed – if not by the courts then by Parliament.”

Two liberal-minded panellists on Radio 4’s social commentary programme, *The Moral Maze*, broadcast on 26 January, also expressed their doubts about the rightness of the present law.

One of them, former Cabinet Minister Michael Portillo, said of present-day society: “I do think our values have been changing with dizzying speed. I think some of these changes have been driven by elites who have used the law in order to try to shape public opinion. There should be tolerance for those whose values change more slowly.” The other, Claire Fox, director of the Institute of Ideas, who describes herself as a secular humanist, commented: “What’s at stake here is increasing tolerance towards religious conscience. This is more about freedom than religion and that is what I think is under threat.”

Mr Portillo’s comments were picking up a theme articulated by Judge Rutherford when giving judgement. Commenting on the change which had taken place in social attitudes in Britain over the past 50 years, the judge said: “It is not so very long ago that the beliefs of the defendants would have been those accepted as normal by society at large. Now it is the other way around.”

However, Mr Portillo’s idea that it is simply a matter of change occurring at a different pace among different groups of people is wide of the mark. For those who believe that the sinfulness of homosexuality is a fixed moral principle unequivocally established in the Bible, the reality is not that a change in attitude will occur more slowly, but that it won’t occur at all. On this issue, Bible-believing Christians in 2011 believe exactly what they did in 1955, and if the world continues for another thousand years, that view, for those who base their moral world-view on the Bible, will not have altered one whit.

Other well-known media voices have been raised in the debate. *Sunday Times* columnist Rod Liddle, not renowned as a champion of Christianity, in a mocking analysis of the Bull case in the edition of 23 January, correctly summarised the existing law when he wrote that it allowed Christians to “think what they like but (did not allow them to) abide by their consciences.” He also observed: “When minority rights are weighed and measured these days it is, incredibly enough, the Christians who tend to come off worst.”

Melanie Phillips wrote in the *Daily Mail* on 24 January: “Penalising religious people for speaking and acting in accordance with their beliefs is neither liberal nor tolerant. It is behaviour more commonly associated with totalitarian dictatorships.”

When Judge Rutherford announced his judgement, he gave Peter and Hazelmary Bull immediate leave to appeal, and, with the support of The Christian Institute, they have now indicated their intention to do so. The date of the appeal hearing has not yet been fixed. Even though the present law itself is palpably unjust and wrong, there is still plenty to appeal about in connection with how the courts should interpret it. As Judge Rutherford himself said in his judgement: “There is little or no direct authority on the issues I have had to decide.”

Rod Badams

EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 9

- 1 Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
- 2 Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Statistically diminished: the gay community is smaller than we thought

An official report has revealed that there are far fewer homosexuals in Britain than the government has been assuming for years.

The report, prepared by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), shows that just 1% of the population is homosexual, and 0.5% bi-sexual. This contrasts with the 5% assumption included in the consultation document on the proposed Civil Partnership Act, published in June 2003 – an assumption which at the time drove the government's patronage of "homosexual rights" and the equality and diversity agenda.

Moreover, in December 2005, the month in which the Civil Partnership Act took effect, the Department of Trade and Industry published the results of an actuarial calculation, based on a number of earlier studies, showing the homosexual proportion of the national population as 6%. This high figure was useful to the government in order to justify the introduction of a new legal status as significant as civil partnership. Based on a national population of 60 million, 6% would represent a homosexual population of 3.6 million, whereas 1% limits the figure to a mere 600,000.

The latest figures call into serious question the nature of sexual orientation, and the recognition and promotion by the government of the gay or lesbian lifestyle as a valid diversity feature on a par with race, age and disability.

The ONS report, *Measuring Sexual Identity: An Evaluation Report*, published in September 2010, is based on data collected in the period April 2009 to March 2010. It is hugely authoritative, in that it involved personal or telephone interviews with 238,206 people. The response represented 96.8% of the sample. Aside from the 1.5% who were gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, the survey revealed that 94.8% were heterosexual, and 0.5% were in a category described as "other."

London has in recent years always been thought to have a higher-than-average gay and lesbian population. The Gay London guide, for instance, without substantiating the claim with any figures, describes London as “home to Europe’s largest gay and lesbian population.”

