

Faith, Hope and Love in Child and Family Policy

The 2nd Annual Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office Lecture, Edinburgh, 23 March, 2005

The New 10 Commandments

A few weeks ago, we were treated to a Channel 4 television programme, entitled, "The New Ten Commandments." Fronted by newsreader Jon Snow, the programme reported the results of a poll on new commandments relevant to the way we live today. 4,000 people were involved in identifying a "top twenty" that was then presented for on-line voting. 40,000 people contributed in this way to the selection of the Top Ten.

According to Channel 4:

"What follows is a comprehensive trashing of the old order, as seven of the most hallowed commandments are dashed to the ground. The New Ten Commandments which replace them are upbeat, positive, lacking the fire and brimstone of the ancient "shall nots." "Never be violent" and "Protect the environment" are two rules in the top 20 new commandments which speak directly to today's world."¹

The one that came out top of the vox-pops was:

"Treat others as you would like to be treated."

This is an encouraging sign; but it is hardly something new. It is actually an explicit part of the "old" Ten Commandments, in another formulation than the short, snappy one set out in the Book of Exodus (20: 1-17). The more expansive wording of the Book of Leviticus (19:18) says:

"you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

This Jewish text (which also has foundational status within Islam) was echoed by Jesus the Jew in the Christian Gospels, where he cites it as a central tenet of the commandments (Matt. 19:19). When asked to identify the greatest commandments, he replies:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22: 37-40)

Nor is this revelation of the modern perspective new to the secular field. In recent decades, there have been a number of initiatives associated with identification of a "Global Ethic." One of these was the establishment of an Inter-Action Council of former government leaders, headed by Helmut Schmidt, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. It set itself the task of drafting a Declaration of Human Responsibilities to match the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to mark its 50th anniversary, which took place in 1998. Article 4 of this Declaration says:

"All people, endowed with reason and conscience, must accept a responsibility to each and all, to families and communities, to races, nations, and religions in a spirit of solidarity: **What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to others.**"

¹ Taken from the Channel 4 website on 5 March, 2005: www.channel4.com

One of the advisers to this group was the theologian Hans Küng, who had, since 1993, been working with the Parliament of the World's Religions to produce a Declaration which set out "a common set of core values ... found in the teachings of the world's religions."² This included the exhortation:

5 "We must treat others as we wish others to treat us."

The Declaration explains:

10 "There is a principle which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others! Or in positive terms: What you wish done to yourself, do to others! This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions."

15 Now - so far so good. It seems that everyone is in agreement. What is often called the "Golden Rule" - treat others as you want to be treated - should be the ethical basis of our society; across the whole world, in communities characterised by any world religion or by a secular mentality. Even the great British public voted for it. So why are things not "hunky-dory"? Why don't we live up to it?

20 First of all, I think it is important to point out that not absolutely everyone thinks this *is* the most important thing. You always have the rogue factor. The internet sets out a whole host of alternative formulations of a New Ten Commandments, ranging from the vaguely Satanic-sounding "Revised Ten Commandments", starting:

1. Show no pity, empathy, or mercy to the chosen.
2. Show equal pain that he/she caused thee pain.

... to the eminently sensible, secular:

"Thou shalt not steal ... unless it's antiperspirant. In that case, please do[e]st."

25 Secondly, as we all know from the normal round of human experience, it's not just what you do that counts, it is how you do it. The Golden Rule is about what we should do or refrain from doing. The "virtues" that I am going to discuss, also underpin this, but add to the action, a quality imparted by the spirit in which we do it.

30 I am going now to explain what I mean by "virtues" and how they relate to commandments and rights; and then I will explore some of the ways in which the virtues of faith, hope and love do, or might, impact on child and family policy.

The Virtues

35 The debate about the 10 Commandments - new or old, is not too complicated, because, at least most people understand what a commandment is. It is an order. It tells you what you are supposed to do or not to do. "Faith, hope and love", which are the subject of my talk today, fall into a different category. They are categorised as "virtues"; a word that I would suggest is rather unfashionable amongst anyone other than moral theologians and devotees of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre.

40 Some have suggested that "virtue" is portrayed in the modern world as "a hater of joy and humanity"; that it is associated with repression and ignorance; a relic of a Victorian

² Küng, H., and Schmidt, S., A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1998.

Puritanism that has happily been overcome. It is a "grim enemy of jolly humanity", typified by "the sanctimonious who shudder at contact with publicans and sinners."³ I have deliberately chosen the word "love" instead of "charity", which is how the third virtue is often described, precisely because "charity" (which actually means "love" in this context) suffers from this association with self-righteousness and lack of love. The phrase, "cold as charity" reflects this contamination.

