

Culture Wars

Defining the battle line

Review by **Peter Saunders**
CMF General Secretary

The 20th Century was defined by economic and class-based divisions between socialists and capitalists. But with the main political parties now increasingly embracing free market capitalism and in the absence of an argument about economic management, culture rather than economics will be the future's defining political divide. The 21st Century will be defined by cultural and social divides, between liberals and conservatives.

American culture wars are already being fought.¹ Liberals embrace abortion, gay marriage, drug legalisation, sexual permissiveness, embryo research, euthanasia, easy divorce, cohabitation, political correctness, positive discrimination, government interference, and higher taxes and spending to pay for welfare; Conservatives most likely go to church and oppose all of the above. The best predictor of whether a white American voted Republican in 2000 was church attendance more than once a week – 79 percent of this group voted Bush.

By contrast, British liberalism reigns largely

unchallenged. Small victories are won – the government defeat over the *Racial and Religious Hatred Bill*, and the rejection of the Joffe Bill – but the general policy thrust, both Conservative and Labour, is liberal. Daily, the headlines are dominated by yet another liberal triumph. Cohabiting couples are to have equal rights as the married; churches and mosques are to be forced to rent out their premises to homosexuals; under-age sex is actively encouraged by the media; single parent families are to be admired as much as married families; drug-taking celebs are condoned; Christian teaching is thought freakish and extreme; and the Human Rights Act makes a mockery of the criminal justice system to the point of virtual collapse of law and order.

The British liberal establishment is now so powerful that it is a wonder we won the euthanasia vote. Government departments, institutions, the media, and even medical journals and organisations like the BMA are increasingly influenced by powerful liberals. As a result, Christians are increasingly marginalised, left without a voice, by

the new establishment.

Many UK Christians will have reservations about some of the issues supported by our brethren in the US. Christian morality is in some ways a strange mixture of right and left wing politics – mixing traditionally left wing concerns for the poor, disabled, ethnic minority groups and developing world with a more traditionally right wing opposition to abortion, euthanasia and sexual immorality. The common factors we would want to emphasise are a concern for the vulnerable and marginalised, and recognition that those most easily exploited need to be both strengthened and protected.

But following in the footsteps of Christ in these days involves both the willingness to speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and the willingness to suffer and expend energy on their behalf. And to do that effectively, we need to be involved at every level of society, not only at the grassroots, but also in the media and institutions.

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Complementary medicine

The Professors, the Prince and the WHO

Review by **Rachael Pickering**
Associate Editor

The ongoing conflict between orthodox medicine and the proponents of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) spilled onto the letters pages of the *Times* recently.¹ An open letter from leading doctors, including Professor Ernst and Nobel Prize winner Sir Black, criticised the NHS' seeping acceptance of CAM. It urged those holding influential positions to review local practices and lobby the Department of Health on the matter: '...patients, the public and the NHS are best served by using the available funds for treatments that are based on solid evidence'. They also criticised the Smallwood report, commissioned by the Prince of Wales, which suggested that more NHS-provided CAM might lead to widespread benefits.²

This gloves-off approach came just as Prince Charles was speaking at the World Health Organisation, promoting his fervent belief that CAM therapies are the answer to our medical prayers: 'I believe that the

proper mix of proven complementary, traditional and modern remedies...can help to create a powerful healing force for our world...orthodox practice can learn from complementary medicine, the West can learn from the East and new from old traditions'.³ This may be an admirable aim but the standards of proof deemed acceptable by CAM advocates appear far woollier than the rigorous standards demanded of orthodox medical trials.

Prince Charles' alternative medical hobbyhorse is more than 20 years old but he comes from a long line of ancestral CAM enthusiasts, right back to Queen Victoria's grandfather.⁴ His view of orthodox doctors as small-minded and petty for refusing to admit CAM into the NHS fold is well known. But despite this, and to his own amazement, the BMA actually elected him president for its 150th anniversary year; he used his tenure well, making both friends in high medical places and digs at doctors' reluctance over CAM in several speeches.⁵

And in 1997 he established the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health to encourage CAM's integration into modern healthcare.⁶

As Christian doctors, we no doubt agree with the spirit of the Prince's vision: 'integrated healthcare – the best of all healthcare for the whole person'.⁷ But whether or not CAM can realise this vision is where we will continue to disagree. True whole person medicine needs to be properly evidence-based.

