

## THE BULLETIN

*News and Reports from the Social Issues Team*

**Issue 42 – November 2019**

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The Bulletin is published by the Social Issues Team of Affinity  
Editor: Matthew Evans, [office@affinity.org.uk](mailto:office@affinity.org.uk)

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# Thoughts on the Present Constitutional Crisis in the United Kingdom

I have put together a number of thoughts in relation to the present constitutional crisis, which seems to be deepening with every passing day, and which will surely have consequences of a far-reaching and perhaps devastating character, although none of us can predict with any certainty what these consequences might be.

The immediate impulse which caused me to write down these thoughts was the recent appeal heard in the Supreme Court, in which eleven senior judges unanimously ruled that the Prime Minister's advice to Her Majesty to prorogue Parliament, between 9 September and 14 October, was unlawful. I do not write as any kind of constitutional or legal expert, although ever since the 2016 Referendum I, no doubt like many others, have had my interest in such matters keenly awakened. I make these observations as a lifelong and avid reader of British history and, above and beyond that, as a Christian who holds to the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible. It is out of a desire to understand the present crisis in the light of our history, and in the light of the Word of God, that I write as I do here.

## 1. The Physiology of the British Constitution

The British Constitution has developed organically over many centuries, and though no national constitution could ever be described as "perfect" – we all live in a fallen, flawed world and every human system of government or organisation partakes of this flawed character – the testimony of history is that our Constitution has been essentially healthy. This organic advancement resembles the development of an unborn child in the womb and the subsequent growth following birth: the essential blueprint and character of the Constitution can be traced back into the distant past, in some senses before Magna Carta (1215) or even the Norman Conquest (1066). But over the succeeding centuries that Constitution has become more mature and sophisticated as the nation has grown, as various challenges have been faced, and as the national character has been shaped – shaped in particular by the teachings of the Bible.

In speaking of "the nation" I am, of course, well aware that the United Kingdom presently consists of four countries – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I have no desire to inflame nationalist passions within any of these four countries. The United Kingdom remains a unitary state, not a federal state (like the United States or Germany), nor a confederacy (like Switzerland). It has, historically, been a profoundly settled and prosperous unitary state, and may that long continue.

In speaking of the British Constitution as an organism, we should first observe that the soundness of any organism is preserved by dynamic and functional communication between its component parts. In a human body, for example, the brain, heart and lungs all need to work according to plan, and in symbiotic unity, for the whole body to be alive and well. This of course is a considerable over-simplification, but it illustrates the point adequately.

In our Constitution there are various branches which need to co-function in an analogous way. These comprise (1) the executive (Her Majesty's Government which consists of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet), (2) the legislature (Parliament), (3) the judiciary (the law courts) – and (4) the people. Most constitutional experts would not include the people as a "branch" in the same sense as the other three, but in the present situation the importance of the people can scarcely be overlooked. More to the point, in relation to the first three branches in particular, or the three "organs of state", there is not the tight separation between them that there is in other constitutions, most notably the United States; rather there has been, and is, a set of complex but orderly relationships which have developed over time and which determine their mutual interaction.

The carefully balanced character of the British Constitution can be illustrated by the way in which the principle of *sovereignty* can rightly, though variously, be attributed to each of these branches. (1) The Monarch, in whose name the Government carries out executive powers, is designated the "Sovereign". But (2) the sovereignty of Parliament is a principle which all constitutional experts continue to emphasise, and

in the present circumstances this principle is being strenuously underlined. At the same time, (3) elected Members of Parliament are understood to be representatives of the people, who are themselves “sovereign” in the sense that they empower Parliament to act on their behalf. And (4) although the vocabulary of “sovereignty” is less often applied to the law courts, the “rule of law” is a phrase with a long and noble history in Britain. In addition, the vocabulary of monarchy permeates all matters juridical: senior lawyers are ennobled with the title “Queen’s Counsel” and even prisoners still serve “at Her Majesty’s pleasure”.

This fourfold form of sovereignty, in and of itself, does not promote a mutual contradiction. On the contrary, it is an exhibition of the finely balanced nature of a mature, robust and (for the most part) well-functioning Constitution. There is no inherent competition between the four branches; the sovereignty of each of them is, instead, the sovereignty of the whole body politic as viewed from four different angles, or aspects. But the sound functioning of that whole body politic depends on their mutual relationships being rightly understood and observed. When tensions between any of them reach a certain critical level, the possibility of trauma or even fissure is increased.

The same principle holds true when we look at each of these branches individually. For example, when we consider Parliament, it becomes clear that there are sub-components which need to observe mutually-orderly and finely-tuned relationships. There are the House of Lords, the House of Commons, the Speakers of both Houses, the Parliamentary Committees and indeed the entire machinery of the Civil Service. Additionally, there are various kinds of overlap between the organs of state, and within them, which need not of themselves result in conflicts of interest. For example, the executive (the Prime Minister and the Government) themselves belong to the legislature (Parliament).

It quickly becomes clear, in summary, that when we consider the whole question of “government” in Britain, we are looking at a hugely complex and intricate system, but one which has – the odd rupture or two notwithstanding, especially in the years 1642-60 – continued with a remarkable lack of disturbance.

It becomes equally clear that we are witnessing a similar kind of rupture at the present time. The seizure of Parliamentary business by the opposition parties, the acquiescence (or active encouragement) of the Speaker of the House in allowing this seizure, the withdrawal of the whip from 21 MPs on the Government benches, the forcing of the Prime Minister’s hand to request from Brussels a further extension to Article 50, and the recent judicial process in relation to prorogation, are all signally symptomatic of a kind of “toxic shock” which is convulsing the entire body politic.

## **2. The Present Crisis and its Causes**

What is the cause of this crisis? It would be very easy simply to say “Brexit”, or more precisely, “the 2016 Referendum and its aftermath”. We can examine the fairness of this response briefly. It is quite reasonable to suggest that the present crisis has been prolonged and intensified by the inability and/or unwillingness of elected Members of Parliament to honour the result of the Referendum, despite the fact that the vast majority of them belonged to political parties which stated in their manifestos that the result *would* be honoured. It is also reasonable to suggest that the 2017 General Election, ostensibly called in order to strengthen Theresa May’s hand in securing a strong Brexit deal, had the opposite effect of significantly weakening her position, not only in negotiations with Brussels but in gaining the support of the House of Commons. This was a weakness which Mrs May unavoidably bequeathed to her successor, and the recent turmoil in the Commons would never have taken place had the 2017 Election delivered a clear majority to any party.

But history teaches us that causation is a far more complicated and nuanced matter than one event or even a series of closely related events. It is not incorrect to say that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 was the “cause” of World War One. But in and of itself it is a desperately inadequate explanation. Somehow, we need to explain how it was that the murder, in Bosnia, of the Austrian heir to the throne, by a Serbian gunman, resulted just a few weeks later in British, French and German soldiers confronting each other a thousand miles to the north-west, across the Marne, and then

“digging in” for a further four terrible years. A satisfactory explanation of why World War One broke out must surely go back much further, to 1871, to 1848, to 1815. And even beyond.

So if we want to know why there is a present constitutional crisis in Britain, we need at the very least to ask what resulted in the Leave vote of 2016, and why the Referendum was called in the first place; indeed, why Britain found itself a member of the European Union to begin with. That necessitates an understanding of the history of the European Union itself – and very quickly we are into a vast and overwhelming array of subjects.

It was always likely to be the case that a phenomenon of the magnitude of Brexit would cause huge convulsions both nationally and internationally, and could never be solved on the proverbial back of an envelope. But like the two World Wars, the Brexit crisis – which may yet be a very long way indeed from anything that could be called resolution – has delivered an almighty jolt to the socio-political configuration of Britain. The fragility of the British Constitution, faced with such a severe jarring, was always likely to come loose at the seams.

Two other events of the last decade, largely unnoticed by the majority of British citizens, have further contributed to a situation in which a constitutional trauma might become more likely:

The first was the creation of the Supreme Court in 2009, which resulted in the growing separation and potential autonomy of the highest judicial authorities in the land: a move towards the American model. Prior to this, the ultimate right of appeal went to the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, or Law Lords, who themselves sat in the House of Lords. This is another example of the overlap and delicate balance of power that previously existed between the organs of state, and which has now been ruptured.

The second was the passing of the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act (FTPA) in 2011, following the formation of the Coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. The political motivation behind the Act was to prevent the splintering of the Coalition and, it could reasonably be argued, it was a success insofar as the Coalition remained intact for five years. But the Act removed the previous prerogative power of the Prime Minister to ask Her Majesty to dissolve Parliament in order to call a “snap” General Election. An Election could only be called mid-term on two conditions: (1) if the Government lost a vote of confidence; (2) if two-thirds of MPs supported an Election. Under the present circumstances, which are so different to the circumstances which existed eight years ago, the FTPA exerts a stifling effect on the political process in Parliament.

### **3. The Ruling of the Supreme Court**

The most substantial constitutional question at present relates to the recent case examined in the Supreme Court, concluded on 24 September. The fact that such a hearing took place – not merely the verdict which was passed – threatens to deliver a deathblow to age-old constitutional conventions.

The question under view was whether the Prime Minister asked Her Majesty to prorogue Parliament for a five-week period in the autumn of 2019 in order to stymie the House of Commons, to prevent them from passing scrutiny on the Government’s policies in the period leading up to 31 October, the date on which the United Kingdom is (still, at the time of writing), by law, due to exit the European Union. Did the Prime Minister misappropriate the power of prorogation, in order to silence reasonable debate in the Commons?

The important question that needs to be answered here is whether the decision to prorogue is “justiciable” – that is, is it a question which the judiciary is qualified to evaluate and resolve? Can a court of law determine that the advice given to the Queen by her Prime Minister – because constitutionally it falls to the Sovereign to prorogue Parliament – was misleading? The fact that such a case is examined allows the possibility that the Prime Minister could be declared to be misleading the Sovereign and thus acting... dishonourably? Or perhaps “lying”? This kind of language can be shouted out on television and in the papers, even though it cannot be stated in Parliament. I will come back to this question later.

Now that the Supreme Court has indeed concluded that the Prime Minister acted unlawfully in advising Her Majesty to prorogue Parliament, a hugely significant challenge to constitutional convention has been upheld. The advice that passes between the Prime Minister and the Crown – and presumably it flows in both directions – will now be subject to the jurisdiction of the law courts. It becomes susceptible to the scrutiny of lawyers rather than being understood as a political judgment.

At this point it should be stated that lawyers, of course, are required to exercise their judgment no more and no less than ministers of the crown. Indeed, the higher anyone climbs in any profession, the more necessary it becomes that they are competent to exercise sound judgment. After all, the Head of the Judiciary in England and Wales is designated “Lord Chief Justice”! It is a truism that the entire concept of judgment is wholly embedded within the very vocabulary of “justice”, “jurisdiction” and “judiciary”. What is more, the essential character of British law – the distinction between historical Common Law in this country and the more codified Roman/Napoleonic forms of law which are practised on the continent is a very important consideration here – implies if anything the even *greater* requirement incumbent on British lawyers to exercise prudent judgment.

But the Sovereign and the Prime Minister are also required to exercise judgment – neither more nor less than lawyers. And this is the really important point: Britain is a constitutional monarchy, not a republic in which the Supreme Court is the highest authority in the land. Whilst it is true that the Queen’s “sovereignty” is largely titular and ceremonial, she remains the Head of State and she retains the right to exercise her sovereignty. There is a difference between having titular sovereignty and having no sovereignty whatsoever. Conversations between the Sovereign and the Prime Minister (she has now been served by fourteen prime ministers, beginning with Winston Churchill) have for generations been regarded as matters of the greatest secrecy and, in a sense, sacredness. They share matters of a political character which are, by convention, understood to be outside the remit of lawyers. It is implicitly assumed that a bond of trust exists between the Sovereign and the Prime Minister, her chief adviser in matters of government. It is a bond of trust into which prying eyes, even those of the highest courts in the land, have not previously been permitted to peep.

But now a new, menacing, cynical and hyper-litigious public culture is threatening to take over. Anyone with the motives, and the means, to overturn an unpopular decision of a Government will be increasingly encouraged to do so through the courts. That is why the ruling of the Supreme Court should be regarded as ground-breaking, a seismic jolt which has rocked the British Constitution.

#### **4. “Truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.”**

The above quote is from Isaiah 59:14. All the considerations I have detailed above lead us to what is surely the most important question of all: why is the British Constitution so fragile? And why *now*, if it has endured so tenaciously since medieval times, is it in such a palsied, sclerotic condition?

The answer which I advocate here is that there has been *an essential and widespread breakdown of trust within the fabric of society*, with the most serious and alarming reverberations within the body politic. In speaking of “trust”, we need to see the relationship between “trust” and “truth” which is far more than a matter of semantics. When trust breaks down, people more readily accuse one another of not telling the truth. Another way to look at the situation is to notice the breakdown of “good faith” – the Latin root of a word like “confidence” implies that faith is exercised towards someone or something. No functional relationship between any human beings, or group of human beings, from the nuclear family to Parliament and the Supreme Court, can thrive when “good faith” has been undermined, where mutual confidence is not present.

“Good faith” is a central part of this whole discussion. It is constitutionally correct to state that the Government was not bound by the result of the 2016 Referendum; that a referendum should be viewed as “advisory” rather than binding. But here is an instance where the exercise or the betrayal of “good faith” comes into sharp focus. David Cameron, the Prime Minister at the time of the Referendum, promised the people that the Government would implement the decision of the Referendum. Constitutionally, he had no

right to make such a promise. But he *did* say this and in so doing created a sense of obligation and expectation on the part of the British people. Moreover, no previous referendum in British history had ever been dishonoured. An action may be constitutionally legal while also being political “dynamite”. Such would be the case if any government were to say to the British people at some point in the future, “By the way, the 2016 Referendum was only advisory and therefore we have decided to ignore its result and overturn Article 50.”

But we should see just how much *bad* faith, even bad blood, is circulating at the moment. When certain politicians appear on the BBC programme *Question Time*, they are not slow in accusing the Prime Minister, or other politicians, of “lying”. They will employ the language of lying far more readily than would have been the case only a few years ago. And there is a palpable sense that some of them are doing so with unbridled relish. Why might this be? Because MPs do not, and cannot, use such language in the House of Commons. When Ian Blackford, the SNP leader in Westminster, shouted out that the Prime Minister, Theresa May, was a “liar”, he was strongly reprimanded by the Speaker, to whom he replied, “Out of courtesy to yourself, I withdraw” (12 Feb 2019).

This is the point: courtesy is observed in the House of Commons as part of the wider picture of *constitutional convention*. Members of Parliament refer to one another as “the Honourable Member” or “the Right Honourable Member” as a result of long-standing parliamentary, constitutional convention. There is an established code of honour, courtesy and respect – even in some cases deference – which has characterised the British Constitution for centuries.

This code is now being stretched to breaking point. When the House of Commons reconvened on 25 September, bitter and vitriolic scenes were broadcast for millions of viewers to see. Whilst the *letter* of the law might have been observed insofar as no MP breached a specific code, it was quite clear that the *spirit* of parliamentary discourse was being violated. The Speaker was quite justified in admonishing the Commons to this effect the following day, and for a time at least, relative decorum ensued.

But this is only the tip of a poisonous iceberg. Whilst Honourable Members may well consent to parliamentary convention while they are sitting on the green benches of the Commons, once they reach for their smartphones then any pretence to parliamentary convention flies out of the window. Social media allows them – and everyone else – the opportunity to vent their hashtagged spleens, on Twitter, on YouTube, on Instagram, on an ever-increasing number of channels. This is a factor which should not be underestimated. On social media, restraint is cast off, and free rein is given to the overflow of black bile. Politicians attack and defame other politicians, and their army of followers voraciously tuck in. Language descends to the level of the playground, both in terms of its bullying nature and its puerile imbecility.

The breakdown of trust is accompanied by the rise of anger and hatred. It is the same phenomenon, viewed from a different angle. It is not a phenomenon which is restricted to politicians. But at the moment they appear to be showing the way.

## 5. May God Show Mercy

The British Constitution, in its essential character, may not survive the present crisis. It may eventually be transformed to become more like the American model, in which the various branches of the body politic, being constitutionally separated, exercise considerably more independent power. Consequently, disputes between these branches are common, so that the whole machinery of US Government can be shut down for days or even weeks on end. Perhaps, in time, a radical change to our Constitution may be unavoidable. This may be the largest single consequence of the recent history of British political engagement with her European neighbours.

One great difference between the British and American Constitutions is that the former is unwritten, whilst the latter is written (as are its many Amendments). The unwritten British Constitution, like the British distaste for identity cards, is for many a cause for quirky self-satisfaction. That the Constitution is “unwritten” is of course only a partial truth. Statute Law, by its very nature, is legislation passed by Acts of

Parliament which finds its way onto the “Statute Books”. Works of authority on the Constitution, such as those by Bagehot and Dicey, and Erskine May, the “Bible of Parliamentary Procedure”, are of course (lengthy) written documents. Acts of Parliament of momentous significance, such as the Bill of Rights of 1689, almost partake of the character of a written constitution. But there is no single document in existence bearing the title “The Constitution of the United Kingdom”, not yet at any rate.

