

THE BULLETIN

News and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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Christianity's Impact on Freedom and Justice

This article is the first of five papers under the general heading of "How Christianity Changed the World". They are adapted from a series of talks given by the author at Word Alive in April 2019. She has given us permission to publish all five in this and subsequent issues of the Bulletin.

Many today would argue that Christianity has changed the world for the worse. The "new atheists" don't just see Christianity as wrong but evil. They believe that we need to be liberated from outdated ideas of moral absolutes and cast off "superstition". Science (not religion) can solve our problems. The way history is sometimes presented is that Enlightened Rome (pagan) collapsed; then came the Dark Ages (religious superstition); but during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, human reason triumphed over religion. Humanity entered the uplands of scientific progress unhindered by faith. Human virtue (without God) could achieve human rights, freedom and prosperity.

That simple narrative has been discredited.¹ In reality, the historical evidence points to the overwhelmingly positive impact biblical Christianity has had through the centuries. The world has been changed immeasurably for the better because of the life and witness of Christ's followers.

The title for this short series is taken from a book by Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*. The foreword claims that Christianity has been:

...the most powerful agent in transforming society for the better across two thousand years... No other religion, philosophy, teaching, nation, movement – whatever – has so changed the world for the better as Christianity has done.²

Of course, this is a vast topic. Christianity today is the first truly global religion: a third of the world's people are nominally Christian. There is no way that the full impact of Christianity can be measured. And we cannot deny that in the past, in the name of Christ, injustices have been wrongly perpetrated. We need to distinguish institutional religion from real living Christianity. And we should never claim that Christians have a monopoly on virtue and compassion. The Bible teaches that God has placed his moral law on the hearts of all humans made in his image; he has given us all a conscience. So, we often see reflections of God's own kindness in the generous and altruistic acts of people who don't even believe in him.

But from the inception of the Christian church at Pentecost, the followers of Jesus have sought to love their neighbour and to reflect God's moral character. We can trace at least some of the beneficial and widespread impact this has had. In this first article we will consider the themes of freedom and justice, leaving the specific question of religious freedom for the next article. The third article will address the protection of life and the dignity of women; the fourth article will look at philanthropy and health care; and the final article will discuss Christianity's impact on educational provision.

Christianity and Freedom

Many people assume that the liberty and justice that we take for granted today are the results of secular thinking.

In reality, the liberties and rights that we value in free societies are to a great degree the result of Christianity's influence. They are based on the conviction that all humans, made in God's image, are equal in dignity (Genesis 1:26-27).³

¹ D Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press, 2010; V Mangalwadi, *The Book that Made your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilisation*, Thomas Nelson, 2011; R Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, Random House, 2006.

² P Maier, Foreword to AJ Schmidt, *How Christianity changed the World*, Zondervan, 2004, 8-9.

³ L Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, Penguin, 2015; Tom Holland, *Dominion*, Little, Brown, 2019.

In 2016, Cambridge University Press published a comprehensive two volume symposium, *Christianity and Freedom*, which incorporated years of research by a team of international scholars. The overall conclusion was that:

...free institutions hardly ever developed in places that were not influenced by Jewish and Christian ideas. Outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, it has been rare for thinkers to suppose that God endowed us with a nature of our own, that freedom is part of that nature...⁴

The origin of the idea of “human rights” is the concept of the person which is founded on the biblical view that all people are created in the image of God. This is what affords equal dignity to every individual.⁵ And the incarnation of Christ confirms the significance of our human condition. Christianity stands alone. Humans are made in the image of God; but then *God taking human flesh* underlines the dignity of the human person.

The historical reality is that regimes which have denied the existence of God and followed an atheistic or “hard secularist” political philosophy have demonstrated the least regard for human rights. Where no God is acknowledged, the State can all too easily “become God”, with appalling consequences. Under Communist governments, so called “enlightenment atheism” regards religion as a “false consciousness” which should be eliminated through propaganda and “re-education”. Militant atheism treats religion as an anti-revolutionary social force which must be suppressed by political measures.

Response to Slavery

Sociologist Rodney Stark writes:

Of all the world’s religions, including the three great monotheisms, only in Christianity did the idea develop that slavery was sinful and must be abolished... Slavery was once nearly universal to all societies able to afford it... only in the West did significant moral opposition ever arise and lead to abolition.⁶

The Christian conviction that every human being is made in the image of God stood in stark contrast to the culture of the ancient world, which rested on brutal slavery.

