

3.9 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of the Chief Minister regarding his involvement in the impending ‘pastoral’ visit from Lambeth Palace:

Will the Chief Minister be involved in the impending pastoral visit from Lambeth Palace and, if so, will he be expressing his concerns over the handling by the Bishop of Winchester of matters concerning the Dean and indeed the resulting damage to Jersey’s relationship with the Diocese of Winchester?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

I will indeed be meeting with the Bishop of Lambeth and the Bishop of Dover during their pastoral visit to the Island later this week. I will, of course, be conveying the deep concerns that have been expressed by a wide range of Islanders ...

The Bailiff:

Sorry, Chief Minister, we seem to have gone inquare again. Could I please ask Members outside the Chamber in the coffee room to return to the States Assembly Room as soon as possible? Thank you. Yes, Chief Minister.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

If I could go on. I will, of course, be conveying the deep concerns that that have been expressed by a wide range of Islanders and their representatives.

3.9.1 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

In a letter to the Dean of Jersey, dated 9th March, suspending him from office, the Bishop of Winchester wrote in these terms, and there is a question at the end of this: “In any case in which you take the view that you are required by local law to disobey me or defy my requests you may not elect to follow the local law rather than to fulfil your duty of obedience to me. Whatever the local law seeks to impose on you, you may not elect to follow it.” Does the Chief Minister share my dismay that a Bishop of the Church of England, a member of the House of Lords, i.e. someone who is meant to espouse the highest ethical and moral values in the land, would seek to require someone to knowingly break the law of this jurisdiction?

[16:00]

Will the Chief Minister express in the strongest possible terms to both the pastoral team and to Lambeth Palace and indeed to those responsible for the conduct of the Lords, I assume at Westminster, that this is completely unacceptable.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Let me start by saying it is certainly something that I would not wish to associate myself with or recommend to anyone. The law is decided by this Assembly, this Assembly is democratically elected and this is upheld by appropriate institutions and everyone in our community should abide by the local law and it should not be the other round. As I said in my opening answer, I will be conveying concerns. The Deputy has just outlined one of those concerns which have been expressed to me and I will be expressing those to the 2 Bishops during their pastoral visit.

3.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Will the Chief Minister reassure the Assembly that he is not going to be discussing the possibility of the establishment of a church of Jersey with the Bishops?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I will be discussing the concerns which have been raised with me and they are wide and varied.

3.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

A supplementary. Will the Chief Minister take the opportunity to discuss the possibility of the disestablishment of the Church of England in Jersey so that issues such as this do not need to be brought to the Assembly necessarily?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am sure it does not surprise the Deputy to know that that is not an issue which has been raised with me.

3.9.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The questioner has read extracts from a letter from the Bishop of Winchester. Given that Article 47 of the States of Jersey Law states that a person who: "Offers any threat, assault, obstruction or molestation or attempts to compel by force or menace any Member of the States in order to influence him or her in his or her conduct as such Member or officer, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of 5 years and a fine." Will the Chief Minister consult with H.M. Attorney General to ascertain whether the bishop has in fact broken Jersey law?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Sir, I thought you were going to reiterate the intervention that you gave earlier.

The Bailiff:

The question was as to whether you were going to consult with H.M. Attorney General, as I understood it.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am always happy to consult with H.M. Attorney General or H.M. Solicitor General. On the surface I cannot see that the point has been well made but I am happy to consult and I might simply say, as I said earlier, we should all be abiding by the laws that emanate from this Assembly, that is absolutely right and proper, that is why we have the rule of law.

3.9.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

To revert, 2 points: would the Chief Minister not concede that many people, the Dean and the victim, have been hurt in this process? Just to see the issue in terms of some kind of church versus State conflict is the wrong approach and will you not accept that now is the time to separate church from the State?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

There appears to be no conflict between church and State at all. It has become apparent to me that there are at least 2 issues here, one is the way that vulnerable people are dealt with in our community and within the church; the other, if I can largely categorise it like this, is with relation to relationships within the church. I think the 2 questions that I have had this morning from Deputy Le Fondré fall into the latter category and I will be answering a question very shortly from Deputy Higgins, which falls into the former category, and that is how we need to view these particular issues. This is not an issue of church and State in that classic sense.

3.9.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I welcome the Chief Minister's last comment about the fact there are 2 issues here and the one that seems to be forgotten, at the moment anyway, is about H.G herself and her treatment by the church. I hope that when the pastoral visit does take place that you will raise the matter and hope that the church is supporting this lady who I think has been badly let down by the church to date.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As I said, I will be raising a myriad of issues which have been raised with me and that is, indeed, one of them.

3.9.7 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

This takes slightly after Deputy Tadier's comments but they are of similar ilk in that will he express concerns to the pastoral visit? To be blunt, the bishop's actions have certainly caused concern locally and do have the potential, if matters are not addressed, to cause a fall-out and, at worst, a complete schism between the Channel Islands and the Diocese of Winchester. Will you also request, on behalf of the public, an explanation publicly as to how much the purportedly enormous sums of money that have been spent by the bishop on this matter, including the London P.R. (public relations) firm, have been funded by Jersey churchgoers?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Again, many questions rolled into one. As I tried to convey in my opening answer, I do not underestimate the disquiet and concern among the church community in our Island that the actions of the diocese have had upon them and the deep hurt and disquiet that they feel. I will be relaying that in the strongest possible terms because it is important. We are a unique community. The relationship between church and State in Jersey is even stronger than it is, I believe, in the United Kingdom, the interlinking of our parochial system, the municipality of the Parish system and the Parish church and the rectors is unlike what one finds in the United Kingdom. We must support that and we must ensure that it is maintained into the future because it is part of what makes Jersey special. Having said all that, I have forgotten what the other part of the Deputy's question was.

3.9.8 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It was an explanation as to have large sums of money been spent on this matter. My understanding is a significant sum of money was spent on a P.R. firm in London and has it been funded from contributions from Jersey? Will you seek explanations and clarification on that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

So from being rather speedy, you seem to have stepped back slightly. But, of course, using a P.R. firm of the calibre that the Church of England uses is an extremely costly business so I would not be surprised if I say many tens of thousands, more like hundreds of thousands, have been spent on this particular venture. As to whether ...

The Bailiff:

I think, Chief Minister, the question is whether you are going to raise this.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes. Well, as to whether any of the funds from Jersey have been spent, obviously I do not know. If the Deputy is formally asking me to raise it then of course I will be pleased to do so.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Yes, that was the point of my question.