

THE BULLETIN

News and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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Introducing Cornerstone – the UK’s only Christian fostering agency

Pam Birtle, Founder and CEO of Cornerstone, met with the Social Issues Team last year and we were so impressed with her work and vision. This is their story:

Adoption is a central theme of the gospel, and one organisation taking this seriously is Cornerstone – the UK’s only Christian adoption and fostering service. From its base in the North East of England, it is now looking to expand to help more precious children.

Cornerstone seeks to place children in Christian households, like that of Pastor Kevin Hornsby and his wife, Hazael, who says:

‘Neither of us enjoyed the quiet house as our grown-up children had left. We always had a desire to take children with disabilities as my brother was disabled and he died at 18, so my heart was always for disabled children. We moved to Teesside and didn’t have any idea about fostering, so I just went on Google and searched for Christian fostering and adoption agencies – and Cornerstone was the only result to come up.

I gave them a ring and realised they were just around the corner, the only one in the country – it was just amazing. They had been praying that a Christian family would ring them that day, so they were blown away and I was blown away and we just felt the link instantly. We wanted a Christian agency so we were singing from the same sheet and that was the start of our journey with Cornerstone. As Christians, it was fantastic to get together with social workers along our journey and pray with them.’

As well as four grown-up children of their own, the Hornsbys have now adopted James into their family and have recently made another addition.

‘God was written all over the story of James coming to us and we feel God is also all over the story of the girl we are currently fostering’ Hazael explains. ‘It was no coincidence how these things came about. After James, we were praying for another little child with disabilities and we were getting the *Be My Parent* magazine. One Saturday morning I remember the magazine coming through the letterbox... it was on top of the pile and there was this little girl looking up at me and I just picked it up and looked at her and thought, “Wow”. I took it through to Kev and put it on his desk and asked what he thought of the little girl and he thought she was beautiful.

At first they were looking for adopters which can be very difficult because you and the child need to know you are going to be comfortable with each other as they are going to be with you for the rest of your life when they have disabilities. But three months later we got a phone call asking if we were still available and we then found out this girl came from Aberdeen and all my family are based up there – I was blown away by that. We then found out this girl had been in care since birth and had been with the same foster carers all her life – and it was a pastor and his wife with four grown-up children – just like us! We were in exactly the same place and they had been praying for a Christian family to come along for this girl and I have goosebumps just thinking about it. We just clicked as soon as we met them. We have now gone through the adoption process with this wonderful girl and it is absolutely amazing how God has brought us together.’

The child was not expected to live, let alone achieve and yet she is now speaking, holding her own head up and generally defying all of the limitations put on her. She loves to sing and ‘dance’ in her wheelchair. She loves to worship and go to church where she is loved and accepted. Without God at the heart of their decision to foster and adopt, Hazael believes the journey would not have been possible:

‘Without the Christian element, without the prayer and support I don’t think we would have been able to do this,’ she insists. ‘It is like having a big family around us, guiding us and leading us. People who are not Christians look at us and think, “Are you crazy? In your late 50s taking on kids you will have your entire life.”

But we just felt this was completely right. We know 100% that we have done the right thing. People sometimes fear these kind of things, but we have a peace knowing God has given us these children. If we didn't have God in this situation with us then it would be very difficult... if you are relying on your own strength it is very hard.'

Kevin and Hazael know first-hand just how hard the roles can be. They support other Cornerstone families within their network who are loving and caring for children with lots of special needs and different challenges including those who have experienced loss, trauma, domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Having a great support team of friends, family, church and professionals is essential as the journey is by no means easy.

Speaking to the Hornsby's you hear their God-given passion for children, as is the case when you hear Cornerstone General Manager Pam Birtle's story:

'My own story is very much one of having been in the care system having been sent to a home for unmarried mothers ran by the Church of England,' Pam explains. 'My son was born the day before my 15th birthday and at that point if you were a teenager there was no expectation you would take your baby home; he was put up for adoption immediately, you didn't have any choice! I left my ten-day-old son in the hospital and went back home and to school and pretty much was expected to get on with life in secrecy and silence. The trauma affected my mental health and I was on Valium at 15.

At school the girl I sat next to, as God would have it, got "saved". She had a real experience of Jesus as a teenager and she talked to me about Him and told me about a God I never knew. I had my own conversion experience which has altered my whole life. I remember saying to God, "I want to be a missionary. Send me." I sat one day in sixth form and asked God what He wanted me to do and there was a Rolodex there with different careers and it landed on social work. I applied to my local authority and found out you had to be 21 to be a social worker. I wasn't even 18, but they invited me for interview and they thought I had an old head on young shoulders so gave me a really rare post as a trainee. I started in that role at 18 and at 21 I was the youngest qualified social worker in Britain.'

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because of our faith but... we stopped getting
placements.*

As she continued to develop a career in the field, Pam felt God calling her to take a significant step:

'I really felt God drop fostering and adoption into my heart. My husband Trevor and I spoke about this and I felt I should stop being a social worker and start taking children into our home and do things that would have a life-transforming impact,' she says.

'Trevor and I were first approved by Barnardo's, who recently declared that their greatest achievement in a decade was to become de-Christianised! Our social worker was a Quaker and really good at his job but was very clear that although we had been approved, the majority of the team were not pro-Christian at all. They never actually said we were an offence to them because of our faith, but at a time when referrals were plentiful and we had lots of experience and skills, we stopped getting placements.

We met other Christians with similar experiences and this is part of why we developed Cornerstone – to support Christians who were experiencing marginalisation and prejudice. We have two families who went to the Ombudsman over these issues and were awarded monies as compensation for the duress they suffered. Others have transitioned to us because they felt discriminated against but did not complain.

There is a national shortage of foster carers and people of all faiths make a great contribution to the pool of carers that do exist (as of course do people of no faith). It seems that “difference” is celebrated everywhere, and rightly so – unless that difference is being Christian!

We went out with a group of Christians from all different denominations and prayed together. We all had a heart for fostering and adoption so we sent off to the Fostering Network and received information on how to start our own agency. We sat down in our dining room, opened a bank account with £10, wrote the policies and procedures and on 1 January 1999, Cornerstone was born.

For us it is not about who we do not take as that was never our intention. It was about who we do take...

Our Code of Practice is part of our governing documents. It includes the fact that it is a “genuine occupational requirement” that all post-holders uphold our faith and value base as distinctly Christian. It also sets out in clear terms our understanding of biblical teaching that *marriage is between one man and one woman for life*. We only take heterosexual, married Christian couples. This was drawn up long before the Sexual Orientation Regulations (SOR) were issued and because we were the only Christian organisation who did not take heterosexual *unmarried* couples, the Charity Commission and the Equality Commission ruled that we were not discriminatory on the basis of sexual orientation as this predated the change in the law. In other words, we were not being hypocritical in not taking homosexual people on the basis of our biblical view of relationships as we did not take couples who were not married at all. It is particularly relevant now due to the change in the law on marriage that we specify “one man, one woman”. For us it is not about who we *do not* take as that was never our intention. It was about who we *do* take and why. We are rated “Good” with Ofsted and although the gospel is an offence to many, the laws of our land still protect our position to be able to serve as a faith-based charity.

Cornerstone is open to all children, including those of other faith backgrounds and none. The law asks that carers receive children into their homes and treat them as a member of the family for the time they are there. If a child from a different practicing faith were placed for an emergency, respite or short-term stay then the faith of the carers and the child would be considered as part of matching and so long as the child was able to follow their own practiced faith and was not expected to join the carers in their acts of worship without the parent’s consent then this could be accommodated in the short term. Children whose family are non-practicing or of no faith likewise, in emergency, respite or short-term placements would be respected by either one of the carers staying home on a Sunday or the child being offered the opportunity to try something new, again with their parent’s consent. We have done these types of placements successfully and had a practicing Muslim child’s parents consent to him attending church with a family as they thought it would be a good experience for him. We have children whose parents are non-practicing in other faiths placed without any issues.

When it comes to permanence however, it becomes more complicated as the child lives as a member of the family and therefore everyone must be open to the child going to church as they are not able to stay home alone.’

The parents Cornerstone work with take on a huge challenge. Pam says:

‘Cornerstone’s model for permanence (whether through fostering or adoption) is that our families commit to parenting as if the child had been born to them. Most “looked-after” young people are not able to transition to adulthood and independence at 18, nor is it normal or desirable to do so. We encourage our families to be parents to their child and grandparents to their children, wherever possible and we have lots of wonderful success stories where this has been the case. We have gay, straight, bi-sexual, single and married children, some of whom are also now parents whose children live with them and some where they

do not, who are still being actively supported by their Cornerstone “Forever Families” nearly twenty years on, without judgment and with lots of love and grace. Some have special needs, learning disabilities, mental health conditions, addiction and anti-social behaviour issues. The commitment of their families is awesome and challenging.’

Currently Cornerstone is only operating in the North, but Pam’s ambitions stretch nationwide:

‘As Christians there is a spirit of adoption on us all and I think that this is very close to the Father’s heart. We are looking to plant Cornerstone in various locations and we now have couples from Hull to Bolton, Newcastle to Wakefield and all points in between. We hope to see this develop through opening more regional offices to support families in clusters throughout the UK. We are looking to have a presence in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland too and would love to hear from church leaders, social workers and prospective families. We’re very open to the Holy Spirit and where He will lead us, but the thing we need most is people who are passionate about this work and who want to see Cornerstone in their area.

In order for us to develop clusters of families with support in other areas, we need suitably qualified and experienced social workers who are passionate about supporting Christian families to achieve outstanding outcomes for children and young people. Initially we are wanting to connect to people who will act as Champions or Ambassadors to seek to gain a presence in their local area. Each area will, eventually, as we roll out, have a regional office base, training and a panel for the consideration of assessments for suitable families to be recommended to join Cornerstone. In the short-term the panel will be in Stockton on Tees so, there will be some travelling.

Social Workers will be recruited to the Cornerstone national team and be involved in championing the Cornerstone model in local churches and with local authorities to recruit and support carers and seek placements. The Head Office will remain in Sunderland until such time as we think God is saying something else.’

For anyone considering fostering and adoption, experienced carers Kevin and Hazael offered their advice:

‘The first thing I would always encourage is to pray,’ Hazael stresses. ‘It is a really big thing, but if you feel God is in it and you feel he wants you to do it, then please investigate it more. By all means, speak to Cornerstone. They are not going to grab you by the neck and drag you in – all they want is the right people doing the right thing and myself and Kevin are more than happy to speak to anyone who would like to know more.’

For more information on Cornerstone and Pam’s story you can visit www.cornerstonenortheast.uk.org. Kevin and Hazael Hornsby are happy to speak to anyone about their experience on kevtherev@uwclub.net

Pam Birtle

What is wrong with Multiculturalism?

What is 'multiculturalism'?

We need to start by defining our terms. What exactly do we mean by 'multiculturalism'? There is a significant difference between describing something as 'multicultural', and the word 'multiculturalism'. It's that suffix '-ism' that turns the adjective 'multicultural' into the ideology of 'multiculturalism'. Think for example of: communism, capitalism, secularism, racism, sexism, nationalism, Marxism, statism, feminism, conservatism, liberalism, Darwinism, fatalism, ecumenism and vegetarianism. These are all ideologies, as is 'multiculturalism'. A 'multiculturalist' is someone who advocates the ideology of multiculturalism.

The ideology of multiculturalism is based on the idea that all cultures are equally valid. No one culture is better than another. All cultures are worthy of equal respect. As a state-sponsored policy it refers to the policy of expecting people from multiple different cultures to live harmoniously alongside each other without any shared values or customs. Since multiculturalists believe that all cultures are equal, they therefore believe that it would be immoral, or even racist, to expect people from radically different cultures to adopt any particular values, ethics, customs or practices. Instead, they argue that we ought to allow them to live their lives according to their own customs, and respect these practices no matter how different or conflicting they may be.

The political failure of multiculturalism

The meaning of multiculturalism is demonstrated by showing how politicians have recently used it. It was the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who was the first major national leader to openly admit the political failure of multiculturalism. In a major 'state of the nation' speech in October 2010 she said:

*'Of course, the tendency had been to say, "let's adopt the multicultural concept and live happily side by side, and be happy to be living with each other". But this concept has failed, and failed utterly.'*¹

Merkel received a standing ovation and was praised for having the courage to tell a difficult truth in the press. It didn't take long for others to follow. Britain's Prime Minister, David Cameron, speaking in February 2011 said:

'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. So when a white person holds objectionable views – racism, for example – we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices have come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious, frankly even fearful, to stand up to them.'