The great Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that without slaves to do labour, enlightened people wouldn’t have the energy and leisure to pursue wisdom and virtue. It never occurred to Aristotle that a slave might have the right to pursue wisdom and virtue! The philosopher Plato believed that slaves had no souls, so they had no human rights; masters could treat them as they wanted. There was no concept of universal human dignity in ancient culture.

Of the seventy or so million people in the Roman Empire, at any one time around a seventh of them, ten million, might have been slaves. It was socially acceptable for male freemen to use women, young men, children, and slaves for their own sexual gratification. “Sheer violence, institutional and personal, was integral to ancient sexual culture.”⁷

In this context the apostolic witness that “in Christ we are all one, whether slave or free” (Galatians 3:28) was revolutionary. There were no pagan cults where slaves and free could both belong on an equal footing. For churches to admit free people and slaves as fellow members was unprecedented. And the early church built on this radical teaching.

⁴ TS Shah and AD Hertzke, *Christianity and Freedom*, Volume 1, CUP, 2016, 29, quoting Remi Brague.

⁵ E Matyjaszek, “Human Rights: The Rise of the All Powerful State”, 229-252, in L Rose, ed, *What are They Teaching the Children?*, VFJ/Wilberforce Publications, 2016.

⁶ R Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*, Princeton University Press, 2004, 291.

⁷ K Harper, in *Christianity and Freedom*, Volume 1, 134.

Early in the fourth century, Lactantius in his *Divine Institutes* said that in God's eyes there were no slaves. Chrysostom, also in the fourth century, proclaimed that when Christ came he annulled slavery. He told the wealthy in his congregation to buy slaves, teach them a trade, and then set them free.

The Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa, AD 335-395, attacked slavery for its sheer arrogance and violation of the free nature of human beings made in God's image. "Do you condemn man to slavery whose nature is free and autonomous?" Gregory demanded.

How much does rationality cost? How many obols for the image of God?... For He who knew human nature said that the entire cosmos was not worthy to be exchanged for the soul of a man.⁸

It took time to root out slavery in the Western world. But treating slaves with dignity as Christian brothers and sisters, embracing them in the church family, giving them communion, all laid the way for arguing that, as slaves were part of the body of Christ, they should be freed. Over the centuries, increasing numbers of manumissions took place, and also increasing numbers of marriages between slaves and free. One such marriage took place when Clovis II, King of the Franks, married his slave Bathilda in 649. She eventually mounted a campaign to halt the slave trade and redeem those in slavery. During the 8th century the Emperor Charlemagne opposed slavery; by the 11th century the last vestiges of slavery in Christendom were abolished.

The transatlantic slave trade brought back the horror on a far wider and more terrible scale. When Queen Elizabeth I was told of the early efforts to take slaves from Africa to the Americas she was outraged and warned that the slave trade would call down the vengeance of heaven. But commercial interests prevailed; between the reign of Elizabeth I and the end of the 18th century, about ten million African slaves were taken over to forced labour in the Americas (and they were the ones who didn't perish on the journey). Shockingly, by the eighteenth century, the prevailing legal and public opinion in England was that slavery was acceptable. Many people believed that the wealth and power of Britain would collapse without the slave trade.

Then, as now, people argued that if something was legal, it was acceptable. The evangelist John Wesley disagreed, demanding:

Can Human Law turn light into darkness or evil into good? Notwithstanding 10,000 laws, right is right and wrong is wrong still!⁹

Famously, Wesley cheered on and encouraged William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the best-known campaigner against slavery. On his deathbed Wesley wrote to Wilberforce:

Unless God has raised you up for this very thing you will be worn out with the opposition of men and devils but if God is for you, who can be against you?¹⁰

Wilberforce often had need of that encouragement! On 12 May 1789, he rose to his feet in the House of Commons and delivered an eloquent, passionate, closely-researched speech that lasted three hours. The response? "We need more evidence." That delaying tactic would be used for the next 18 years. Year after year, Wilberforce introduced a bill to outlaw the slave trade. Year after year, the establishment prevaricated.

He was vilified as a national traitor by many. English military hero Lord Nelson spoke of "the damnable Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies". Sometimes he nearly achieved success. In 1796 his bill was thrown out by 74 votes to 70, just four votes short. The bill fell because about a dozen MPs who had promised

⁸ Quoted by K Harper, in *Christianity and Freedom*, Volume 1, 133-4.