Whether there ever will be may not seem like a terribly important argument. Indeed, we might think, if a written constitution delivers a happier set of results than an unwritten one, then why not begin writing it immediately! But the point here is simply that the British system has *worked* satisfactorily for several centuries with an unwritten constitution, not only because of the knowledge and expertise of constitutional scholars, but more importantly because of the exercise of decency, honour and essential “good faith” across the whole body politic.

Ultimately, this “good faith” among human beings cannot exist without a strongly-held value system, a world view which is conscientiously shared by individuals and communities. The greatest influence on British society, for most of the time since the Constitution began to take shape, has been biblical Christianity. The truly *biblical* character of that Christianity reached its apogee in the time of the Reformation and the Puritans, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The very soul of the nation was formed during those centuries, and the constitutional developments which took place from the late 1600s to the early 1900s were the fruit of rich spiritual blessings. The great revival of the eighteenth century, when George Whitefield, John Wesley and so many others preached to the multitudes, created an environment in which this nation was spared from the kind of bloody revolutions which shook so much of continental Europe.

In writing these things I am not indulging in some kind of jingoistic nationalism, neither would I overlook the shameful episodes of British history. And nationalism is a very different thing to patriotism. A true patriot, bound to his nation as to his own family, may well believe in his heart that his country is the best country in the world, but he understands why citizens of another country would feel the same about *their* own country. When I hear the French, American, German or even old Soviet national anthems being played; when I hear a rendition of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, or *Flower of Scotland*, I can feel as moved as I am by *God save the Queen* – or even more so. A nationalist is incapable of experiencing such sympathies.

But the honour, decency and good faith of which I have written cannot be disassociated from the Christian consensus which prevailed in Britain – in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, during these most formative years. The Bible worked its way into the national consciousness of these countries and became part of their DNA. This happened with and without Acts of Parliament – witness the different narratives of reformation and revival across these countries. The distinctive flavour of Christian witness in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is beautiful testimony to the way in which God has worked variously among different peoples in different places.

Now that prevailing consensus is being changed beyond recognition, hideously disfigured. A woman gives birth to a child and is then declared to be a man, and wants to insist that the child never had a mother. This is where we are. We now seem to be accelerating towards an era like that described at the end of the Book of Judges, where there was no king in Israel and each man did what is right in his own sight (Jdg. 21:25).

The Prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of Judah, seven hundred years before the birth of Christ:

Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. (Isa. 1:4-6)

This seems an accurate description of where we are today. As human beings, made in the image of God, reject God and the revelation he gives, they slide further and further towards destruction. The proud nations and empires of the ancient world exist no longer. It is time to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, and to read Augustine's *City of God*.

May the LORD God himself turn and have mercy. The God of the Covenant, and he alone, always keeps good faith with his people, through his Servant and Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Paul Yeulett*



# Engaging with your School

## The Invitation

Your government needs you. Specifically, the Department for Education (DfE) needs to ensure you are engaged with your schools and that schools build a sense of trust and shared ownership of their direction and performance with you. Since there is much to talk about and engage on, this is an invitation you shouldn't lightly refuse.

In March this year the DfE produced an updated version of the *Governance handbook: For academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools*. For simplicity, note that in this article only the term "schools" is used. Section 2.4 of the handbook, "Parental engagement and community leadership" has been updated "...to place stronger emphasis on parental engagement." I quote:

*"As the strategic leaders of their organisations it is vital that boards [or governors] are connected with, and answerable to, the communities they serve, particularly parents/carers."*

*"Parental engagement can have a large and positive impact on children's learning. It should not be confused with parental representation on a board and neither should it be seen as a one-off exercise for organisations..."*

*"All boards should assure themselves that mechanisms are in place for their organisation to engage meaningfully with all parents and carers..."*

*"...Boards should aim to build productive relationships, not only with parents and carers but also with the local community to create a sense of trust and shared ownership of the organisation's strategy, vision and operational performance."*

*"Boards should be able to demonstrate the methods used to seek the views of parents, carers and the local community..."*

Much of this is about improving children's learning; that is, more effective learning, primarily focussed on literacy and numeracy and other core subjects, since children do indeed learn better when their parents are directly (and appropriately) involved. But it is also broader than this and is in part about the social licence to educate – school governors are to be answerable to their communities. There is an indication of a need for not just passive approval, but for active approval of the school's strategy, vision and operational performance, together with an opportunity to influence them.

While the key focus is on parents/carers, it is also clear that the wider (local) community is also invited. An aspect of this wider community is more clearly outlined in another recent DfE publication providing guidance covering: *Primary school disruption over LGBT teaching/relationships education, 10 October 2019*.

In the case of maintained schools, the advice is aimed at local authorities. Amongst the advice given is:

- draft a letter for primary schools to adapt and send out to their parents, acknowledging concerns and inviting any who wish to discuss the matter further to arrange to go into the school to do so
- ensure schools have good practice examples of effective parental engagement, so that they can quickly put this in place if they have not already done so
- consider whether you can support the school in discussions with relevant faith leaders to ensure mutual understanding of the issues.

The particular context of this guidance is clear and it is not aimed at everyday engagement. Nevertheless, the preferred route to managing disruption, or potential disruption, is the same: discussion/engagement with parents, and discussion with the wider community – in this scenario faith leaders in particular, since they clearly have much to contribute to the moral position. However, faith leaders (e.g. elders and others in your church) should be encouraged to look for opportunities to engage outside of these pressured situations.

## The Call

Hopefully, you will already be aware of, and concerned about, the rapid rise in the promotion of LGBT+ lifestyles generally and, in particular, teaching on LGBT in our primary and secondary schools. The concerns generated by the educational establishment's stance over sex education are substantive in their own right and are still very much with us. These concerns have now, however, over a relatively short period of time, been dramatically multiplied by the introduction of relationships education teaching LGBT content.

Sex education in our schools is often justified on the basis of promoting personal responsibility and mutual respect. The approach to doing this is often to describe sexual acts in more and more detail to younger and younger children based on the flawed notion that children can process and act on this information in ways that are good for them and everyone else. But children cannot do so because use or misuse of this information is very sensitive to context and moral strictures. Its effect (and very likely the aim of those who promote it) is to normalise and present as good thoughts and behaviour what we would consider as aberrant.

Teaching on LGBT is part of the equality/minority rights agenda and is justified on broadly similar grounds including the promotion of tolerance, inclusivity and respect. Again, the goals appear to be so important that the end justifies the means, regardless of the means or degree of moral degradation (referenced to biblical norms) reached or the longer-term societal effects. Apart from the moral considerations, the LGBT+ topic in general is ideologically vacuous, confused and confusing with no significant scientific basis.

Literacy, numeracy and the core subjects of education are important and you will want to engage with your school to ensure as best you can that your child's learning and that of other children is as effective as possible. You will also want to seek to ensure your children and the children of others are not corrupted by teaching on sex education and LGBT issues. This is a salt and light matter.

## The Route

Here are a few suggestions that might help to turn concerns into actions.

You will need to be reasonably informed on the issues. There are a number of books by Christian as well as secular authors which will give you an informed background and insights into the gender, LGBT and related issues and movements. For example, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, Gabriele Kuby; *Transgender Children and Young People: Born in Your Own Body*, Edited by Heather Brunskell-Evans and Michele Moore; *God's Design for Women: In an Age of Gender Confusion*, Sharon James; *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, Stephen R.C. Hicks; *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*, Douglas Murray.

Review the websites of organisations such as The Christian Institute and Christian Concern. Understand the core biblical position – God made two distinct sexes, male and female. The biblical position on sex education, equality, gender, LGBT and respect across the sexes flows from this binary biological beginning.

The counter positions are ideological creations often characterised by confused and irrational thinking and which depend on the power (and sometimes threat) of the crowd, under the guise of defending and promoting minority rights, for their influence and spread. Minority rights have largely been established; the current direction and activities of LGBT+ and other groups appear to be directed and focussed on eliminating or silencing any views counter to their own. Our children are a prime target.

As much as possible seek to understand for yourself where these groups and their ideas come from and where they are seeking to go with them. What do you think they want and why? Your reaction to them will, in part, depend on how much you appreciate the threat they pose. In doing so don't forget that some people have real issues in these areas that you will need to understand and deal with such cases sensitively. Your church is likely to be providing teaching on these subjects. Ensure you engage with your fellow Christians and your church leaders to understand and discuss these matters and work out the best

approach to engaging with your local schools. It is much better to seek mutual support, to discuss and pray over a plan together, than go it alone as a family. Think about the positives, not just the negatives. Don't just condemn what is taught but seek and suggest possible good alternatives.

Influence and persuasion work best through strong relationships and trust. You often need to earn the right to a fair hearing of your deeply-held views. Get involved with your local school and get to know the staff, understand their everyday problems and difficulties and offer to help, genuinely. Don't pursue this approach as a tactic; avoid insincerity and manipulation. They will be much more ready to listen to your views and react favourably if they have witnessed and experienced your authentic help and interest in them.

Get to know the other mums and dads and sound out their views. You may well find sympathy with your own views even though they may not share your faith.

Finally, remember, *"Boards [Governors] should be able to demonstrate the methods used to seek the views of parents, carers and the local community..."* Consequently, don't forget to ask what their methods are and seek to use them constructively.

*The above article was submitted by an independent, bona fide contributor, who, for professional reasons, has asked to remain anonymous. We are happy to agree to this request.*

## Managing Allegations against Members of Church Staff and Volunteers

Back in the early 2000s when churches were becoming aware of the need for safeguarding policies and background checking, we had to consider the extent to which as churches we should submit to legal requirements. At that point, there was discussion about state interference in the spiritual life of the church, but over the following years the necessity, and indeed wisdom, of these requirements has been largely accepted.

Since that time, safeguarding practice has advanced considerably. However, this progress has not always been reflected in churches; many now finding themselves significantly behind current best practice. In addition to this, historic and current cases of abuse across all organisational sectors (including churches) has resulted in increased mistrust and concern.

As a result, we now find ourselves in a climate of:

- Increased awareness of the importance of safeguarding
- Increasing awareness of the deficiencies of past safeguarding practice
- Increasing awareness of the ever-changing and increasing safeguarding risks
- Increased expectations of all organisations to safeguard the vulnerable
- Increasing scrutiny from civic authorities
- Calls for greater transparency, accountability and even regulation of those working with the vulnerable

The other key factor that is of significance, particularly for Faith Based Organisations, is the changing attitudes and views within society with regard to issues that have, heretofore, been regarded as moral or ethical issues, which is resulting in increasing divergence from, and to some extent hostility towards, traditional biblically-based values.

In this climate, serious consideration of our response, including reconsideration of the question of the extent to which churches should submit to the authority of the state is required. There is not a simple, clear-cut answer to this question and there are many principles to consider. We cannot explore all of these thoroughly, however, we will try to “plot a course” that is both biblical and legally compliant.

The appointment of leaders within churches is not merely a question of the person best qualified for the role as is the case in secular organisations, but rather the recognition that God has gifted and called this individual to the position; they are “raised up” by God to lead and teach his people. As such, accusations against leaders should not be taken lightly (e.g. 1 Timothy 5:19 and 1 Samuel 24:5-6). Church leaders have a solemn duty to God to faithfully declare his word, even when that message is unpopular (2 Timothy 4:1-5). It is our place as leaders to shepherd, nurture and build up the church (Ephesians 4:1-16).

Given that on occasions leaders must deliver hard messages either to an individual or to whole groups, the possibility of people taking exception to the ministry, even when conducted faithfully and with due sensitivity and love, is nonetheless real. Allegations against leaders must always be considered in the light of the character of the leader and the solemn responsibility that God has placed upon them. This must, however, be held in balance and must not place them above contradiction or in a position of power that can be abused. As leaders, we are servants of the church and under-shepherds, accountable to God (e.g. 1 Peter 5: 1-4). Leaders are not beyond temptation themselves (e.g. Galatians 6:1) and when they fail they should be called to account (e.g. 2 Samuel 12:7-9, Galatians 2:11-14).

It is important that as churches we are wise and discerning and that as leaders, we follow the example of Jesus himself as servant-leaders who fully embrace the calling of God on our lives with humble confidence in him and that we walk in a manner worthy of that trust.

A further important aspect that requires consideration is laid out in 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 – the handling of disputes between church members. The question is how far should we take Paul’s teaching. To what extent should cases between believers be dealt with “in house”?

The context here is important. We know that Paul is dealing with a church at Corinth where prideful competitiveness and the tolerance of serious sin were amongst the issues he is addressing. In terms of the immediate context, one member has a grievance against another (v1) and the cases are relatively minor (v2). Paul appears to be addressing proud selfishness that asserts its own rights and is unconcerned about the witness that this displays to the watching world. There is an important principle here, namely that we should not indulge these prideful attitudes, and that the church should be able to address such issues amicably. From the point of view of our submission to the requirements of the state, however, there is a need for consideration of further biblical teaching.

The thrust of New Testament teaching seems to be that authorities and rulers are appointed by God and that we should obey them as the Lord’s servants (e.g. Mark 12:17, Romans 13:2-7, Titus 3:1-3, 1 Peter 2:17-18). Thus, if we bring these together, we see that we are to be subject to the state as those rulers have been ordained by God to that role, that evildoers have cause to fear the state but that those who do what is right have no such cause to fear. Also, the church should deal with trivial cases internally, rather than bring the gospel into disrepute before the authorities. This conclusion is not intended to undermine consideration of how we handle a situation where the law of the land contradicts the Law of God; that is a different discussion that is beyond the scope of this article. Our point here is that to generalise the 1 Corinthians 6 principle so that every case, including matters of abuse or other illegal activity, are to be dealt with internally is to develop the text beyond its legitimate interpretation, such that it at least potentially contradicts those other passages.

Also, if we consider some of the recent media coverage of the handling of serious allegations within high profile churches (the Southern Baptist Convention, The Village Church, Sovereign Grace Ministries, Willow Creek etc.) much of the criticism revolves around issues of accountability and lack of transparency in how those churches went about investigating the accusations.

At this point, we need to sound a cautionary note. It is easy to be critical with the benefit of hindsight, particularly when dealing with historic cases and it is important that we consider the actions taken in the context of that time. That said, it is also important that we learn from the past so as not to repeat mistakes made. We must recognise that:

*It is no longer sufficient simply to do the right thing; we must be seen to be doing the right thing.*

While this may be seen as worldly wisdom, the argument arises from scripture. First Peter 2:11-17 (particularly verse 12) tells us to watch our conduct so that even though we are accused as evildoers, our actions will speak for themselves.

We know that the gospel is an offence to many (Galatians 5:11, 1 Peter 2:8) and we also recognise that as views of mainstream society change, some orthodox biblical beliefs are now being seen as offensive, abusive and evil. In this environment, Peter’s exhortation seems to land with particular force. We may apply this teaching as: *Even though many in the world may find our views offensive and even abusive, when they look at our conduct, they have to acknowledge that we love and care for people well and that our safeguarding of the vulnerable is exemplary.*

This application arises from our fundamental belief that,

*Safeguarding should be a practical outworking of our biblically-based values and our gospel witness.*

One final issue that we must address, particularly in relation to historic allegations of abuse is the question of the responsibility of believers to forgive one another (Luke 11:4, Matthew 18:21-35). While it is certainly true that, for all believers, forgiveness of others is a biblical requirement, and for victims of abuse

forgiveness is an important part of their journey to healing and peace, this should never be used to silence victims and cover up the crimes that have been committed. First Peter 4:8 has sometimes also been quoted to encourage victims of abuse to forgive and love those who have abused them. Here it becomes important to distinguish between what is an important part of the individual's spiritual journey and what is helpful to the process of healing and recovery (forgiveness for those who have sinned against us), and on the other hand the requirements of justice and our responsibility to protect the vulnerable. God is both a God of mercy and of justice. To deny either one of these characteristics is to deny his true character and the very basis of the gospel. God loves the weak and vulnerable in a particular way and calls us to protect and care for them.

Our view of safeguarding should be shaped by all of our biblical principles. These would include, but are not limited to:

- People are made in the image of God
- We live in a fallen and broken world
- Israel's law protected the weak and vulnerable
- God values the life of unborn children
- God's love for people
- Jesus welcomed children and vulnerable adults
- The church as a community of grace should be a place of love, healing, restoration and safety
- We are commanded to obey authorities because they are appointed by God
- We are commanded to do everything for the glory of God

Scripture calls for those in positions of authority to be accountable (1 Samuel 2:12-36). Where God's servants are faithful and obedient, they should be given all due respect and honour (1 Timothy 5:17), but those within the church who sin should be challenged, in love, with the aim of bringing them to true repentance. Where wrong has been done, justice must be upheld. Salvation does not always remove from us the consequences of our sin (e.g. Paul's appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus).