However, the regional breakdown of the figures in the recent survey shows that the number of gays, lesbians and bi-sexuals in London totals only 2.2%, against the national figure of 1.5%.

According to these latest statistics, two-thirds of the bi-sexuals are women, and there are twice as many gays as lesbians.

This new report did not include in its remit the exclusiveness of the sexual experience of its respondents. An earlier 1994 survey, sponsored by the Wellcome Trust, showed that of the men, 90.1% had only ever had sexual experience with women, and of the women, 92.7% had only had sexual experience with men. In contrast, of the men who had at some time in their life had a male sexual partner, 90.3% had also had a female sexual partner. The percentage for women was even higher, 95.8% of those who had had a female sexual partner having also had a male partner.

These statistics convincingly demonstrated a striking difference between the two sexualities. Heterosexual disposition was generally exclusive, whereas the same-sex drive seems to be less permanent and to have very little exclusiveness – characteristics which strongly support the contention that a homosexual tendency is driven by social and environmental, rather than genetic, factors.

Just as the 1994 report, on the basis of this lack of exclusiveness, undermined the notion that homosexuality should be recognised as a normal or natural sexuality, so the small total number of homosexuals revealed by the 2010 survey damages the credibility of homosexuality as a formal “orientation” deserving of a status equivalent to marriage.

The 1994 report was largely ignored by the powers that be, and it is more than likely that the recent ONS data will suffer the same fate.

Rod Badams

What the 2011 Census is about to reveal!

Fears that the 2011 national census may show a steep decline in the proportion of the British population claiming to be “Christian” are likely to prove unfounded, in spite of an advertising campaign by the British Humanist Association.

Compared with the findings of the 2001 census, there will be a modest drop in the numbers professing to be “Christian,” but two-thirds of the population will still be stating Christianity as their religion, compared with the 71.8% for whom this was the case in 2001.

What will be significant in the 2011 census figures when they become available will be an increased number of Muslims – up from 2.8% in 2001 to perhaps 4.2% - and a rise in the number claiming to have no religion – up from 15.1% to perhaps 20.4%.

How do we know all this, before the census, due on 27 March, has even taken place?

The answer is found in a briefing paper just published (Spring 2011) by the Equality and Human Rights Commission entitled *Religion or Belief*. The author, Dave Perfect, is a member of the EHRC Research Team. In producing his findings, he has made use of a wide range of available statistical data, some of it as recent as 2009-2010. The figures which measure the population of Great Britain by religion are annual to 2008-2009, and I have extrapolated these for a further two years in order to arrive at estimates of the possible 2011 census figure.

To evangelical Christians, who represent a tiny percentage of the current UK population, the claim by millions of adults to be "Christian" seems anomalous. The anomaly is borne out by the fact that although two-thirds of adults in Britain claim to be "Christian," a 2010 survey shows that only 37% believe there is a God. Consequently, something like 30% of the population, which represents about 18 million people, are claiming to be "Christian" without even believing in God. Only 32% of those claiming to be "Christian" said that they actively practised their religion in any way.

Nonetheless, there is clearly something which prompts people to tick a box marked "Christian" when in the 2001 census they had the alternative of ticking a box marked "No religion" and even of not answering the question at all. Whether it is a desire to identify with the country's religious heritage, or with the faith of their grand-parents, we cannot know. But it must mean something, and Christian witness today needs to build on that.

There are several other matters of interest in Mr Perfect's briefing paper.

The percentage of those believing there is a God has declined in Britain from 51.7% in 1991 to 41.8% in 2008, a net loss of about six million "believers" in 17 years. Most of the current "believers" claim that they have always believed, but figures are also given for those who were not originally "believers" but have come to believe. These figures have remained more constant – 5.9% in 1991, 4.2% in 1998 and 5.1% in 2008. Conversely, 12.1% in 1991 stated they had lost the belief they once had, compared with 11.6% in 1998 and 15.2% in 2000.