⁹ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, London 1774, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/wesley/wesley.html>, (accessed 23 December 2019), 34.

¹⁰ Quoted in J Pollock, *Wilberforce*, Lion, 1977, 105.

support had not bothered to show up: they'd gone off to the opera, or into the country. Eventually in 1807 the bill to abolish the slave trade passed by a staggering 283 in favour and 16 against. Wilberforce wept as the crowded House of Commons gave him a standing ovation. Twenty-six years after that, just before his death, on July 26 1833, Wilberforce received word that Parliament passed the abolition act, freeing 700,000 slaves and agreeing to payment of two million pounds in compensation to owners.

Wilberforce was only one among many faithful campaigners. One of the often-forgotten leaders was Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838). He was the behind-the-scenes researcher, a statistician who tirelessly worked 18-hour days to provide the hard facts.¹¹ During his long fight against injustice he was continually vilified, slandered and attacked, but he persevered. Another forgotten hero was the evangelical Granville Sharp (1735-1813). As a young man he was powerfully moved by an encounter with a young runaway slave in London's docklands. He single-mindedly devoted his life to the cause of abolition. In 1772, he argued that English law stretching back to Magna Carta did not justify the practice. He later memorably remarked that "no power on earth" can make slavery right. In the famous Somerset case, Sharp applied for a writ of *habeas corpus* for the freedom of James Somerset, arguing that as he was not the property of his master he could not be forcibly shipped to Jamaica. After the Somerset case, English courts consistently upheld the rights of former slaves against their masters.

In America, slavery continued for a further thirty years. But many heroically resisted it. Thousands of runaway slaves were led to freedom in the North and in Canada by both black and white abolitionists who organised a network of secret routes and hiding places that came to be known as the Underground Railroad. One of the greatest heroes of the Underground Railroad was Harriet Tubman (1822-1913), a former slave who, on numerous trips to the South, helped hundreds of slaves escape to freedom. Finally, in 1863 Abraham Lincoln ended slavery in America by issuing his 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

The story of slavery in America is deeply disturbing. We can only be sickened to read the testimony of one Christian slave who reported that his master served him communion in the morning, and then whipped him in the afternoon for arriving a few minutes late to his shift. We can only be appalled to know that simply meeting in clandestine prayer meetings out of work hours could be punished by brutal flogging. But the other side is the countless inspiring stories of courage and sacrifice. The dignity and spiritual power of the Christian testimony of those suffering dreadful abuse was later analysed by Martin Luther King (1929-1968) who developed a whole theology of suffering from the experience of black believers suffering discrimination. Famously, he wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."¹² In other words, we are all descended from the same first parents, we are all made in the image of God, we all have equal value, and we all have a real responsibility for each other.

The shocking reality is that there are more slaves in the world today than ever before.

The International Labour Organisation says there are 20.9 million victims of human trafficking worldwide. Once again Christians are in the front line of opposing slavery and people trafficking. The International Justice Mission is a significant, international Christian network fighting abuse, but there are others. The global curse of people trafficking is partly fuelled by the exploitation of women and children in the so-called "sex trade", which involves buying, selling and abusing human beings. This in turn has been exacerbated by the sexual revolution. The demand for unlimited sexual "freedom" has created moral carnage. It is those trapped in slavery who pay the highest price. There are countless Christians devoted to rescuing and rehabilitating those trapped in slavery. Christians oppose pornography, and oppose the buying and selling of sex, which are major factors behind the vast increase in trafficking.

Christianity and Justice

Our triune God is characterised by perfect righteousness and justice. He is the great lawgiver. The Creator

¹¹ F Cook, *Zachary Macaulay*, Evangelical Press, 2012.

¹² ML King jr, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 1963. https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html (accessed 23 December, 2019) paragraph 4.

has placed his moral law on the hearts and consciences of all the people he has created (Romans 2:15). Each will have to give account to him. Our God is characterised by justice, and he expects rulers to be just as well:

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly. (Leviticus 19:15)

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent: the LORD detests them both. (Proverbs 17:15)

This is what the LORD says [to the King of Judah]: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place (Jeremiah 22:3-5)

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

Throughout history, rulers have been tempted to use power for their own advantage. In the Old Testament, God's prophet Elijah condemned wicked King Ahab when he forcibly took Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21).

