



CNI

Three major messes at Stormont needing Gospel accountability

The old Stormont may have had its faults. However there was one area in which it has not been given credit. It was remarkably free of any whiff or taint of corruption and the cronyism which seems almost inevitably to surround such activity

- Houston McKelvey writes

The current investigations by PANI, the Law Society and a Stormont Committee over the allegations which have been made concerning NAMA represent a truly seismic shift in public affairs.

That these allegations appear to involve a former partner in one of the foremost long-standing and well-respected law practices in Belfast underscores for myself the magnitude of the hiatus. Two of my contemporaries at school

and university are 'graduates' of Tughans. Both have served as judges and are people of proven probity. That is the standard of that practice and I have no doubt concerning the quality of the present lead partner.

Obviously there is a long way to go before all aspects of this issue are adequately examined and shortcomings professionally identified where necessary.

For certain, the links within our society having regard to our size in terms of population and area can be too close. Those identified in the press who were acting on various public bodies had their service recognised in some cases by public honours. Their appointments and public recognition can fairly be regarded as the outcome of associations and friendships which now appear to have been compromised intentionally or otherwise. How have the necessary systems and protocols of public service fared which should ensure the clarity which respects and upholds public confidence?

This is a major public confidence issue which goes well beyond party political affiliation or outlook. From the outset Stormont has not exactly covered itself with a record of attainment. My sense is that the confidence of

the average elector in Stormont is not such that it will sustain much further cynicism whether justified or not.

Central to my concern is that the legally inflicted paralysis which parties at Stormont can access and utilise in order to protect their own members and party interests, must not be used to prevent a fulsome enquiry into the NAMA situation. If Stormont fails on this, one doubts that it is recoverable in its present form. Its lifespan as a relevant forum of governance depends on its credibility.

The 21 questions tabled by a member of the assembly who has proven legal competence, cannot be avoided and will need to be answered by any of the enquiries identified above.

However, the NAMA issue did not come alone. It arrived as two other major short fallings were being exposed in the media.

The situation affecting Sport NI (the former Sports Council) defies description. A safety expert ventilated his concerns about public safety in the plans for the GAA's Casement Park development plan. He claimed that his views were ignored. The Chief Executive of Sports NI is on leave following concerns about staff matters.

And now a majority of members of the board have resigned en masse - all people with proven records of service to sport. Many also had experience of service on other public bodies and presumably of the necessary policies and protocols regarding staff and business procedures.

The Minister claims she is in charge of this scene which to me resembles the Titanic' encounter with the iceberg. Professional and accountable Civil servants have been appointed to provide management - and a so-called arms length body is now under virtual direct rule from the Department and Minister. For sure the Minister cannot avoid the fact that this debacle happened on her watch.

In education, pertinent questions had been tabled by school principals and politicians regarding the accountable disbursement of surplus funds at the end of the last financial year by schools who had received extra budgets under social deprivation criteria. So far no satisfactory answer has been provided by that Minister or his Department.

There are basic Biblical, ethical and spiritual matters involved at the very heart of these three issues - NAMA, Sports NI and education. Justice

lies at the very heart of the Jewish and Christian scriptures - the Old and New Testaments. For certain the prophets of both testaments including John and Jesus would be speaking forth. There would appear to be issues of greed, dishonesty, and care for all children, in the three scenarios.

Is there a word from the Lord being uttered by those who are the leaders of the people of God in Northern Ireland?

So far there has been silence. Are they sitting too close to those in power? Or is there a preference for forms and expressions of a bogus Christianity which keeps its cassocked skirts clear of a robust but essential proclamation of the true Gospel?

Or equally importantly are they afraid of coping with the backlash which inevitably is the inheritance of the spirit-anointed prophets of God?

Huston McKelvey