All of the above principles are important when considering allegations. We must consider all of these factors carefully and must not minimise any of them, taking care to act with honesty and integrity.

All of the above considerations must be carefully considered and weighed; however, we would suggest that there is no real biblical foundation for any opposition to the principle of referring allegations to the local authority or the police for investigation where necessary. Indeed, we would suggest that Scripture directs us to submit ourselves to the authorities. What is that we have to hide that would cause us to refuse to be transparent about our practice?

### **Definition of an Allegation**

An allegation is defined in guidance as a claim that someone who works with vulnerable people has either:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed them *or*
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to them *or*
- behaved towards a vulnerable person in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to them

Where we have received an allegation or have a suspicion about such abuse, we must contact the Local Authority to discuss the matter. Every Local Authority has an allegations manager; often referred to as the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) but other titles may be used. Each Local Authority publishes its procedures for handling safeguarding concerns (including allegations) on its Safeguarding Board's website and local procedures must be followed.

There are several steps that we must take. Typically, allegations management teams work office hours. As such, we may need to manage the situation ourselves initially, but it will be possible to contact the police where required for assistance and support. Where a concern comes to light while the LADO is available, they can be contacted for advice.

The following steps should be taken:

- Make an initial assessment of the situation:
  - *Is there any immediate action that is required to ensure the safety of a child, children or vulnerable adult?*
  - *Is there a possibility that evidence could be corrupted or destroyed?*
  - *Do we have sufficient information or does any initial fact finding need to be conducted?*
  - *Who should be handling the situation on behalf of the church? Usually this should be one of the elders/leaders rather than the Designated Safeguarding Officer, but you must act in accordance with your policies and procedures*
  - *How will the person against whom the allegation has been made be supported through the process?*
  - *How will reputational risk and/or damage be managed?*
- Take any immediate action that is required to ensure the above
- Contact your insurer to notify them of the allegation
- Speak to the Local Authority at the earliest possible opportunity to seek advice and ensure transparency:
  - *The LADO will advise what further action needs to be taken*
  - *Further action may include an examination of the policies, procedures and culture of the organisation*
- If an investigation is initiated:
  - *Participate fully and transparently in the investigation*
  - *Support the accused individual throughout the process as advised/requested by LADO*
- Once the investigation is complete:
  - *Take any actions that are required as advised by LADO*
  - *Dependent upon the outcome of the investigation, records will need to be either retained or destroyed*
  - *In some cases, you may need to refer the case to the Disclosure and Barring Service but LADO will advise should this be required*
- Review the experience for lessons learned and any changes to systems, processes etc that may be required

In addition, the potential for reputational damage (harm to the reputation and witness of the church) should be considered. It may be necessary to formulate official statements (in conjunction with the LADO).

Further information about handling allegations is available from Christian Safeguarding Services (CSS) and advice and support around specific allegations (anonymously discussed) can also be provided. CSS can be contacted on 0333 303 4101 or 07960 751778, or email [info@thecss.co.uk](mailto:info@thecss.co.uk) or visit [www.thecss.co.uk](http://www.thecss.co.uk)

Paul Harrison

## Why we still know so little about dementia

The stigmatisation and misinformation that surrounds dementia remains a global problem requiring global action, according to the website of World Alzheimer's Day, which falls on 21 September. In the UK the stigma has been reduced but the dread surrounding dementia is still high, due largely to ignorance and misinformation.

A woman whose husband had died from the disease raged to me that she had been woefully ignorant and unprepared because no real information was "out there". Yet there are thousands of books, websites and media stories about dementia but, like most of us, she had ignored them until the disease impacted her life. Perhaps it is understandable, because who wants to read about a disease that is among the most dreaded of all? It is this "not knowing" that has led to increased fear, misunderstandings and myths about dementia. I was amazed to find some ethnic groups put dementia down to demonic possession.

Time and again I am surprised at how little is known about the disease. If I had a pound for every time I have been asked, "Is dementia the same as Alzheimer's?" my wallet would be bulging. No, it isn't, is the answer. Dementia is the name given to the symptoms that result from physical damage to the brain and although Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of such damage, it is just one of around a hundred.

It was to discover the facts about dementia that I chose it as the topic for my Master's research (I am a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist) and wrote the first of a series of books about it. [\*Could it Be Dementia: Losing your mind doesn't mean losing your soul\*](#) was one of the first to put the understanding of dementia within a Christian context and shows that the person remains, however much the individual appears to change as the disease progresses. There are well-documented cases of times when the sufferer regains lucidity, with faculties that had appeared to be lost. In Christians, this is often prompted by worship, or reading Scripture. "It was lovely to hear Joan again", a carer told me, after reading a devotion from [\*Worshipping with Dementia\*](#).

A decade ago the dread of dementia was equal to that of cancer twenty-five years earlier, and predictions at the time were that, as cancer had become more treatable and the dread diminished, so it would with dementia. But there is still no pharmaceutical cure, although the few medications available do make life-changing differences for many.

However, good things are happening. In our educated, Western world many myths have been demolished. We now know that dementia is a physical disease and not an inevitable part of ageing. A 35-year-long study of men living in the Caerphilly vale, north of Cardiff, showed that those who stuck to healthy living guidelines saw the risk of dementia more than halved, at 57%. (For information, Google "Caerphilly Study, BBC".) We know, too, that the numbers of new cases in the general population are declining, although this is not being reported in the media as well as it should be. The figure of 850,000 for those living with dementia is commonly quoted, but the number of actual diagnoses is 537,097.<sup>1</sup> Why the big difference? The higher figure is from projections made in the 1980s that have not been realised, and do not take into account the fall of new cases of dementia in the general population over the last two decades.<sup>2</sup> The figures do not reflect the results of changes in life expectancy, living conditions and improvements in health care and lifestyle, says Professor Carol Brayne,<sup>3</sup> of public health medicine at the Cambridge Institute of Public Health. The biggest hope, and the biggest myth-buster, is having accurate information and acting on it.

*Louise Morse* (see final page for a list of Louise's books)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dementiastatistics.org/statistics-about-dementia/prevalence/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/dementia-rates-falling/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.medicaldaily.com/dementia-epidemic-improved-health-care-and-lifestyle-lead-fewer-diagnoses-growing-349044>



## Ten Reasons why Smacking should not be Criminalised

On Thursday 3 October the Scottish Parliament voted to outlaw parental smacking. Parallel legislation is making its way through the Welsh Assembly. Campaigners now have their sights on England and Northern Ireland, with attempts to change the law likely in the next couple of years.

Consider these ten reasons to oppose the criminalisation of parents who smack their children. For more information, visit [www.bereasonable.org.uk](http://www.bereasonable.org.uk)

### 1. Parents will be criminalised

The Scottish and Welsh smacking legislation removes the defence of “reasonable chastisement” from law. This defence allows parents to use reasonable discipline with their children – a tap on the hand or the backside – without being charged with an assault. Removing it means that all physical discipline, no matter how light, will be dealt with as assault. Parents will be liable to investigation, prosecution and conviction for smacking.

A criminal charge for smacking would have huge ramifications for families in general. Parents could lose their jobs, resulting in a loss of income. In exceptional cases, parents could even lose custody of their children.

In cases where prosecution does not occur, families will still be subjected to distressing interference. Parents accused of smacking will be investigated by social workers and potentially the police, with children likely being interviewed separately from “the accused” – their mum or dad.

### 2. Children are already protected from violence and abuse

The law as it stands across the UK is sensible and proportionate. It outlaws violence, abuse and unreasonable chastisement. The reasonable chastisement defence is rarely cited in court, proving that it is well understood by prosecutors and the police. Responding to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee consultation in Scotland, a police officer with 29 years’ experience said: “I have never come across a case where I have felt the law as it stands is inadequate for any investigation into child abuse... I have found no appetite amongst my operational colleagues for any legislative changes.”<sup>4</sup>

Professionals in Wales, England and Northern Ireland also understand the law well and have not expressed a desire for it to be changed. If it was lacking in any way, police officers, social workers, and legal professionals would have pointed this out long ago.

### 3. Reasonable chastisement does not harm a child

Proponents of a smacking ban often claim that physical discipline is harmful to children. However, many studies have found no causal link between physical punishment (smacking) and negative outcomes. Professor Robert Larzelere, a world-renowned expert in child developmental psychology, concludes that the main meta-studies on smacking are “not methodologically sound enough” to allow for robust conclusions to be made.<sup>5</sup> Professor Tommy MacKay, former President of the British Psychological Society, also stresses that the evidence is inconclusive.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, the Welsh Government’s own consultation document stated that there is unlikely to be any evidence which specifically shows that a light and infrequent smack is in any way harmful to a child.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.parliament.scot/S5\\_Equal\\_Opps/equal%20protection%204/344-358.pdf](https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/equal%20protection%204/344-358.pdf) (accessed 16 October 2019).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Improving Causal Inferences in Meta-analyses of Longitudinal Studies: Spanking as an Illustration’, Robert E. Larzelere, Christopher J. Ferguson, Marjorie Linder Gunnoe. From: Society for Research in Child Development, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.parliament.scot/S5\\_Equal\\_Opps/equal%20protection%203/CEPFA\\_238\\_PROF\\_TOMMY\\_MACKAY.pdf](https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/equal%20protection%203/CEPFA_238_PROF_TOMMY_MACKAY.pdf) (accessed 16 October 2019).

#### 4. Genuine cases of abuse could be missed

There are serious concerns that a smacking ban would make the job of the police and social workers more difficult and distract them from genuine cases of abuse. The Welsh Government estimates that 548 people a year would be investigated under its smacking legislation.<sup>7</sup> In Scotland it could be as many as 948. This is a significant number of additional investigations for child protection professionals to pursue. Identifying at-risk children is like finding a needle in a haystack. Making the haystack bigger does not make them easier to find.

A social worker in the audience of a BBC Question Time in Kilmarnock expressed concern that a smacking ban would be impossible to police and that the burden would fall on professionals such as herself. She warned: “you’d need a million more of us to make it work”.

#### 5. A smacking ban is state overreach

If there is no reliable scientific evidence to show that reasonable chastisement is harmful to children, then Government does not have the right to reach into homes and criminalise parents for smacking. Parents accept that in circumstances where a child is at risk, the state has the right – and responsibility – to step in and safeguard that child. This could include removing a child temporarily or permanently from a home and arresting a parent who acted to harm a child.

However, in general, the state should not tell parents how to bring up their children and threaten parents with draconian punishments if they do not do so in a state-approved fashion. That is the mark of an authoritarian society, not a free one.

#### 6. A smacking ban erodes trust between parents and professionals

A major drawback of a smacking ban is the potential for a breakdown in trust between parents and the authorities who are there to provide help and support. Trust between parents and professionals is already strained. If parents believe that engaging with professionals could lead to negative intervention in the home, they will be less likely to approach them when they do need help. This would not be a good outcome for children in circumstances where a parent is struggling with some aspect of their care.

#### 7. Family lawyers are worried

Katie O’Connell, of Wendy Hopkins, the largest family law firm in Wales, has warned that removing reasonable chastisement from the law could leave families in “real turmoil”. She wrote:

*“Social services would also very likely be involved. Pending prosecution of the accused or if a parent is convicted of an offence against their child, it could result in families being divided. Of course, the other parent would need to be seen as protecting their child from potential harm. Where would this leave their relationship with the accused?”<sup>8</sup>*

Officials at the UK Ministry of Justice have also outlined problems with a smacking ban:

*“Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Service have serious concerns that feuding parents may, following the removal of the defence, use the change to further their cause against the other parent in a separation or divorce.”<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s91152/CYPE5-23-19%20-%20Paper%20to%20note%201.pdf> (accessed 16 October 2019).

<sup>8</sup> <https://wendyhopkins.co.uk/smacking-ban-the-impact-on-family-law/> (accessed 16 October 2019).

<sup>9</sup> [http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s91407/Ministry\\_of\\_Justice.pdf](http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s91407/Ministry_of_Justice.pdf) (accessed 16 October 2019).

## **8. Smacking bans have hurt families overseas**

In most of the 57 countries said to have “banned” smacking, they have only used the civil law. The changes were often merely symbolic, have no enforcement mechanism, or are simply not enforced in practice. By contrast, the Scottish and Welsh proposals make smacking a criminal offence.

In New Zealand, which voted to outlaw smacking in the same way as Scotland and Wales, public law specialists have concluded that the ban has led to ordinary parents being criminalised – despite the assurances of politicians.

In Norway, another country which criminalised smacking, parents have been treated harshly under the law. In 2018, the BBC spoke to one mother who was arrested for smacking. She said she had intervened to stop her son from biting a sibling, but her explanation was rejected and her four youngest children were taken into care.<sup>10</sup> There is a growing outcry about the effect of the law in Norway.

## **9. The public don't want it**

In Scotland<sup>11</sup> and Wales<sup>12</sup>, the public have expressed strong opposition to a smacking ban. More than 70 per cent of adults do not think parental smacking of children should be a criminal offence. More than 70 per cent think it should be up to parents and guardians to decide whether or not to smack their children. And more than 60 per cent say it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child. It is likely that citizens in England and Northern Ireland feel the same. Politicians should listen to the views of their constituents.

## **10. A smacking ban will affect some people more than others**

Smacking investigations are more likely to occur in families who are already on the radar of social services. Refugees from nations where there is no such law will also be disadvantaged, especially if there is a language barrier. It is unjust that a smacking ban will affect some groups in society more than others.

*Jamie Gillies*

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/norways\\_hidden\\_scandal](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/norways_hidden_scandal) (accessed 16 October 2019).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bereasonablescotland.org/public-opinion/> (accessed 16 October 2019)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bereasonable.wales/en-home/public-opinion/> (accessed 16 October 2019)

## Reproving an Older Believer for Sin

He had worked hard in the life of the church. He was highly respected and loved by his fellow believers. He also had an excellent reputation in the community. Added to these things he was a generous man, and so when he bought a new computer he gave his old one, which was only a couple of years old, to the pastor. That is when his porn habit was discovered. The pastor was shocked and concerned but reluctant to take any action, not even to have a quiet word with the brother which may have helped him to address his problem. He made excuses for the obvious facts before him and convinced himself that older people don't do that sort of thing, so he remained silent. The fact is that older people do do that sort of thing!

Reproof is a vital and valuable pastoral ministry, enabling individual believers to keep themselves "pure and unspotted from the world", and also to keep the Christian fellowship pure and careful about sin:

*"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him"* (Leviticus 19:17).

*"Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become wary; rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge"* (Proverbs 19:25).

There is a further consequence of judicious reproof – it reveals the true state of a person's spiritual condition. Proverbs is clear:

*"Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning"* (Proverbs 9:8-9).

In practice, however, reproof seems to be mainly honoured in the breach. Indeed, in our culture it may be felt to be out of place:

*"In self-esteem cultures, pastoral rebuke may be a paradoxical and unwelcome notion."*<sup>13</sup>

So pastors and church leaders may be tempted to hold back on this plainly biblical ministry rather than do something that their congregation might object to as being intrusive, too directive and lacking in empathy and understanding of people. Such objections are not unusual.

Of course, we do not go looking for people to rebuke, or for sins to expose, but when they become known, either to someone as an individual or publicly to the whole community, then action needs to be taken with due caution and care. We cannot escape the emphasis on it in the Bible. Paul states the principle:

*"Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear."* (1 Timothy 1:20)

And then Paul gives careful instruction to Timothy that rebuke is to be administered tenderly and appropriately:

*"Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity."* (1 Timothy 5:1-2)

In addition, believers are encouraged in Galatians 6:1 to gently restore brothers who fall into sin:

*"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."*

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<sup>13</sup> Bob Yarborough, quoted in Dan Doriani, "Reproof is a Pastor's Gift of Love", <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/reproof-pastors-gift-love/>

In similar vein the Apostle encourages those in ministry to be gentle and careful in correcting those (believers and unbelievers) who have become ensnared by temptation:

*“The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:24-26)*

Such care and concern is to be part of the church’s normal practice; reproof has a restorative and strengthening element that the whole congregation need to know. Tactfulness and compassion are essential aspects of a godly ministry of correction, but with them must come courage and earnestness for the truth and the well-being of those affected.

The injunction in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 addressed to Timothy as a younger man to be cautious in his dealings with young women would generally be recognised as wise and sensible by most believers. And there is common sense in the advice about approaching younger men as brothers, rather than in an authoritarian or overbearing way. But the implication that older people, men and women, have a need to be rebuked and corrected is somewhat surprising. But Paul raises the issue with Titus as well:

*“But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in the faith, in love, in patience; the older women like waist, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.” (Titus 2:1-3)*

So clearly there is an issue here that seems to get overlooked in our modern church life.