In the New Testament Paul taught that all rulers are God's "servants" or "deacons" placed in society to keep order by punishing evil and rewarding good (Romans 13:1-8). Rulers, like all people, have God's moral law placed on their consciences. Each will answer to God at the Day of Judgement for how they have fulfilled their trust.

The Biblical Foundation for Magna Carta (1215)

In 2015 the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta was celebrated. *Magna Carta Libertatum* is Medieval Latin for "the Great Charter of the Liberties". It was a charter of rights agreed to by King John of England at Runnymede, near Windsor, on 15 June 1215. Over eight centuries this has symbolised the right of the people to limit the power of the government. It was framed by Archbishop Stephen Langton and others as a way of curbing the king's tyrannical power. Magna Carta made it clear that the king's authority was not unlimited. The king could not help himself to the property of his subjects; or make up laws to suit his own ends; or exploit the judicial system to enrich himself by collecting bribes. In short, the charter established the principle that no one, not even the king, is above the law. Ever since it was agreed in 1215, it has been used to protect life, liberty and property, and as the basis for constitutional rights and liberties around the world. That is something for which Christians can thank God.

Certainly, at the time, the legal rights that Magna Carta spoke of, applied only to freemen. But it set the trajectory for these freedoms to be extended to everyone. Over the twists and turns of the centuries, with many reversals and advances, these ideas have come to dominate the legal landscape. The influence of Magna Carta spread to the USA and most countries in the West.

Baroness Caroline Cox has been at the forefront of humanitarian work in some of the most dangerous places on earth for many years. She believes:

...it is the Judeo-Christian tradition with its inherent respect for the human individual and its cherishing of the concept of individuals' rights and freedoms, which has generated and sustained the most humanising and humanitarian internationally recognised laws and policies, such as the abolition of slavery and the concept of Genocide.¹³

Caroline Cox has often visited Burma, where her project HART works with local partners, in areas where human rights abuses abound. They testify that the Burmese Government dislikes Christianity especially

¹³ C Cox, "Holding the Line", in L Rose, ed, *What are they Teaching the Children?* VFJ/Wilberforce Publications, 2016, 343.

because it “fosters genuine democracy by encouraging individuals to think for themselves”.¹⁴ That is a powerful tribute to biblical Christianity. Similarly, on a trip to a war-torn region of Sudan she was told by one leader of the great gift of education given to his people by British missionaries. Education, he said, had given his people the freedom to think for themselves: “You cannot give anyone a greater gift or freedom than that.”¹⁵

A research project of many years duration by Robert D Woodberry showed that where there has been the most impact of Bible-believing mission in the world, there are governments which are most respectful of human rights, and the rule of law, and least prone to tyranny.¹⁶ It is a historic fact that individual freedom and rights are most prevalent where Christianity has had the greatest impact.

Today, internationally, Christians in many different capacities and ministries sacrificially campaign for justice. For example, the International Justice Mission, mentioned above as one of the major organisations working against modern slavery, was founded in the 1980s by an American lawyer, Gary Haugen. He was outraged that so many well-meaning attempts to help the poor were worse than useless when the poor were unable to secure justice. A fundamental cause of poverty is the absence of the rule of law.¹⁷ If someone works hard, but their profits are stolen and there is no means of justice, that destroys all incentive. What is the point of giving a poor widow a loan to start up her own business if as soon as she makes a profit, it is stolen from her and she can get no redress? You will never get social and economic justice until you have legal justice, including property rights. When some government officials and their friends are above the law it means that what you work hard for can simply be grabbed by the powerful – or by those who have guns, and who have the means to bribe higher officials.

Christians care about justice, because we worship the God of Justice. And he expects us to uphold justice too. The prophet Isaiah foretold the mission of God’s servant, the Messiah:

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. (Isaiah 42:4)

Our God is a God of justice, and his Word is the source of our ideas of freedom, human rights and religious liberty. Across the world today it is often Christians who are sacrificially standing for liberty for the enslaved and justice for the oppressed.

Sharon James

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁵ C Cox, “Holding the Line”, in L Rose, ed, *What are they Teaching the Children?* VFJ/Wilberforce Publications, 2016, 343.

