

Faith & Policy Watch

Bye Buy Childhood

Welsh Assembly: Short Debate: Let children be Children

On 14th June, Jocelyn Davies AM (pictured) hosted a debate in the Welsh Assembly on the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood. The aim of the debate was to assess the impact of these issues on children and young people in Wales. Ms Davies was also keen to discuss whether the Assembly would respond to the Bailey Review and meet with Mr Bailey and other experts in Wales.



The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, Gwenda Thomas AM (pictured) outlined a number of initiatives that the Welsh Assembly Government is supporting in order *"to tackle the public's often negative perception of children and young people and to give them the tools and skills that they need to promote themselves positively through the media"*. She also argued that these initiatives were *"an important step in trying to stop this creeping sexualisation. These activities and initiatives, and our commitment to children and young people in Wales, will assist us in tackling specific issues in relation to clothing and products that are suitable for children, advertising, marketing and the media."*

The Deputy Minister promised that she would look at the recommendations of the Bailey Review, as well as the findings of the 2010 report undertaken for the Equal Opportunities Committee of the Scottish Parliament, before deciding whether action should be taken by the Welsh Assembly.



Angela Burns AM (pictured) voiced concern that, whilst important to focus on serious issues such as child trafficking, the Deputy Minister had failed to address the 'creeping sexualisation' which *"creeps into society and into attitudes in how men and women behave towards each other and towards children."* She also argued that should a voluntary code not work in halting the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, the UK Government should consider legislation. *"Our children are the future,"* she said, *"and our future is what we allow our children to become. We should never, ever*

forget that."

If you live in Wales, please consider contacting your Assembly Member to ask them:

- Would you call on the Welsh Assembly taking action on the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood in Wales?

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On 5th July, Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin (pictured) quizzed the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood in Ireland.



Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: If she has any plans to establish an independent review into the commercialisation and sexualisation of children similar to the Review, *Letting Children be Children*, which was commissioned by British Prime Minister David Cameron; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): (pictured)



I understand that the Review referred to by the Deputy was commissioned following commitments made by both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in their 2010 Election Manifestos to deal with the issue of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood. This commitment was subsequently reflected in the Coalition Agreement. The resulting Report of the Review "*Letting Children be Children*" was published in June 2011. At present there are no plans to conduct a similar review in Ireland. However, I have asked my Department to examine any key findings in the Report which could help inform policy approach in respect of this area.

In response to the Minister's answer, Mr Ó Ríordáin said "*Given the enormous level of sexualisation and commercialisation of our children at the present time, I believe this warrants a similar study to be conducted by the Department of Children. By undertaking such a study, we could assess how best to protect some of the most vulnerable people in this society.*"

If you live in Ireland, please consider contacting your TD to ask them:

- Would you call on the Oireachtas to investigate the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood in Ireland?

Westminster: Inquiry into the Internet and Child Protection

Claire Perry MP (pictured) has launched an enquiry into the internet and child protection, following her lobbying of internet service providers (ISPs) to put a default 'off' setting to block internet pornography. This would then require the customer to actively turn on access to pornography. The inquiry is holding two evidence sessions, in September and October, to which Mothers' Union has been invited.

The Inquiry will seek to:

1. Understand better the extent to which children access on-line pornography and the potential for harm that this may cause
2. Determine what British Internet Service Providers have done to date to protect children online and the extent and possible impact of their future plans in this area
3. Determine what additional tools parents require to protect children from inappropriate content
4. Establish the arguments for and against network level filtering of content that would require an 18 rating in other forms of media
5. Recommend to Government the possible form of regulation required if ISPs fail to meet Recommendation number 5 from the Bailey Review.



Shopping light

Shopping is now a universal obsession. Yet while millions consume their lives away, millions more die daily of poverty and debt. How can we afford this global inequality? So let's rewrite our weekly shopping list for the wellbeing of the world:



Let's start shopping lighter by:
shopping light of excess,
shopping light of instant demand,
shopping light of commercialisation,
shopping light of environmental waste,
shopping light of non-seasonable produce,
shopping light of bargains at other people's expense.

Let's start reducing our greed by:
reducing poverty,
reducing malnutrition,
reducing unfit housing,
reducing unclean water,
reducing unfair trade rules,
reducing employment exploitation.

Between the producer and the consumer
hold the hands of wealth and the heart of greed.
Between governments and nations
hold the hands of economics and business profits.
Yet together we can redistribute our resources
and bring together
the hands of justice and the heart of life.
And that will be money well spent.

Fleur Dorrell – Mothers' Union.

Family proofing Government policy

Following the riots which affected a number of cities and towns in England this August, the Prime Minister gave a speech on 'the fightback' to address "the slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations." In an effort to build up "stronger families, strong communities, a stronger society" Mr Cameron promised to put more emphasis on family and parenting, by applying a 'family test' to all government policy.

"If it hurts families, if it undermines commitment, if it tramples over the values that keeps people together, or stops families from being together, then we shouldn't do it... More than that, we've got to get out there and make a positive difference to the way families work, the way people bring up their children... and we've got to be less sensitive to the charge that this is about interfering or nannying."

"We are working on ways to help improve parenting – well now I want that work accelerated, expanded and implemented as quickly as possible... This has got to be right at the top of our priority list."



Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct

Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) met for 5 years to reflect and produce a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness in a multi-religious world. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

A basis for Christian witness

Jesus is the supreme witness (John 18:37). Christian witness shares in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God.

Principles for Christian witness

Acting in God's love.
Imitating Jesus Christ.
Christian virtues.
Acts of service and justice.
Discernment in ministries and healing.
Rejection of violence.
Freedom of religion and belief.
Mutual respect and solidarity.
Respect for all people.
Renouncing false witness.
Ensuring personal discernment.
Building inter-religious relationships.



Recommendations

- Study the issues in the agreed document and apply the guidelines appropriately.
- Build relationships with people of all religions, especially at institutional levels.
- Encourage Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith while deepening their understanding of different religions and be careful not to misrepresent other religions.
- Co-operate with other religious communities towards justice and the common good.
- Call on governments to ensure freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected.
- Pray for neighbours recognising that prayer is integral to who we are and what we do as.

The full document can be found at:

www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccmain/2011pdfs/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf

Faith & Policy Annual Conference

Don't forget that our annual Faith & Policy Conference is 19th-21st October at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire. Our focus is: **Your Gift? Discover and celebrate!** This focus is also the main theme for 2012 and we have produced fourteen creative and interactive downloads for you to use throughout the year which will be available on the web later this month. If you can't come to the Conference then please do pray for its fruitfulness and for our Unit as a whole. For more information contact Fleur Dorrell on fleur.dorrell@themothersunion.org or tel: 020 7222 5533.