There is a whole set of consequences from this neglect. Principally they cover the impact in the church where known sins in older people are overlooked, there is also the care for the older person who may need counsel as well as correction, and inevitably there is an impact on the testimony of the church before the watching world. Personal experience testifies to this latter point: The adverse impact of a failure to reprove and counsel an older brother whose public behaviour brought the gospel into disrepute was grieving to experience as unbelievers spoke of the man’s sin and laid the blame firmly at the church’s door.

The reality that we have to face is that the Bible very clearly teaches that there are specific sins which affect older people. Examples include:

- Stubbornness and a refusal to listen to good advice, and many families know it too well (Ecclesiastes 4:13).
- Deprecating the present while glamourising the past (Ecclesiastes 7:10)
- “I can’t change at my age”. The Word of God changes us whatever our age because the Spirit knows no limits to his transformative power. To deny this is sinful and needs tender attention (Titus 2:3)

There are, in addition, aspects of ageing that can partly account for these blemishes on godly lives. Often these factors arise because of an absence of teaching about the nature, dangers and challenges of growing old in a fallen world. They fall into three categories:

- Reaction to the loss of self-image and significance – in our culture older people are devalued, and that has a significant impact on the older person’s understanding of themselves. Often in church life older people and their still valuable gifts are not used simply because of their age. (There does come a time when, due to a person no longer functioning well, they may need gentle persuasion to step down from some activity). But not being used does not excuse the sinful attitudes and behaviours that may arise. It does show the wisdom of Paul in encouraging Titus to teach older men and women what the Bible says and so to address their behaviour patterns.
- Reassertion of unmortified sins – pride and self-promotion, lust and inappropriate desires all plague us throughout our lives. When the heart and mind are not focussed and stimulated to godliness then sins

reappear. Similarly, when the mind is exposed to sinful values through unadvised reading materials or television then sin revives.

- Disappointment and frustration associated with social, physical and intellectual losses that usually attend ageing. With them come the temptation to fall into bitterness, undue regret, recrimination and a host of other wrong attitudes.

We also have many examples in the Bible of older people falling into sin in later life – Noah (drunkenness), Moses (impatience and anger), Miriam (rebellion), David (misuse of time, lust and adultery, and murder), Solomon (disobedience and idolatry), Joash (idolatry and conspiracy to murder), Uzziah (pride), Zechariah (disobedience). Others could be added. The sad fact is that their fall into sin in their later years illustrates the vulnerability of older people. It is also important to see how in many of these cases the sin of the older person had serious impacts on others. The necessity of appropriate public ministry and private counselling by pastors and church leaders is surely emphasised by this. Satan is subtle and ignorance of the dangers is a key aid in his malevolent purposes.

The glorious truth is that God accepts us in Christ as we are at conversion, but then he changes us. All believers are being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), and all believers are to know the transforming work of God in their minds (Romans 12:2). So it is inconsistent with gospel care to leave people alone when we see them engaged in sin, which may harm others and will most certainly harm themselves.

*Roger Hitchings*

## Book review: The Madness of Crowds

***The Madness of Crowds*, Douglas Murray, Bloomsbury Continuum, 288pp, (2019) £12.75 (Amazon)**

Best-selling author, journalist and political commentator Douglas Murray has written a new book which discusses various problems with the way our culture has developed. It is an important analysis and critique of various aspects of contemporary society, touching on subjects that many shy away from talking about. Murray is straight-talking and blunt: Contemporary culture is riddled with serious problems that stem from our abandonment of Christian values and morality; we are on the path to destruction. While Murray's diagnosis is clear, he offers no solutions. The challenge for Christians is to boldly proclaim our need to recover a biblical vision for society. This is the only solution to our mounting problems.

### The sceptical society

Douglas Murray begins his new book with an apposite quote from G.K. Chesterton: "The special mark of the modern world is not that it is sceptical, but that it is dogmatic without knowing it." Murray's thesis, which few can really disagree with, is that "We are going through a great crowd derangement" (1). People are becoming "increasingly irrational, feverish, herd-like and simply unpleasant" (1). You only need to have watched anything about politics in the last few weeks to know what he is talking about.

Why has this happened? Murray is clear. He lays the blame firmly at the foot of postmodernism which entails suspicion towards all grand narratives. Christianity, which provided the moral and philosophical foundations for western civilisation, is now regarded with suspicion or even hostility. No credible alternative has stepped in to replace it. We are therefore left with no answers to the obviously pressing question of what life is for.

### Identity politics

Into this moral and spiritual vacuum comes identity politics, proposing to interpret the world through the lens of victimhood, the assumption being that victims have "a heightened moral knowledge" (3). People feel unable to contradict someone who prefaces what they say with "Speaking as a..." The more of a victim you are, the more your views should be respected. If you don't respect the views of such victims then you are written off and slandered as "bigoted", "sexist", "racist", "homophobic", "transphobic", "Islamophobic" etc. Yet somehow, all these intimidating and bullying insults don't qualify you for victim status. Rather, once you have stumbled over one of these "freshly laid tripwires" (7) as Murray describes them, you are written off and disqualified from the debate.

These tripwires can be lethal for your career, [as many of our clients have discovered to their cost](#). If you land on the wrong side of the victim narrative you are, somewhat perversely, victimised without mercy. Murray's book consists primarily of four long chapters covering the shibboleth topics of Gay, Women, Race and Trans. These are topics that are not open for discussion in our society. They are laden with tripwires; Murray has decided that it is his job to expose them.

### Gay

The fact that Murray is himself openly gay makes this chapter all the more powerful as he criticises our inability to discuss the issues openly. One key theme of the book is the concept of "hardware versus software". If sexual orientation is genetically determined, this would make it a hardware issue in Murray's terminology. If it is purely a lifestyle choice, then it is a software issue. The gay lobby is keen to portray homosexuality as a hardware issue as this gives them victim points. If, on the other hand, it is a software issue, then they lose victim status. Sadly for the gay lobby, there is no hard evidence of sexuality being a hardware issue. Murray surveys the evidence and concludes we just don't know. (I think the [evidence is rather more conclusive than that](#).)

Murray then goes on to distinguish between “gays” and “queers”. He defines “gays” as those who just want to live their homosexual lifestyle and be left alone. “Queers”, on the other hand, are activists who want to destroy traditional concepts like marriage and the family. Murray agrees that we have gone beyond acceptance of homosexuality to celebration as a society. But he recognises the “moral blackmail” that this sometimes entails (41). You can be called a bigot for suggesting that two men cannot make a baby these days (42). Truth is a serious casualty here. This is also insulting to women, without whom no babies are made, but the new morality is full of such contradictions.

## Cultural Marxism

Murray has an interlude on “The Marxist Foundations” which very clearly explains how economic Marxism, which saw the working class as the victims, has morphed into cultural Marxism whereby the victims are sexual minorities, racial minorities, women and various other groups. The flip side of this is that white, heterosexual males can never be victims and should rather feel guilt and shame for “white privilege”. The fact that [fake academic papers](#), carefully checked by the authors to ensure that they say nothing meaningful, have been accepted in peer-reviewed academic journals shows how far this nonsense has permeated academia. As Murray says, much of academia these days is not interested in discovery and dissemination of the truth. Instead the purpose has become the propagandisation of cultural Marxism. This is not academia, but activism (59).

## Women

Murray explains how we have moved from first wave feminism – the campaign for legal rights – to third or fourth wave feminism, where men are seen as the problem or even the enemy. The way feminism has moved has resulted in what he calls “an impossible demand” (80). Women must be allowed to be as sexy and sexual as they please, but then can never be sexualised. The other paradox of modern feminism is that it insists that women are as good as men at everything, but at the same time better than men at some things. Men are blamed for all the problems in the world, the assumption being that women would naturally do a better job. Everyone is supposed to just sit and swallow paradoxes like this on pain of being called sexist.

Many major corporations have instituted compulsory “unconscious bias training” (88). This is problematic because there is no way of proving that you don’t have unconscious bias. You are assumed guilty by default. Furthermore, the evidence is that tests of such bias are unreliable and measures to counter “unconscious bias” do not work. Pressure on companies to publish pay differences has resulted in absurdities such as an employee being asked if she (I assume female from what follows) would accept a higher salary so as to help satisfy the gender and racial salary quotas in the organisation (92)! The other paradox with such quotas is that the minority people that benefit from such quotas are often some of the most privileged people in society (93). So who is this really working for?

## Race

I found this the most disturbing chapter. Many universities now offer courses on “whiteness studies”. Whereas “black studies” look at the positive contribution of black people to culture and history, “whiteness studies” is aimed at “problematizing whiteness” (124). Of course, “problematizing whiteness” means “problematizing white people” which is actually racist (126). Nevertheless, hundreds of British academics have had to attend “white privilege” workshops which explain that their skin colour makes them racist even if they don’t recognise it (127).

Murray has some very disturbing stories about how white academics in US universities have been hounded out by mob rule. People are told that they are not allowed to speak because they are white (131). Since his book was published, Edinburgh University has attracted criticism for hosting an event where [white people will not be allowed to ask questions](#). This is blatant racism.

It gets worse. In some of this dialogue, the concept of “objective truth” is presented as a construct of the Euro-West, and therefore a racist concept (136). In such a mindset, facts and arguments are expressions of



racist oppression. Nothing will persuade such people. We are in the land of mob rule where might is right. Murray explains that the western concept of “equality” was rooted in Christian ideas of all people having equality in the eyes of God (168). Once we abandon God, this moves to equality in the eyes of man. But equality of looks, or gifts, or experience, or knowledge, or wealth is impossible to achieve. Even equality of opportunity is impossible. Should we ban parents from reading to their children because it gives them an unfair advantage? We are living in a world where most people are striving for impossibilities and making impossible demands along the way.

## Forgiveness

Murray has an interlude on forgiveness in which he helpfully articulates that one of the problems of the internet age is that we have not learnt how to forgive. The internet never forgets, and one consequence of this is that people never forgive what was said – no matter how long ago it was. Humans are by nature fallible. We can’t undo what we have done. We all need forgiveness, without which we can be paralyzed by our mistakes. With the internet, Murray says,

*“We have created a world in which forgiveness has become almost impossible, in which the sins of the father can certainly be visited upon the son. And we remain remarkably unconcerned to create any mechanisms or consensus over how to address the resulting conundrum.” (182)*

Murray laments the loss of the Christian emphasis on forgiveness. It is striking to see an atheist perceive and explain this problem with which Christians would wholeheartedly agree.

## Trans

Murray begins this chapter by saying:

*“Every age before this one has performed or permitted acts that to us are morally stupefying... It is worth wondering what the blind spots of our age might be.” (184)*

He relates the story of Nancy Verhelst who was euthanised a year after her last sex change procedure. He imagines future generations wondering: *“So the Belgian health service tried to turn a woman into a man, failed and then killed her?” (185).*

Murray discusses intersex, autogynephilia and gender dysphoria. The discussion is interspersed with stories and anecdotes which bring it to life. Some of these are heart-rending accounts of trans-regret people who now say they were uncritically placed on a conveyor belt for treatment. Parents are told that *“parental acceptance is the first step to prevent suicide” (221)*. This is nothing less than emotional blackmail. Children make use of this type of manipulation too – *“Let me change gender or I’ll kill myself” (222)*. What this means is that the slightest discussion or questioning of what is best is effectively silenced or condemned. Yet treatment is irreversible; surely serious discussion and questioning should be a requirement before we engage in something like that? Since the book was published it has been reported that [hundreds of young trans people want help to detransition](#). The evidence that we are getting this wrong is mounting. Meanwhile a lot of people are getting hurt.

## So what can we do?

Murray’s concluding chapter has some ideas about how to respond to all this. Part of what to do is to point out the contradictions in contemporary culture – of which there are many. One is that the countries most advanced in equality and human rights are presented as the worst offenders (232). Another is why people who accept transgenderism will not accept transracialism? (234) Should we really allow men (who identify as female) to beat up women in martial arts? (237).

Then there are the facts that contradict the narratives. Did you know that gay men and lesbian women consistently earn more on average than their heterosexual counterparts? (242). Does this make

heterosexuals victims of discrimination? In America Asian men earn higher than any other group? (242)  
Should something be done about this?

There is also some myth-busting to do. One is the myth of the “noble savage” which is based on a rejection the doctrine of original sin and which is contradicted in history (250). Another is the myth of the virtuous victim. Victims are not always right; it is a perverse culture that idealises victimhood rather than heroism or stoicism (252).

Pointing out contradictions and problems like this will help some people. Murray is convinced, however, that the cultural Marxist element is not really interested in truth or problem solving. Their analysis is “expressed not in the manner of a critic hoping to improve, but as an enemy eager to destroy. There are signs of this intention everywhere we look.” (245)

In Murray’s words:

*“Their desire is not to heal but to divide, not to placate but to inflame, not to dampen but to burn.”* (247)

If you can make people doubt absolutely everything – even that there is such a thing as men or women – you can destroy society.

## **Conclusion**

Murray’s book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand contemporary culture. Murray diagnoses and explains the problems we face with great skill and clarity. He recognises that abandoning Christianity has left us without a moral framework or narrative purpose for society. This is deeply problematic and has landed us on the road to destruction. He has no alternative to offer though. The fact is that the only real answer is a return to Christian morals and values. In his heart I suspect that Murray realises this but doesn’t want to go there; this is too challenging for his lifestyle. Even so, he advocates Christian ideals like forgiveness and generosity.

As Christians we need to step up and boldly proclaim that Christianity has the answers and the explanations. The evident contradictions and paradoxes of the alternatives present a clear opportunity for the gospel. God is the foundation for objective truth about sexual ethics, race, gender and much more. Biblical morality sets people free and has none of the contradictions that Murray highlights. People are hungry for purpose, acceptance and forgiveness. All of these can only really be found in God. The harvest is ripe. We just need more workers.

*Tim Dieppe*

## Book review: Plugged In

***Plugged In: Connecting your faith with what you watch, read, and play*, Daniel Strange, Good Book Company, 160pp, (2019) £6.79**

While I think Timothy Keller's endorsement, "There really is nothing else like this book" may be a little overstated, I sympathise with his point. Daniel Strange has written a thought-through and accessible book that is worthy of consideration by any Christian who desires to wisely relate to contemporary culture.

### Exit or engage?

Christians face a battle as to how we can honestly and helpfully interact with the world around us. How are we to be "in the world but not of the world"? It can be very difficult to get the balance right. Strange helpfully introduces his book by listing various options the church has responded:

- "Look in" at culture, staying within our own Christian cultural "holy huddle"
- "Lash out" against culture, attacking the worst parts with judgmentalism and moralism
- "Look like" culture, adopting its changing fads and morality (16)

Strange submits an alternative, better way, urging us to meaningfully engage with culture. In the pages that follow, he defines culture as "the stories we tell that express meaning about the world" (23) and presents a biblical basis and model for effectively analysing and approaching the world around us.

### Confronting and connecting

Strange states that the gospel transcends culture but that we can often assume that our own context (in the author's case, English and middle-class) does Christianity best. Pointing to the beauty of diversity in Christian community, he desires that Christians should find that their engagement with culture "results in us loving Christ more and more, and telling others to follow him with more and more clarity and persuasive power" (95). This is accomplished through *confrontation* that challenges societies' plausibility structures with the miraculous gospel of Christ, *connecting* Christ's cross to the culture in front of us (100-101).

Drawing from Paul's ministry in Athens (Acts 17) and 1 Corinthians 1, *Plugged In* presents a model of confronting and connecting culture with Christ via a process that Strange calls "subversive fulfilment".

*"The gospel is the subversive fulfilment of culture... compared to the idolatrous stories that the world tells, the gospel both subverts and fulfils... it subverts in that it confronts, unpicks and overthrows the world's stories. It calls for new ways of looking at the world because the old ways are so useless and harmful... The gospel fulfils in that it connects and is shown to be worthy of our hopes and desires. The gospel is appealing in that it is a call to exchange old hopes and desires for new ones, because these new ones are the originals from which our false stories are smudged and ripped fakes."* (102)

Strange spends a significant amount of time unpacking this in theory before showing what it means practically in a series of four steps:

- *Enter* – patient observation of the world or a specific item of culture (e.g. a film, book, play) leading to careful (as opposed to caricatured) descriptions of what we are engaging with.
- *Explore* – searching for elements of grace, while acknowledging idolatrous components that detract from worship of God.
- *Expose* – show people's idols to be "destructive frauds" (125) by highlighting their spiritual bankruptcy.
- *Evangelise* – show off the good news of Jesus Christ. Strange says: "The gospel has something to say about anything and everything because the gospel impacts anything and everything."

He cautions against a one-size-fits-all gospel presentation and gives examples of meaningful engagement.

In what is certainly a unique and helpful feature, *Plugged In* concludes with some fascinating, if somewhat random, exemplar essays that model how to go about Christian cultural analysis. Looking at adult colouring books, birdwatching, zombie-culture, and Japanese toilets, the author does a remarkable job of showing how the gospel can quite literally engage with anything!