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SAVE versus ABC

The Alphabet Wars of AIDS Prevention

Review by **Steve Fouch**
CMF Allied Professions Secretary

In April, Christian Aid declared its support for the new HIV prevention strategy SAVE (Safer practices, Available medications, Voluntary counselling and testing, Empowerment.), as ABC (Abstain from sex until marriage, Be faithful to one sexual partner, and use Condoms) was 'not well suited to the complexities of human life'.¹ Some groups, who support ABC as applied in Uganda, are very unhappy with Christian Aid's announcement;² others though feel that ABC is now too pressured by US funding, causing an epidemic rebound due to over-emphasis of A and under-emphasis of C.^{3,4}

Christian Aid is not against ABC but sees SAVE as a more comprehensive strategy. Developed by ANERELA+ (African Network of RELigious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS), SAVE seeks to provide a nuanced and broad based response to the real issues faced by African communities.⁵ UNAIDS regards these strategies as integral to HIV prevention, but

is not itself promoting any one acronym.⁶

By devising catchy acronyms to encompass complex realities, we can create falsely opposed positions. ABC is highly effective for a general population. It can be embraced by SAVE's *Safer Practices* arm; but its value is limited for example when working with prostitutes who instead require emphasis on condom use and finding viable alternative employment.⁷

In reality, there are several AIDS epidemics, each requiring a specific strategy. The anger directed by conservative and liberal factions towards the other's methods is obscuring the evidence: we need various locally appropriate and integrated HIV prevention programmes.⁸

God's plan for human sexuality is the ultimate HIV safeguard, yet we are a fallen humanity.⁹ Even believers sometimes fail to be sexually pure, let alone those who do not share our faith in Jesus and are without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to lead regenerated lives. Christians need to address harm minimisation when fighting HIV.

Equally, secular groups need to recognise that, without primary sexual behaviour change, condoms are of limited, even detrimental, value.¹⁰ Rather than getting bogged down in childish alphabet wars, the way ahead lies in adopting a more balanced approach, listening to one another and working together with what actually saves lives.

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Human Trafficking

Horrific indifference to human misery and injustice

Review by **Steve Fouch**
CMF Allied Professions Secretary

In June and July 2006, Germany played host to the World Cup. Up to three million football fans from across the globe descended on the country.

Amongst the leisure services provided by the German authorities were dozens of legalised brothels. Up to 100,000 women, mostly from outside Germany, are thought to have been involved. German state licensed brothels have strict rules on condom use and ensure the women's access to health facilities, but the premiums men will pay for sex without condoms may have resulted in many unlicensed, unregulated brothels as well.¹

There are several alarming issues: the moral question of promoting sex for financial gain; the public health issues of STDs and HIV; and the matter of human trafficking.

Trafficking is hard to quantify but anecdotal evidence from human rights groups suggests that, as far away as Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, girls and young women were being approached with offers of lucrative summer work in Germany – jobs that in most cases end up in unlicensed brothels. All over Eastern Europe,

including the new EU accession states, thousands of women and girls were in danger of being trafficked to Germany.² But the authorities, including FIFA and the FA, did not express concern.

Human trafficking is a major 21st Century global issue. UNICEF estimates that 1.2 million children are trafficked each year and forced into labour or prostitution.³ Similar numbers of adults are also victims of this modern slave trade with many of the women ending up in the sex industry. Home Office Research, based solely on reported cases, estimated that up to 1,420 women were trafficked into the UK over just one year.⁴

This is not economic migration but the abduction or deception of people into bonded labour, often in harsh and dangerous conditions. The horrific indifference to this human misery and injustice is deeply disturbing. When linked to the sex trade, the sexual and mental health impacts of this industry are truly horrifying. How many of these girls and young women end up infected with STDs and HIV is anyone's guess, and the potential for HIV spread to

other clients, their partners and subsequent children is another cause for grave concern.

Either by supporting the church-based Stop the Traffik campaign or by other means, we need to lobby our government and the European Union to take active measures to tackle this pernicious industry. We should also consider getting behind groups – including a significant number of churches – who are helping victims of trafficking.⁵ Scripture warns us that God judges harshly those who force people into slavery, and the commodification of vulnerable human beings into sex objects is a debasement of the image of God in each trafficked person.⁶

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