

LETTERS

Stealing doctors

Stealing nurses is an even bigger problem, argues independent pharmaceutical consultant John Griffin.

Jason O'Neale Roach's article on 'Stealing Doctors' (*Triple Helix* 2002; Autumn:14-16) is timely, but there is another facet to the theft of health care workers from less affluent countries to bolster up our needs for trained personnel. This is the blatant recruitment drive to entice overseas trained nurses to work in the NHS. The scale of this exercise is most clearly shown in the table (below), which presents the numbers of nurses seeking work permits for the UK.

The health care needs of some of these countries are greater than that of the UK. These countries have also invested resources in their training and are not receiving a return on their investment. It is quite understandable that these nurses wish to benefit themselves both financially and perhaps educationally by spending time working in the NHS, and nobody would begrudge them this, but NHS authorities are not so altruistic. The NHS wants these staff to spend their whole working career bolstering up the NHS shortfall in training enough nurses for the UK's needs.

We are meeting our needs by plundering other countries' resources. The governments of their own countries cannot compete with the financial carrots being dangled in front

of these trained personnel. Is it morally and ethically right? What should our position as Christians be? We welcome them as strangers, we offer hospitality, we are grateful for their professional help – however we should recognise our gain is another's loss and that this is not really an acceptable way for a country to behave.

Rowan Williams

Greg Strain, medically qualified pastor in St Albans, takes issue with John Martin's editorial on the new archbishop of Canterbury.

John Martin's editorial on Rowan Williams (*Triple Helix* 2002; Autumn:3) is admirably temperate and the call for prayer is surely a right one. But my fear is that the article could encourage people to accept RW's ministry. This could bring spiritual disaster.

The piece puts great faith in Alister McGrath's analysis of RW's theology. Other voices have been less reassuring. Gary Williams, a fine evangelical scholar at Oak Hill College, has come to a radically different assessment. He highlights not only RW's flawed ethics but identifies a deeply disturbing and errant doctrine of revelation. Is John sure that McGrath is right?

If RW is orthodox in doctrine and is willing to uphold the faith set down in the 39 Articles then yes indeed, let's pray for him in his difficult task. But if his theology is shown

to be heterodox then evangelicals within the Church of England will need to stand against his appointment. We do *not* need to wait for him to make further pronouncement. His theology is in print, and to my knowledge he has not offered any retraction, so we should be able to see plainly what he believes.

John Martin replies.

My editorial on Rowan Williams has provoked more comment than any single item since the launch of the magazine. No reader has questioned the rightness of a call for prayer for Dr Williams. There were, however, expressions of concern about how the editorial represented his views of biblical authority and the homosexuality issue.

It's important to point out that many of the widely quoted statements of Dr Williams, and some of his writings, suffer for a lack of clarity in expression. This helps in part to explain why turbulence now surrounds him. He is learning quickly that Christian people look to those who hold high office in the Church for a clear exposition of the faith and how it applies, and that it is unhelpful to 'think out loud' in public statements.

It's important to note, too, that my editorial was drafted and typeset before the controversy surrounding Dr Williams hotted up. Some readers have questioned my statement that Dr Williams is 'crystal clear in his commitment to the authority of the Scriptures'. By that I did not mean that his position was identical with that of the CMF, in upholding the Bible as 'the supreme authority in matters of faith and conduct'. Rather, that like many Anglicans, he says he accepts biblical authority, but reads the Bible *through the lenses of tradition, experience and reason*. In his own words, 'how we read the Bible does shift, sometimes imperceptibly, from century to century...which doesn't at all mean that the Bible isn't continuously authoritative in the church, just that perspectives shift a bit.' (*Church Times* 2002; 29 November:12-13)

Source Countries	Work permit applications by nurses to work in UK	
	Year 1998-1999	Year 2001
Australia	1,771	601
South Africa	1,114	2,514
Philippines	972	10,050
Nigeria	920	1,100
India	na	2,612
Zimbabwe	na	1,801

Source-Tajadens F. Health care shortages. *Eurohealth* 2002;8(3):33-35

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I am not persuaded that that the Latimer paper by Dr Gary Williams is to be regarded as the last word on the theology of Rowan Williams. Not all evangelicals affirm the methodology employed by Gary Williams in the Latimer paper. Rowan Williams commented subsequently: '...his book is so selective and deliberately tendentious that I feel that he can only have set out to find damaging quotations and ripped them with glee out of context.'