Brighton and Hove is far and away the most secular place in the country, as many as 42% of its population claiming to have no religion. The next highest, Kingston upon Hull and Bath and North Somerset, only have 30% professing no religion. In contrast, 93% of the people of Slough have a religious affiliation. In all the local authority areas of the North-East and North-West of England, more than 80% claim a religious affiliation.

Internationally, there are huge variations in the belief patterns across Europe. France has most secularists, 40% of the population indicating that they "do not believe there is any sort of spirit, God or life force." In Britain this figure is 25% and in Italy only 6%. In the Czech Republic, only 16% believe there is a God, compared with 94% in Malta, 37% in Great Britain and an EU average of 51%.

The detailed breakdowns of the statistics derived from the 2011 census are not expected to be available until 2013.

Rod Badams

LIFE ISSUES

Abortion

Pro-life action in the USA

Since the Senate elections last November, the profiles of many State legislatures have become significantly more pro-life. For example, the number of anti-abortion State governors has risen from 21 to 29. This means there is now more muscle to pass pro-life laws within individual States.

Currently the pro-life focus is on three major pieces of prospective legislation. The first is to implement a ban on late-term abortions on the basis that the foetus can experience pain after 20 weeks' gestation. Nebraska passed the first such foetal pain abortion ban last April. Second, they want a legal requirement for an ultrasound scan of her unborn child to be shown to every pregnant woman prior to her abortion. Oklahoma enacted such a law last November. Third, the push is for a bar on the costs of abortions being paid for by health insurance coverage – lots of Americans object to their tax dollars being used to fund abortions.

Already in January 2011, two bills have been introduced into Congress that would restrict the federal funding of abortion – they are the Protect Life Act and the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act. One of the sponsors of the Protect Life Act is Joseph Pitts, Republican representative of Pennsylvania. He considers that “the momentum is on the pro-life side.” Pitts has good pro-life credentials and he may be a man to watch, and a name to recall.

Medical abortion and Misoprostol

On 13 January, the UK's largest independent provider of abortion, bpas, formerly known as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, launched a High Court challenge to reinterpret the 1967 Abortion Act. The case, contested by the Department of Health, started on 28 January 2011. In his reserved judgement on 14 February, Mr Justice Supperstone dismissed the bpas challenge. The full judgement may be read at <http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/EA84E844-C189-42BE-B848-52830A718886/0/bpasvsecretaryofstateforhealth.pdf>

The challenge centred on the so-called abortion pill, which is used to terminate a pregnancy of up to nine weeks. This is commonly known as an ‘early medical abortion,’ or an EMA, of which 69,000 were performed in the UK during 2009. It is a two-stage procedure. The active ingredient of the first pill is mifepristone, or RU-486, which was licensed in Britain in 1991. Mifepristone is an antiprogestin, which blocks the hormone progesterone, breaks down the lining of the womb, and makes any pregnancy unsustainable.

Mifepristone is the abortifacient, but another drug, misoprostol, a prostaglandin, is needed to cause the uterus to contract and expel the embryo or foetus. So an ‘early medical abortion’ requires two different drugs – 200 mg mifepristone orally, followed, 24 to 48 hours later, by 800 µg misoprostol vaginally or orally. In most cases, it is not until the misoprostol is administered that a woman will begin to experience abdominal cramping and bleeding, often with nausea and diarrhoea.

The legal issue at stake is that section 1(3) of the 1967 Abortion Act specifies that “any treatment for the termination of pregnancy must be carried out in a hospital... or in a place approved for the

purposes... by the Secretary of State.” The Department of Health interprets this to mean that all EMA drugs must be both prescribed and *administered* on licensed abortion premises. This means women must make separate trips to a clinic to obtain each drug, which must then be taken at those premises, before travelling home. The bpas wishes to change the law to permit the administration of the second drug, the misoprostol, at home.

On 22 January 2011, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists just happened to publish its latest draft guidelines, *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion*. It concludes: “Neither early medical abortion nor home administration of misoprostol suits all women. However, published data do not suggest any clinical reason why women should remain in hospital during their abortion, and demonstrate that it is safe for women to administer misoprostol at home.” It went on: “While taking misoprostol at home is not legal in Great Britain, the evidence would support its use were that to be possible at some time in the future.” This is what is known as timely lobbying.