*The failure of some to confront the horrors of forced marriage – the practice where some young girls are bullied and sometimes taken abroad to marry someone they don't want to – is a case in point. This hands-off tolerance has only served to reinforce the sense that not enough is shared.'*²

A few days later, French President, Nicolas Sarkozy joined in, pronouncing multiculturalism to be a 'failure' in a television interview, saying: *'The truth is that, in all our democracies, we've been too concerned about the identity of the new arrivals and not enough about the identity of the country receiving them.'*³

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany-multiculturalism-failures>

² <https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-islam-ideology>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-sarkozy-multiculturalism/sarkozy-joins-allies-burying-multiculturalism-idUSTRE71A4UP20110211>

It is important to realise that these politicians were not criticising multi-ethnicity. They were stating that the idea of welcoming different cultures, customs and values and treating them all equally, that is the ideology of multiculturalism, has led to a disjointed, segregated society lacking any sense of cohesive identity.

What is culture?

Let's take a step back and examine what culture is. Anthropologists tend to define culture as: 'a shared set of values and rules of behaviour that allows a social group to function and perpetuate itself.'⁴ This is helpful, so far as it goes, but a Christian understanding of culture would seek to broaden and deepen that definition.

First, humans are inescapably religious (Romans 1:25). We all have some ultimate commitment from which we obtain our values and sense of self-worth. Values and rules of behaviour are also inescapably religious. The source of a culture's values and rules is effectively that culture's god. It is the ultimate authority for that culture. Therefore, all cultures are inescapably religious, whether recognised as such or not. An Islamic culture is a cultural manifestation of Islam. A humanistic culture is a cultural manifestation of humanism, which is another religious worldview. Any culture is necessarily a manifestation of the religion of that society. Hence, Henry van Til loosely defined culture as 'religion externalised'.⁵

All cultures are inescapably religious, whether recognised as such or not.

Secondly, culture includes more than values and rules of behaviour. Surely it includes works of art, buildings, infrastructure, literature, clothing, food, technology, industry and much else besides. Culture, more broadly speaking, from a Christian perspective is what humans make of creation. Genesis 1:28 is often referred to as the 'cultural mandate'. Humanity is instructed to 'fill the earth and subdue it'. This means to create culture out of creation. God delegated responsibility to humans for creating a social order or culture that glorifies God out of creation. The shortest definition of culture is 'what we make of the world'.⁶ Culture-making is what humans do. All forms of work participate in culture formation. Once again, all this is inescapably religious. Any culture will either be aimed at glorifying the living God or at the worship of some idol(s) or divine substitute from which the society seeks fulfilment and direction.

No neutral cultures

What this Christian understanding of culture makes clear is that there is no such thing as a neutral culture. All cultures proclaim certain values which they understand to be superior to alternative values. Multiculturalists cannot escape from this since they believe that multiculturalism creates superior forms of society. No culture can be religiously or value neutral.

All cultures will have some ultimate commitments that cannot be challenged. A current myth in our society is that 'tolerance' is a helpful ultimate virtue. Confusion arises here because the meaning of 'tolerance' has changed from accepting behaviours to which we may continue to object, to not criticising anyone else's behaviour. True tolerance is not the same as approval. What the new definition means in practice is that someone who criticises the prevailing morality of society is regarded as 'intolerant' and therefore as

⁴ Zee, *Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism & Sharia Councils* (The Hague, Netherlands: Eleven International Publishing, 2016), 5.

⁵ Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 200.

⁶ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (InterVarsity Press, 2013), 23.

someone who is effectively a traitor to this ultimate commitment to be 'tolerant'. Society then becomes highly intolerant of what is seen as 'intolerant' behaviour, whilst claiming to value 'tolerance'! This is why we are starting to see the courts attempting to restrict free speech in this country when people criticise currently accepted sexual ethics.⁷ All cultures will have some behaviours of which they are intolerant. Culture is inherently prejudiced and will therefore 'pre-judge' some behaviours as immoral.

This religious nature of culture also enables us to better understand multiculturalism as equivalent to religious pluralism, or state-sponsored polytheism. The multiculturalist tries to say that society can continue without any favoured religion or worldview. This is self-defeating because multiculturalism itself is a favoured worldview. It is also inherently unstable. Different religions and worldviews proclaim different values and ethics which will unavoidably clash. A society with no agreed moral or religious foundation cannot avoid collapsing or fragmenting into a set of isolated subcultures abiding by different values. This is already what we are seeing in the UK with segregation of our society into enclaves dominated by certain religions, most notably Islam in certain areas. Professor Elham Manea aptly described this present reality as 'plural monoculturalism'.⁸

Cultural Relativism

The foundational doctrine of multiculturalism is the view that all cultures are equally valid. This leads straight on to cultural relativism which believes that a person's behaviour should be judged relative to their own culture rather than against any other criteria.

From a Christian perspective we can straightaway reject the idea that all cultures are equal. Clearly a culture aimed at glorifying God is superior to one that glorifies human sexuality or any other idol. Even without this perspective, to say that all cultures are equal makes a mockery of equality. Every culture proclaims certain values and ethical norms which can be in direct conflict with another culture. Therefore, it makes no sense to say that they are all equal. Is a culture that values free speech equal to one that does not? Is a culture that values women's rights equal to one that does not? Is a culture that promotes promiscuity and homosexuality equal to one that does not? What about slavery, racism, polygamy, FGM, etc.? All these are cultural practices, and they are evidently not equal. Of course, to say this is to imply that there is a transcendent source of morality by which all cultures can be judged, which is a truth that contemporary societies seek to reject.

This reality of a transcendent source of morality directly contradicts cultural relativism. A consistent cultural relativist would neither criticise nor seek to curb the practice of slavery, for example, because she sees this practice as culturally relative. She has no moral source to appeal to. As Christians we recognise the divine origin of moral law as revealed in the Bible, and thus we have legitimate, transcendent grounds to criticise various cultural practices. In fact, we are morally obligated to critique cultures and to proclaim God's laws and moral order to them. This is what the prophets did, not only in Israel, but to the surrounding nations – see Amos 1 for example.

This is why William Carey was able to boldly criticise and campaign against the culturally ingrained, religious practice of Sati in India – the practice of burning widows alive at their husbands' funerals. His campaigns led to the outlawing of the practice.⁹ No consistent cultural relativist could consider doing such a thing.

In this way, cultural relativism suffers from what is known as the Reformer's Dilemma.¹⁰ If cultural relativism is true, then a person's actions can only be evaluated according to the culture they are from. If

⁷ For example, the case of Felix Ngole who was thrown off his university course for supporting biblical sexual ethics. Also, the case of Richard Page who was dismissed as a magistrate for expressing his belief that children are best raised with a mother and a father. <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-issues/employment/employment-tribunal-allows-censorship-of-christian-beliefs>

⁸ Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law: The Impact of Legal Pluralism in the UK* (London: I. B. Tauris Limited, 2016), 171.

⁹ <http://www.christiantoday.co.in/article/wiliam.carey.played.significant.role.in.abolishing.sati.system/4906.htm>

¹⁰ Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 101.

that is so, then the greatest crime possible is to try to change the practices of a culture. Cultural change can only be evaluated by a multiculturalist as immoral. Therefore, the cultural relativist must condemn people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., William Wilberforce, William Carey and many others. Their actions can only be regarded as moral if we accept a transcendent source of morality.

Furthermore, cultural relativism is also undermined by cross-cultural actions. What are we to make of a person from culture A having extra-marital sex with someone from culture B, whilst staying in a hotel in culture C? By which culture should the morality of this act be evaluated? How about someone who's biological parents are from cultures A and B, and whose foster parents are from cultures C and D, who is now living in culture E? Which culture's moral standards is she expected to abide by? These are not merely hypothetical examples – witness the fuss caused by the story of a child with some Christian cultural heritage being cared for by Muslim foster parents who were alleged to be imposing Muslim values on the child last year.¹¹ The child was actually of mixed cultural heritage which added to the complexity of the story. The point is that cultural relativism cannot resolve issues like these because it tries to affirm that all the cultures are equally valid even though they clash and conflict in multiple ways. It is the ideology of multiculturalism that has created situations like this.

Other examples of the absurdities of multiculturalism abound; a court in Ontario ruled that a man was not guilty of raping his wife because he genuinely believed he could have sex with her whenever he wanted.¹² No matter that he broke Canadian law. The judge accepted that he did not know it was against the law to have sex with his wife without her consent. An Australian court granted leave for an Afghan rapist to appeal on the basis that the rapist had 'an unclear concept of what constitutes consent in sexual relationships in Australia'.¹³ A judge in Germany acquitted a Turkish man of a rape that had left the woman incapacitated. The judge argued that in 'the mentality of the Turkish cultural circle,' what the woman 'had experienced as rape' might be considered merely 'wild sex'.¹⁴ An Iraqi man who raped a 10-year-old boy at a swimming

The multiculturalist thinks that someone's moral behaviour can only be judged relative to their culture.

pool in Austria had his conviction overturned after judges found he may have believed the child consented.¹⁵ The victims in all these cases had a valid cultural expectation not to be abused in this way, and a further cultural expectation that their abuser would be punished by the law. Multiculturalism is responsible for such injustices which undermine the fundamental principle of one law for all. The multiculturalist thinks that someone's moral behaviour can only be judged relative to their culture. What this means in practice is that multiculturalists hold people from other cultures to a lower standard of morality, which can be viewed as a form of racism in itself.

Samuel Huntington writes: 'Multiculturalism is in essence anti-European civilisation... It is basically an anti-Western ideology.'¹⁶ Western culture was based on Christian values. We have seen that fundamental to multiculturalism is the denial of objective transcendent moral law. Thus, multiculturalism is directly opposed to Christianity, which proclaims that there is one God who is the sole source of objective, transcendent moral law by which all people from all cultures will be judged. Therefore, multiculturalism is fundamentally anti-Christian. It cannot tolerate Christians proclaiming that there is a God who 'commands all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30).

¹¹ <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/the-multicultural-adoption-case>

¹² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5001452/Man-NOT-guilty-rape-did-not-know-illegal.html>

¹³ <http://www.frontpagemag.com/point/184298/australian-judge-finds-muslim-cultural-differences-daniel-greenfield>

¹⁴ <https://pjmedia.com/trending/2017/04/21/german-judge-acquits-turkish-man-of-rape-after-4-hours-of-forced-violent-sex/>

¹⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/iraqi-refugee-raped-10-year-old-boy-swimming-pool-vienna-austria-sentence-conviction-overturned-a7377491.html>

¹⁶ Samuel P Huntington, *Who are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), 171.

On cultural identity

Multiculturalism teaches that a person's authentic identity is bound up in their cultural identity, so much so that non-recognition of this cultural identity constitutes psychological harm.¹⁷ The idea that identity is bound up in culture assumes that people never change culture, or convert to another religion. A multiculturalist would severely criticise anyone who criticised their original culture – that is seen as a form of treason.

The idea that non-recognition of cultural identity constitutes psychological harm is one of many victim narratives by which contemporary culture is captivated. Why would not being categorised as a member of a particular community constitute harm? Insisting on recognition of different cultural identities is in fact divisive, anti-inclusive, and leads to the fragmentation of society.

Machteld Zee illustrates how this applies in practice:¹⁸

'Take, for example, "John". John is an Iraqi-born Muslim living in Birmingham who disapproves of people who do not follow his religion. In fact, an important part of John's identity is expressed through his dismissive attitude towards non-believers. He wishes not to recognise a non-believer for who that person truly is, preferring to be critical, or even dismissive of Western values. If we were to follow multiculturalist theory, we respect John's true nature. We should not even criticise John for criticising other people's life choices. John has the right to believe whatever he wishes, and we should be respectful and tolerant of his position. So far so good. But now we change John a little bit and this time, he is a white male citizen living in Liverpool. John does not recognise Muslims for who they truly are, in fact he is quite dismissive of Islam. He regularly unfolds his critique of life choices inspired by that religion, stating that Islam is detrimental to individual wellbeing. He questions the merits of Islam-inspired practices, such as veiling and praying five times a day. Now multiculturalists would label the latter lack of recognition as a form of causing psychological harm, as well as arrogant, condescending, and Eurocentric, possibly even racist and discriminatory. The moral duty of recognising an individual for who he truly is thus a one-way street.'

Somehow, as Zee points out, multiculturalists manage to assume that white Euro-Americans are psychologically immune to criticism, even to the extent of being called racist, whilst at the same time assuming that members of minority cultures are dependent on the approval of white Euro-Americans for their sense of self-worth! This inequality is held to be justified because of collective guilt imposed on white Euro-Americans for their past behaviour. This imposed guilt actually requires multiculturalism to be false because it assumes that historically, culturally-bound practices were immoral. A true multiculturalist cannot say that past cultural actions were immoral, let alone that present cultures are collectively guilty for those past actions.

It is, in fact, people who should be treated with equal respect and dignity because they are all of equal worth, being created in the image of God. Cultures, however, do not deserve equal respect, because not all cultural beliefs and practices are equally worthy. A person's identity is not intrinsically bound up in their cultural background, both because their culture may change, and because they may change their cultural allegiance.