### **Is this helpful?**

Church planting and pastoring is difficult, responsible work. Meaningful engagement with one's local community – inside and outside the church body – is essential. Such relevant engagement is not possible without attempts to understand what is going on around us.

Over the years, I have taken great joy in following very similar steps to Dan Strange in taking works of our culture and engaging with them as a Christian in attempting to reach people with the gospel. I have often seen fruitful conversations develop as a result with some more meaningful relationships developed and, in quite a few cases, people professing or growing in their faith. That said, this has not always been without difficulty or misunderstanding.

Someone once challenged me on the evils of television and urged me to not watch any movies or use illustrations from them in my preaching. On another occasion I was told that "The Avengers are evil and no Christian should watch the films or read the comics, because God says 'vengeance is mine' and so he is the only Avenger." While I disagreed with the method and motives of these individuals, I accepted that entertainment is a matter of conscience for Christians and sought to move on – but that did not mean they did!

Entertainment aside, our church once held a series of special outreach Bible studies where other religions were analysed and assessed from a biblical perspective, their beliefs and behaviours appraised and exposed via a similar model to Strange's subversive fulfilment. One person made it clear his attendance was reluctant, because "we don't need to know anything about anyone else or what they believe because it's all lies and all we need is the gospel". On another occasion, I was asked to address the topic of tolerance from a Christian perspective. As part of this, in looking at the western cultural climate, I considered gender confusion, identity and freedom of speech issues from a scriptural lens. One individual commented, "Just preach the gospel. There is no need to tell us about philosophy".

Unfortunately, anyone who attempts to illustrate how the gospel subversively fulfils the culture's deepest desires and needs will face challenges. Many, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day who questioned his interactions with certain people, just won't see the point of Strange's book. And yet what he offers is a biblical model for engaging an increasingly hostile environment. As Paul proclaimed the gospel to Athenian philosophers with a contextually appropriate and clear message so should we be equipped to effectively confront this world.

### **Engagement is worth it**

For every negative reaction to Christian cultural engagement, I have seen so many more equipped and helped to reach out who would otherwise not have done so. I have seen and had gospel conversations started out of discussions on other religions, superhero movies, Arsenal football, veganism, Lord of the Rings, clowns and graphic t-shirts. It has sometimes taken me out of my normal interests or comfort zone (the discussion of flat earth theory with an acquaintance and his brother in their flat while they smoked weed can't be erased from my mind), but in every case God has given me the words to speak to the hope that is in Christ.

I am confident Strange's book can and will inspire the reader to reach out in more fresh and effective ways with the truth of Jesus Christ, who is the power and wisdom of God.

*Regan King*

## Movie review: Joker

I did not enjoy the critically acclaimed and – in some people’s book – controversial *Joker*. This was not because I think it glorified evil, nor because Joaquin Phoenix’s Joker was played to encourage sympathy for, or to excuse, his actions. I do not believe he does so and I find this interpretation – offered by Greg Morse at *Desiring God*<sup>14</sup> – as superficial and mistaken. *Joker* no more lionizes villains, glorifies evil, or excuses sin than do many graphic passages of Scripture (too many to choose from, but Judges is a standout).

No, I did not enjoy Director Todd Phillips’ movie; I found it too realistic, too plausible even. Beautifully shot and masterfully acted, it painstakingly chronicles the external influences, personally and socially, that shape the gradual descent of a troubled individual – and a city – into total anarchy.

### A crying clown in mental chaos

*Smile,  
Though your heart is achin’  
Smile,  
Even though it’s breakin’  
When there are clouds in the sky  
You’ll get by...<sup>15</sup>*

*Joker* opens by introducing us to Arthur Fleck, part of a company of clowns for hire. Introverted and softly spoken, Arthur has a history of mental health problems and has spent time in Gotham’s Arkham Asylum. He is very much an outcast and is routinely bullied, ignored, made fun of and, in one of the opening scenes, brutally beaten up by a group of teenagers. He weeps as he simultaneously laughs uncontrollably (a medical condition) and goes home to take care of his ailing mother whom he clearly loves, though some elements of their closeness are disturbing.

In the aftermath of Arthur’s beating he visits his social worker. Her body language is tense, her speech terse; her questions are banal and her listening skills poor. Arthur acknowledges in exasperation that all he has are negative thoughts and that he felt better when he was in hospital. No solutions are suggested and trying to smile and put a brave face is no longer working. The mental anguish he experiences is reflected in his journal, doubling – at least in Arthur’s mind – as a joke book where he writes such one-liners as, “*I just hope my death makes more cents than my life.*” At this point, one really does sympathise with Arthur. He muses in his journal, “*The worst part of having a mental illness is people expect you to behave as if you don’t.*”

Little by little we see Arthur’s hope chipped away at until he enters free-fall. But while the actions and inactions of others don’t help, there is no question that Arthur himself is responsible for his behaviour.

### A cognisant criminal who murders compulsively

Arthur’s difficult life is not unfamiliar to many. The reality of personal adversities that serve as opportunities to make life-defining decisions for good or ill is very clearly portrayed in *Joker*. Arthur loses his job through his naivety and betrayal by a colleague. He is angry and starts carrying a gun. When he is again mocked – this time by some businessmen on a train, Arthur, still dressed in his clown costume, seems to accidentally shoot one dead before deliberately killing the other two.

It is at this point that *Joker* takes us down some confusing paths, relating events which Arthur thinks to be real but that are merely conjured up by his paranoia and narcissism. These scenes, mingled with other real events, require of the viewer intelligent engagement.

The “clown murders” are now making headlines across Gotham, giving Arthur a sense of importance. At the

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-the-jokes-on-us>

<sup>15</sup> *Smile*, songwriters: Geoffrey Parson, John Turner, Charlie Chaplin, © S.I.A.E. Direzione Generale, Universal Music Publishing Ltd.

same time he loses his main source of accountability and support when social care budget cuts bring an end to his counselling sessions. Meanwhile his respect for various people he loved and admired collapses and he makes a conscious decision to embark upon a string of murders.

The crying clown is now a cognisant murderer, targeting anyone who has abused, ignored, lied to or betrayed him or, yes, even failed to find his jokes funny. We may see others as culpable for the harm that makes Arthur snap, but he is fully aware of, responsible for and proud of his heinous crimes. Psychological confusion may not have helped, but it is not responsible for the evil he now inflicts.

### **A counterfeit Christ for the mob's cause**

*I started a joke which started the whole world crying  
But I didn't see that the joke was on me, oh no  
I started to cry which started the whole world laughing  
Oh, if I'd only seen that the joke was on me.<sup>16</sup>*

Joker is not without his fans; many in Gotham see the murderous clown as a hero and he develops a cult following, clown masks being worn in solidarity against those who are better off in difficult times. Authority figures are beaten up in displays of wanton violence. Upon revealing himself as Joker live on TV he is arrested, only to be rescued by a mob in clown masks who hold him aloft as their anointed saviour. The crying clown is now the clown prince. Joker's actions spark a popular revolt against social ills but in so doing plunge Gotham into even greater darkness.

### **A conscientious critique of mankind's crisis**

*But where are the clowns, send in the clowns  
Don't bother, they're here.<sup>17</sup>*

Many, perhaps most, who view the film, will join me in seeing *Joker* as uncomfortably plausible, reflective of our own culture. Mental health problems and loneliness abound across the UK. In pastoring an inner-city London church, scarcely a week goes by when I do not deal with people struggling with depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. In helping lead a new charity, Pregnancy Crisis Helpline, I routinely listen to women who have been lied to and misdirected into having an abortion who now suffer extreme mental anguish that tempts them to react in harmful ways. Many who struggle with mental health issues are bullied and mocked; I have seen it happen. I have watched groups of young people provoke mentally unstable people who then react in kind.

*Joker* is a critique of all of us and that is why it so uncomfortable. Some will, like the mob, justify their violence in their rage against injustice. The Joker is the hero that so many want but no one needs – the hero who is no hero at all. But in the mess of it all there is hope. As *Joker* ends and as the crowd venerate their murderous hero, a boy weeps over the bodies of his parents, shot dead by a clown. Bruce Wayne will grow up to become the Batman and put an end to Joker's reign of evil. He is the hero Gotham needs.

Are we that different from Joker and the mob? Evil takes many forms. It is all around us; it is in us. And there are many Counterfeit Christs too. But a child has been born who lived, died and rose again to put an end to our evil madness. Jesus Christ is the ultimate cure to our crisis – the hero we need.

**Note: *Joker* is not a typical comic-book film and viewer discretion is advised. It is not suitable for children or those struggling with mental health problems. *Joker* also contains violence and some swearing.**

*Regan King*

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<sup>16</sup> *I started a joke*, songwriters: Barry Gibb, Maurice Gibb, Robin Gibb, © Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Ltd.

<sup>17</sup> *Send in the clowns*, songwriter: Stephen Sondheim, © Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Ltd.

## Update on Life Issues – October 2019

### Abortion

#### Decriminalisation in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has long enjoyed being an anomaly. Its people want to be citizens of the UK, yet it is geographically detached from the mainland and also legally detached from the 1967 Abortion Act. Instead, its unique pro-life reputation has been safeguarded by the provisions of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. In other words, unlike the rest of the UK, abortion has been almost entirely illegal in the Province for the last 158 years.

Alas, now that protection for the unborn and their mothers no longer exists. Here is the back story. The abortion policy of the Province has been a devolved issue – to be determined by the members of the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont, not by politicians at Westminster. But in January 2017, the Stormont Assembly collapsed in a row between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Pro-abortion MPs at Westminster seized upon this impasse and on 17 July 2019 succeeded in passing the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill through its final stages in the House of Lords by 182 vs. 37, and the next day through the Commons with a majority of 328 vs. 65. This Bill had cunningly been amended so that sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act would be repealed. The enactment date was set for 21 October. So, if Stormont was still defunct by that Monday midnight, abortion would automatically be decriminalised across Northern Ireland, that is, removed from the criminal law and placed under medical regulation.

The pro-life counter plan was simple – the Assembly at Stormont must be reconvened. A fast-track private member's measure, the *Defence of the Unborn Child Bill 2019*, was proposed in order to halt decriminalisation. Attempts were made to kick-start the Assembly. First, a Speaker had to be approved by all political factions, but Sinn Féin refused to turn up and other party members walked out. The sitting was abandoned after less than an hour.

The midnight deadline came and went. Abortion in Northern Ireland is now deregulated and available, on demand, for any and no reason, for up to 28 weeks. The Province has been transformed from a country that genuinely protected its unborn children to one that openly slaughters them. The most pro-life country suddenly has become the most pro-abortion country.

However, for the time being, abortion in Northern Ireland is in limbo, if not turmoil. A recent poll showed that 52% of its citizens oppose the new law. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Julian Smith MP, now has to draft a fresh legal framework for abortion. Then there must be a public consultation. In the meantime, abortion will be unregulated until the end of March 2020. Currently there are no abortion clinics in Northern Ireland, but by 31 March 2020 abortions must be provided by its state hospitals. And the status of conscientious objection remains unclear. An open letter opposing abortion in their country has recently been signed by 911 doctors, midwives and nurses. Some have vowed to quit their jobs rather than be forced to be involved in abortions.

And all this is just the start. Abortion campaigners intend to see abortion radically liberalised across the whole of the UK. They are currently seeking to hijack the Domestic Abuse Bill at Westminster in order to render the 1967 Abortion Act obsolete. If that occurs, abortion will be fully decriminalised in all four countries of the UK. The prospect is alarming. The entire UK will become an even more dangerous place for the unborn and their mothers.

#### Abortion CEO overpaid

We all know the abortion industry is booming and flush with cash. Yet almost everyone was shocked to learn that Simon Cooke, the chief executive officer of Marie Stopes International (MSI), was paid a

whopping £434,000 last year. His basic salary rose from £173,067 to £217,250 and he was then awarded a performance-related bonus of the same amount, which effectively doubled his remuneration. It's called making a killing from killing.

Even the Charity Commission has apparently been shocked and has asked MSI to justify the boss's pay rise. Last year, the average salary of the heads of Britain's 100 biggest charities was £178,000. And remember that MSI is a registered charity – surely, an unfitting word – besides being a global abortion provider in 37 countries, as well as running 60 abortion clinics in Britain.

I donate to several charities. But I have never supported MSI, and I never will. Having written that, it needs amending. Actually, I do financially support MSI, and BPAS, and all the other UK-based abortion providers. I pay my taxes and the NHS uses my, and your, money to pay these terminating subcontractors to perform most – currently 72% – of the 200,000 or so abortions in the UK each year. Another 26% are performed in NHS hospitals, so we, the UK taxpayers, fund 98% of all abortion – only 2% are privately funded. I feel queasy.

### **Buffer zones**

It has always been a controversial activity outside abortion clinics. Pro-life men and women praying with rosaries, speaking with clients, holding religious posters and so on, trying to dissuade women from entering to terminate their pregnancies.

The targeted abortion providers are not happy. In April 2018, Ealing Council initially enforced a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) of 100 metres upon its local Marie Stopes. Then in February 2019, Richmond Council did the same with several other councils following suit, including Birmingham, Manchester, Portsmouth, Leeds, Lambeth and Southwark.

The targeted pro-life supporters are not happy. They went to court saying that buffer zones infringed their right to freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of assembly and association, and denied women from receiving pro-life support. But on 21 August, judges at the Court of Appeal rejected their challenge to a High Court ruling which had previously upheld that the restrictions of the Ealing Council's buffer zone were "justified". It was alleged that buffer zones were necessary to protect the Marie Stopes clinic users from "intimidation, harassment and distress". However, nowhere in the UK have there been any reports or prosecutions of "intimidation, harassment and distress" concerning such pro-life vigils.

On hearing the outcome, the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, praised the "good news" in a tweet. He said, "A woman's right to choose, free from intimidation or harassment, must be protected." Meanwhile, the pro-life litigants have said they will seek to take the Court of Appeal's decision to the Supreme Court.

## **Assisted Reproductive Technologies**

### **"Spare" embryos**

One of the major bioethical objections to IVF is the production of "spare" embryos. Women patients are routinely super-ovulated, multiple ova are collected and fertilised, many embryos are created, a few are transferred and the rest, those supernumerary, surplus, "spare" embryos, are sometimes squashed but mostly frozen and stored. The numbers from a typical IVF treatment cycle can look like this – 15 ova are collected and fertilised to produce 10 embryos, 2 are transferred to the woman and the remaining 8 are frozen.

That pattern occurs wherever IVF is practised. Recently NBC News reported on this dilemma as it occurs in the USA. When patients stop paying storage fees or fail to respond to a clinic's attempt to contact them, their embryos are regarded as "abandoned". Fertility clinics are not required to report on numbers. But NBC News reckons that the total could be in the millions. And the numbers are accumulating year-on-year.



What to do? Could these “spares” be used in the treatment of diseases, remedies for infertility, or “prenatal adoption”? Each of these options involves bioethical objections and practical challenges, and the numbers remaining would still be colossal. Herein is the lesson – when you cross moral lines, there’s a price to be paid.

### **Mother or father?**

Though not strictly a mainstream ART issue, the case of Freddy McConnell is noteworthy, as well as alarming. McConnell was born a woman but has lived as a man for several years starting testosterone treatment in 2013. He has retained his female reproductive system and, after suspending his hormone treatment, became pregnant in 2017 on the second attempt at IVF using sperm from a donor. After the 2018 birth, he wanted to be listed as the father on the child’s birth certificate, but a registrar insisted that he be recorded as the baby’s mother. This was despite having a gender recognition certificate affirming that the law considered him to be male.

However, in English law the person who gives birth to a child is the biological and legal mother, even in cases of surrogacy. McConnell, aged 32 and a *Guardian* journalist, pursued a judicial review, which if successful, would have made the child the first in the UK to be recorded on official registration documents as having no mother.

In late September, the case was rejected by Sir Andrew McFarlane, president of the family division of the High Court. He declared that, “While that person’s gender is male their parental status, which derives from their biological role in giving birth, is that of mother.” The ruling was quickly attacked by campaigners and lawyers as a blow to the rights of transgender parents and their children.

In defining the meaning of “mother”, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 states, “The woman who is carrying or has carried a child as a result of the placing in her of an embryo or of sperm and eggs, and no other woman, is to be treated as the mother of the child.” Will this have to be amended soon to include “man”? McConnell is considering whether to appeal against the judge’s decision. Is this on the edge of a bioethical dystopia?

## **Genetic Engineering**

### **Germline editing codes**

Last November, He Jiankui shocked the world by claiming to have produced the world’s first genome-edited human babies. Using CRISPR editing procedures his experiment made germline – that is, heritable – changes to the girls’ genomes. Many are worried and have asked, how can this sort of cavalier research be halted or, at least, controlled?

As a direct response to that question, 13 major biotech companies have pledged not to use genome-editing in germline cells. In late August, a document entitled “Statement of Principles on Genome Editing” was released by the industry advocacy group Alliance for Regenerative Medicine (ARM). Moreover, these companies have also pledged to pursue clinically-validated therapeutic research in somatic – as opposed to germline – cells under national or regional regulations.