If the bpas challenge had been successful, women would not have received the physical and emotional support and information they deserve. There would be no way of monitoring their safety. Incomplete or failed early medical abortions (which account for 2-3%) require surgery, and other problems associated with heavy bleeding are not uncommon. Women will not always be prepared for how they might feel, especially if abortion has been portrayed as an easy, two-step process. It can be a frightening time, particularly for younger women. Home should be a place of warmth and safety, not the place for being directly involved in abortion with potentially nasty complications, or the place for memories of a lonely medical ordeal. In addition, women will have to deal with the disposal of the dead embryo or foetus, which for many will be a highly traumatic experience with possible psychiatric consequences.

The main purpose of the 1967 Act was to ensure that legal abortion was as safe as possible – no more unhygienic backstreet abortions, botched jobs, and so on. The long-term aim of bpas is to make abortion more and more accessible. Bpas is a commercial business, which makes money out of abortion. It is difficult not to view its wish to spare women the inconvenience of a second bus ride with anything other than cynicism. Moreover, the bpas is trying to shift the focus from the major issue – whether a woman should, or should not, have an abortion – to a minor argument about where and how she should have it. We already know that bpas does not care about unborn children. Does it really care about women?

Abortion and adverse mental health

There is a growing corpus of studies that demonstrate that women are more likely to suffer a variety of mental health problems subsequent to abortion compared with women who go to term.

In 2009, one more such study entitled, *Induced abortion and anxiety, mood, and substance abuse disorders: Isolating the effects of abortion in the national comorbidity survey*, was published in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* by Priscilla Coleman, of Bowling Green State University, and her colleagues. It showed that women having abortions were at greater risk from anxiety (such as panic disorder, panic attacks and agoraphobia) as well as mood (bipolar disorder, mania and major depression) and substance abuse (alcohol and drug abuse and dependence). Abortion was implicated in between 4.3% and 16.6% of the incidence of these disorders.

Such evidence for the existence of any contra-indications to abortion, or so-called post-abortion syndrome, is anathema to supporters of abortion. Two of them, Julia Steinberg, of the University of California, and Lawrence Finer, of the Guttmacher Institute, have recently set out to disprove Coleman’s findings. The January 2011 issue of *Social Science and Medicine* includes their article,

Examining the association of abortion history and current mental health: A reanalysis of the National Comorbidity Survey using a common-risk-factors Model.

Steinberg and Finer have apparently re-analysed Coleman's data and, surprise, surprise, they could find no conclusive evidence for a link between abortion and adverse mental health. But according to Coleman, the pro-abortion researchers used a different set of criteria. She explained: "The critical distinction is in how the psychological disorders were defined. Our analyses reflected 12-month prevalence and their analyses reflected only the 30-day prevalence."

Over the last five years there have been at least 30 studies published by researchers and scientists from the UK, USA, Norway, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, supporting the existence of an abortion-mental health link. Would Steinberg and Finer maintain that all these reports are also flawed? Is it true that the abortion industry (which Steinberg and Finer ardently support) wishes to hide the realities of abortion from women?

Do not ignore, either, the anecdotal evidence. Sit down and have a chat with any pro-life counsellor and hear what they have to say about the devastation, mental and otherwise, that abortion can wreak. Abortion does hurt women (and children).

Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Single-embryo transfer

It has long been recognised that the biggest health hazard of IVF, for both mothers and their children, is the incidence of multiple pregnancies. Multiple pregnancies are associated with low birth weights, stillbirths, disabilities and neonatal deaths. In addition, their mothers are more likely to miscarry, have high blood pressure and haemorrhage. Such events inevitably increase costs to the health service. Currently, 22.8% of all IVF babies are either twins or triplets. The offending practice seemed so logical – to increase the chances of a pregnancy, doctors would transfer several embryos to the woman. However, any resulting multiple pregnancies were always problematic, unless doctors resorted to the unspeakable procedure of 'selective reduction.'