On preservation of culture

One argument put forward by multiculturalists is that minority cultures ought to be preserved. This is an odd argument to make. No-one argues for the preservation of Victorian culture. Of course, we should preserve the history and historical information about Victorian culture, but we shouldn't condemn some people to living as if they were in Victorian Britain today. Neither should we insist that indigenous African

¹⁷ Zee, *Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism & Sharia Councils*, 18-29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

tribal culture is preserved. Indigenous people will benefit from better education, water supply, healthcare, and many other technologies that their original culture did not have. They should not be denied these benefits.

Cultures regularly become extinct, largely because people turn away from them. People should have the freedom to do so. Western missionaries have been criticised for changing local cultures by introducing Christianity. But the fact is that cultures change all the time, sometimes for the better. The introduction of Christianity will objectively improve any culture with superior morality and religious conviction. Christianity will also tend to improve literacy, education, healthcare and much else besides. We should all feel morally obligated to seek to change cultures in these various objectively beneficial ways. Multiculturalism is fundamentally opposed to missionary activity and thus opposed to evangelical Christianity.

Our loss of cultural identity

French President Emmanuel Macron famously said, 'There's no such thing as French culture.'¹⁹ Unpicking his words in detail, he explained: 'There is culture in France and it is diverse.'²⁰ This amounts to an admission of no unifying culture. Macron's statement is indicative of a collective loss of cultural identity throughout western Europe. The British government's commissioned report into integration in our society resulted in an admission that we have basically failed at integration.²¹ This is hardly surprising if we lack any sense of collective identity in the first place. The government is now desperately trying to work out what 'British values' are in order to regain some sense of collective identity and shared values. David Cameron was even criticised for wanting migrants to learn English.²² But surely a common language is the most basic requirement of a cohesive society?

Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, claims that modern Britain is the first society to try to operate without shared religious beliefs and rituals at its heart. 'In a sense, we are a very unusual society. We are trying to do something that no society has really done. We are trying to live without an agreed narrative of our communal place in the cosmos and in time', MacGregor said.²³ There is truth in this, though it is an exaggeration. No society can hold together without some agreed set of values, and the source of these values is necessarily a religious worldview, whether recognised as such or not. Multiculturalism is an ideology which imposes certain values on society. These values are neither morally nor religiously neutral. What is unusual about multiculturalism is that it expects everyone to accept contradictory values and practices in the same society and yet to live harmoniously together. This expectation is delusional. No society can accept contradictory values and practices and hold together.

Fundamental freedoms

We now recognise that any society necessarily adheres to some religious convictions which provide its source of values. Clearly, the best moral framework for any society is the biblical one. What this framework also provides for is fundamental freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of conscience. Indeed, it is widely recognised that Christianity formed the moral foundation for the whole concept of human rights.

In any society all these freedoms are limited to some extent, and freedoms naturally come with responsibilities. The laws of the land should be respected, and everyone should be treated equally by them. This is another biblical principle (Exodus 12:49; Numbers 5:16). Within these constraints, fundamental freedoms should be maintained and protected, with the law also making allowance for freedom of

¹⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/emmanuel-macrons-unlikely-path-to-the-french-presidency/2017/05/07/f8943ed8-bdc3-4ed4-8bbb-97a8781ff393_story.html?utm_term=.e486fb213820

²⁰ <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/@future-learning/2017/05/04/24457/macron-french-culture>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/18/david-cameron-stigmatising-muslim-women-learn-english-language-policy>

²³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/11/neil-macgregor-britain-stands-alone-comes-religi1on/>

conscience, particularly in controversial areas. Historically, UK law has allowed conscientious objection during war, and it currently allows conscientious objection regarding abortion. In general, people should be allowed to object to the production of goods or services on conscientious grounds. Recent cases of bakers and printers being asked to produce goods promoting same-sex marriage have raised the profile of this issue. A principle of 'reasonable accommodation' should be agreed which allows for people to obey their conscience. Such accommodation should not extend to the creation of a de facto parallel legal system as we see with sharia courts in this country, nor to the promotion of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, or to promoting hatred for outsiders, for example.

Integration requires a measure of respect for the host culture, including agreement to abide by the laws of the land. Any society also requires not just a common law, but a common language to hold together. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali is quite right to point out that integration does not necessarily mean assimilation, however.²⁴ Many communities such as Jews, Huguenots and East Africans have successfully integrated whilst also maintaining something of their own distinctiveness. Others are segregated and are widely understood to have failed to integrate, for which the ideology of multiculturalism must take a large part of the blame.

What is wrong with multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism is an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to Christianity. It cannot accept a transcendent source of morality and therefore resists accepting the reality of a creator God. It considers missionary activity and attempts to morally reform cultures as immoral. It is damaging to society in that it creates obvious injustices and holds people from different cultures to lower moral standards, which can be regarded as a form of racism. It undermines a fundamental principle of democracy – the principle of one law for all. State sponsored multiculturalism is a form of state endorsed religious pluralism or polytheism. It is unstable and will inevitably result in the collapse or fragmentation of society.

Multiculturalism is an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to Christianity.

Multiculturalism should be resisted by Christians. Indeed, it has only been able to arise in the context of weakened allegiance to Christianity in this country. Our task, as Paul wrote, is to 'demolish arguments and every pretention that sets itself up against the knowledge of God' (2 Corinthians 10:5). Since multiculturalism is opposed to Christianity, it needs to be demolished. This article is an attempt to demonstrate the kinds of arguments Christians can employ to do so. We, like Paul, are called to proclaim the gospel to people of all cultures (Acts 17). This necessarily involves the proclamation of a creator God who holds all people accountable to his transcendent moral law, regardless of culture. It is the proclamation of this truth that is our primary tool in calling people to reject multiculturalism, and to seek to objectively improve contemporary culture according to God's transcendent righteous moral standards.

Tim Dieppe

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²⁴ Nazir-Ali, Michael, *Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism* (Bloomsbury: London, 2012), xi, 12.

Advance Decisions (Living Wills)

From time to time church leaders have people in their congregation who will look to them for advice on making choices and decisions about medical treatment and especially future treatments when death is near or personal mental capacity has failed. Such advice should only be given in consultation with family and those who may have care of the person asking for advice. This short article follows on from the previous article on Lasting Powers of Attorney (The Bulletin Issue 35, July 2017) and looks at other options.

If someone is unwell they will normally discuss their treatment with their doctor and come to an agreement about what options they should take. It is often at this time that the pastor/elder/church leader may well be consulted. But sometimes, because of the seriousness of their illness, or because they are unconscious, or because they have limited intellectual powers, it is not possible for that person to make a decision. To mitigate that situation it is possible to do one of three things:

- i. Make and register a Lasting Power of Attorney for health and care decisions;
- ii. Make an Advance Decision to refuse treatment under specified conditions (these are sometimes referred to as Living Wills);
- iii. Prepare an Advance Statement of wishes and care preferences that will inform others of what is wanted and so that can be taken into consideration.

Advanced Care Planning is a term used to describe a conversation between a person, their family and care-givers, and professionals involved in their care. The whole process is covered in England and Wales by the Mental Capacity Act 2005. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the situation is different; in Scotland the relevant legislation is the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. Advance Decisions are governed by common law rather than legislation, although the definition and determination of mental capacity is covered by the relevant acts of Parliament.

An Advance Decision to refuse treatment allows someone who has mental capacity to make a decision about medical treatment(s) they would want to refuse should they be deemed to need such treatment in the future and by that time lack 'mental capacity' to decide and/or express their own wishes. An Advance Decision does not need to be in writing in most cases. However, if that person wishes to refuse life-sustaining treatment, it must be in writing – signed and witnessed – and state clearly that it must apply, even if life is at risk.

An Advance Statement allows someone to make more general statements, describing their wishes and preferences about future care should the situation arise that they cannot make or communicate a decision or express a preference at the time. This statement will often reflect religious beliefs and personal values that the person holds. It can include things such as food and drink preferences; type of clothes to wear; music, TV or DVD to be played or toiletry preferences. It may also state who should be allowed to visit, and who should be consulted about care. It is helpful to write such information down. If a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) of health and care decisions is being created the existence of an Advance Statement should be stated. An Advance Statement is not legally binding but should be taken into account by those making decisions in the best interest of the person.

A person may record their wishes in an Advance Decision, or in an Advance Statement or in both. There are as many reasons for doing this as there are for making a will. It certainly gives peace of mind to people, especially if they have a life-limiting condition. It also gives peace of mind and confidence about the future to family and those who may have to make decisions on the person's behalf.

It is, of course, not necessary to make an Advance Decision. It can be left to whatever medical staff are undertaking care to decide what is in the patient's best interests. In deciding on what is in the best interests of the patient a doctor should take account of evidence of beliefs and past wishes and talk to family, friends and carers where appropriate.

In order to make an Advance Decision the person must be aged 18 or over and have the mental capacity to make such choices about treatment. For most people, there is no doubt about their capacity to do so. If there are concerns about mental capacity, two simple questions are asked:

- i. Do they have an impairment of the mind or brain, or is there some sort of disturbance affecting the way their mind or brain works?
- ii. If so, does that impairment or disturbance mean they are unable to make the decision in question at the time it needs to be made after all practical and appropriate support to help them make the decision has been tried?

Answering 'yes' to both questions and recording the basis of that conclusion would support a reasonable belief that someone 'lacks capacity' to make treatment decisions.

An Advance Decision cannot be used to refuse basic care that is essential to keep you comfortable, such as nursing care, pain relief or keeping you warm. Nor can it be used to refuse the offer of food or drink by mouth. Obviously, it also cannot be used to ask for anything that is against the law such as euthanasia or help to take your own life; it is a decision *not* to have certain treatments rather than a request *for* specific treatments.

It is not necessary to involve a doctor or a solicitor in making an Advance Decision. If, however, the person has a life-limiting condition, or even a terminal condition, then consultation with doctors is the wisest thing to do. Certainly, every effort should be made to encourage people to consult a solicitor.

An Advance Decision only needs to be in writing if you want to refuse life-sustaining treatment. Putting it in writing and getting the doctor to record the fact in medical notes avoids uncertainty. There is no dedicated form to use if you want to put an Advance Decision in writing, but there are a number of firms offering forms, especially on the internet. That is why it is far better to involve a solicitor.

Life-sustaining treatment is described as 'treatment that, in the view of the person providing health care to the person concerned, is necessary to sustain their life'. If, subsequent to making an Advance Decision, the person decides to add a refusal of life-sustaining treatment that decision must be recorded in writing and signed and dated in the presence of a witness, who must also sign it.

If an Advance Decision is prepared according to the requirements of the Act, it is legally binding and medical professionals must follow it, regardless of whether they believe it is in the best interests of the patient. They must be aware that the Advance Decision exists, is valid and applies to the situation. Doctors must also be sure the person has not withdrawn it or clearly said or done something that goes against it which would suggest they have changed their mind. It is at this point that difficulties can arise and church leaders have found believers undergoing treatment to which they know the person would have objected. Great care should be taken to ensure medical staff know the Advance Decision exists and what its terms are.

An Advance Decision can be cancelled at any time while there is capacity to do so. There is no formal process. Tell everyone who knows there is an Advance Decision that it has been cancelled and put this in writing to avoid uncertainty. Healthcare professionals should record any verbal cancellation in the person's records for future reference. This may seem a mundane matter, but it is an issue that can cause great distress if not handled properly.

Roger Hitchings

The State of Freedom of Religion in the UK

A new law is urgently required to safeguard religious freedoms in the UK, freedoms that have taken centuries to build. Many struggled to win these freedoms for us, and were themselves discriminated against, imprisoned and even killed. But intolerance, complacency and uniformity are slowly eroding these away.

On 3 October 1660, John Bunyan stood trial for not attending the State Church, and conducting services apart from the State Church. During the trial, the judge initially gave Bunyan the option of no imprisonment if 'he swears solemnly to discontinue' preaching. His response was clear:

'I cannot do what you ask of me... my calling to preach the Gospel is from God, and He alone can make me discontinue what He has appointed me to do... the State has no right whatever to interfere in the religious life of its citizens.'

The judge proceeded to place another decision in front of Bunyan, by stating that as a dissenting (according to the State) preacher he should procure a licence. This was vital because, as the judge stated, *'Mr. Bunyan, [you] must surely grant the legitimacy of the State's interest in ensuring that any fool with a Bible does not simply gather a group of people together and begin to preach to them. Imagine the implications were that to happen!'*

Bunyan replied,

'I appreciate the Court's efforts to be... accommodating. But again, I must refuse your terms; I must repeat that it is God who constrains me to preach, and no man or company of men may grant or deny me leave to preach... licenses... are symbols not of a right, but of a privilege [and] implied therein is the principle that a mere man can extend or withhold them according to his whim... privileges [the licenses] granted by men may be denied by men. Rights are granted by God, and can be legitimately denied by no man. I must therefore, refuse to comply.'

