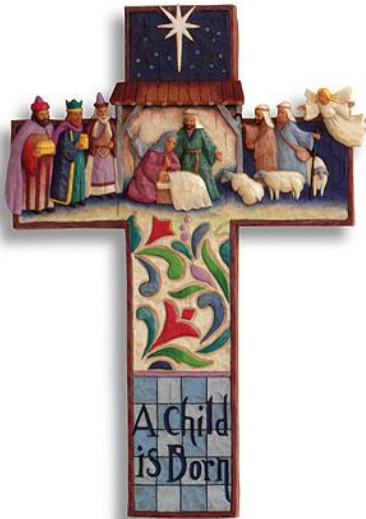


Faith & Policy Watch



December 2011

A great light and a great gift



The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light... For a son has been born for us, a son has been given to us, and dominion has been laid on his shoulders; and this is the name he has been given, 'wonder-counsellor, mighty-God, eternal-Father, prince-of-peace.' *Isaiah 9:1a; 5.*

This passage must have been enormously significant in raising morale and confidence in a nation that was torn and fragmented. It is an amazing prophecy because it speaks about the birth of a child who will come to help the Israelites in their time of greatest need and in their greatest weakness, thereby demonstrating God's power and authority. It seems strange that a child would be wise, a counsellor, almighty, but all would be made clear in the coming of the Saviour-King, 700 years later.

Nestled in the manger we see the Shepherd King, son of David and Son of God, who offers himself as a gift. Completely vulnerable and helpless before his chosen flock, he is very much as he will be at the moment when he gives himself up to be nailed to the cross. Even at the moment of his birth, the rough wood of the manger foreshadows the rough wood of the cross, and the bands of cloth in which Mary so carefully wraps her child foretell the linen bands used to wrap his body for burial. His birth at Bethlehem contains the seed of his glorious rebirth in the resurrection.

God's generosity comes with no strings attached, no bargains or commercial transactions. With divine patience, he waits for a response from us. May we receive the grace to see his goodness, and may we, full of adoration and praise, let go of our human wishes enough to love him with our whole hearts. And there are other gifts that God gives to us, to help us in our walk of faith: people that he sends us to be unwrapped and treated as precious. Some of these gifts are not wrapped in beautiful paper with exciting ribbons; some are so badly wrapped that if we only considered the outside we would miss the richness inside. Some are wrapped so tightly, others too loosely while others arrive quite damaged and broken. What we are called to do is look with God's eyes, to see the true worth and ponder what response such a gift requires.



God of light and gifts,
thank you for giving me your son.
In times of light and darkness
may I remember this most precious gift,
and cherish Christ with all my heart.
Amen.

For our new interactive advent calendar, please go to www.muenterprises.org/advent

Contents	
Christmas reflection.	P1
Bye Bye Childhood.	P2
Scottish consultation on Civil Partnerships.	P3
Family Justice Review.	P4
Welfare Reform Bill.	P4
Violence Against Women.	P4

Bye Buy Childhood

Advertising Standards Authority adjudications

The ASA has upheld a number of complaints in recent weeks about sexualised advertising. *We have included pictures to demonstrate the sort of imagery now considered unacceptable.*

Lynx: 114 people complained about posters for Lynx shower gel featuring a woman in a bikini under a shower. The complaints challenged whether the advert was a) offensive because it was sexually suggestive, glamourised casual sex, and objectified women; b) whether it was irresponsible because it was inappropriate for public display, where it could be seen by children; and c) whether it was irresponsible because it promoted promiscuity. The complaints were upheld on points a) and b) and the poster must not appear again in this form.



Lynx: Another 15 people complained about five advertgames for Lynx, which featured model/actress Lucy Pinder in her underwear carrying out various tasks. The complaints challenged whether the adverts were a) offensive, because they featured sexually provocative content and were degrading to women; and b) were irresponsible, because they were inappropriately located on sites that could be seen by children, and could cause harm to children. The complaints were upheld on both points and the adverts must not appear again in this form.

Coty UK Ltd (trading as Marc Jacobs): Four people complained about a magazine advert for *Oh, Lola!* perfume, featuring model/actress Dakota Fanning sitting on the floor, holding an oversized bottle of the perfume on her lap. The complaints challenged whether the advert was offensive and irresponsible as it portrayed the young model in a sexualised manner. The ASA upheld the complaint on the grounds that the model looks under 16 and the length of her dress, her leg and position of the perfume bottle draw attention to her sexuality; which presents the image of a sexualised child. The advert must not appear again in this form.



Internet parental controls

At the end of October, the 'big four' internet service providers (ISPs), BT, Sky, Talk Talk and Virgin Media, produced their *Code of Practice on Parental Controls*. The Code has three main objectives: to improve awareness of parental controls; to improve the effectiveness of information and education initiatives and to review options offered by future technology; and to review options offered by future technology. The ISPs will produce a harmonised set of 'best practice guidelines' on communicating to parents about online protection by **December 2011** and will offer all new customers an 'enforced choice' at point of purchase or installation to turn on or off parental controls by **October 2012**. You can find the guidelines at www.byebuychildhoodmu/get-involved

Music videos

In January 2012 the Government is due to launch a consultation on the age rating of music videos – read next month's *Faith & Policy Watch* for further details. The issue has also be raised in France, where the Supreme Audiovisual Council has ruled that Rihanna's *We found love* music video is too explicit to be shown on daytime television and can only be shown after 10pm. The video depicts an abusive relationship and drug use, as well as sexualised imagery.