Yet the answer was always within the ambit of the IVF practitioners. Perhaps they were too enamoured with pregnancy success rates rather than their patients' health. But in recent years the clinical evidence has been accumulating – less means more. The facts are these: while women who chose to receive a double-embryo transfer are more likely to become pregnant, those who elect for a single-embryo transfer (known as an eSET) improve their chances of delivering a healthy baby. The most recent international study, reported in the 21 December 2010 edition of the *British Medical Journal*, has shown that the chances of a full-term, single birth following single-embryo transfer is almost five times higher than those following the transfer of two embryos. The researchers concluded that the transfer of single embryos should become the 'default position' in IVF.

Since January 2009, the HFEA has adopted a policy to reduce the UK's IVF multiple birth rate to just 10%, in stages, over several years. Each IVF clinic has been told to devise its own 'multiple birth minimisation strategy.' In January 2009, the limit was set at 24%. The January 2010 level was 20%. In December 2010, the next year's limit, to be achieved by March 2012, was set at 15%. IVF clinics "that are statistically above this target will, as a first step, be asked to attend a management review meeting with HFEA staff to discuss recommended actions." Yes, and then what?

Does not this smell of an authoritarian control of human breeding? Of course we sympathise with infertile couples. But IVF looks more and more ugly. Since the entire process is unnatural, it unavoidably becomes subject to more and more management strictures. Let no-one be lulled into thinking that single embryo transfer (eSET) means the end of the bioethical nightmare of all those 'spare' embryos. It does not. It is still standard procedure for every IVF clinic to superovulate women, harvest many ova, fertilise them, create numerous human embryos, and then select just a few to transfer to a woman – the leftovers will as a rule be deliberately destroyed. Nothing much about the bioethics of IVF changes.

Surrogacy, celebrity and money

Those with a long(ish) memory may remember that just about the only issue to which the Warnock Committee strongly objected was surrogacy. The Warnock Report (section 8.7) stated: "We are all agreed that surrogacy for convenience alone... is totally ethically unacceptable." Moreover, the Committee thought that if money changed hands, as in commercial surrogacy, then it must be wrong.

How times have changed. Commercial surrogacy is now becoming *de rigueur*, especially among much-admired celebrities. First there was Sarah Jessica Parker, then Elton John, then Nicole Kidman. In all three cases the surrogates were American and significant amounts of money changed hands. It has all been so admired by the media. Are we on the cusp of seeing culture follow art? Are entertainers now setting the surrogacy agenda?

Surrogacy in the UK is not illegal as long as there is no commercial gain. The 1985 Surrogacy Arrangements Act allows only 'reasonable expenses' to be paid, including, for example, clothes, travel expenses and loss of earnings, though these apparently now average £15k. Moreover, the child does not automatically belong to the commissioning parents. All this may now change as a result of a recent High Court ruling. In December 2010, Mr Justice Hedley allowed a British couple to keep a child even though they paid in excess of 'reasonable expenses' to the American surrogate. The door opens just a little wider.

In other parts of the world, such as India and the Ukraine, surrogacy is legal, and big business, with legally-binding contracts to be made before the birth. Is surrogacy exploiting vulnerable women? Is it any more than womb renting? Does it not dehumanise women? Certainly Nicole Kidman thinks so when she denigrated her surrogate mother as a 'gestational carrier.' Does not surrogacy commodify children as trade items, objects to buy and sell? Yes, yes, yes and yes.

Donating sperm and eggs: have your say

In the world of ARTs, there has always been a shortage of women's gametes – men have billions of sperm, women have only a few thousand ova. Men's gametes are readily available, women's are inaccessible. And these differences come to the fore when IVF is contemplated, and an egg donor is needed.

Currently, the compensation limit for women undergoing the complex (and often dangerous, because of the superovulation drug regime) process of egg donation is £250. Should gamete donors be paid more substantial sums, maybe even thousands of pounds? The HFEA wishes to test public opinion on this and some other related matters. On 17 January 2011, it launched a public consultation. See the details and the online questionnaire at <http://www.hfea.gov.uk/5605.htm>! Go on, give it a go, complete it! It will certainly make you think about the issues. The closing date is 8 April 2011.