John Bunyan was incarcerated in Bedford Jail for an initial six years, where he wrote the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Over hundreds of years, the restrictions placed on freedom of religion (such as were faced by Bunyan in 1660) were gradually repealed. These repeals, gradually worked out over centuries, formed into seven specific aspects of freedom of religion:

1. Freedom to read the Bible in public (achieved 1537)
2. Freedom to interpret the Bible without government interference (achieved 1559)
3. Freedom of worship (achieved 1689) – something John Bunyan did not experience
4. Freedom to choose, or change, your faith or belief (achieved 1689)
5. Freedom to preach and try to convince others of the truth of your beliefs (achieved 1812)
6. Freedom to build churches and other places of worship (achieved 1812)
7. Freedom from being required to affirm a particular worldview or set of beliefs in order to hold a public-sector job or stand for election, work in professions such as teaching and law, or study at university (achieved by the repeal of various Test Acts between 1719 and 1888)

But it is exactly because these freedoms were achieved by the repeal of various restrictions on freedom of religion, rather than being positively affirmed by specific laws, that they are vulnerable to being eroded – eroded by those who are either intent on imposing a particular ideological agenda, or by politicians who are simply ignorant of the enormous importance that previous generations played in developing freedom of religion and spreading it to other parts of the world.

Consequently, some of these aspects of freedom of religion which the UK led the world in developing are now being significantly eroded in the UK. Is this really happening today? Unfortunately, yes. In recent years

a preacher has been prosecuted for preaching the gospel; another has been prosecuted for a sermon, preached from his own pulpit; a NHS worker has been fired for offering to say a prayer for a colleague in their lunch hour; a politician had to stand down from a prominent role because his faith came under hostile questioning from the media; an African student was kicked off a UK university course for replying to Facebook questions about his Christian beliefs; and a nurse was fired for wearing a cross with her uniform, which they have worn for decades.

Regrettably, these are all real recent cases from the UK. We at Barnabas Fund, alongside our coalition partners, are therefore asking for a new Act of Parliament, which specifically affirms and protects all of these aspects of religious liberty in the UK. We need to stand together now to reclaim the heritage of freedom of religion in the UK, for which previous generations of Christians endured hardship, persecution and even death. The seven freedoms are under threat and a law to protect and guarantee them is urgently needed, for us and for future generations.

OurReligiousFreedom.org

Hendrik Storm

Pretty Super: Behind the Mask of Society's Fascination with Superheroes

In 2015, domestic comic book sales in the United States topped \$940 million.²⁵ Lest you think all of this cash is generated from men's bank accounts, market research has shown that 47% of comic fans are women.²⁶ With more comic material devoted and targeted directly to women – Marvel's current Thor female being a case in point – some see this as likely to increase even more. That said, the divergence from classic brands within Marvel and DC – all for sake of 'diversity' – have not been well received. With few exceptions both male and female fans prefer the traditional, and yes, more 'complementarian', superhero storylines.

With easy to follow story lines, natural scripting, and graphic illustrations of characters and scenes, it stands to reason that comic superheroes are a favourite with movie script-writers, producers, directors, actors and fans. Some graphic novels that are not strictly speaking a part of any superhero universe, such as Frank Miller and Dark Horse Comic's *300*, have successfully been portrayed in a unique, almost frame-by-frame, way on film. While not done in quite the same way with live-action superhero films, it is not uncommon to recognise certain scenes as directly inspired by a particular comic. *Box Office Mojo* has listed over 120 superhero movies made since 1978, with combined earnings of over \$17 billion – and things aren't slowing down.

Comic book giants DC and Marvel will continue to go head-to-head in what I call the 'Super-stakes' with what is anticipated to be over twenty films set in their respective superhero universes over the next four years. If the significance of this is still not appreciated, consider the presence of *The Avengers*, *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Captain America: Civil War* and the un-inspiringly named *Iron-Man 3* in the worldwide all time highest grossing movie top fifteen. There are over twenty such movies in the United States all time highest grossing domestic top 100 (and almost that in the worldwide top 100).

So what is so attractive about superhero stories? What draws people to them? What lessons can we learn from them? How do they illustrate mankind's nature, wants, needs and emotions? Is there intended allegory in the stories? Does this have any importance pastorally and in church life?

When super meets ordinary

Despite the extraordinary universe in which the stories are set, the primary themes of superhero stories are very normal and relatable. They appeal to human conscience and morality and stir up emotions and residual desires that show both our wish to be and to have heroes.

Good

Superheroes – at least in their origin – reflected the reality of an ongoing war between good and evil. In a world falling apart, they have regularly reflected a very Judeo-Christian worldview, rooted in a sense of moral objectivity and absolute truth. They are loved because they present good and evil for what they are; they make it easy to pick sides; they recognise absolute truth and justice and that whatever bad may occur, what is good, right and true must always ultimately win. One superhero with perhaps a greater appreciation for absolute truth than others is Captain America. In one monologue he says:

'Doesn't matter what the press says. Doesn't matter what the politicians or the mob say. Doesn't matter if the whole country decides that something wrong is something right... when the mob and the press and the whole world tell you to move, your job is to plant yourself like a tree, beside the river of truth and tell the whole world "No. You move."'

While many continue to abandon the concept of absolute, objective truth, their love of such heroes suggests that they still, in their conscience and hearts, know that it is this absolute and concrete objectivity

²⁵ 'Comic Book Sales by Year', www.comichron.com

²⁶ Brett Schenker, 'Market Research Says 46.67% of Comic Fans are Female', *The Beat: The News Blog of Comics Culture*, 2 May 2014

that the world needs. Truth is not based on fads or trends or decided by culture; it is an unswerving and immovable standard, unaffected by human politics or legislature.

Captain America is not the originator of this idea of following truth and justice. The principle is found back in Psalm 1 in the Bible. These words point the way more clearly than even the best of superheroes:

'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.' (Psalm 1:1-3)

Evil

In the earlier days of modern superhero stories, bad guys were often portrayed in outlandish, sometimes even comical, ways. This did not make their character or actions less evil; their humour and comical portrayal in some ways, paradoxically, made them that much more creepy. Characters such as Batman's nemesis, the Joker, would eventually be developed to become increasingly more gritty in strategy, crime and general psychosis.

Sometimes subplots within superhero stories have now become so gut-wrenchingly realistic that it is possible to sympathise with Alfred the butler's musing in the new film *Justice League*: 'One misses the days of exploding, wind-up penguins.' Other stories spectacularly portray in a vivid visual form the battle against truly demonic forces, including the recent *Avengers vs. Ultron*, *Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman vs. Doomsday* and *The Justice League vs Steppenwolf*. In each of these, the heroes are portrayed as the good versus the demonic evil. Like any anti-Christ figure, at times the evil protagonists come in the guise of bringing good and justice into the world, but in such a way that is itself devoid of mercy and grace.

In *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Ultron philosophically muses of what he will bring to the world: 'I was designed to save the world. People would look to the sky and see hope... I'll take that from them first.' Ultron bills himself as a saviour but he has no grace or love.

Elsewhere he says, 'I was meant to be new. I was meant to be beautiful. The world would've looked to the sky and seen hope, seen mercy. Instead, they'll look up in horror.' Ultron sees the chaos and destruction he metes out as a good thing and accomplishes his aim of delivering the world without compassion and with a cruelty as hard and cold as the vibranium metal he embodies.

In *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, the twisted and psychotic Lex Luthor regularly rants against God, his goodness and power. Portraying Clark Kent as the God figure, Luthor asserts that if God is all-powerful he cannot be all good, rooting his belief in that God did not keep his father from beating him. Luthor, in creating the Doomsday monster states: 'If man won't kill God, the Devil will do it.' Luthor, embracing evil, is ultimately defeated along with Doomsday. His defeat comes at great cost and much destruction, with great sacrifice and the death of a hero.

Superheroes join us in our struggle

Most superhero stories have fairly predictable plot-lines. They consistently feature suffering and pain. Some go beyond physical pain and portray characters with deep emotional angst. This is no less true of the superheroes. In their origin stories we often see the hero shaped through much pain; young Bruce Wayne's parents are shot dead in front of him, paving the way for his development into the Batman. Kal El's parents send him to Earth as their own world meets its destruction. Comics and television shows like *Smallville* portray Kal El's development on Earth as Clark Kent and the struggles he has in realising his superpowers. Peter Parker (Spider-man) is moulded by the tragic death of his uncle. Steve Rogers (Captain America) is a bullied, sickly and weak young man whose only attractive attribute initially is his good character. Superheroes don't only live in a world of trouble; they are themselves troubled.

Upon taking on their mantles in their respective universes, it is not uncommon for superheroes to continue to face personal battles and difficulties, often feeling helpless and hopeless in the face of evil. In *Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice*, Alfred warns an aging and broody Bruce Wayne of *'The fever, the rage, the feeling of powerlessness that turns good men cruel.'* *Captain America: Civil War* depicts infighting and personal struggles shared by the Avengers. These stories point to the struggles not only with trouble around us but against those within.

While superheroes are portrayed as seemingly invincible, they, like humans, can and do die. While it is common for the comic universe to kill off and subsequently resurrect some of its characters – the Messiah-inspired Superman being most notable – others die of all too familiar causes. In *The Death of Captain Marvel* (1980), it is cancer that kills off the hero. After *Civil War* (the comic book, not the movie), Steve Rogers takes off his mask as Captain America and turns himself in to S.H.I.E.L.D. In *Captain America Vol. 5, No. 25*, The 'Sentinel of Liberty' is assassinated while imprisoned. It is the mortality of these superheroes that make them all the more appealing. Though 'super' and otherworldly, they are simultaneously very human and prone to being abused, misunderstood, slandered, humiliated and even killed. There is something heroic in the humiliation of a superhero's death – and even more so, if the hero is vindicated in regaining life.

Pastoral implications

We are fascinated by superhero stories because, in their own way, they seem so relatable and so real. They don't sugar-coat the realities of the world. They portray physical, mental, emotional and spiritual trouble. They deal with the constant conflict between good and evil. They remind us of what we already know; the world is in a lot of trouble and we want and need a hero who can come into our troubled world, join in our pain, and defeat the evil and suffering.

Natalie Haynes, writing for the BBC, says:

*'We are surely drawn to heroes and superheroes because they illuminate the human condition – and they do so precisely because they operate at a slightly inhuman level. Heroes are like us, but more so: stronger, cleverer, faster. They suffer from the same human frailties as we do, but because of their superior powers, these struggles are played out in a more dramatic arena than our own. Superheroes impose order on a chaotic world, which can often seem to be filled with nefarious powers (from natural disasters to supervillains) that mere mortals cannot identify or hope to fight.'*²⁷

Acclaimed comic book writer Grant Morrison has added: *'We love our superheroes because they refuse to give up on us. We can analyse them out of existence, kill them, ban them, mock them, and still they return, patiently reminding us of who we are and what we wish we could be.'*²⁸

Pastorally, these stories help illustrate mankind's deepest longings. We want just, wholesome societies which are very different to our own. We need healing in our land and we know that we need a hero. We expect heroism of our leaders but they all fall short. Superhero stories hold out hope and present an escape from reality where we can dream of something better than what we have.

But the truth is not far away from each one of us. There is something much better that we can have and someone that we can point to as better than the best of superheroes.

Jesus is better

The Bible's greatest hero, indeed, the world's greatest hero, is the historical and non-fictional Jesus Christ. His story doesn't gloss over the difficulties of human life; rather, it puts political, personal, psychological

²⁷ Natalie Haynes, *Before Marvel and DC: Superheroes of the Ancient World*, 19 August 2015.

²⁸ Grant Morrison, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human*, Epilogue.

and spiritual turmoil on full display. Everything that attracts people to fictitious superhero stories is true of the historically verifiable story of Jesus Christ. This is why it is important to appreciate comic book fiction and use it, where possible, to point to the facts found in Jesus.

Just as the pagan Greek philosophers and poets were used by Paul in a redemptive way, those of us involved in Christian ministry should at least be acquainted with our modern culture, its philosophies, interests and obsessions. Engaging people with words and illustrations they recognise and understand can be greatly used evangelistically. Pointing people to the Messianic inspiration and Christian symbolism that underpins Superman's story can be surprising to them and a real conversation starter. Even with darker stories, such as the X-men franchise's most recent film, *Logan*, the Judeo-Christian and Messianic themes are undeniable.

Jesus is the hero of heroes: fully God and fully man, miraculously born to save the world, living to die as a sacrifice for all who believe, humiliated, rejected by his own, and yet patient and faithful in fulfilling his mission of deliverance – historically verifiable and resurrected from the dead. He accomplished where our superheroes fail; he is the one who will return and save the world once and for all.