In conclusion can I offer two thoughts? First, I think it's important that rather than relying solely on media commentaries and soundbites, that CMF members read Rowan Williams for themselves. Second, I am heartened that Dr Williams has made it clear he intends to uphold the official policy of the Church on homosexuality as set out in Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference (as was the expectation of my editorial). However, I re-iterate: I share the concerns of many about Dr Williams' *private* views on homosexuality, in particular his apparent endorsement of monogamous gay relationships. Such a position is clearly at odds with Scripture and *Triple Helix* will be keeping a watching brief.

Gay adoption

David Barnardo, retired Consultant Physician and Chair of Council (Trustees) of Barnardos, believes there is a place for gay couples to adopt:

Seyi Hotonu (*Triple Helix* 2002; Spring:8-9) purports to show the folly of extending rights of adoption to include both parties in a same-sex 'family' but does not address the issue in a balanced way and merely emphasises the sad fact that biological parenting often fails children. Children whose primary families have failed them show particularly poor outcomes whilst 'in care' of the State and therefore need carefully selected family units with monitoring and support from a variety of agencies.

Review of published evidence to date has failed to show significantly different outcomes for children raised by a biological parent in a 'gay' setting. I agree with the author that many studies are flawed and firm conclusions limited - that being the case we should be guarded in conjecture. There is no research data to show outcomes amongst children previously 'in care' who are subsequently fostered or adopted by gay family units and, whilst robust investigation (to confirm or refute the impression of many adoption agencies that this is not flawed policy) must be undertaken and practice modified according to evidence, many children urgently need families to foster or adopt them.

A recent assessment by the Fostering Network estimates that, in the UK, at least 8,000 additional foster parents are required (and this means several times as many applicants). Sadly, some 'gay' foster and adoption placements fail (this may have more to do with the challenging needs of these children). Nevertheless, it is dishonest to insinuate that traditional practising Christian families are free from such failure. They are not.

We should be concerned to develop a balanced theological understanding of the issues but at the same time there is the need for action (and I appreciate that individual Christians may respond, in compassion, in differing ways which should be seen as complementary).

Providing a variety of alternative family settings for children urgently in need of loving, stable, tolerant and resilient homes may appear to fall short of the God-inspired and biological ideal but I believe that God's love extends this far.

Seyi Hotonu replies:

Like Dr Barnardo, I agree that children 'in care' need loving, stable, tolerant and resilient homes. As mentioned in my article, there is

currently no reliable evidence about outcomes of adoption by gay couples. Yet, despite this deficiency, I am still meant to conclude that the most vulnerable children in society should be raised in alternative family settings. Why? Elsewhere in medicine, proposed therapies are expected to undergo rigorous testing before gaining widespread acceptance and usage. Why not here?

Dr Barnardo claims that my article 'merely emphasises the sad fact that biological parenting often fails children'. The same conclusion could be arrived at about the care system itself, which, he notes, also fails children and which is run incidentally by the very same social workers that are responsible for finding foster and adoption placements.

I appreciate the number of additional foster parents required but I also note that before the Adoption and Children Bill was even enacted, the number of children adopted from care, had doubled since 1997 from 1,900 to an expected 3,800 in 2002. The resulting fall in numbers of children in care was mainly due to the government's initiative.

What is a 'balanced theological understanding of the issues'? The Bible says that homosexuality is wrong. This is orthodox teaching. The Bible says that at its core the family consists of a father and a mother, not two fathers or two mothers. This is orthodox teaching. The Bible says that we should take special care of orphans. This is orthodox teaching. Dr Barnardo says that traditional practising Christian families fail. The Bible contains many examples of people who have failed. But as a result of this failure God did not leave us to compound our failures by sinning further but rather sent his Son to be our Saviour.

Children do need to be taken out of the care system but not at any price. The tragedy is that many Christian adoption agencies have abandoned 'the God-inspired and biological ideal' to support an unrelated political agenda.

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