¹⁶ RD Woodberry, “Protestant Missionaries and the Centrality of Conversion Attempts for the Spread of Education, Printing, Colonial Reform, and Political Democracy”, in *Christianity and Freedom*, Volume 1, 367-390.

¹⁷ G Haugen, *Good News about Injustice*, IVP, 2009; *The Locust Effect: Why the End of Poverty Requires the End of Violence*, Oxford University Press, 2015. See also W Grudem and B Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution*, Crossway, 2013.

Teenagers and the Trans Contagion

The NHS Gender Identity Development Service has become mired in controversy. There is the internal report claiming that children are being rushed through “gender-transition”, and the poor evidence base for puberty-blocking drugs. There is the legal challenge from a distressed parent, the spate of resignations, accusations of being misled from ex-transgender people, questions over its relationship with radical trans activist organisations, “hidden” study results showing poor mental health in “treated” teenagers. The list goes on.

At the heart of it all, however, lies a medical mystery: in only a decade, the clinic has seen a more than 3,000% increase in young people referred for gender dysphoria, from 77 in 2009/10 to 2,590 last year. Most are teenagers, three-quarters of whom are girls. Each year the service prescribes hundreds of them with puberty-blocking drugs, and thousands more are on the waiting list. While there have always been cases of gender confusion, particularly among young males, this burgeoning new cohort signals something radically peculiar – but what?

This very question was put to Elizabeth van Horn, a psychiatrist at the clinic, in a recent appearance on BBC Radio 4. She responded:

I suppose the honest answer to that is that actually nobody knows yet, but actually my own personal view... is that... there have been significant cultural changes that perhaps make it more acceptable for people to tell their families and their friends that they're transgender.¹⁸

Like many others, van Horn believes that “social acceptance” has merely brought trans people into the open. While there may be some truth to this, it is a superficial explanation that reveals an unwillingness to inquire further among those who should know better. It seems highly improbable that “acceptance” alone could ever account for such a unique and rapid phenomenon. Equally superficial, however, is the tendency to dismiss transgenderism as a passing fad. The term “Transtrender” is a nickname for those who identify as trans only because it is trendy. While there’s no doubt such people exist, the “fad” idea underestimates the intensity of distress experienced by these adolescents over their biological sex. It takes more than trendiness to make a person inject themselves with hormones. So, we return to our question: if not just “social acceptance” or a “passing fad”, what *is* the cause of this apparent explosion in teenage gender confusion?

Feminists, LGB activists and others have offered their own theories. They blame misogyny, gender stereotypes, and “internalised homophobia” for leading teenagers into thinking they are the wrong sex. Christians should think critically about these ideas, and listen especially closely to the testimonies of ex-transgender people. We don’t have to adopt their ideas wholesale to see that much of their thinking has merit. However, such theories often serve other ideological commitments, and as believers we should start with a frank acknowledgement of the complexity of the situation before us. It is likely there is no single cause for all this.

That said, there is one phenomenon that deserves a large portion of blame but rarely features in the discussion: “social contagion”. Broadly, this term refers to the spread of feelings or behaviour throughout populations. In recent years it has been applied to the social ills of self-harm and eating disorders, and the subcultures that promote them. These behaviours are often “maladaptive coping mechanisms” (behaviours that try – but fail – to address underlying problems). Notably, they seem to concern a particular demographic: young people with poor mental health and little direction, engaging in self-abusive behaviour.

The contagious quality of such behaviours is uncontroversial. Since the 1980s anorexia contagions, for example, have been repeatedly observed. Friendship groups have regarded eating disorders as an adolescent identity and social distinction, and research has looked at the transmission of this identity through things like body-size comparisons, bullying and manipulation. Deanne Jade, of the British National

¹⁸ “Going back: The people reversing their gender transition”, *BBC Radio 4*, 1/12/19, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000bmy9>

Centre for Eating Disorders, put it bluntly:

...I ask myself if an eating disorder unit is the best place for an impressionable young girl to be... As any inpatient will tell you, a specialist unit is the best place to learn how to be really, really good at anorexia... Some patients have reported bullying and intimidation by the hard-core cases...¹⁹

Research has shown that social media makes the problem worse, leading some clinics to adopt a policy of “no online talk”. In fact, back in 2012 social media platform Tumblr seemed to twig that their own website may not have been helping matters. They issued a policy change, saying: “Don’t post content that... urges or encourages readers to cut or mutilate themselves; embrace anorexia, bulimia, or other eating disorders; or commit suicide...”²⁰. Until then, Tumblr had been a hotbed for this content. Directionless teens were able to stew amongst a myriad of pictures, memes, and in-jokes celebrating anorexia and self-harm – and facilitating contagion.