The Statement contains five points mainly focusing on the therapeutic potential of genome-editing in somatic cells, while stressing the industry’s commitment not to pursue human germline editing. One key principle states, “We, as therapeutic developers utilizing gene editing technologies, are not modifying human germline cells for use in human clinical studies. Gene editing technologies have not matured to the point where human trials of edited germline cells are appropriate. Many important safety, ethical, legal, and societal issues involved with this type of gene editing remain unresolved.” And another reads, “Unless

and until ethical and potential safety questions with respect to germline gene editing are adequately addressed, we do not support or condone germline gene editing in human clinical trials or for human implantation. We believe that these are international concerns and would be supportive of an effort to discuss therapeutic gene editing issues on a global stage.”

These are bold and necessary declarations. How effective they will be only time will tell. But they are a good and commendable start. Hopefully, they will stop some arrogant scientists and make others think twice before they plan to perform germline-altering experiments.

ARM is not the only organisation to discuss the governance and use of embryo genome editing. In mid-July, the World Health Organization reported that it wants countries to forbid all research that would edit the genes of human embryos. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared, “Regulatory authorities in all countries should not allow any further work in this area until its implications have been properly considered.” Of course, WHO recommendations do not carry the force of law, but as Carolyn Brokowski, a bioethicist at Yale Medical School has said, “Given the uncertainty at this time, it would be unfortunate for any country or institution to do anything that’s contraindicated by the WHO.”

Even the Chinese are apparently joining the bandwagon. In July, China announced that it will establish a national committee to advise the government on research-ethics regulations. According to Chinese media, it will strengthen the coordination and implementation of a comprehensive and consistent system of ethics governance for science and technology. However, the government has released few details on how the committee will work.

And there is more. In mid-August, the international commission on the Clinical Use of Human Germline Genome Editing met for the first time. The meeting was organised by the USA’s National Academy of Medicine and National Academy of Sciences and the UK’s Royal Society and was held at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington.

It was a pretty mixed affair compared with the ARM’s robust Statement. For example, many delegates called for a complete moratorium on germline editing for clinical use at the present time. “We currently do not, cannot and will not support gene editing in human embryos”, declared Carrie Wolinetz, acting chief of staff and associate director for science policy at the US National Institutes of Health. On the other hand, others suggested allowing clinical germline editing to go forward, but only under “strict conditions”. Yes, we know all about those tight boundaries! One such advocate was the UK’s Sarah Norcross, who offered an idea of how genome editing could be incorporated into the UK’s reproductive regulatory framework in the future. She suggested the technology’s use could be regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. She said, “Clinics would need a special license to genome edit, and then need another license for each case. An embryo with an edited genome might become a “permitted embryo”. It could be used to establish a pregnancy, to avoid “serious disease”, or similar wording,” she said. Oh dear, the UK appears again to be way out of step with global thinking and far too permissive in this area.

## **Stem-cell Technologies**

### **CIRM is sinking**

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) has announced that it will no longer accept grant applications – the money has run out.

The CIRM was set up in 2004 after 59% of California voters approved a \$3 billion bond issue to support human embryonic stem-cell research. It was a controversial decision, and despite the warnings that such research would be unethical and ineffective, those gullible Californians were sucked into the embryonic hype. Meanwhile, the vast majority of successful stem-cell treatments have come from using the bioethically-neutral adult and induced pluripotent stem cells.

Despite the failures, the CIRM is battling on. A \$200 million bridging loan has recently failed yet the faithful hope to place a \$5.5 billion bond initiative on the 2020 ballot. Why do people listen to celebrity endorsements and those advocates of dubious science? The bioethicist, Wesley Smith, has called it a case of “fool me once, shame on you – fool me twice, shame on me.”

### **A blind man can see**

Some 25 years ago, when James O’Brien was 18 years old, he was blinded in his right eye after being sprayed with ammonia in a random attack in south London. He had almost no sight in the damaged eye. That is until he became the first NHS-funded patient to receive pioneering stem-cell treatment. Now he can see.

The procedure used is deceptively simple. Doctors at the Moorfields Eye Hospital in London removed stem cells from the limbus of his healthy left eye. The normal function of these limbal stem cells is to heal any damage to the outer layer of the cornea. These cells were then sent to a laboratory in Modena, Italy, where they were grown for about six months. They were then transplanted into Mr O’Brien’s damaged eye after doctors had removed remaining scar tissue. About a year later, in June 2019, once the new tissue had embedded, a donor cornea was inserted.

Mr O’Brien, the 44-year-old father of two said, ‘Being able to see with both eyes, it’s a small thing that means the world. Basically, I went from near-blindness in that eye to being able to see everything. Before I couldn’t even see the chart with all the letters on, now I can see the third line down and it’s going to get much better.’

The Modena link is crucial. It is there that Graziella Pellegrini and her team developed this amazing limbal stem-cell treatment. It has now been commercialised as Holoclar, the first advanced therapy medicinal product containing stem cells to be approved by the European Medicines Agency. Read more about its background on p. 127 of my 2014 book, *Bioethical Issues*.

### **A blind woman can see**

A woman in Japan has become the first person in the world to receive a corneal transplant made from induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs). The work was carried out by ophthalmologist Kohji Nishida and his team at Osaka University.

The patient, a woman in her forties and blind in one eye, left hospital on 23 August 2019, a month after the surgical treatment. She had a condition known as corneal epithelial stem-cell deficiency, meaning her limbal stem cells were unable to restore her damaged cornea.

The team transformed iPS cells, donated from a third party, into cornea cells. They then turned them into a sheet 0.03 to 0.05 mm thick and transplanted them onto the patient’s left eye. Nishida confirmed that, “After the operation, her clouded cornea became transparent and her vision has improved considerably.” Amazing!

The only available treatment until now has been a corneal transplant from a dead person. Such transplants have a relatively short life. About 2,500 people in Britain receive a new cornea each year. However, in 2017 the number of available corneas across the country was 21% less than that required. Could iPS cells come to the rescue?

## **Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide**

### **Dutch euthanasia doctor acquitted**

It had to happen sometime. While many are of the opinion that euthanasia in the Netherlands is “out of control”, one of its doctors, has, at last, been prosecuted for riding roughshod over the rules, like lots of her

colleagues. However, few thought that the charges would stick. This case is notable because it is the first to trigger a criminal investigation since the 2002 Dutch euthanasia law was enacted. It was initiated because the Dutch euthanasia review committee (RTE) found that the patient's case failed to meet the due care criteria of a voluntary and well-considered request as well as that of due medical care.

The original 2016 incident involved an unnamed 68-year-old woman doctor and a 74-year-old woman patient (known as Mrs A), who suffered from Alzheimer's. The patient had, four years previously, made an advance euthanasia directive, a so-called AED. But the question before the court was, Should the doctor have verified whether the patient still wanted to be euthanised at the time of her death? The doctor maintained that she could not consent to being killed owing to the advanced stage of her condition – she could no longer understand the concept of euthanasia. The judge at the District Court of The Hague ruled that the patient's previous request for euthanasia, signed when she was competent, was sufficient. The doctor was acquitted.

But that is not the full story. It is truly ghastly. On 22 April 2016, the day of Mrs A's appointed demise, the doctor had a mid-morning coffee with the patient, her husband and her adult daughter. The doctor put a sedative into the patient's drink. After half an hour, the woman felt sleepy but she did not go to sleep. A second dose of the sedative was administered subcutaneously. The patient, although woozy, indicated her displeasure at the pain of the needle. A paramedic inserted an infusion line. While Mrs A was asleep, the doctor attempted to administer a lethal dose of thiopental, but the woman stirred from her sleep and stood up and had to be held down by her family to allow the doctor to give the final injection of thiopental and a neuromuscular blocker.

Tough questions arise. Did the actions of Mrs A, and her doctor and her family, indicate her free and voluntary consent? What would happen if she had changed her mind? How would that be communicated? Would other Dutch doctors in a similar position disclose the details of such an event or would they hope it would go unreported?

And the Dutch call that "death with dignity". And they say that a Dutch euthanasia or doctor-assisted suicide will be "a good and happy death". What do you think?

### **"Mercy killing" in the UK**

What is mercy killing? The English courts have been grappling with that concept in two recent cases.

First, in June, at Basildon Crown Court, 53-year-old Robert Knight, pleaded guilty to manslaughter for killing his 79-year-old mother, June Knight, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. He was cleared of murder and given a two-year prison sentence suspended for two years. In December the previous year, he had walked into the nursing home, taken his mother in his arms and thrown her from a first-floor balcony. She fell 4 metres onto her head and died.

In sentencing, Judge Samantha Leigh described the death as a "mercy killing" and told Knight, "You are someone who acted out of love and desperation. You have been punished enough and you have to live with what you have done."

Second, 80-year-old Mavis Eccleston was cleared of murdering her husband in February 2018, and set free. Dennis, aged 81 and her husband for almost 60 years, was suffering from bowel cancer. He wanted to go to Dignitas in Switzerland to commit assisted suicide, but he was too ill to travel. So his wife gave him a lethal cocktail of prescription medicines and took a similar dose herself in what appeared to be a suicide pact at their bungalow in Huntington, Staffordshire. They were rushed to hospital after being found unconscious by relatives in February 2018. The dose failed to kill her but he died after a few hours in hospital while holding hands with his wife in adjoining beds.

In September, a two-week trial was held at Stafford Crown Court. The Crown Prosecution Service alleged that the couple had not formed a "clear and common" agreement to end their own lives and that it being a

“mercy killing” was no defence to Mrs Eccleston’s actions. There was confusion about whether Dennis had consented. Originally, Mrs Eccleston told nurses that she had not told him that he was taking a deadly potion, but later she changed her story. Nevertheless, the jury of eight men and four women took four hours to reach their unanimous decision on both counts, which means they believed that Mr Eccleston took the lethal overdose himself in the full knowledge of the outcome. Mrs Eccleston was thus cleared of murder and manslaughter.

How should we judge “mercy killing”? What, and how, are courts to decide? Were such killings motivated by compassion and nothing else? Do the terminally ill deserve to be killed, while the rest of us do not? Does someone’s death not benefit someone else – whether family, hospital, pension provider and so on? What sort of support do carers deserve and actually get? Can killing someone with dementia or a terminal illness ever be described as an act of love?

These so-called acts of “mercy killing” take us back 50 years and more. In those days we plainly understood the act and the outcome and often the motivation. But something sinister has occurred since. “Mercy killing” has been subjected to lexical engineering – that is wordplay and bioethics is rife with it. While we mostly understood, and disapproved of, “mercy killing”, it has been transmogrified to “the right to die” and then “death with dignity” and “assisted suicide” and now “assisted dying”. The latter is meant to be nicer than the former. And so lexical engineering inevitably leads to social engineering. “Mercy killing”, bad – “assisted dying”, good. Can you see where we are going?

### **Quebec slides**

Assisted dying laws in both Canada and Quebec stipulate that only patients facing “reasonably foreseeable” death may access medical assistance in dying (MAID). That law was enacted in June 2016. Of course, that stipulation was never going to last long. And it hasn’t.

Nicole Gladu and Jean Truchon, both of Montreal, challenged this eligibility criterion. Miss Gladu suffers from post-polio syndrome and Mr Truchon has cerebral palsy – both could continue to live for several years, rather than a “foreseeable” time. The plaintiffs argued that this MAID requirement was too restrictive, that it contravenes Canada’s charter of rights and freedoms and is therefore unconstitutional. On 11 September, Justice Christine Baudouin ruled in their favour and granted them immediate access to MAID. And she gave the federal and provincial governments six months to amend their laws before those provisions are suspended. Both governments said that they would study the ruling before deciding whether to appeal.

What do you think will happen next? Of course, both governments will cave in and the law will be changed to give greater access. And next? Why do Canadian citizens have to be ill, terminally or otherwise, to access MAID? And next? Who knows? But don’t tell me that bioethical slippery slopes are imaginary.

## **USA and Elsewhere**

### **US abortions drop**

Abortion numbers across the USA are continuing their long-term downward trend to a new all-time low. According to the latest report released in September by the Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion research group, there has been a 7% decrease in abortions between 2014 and 2017.

In 2014, the total was 926,200 while in 2017 it was 862,320. In 2014, the abortion rate – which measures how common abortion is among women of childbearing age – dropped from 14.6 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, down to 13.5 in 2017. The peak rate was 29.3 in 1980. Not since the US Supreme Court allowed abortion on demand in 1973 through *Roe vs. Wade* have abortion numbers been so low.

Guttmacher, unsurprisingly, attributed the decline to lower pregnancy rates and better access to contraception.

However, pro-life efforts to protect unborn babies and their mothers must also have made an impact. After all, during that time period 32 states passed about 400 pro-life laws, including requirements that women be allowed to see the ultrasound of their unborn baby, informed consent, parental consent and waiting period requirements. Again, unsurprisingly, Guttmacher tried to dismiss this perspective.

### **Seven US states**

As abortion numbers drop to historic lows, seven US states now each have just one abortion facility left. They have been closing at a rapid pace for the past decade. Abortion activists put the blame on pro-lifers for passing laws that protect unborn babies and mothers, while abortion clinic operators complain about a lack of clients as well as doctors unwilling to do abortions.

Currently states with only a single abortion facility are Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wyoming. In Kentucky and Missouri, current legal battles, involving health and safety problems at their remaining facilities, could end abortions completely in these states. However, for now, judges have blocked those states from closing those facilities. Mississippi and North Dakota have also recently passed pro-life laws that could shut down their last abortion clinics. However, judges have currently blocked both the heartbeat law in Mississippi and the dismemberment abortion ban in North Dakota.

### **Six US cities**

While several states aim to be abortion free, some cities have already claimed such a status. For example, in September, a sixth Texas city jumped on board this growing movement to protect the unborn from abortion at the local government level. The Gilmer City Council voted 4 vs.1 in favour of an ordinance declaring their municipality to be a Sanctuary City for the Unborn. The new regulation prohibits abortions and bans abortion facilities from opening within city limits. The other Texan abortion-free cities are Tenaha, Waskom, Omaha, Naples and Joaquin. These are hardly “cities” since Gilmer is the largest with a population of about 5,000. Nevertheless, it is a start and a fascinating concept and enactment.

### **Georgia’s heartbeat bill**

In May 2019, Georgia’s Governor, Brian Kemp, signed a law to ban abortions after an unborn child’s heartbeat is detectable, that is, at about 6 weeks of a pregnancy. It is called The Living Infants Fairness and Equality Act and allows for some exceptions, including in cases of rape or incest if a woman files a police report, or when the life of the pregnant woman is threatened.

A legal challenge was always expected. And in late September it came. US District Judge Steve C. Jones heard a request from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and others to block the state from enforcing this pro-life law until the case goes to trial. Georgia’s pro-life supporters hope the case will eventually make its way right up to the US Supreme Court and prompt the justices to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*. Judge Jones said he will make a decision before 1 January 2020, when Georgia’s law is scheduled to go into effect. On 1 October he delivered his judgement - he temporarily blocked the new law. A spokesperson for the Governor responded, “Despite today’s outcome, we remain confident in our position. We will continue to fight for the unborn and work to ensure that all Georgians have the opportunity to live, grow, and prosper.”

### **Dr Ulrich Klopfer**

This man was probably Indiana’s most experienced abortionist. He began doing abortions shortly after the US Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision. During his long career it is reckoned that he performed “tens of thousands of procedures in multiple counties over several decades.” In 2016, the state of Indiana eventually barred him from practising because of his inadequate record-keeping and failure to follow best practice. He was not a nice man – he ran three abortion clinics. He died on 3 September 2019.

Yet worse was to come. Relatives trawling through his property after his death found the medically preserved remains of 2,246 fetuses stored inside 70 cardboard boxes stacked from floor to ceiling in his garage. A few days later another 165 babies’ bodies were found in the boot of his 1990s Mercedes-Benz. Details are still sketchy and investigations are on-going. Whatever the details, this is gut-wrenching news.

Yet the American media have shown very little interest in the scandal. It certainly raises huge questions. How does a doctor amass enough dead bodies in his garage to fill a mass grave? Did his colleagues and employers never notice he was taking baby parts home? And, of course, why? Was Klopfer troubled, or mad, or what?

### **New South Wales and abortion**

In late September, abortion was decriminalised in Australia's most populous state, New South Wales. After a fractious debate, lasting more than 70 hours, that threatened to divide the conservative government, the Upper House voted 26 vs. 14 in favour. The controversial law overturns a 119-year-old statute and allows abortions for any reason up to 22 weeks and up to birth with the permission of two doctors and a hospital committee. Pro-abortion politicians cheered and hugged each other in celebration after they voted to strip away basically all protections for babies in the womb – that is what decriminalisation does. New South Wales was the last state in Australia that protected the unborn from abortion. Now, abortions are legal across the whole country, where it is estimated that between 65,000 and 80,000 are performed each year. Those numbers will probably now increase as a result of this New South Wales vote.