The common definition of a "virtue", drawing on the work of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, is that it is a "good operative habit." What this means is that it is a good way of behaving that is so ingrained that it has become second nature. The virtuous person does not really have to think about it; the habit is so deeply entrenched, that the first instinct is to do what is right or good.

I should add here that I don't know enough about other faiths to be able to talk in any detail about their perspective on the role of the virtues in the pursuit of goals. But I am sure there will be equivalents.

Virtues are intimately related to commandments. In a virtuous society, the virtues should be reflected in our commandments and our laws - which should be their incarnation, so to speak. But virtue has a double role. Commandments and laws tell us what to do or not to do; the virtues shape the ways in which we do or refrain from doing them. We can identify with this also from experience. In every aspect of human life, popular language distinguishes between acts done with "good grace" and with "bad grace." And in organizational behaviour, we are aware of the difference between things done simply to comply with orders, keep ourselves legal, and stop us from being sued - the "tick the box" mentality - and things done out of genuine human concern and commitment. If someone does something:

- Because they *believe* it is right to do so;
- Because they have *hope* that it will help achieve a worthy goal; and
- Because they *care* about the human impact of their actions or omissions;

then they are demonstrating faith, hope and love in their ordinary sense. They are acting virtuously rather than officiously.

"Virtuous" implementation:

- Would make *public child care* a truly credible, aspirational and loving intervention in the life of a child or family.
- It would make "*asylum*" an effective and caring refuge that gave true hope to those who sought it.
- It would ensure that "*benefits*" lived up to their name; that they affirmed the basic human dignity of those who needed them; fuelled their aspirations; and freed the recipients to care for their own dependents; a virtuous, rather than a vicious, circle.

My basic function as Commissioner is to safeguard and promote the rights of children and young people. Since I took up my post last year, I have given dozens of speeches on a whole

³ Farrell, W., *A Companion to the Summa*. Published originally by Sheed & Ward, New York, 1938-1942, and now available at: www.op.org/farrell/companion/ See Comments in Vol. II on Chapter IX – Happiness and Virtue (Q. 55-58).

range of subjects, to different groups and in different contexts. Most of these have been delivered in the language of "rights", but some have focused on the *virtues* of "faith, hope and love." This raises the question - How are virtues related to rights?

Virtues and Rights

5 Sometimes people bristle at the language of rights; perceiving it as individualistic, materialistic and confrontational. Rights are sometimes compared unfavourably with virtues as a framework for human action and responsibility. But I see no conflict. Rights and virtues play different roles. The way I see it, rights operate from the outside in of a person, and virtues from the inside-out. In the words of Thomas Aquinas:

10 "The precepts of the Law are about acts of virtue."⁴

The rights we proclaim express and manifest the virtues we prize. We must articulate them clearly and hold to them dearly. But the double role of the virtues means that they should *both* shape the rights *and* fuel their implementation. As is the case with laws or commandments, the rights of the Convention will be poorly served if there is a lack of virtue
15 in their application.

Talking of the Virtues

I would like to tell you a little about my experience of talking about the virtues of faith, hope and love, in the context of my work.

It's an interesting thing to do. Sometimes, you can feel a little "*frisson*" when you speak the words as people think - What is this? Is it going to be religious? And will it be embarrassing?
20 But I proceed to talk about the issues in a way that presents a comfortingly non-threatening, secular version of the concepts and relates them very specifically to some central concerns of my work. So I am going to move on to that general presentation, which some of you may have heard before (and if so, apologies for the repetition), before placing it within the
25 broader context of this lecture.

What Kind of Scotland?

What kind of Scotland do we want, and how can child and family policy helps us to achieve it?

I have said that I would like to see a Scotland imbued by the virtues of faith, hope and love, and able to bequeath these virtues to its children. I have said that we, as adults, need to
30 foster the seeds of faith, hope and love in ourselves, if we are to encourage their growth in the children and young people who will inherit what we have built and continue to shape it. And I have asked - How can we do that?

Faith

First of all - faith. Children and young people need to have faith in us, and we need to have
35 faith in them.

When we ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is a central focus of my job, we made promises to the children and young people of this country that we would make life better for them by upholding the standards in the Convention, that cover vast areas of their lives. The Preamble to the Convention reminds us of earlier promises that
40 "childhood is entitled to special care and assistance." And I think it is still worth harking

⁴ Aquinas, T., Summa Theologica. I-II,62,1.

back to the earliest international promise, made in the 1924 League of Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child: "recognising that mankind owes to the child the best it has to give ..."