The online groups promoting self-harm or anorexia bear a striking resemblance to the transgender community. Paediatrician Dr Lisa Littman points out examples of young people being encouraged to deliberately deceive clinicians into issuing hormones more speedily. In the words of one trans person: “It’s about getting treatment, not about being true to those around you.” The “transition-or-suicide” narrative is routinely employed to blackmail parents and generate a sense of urgency in the community. Some hold positions of seniority over others; benevolent, more experienced mentors, affectionately known as “trans-elders”, who take it upon themselves to “validate” the younger ones, assisting them throughout transition.

But, just as in 2012, today’s Tumblr is home to a very troubling trans subculture. A cursory search reveals a constant stream of posts and videos glorifying the transition process, graphic self-loathing, memes, comics, and in-jokes. Much makes light of irreversible intervention. A lot of it represents very genuine, agonised cries for help. But it all contributes to a dangerous ecosystem which normalises the claims of gender ideology, and demonises anyone who disagrees. On this evidence, the notion of a “trans social contagion” looks like a highly plausible explanation.

It is also worth noting the role of “suggestibility” in social contagion. This is the way that a suggestion, when believed, can have significant impact on the senses. This vulnerability of the mind, often spectacularly exploited by mentalist performers, is perhaps best known in the role of the placebo: you take the pill, under the suggestion you may get better, and so you do *feel* better. Perhaps more startling is the *nocebo* effect. This is where the belief you will suffer leads to negative symptoms themselves. History is full of examples. There are cases of groups experiencing fainting and headaches, all because they *wrongly believed* a gas attack had taken place. There are maladies like “electro-sensitivity”, apparently causing groups to suffer sickness or insomnia – yet dozens of experiments show that such people are just as likely to report the same symptoms when exposed to transmitters that, unbeknown to them, are fake. All this demonstrates the power of suggestibility. Naturally, the suggestion must be believable, but it only takes a dull ache, or some small abnormality not normally noticed, for you to then attribute it to the suggested cause. This can have a contagious quality: the more people exhibit symptoms, the more others become open to the false suggestions. It doesn’t take much for the snowball effect to take hold. This was seen in 1962, when factory staff experienced dizziness and vomiting, believing a bug was spreading in their department. Investigation by the US Public Health Service, however, concluded that the symptoms were caused by social contagion. More than sixty workers were affected.

It is no stretch to suspect a similar process is taking place in the trans community. When a person is suffering vague angst or discontent, negative suggestions find fertile soil. All it takes is for those feelings to be diagnosed as symptoms of something much bigger for the nocebo effect to take hold.

And social media platforms, like Reddit, are full of people open to an authoritative diagnosis of their vague

¹⁹ Quoted in “Still at war with our bodies”, *The Guardian*, 1/2/04, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2004/feb/01/health.lifeandhealth>

²⁰ “A New Policy Against Self-Harm Blogs”, *Tumblr*, 23/2/12, <https://staff.tumblr.com/post/18563255291/follow-up-tumblrs-new-policy-against>

afflictions. “Do I have dysphoria?”, says one; “Trying to figure out if I am trans or not” says another. The cries go on and on: “I honestly don’t know if I’m trans or not, any advice?”; “Is it gender dysphoria? Can you help me?... I am so confused.” One person says: “I think I’ve gone through just about every online article and quiz, looking for something that makes it click one way or the other, but nothing has...”

And predictably, the response is unequivocally affirmative: “This is like. Textbook. I had more or less these exact thoughts and I don’t know if I’ve ever met a trans girl who didn’t.” Another asks: “Am I really thinking about this right?... Ok, so I am not 100% sure that I am a girl on the inside...[but] I generally feel more connected to women”. And the response: “You didn’t specifically ask the question but I will answer it anyway. Yes, you are probably trans. I and most others who have started [hormone replacement therapy], went through the same doubts that others have gone through...Then make an appointment with your... endocrinologist to start [hormone replacement therapy].”