Lois Lane comments at the end of *Justice League*: *'The truest darkness is not absence of light but that light will never return... But the light always returns... Hope is real. You can see it. All you have to do is look up into the sky.'*

Indeed. While Superman is not real, Jesus is and he is coming again.

'He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognise him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:11-14)

'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.' (Acts 1:11)

Regan King

Ding, Dong, the Bells will not be Chiming: the 2015 Marriage Statistics

The furore over the redefinition of marriage in 2014 to include same-sex couples may have obscured another tragedy which was just as significant – that marriage in Britain, even when opposite-sex couples had it to themselves, had been in serious decline for several decades.

This was brought home by the release last month (28 February 2018) of the latest available marriage statistics for England and Wales, those for 2015, which showed marriage to be less popular than at any time since records began in 1862.

Compiled by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the figures revealed that only 2.17 per cent of eligible men (unmarried men over the age of 16), and 1.98 per cent of eligible women, married in 2015.

Marriage popularity, as measured by what is known as the ‘marriage rate’, was at its peak in 1972, when the equivalent figures were 7.84 per cent for men, and 6.05 per cent for women. This means that the proportion of men and women in the population who chose to marry in 1972 was more than three times what it was in 2015. In the 43 years between 1972 and 2015, the marriage rate percentages have been dropping relentlessly (4.21 and 3.61 in 1990; 3.01 and 2.59 in 2000; and 2.36 and 2.13 in 2010).

The decline in the marriage rate is particularly pronounced in the under 35s, which is a strong indication that the annual number of marriages can be expected to continue to decrease in the coming years.

Actual marriage numbers given in the recent release, as distinct from the marriage rate statistics, showed that there were 239,020 opposite-sex marriages in 2015, a decrease of 3.4 per cent compared with 2014. However, the lowest annual total on record is still the 231,450 in 2007.

Marriages in Scotland (28,020) and Northern Ireland (8,355) also declined in 2015, but not as much (2.4 per cent and 2.3 per cent) as in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland, all marriages are still between opposite-sex couples.

In the peak year of 1972, there had been 426,241 marriages in England and Wales – 78 per cent more than in 2015. This difference is made even more stark by the fact that the population in 1972 was lower than in 2015 by 8.5 million (15 per cent).

Prior to 1972, marriage was as central to the defining structure of society in Britain as birth and death. The three were inseparably linked in official records labelled *births, marriages and deaths*, and in the public mind through newspaper columns affectionately known as *hatches, matches and despatches*.

Since 1972, however, marriage has been racing out of fashion. While the population increased by 200,000 a year, the number of marriages decreased by 4,354 a year – every year for 43 years.

This is salutary for those, myself included, who feared the extent to which the introduction of same-sex marriage from March 2014 would diminish marriage, rob it of its unique definition, and undermine its esteem and place in society. The redefinition of marriage will have had, and will continue to have, those tragic and lasting effects.

Alongside our grief over that, however, and over the extent to which the redefinition does not honour God, we need to recognise that for years before same-sex marriage was even thought of, marriage in Britain was already in serious free-fall.

It has not been my purpose in this article to assess the many and varied possible reasons for the downgrade, and the reduced take-up, of marriage in Britain. My only present intention has been to report the statistics themselves.

A serious and thorough investigation of the precise reasons for the downgrade and reduced take-up of marriage is much needed. It would help Christians, corporately and individually, to challenge contemporary society regarding the place, significance and benefits of marriage. It would provide a useful reference point for Christians and churches in their teaching and pastoral ministries on marriage, and would better enable Christians, in their own marriages and church life, to guard against the influences and mindsets which have wounded and weakened marriage in the experience of the last two generations.

For the record, there was no dramatic rise or fall in the number of same-sex marriages in the second year following its introduction. There were 6,493 same-sex marriages in 2015, which amounted to 2.6 per cent of all marriages in 2015. This was slightly higher than the *pro rata* figure for the launch year of 2014, when 4,850 same-sex couples were married between 29 March and the end of the year.

In addition to the 11,343 same-sex marriages in 2014 and 2015, there were 11,567 conversions of civil partnerships into marriages in the same period. Civil partnership is now on the wane, there having been only 1,014 new civil partnerships contracted throughout the UK in 2015.

Rod Badams

Update on Life Issues

Abortion

Maria Caulfield – pro-life MP

When Teresa May reshuffled her cabinet in January she appointed Maria Caulfield, MP for Lewes, as the vice-chair for women at the Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ).

Miss Caulfield was a former senior nurse at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London and is a current member of the House of Commons' All-Party Pro-life Group (APPLG). In March 2017, she led the charge against Labour MP Diana Johnson's Ten-Minute Rule Bill, which sought to decriminalise abortion in the UK. She stated that such a move would result in abortion on demand, leave young women less safe and 'embolden' men to force women into abortion. It would, she said, become a 'charter for extreme abortion practices', including sex-selective abortion.

It did not take long before the feminist flak flew. For example, Sophie Walker, Women's Equality Party leader, said Ms Caulfield could 'never advocate effectively' for women. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (bpas) accused her of holding views on abortion that were 'out of step with members of the public and her own parliamentary party.' Caulfield trenchantly replied to such criticism, 'It's a sad day in this country if you can't have a different view to someone. To say that someone who has a different view cannot represent women is absolutely ridiculous.' And she Tweeted her answer to the bpas accusation as, 'I, and many colleagues who share my views, will not be silenced as we seek to be a voice of the voiceless, and as we argue for more modern and humane abortion law that upholds not only the dignity and rights of women but the dignity and rights of the unborn child.'

Maria Caulfield has thus been branded a heretic. In other words, she has become yet another victim of 'illiberal liberalism' and 'intolerant tolerance'. You cross swords with these so-called progressives and they will seek to deny you a voice. We say, 'Bravo. Good on you, Maria!'

Good news for conscientious objectors

Last December, the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health (FSRH) reversed its earlier decision and will now allow Christian doctors and nurses (and others who object on grounds of conscience) to train and work as sexual health professionals without having to provide abortifacient devices and drugs, such as the morning-after pill.

In April 2107, the FSRH had insisted that anyone who wanted to obtain a diploma to work in the sexual and reproductive health field must 'prescribe all forms of contraception'. The FSRH performed this welcome U-turn after the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) threatened legal action. In June, a similar climb-down on grounds of conscience had been performed by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) in its revised guidelines on Religion, Personal Values and Beliefs for pharmacy workers. On that occasion it was the Christian Institute that had warned the GPhC of an impending court case.

Marie Stopes out of NI

The 1967 Abortion Act does not extend to Northern Ireland. That has generated a personal and a political battleground ever since.

In October 2012, amid huge controversy, Marie Stopes opened the first Northern Ireland private abortion clinic in the centre of Belfast. The clinic has been constantly picketed, primarily by members of Precious Life. Marie Stopes promised to provide terminations within Northern Ireland's current legal framework, namely if continuing a pregnancy would put a woman's life at risk, or pose serious long-term damage to her physical or mental health.

In the six years prior to 2012, only 262 legal abortions had taken place in Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, just over 1,000 women each year were travelling to England and Wales for terminations. The Northern Irish pro-choice argument has always been that having to travel to the rest of the UK or further abroad to access safe, legal abortion, exacts an unfair financial and emotional cost on the Province's girls and women.

Then the Province's pro-life status began to be craftily dismantled. In June, the Westminster government announced that Northern Ireland residents would be given access to free abortion services on the NHS in England. And in October, the government said that women on low incomes – those on less than £15,300 a year – would also be entitled to help with their travel costs.

Finally, in December 2017, the Marie Stopes' Belfast clinic closed. The reason given was that local women could now have NHS-funded terminations in the rest of the UK. Pro-life groups were delighted at the closure. The director of Precious Life, Bernadette Smyth, described it as a 'massive pro-life victory'. They maintained that the Marie Stopes clinic was little more than a publicity stunt, and because of the Northern Irish strict abortion laws the clinic had actually performed very few abortions.

SofTouch – the new old

Among the New Year natter was the launch of a new abortion device called SofTouch. It is reported to be nearly 100% effective and able to complete an abortion in 60 to 90 seconds if the patient is less than six weeks pregnant and in about two or three minutes if she is between six and ten weeks.

The device was apparently developed in 2011 by Dr Joan Fleischman, a Harvard-trained physician, who was inspired 'to normalize the early abortion experience' – ugh! In essence, it is based on the old 'manual vacuum aspiration' (MVA) method. Its only new feature is that it fits into the palm of a doctor's hand. The SofTouch® website states that it is 'noninvasive and natural'. Neither of those statements is true. Abortion

is always invasive because to reach and extract the embryo or foetus the woman must be invaded internally and intrusively. And all abortions are unnatural, they are the deliberate interruption of a natural pregnancy.

Furthermore, SofTouch is advertised as the least invasive form of abortion that does not require sedation, an operating room, fasting the night before, or an electric suction machine. Big deal. The heart, the be-all and end-all, of abortion is not the method, but the object of the method, namely the snuffing out of the life of an innocent unborn child. SofTouch alters nothing.

Assisted Reproductive Technologies

IVF in the UK - 2016-17

In December 2017, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority issued its first-ever *State of the fertility sector: 2016-17* report. It assessed the performance of fertility clinics and research laboratories in the financial year 2016-17 by reporting on inspection findings, incidents and patient feedback. The full report may be accessed [here](#).

In 2016-17, approximately 60,000 patients underwent a total 86,016 treatment cycles in 119 licensed fertility clinics across the UK. These consisted of 76,469 IVF, 4,051 partner inseminations and 5,496 donor inseminations.

The publication's style is upbeat. It opens with, 'Our vision for fertility services in the UK is high quality care for everyone affected by fertility treatment. We want patients and donors to have access to safe, ethical and effective treatment with good outcomes.' And it focuses on its apparent star indicator, 'The report shows that fertility clinics perform very well on minimising multiple births: 86% of clinics have met our stretching target of no more than 10% multiple births. Working together, we have reduced the national multiple birth rate from 24% in 2009 to 11% today without reducing birth rates. This is a fantastic achievement which has increased the safety of IVF for mothers and their babies and reduced the burden on NHS ante- and neonatal services.'

However, all is not so jolly and bright. True, the number of IVF treatments showed a 6% increase over those from 2015. But during 2016, clinics reported 502 adverse incidents and 38 near misses – 'a slight increase from those reported in 2015.' Such incidents, though relatively rare at about 1% of all treatments, have increased by 8.5% from the previous year – hardly 'a slight increase'.

Adverse incidents are graded from A to C. There was only one grade A, which involved the birth of a baby with cystic fibrosis (CF) which occurred because of inadequate paperwork – the parents were not aware they were CF carriers and would have destroyed the embryo if they had known.

Comparing 2016 and 2015 data, there was a lower number of grade B incidents (serious harm to one person, such as the loss or damage of embryos, 176 vs. 200) and a higher number of the less serious grade C incidents (involves minor harm, such as one of many eggs being rendered unusable, 325 vs. 267). Near misses are defined as 'in which only luck [yes, that very word is used] prevented an incident from occurring' (38 vs. 30).

These are a cause for grave concern, or they should be. However, a sense of jauntiness exists in the industry. For example, Adam Balen, Chairman of the British Fertility Society, stated, 'We welcome the report, which shows the extraordinary commitment our specialty has to transparency ... We are confident that, in reality, there is no evidence that practices have changed or that there ought to be concerns about the sector.' Well, Professor Balen, I can think of at least 10 concerns about the sector.

Another bizarre IVF story

We like to keep a record of the curiosities and oddities associated with ARTs. And there are many. Of course, we already know about grandmothers giving birth to their grandchildren. And babies with two fathers and three mothers, and post-menopausal women having babies.

Here is another. Emma Wren Gibson, conceived within a year of her mother, was born on 25 November 2017. She is known as a 'snowbaby', an embryo frozen and stored for later possible later use. In this case she was frozen on 14 October 1992, or 24 years before she was born, the longest known time between freezing and birth. Emma and her mother Tina were conceived just a year or so apart. Weird?

On 13 March, Carol Sommerfelt, IVF laboratory director at the National Embryo Donation Center at Knoxville, Tennessee, thawed the embryonic Emma and transferred her into Tina Gibson. Emma was born a healthy baby, weighing 6 pounds 8 ounces and measuring 20 inches long.

Here is the backstory. Seven years ago, in 2010, Benjamin and Tina Gibson were married. He had cystic fibrosis so infertility was not unexpected. They fostered several children and thought of adopting. Then they heard about embryo adoption. They had two weeks to go through the profiles of 300 possible embryo donors. Looking at the characteristics of the anonymous donors they picked two – their first choice failed, so three embryos from their second choice were used. Tina became pregnant with Emma.