5 Across the years, we have made these promises. And we must do our best to live up to them if children and young people are to have faith in us - faith that we will do what we have promised. Broken promises, empty promises, are likely to undermine the faith of those to whom the promises were made.

10 But we must also show faith in them. This means that we must not write them off as a wasted generation, beyond redemption; that we must not propagate, by our policies and our media, the idea that they are the problem in our society rather than its future and the keys to the solution of whatever problems we have. In work with young people, the thing they usually say they want most is respect. We have to make sure that the faith we have in our children and young people is manifest in the respect we show to them, even when they may not seem to be respecting us. We are the adults; we are the role models. An attitude of
15 respect for the basic human dignity of people of every age must be something that we regard as non-negotiable; something we try to model even when the going gets tough.

The opposite of faith is cynicism; a tempting attitude when life seems hard, but not a very helpful philosophy of life. We must avoid fostering cynicism in our young.

So faith must be the first step - a faith that manifests in commitment and action.

20 **Hope**

The second word is Hope.

We must give our young people something to hope for; dreams and aspirations that are achievable, and that we will help them to achieve.

25 Some years ago, during my days as Director of the Scottish Child Law Centre, our outreach worker returned from a session with a group of young people in one of our cities and said with some dismay:

"They have no hopes or aspirations. Not one of them envisaged ever getting a job. They just assume that they will be unemployed and live on benefits like their parents."

30 There are two opposites of hope; one is apathy, which was shown by this group of youngsters; the other is despair. A recent inspection report of Polmont Young Offenders Institution, noted some positives about the institution, while commenting that:

"There is a great deal of despair in Polmont."⁵

35 This sense of despair manifested in the low expectations held by many of the young people. Contrary to the popular view of a generation always ready to complain and to stand up for their rights, complaints were very few, because they did not expect standards to be high. They had no hope that they might be so; that things might be different than they were.

Sometimes, young people do express their hopes: for facilities (especially, these days - skate parks); for safe communities and safe schools; for a voice within their communities - a voice that is truly listened to. They must feel that they have an investment in their communities,

⁵ Scottish Executive: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Report on HM Young Offenders Institution Polmont, May 2004, Para. 1.4.

and that their communities have an investment in them. And that means that we, as adults, must have dreams and aspirations about their future, which is inextricably linked with our own. We must envisage a future in which the potential of our young is joyfully fulfilled. We must have hopes *for* them and we must place some at least of our own hopes *in* them. We must model hope to our young.

Love

"Love" requires that we truly care about children and young people; not just our own, but the whole community of them. We must not seek to warehouse them to allow their parents to make a contribution to the economy that is considered more valuable than what they have to give to their children. We must not view children as the inconvenient by-products of our economic systems. We must not accept that they should make do with our left-over energies at the end of a working day in a long working week. Our care for our young - our love for them - must be made manifest in our priorities, in the way we order our lives and in the way we organize our economy. The child, we remember from 1924, deserves the best we have to give. Let us live out that promise. If we allow ourselves to love them, and if we give ourselves the time and space to show them how we care for them, we will help them to take the same attitude towards others.

"Love" embraces a whole host of concepts: tolerance, leniency, compassion, humanity, mercy, sufferance, clemency. Its opposites too are many: intolerance, harshness, hardness of heart, unkindness, retaliation, vindictiveness. The opposite of love is not just hate, but dislike, enmity, bitterness, antipathy, scorn, indifference, loneliness, meaninglessness. We must avoid building our policies and practices on these negative emotions, attitudes and experiences, even if they seem to be popularly felt, if we are to avoid fostering these same negative emotions, attitudes and experiences in our children and young people.

Moving On

If we want to reshape Scotland, we have to begin by reshaping ourselves. If we want the young to be good, kind, tolerant, humane and loving, we have to begin by being good, kind, tolerant, humane and loving ourselves.

We could start by taking a good look at current law, policy and practice, and reflecting upon the extent to which they manifest our faith in, hopes for and love towards our children and young people. Not exactly a faith, hope and love audit with performance indicators, boxes to tick, applause for success and condemnation for failure; we are all on a pilgrimage and we will all at times fail. We need to take a positive attitude based upon a commitment to doing better rather than too much breast-beating about what we haven't done in the past or are not doing in the present. You could say that means that we need the confidence engendered by a measure of faith in, hope for and love towards ourselves.