Euthanasia

The good news about euthanasia

Attempts to legalise euthanasia in any of its euphemistic forms, be they assisted suicide, assisted dying, or physician-assisted suicide, are cropping up all round the world. The good news is that they are continually being defeated, often heavily. Here is a selection from the last 12 months.

In January 2010, an assisted suicide bill was defeated in the US State of New Hampshire's House of Representatives by a vote of 242 to 113. In April 2010, the Canadian parliament rejected, by 228 votes to 59, a bill that would have legalised euthanasia. In November 2010, a similar bill before the South Australia legislature was defeated by 12 votes to 9. In December 2010, the Scottish Parliament rejected Margo MacDonald's End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill by 85 votes to 16, with two abstentions.

In January 2011, the Israeli Knesset rejected by 48 to 16 votes a proposal to allow terminally-ill patients to self-administer lethal drugs. In late January 2011, the French Senate rejected proposals to legalise euthanasia. The margin was 170 votes to 142. Francois Fillon, the French prime minister, spoke out strongly against the proposals, saying: "They do not fit in with my views on respect for human life or the basic values of our society."

The bad news about euthanasia

Dignitas is in trouble (again). Foreigners have been coming to Switzerland in larger numbers to die. It is the only country that allows doctors to help foreigners die and more than 25% of the 380 assisted suicides during 2009 were those of non-Swiss nationals. Besides continuing to upset its neighbours in Zurich, Dignitas is, according to some people, giving Switzerland a bad name as a paradise for suicide tourists. The voters of Zurich are due to decide in May whether to tighten the law, or to ban assisted suicide outright.

And, just a hop and a skip across France, in Belgium, a dire collision has occurred between two contentious bioethical practices. Belgian doctors have produced protocols to harvest transplantable organs from patients who have chosen to die by euthanasia. Apparently, many of those who opt for euthanasia suffer from diseases that do not directly affect the health of their organs, making them prime candidates for organ donations. To harvest suitable organs, the patient must be hospitalised before death rather than at home, because the organs must be removed from the donor moments after death. It prompts that old philosophical question: may we not do evil so that good may come? (See Romans 3:8.)

The morning-after pill

The MAP is back in the news. You remember it as a so-called, but deceitfully misnamed, emergency 'contraception' pill, introduced into the UK in 2001, to be used only under medical supervision (to protect vulnerable people and to prevent abuse) and only in emergencies (because the health risks of multiple and long-term usage had never been assessed). Well, 10 years is a long time in sexual and reproductive health practice. The MAP's consumption is now widespread, frequent, typically 'on the house,' regularly unsupervised, and virtually unregulated.

The Cooperative Pharmacy poll

Recently, the Cooperative Pharmacy polled 1,800 UK women and found that 20% of them, aged between 18 and 35, had taken the MAP in the last year. Moreover, 2% had taken it at least three times in that 12-month period, a percentage equivalent to about a quarter of a million women nationwide. Nobody knows exactly how many MAPs are used each year – during 2009-10, the NHS spent more than £2 million on emergency contraception, prescribing almost 250,000 such pills, but apparently most women obtain the MAP from other outlets, without a prescription.

The MAP's distribution

The MAP continues to become more and more available. From April 2011, it will be free at all pharmacies in Wales – currently it is available for £25. In Australia, pharmacists have been accused of being too intrusive before handing over the MAP because they ask about the time lag since unprotected sexual intercourse, or about a woman's age – the very sort of questions a good medical professional should ask. The objection is that such inquisitions might deter some women from getting the MAP. On the Isle of Wight, since last November, girls as young as 13 (well below the age of consent) can obtain the MAP, plus a month's supply of the contraceptive pill from certain pharmacies – without parental knowledge, without needing a prescription, or without first seeing a doctor. In Ireland in January this year the Boots pharmacy chain started supplying the MAP directly to women.

The MAP's purpose

What is this all about? It is an ideological strategy. It began in 1999, when the Labour government started a nationwide drive to halve the number of teenage conceptions in England and Wales by 2010. The Teenage Pregnancy Unit has since spent about £260m, and failed miserably to reach its target. The MAP has been central to this strategy, which was based on the unswerving belief that distributing the MAP, as far, and as widely, and as freely, as possible would help solve the pregnancy problem, especially among teenage girls.