### **Romania and abortion**

Romania has one of the highest abortion rates in all of Europe, but a growing number of doctors in the country are refusing to abort the unborn. It has been reported that 60 of the 189 hospitals in the country will not perform abortions because of their doctors' moral or religious objections.

Abortions are legal in Romania for any reason up to 14 weeks, without any requirements, such as counselling or waiting periods. While public hospitals must provide abortions by law, individual doctors may refuse under Romanian conscience protection laws. Robert Danca, manager of Cuza Voda hospital in eastern Romania, stated, "The law does not oblige us to do this, as it is a service on request, and we can accept or not."

One such doctor, Daniela Chiriac, has explained that she quit doing abortions seven years ago at the Municipal Clinical Emergency Hospital in the western city of Timisoara because she now believes they are a sin. "I thought that if I could avoid a sin, then I should do it," she said. "There are many patients who ask me to recommend someone else and I refuse, because it is also a sin."

In a related development, some Romanian politicians are working to combat the high abortion rate by implementing pregnancy support programs. For example, Matei-Adrian Dobrovie, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, has proposed providing state funding to pregnancy resource centres that provide support to mothers and babies. He has rightly declared that, "Romania is in demographic decline, and there is a need "to support the pro-life movement," since the country ranks as second highest in the EU for abortions per live births, behind only Bulgaria."

## **Miscellaneous**

### **The miracle cure**

And now for something (quite) thought provoking. Christians already know about historic miracles – water to wine, dead to life, storm to calm, and so on. We are also generally disbelieving of modern-day miracles – a gold Mercedes-Benz on the drive, a pointless prophecy, or a cancer cure. Now comes news of a universal miracle health cure, a treatment that is essentially 100% safe and 100% effective. It's called physical activity. Oh dear, you are disillusioned and disappointed, aren't you? I am not. Because physical activity has been called a miracle cure by no less an august body than the Academy of Medical Sciences.

The simple truth is that any level of activity is better than none. And more is better still. That is the message recently pronounced in the updated guidelines from the UK's chief medical officers. The evidence that physical activity is good for both body and mind is increasingly impressive. People who are more active live longer and have lower rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer and depression. Moreover, it seems to have few, if any, side effects, and, unlike some prescription drugs, it is not generally addictive. So, for almost everyone, besides the chronically ill and the immobile, the dictum should be, "start slow and build up".

Climb the stairs, get out and walk, hold stand-up meetings, get on your bike, do a park run, swim 10 lengths, get off the couch, whatever. No, of course such physical activity is not a miracle cure in the biblical sense, but nevertheless it will do you much good.

Here are two verses to provide the biblical balance. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honour God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

### **How old are you really?**

Everyone will live forever, whether they want to or not, either in heaven or hell. We all have a never-dying soul. While we are on earth most of us would quite like to appear younger than our chronological age. And maybe you can. A small study in California (where else?) has shown that it might be possible to reverse the body’s epigenetic clock. The latter assesses a person’s biological age by tracking changes in DNA. Nine healthy men, aged between 51 and 65, took a cocktail of three common 2014 drugs – growth hormone and two diabetes medications – for one year. On average they shed 2.5 years as measured by changes in genomic markers. In addition, their immune systems perked up. Read all about it at, Fahy, G. M., *et al.*, “Reversal of epigenetic aging and immunosenescent trends in humans”, *Aging Cell* (online), 8 September 2019.

*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 are being handled by the Christian Legal Centre.*

### **Doctor’s foundational Bible belief ruled “incompatible with human dignity”**

An experienced Christian doctor who was forced out of his job working for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) after refusing to use transgender pronouns has lost his Employment Tribunal case. The tribunal ruled that his belief in the Biblical view of what it is to be male and female was “incompatible with human dignity”.

The judgment will have serious ramifications for Christian professionals and indeed all medical professionals, as the judgment dictates the language that professionals must use in the workplace. The judgment is also contrary to scientific reality and is likely to undermine freedom of speech in the workplace.

### **Sacked for refusing to use transgender pronouns**

In July 2019, Dr David Mackereth, 56, a doctor for 26 years in the NHS, challenged the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at Birmingham Employment Tribunal after he was sacked from his job for refusing to identify clients by their chosen gender instead of their biological sex.

Counsel representing Dr Mackereth, Christian Legal Centre’s Michael Phillips, argued that the DWP discriminated against Dr Mackereth because of his Christian beliefs, including: “His belief in the truth of the Bible, and in particular, the truth of Genesis 1:27: ‘So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.’ It follows that every person is created by God as either male or female. A person cannot change their sex/gender at will. Any attempt at, or pretence of, doing so, is pointless, self-destructive, and sinful.”

The DWP’s case against Dr Mackereth, however, claimed that his belief in Genesis 1:27 was not a belief protected by the Equality Act 2010 and was a “mere opinion”.

### **Foundational Christian beliefs not “worthy of respect”**

In the judgment Judge Perry puts “transgender rights” ahead of Christian freedoms and in effect forces Christians to use compelled speech in order to not offend those who believe in gender-fluidity.

The judge found that Dr Mackereth “holds to the principles of the Great Reformation of the 16th Century including a commitment to the supremacy of the Bible as the infallible, inerrant word of God as his final authority in all matters of faith and practice”. That includes his belief in the truth of Genesis 1:27, and the logical consequence: scepticism about transgenderism and refusal to use transgender pronouns.

The judge ruled that “belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals” (para 197). He continued that, “in so far as those beliefs form part of his wider faith, his wider faith also does not satisfy the requirement of being worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others” (para 232).

In the Bible, Genesis 1:27 establishes the foundational doctrine that human beings are made, male and

female, in the image of God and therefore of great value and dignity. The teaching is foundational to Judeo-Christian thought and was highly influential in political history as concepts of tolerance and human rights were first developed.

The ruling will have profound ramifications, excluding foundational Christian beliefs from the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination law. The ruling puts a belief in the Bible on a par with the racist and neo-Nazi ideologies which have been held to be “not worthy of respect in democratic society” in earlier judicial decisions.

### **“Would you call a six-foot bearded man, madam?”**

At proceedings in July, giving evidence, Dr Mackereth had said that he was asked in a conversation with his line manager: “If you have a man six-foot-tall with a beard who says he wants to be addressed as ‘she’ and ‘Mrs’, would you do that?” Dr Mackereth, who now works as an NHS emergency doctor in Shropshire, said that in good conscience he could not do this and said that his contract was subsequently terminated over his refusal.

He told the tribunal he was suspended the following month after being “interrogated” by his boss, James Owen, for refusing to “call any six-foot-tall bearded man ‘madam’ on his whim”. The medic claims he was told he was “overwhelmingly likely” to lose his job unless he agreed. Dr Mackereth left his role on 25 June 2018, after an email exchange with Mr Owen in which he was instructed to follow the “process as discussed in your training”.

The email read: “If however, you do not want to do this, we will respect your decision and your right to leave your contract.” Dr Mackereth replied: “I am a Christian and in good conscience cannot do what the DWP is requiring of me.”

### **“Freedom of speech has died in this country”**

Dr Mackereth gave evidence that he did not resign his position and was the victim of direct discrimination and harassment.

He argued that he was dismissed, *“not because of any realistic concerns over the rights and sensitivities of transgender individuals, but because of my refusal to make an abstract ideological pledge”*.

Responding to the judge’s ruling, Dr Mackereth said: *“I am not alone in being deeply concerned by this outcome. Staff in the NHS, even those who do not share my Christian convictions, are also disturbed as they see their own freedom of thought and speech being undermined by the judges’ ruling.*

*No doctor, or researcher, or philosopher, can demonstrate or prove that a person can change sex. Without intellectual and moral integrity, medicine cannot function and my 30 years as a doctor are now considered irrelevant compared to the risk that someone else might be offended.*

*I believe that I have to appeal in order to fight for the freedom of Christians – and any other NHS member of staff – to speak the truth. If they cannot, then freedom of speech has died in this country, with serious ramifications for the practice of medicine in the UK.”*

### **Compelled speech for first time in English law**

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:

*“This is an astonishing judgment and one that if upheld will have seismic consequences not just for the NHS and for Christians, but anyone in the work place who is prepared to believe and say that we are created male and female.*

*It is deeply disturbing that this is the first time in the history of English law that a judge has ruled that free citizens must engage in compelled speech. Here Judge Perry has ruled that Christianity is not protected by the Equality Act or the ECHR, unless it is a version of Christianity which recognises transgenderism and rejects a belief in Genesis 1:27.*

*The teaching of Genesis 1:27 is repeated throughout the Bible, including by Jesus Christ himself. It is fundamental to establishing the dignity of every human person but is, in a bizarre ironic twist, being branded as incompatible with that dignity.*

*No protection is given to beliefs 'incompatible with human dignity' and 'not worthy of respect in a democratic society'. In the past this definition has only applied to the most extreme beliefs, such as those of Holocaust deniers, neo-Nazis, and similar. It is quite shocking for the judge to put the belief in the Bible in the same category now.*

*This is one of the most concerning rulings we have ever seen at the Christian Legal Centre and we are determined to continue to fight for justice in this case, not just for Dr Mackereth and Bible-believing Christians, but for everyone who believes that we are born male and female.*

*People who suffer from gender dysphoria must be treated lovingly, but not telling the truth to these vulnerable people is unloving. Men cannot become women nor can women become men."*

### **Actress sues theatre and agency after being sacked for citing Bible on Facebook four years ago**

A Christian West End actress who was removed from a lead role in a musical for a four-year-old Facebook post that cited the Bible, is set to take a theatre and her agency to court for breach of contract and for anti-Christian discrimination.

The case, supported by the Christian Legal Centre, raises the question of whether Bible-believing Christians have the freedom to hold and express mainstream Biblical views in public, without fear of losing their livelihoods. It also raises the issue of whether, as a society, we are allowed to hold and express opinions and interpretations of art, literature and drama in ways that are contrary to LGBT ideology.

#### **Given lead role in *The Color Purple***

On 14 March 2019, Miss Seyi Omooba, 25, from East London, had been given a lead role as Celie in Leicester Curve and Birmingham Hippodrome's co-production of the award-winning musical *The Color Purple*, based on Alice Walker's classic American novel. The casting was announced the same day that Miss Omooba went with her father, Pastor Ade Omooba, an eminent international Christian campaigner and Christian Concern's co-founder, to Buckingham Palace to receive his MBE.

Miss Omooba had developed her raw talent from a young age, singing gospel in church and studying performing arts at Anglia Ruskin University. She had already built up a portfolio of performances, among them parts in *Hadestown* at the National Theatre, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Spring Awakening*, and had played the role of Nettie in the Cadogan Hall production of *The Color Purple*.

In a review of her full debut in the West End musical, *Ragtime*, Miss Omooba was described as: "jaw-droppingly good, and her ferocious gospel vocals... pin you to your seat. This is her professional debut, and she's someone to watch." In the production of *A Color Purple* at Cadogan Hall, Miss Omooba's depiction of the character of Nettie was described as capturing the "very heart of her character".

## Facebook post from 2014

After the cast was announced, however, on 15 March, Miss Omooba was tagged on Twitter by another West End performer, Aaron Lee Lambert, who is not known to her. With a screenshot of a Facebook post that Miss Omooba had posted four-and-a-half-years ago on 18 September 2014, Mr Lambert wrote:

*"@seyiomooba Do you still stand by this post? Or are you happy to remain a hypocrite? Seeing as you've now been announced to be playing an LGBTQ character, I think you owe your LGBTQ peers an explanation. Immediately."*

In September 2014, Miss Omooba was a 20-year-old student whose acting career had not even started. She regularly posts about her faith online without any issue, and in this post had written on her personal Facebook page, in the context of the government introducing same-sex marriage legislation, that:

*"Some Christians have completely misconceived the issue of Homosexuality, they have begun to twist the word of God. It is clearly evident in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 what the Bible says on this matter. I do not believe you can be born gay, and I do not believe homosexual practice is right, though the law of this land has made it legal doesn't mean it is right. I do believe that everyone sins and falls into temptation but it's by the asking of forgiveness, repentance and the grace of God that we overcome and live how God ordained us to. Which is that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24. God loves everyone, just because He doesn't agree with your decisions doesn't mean He doesn't love you. Christians we need to step up and love but also tell the truth of God's word. I am tired of lukewarm Christianity, be inspired to stand up for what you believe and the truth #our God is three in one #God (Father) #Jesus Christ (Son) #Holy Spirit."*

Miss Omooba received the tweet from Mr Lambert while supporting a grieving friend, and despite being deeply shocked and intimidated, refused to be drawn into an online discussion on the issue.

## Called the "n" word for citing the Bible

Calls for Miss Omooba to be removed from the cast followed, however, as well as online abuse which included her being called the "n" word.

Miss Omooba, who visibly prays before each show and wears a "Not Ashamed" of the gospel wristband, had accepted the lead role over Celie after originally auditioning for the character of Nettie, and disagrees with the interpretation that Celie is a lesbian character.

The character of Celie in *The Color Purple* has intrigued readers and critics since it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 after its publication the previous year. Set in the Deep South of the US, its main character, Celie, leads a life of immense struggle at the hands of men, until she briefly finds comfort and friendship with another woman. It was made into a Hollywood film in 1985 and starred Whoopi Goldberg, who described the film and the character of Celie as:

*"Not really about feminism, or lesbianism, despite the fact that Celie finds out about love and tenderness from another woman... It has nothing to do with lesbianism. It has to do with, her eyes are opened, now she understands."*

Steven Spielberg, who directed the film, was pressed in 2011 on whether today he would make the "kiss" scene in the film more explicit, but he said: "I wouldn't, no. That kiss is consistent with the tonality, from beginning to end, of *The Color Purple* that I adapted."

On 15 March, Miss Omooba received a call from her agency, Global Artists, telling her that pressure was mounting for her to be removed from the show because of her views. She was told that only through retracting the comments and publicly apologising would she be able to continue under their management, which she refused to do.

## **Fake news article led to contract termination**

Leicester Curve Theatre and the Birmingham Hippodrome then released a statement on 21 March which led to Miss Omooba's contract being terminated. The theatres claimed in their statement that: "The play and production are seeking to promote freedom and independence and to challenge views, including the view that homosexuality is a sin."

That same day, Miss Omooba was now told by her agency "not to make public comment at this point", without informing and consulting them, which Miss Omooba agreed to do. However, on the 24 March, a blogger based in Nigeria published a fake news article on the story which included a fake quote from Ms Omooba made "through her publicist", saying that homosexuality is an aberration and that she stood by her Facebook post from 2014. The blogger wrote clearly that the article was "clearly satirical and should not to be taken seriously".

Nonetheless, this article was enough for the agency to send Miss Omooba a brief email telling her that she would now be released from their services, and the news appeared in the media within hours – before Miss Omooba had the opportunity to explain that the article had nothing to do with her, which she was only able to do the following day. Even though Miss Omooba chased the agency for a response, it was not until 18 April that they responded saying their decision was final as their confidence in her had been "irretrievably eroded". This was despite Miss Omooba being entitled to two months' notice.

## **Told to abandon entire upbringing**

Since then Miss Omooba has tried to find work in the theatre profession but appears to have been blacklisted. One agency she approached for roles even told her that: "Homophobia is illegal. It is not a matter of faith." and added that the agency would help her once she came "to her senses on this matter" and when she had "got away from the ideologies of your entire upbringing".

The theatre has attempted to avert Miss Omooba's lawsuit by offering to pay her the full wages she would have received for playing in the performance. However, Miss Omooba has rejected that offer, and will ask the Employment Tribunal for a formal and public ruling that the theatre has acted unlawfully and discriminated against her because of her Christian beliefs.

## **Told to choose between her beliefs or career**

*Miss Omooba said: "When I received the email that I was going to be dropped from the cast, I was heartbroken. The theatre has offered me a financial settlement, but I am not in this for the money. For me it's not about the money or my face – it was about telling and expressing Celie's story, as I interpret it as a performer, because that is what I love to do.*

*For me, Celie is a complex character. I do not think it is possible to clearly define that she is a 'Christian' or a 'lesbian'. Celie has to grow up so fast, but in her mind she is just a child trying to navigate through and overcome the many trials and tribulations that life throws at her.*

*The people who know me, know that I have no hatred as a result of my faith; only love. Yet the theatre and the agency gave me the choice of either losing my career or renouncing my faith. I could not do this, not even to save the career that means so much to me.*

*I want our society to be more open to both sides of the debate and to accept that many Christians do not believe homosexual practice is right. Even though there are differences in belief, we need to be more loving to each other, we need to understand each other's struggles – that is what my post in September 2014 was all about. No one should be treated as I have been because of expressing these beliefs."*

## **Blacklisted for expressing what the Bible says**

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: *“What happened to Seyi Omooba was cruel and has damaged the career of a highly talented young artist for a Facebook post she had made four years ago.*

*Here you have a young Christian woman, with what critics have described as having a ‘ferocious’ talent, being sacked and blacklisted for expressing what the Bible says about homosexual practice, the need for forgiveness and God’s love for all humanity. This is another in a string of cases involving Christians being hounded out of their careers because they love Jesus.*

*The presence of a homosexuality theme in the play is a very poor excuse for discriminating against a Christian actress. If we were talking about a lesbian actress playing a Christian character, nobody would dare to suggest that her sexual lifestyle would make her unsuitable, and that you could fire her without breaking the law.*

*This story sends a chilling message to Christians, not only in the theatre profession but across our society, that if you express and hold mainstream Biblical views, you will be punished and will lose your career if you do not immediately renounce your beliefs.*

*This cannot go unchallenged and we are determined to fight for justice in this case.*

## **Met Police offers damages to Nigerian street preacher after wrongful arrest**

A Christian street preacher has been offered £2,500 in exemplary damages from the Metropolitan Police in relation to his false arrest, imprisonment and unlawful detention.