What can possibly be wrong here? After all the National Embryo Donation Center is a faith-based organisation, founded in 2003. Its website states, 'Christian faith is the overriding principle upon which we operate.' And Tina has said, 'We're just so thankful and blessed. She's a precious Christmas gift from the Lord. We're just so grateful.' For more substantial answers, read the section on IVF in chapter 3 of my Bioethical Issues book. There is even a piece there about embryo adoption on p. 94.

The shrinking family

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has recently reported that the average size of families in England and Wales has fallen to a record low – the fertility rate has dropped to 1.9 children per woman. And almost one in five do not have any children.

This low figure is partly linked to voluntary childlessness, women delaying motherhood for career prospects, financial reasons and later marriages. The ONS compared two cohorts – a young group of 45 year olds and an old group of 72 year olds, somewhat equivalent to the mothers of the young group. On average, the young had 1.9 children per family whereas the old had 2.2. Families with four or more children have also decreased, 10% vs 20%. Unsurprisingly, childlessness is also increasing with 18% (and 44% by the age of 30) vs. 11% among the older group.

The demographic pattern of families and childbearing are showing disappointing trends. Having children is now regarded as less and less aspirational. And delayed parenthood is causing unsolvable problems for more and more couples. Such a situation may be good news for IVF practitioners, but for the socially-aware and the bioethically-sensitive the future looks grim.

Genetic Engineering

On cloning primates

The big biological news during January 2018 came from China, where scientists have created the first cloned primates, two macaques, with a technique similar to the one used to clone Dolly the sheep way back in 1996. Though successful with several mammalian species, this somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) method has failed to produce live primates until now.

This is the work of Zhen Liu *et al.*, which appeared in *Cell* (24 January 2018) under the title, *Cloning of Macaque Monkeys by Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer*. The two identical, crab-eating cynomolgus monkeys

(*Macaca fascicularis*), named Zhong Zhong and Hua Hua (they look seriously cute), were delivered by Caesarean section at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Shanghai.

The research team started by removing the nuclei from fibroblasts from an aborted female macaque foetus, rather than an adult. These were inserted into 129 macaque denucleated ova, which were then cultured and artificially stimulated to cause the zygotes to begin cell division. At this point, novel culture conditions and chemical modulators, to switch on or off certain genes that were inhibiting embryo growth, were developed and used. The outcome was 109 SCNT embryos. A total of 79 of these were transferred into 21 surrogate monkeys, which resulted in six pregnancies but only two live birth survivors – they were born in December 2017.

Why did this team succeed where others had previously failed? The paper states it was due ‘to the optimisation of the nuclear transfer protocol, the use of fetal cell nuclei, and epigenetic modifications. All of them together greatly improved the quality of blastocyst development and pregnancy rate.’

Two immediate questions arise – why clone monkeys, and will humans be cloned? First, Lui and his colleagues hope to use this revised SCNT technique to develop populations of genetically-identical non-human primates to provide improved animal models of human disorders, such as cancer, and for testing potential drug treatments. This technology could, some say, also be combined with CRISPR–Cas9 to create genetically-engineered primate-brain models of human disorders, including Parkinson’s disease.

Second, this achievement inevitably raises concerns among scientists and the public that the technique might be used to create cloned humans. Mu-Ming Poo, a co-author of the paper, has said, ‘Technically, there is no barrier to human cloning. We want to produce genetically-identical monkeys. That is our only purpose.’ Nevertheless, it is common knowledge that there are at least a handful of cloning mavericks around the world, who have already tried, and so far failed, to clone humans. For them, this improved SCNT will be like sweets to a child.

This improved SCNT method works, but not very well. Even so, the Shanghai lab is expecting the birth of another six macaque clones soon. Some regard all this as the beginning of a new era for biomedical research. And human cloning is again being discussed, if not pursued. So where are the restraints? There are no international agreements preventing human cloning. It is not illegal in most of the USA, whereas it is currently prohibited in, for example, Germany and the UK. The prudent strategy – human SCNT should be banned worldwide, and soon.

Gene editing – risks and dangers

How should we assess gene editing? Nathan Gardels has considered some of the issues (*Washington Post*, 15 December 2017). The application of this relatively new technology of gene editing to the human condition is full of both promise and peril. The process certainly has the potential, and the emerging actuality, to eliminate some genetically-induced diseases, boost the immune system and extend longevity. Then again, it can easily cross ethical boundaries. For example, it can change the human genome forever by altering the germline and passing those changes down through the generations. In short, gene editing can be good and bad.

Bioethically, the dangers are only too apparent. Craig Venter, the man who led the team that first mapped the human genome and who remains at the forefront of synthetic biology, understands this. For him, it is a red line. He is fearful of the temptation to construct permanent germline fixes. He warns that this red line should not be crossed because it can only be tested through experiments on humans. He has stated, ‘The world agreed at the end of World War II to stop all direct human experimentation. Human germline editing would cross that boundary and take us back into random human genome editing, just to see what happens. We should not let this happen.’

Others worry that the science is outstripping the ethics. But how are ethical boundaries to be built and maintained? Already, in China during 2015, gene editing has modified the human embryo – that was once

thought to be the red line. Moreover, it has now been reported that as many as 86 patients in China have had their genes altered in clinical trials to treat a range of diseases. Bioethical thinking and scientific practice must somehow come together and dialogue. But that will prove to be more than difficult in a world where some are driven, despite the unknown risks and unintended consequences, to be the discoverers of the next scientific breakthrough and leaders of the next medical revolution. Vainglory is not a trait found only in non-scientists.

The vast majority are convinced that gene editing needs regulating, but so far few have been able to suggest guidelines, not to mention rules and laws. Yet effective regulation would minimize risks and reassure the public. The accomplishment and reality of germline modification of human embryos and the subsequent threat of the 'designer baby' have rocked the scientific and public communities. And this year comes evidence that the Cas9 component of the CRISPR-Cas9 system can have pre-existing cell-mediated adaptive immune responses in humans, which could potentially produce adverse effects in patients. Is science out of control? Will the mavericks prevail? Have they already conquered? The future of safe, ethical human medicine can at times look pretty slippery.

Yet gene editing is not inherently evil, or wrong, or even amiss. It can be both benign and beneficial. For instance, look at the next article.

Goodbye inherited deafness?

When Ludwig van Beethoven realised, at the age of 32, that his hearing was failing, he wrote, 'as the leaves of autumn wither and fall, so has my own life become barren'. Hearing loss later in life is common and some is linked to inherited DNA changes. Could gene editing provide a cure?

Xue Gao and his colleagues at Harvard University think so. They have reported successfully using CRISPR-Cas9 technology to treat a mouse model of inherited human deafness. Their work was published as *Treatment of autosomal dominant hearing loss by in vivo delivery of genome editing agents* (*Nature*, 2017, **553**: 217–221).

Hearing is a remarkable process. In the inner ear are tiny cilia, hair-like structures, which respond to sound waves. Ciliary movement produces an electrical signal via a protein assembly at the base of each hair which changes when motion occurs. A protein, known as *Tmc1* (transmembrane channel-like gene family 1) is part of that assembly. Mutations of *Tmc1* cause some people to lose their hearing.

Gao's team used mice from the so-called Beethoven strain – these animals have a *Tmc1* mutation that matches the human faulty gene and causes them to grow deaf over time. The repair of this type of deafness is a delicate matter. Two copies of the gene exist – the mutated gene must be disabled while preserving the good gene within the same cell. In fact only one nucleotide of DNA distinguishes the two versions of the *Tmc1* genes – adenine nucleotide (A) occurs in the mutant at a position that should be thymidine nucleotide (T).

The authors used CRISPR–Cas9 gene editing to solve the problem and cut out the mutant form of the gene. Moreover they solved the tricky problem of delivery by encapsulating the CRISPR components in Cas9–guide RNA–lipid complexes to deliver it directly into the inner ears of the mice, rather than the more common use of a virus. And it worked. Eight weeks after the injection, untreated mice did not flinch at 120-decibel noise – roughly the volume of a rock concert or a chainsaw – whereas the treated were significantly startled by such noise. As the authors elegantly put it, 'Enhanced acoustic startle responses were observed among injected compared to non-injected *Tmc1* mice.'

This research has provided a first step towards human clinical trials. In mice, it is safe and effective. Of course, much more needs doing, but gene-editing techniques have an astonishing habit of transferring apace to human patients.

Stem-cell Technologies

Early embryo development

We know so little about the details of early human embryo development. One reason, of course, is that the processes are difficult to access experimentally. The bioethical dilemmas associated with this sort of work are noted. A recent paper by Shahbazi *et al.* (*Nature*, 2017, **552**: 239–243) has revealed a little more information about this most remarkable biological progression.

About 6 days after fertilisation, the embryo forms a structure called the blastocyst, which contains a mass of pluripotent embryonic stem cells, which can give rise to any of the 200 or so different cell types in the impending adult body. It is the blastocyst that implants into the uterus over a period of between the next 5 to 12 days. Implantation can be put on hold by maternal hormones, which induce the blastocyst to secrete the protein called leukaemia inhibitory factor (LIF) and to enter a dormant or 'native' state.

When LIF is removed, these embryonic stem cells become 'primed' and can initiate their differentiation into the various cell types that build the body. The role of these different states is not clear – it may be that LIF removal primes the embryo to resume development, therefore acting as a sort of checkpoint prior to implantation.

At implantation, the embryo undergoes a dramatic change in shape. The amniotic cavity, which will contain the growing embryo and the fluids that surround it, begins to form within a circle of primed pluripotent cells.

Shahbazi *et al.* used human and mouse embryos to study the coordination between the loss of pluripotency and the formation of the amniotic cavity. They found that first, the cells arrange into circular rosette structures, with their apical ends in close proximity. Second, fluid-containing vesicles are trafficked towards the apical interfaces between cells, and tight junctions are formed. Then negatively-charged, membrane-spanning apical proteins called sialomucins are produced to form a negatively-charged gap in the centre of the rosette. Sialomucin production is induced after LIF removal. The researchers next showed a potential role for the protein Oct4 in regulating sialomucin expression. Indeed, Oct4 seems to have a crucial role in controlling early human development. Furthermore, other proteins, such as the tight-junction protein cingulin, which is produced when LIF is removed, may also have a role in cavity formation.

This work has outlined a possible mechanism by which embryos coordinate the changes from the loss of pluripotency to the formation of the amniotic cavity. It is fascinating stuff. You too have passed through those changes. Let no one say that we are not 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Conway continued

The latest development in the case of Noel Conway, the 68-year-old man suffering with motor neurone disease, occurred on 18 January 2018. Two judges from the Court of Appeal granted him permission for a full hearing against an earlier decision, which rejected his challenge to the current law on assisted suicide. This latest judgment was handed down following an oral hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice. The case of Noel Conway vs. Secretary of State for Justice, which is supported by the Dignity in Dying organisation, was dismissed by the High Court on 5 October 2017 following a four-day hearing in July. It will now proceed to the Court of Appeal later this year – the Court heard from his legal team that Mr Conway has 'more than six months to live, but not much more' and that an early hearing of the appeal would be welcome.

Mr Conway's lawyers have previously argued that the current blanket ban on assisted suicide under the 1961 Suicide Act is incompatible with his rights under section 8 of the Human Rights Act, which ensures respect for private and family life. Last October, three senior judges, Lord Justice Sales, Mrs Justice Whipple and Mr Justice Garnham rejected his case. They concluded, 'It is legitimate in this area for the legislature to seek to lay down clear and defensible standards in order to provide guidance for society, to avoid

distressing and difficult disputes at the end of life and to avoid creating a slippery slope leading to incremental expansion over time of the categories of people to whom similar assistance for suicide might have to [be] provided ... we find that section 2 (right to life) is compatible with the Article 8 rights (private and family life) of Mr Conway. We dismiss his application for a declaration of incompatibility.’ Thus the Divisional Court refused him permission to appeal, so Mr Conway then filed an application in the Court of Appeal seeking permission directly. This is what has now been granted.

It should be remembered that since 2003 there have been almost a dozen attempts to legalise assisted suicide through the Assemblies and Parliaments of the UK. All have failed. Most significantly, the last of these was the 2015 Marris Bill in the House of Commons. It was roundly defeated by 330 votes vs. 118. This failure of its cause through the various legislatures has led Dignity in Dying to switch its strategy to the courts.

It is to be hoped that the Court of Appeal will agree with the High Court’s decision of last October and dismiss this case again.

Withdrawal of clinical assistance

On 13 November yet another ground-breaking right-to-life case, NHS Trust vs. Y and Another was decided in the Court of Protection. This time it was pronounced by Mrs Justice O’Farrell.