We are not a nation of isolated individuals, but a community of interdependent persons whose happiness lies in our ability to relate meaningfully and respectfully towards each other. What kind of Scotland do we want? One characterised by kindness, by relationship, by consideration for the basic humanity of people of all ages and statuses; one in which the human rights of all - the dignity of all - is fully respected.

If child and family policy were shaped by faith, hope and love, life would be better for all of us.

Where are we going? - Current Child and Family Policy

How well are we doing in moving towards this goal? Is our current child and family policy imbued with faith, hope and love, and is our society virtuous enough to translate that policy into practice?

- 5 In Scotland, the Children and Young People Cabinet Delivery Group has set out its "vision", which supports a set of "national priorities".

The "vision" statement says that children should be:

- Safe
- Fulfilled
- 10 □ Healthy
- Achieving
- Active
- Respected and Responsible
- Included.

- 15 The national priorities talk in terms of "increasing levels of creativity and ambition in young people." This is all very positive. These aspirations are certainly capable of supporting "faith, hope and love." What will be critical is how they are implemented and translated into action. And in that arena, it is "love" that is primary.

- 20 The great hymn to love in the First Letter to the Corinthians is most often quoted today in wedding ceremonies. However the love it speaks of is not restricted to romantic love between two individuals; it is about how we love in general. It speak of faith and hope, but gives love the primacy:

- 25 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

To which one might add:

- 30 If I speak in the tongues of visions and outcomes, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have three year plans and understand all aspects of the Partnership Agreement, and if I have faith to surmount all obstacles, but have not love, I am nothing. If I increase resource allocation, and if I expose myself to the wrath of the press, but have not love, I gain nothing.

- 35 "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

- 40 Faith and hope are easier for government departments to embody and manifest than "love." That comes through the individual people who turn the policies into practice. So what I am saying here is not at all meant to imply a lack of love on the part of any particular politicians.

But government policies can at least hold back from pursuing routes that act *against* love. Remember that the opposites of love, already referred to, included: intolerance, harshness, hardness of heart, unkindness, retaliation, vindictiveness, dislike, enmity, bitterness, antipathy, scorn, indifference, loneliness and meaninglessness.

5 Are our laws and policies tolerant of children and young people? Which way are they going? Are they moving in the direction of love and community? Community that is inclusive of children and young people? Or is there a sense of retaliation, enmity, bitterness, antipathy? Perhaps we find a bit of both. Perhaps we are still tempted to divide children and young people up into the good, and the bad, sad or mad. If we are to be a virtuous society, we must
10 extend *special* care and love to those whose actions imply *their* antipathy to society. What we must not do is, by *our* antipathy and scorn, push them ever nearer the edge.

Where there *are* virtues embedded in laws and policies, we must be aware that they won't be translated into practice unless they are implemented by virtuous people. Which raises the question whether our society is one which *fosters* virtue; which *promotes* faith, *feeds* hope
15 and *inspires* love?

A Virtuous Society?

I believe that there *are* virtues in our society of care and compassion, but they risk erosion. It is because we still have these virtues that we can be so shocked at:

- The Second World War Holocaust;
- 20 □ The abuses at Abu Grabh; and, most recently,
- The exposure of racial, physical and sexual abuse in some parts of the immigration detention and removal system.

Yet these scenarios are a warning to us - a warning from history, as the oft-repeated TV programme on the Nazis tell us - that such virtue is not a necessary part of our moral
25 furniture; it can be undermined, reasoned away, frightened off, ignored.

Ever since I first read it in 1982, I have been haunted by the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian executed by the Nazis for his part in a plot to kill Hitler. From his prison he wrote a reflection on the ways different individuals responded to the evils of the Nazi regime; in particular, how individuals, faced with the atrocities of the
30 regime, overcame their consciences, and redirected their innate "virtue" to the *private* sphere. He observed:

"Here and there people flee from public altercation into the sanctuary of private virtuousness. But anyone who does this must shut his mouth and his eyes to the injustice around him. Only at the cost of self-deception can he keep himself pure
35 from the contamination arising from responsible action. In spite of all that he does, what he leaves undone will rob him of his peace of mind. He will either go to pieces because of his disquiet, or become the most hypocritical of Pharisees."⁶

"Virtue" cannot be restricted to the private sphere. True virtue calls to action.