In February, a video showing the aggressive arrest of Pastor Oluwole Ilesanmi (64) was watched by millions around the world, prompting outrage. Officers were shown forcibly handcuffing the preacher, claiming that he was breaching the peace and had made “Islamophobic comments”.

A petition was quickly launched calling on the Home Secretary to investigate the guidance and training given to police officers nationwide on the freedom to preach in public.

Marking the resolution of his case, Pastor Oluwole will deliver the petition, now with over 38,000 signatures, this Tuesday (30 July) at 10.30am at the Home Office to the new Home Secretary Priti Patel, as well as to London City Hall. The Christian Legal Centre, which has assisted Pastor Oluwole throughout the case, has written to chief constables across the country, asking them to uphold the freedom of street preachers to speak freely about Jesus Christ in public. This letter will be delivered on Tuesday to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick.

### **“Exceptional humiliation and degradation”**

On 23 February 2019, Pastor Oluwole was preaching outside Southgate Underground station. A member of the public, Mrs Ambrosine Shitrit, saw a tall, hooded man squaring up to a street preacher. Thinking that the preacher was about to be assaulted, she pulled over and started filming with her phone.

Two police officers shortly arrived in response to a 999 call, claiming that the preacher had been “Islamophobic”. The hooded man, who had identified himself as a Muslim, left the immediate vicinity and the police began asking the preacher to leave the area for supposedly “breaching the peace”.

The video, which shortly afterwards went viral online, shows Pastor Oluwole explaining his freedom to continue preaching to the officers, who arrest him, forcibly handcuffing him and snatching his Bible. Pastor Oluwole was then driven five miles away from the scene, beyond the area he could use his Oyster card, and left with no means to pay for his ticket home. Police initially denied that this had happened, later changing their story after evidence backed the pastor's claim.

Motivated by the desire not to see other street preachers treated the way he was, Pastor Oluwole authorised the Christian Legal Centre to write a pre-action letter to the Metropolitan Police. In response, the police force has agreed the sum of £2,500 in damages, including general damages for false imprisonment in the sum of £500, plus £1,000 for the exceptional humiliation and degradation and £1,000 for the mental trauma caused to Pastor Oluwole.

### **Petition to be delivered**

Following the initial incident, questions were asked by MPs, peers and London Assembly members concerning Pastor Oluwole's treatment. A Christian Concern petition was also launched, supporting Pastor Oluwole and calling for the Home Secretary to urgently investigate the training given to police officers nationwide to ensure that they protect the freedom to preach in public.

The Christian Legal Centre will also deliver a letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, which is being sent to every chief constable in the country that calls for many of the misconceptions about street preaching freedoms to be addressed through specialist training.

The letter explains:

*'Many street preachers have found themselves in trouble. This has included being arrested, and prosecuted, despite the law recognising their rights to both manifest and express their religious beliefs. None of the clients we have assisted has been convicted; accordingly, that might suggest the criminal justice system is working appropriately; however, the problem is that many officers simply do not understand the interplay between the public order legislation and the right to freedom of speech.'*

### **Christians and freedom of speech must be protected**

Pastor Oluwole said: *"I am glad that the police have recognised that it was not right to arrest me for preaching from the Bible. It was traumatic being arrested and left many miles from my home. But God was always with me and even though I was left in a place I did not know, I was determined to get back to Southgate and start preaching the gospel again.*

*When I came to the UK it was a free Christian country, but now preachers like me are being arrested for speaking the truth. Christians and freedom of speech must be protected, especially by the government and police. I hope this recognition of fault can lead to more Christians being protected and the police gaining greater insight into what it means to lawfully proclaim the Word of God on our streets.*

*I am amazed and so grateful for the support I have received from people across the world and the Christian Legal Centre."*

### **Critiquing ideas is often motivated by love and not hate**

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: *"Street preaching has a long and honoured history in the UK. In many ways it is symbolic of the kind of freedoms we have treasured in this nation.*

*However, despite laws that theoretically support the freedom to preach in public, in practice, police officers are quick to silence preachers at the first suggestion that a member of the public is offended. Freedom of speech means that each one of us needs to be able to critique all religions and ideas without immediately*

*being labelled and silenced as offensive. Critiquing ideas is often motivated by love for others and not hate. The result of this also chills free speech through self-censorship.*

*While the extent of the public outrage at Pastor Oluwole's arrest was unique, what he faced from the police and members of the public was not. We are constantly supporting street preachers who are being silenced and penalised on our streets by the police, and their poor treatment and the injustice they face is too quickly forgotten.*

*So whilst we are pleased that the police have agreed to pay compensation for what has happened to Pastor Oluwole, we now need to see tangible action from the government, the police and the Mayor of London, offering assurances that Christian street preachers are free to preach the gospel within the law without fear of prosecution."*

### **Victory for Felix Ngole in watershed ruling for Christians and freedom of speech**

In a landmark judgment in the case of Felix Ngole, the Court of Appeal has upheld the rights of Christians to freely express their faith and overturned a High Court decision. The crucial outcome represents a major development of the law which results in Christians now having the legal right to express Biblical views on social media or elsewhere without fear for their professional careers.

This is the first Court of Appeal judgment regarding freedom of expression of Biblical views which sets limits on the rights of professional regulators to limit free speech on social media; the judgment will be an authoritative statement of the law which is likely to be relied upon in hundreds of current and future cases.

#### **A major development in the law**

Felix Ngole was expelled in 2016 from his course at the University of Sheffield where he was studying to become a social worker after quoting Bible verses on Facebook that were deemed critical of homosexuality. In 2015, he had entered into a discussion on Facebook over the imprisonment of Kim Davies, the Kentucky marriage registrar who was jailed for refusing to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples. In a robust online debate, views were exchanged on same-sex marriage, many openly discursive of the Christian faith. Devout Christian, Ngole, quoted Bible verses affirming the traditional Christian opposition to same-sex-marriage and of the sinful nature of homosexual activity.

Some months later, Felix Ngole was anonymously reported to the University of Sheffield; and subsequently was disciplined in a Fitness to Practice hearing. He was informed that he had brought the profession into disrepute and was dismissed from the course, losing his career.

#### **It was the university that lacked insight**

The university refused any compromise, arguing that Felix Ngole "lacked insight" into the effect of his posts. The expression of his Christian views was found to be unacceptable by the university; and, in effect, he was required to stay silent on pain of losing his career. Felix Ngole felt he could not surrender his faith.

The University of Sheffield held that he was not permitted to express the Christian viewpoint on same-sex marriage or homosexual activity in any public forum, even including a church. He could never express his viewpoint in a work situation even if directly asked.

The Court of Appeal held rather that it was the University that was lacking insight and not Felix Ngole; further the Court of Appeal lavished praise on Christian Concern's Pastor Ade Omooba for his good sense in seeking "caution" and compromise.



## **Felix had never acted in a discriminatory fashion**

The Court of Appeal condemned the position of the University whereby people would live in fear if private expressions of views were overheard; and could be reported by anonymous complainants. The Court of Appeal held that: "The mere expression of religious views about sin does not necessarily connote discrimination." It was also recognised that Felix Ngole had never been shown to have acted in a discriminatory fashion.

Felix Ngole was represented by the leading religious rights barrister, Paul Diamond, who argued against the misuse of professional disciplinary processes to silence speech you disagree with. This case will have significant implications not just for Christian free speech, but in relation to all free speech. For example, comments made by people on social media (often many years ago) have been arbitrarily used to penalise viewpoints that people dislike or disagree with, with a silencing effect on free speech.

### **"My personal loss is gain for future Christians"**

Felix Ngole said:

*"This is great news, not only for me and my family, but for everyone who cares about freedom of speech, especially for those working in or studying for caring professions. As Christians we are called to serve others and to care for everyone, yet publicly and privately we must also be free to express our beliefs and what the Bible says without fear of losing our livelihoods.*

*I am thankful to the judges for recognising that I did not discriminate against anyone and that it was not I who was entrenched, lacking insight or disproportionate in my approach to the issue, but the University of Sheffield.*

*I have suffered tremendously as a result of how I was treated by the University of Sheffield and I feel that four years of my life have been taken away from me. Despite all this, I feel overwhelming joy that what I have lost will be so much gain to Christians today and in the future as a result of this important ruling for freedom. I would also like to thank the Christian Legal Centre and Paul Diamond for supporting me."*

### **A message of freedom**

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: *"This is a watershed case for Christians and a resounding victory for freedom of speech. We are delighted that the Court of Appeal has seen the importance of this case and made a ruling that accords with common sense. It is shocking that the University sought to censor discussion of the Bible in this way, and we hope this sends out a message of freedom across all universities and professions that Christians and others should be allowed to express their views without fear of censorship or discipline.*

*Felix Ngole is a hero, and he and his courageous family have taken a stand for freedom in this case so that we and future generations of Christians do not have to. His case has always been one of the most disturbing and important cases the Christian Legal Centre has faced and if the judges had not made this ruling, the ramifications for Christian professionals across society would have been significant.*

*Due to Felix's sacrifice, Christians and others now know that it is their legal right to express Biblical views on social media or elsewhere without fear for their professional careers. This is a major development of the law and must be upheld and respected in current and future Christian freedom cases.*

*Despite this victory, this is not the end of Felix's fight for justice. He must now go back to a University of Sheffield panel who will judge, in light of this outcome, his fitness to practice as a social worker. Full justice must be served and the university held to account so that this kind and compassionate man can finally work in a job that reflects his education and his ability, professionally and as a person. Our communities and the most vulnerable in our society need more Christian professionals like Felix, not fewer."*

## **Christian school worker sacked for sharing concerns about sex education**

A Christian school worker is to challenge a Gloucestershire school academy's decision to dismiss her for gross misconduct. She was dismissed after she shared with friends two Facebook posts that raised concerns about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at another school in the same village – her own child's Church of England primary school.

### **Two schools**

Kristie Higgs, aged 43, a mother of two children, has been working at the academy – Farmor's School in Fairford, Gloucestershire – for the past six years as a pastoral assistant with an exemplary record. Yet, after one anonymous person saw two of Kristie's personal Facebook posts, which shared concerns about sex education lessons at her own child's primary school, she was reported to the academy headteacher with a claim that her posts were "homophobic and prejudiced to the LGBT community". Even though the posts were only visible to her friends, Mrs Higgs was subsequently sacked.

Mrs Higgs was told at a hearing that, for holding and sharing her views, she "may exert influence over vulnerable pupils who may end up in isolation" and was therefore deemed no longer suitable to work with children.

### **Two Facebook posts**

With reference to her child's primary school, Kristie Higgs, using her personal Facebook account under her maiden name, had shared two posts. The first began with her writing in capital letters: "Please read this they are brainwashing our children!" "Please sign this petition, they have already started to brainwash our innocent wonderfully created children and it's happening in our local primary school now." The rest of the post, written by another mother, highlighted that a government consultation on proposals to make RSE mandatory for children as young as four was coming to a close, and urged its readers to sign a nationwide petition calling on the government to uphold the rights of parents to have children educated in line with their religious beliefs.

The petition, subsequently signed by over 115,000 people, was debated in parliament, ironically under a government protocol for freedom of speech and for fostering closer links between public concerns and parliament in an open democracy. This mother wrote conveying that she felt that some aspects of the proposed RSE syllabus, especially children's books with transgender themes, were not right for pupils at her own child's Church of England primary school, and she wanted other parents to be able to make informed decisions. Mrs Higgs shared this in her post.

In the second post, Mrs Higgs shared an article from Judybeth.com on the rise of transgender ideology in children's books in American schools and added her own comment: "This is happening in our primary schools now".

These posts, sharing with friends her concern for her child's primary school, were reported to the academy where Mrs Higgs was working. The person who reported it remains anonymous.

### **Investigation and dismissal**

After an investigation, the academy concluded that Mrs Higgs would be dismissed for: "illegal discrimination", "serious inappropriate use of social media", and "online comments that could bring the school into disrepute and damage the reputation of the school". However, the conclusions by the academy were unfounded.

In the conclusion to Mrs Higgs' hearing, the academy admitted in writing that: "*Regarding bringing the*

*school into disrepute... we agree that there is no direct evidence that as a matter of fact that the reputation of the school has been damaged to date."*

Furthermore, despite the clearly religious context, with one of the Facebook posts specifically mentioning Mrs Higgs' views on Christian teaching and that "freedom of belief would be destroyed", the academy claimed: "We concluded that no action was taken because of your religion. The disciplinary occurred for reasons other than your religion."

The academy added: "*As an inclusive employer, Farmor's school recognises and protects the statutory rights of its staff. Such rights however are not absolute and we are concerned that you did not demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the school's requirement to respect and tolerate the views of others and to role model such behaviour.*"

When Mrs Higgs asked whom she had discriminated against, she was told by the academy: "*you had not directly discriminated against one person, rather it was about the words you had used that could be perceived as discrimination*".

### **Legal action**

Mrs Higgs, a member of Fairford Christian Fellowship, has been supported by her pastor, Gregory Husband, in this case and has turned to the Christian Legal Centre for help. She is now taking legal action against the academy for unfair dismissal and discrimination.

Mrs Higgs said: "*I have been punished for sharing concerns about Relationships and Sex Education. I hold these views because of my Christian beliefs, beliefs and views which are shared by hundreds of thousands of parents across the UK. My number one concern has always been the effect that learning about sex and gender in school will have on children at such a young age.*

*As soon as the investigation into the posts began, I was repeatedly told: 'this is nothing to do with your religion'. That was clearly a legal tactic and of course it has everything to do with my religion. I am determined to fight this case and to stand for Christians and all parents across the country who are being silenced for sharing and holding these views."*

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: "*This case is about the freedom to hold Christian views about what it means to be human. Many Christians have faced pressure for expressing these views in the workplace before, but in this case, Kristie has been dismissed for sharing her views among friends on Facebook.*

*What Kristie shared on Facebook simply reflects the genuine and justified concerns of a parent about the sexual ideology currently being imposed on her own children and thousands of children across the UK. Kristie has not only lost her job, but her whole career is now tarnished with the accusation that for holding these views she is now a danger to vulnerable children. This is despite an exemplary record at the school and in her work with youth in the wider community. If Kristie does not win this case, due to one complaint, she will never be able to work with children again.*

*Kristie is a kind, loving and courageous woman, and we will stand side by side with her as she fights for justice."*

## Contributors to this issue of *The Bulletin*

**Paul Yeulett** is pastor of Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London.

**Paul Harrison** is an elder at Grace Church, Loughborough and together with his wife, Sue, heads up Christian Safeguarding Services, supporting churches and faith-based organisations with policy development, bespoke training and consultancy services.

**Louise Morse** is Media and External Relations Manager for the Pilgrims' Friend Society. Her published books include: *Could it be Dementia? Losing your mind doesn't mean losing your soul*, 2008, Lion Monarch (with Roger Hitchings); *Dementia: Frank and Linda's Story – new understanding, new approaches, new hope*, 2010, Lion Monarch; *Worshipping with Dementia*, 2010, Lion Monarch; *Dementia: Pathways to Hope, practical and spiritual insights*, 2015, Lion Monarch; *Dementia from the Inside: a doctor's personal journal of hope*, 2018, SPCK (with Dr Jennifer Bute); *What's Age Got To Do With It? about God's purpose for the later years*, 2010, Lion Monarch.

**Jamie Gillies** works in public affairs at The Christian Institute which is part of the Be Reasonable campaign.

**Roger Hitchings** retired in 2011 from the pastorate of a small church in the East Midlands after 15 years of ministry. Previously he worked for 23 years in the field of social welfare with a particular emphasis on older people, and continues with that area of interest through writing and speaking.

**Tim Dieppe** is Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern.

**Regan King** is pastor of the Angel Church, London and CEO of Pregnancy Crisis Helpline.

**John Ling** is a freelance speaker, writer and consultant bioethicist. He is the author of three books on bioethical issues. His personal website is [www.johnling.co.uk](http://www.johnling.co.uk)