Many are doubtful: “Is there some other reason I’ve hated my body since puberty? Some other reason that I hated having short hair? Some other reason that I kept cross dressing?” But they are soon re-educated: “You don’t want to be a girl because you hate yourself. You are a girl, and you want to love yourself.” Material like this is constant and abundant.

To demonstrate how easily a vulnerable teenager can be swept into the belief they are transgender, consider the “transgender survival guide” found on Tumblr. It offers “signs” of gender dysphoria:

Continual difficulty with simply getting through the day... A feeling of just going through the motions of everyday life... A seeming pointlessness to your life, and no sense of any real meaning or ultimate purpose; Knowing you’re somehow different from everyone else, and wishing you could be normal like them.

Such broad “signs” describe just about any teenager – and many of all ages – yet they are flagged up as evidence of dysphoria. The suggestion is made, the placebo is swallowed, and for some, genuine feelings of confusion and gender-related distress take root. As one ex-transgender girl puts it:

I saw all these young awkward girls who were obviously super uncomfortable with themselves, getting to become new glitzy attractive men... and I wanted that... if the ball got rolling... that meant a lot of depression and that meant a lot of... I think real gender dysphoria.

It remains true that the transgender explosion probably has no single cause. Social contagion is part of the answer but we should not seek to oversimplify the problem. We live in a society that has undergone immense cultural upheaval over the last century, and all of us have been affected in complex ways. Young people have been left particularly vulnerable, many struggling with poor mental health, feeling directionless and without meaning. Often it seems the secular worldview dominates the public square. Recently, powerful transgender ideology has seeded in the morass. It has sprouted its own subculture, offering community, identity, and meaning to the vulnerable. It celebrates gender-transition, promotes self-loathing, and employs manipulative messaging. In some quarters it encourages young people, with evangelical fervour, to view their struggles through the lens of dysphoria. All this exploits their predispositions and vulnerabilities, having a profound effect on suggestible minds, and leading some to real gender confusion. It is a social contagion of unknown proportions and durability.

Although it is not the purpose of this article, we should remember that the biblical worldview is more robust and beautiful than anything offered by transgenderism. The hope Jesus Christ extends to the weak and weary surpasses the “new birth” promised by gender-transition. Christians must think it, speak it, and live it, at all times and all places. And they must think carefully about how to reach the victims, and would-be victims, of the contagious transgender culture.

Michael Taylor

Pastoral resources on transgender issues

As the incidence of diagnosis of gender dysphoria and other gender identity disorders, and of people declaring themselves to be “transgendered” in some way, has risen, the matter of pastoral care for these issues has become more pressing. In this brief article I shall outline what Christian resources are available. I shall then explain the situation in the United Kingdom, which is that there isn’t at present a Christian ministry explicitly devoted to these problems, partly due to the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK. Pastors and lay Christians alike need to understand the effect that this has had, given that the Memorandum could be weaponised by government stooges to target churches that do offer pastoral help.

Pastoral resources for transgender problems

In the USA there is a very good Christian ministry for people battling with gender confusion and their relatives called Help 4 Families (<http://www.help4families.com>). Help 4 Families is run by Denise Shick, who is the daughter of a now-deceased male-to-female transgender father. It offers support groups in the USA but also online, prayer support, webinars and events. Denise Shick has authored several books of personal testimonies and pastoral advice and support aimed at healing and restoration of those afflicted by gender confusion. Her family-based approach is excellent as it takes into consideration the fact that some family members may also start to be tempted to identify as members of the opposite sex if one person “comes out” as transgendered. Help 4 Families is part of the ex-LGBT ministries organisation Restored Hope Network. It has good links with churches and Christian para-church organisations as well as professional therapists, counsellors and psychiatrists.

As gender dysphoria has historically been classified as a psychiatric disorder, ideally churches should try to work with competent mental health professionals to help a sufferer. However, as transgender campaigners are increasingly persuading governments to depathologise gender dysphoria (despite still demanding that taxes for healthcare pay for sex-change/gender reassignment surgery and cross-sex hormones), professionals are either staying silent or have to work secretly or outside mainstream organisations.

The International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (<http://www.iftcc.org>) has therapists and counsellors in different countries who are willing to help those with gender confusion and who wish to be helped to live as members of their biological sex.