Rep Ireland consultation on the Children's Commercial Communications Code



In October, Mothers' Union in the Rep. Ireland responded to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's public consultation on the review of the rules on Diet and Nutrition in the Children's Commercial Communications Code. Food is currently the category of advertising children see the most, with dairy products, confectionery and convenience foods comprising over three quarters of that. The BAI is required to review its broadcasting codes and rules from time-to-time and the BAI may consider prohibiting the advertising to children of foods and drinks which contain fat, trans-fatty acids, salts or sugars. The second stage of consultation will commence in early 2012. For further information go to www.bai.ie/

What can I do?

Christmas is often the time of year we feel the impact of commercialisation most keenly – how can we navigate the hopes and expectations of this celebration?

- Talk to your children* about the meaning of Christmas and the practice of giving presents – you might find it useful to use this year's John Lewis Christmas TV advert (we won't spoil the ending and sorry to plug a major retailer!) as a discussion starter
- Gifts do not always have to be material. You could give your children* a fun day out together – it could be a mystery tour or treasure (of any sort) hunt
- Many charities now offer 'ethical gifts', whether sponsorship or fair-trade goods

*or grandchildren/nieces/nephews/godchildren etc

Rites or Rights? Civil Partnerships and same-sex marriage proposals

The UK Government's Equalities Minister, Lynne Featherstone MP, has announced that a public consultation to consider how to make civil marriage available to same-sex couples will begin in March 2012. This would allow any legislative changes to be made before the end of this parliament. The consultation will cover civil marriage for same-sex couples only and not religious marriage or opposite-sex civil partnerships. The UK Government has already consulted on the registration of civil partnerships on religious premises which came into force this December 2011. Under that measure, faith groups can choose to 'opt in' to the reform, but it is not compulsory.

The UK Government Equalities Office (GEO) is responsible for policy and legislation which relates to sexual orientation and transgender equality. This includes the Civil Partnership Act 2004, the Equality Act 2010 and equality policy for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

The Scottish Government has also recently consulted on two areas of relationship provision: the capacity to hold religious ceremonies for civil partnerships on religious premises, and the possible introduction of same sex marriage in Scotland. They will be considering these issues alongside the UK government's proposals, which they already feel are inadequate in their extent and purpose.

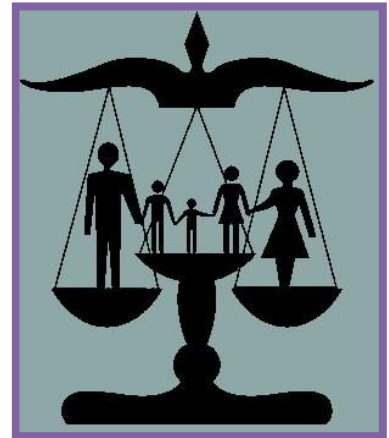
The aim of the Mothers' Union is to promote care for families. Our belief is that the care of families is best promoted in the context of stable and loving marriage. So we want to protect the dignity of marriage and thus the foundation of the family and the stability of society. The Church as a whole, and the Mothers' Union as part of the Church, are constitutive elements of this society and therefore any legislation that seeks to redefine the nature and purpose of marriage should be taken very seriously by us. Is this a matter of rites or rights? Let us know your opinions.

Both of these consultations are being monitored by the Faith & Policy Unit and we will make an organisational response to the Scottish Government's consultation by its deadline of 9th December 2011. We will update you further in the New Year about the March 2012 UK consultation.

Family Justice Review

The Family Justice Review panel was appointed by the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education, and the Welsh Government to review the whole of the family justice system in England and Wales, looking at all aspects of the system from court decisions on taking children into care, to disputes over contact with children when parents divorce. The panel's final report was published in November and recommended that:

- A new six month time limit in care cases is introduced so delays are significantly reduced.
- People are encouraged to make their own arrangements for their children upon separation, through, for example, the use of mediation, and only use courts when necessary.
- The family justice system is overhauled so that agencies and professionals work together with greater coherence.



The Review has been criticised for failing to recommend that parents have equal rights to share custody of their children following separation; and for recommending that grandparents should have to go to court to request access to their grandchildren when it is denied. To read the full review, go to www.justice.gov.uk/publications/policy/moj/family-justice-review-final.htm

Welfare Reform Bill

The Welfare Reform Bill is currently going through Committee stage in the House of Lords. Part Six of the Bill contains clauses concerning child maintenance and the proposals include:



- A 'gateway' to the future new statutory maintenance scheme run by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, intended to divert parents from pursuing an application to the statutory child maintenance service and encourage them instead to try to negotiate their own private voluntary child maintenance arrangements with the other parent.
- New limits on access to the statutory collection service so that it will only be available to applicants allowed through the gateway where either a non-resident parent agrees to it, or the Commission is satisfied maintenance will not otherwise be paid.
- Imposing charges to use the future Child Support Agency (CSA), designed to deter applications from parents with care, and use by either parent of the Commission's collection service. For parents with care, the Government is considering both an upfront application charge of £100 (£50 for those on benefit), and an ongoing 'collection deduction' from every child maintenance payment of between 7-12%. For non-resident parents, there would be a 'surcharge' of 15-20% levied on every child maintenance payment collected by the Commission.

Gingerbread, the single parent charity, has launched a campaign against these proposals and Mothers' Union is supporting their lobbying activities. For further details of the proposals and Gingerbread's campaign go to www.gingerbread.org.uk

Together we can stop it

Together we can stop it is a campaign against domestic violence run by Scottish Women's Aid. They have produced resources specifically for faith communities on what they can do to stop domestic abuse, which include suggestions such as ensuring you have a domestic abuse policy in your place of worship, supporting anyone within your place of worship you think is suffering abuse and raising awareness of the issue. For further information and resources go to www.togetherwecanstopit.org or call 0131 226 6606.