The case concerns a 52-year-old man, known as Y, who, in June 2017, suffered cardiac arrest after a heart attack. It had not been possible to resuscitate him promptly and so he suffered severe cerebral hypoxia causing extensive brain damage. Y lacked capacity to make decisions about his future treatment and care. Two neurological rehabilitation experts agreed that Y had no awareness of self or his environment and that it was highly improbable that he would re-emerge into consciousness.

The London North West Healthcare NHS Trust’s clinical team and Y’s family were agreed that it would be in his best interests for so-called clinically-assisted nutrition and hydration (CANH – commonly called food and water) to be withdrawn, with the consequence that he would die within a period of two to three weeks.

The NHS Trust had sought a declaration that it was not mandatory to bring before the Court of Protection the proposed withdrawal. The Official Solicitor, appointed to act on behalf of Y and represent his best interests, accepted that there was no statutory obligation to bring an application for such withdrawal, but submitted that it was good practice to ensure that Y’s human rights were not infringed and to provide independent scrutiny of the decision.

Mrs Justice O’Farrell ruled that it was not mandatory to bring before the Court of Protection this matter of the withdrawal of CANH from Y, who had a prolonged disorder of consciousness in circumstances, and where the clinical team and Y’s family were agreed that it was not in his best interests that he continued to receive that treatment.

This case resonates with that of Tony Bland, when, in 1993, the Law Lords made a momentous declaration that artificial nutrition and hydration (namely CANH) was to be regarded as medical treatment, rather than basic nursing care, and therefore could be withdrawn. Tony Bland died nine days after the withdrawal of food and water and so became the ninety-sixth victim of the Hillsborough disaster. This was considered by many to be ‘euthanasia coming in by the back door’.

Since 1993, all similar cases have sought prior approval from the court. Mrs Justice O’Farrell’s judgement changes all this. And it sets a dangerous precedent. Indeed, the Official Solicitor has appealed this decision and a Supreme Court hearing will be before Lady Hale, Lord Mance, Lord Wilson, Lord Hodge and Lady Black at a date yet to be confirmed. For reference, Case ID: UKSC 2017/0202.

USA and Elsewhere

March for Life 2018

Friday 19 January just about the 45th anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade verdict, which legalised abortion throughout the USA. Every year this is commemorated by a March for Life at Washington DC and at other locations across America.

This year's theme was 'Love Saves Lives'. And this year, the crowds experienced a first. As the first sitting President, Donald Trump addressed them directly from the Rose Garden of the White House. Speaking via a live video-feed to the gathered pro-life supporters he declared, 'The March for Life is a movement born out of love ... and you love every child born and unborn, because you believe that every life is sacred, that every child is a precious gift from God.' 'As you all know Roe vs. Wade has resulted in some of the most permissive abortion laws anywhere in the world. For example, in the United States, it's one of only seven countries to allow elective late-term abortions along with China North Korea and others.' 'It is wrong,' he said. 'It has to change.' 'Under my Administration, we will always defend the very first right in the Declaration of Independence and that is the right to life.' 'We are protecting the sanctity of life and the family as the foundation of our society. But this movement can only succeed with the heart and the soul and the prayer of the people.'

Mr Trump has been called 'a rampant narcissist and semi-literate man-child who listens to no one.' Yet he has also become known as the 'most pro-life president in American history'. Since taking office, he has reinstated the Mexico City Policy, which prevents US foreign aid from going to organisations that commit or promote abortion abroad. He has signed a law allowing states to defund the great abortion provider, Planned Parenthood, appointed a number of strong pro-life advocates to key Administration positions and ended Obama's Health and Human Services contraception and abortion pill mandate requiring employers to violate their consciences. And on 18 January 2018, Trump created a new division within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division of the Office of Civil Rights, to enforce 'laws and regulations that protect conscience and prohibit coercion on issues such as abortion and assisted suicide' for healthcare workers. And he proclaimed Monday 22 January to be 'National Sanctity of Human Life Day' to juxtapose with the 45th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade.

As ever, the 'Big 3' television networks – ABC, CBS and NBC – largely ignored the March for Life. They devoted only a combined 2 minutes and 6 seconds of coverage in their evening news' programmes. The very next day, perhaps predictably, these TV networks gave three times more airtime to coverage of the pro-abortion Women's March in Washington.

More US pro-life legislation

During mid-December, in Ohio, a pro-life bill protecting preborn babies with a probable Down's syndrome diagnosis was sent to Governor John Kasich's desk for him to sign it into state laws. The Down Syndrome Non-Discrimination Act was passed by the Ohio Senate 20 vs. 12 and by the Ohio House 63 vs.30 in November. Later this year, Kentucky could become the first state in the US to have no abortion clinics. The state's last remaining clinic, the EMW Women's Surgical Centre in Louisville, is facing closure after the state's pro-life Republican governor argued it does not have the right licensing requirements. Such pro-life laws have been enacted several times before across several states. They are always fiercely disputed by pro-choice campaigners, challenged through the courts and usually eventually repealed. Yet, if you don't try ...

Before the US Senate has been the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act. This would prohibit abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy based on the substantial scientific evidence that foetuses can feel pain by that stage of development. On 3 October, the House of Representatives passed this bill by 237 votes vs. 189, for the third time in the last five years. However, the legislation faced an uphill battle in the Senate, where Republicans did not have the 60 votes necessary to overcome a filibuster, a procedural blocking device, from Senate Democrats, who wrecked a similar bill in 2015. And so on 29 January, as expected, the Democrats filibustered the bill in a 51 vs. 46 vote, so it failed. And so an estimated 6,000 late-term

abortion on babies older than 20 weeks will occur this year in the US. And this is despite a recent Marist opinion poll which showed that 76% of Americans support stricter laws on abortion. That poll also showed that in December 2017, 63% of Americans supported a ban on abortions after 20 weeks, an increase of four percentage points from January 2017.

Planned Parenthood faltering?

According to its own annual report, Planned Parenthood performed 321,384 abortions in the US during its 2016-2017 fiscal year. This is a slight decrease from the 2015-2016 figure of 328,348. Moreover, it is the lowest number since 2007. The organisation's total revenue was \$1.46 billion, with \$543.7 million (37%) of that coming from taxpayers. This represents a slightly lower contribution in government funding from \$554.6 million the previous year. Despite these decreases, its total number of customers was the same as last year, namely 2.4 million individuals.

The Trump Administration now has a golden opportunity during 2018 to show that its warm words about government defunding of Planned Parenthood become a reality.

US Supreme Court candidates

In mid-November, the Trump Administration announced the names of five new potential nominees for the Supreme Court. They are Judges Amy Coney Barrett, Brett Kavanaugh, Kevin Newsom, Britt Grant and Patrick Wyrick. They are considered to both conservative and pro-life. Perhaps we will hear of them in the near future.

However, there are no current vacancies on the SCOTUS, but three of the nine justices are 79 years old or older. Of the liberals, Ruth Bader Ginsburg is 84, Anthony Kennedy is 81 and Stephen Breyer is 79. Pro-lifers hope that when a vacancy does arise, a Trump pro-life conservative will steer the Court away from the last four decades of liberalism, apparent in pronouncements on, for example, the legalisation of abortion, homosexuality and same-sex 'marriage'.

Miscellaneous

The Nuremberg Code

On 20 August 1947, just over 70 years ago, and just six weeks before I was born, the International Medical Tribunal in Nuremberg delivered its verdict on the crimes of 23 Nazi doctors and bureaucrats who had been involved in concentration camp medical experiments. As part of that judgment, it produced a 10-point set of rules now known as the Nuremberg Code.

The post-World War II years were dominated by an international push to formulate codes of human behaviour in attempts to ensure that the horrors of war were never to be repeated. Criteria were concocted for respect for human rights, individual autonomy, informed consent, and so on. The Nuremberg Code fitted this agenda.

Perhaps its greatest and most enduring rule concerns the 'voluntary consent' of every human research subject. This decree has become a (nearly) global benchmark for the ethical conduct of medical trials. Yet the Code was initially largely ignored. It took some 20 years to gain any significant impact. But even today it has not been officially accepted in law by any nation, or as the ethical guidelines by any medical association. The truth is that it was eclipsed by the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki in 1964.

For completeness, the principles of the Nuremberg Code can be summarised as:

- 1] Voluntary consent is essential.
- 2] The results must be for the greater good of society.
- 3] Should be based on previous animal experimentation.

- 4] Should be conducted by avoiding physical/mental suffering and injury.
- 5] No experiments should be conducted if they might cause death / disability.
- 6] Risks should never exceed the benefits.
- 7] Adequate facilities should be used to protect subjects.
- 8] Conducted only by qualified scientists.
- 9] Subject should always be at liberty to stop at any time.
- 10] Scientist in charge must be prepared to terminate the experiment when injury, disability, or death is likely to occur.

The Code is part of a long history of attempts to regulate the ethics and practice of medicine. Though none has matched the robustness and durability of the ancient Hippocratic Oath with its signature 'do no harm', the Nuremberg Code has played its minor role. The medical profession, with its propensity to do harm, still needs a tough, broadly-defined set of rules to protect the rights and well-being of human patients and research participants.

John Ling

Latest news of significant individual cases

The following are summaries of the story so far in some of the significant recently-resolved or still unresolved cases involving Christians responding to a wide range of legal, police or disciplinary action against them. Seeking a remedy by means of litigation can be a lengthy process – sometimes taking several years for a closure to be reached. All cases mentioned except the first are being handled by the Christian Legal Centre.

Ashers Baking Company

The United Kingdom Supreme Court will consider Ashers' appeal at a hearing in Belfast during the week commencing 30 April 2018. Ashers are appealing an October 2016 judgment of Northern Ireland's Court of Appeal. The case arose from the bakery's refusal in May 2014 to ice a cake bearing the slogan 'support gay marriage', which was ordered for a political event. The Supreme Court will also hear arguments from the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, John Larkin QC, who is party to the case and who has argued in relation to the validity of the discrimination laws that were used against the bakery. The forthcoming hearing will be the first time that the UK's highest court have sat in Northern Ireland. The case raises wider significant issues regarding compelled speech and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. (*The Christian Institute*)

Transgenderism

Joshua Sutcliffe

A respected Christian maths teacher at a school in Oxfordshire is facing discipline for 'misgendering' a student. Joshua Sutcliffe, from Oxford, began working at the school in September 2015 and currently teaches children aged 11-18. He has achieved excellent results, with his Key Stage 3 students outperforming every parallel class. But on November 2, a complaint was made that Joshua referred to a pupil as a 'girl', rather than the desired 'boy'. Although born as a girl, the pupil had self-declared as 'male'. Joshua had not been given any formal instruction on how to refer to the pupil. An investigation began immediately, during which Joshua was prevented from teaching and forced to spend all his time 'in isolation' in the staff room. Following the week-long investigation, the school found that Joshua 'misgendered' the pupil, 'demonstrating discriminatory behaviours' and '[contravened] the school's equality policy'. The school recommended dealing with the matter of 'misconduct' under the disciplinary policy.

Since the pupil started at the school, Joshua has tried to balance his sincerely held Christian belief that biological sex is God-given and defined at birth, with the need to treat sensitively the pupil. He avoided the use of gender-specific pronouns, and instead referred to the pupil by the pupil's chosen name. Joshua admits saying "Well done girls" when he addressed a group of students including the pupil in question. The pupil became irate at this and Joshua sought to defuse the situation and apologised.

The Christian Legal Centre are currently supporting Joshua in his application to the Employment Tribunal.

Nigel and Sally Rowe

A couple on the Isle of Wight have removed their child from a Church of England primary school pending legal review of the school's handling of another pupil's request to be recognised as 'transgender'. Nigel and Sally Rowe felt they were left with no option but to withdraw their child as the new school year began, after receiving what they describe as a 'cold and shockingly inappropriate' response to concerns they had raised.

The couple, who have actively supported the school over the past four years and helped to lead assemblies, describe the step as 'deeply painful and very reluctantly taken'. They feel they cannot return their child to the school until there is a satisfactory resolution, and believe their only hope of reaching it is to launch legal action, challenging the school's behaviour and the legitimacy of national guidelines.

They are taking action to safeguard the wellbeing of their own children, and also to challenge the 'aggressive new gender ideology that is being rolled out across the education system to the detriment of children's best interests'.

In a written response, the school, having taken advice from the Diocese of Portsmouth and citing County Council policy, defended its behaviour. The school made clear that it considered 'the refusal to acknowledge a transgendered person's true gender e.g. by failing to use their adopted name or using gender inappropriate pronouns' to be 'transphobic behaviour'.

'Bethany'

A Christian family fear, that unless they allow their 14-year-old daughter 'Bethany' to change her name to 'Gary', (names changed) she might be taken into foster care. The family are locked in a battle with social services concerning their daughter, who, within a few months of returning to school after being home educated, started to dress as a boy and decided that she wanted to be called Gary.