The MAP's failure

Well, bump! Enter a new study entitled, *The Impact of Emergency Birth Control on Teen Pregnancy and STIs*, published online during December 2010 in the *Journal of Health Economics* by Sourafel Girma and David Paton of Nottingham University. They examined all teenage pregnancies in England between 1998 and 2004 and compared those areas where teenagers were, or were not, offered the MAP. They found that giving teenagers the MAP, first, failed to reduce the number of under-age pregnancies, second, encouraged them to indulge in riskier sexual behaviour, and third, increased the rates of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) – by 12% among under-16-year-olds.

Professor Paton summarised the findings thus: "We find that offering the morning-after pill free of charge didn't have the intended effect of cutting teenage pregnancies but did have the unfortunate side effect of increasing sexually-transmitted infections. By focusing on sexually transmitted infections, it allows us to test whether there is an impact on sexual risk-taking, and that seems to be the implication."

It is the law of unintended consequences – supplying the MAP produces an effect opposite to that intended or expected. Now what? The last government's 10-year teenage pregnancy reduction plan has almost ended, and signally failed. What will the new coalition government propose? It has

already scrapped the amoral Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group (TPIAG). Will abstinence now get a look in?

Stem cell technology

Direct reprogramming

Can you believe this? We all thought that induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells were amazing – now they are beginning to look like old-school technology. The original Yamanaka method, first published in 2006, took two to four weeks to create iPS cells. Only a few of the adult cells were transformed, and it took another two to four weeks to induce them to become the desired cell type. In addition, because the method required the addition of several genes, the fear of generating cancerous cells was never far away. Such techniques have moved on – now the latest hot topic is direct reprogramming.

Stem cell researchers around the world are eagerly seeking better, faster, cheaper, more efficient protocols. For example, in November 2010, Canadian scientists, led by Mick Bhatia at McMaster University, reported a technique for the direct reprogramming of human skin cells into blood cells. The transformation dispenses with the need first to produce iPS cells, so the risk of tumour production is circumvented. The team created blood progenitor cells from which the other types of blood cells are derived. Human blood obtained from a patient's own skin cells is a fascinating prospect. The hope is to begin clinical trials in 2012.

At the end of January 2011, Professor Sheng Ding and his colleagues at the Scripps Research Institute in California, reported the conversion of adult skin cells directly into beating heart cells, bypassing the iPS cell stage. They began with the conventional iPS cell production method, but replaced all but one of the usually-added four genes with a cocktail of chemicals. They switched off the process early and quickly signalled the transformation stage to begin. They went from skin cells to heart cells in just 11 days. OK, it was only with mouse cells – human cells may react differently.

Of course, direct reprogramming faces serious safety and technical hurdles, but it does seem like solid progress on the road to bioethically unobjectionable stem cell therapies. Could it sound the death knell of embryonic stem cell technology?

Mending broken hearts

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) has just launched its 'Mending Broken Hearts' appeal to raise £50m. It wants to invest this money, over the next five years, in "stem cell research and developmental biology to see whether we can repair or replace damaged or dead heart tissue with new, healthy, functioning heart tissue."

This is another example of regenerative medicine using stem cells. It sounds exciting and laudable. Could you donate to it? Yes, of course you could, but first read the BHF's policy statement: "We fund research that uses stem cells from human or animal embryos, and adult tissues, because we believe that both approaches are important."

A distinct lack of evidence

A *Commission on Assisted Dying* was launched in London on 30 November 2010. This is not an official government Commission, but rather a private initiative of Lords Charlie Falconer and Joel Joffe, two politicians who have previously sponsored their own euthanasia bills at Westminster. It is funded, among others, by Sir Terry Pratchett, a well-known writer and proponent of euthanasia, and by Dignity in Dying, formerly known as the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

The 'Commission,' though presenting itself as an authoritative, rigorous and truth-seeking Committee, has its own agenda, which is to make assisted suicide appear decent and honourable. It is largely composed of people with a track record of commitment to pro-euthanasia ideology. Many good doctors and bioethicists have already refused to appear before it, or to make a submission to it, for fear of giving it credibility. The Commission is expected to publish its report in October 2011.