Is that true of us in the UK today? Is there virtue, and does it manifest in action? ...
40 Sometimes. The magnificent response to the recent Tsunami appeal showed an admirable

⁶ Bonhoeffer, D., *After Ten Years: A Reckoning Made at New Year 1943 in Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bethge, E., (Ed.). London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994.

level of concern and generosity. Since my appointment last year, I have travelled across Scotland and met hundreds of dedicated people who really do care and really want to make a difference. Sometimes they try and sometimes they succeed. Sometimes they try and they fail, and they look to see if there are others, like myself, who might be able to help. Sometimes they are too disillusioned or cynical to try. They may care - they may manifest the virtue of love, but they may not have faith that there is a solution, or hope that it can be achieved.

And I hope that is the reason why there has been no sustained outcry on some issues that I thought would create more waves. When Panorama last year broadcast a very powerful report on the lives of the children of drug-abusing parents, using their own words, I thought it would be like a second "Cathy Come Home." I thought it would lead to campaigns and petitions and a change in attitudes, funding and practice. But - nothing. I was stunned by the silence. And I can only hope that this was due to a lack of faith and/or a lack of hope rather than a lack of love. Because if it were a lack of love, that would be *really* worrying.

In the past couple of weeks, we have seen school children in Drumchapel protesting about the way in which their fellow pupil, a failed asylum-seeker who had lived here for four years, was removed from her home, with her family, for deportation. Fourteen officials arrived without warning at 7am and took them by van to a detention centre in Luton. They were given only a few minutes to pack and had no opportunity to say good-bye. According to some reports, the father of the family was handcuffed in front of the children. When they found out, the children's school friends were shocked and tearful, and the other asylum-seeking children were terrified that it would happen to them. This is not an isolated incident. This is policy. I have had teachers in other schools expressing similar concerns. There has been some media coverage of the case raised by the pupils, so we will see whether the public are appropriately outraged by it.

I think it is fair to say that there has been more public concern in Scotland about the detention of asylum-seeking families than there has in the rest of the UK. Also, by all accounts, conditions in Dungavel are better than those in similar facilities elsewhere. This poses a problem. If we merely insist that no children be detained in Scotland, will the consequence be that there will be more early morning removals and cold van journeys to worse facilities elsewhere? The issue needs a wider response. And yet, here too, it is important not to compromise on matters of basic principle. I return to Bonhoeffer's analysis, where he touched on the road of pragmatism and compromise. The pragmatist, he says:

"will assent to what is bad so as to ward off something worse, and in doing so he will no longer be able to realise that the worse, which he wants to avoid, might be the better. Here we have the raw material of tragedy."

What I take from that is that, we should not be comforted by the fact that what happens elsewhere is worse. This does not absolve us from the responsibility of opposing the bad. We cannot salve our consciences by our private virtue; by the fact that we are really all nice people who give money to far-away tragedies, if we fail to care for - fail to love - the stranger amongst us, especially where that is a child.

This also raises the question whether Government policy is falling into the trap of "assenting to what is bad so as to ward off something worse." Is the possibility that a few families might abscond really worse than the use of dawn raids? Is this response "proportionate" in

terms of human rights? Is it the "raw material of tragedy" in terms of Bonhoeffer's insightful and informed analysis?

5 When I think of that scenario, of dawn raids on the homes of innocent families, who have committed no crime, I wonder what impression it leaves upon our young. What does it feel like to grow up in a country that allows this to happen? What values does it model to them? You will remember that virtues were defined as "habits." Have we lost the habit of caring as a human imperative? Do we disapply it to particular groups? Are there not dangerous precedents here? Is this the start of the slippery slope? Habits can be lost. Virtues can be lost. Basic humanity can be lost. "Ordinary people" can descend to inhuman depths if they
10 lose the habit of behaving well and the context that supports and values it. What inheritance are we bequeathing to our children?

15 My concern is that if we harden our hearts, and view soft-heartedness as weakness; if we accept official statements that there is no alternative; if we accept the bad in order to avoid the worse, we will lose the habits: of loving our neighbour (even one locked behind barbed wire); of believing in a better way; and of hoping to achieve it. Our cynicism will undermine faith; our apathy or despair will undermine hope; and our indifference or hardness of heart will undermine love. What will we have to bequeath to our children? What are we modelling to them?

Conclusion

20 If we are to create a truly human and happy society, we have to ground it in faith, rather than cynicism; inspire it with hope rather than apathy or despair; and warm it with love rather than indifference. We must dare to care, even when it is the costly option.

This means that, not only should our child and family policy be *shaped* by the virtues of faith, hope and love, but it must be *implemented* by people habitually disposed to the same virtues.
25 If we do not have such people, we must train ourselves to be them. We must demonstrate and model these virtues to our children. We must never lose faith. We must always hope. And we most certainly must always love.