The parents were originally told that their refusal to allow the name change is tantamount to 'neglect'. Although social services have now moved away from that position, they are still very much involved in monitoring the situation.

The Christian Legal Centre continues to work with the family and seek the best professional support for Bethany. Enquiries are being made to find a suitable psychologist for Bethany.

Religious Freedom at Work and in Education

Victoria Wastenev

Victoria Wastenev, a former senior NHS occupational therapist, was disciplined for giving a Christian book to a Muslim colleague and for praying for her. She was suspended by the NHS Trust for almost nine months and eventually found guilty of three 'offences' by an internal disciplinary panel: inviting her Muslim colleague to church-organised events, praying with her (despite having permission to do so) and giving her a Christian book.

An Employment Tribunal ruled that the Trust was justified in disciplining Victoria for sharing her faith with her colleague, despite seeing evidence that Victoria's colleague appreciated and reciprocated her friendship.

Victoria appealed the Employment Tribunal's decision to the Employment Appeal Tribunal. They too decided against her, holding that the treatment of which she complained was because of, and related to, her inappropriate actions, rather than any legitimate manifestation of her belief.

Victoria was granted an oral hearing at the Court of Appeal in May, though this was subsequently vacated and a new date arranged on 27th July. Following this hearing, permission was refused for a full hearing. An application to the European Court of Human Rights has been sent and we are waiting to hear whether the court will hear the case.

Barry Trayhorn

Barry Trayhorn was forced to resign from his job at a sex offenders' prison after Bible verses that he quoted during a Christian chapel service provoked a hostile response from prisoners and prison management. Whilst leading worship at a chapel service in May 2014, Barry spoke about the wonder of God's forgiveness for those who repent, quoting 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 from memory. The verses mention a number of sins, including adultery, homosexual practice, greed and drunkenness. The prisoners were at the service of their own volition, and were free to leave at any point.

Four days after the service, a complaint was made. Barry was immediately barred from helping with chapel services. He was later told that his comments during the service were '*homophobic*' and breached national prison policy and he was issued with a final warning. Barry complained to the Employment Tribunal that he had been constructively dismissed and that he had been discriminated against because of his Christian faith.

The prison defended its decision to discipline Barry because it said prisoners needed to be protected from offensive statements and Barry's comments may have resulted in bullying towards homosexual prisoners, even though no evidence for this was presented to the Employment Tribunal. It held that Barry had not been discriminated against by the prison by sharing his Christian faith. This decision has very disturbing implications for the freedom to maintain gospel witness in prisons.

Barry successfully applied for permission to appeal the Employment Tribunal's decision to the Employment Appeal Tribunal. The Employment Appeal Tribunal decided against Barry, and permission is being sought to appeal to the Court of Appeal.

Richard Page

Richard commenced work as a magistrate in Kent where he served for 15 years. During this time, he became a well-respected member of the Family Panel.

In July 2014, while presiding over an adoption case involving a same sex couple, Richard expressed the view that a child is best raised by a mother and a father during a closed-door consultation with colleagues. Having heard all the evidence, he decided that his legal duty to act in the best interests of the child meant that he could not agree with placing the child with a same-sex couple.

His colleagues complained about him and, following an investigation by the local Justice of the Peace Advisory Panel, the case was referred to the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice. They told Richard that his Christian beliefs about family life were discriminatory against same-sex couples. He was publicly reprimanded and barred from sitting as a Magistrate until he had undergone equality training.

In March 2016, Mr Page appeared for a few seconds on BBC Breakfast News and said that '*my responsibility as a Magistrate as I saw it, was to do what I considered best for the child, and my feeling was therefore that*

it would be better if it was a man and woman who were the adoptive parents'. Richard was removed from the Magistracy by the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice for the comments he made during the BBC interview which were held to have brought the magistracy into disrepute which constituted serious misconduct.

Mr Page lodged a claim at the Employment Tribunal, claiming discrimination on grounds of his Christian faith.

A preliminary hearing concerning judicial immunity was scheduled at the Employment Tribunal for October 2016, though this was subsequently adjourned. The adjournment was made to allow the Supreme Court to consider judicial immunity in a separate case before them later this year. A preliminary hearing for Mr Page was scheduled for September 2017 though this has been deferred until 4th December 2017. A full hearing will take place from 12-19 February 2018.

In a separate matter, but one which is related to Richard's decision in the adoption case, the NHS Trust where Richard used to be a non-executive director, suspended him pending investigation into his comments. They later decided that it was not in the interests of the health service for him to continue serving as a non-executive director. This is a further example of the way in which Christians are being forced out of public life for holding Bible-based beliefs.

At a preliminary hearing at the Employment Tribunal in January 2017, the judge described Richard Page's case as 'crying out to be heard'. A full hearing took place at the Employment Tribunal from 1-4 August, following which Richard's claim to be reinstated as a non-executive director of the NHS Trust was rejected on the basis that expressing his views on national television was not intimately linked to his religion or his beliefs.

In obiter, the judgment noted that 'Had the belief relied on by the Claimant been... that 'homosexual activity' is wrong then the tribunal may well have concluded that this was not a belief that was worthy of respect in a democratic society'.

The Christian Legal Centre are continuing to support Richard, and are in the process of making an application to appeal.

Felix Ngole

Felix Ngole was studying at the University of Sheffield on an MA Social Work course. In a Facebook discussion about Kim Davis' case, the marriage registrar who refused to register same sex weddings, Felix posted bible verses and comments to demonstrate the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics and marriage. An anonymous complaint was made about Felix's comments and Felix was investigated by the University.

Felix was removed from the course because his comments may have caused offence and his subsequent appeal was dismissed. The University's decision prevents him from pursuing his desired profession as a social worker and highlights their very concerning position that only certain views about sexual ethics are acceptable. Felix challenged the University's decision by submitting a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator which was rejected.

With the support of the Christian Legal Centre, he then appeared in the High Court in late April to seek permission for a judicial review of the decision to expel him from his University. Felix was granted such permission, and his case was heard in full on 3 & 4 October.

While noting that the university's sanction 'was indeed severe', and that there had been no evidence of Felix acting in a discriminatory fashion, the Tribunal found against him on the basis that the posts could be accessed and read by people who would perceive them as judgmental... or suggestive of discriminatory intent, and it was reasonable to be concerned about that perception.

The ruling has a deeply concerning impact on freedom of expression, and flies in the face of the government's expressed intention to promote free speech at universities.

The Christian Legal Centre have submitted an appeal and are waiting for a hearing date.

Sarah Kuteh

Sarah began working for the NHS Trust in 2007, and initially served as a Senior Staff nurse for 5 years in the intensive care department, before being promoted to Sister. In January 2016 she was assigned a position in the pre-operation assessment department.

Her role included taking patients through a pre-op assessment questionnaire, covering various topics including the patient's contact details, their health, allergies to medication, and their GP's details. The questionnaire also asked about the patient's religion, as this may have informed their future treatment.

Many patients expressed their beliefs in the questionnaire, and, on occasion, Sarah would enter into discussions with them about their faith. Where the patient said that they were not interested in religion, she would ask, where appropriate, how they had arrived at their decision. Depending on the patient's demeanour and their willingness to talk about religion, she would also sometimes share briefly about how her faith had changed her life.

Following a short investigation, during which Sarah was unable to quiz the witnesses who had made complaints, the hospital dismissed Sarah in August 2016 for gross misconduct, a penalty which Sarah believes is completely disproportionate and punitive.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Sarah filed a claim for unfair dismissal in the Employment Tribunal. The Employment Tribunal dismissed Sarah's claim, heard in Spring 2017, though an appeal has since been lodged with the Employment Appeal's Tribunal. A permission hearing took place on 12 January 2018, and the full hearing date has been set for 16 February 2018.

In a separate matter, a hearing took place in the Nurses and Midwifery Council from 8-11 January 2018 to determine whether Sarah can continue practising as a nurse. The NMC found that Sarah's fitness to practice was impaired, and have issued her with a three months' conditions of practice order.

Sharn Ashridge

Sharn Ashridge has worked as a supply teacher for over five years at numerous schools. On 16 February 2017, she was teaching an RE lesson to Year 10 class. The topic was 'Christians helping the Poor'. On discussing the background of Mother Teresa, there was a line about how her Christian faith led her into this work to spread the Gospel. Sharn touched on the meaning of 'Gospel', and then on explanatory doctrines such as 'Sin, Jesus' death on the Cross, Heaven and Hell'.

Sharn was asked what sin was, and explained about it being to 'miss the mark/standard set by God'. One female student then asked about Sharn's views on same-sex marriage, and Sharn gave what she clearly said was her personal opinion that 'the Bible calls homosexuality an abomination, wickedness and unnatural', and it was one of the reasons God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. She then went on to talk about other sins to which she concluded by quoting the Bible 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'. She was asked if she hated homosexuals, to which she replied no.

After the class, two members of staff questioned Sharn about her comments on homosexuality and demons. The Deputy Head ordered that Sharn be dismissed immediately.

The Christian Legal Centre made an application to the Employment Tribunal, and the hearing will take place from 10-12 April 2018.

Right to Life (Assisted Suicide)

Nikki and Merv Kenward

Nikki and Merv Kenward, who campaign against euthanasia and assisted suicide, have been seeking to challenge the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions to change the policy on the prosecution of healthcare professionals who assist patients in committing suicide. In October 2014, the DPP amended the policy, making the prosecution of healthcare professionals in assisted suicide cases less likely.

In response, the Kenwards sought to challenge the decision, arguing that the DPP acted outside of her powers by liberalising the policy and that this would endanger many vulnerable people. However, in December 2015 the High Court ruled that the DPP had acted lawfully and thus the Kenwards' application was refused.

The Kenwards appealed to the Court of Appeal for permission to appeal the High Court's decision. This application was initially refused, though the Kenwards were granted permission for an oral hearing which took place at the Court of Appeal in January 2017. Lord Justices Longmore and Kitchin heard the Kenwards' appeal application, but unfortunately refused permission for the appeal to go ahead. A costs order was made against the Kenwards, though the Christian Legal Centre are planning to file an ECHR application on the grounds of discrimination.

Right to Life (Abortion)

Aisling Hubert

Aisling Hubert began private prosecutions against two doctors who were caught offering sex-selective abortion for baby girls. The CPS had already investigated the case, but decided against prosecution because, whilst there was sufficient evidence, it would 'not be in the public interest'.

However, Aisling's attempt to bring the doctors to justice was again halted by the CPS when they intervened and stopped the private prosecutions. As a result, costs orders were made against Aisling, in favour of the doctors. She then faced a further costs order after unsuccessfully challenging the CPS's decision to stop the private prosecutions. The costs orders against her totalled more than £40,000. Aisling attended court on 17 January 2017 to challenge the costs orders made in favour of the doctors. After the judge ruled that the costs could not be amended, a settlement was reached regarding the amount Aisling had to pay. She now has until mid August to pay the agreed amount (which cannot be disclosed because of the doctors' wish for confidentiality).

While we are very disappointed with the result, the case has achieved much in terms of exposing unlawful abortion procedures and the failures of the CPS to afford justice to the most vulnerable in our society. The Christian Legal Centre are continuing to support Aisling, and are challenging the costs order in an application submitted to the European Court of Human Rights. We wait to hear whether the ECHR will consider her application.

Family

Bodnariu family

In November 2015, Marius and Ruth Bodnariu had their five young children snatched from their care and scattered across three different households, three hours away from their family home.

Upon a minor complaint being made by the school headmaster that one of the daughters mentioned she had been spanked, Norwegian child and family services began an investigation that was mired in prejudice from its very beginning.

Based solely on the testimony of children elicited through unchecked questioning, which the principle investigator recognised was likely to be untruthful, they were snatched from their parents. After being

removed, the children were systematically interrogated for hours without recourse to legal counsel or any other safeguarding supervision to ensure their testimony was not achieved through manipulative questioning. The coercive nature of the investigations led to Naomi exclaiming during her testimony: 'I don't know what else to make up.'

Despite all medical and psychological assessments showing that the children were not subjected to violence or abuse, it took nearly a year for the family to be reunited. Desperate to provide solace to their traumatised children during this period, Marius and Ruth were forced to sign agreements stating that they would not speak their native language whilst communicating with their children. Any conversations would be terminated upon this agreement being breached.

The unnecessarily delayed reunification, coupled with coercive investigations, did serious harm to the interests of the Bodnariu's five children. Iona suffered extensive emotional, psychological and physical harm from being separated from his parents for a prolonged period, and baby Ezekiel was subjected to multiple x-rays, despite there never being any evidence of abuse. Following the trauma, Marius and Ruth moved to Romania, having left their comfortable and prestigious jobs and their family home, to dedicate time to the healing of their family.

Christian Legal Centre is providing close support to the Bodnariu family, and has filed a claim to the European Court of Human Rights about the way that the family was treated.

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