Dr John R Ling

Note: Along with many other organisations, Affinity has been invited to give evidence to Lord Falconer's Commission. It has taken the decision not to do so, in view of the Commission's lack of objectivity. Affinity has stated its reasons in a letter to Lord Falconer. Many other Christian organisations are known to have taken a similar stance.

If when it presents its report, the Commission claims to be authoritative or representative, or fails to mention the many interested parties which absented themselves from the process, the Affinity Social Issues Team will take steps to make the true situation clear to the government and to the public generally.

Church of England school admissions

Parents connected with Affinity churches will find it easier from September 2011 to gain admission for their children into Church of England Schools.

The Church of England Board of Education has agreed to recognise Affinity churches on the same basis as it already recognises churches linked with Churches Together and the Evangelical Alliance. This recognition will be included in the official guidance available to Church of England Schools.

Church of England Schools have always been free to make their own judgements about whether they accept Affinity parents as meeting the church adherence requirement, and in many cases Affinity parents have been accepted without difficulty. However, some schools have adhered strictly to the official guidance and have in the past given Affinity parents lower priority as a result of the “failure” to meet the official criteria.

This new provision will not guarantee applicants a place in their chosen school, as there are other legitimate factors which the schools have to take into account. Popular schools may also be over-subscribed. But at least it will mean that evangelical parents will no longer be penalised for belonging to the wrong kind of church.

What it will require to feed the world

A new government report warns that the world will need 40 per cent more food, 30 per cent more water and 50 per cent more energy by the middle of the century. In *The Future of Food and Farming*, Sir John Beddington, the government’s chief scientist, says that every means to improve food production should now be employed, including widespread use of new bio-technological techniques.

Other recent reports suggest that world food production may need to increase by 70-100 per cent by 2050 to meet the demands of a predicted population of 9 billion. Yet the same increase in population is likely to reduce the amount of arable land available, and cause harm to what remains, through pollution, greater scarcity of water, and other environmental damage.

Given that our current farming habits appear to be unsustainable, doubling food production doesn’t seem a realistic possibility without major changes.

Three years ago, former Royal Society Vice-President and Foreign Secretary Sir Brian Heap alerted the Jubilee Centre to this impending crisis, warning that the world must be willing to embrace the use of genetically-modified crops. He noted that the independent Nuffield Council on Bio-Ethics, which specialises in the analysis of complex bioethical issues, had concluded in the year 2000 that the large-scale introduction of genetically-modified crops was a moral imperative on the basis of the ethic “to each according to need.”

Technical fixes such as improved efficiency may hold part of the answer, but another side of the problem is plainly behavioural. Food in the West is just another form of consumer goods, and waste is an affordable luxury.

About a third of the food we buy is thrown away by the end user, quite apart from the waste that occurs earlier in the chain between the farm and the retailer. The total food discarded in the UK is

enough to satisfy half of Africa's import requirements. It's not efficiencies of production that are required, but efficiencies of consumption.

The answer isn't exactly handed to us on a plate – problems of distribution still exist, for one – but addressing the problem of waste is not bad as a starter. Ultimately, however, we must recognise that technological and behavioural change alone will not be an adequate response to the challenge before us. So what is?

The Jubilee Centre's book *Christianity, Climate Change, and Sustainable Living* (by Nick Spencer and Bob White) concludes: "The New Testament is infused with a sense of 'now and not yet,' the belief that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus but is not yet fully here – that Christ came to 'make all things new' but, as yet, all things are not made new... We are not called to conceive, design, build and maintain a better version of the old world but rather to participate in the new one that has been inaugurated on the cross..."

We should understand, not least from the vision of Isaiah 40–66 and the events recorded in the New Testament, that God has not given up on his creation but has chosen to recreate it from within; that he invites us to participate in that recreation of all things and promises that he will one day finish the job himself...

'All things' is not a biblical euphemism for 'the environment,' but really does mean *all things* – our personal lives, the cultures in which we live, the systems that structure our society: all require renewal."

Dr John Hayward

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