Those who find themselves in a situation of pastoral care for a person struggling with gender confusion should acquaint themselves with the literature on the subject in Christian ethics, as well as older publications in psychiatry and psychotherapy.²¹ The reason for the latter is that by now very little clinical research on crucial questions such as causes and comorbidities of gender dysphoria and related gender identity disorders is being conducted in the United Kingdom. The most accessible, comprehensive overview for psychotherapy and psychiatry is the work of the French psychotherapist Colette Chiland, which has been translated into English.²² She refused to refer patients for sex-change surgery and cross-sex hormones, as it was clear to her that their problems were psychological. She deals with the problems of both adults and children. Her bibliography is also standard, and she gives a thorough assessment of the different debates that have taken place among mental health professionals over time. Other psychotherapists tending not to favour physical treatments who have written insightful contributions can also be found still in print.²³

²¹ Oliver O’Donovan, *Transsexualism: Issues and Argument*, Cambridge: Grove Booklets, 1982; Evangelical Alliance, *Transsexuality*, London: Evangelical Alliance, 2000. Lisa Nolland et al, *The New Normal: The Transgender Agenda*, London: Wilberforce Publications, 2018; Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What do Christians need to know*, Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2019; The Christian Institute, *Transsexualism*, <http://www.christian.org.uk/resource/transsexualism-briefing>.

²² Colette Chiland, *Transsexualism: Illusion and Reality*, London: Continuum, 2003.

²³ Giovanna Ambrosio (ed.), *Transvestism, Transsexualism in the Psychoanalytic Dimension*, London: Karnach Books, 2009. One of the authors in this collection is Estella V. Welldon, who used to work as a therapist with young adults with gender identity problems at the Portman Clinic in London. Az Hakeem used to run group therapy for people who regretted undergoing sex-change surgery at the Portman Clinic. He writes about this in Az Hakeem, “Trans-sexuality: A case of ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’”, in David Morgan

On psychotherapy for children and adolescents, still the main resource for helping them to live as members of their sex is the work of Kenneth J. Zucker and Susan J. Bradley, formerly from the gender identity clinic for children and adolescents in Toronto, Canada.²⁴ However, as with the works previously mentioned, these are now dated and won't refer to the recent phenomenon of people wanting to "transition" without having surgery (i.e. only use cross-sex hormones, or focus more on cross-dressing and insisting that everybody use their preferred cross-gender persona pronouns), nor will they be dealing with the trend for "non-binary" identification, where people refuse to be known as members of their sex or the opposite sex.

Moral shortcomings of secular resources

The most conspicuous contemporary trend is that of the increase in girls being referred to gender identity clinics due to gender confusion. A whole new feminist movement has sprung up to criticise and oppose this trend.²⁵ Whilst much of its literature is serious in its attempt to be rigorously scientific and to uncover the psychological and social assumptions made by the transgender movement, it is important that Christians also not take on all of its work uncritically either. For example, it has very little to say about the fact that there has also been a rise in boys being referred to gender identity clinics, and what it has to say is often unwise, e.g. suggesting that boys cross-dressing is harmless fun, when in reality it is not, and cross-dressing is clearly prohibited for both sexes in the Bible (Deuteronomy 22; 1 Corinthians 11).

The other problematic aspect of feminist criticism is that it tends to assume that many, perhaps most, teenagers referred to gender identity clinics are same-sex attracted underneath. Feminist and other secular critics of gender reassignment for teenagers tend to assume that the transgender movement is targeting teenagers who would otherwise "come out" as gay or lesbian, and thus accuses the transgender movement of homophobia. I have provided a critical rebuttal of this claim in my discussion of Lisa Littman's research on so-called "Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria" in the UK and USA.²⁶ First, the available data does not enable the categorical claim that most teenagers are going down the transgender path to validate same-sex attraction. The samples involved are snowball samples of parents reporting on behalf of teenage children, not representative samples from gender identity clinics or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Second, the obvious question then is why would a teenager with same-sex attraction also be referred to a gender identity clinic? I have shown how, in the same sample, most parents had affirmative views towards same-sex marriage and would have brought their children up likewise, so there is no good reason to think that these children would be trying to avoid "coming out" to avoid parental disapproval of homosexuality. What is however possible is that some teenagers simply feel uneasy with their own same-sex attraction because it is at odds with the natural form of the human body, but given that all mental health professionals in the UK have been prohibited from offering therapy to diminish unwanted same-sex attraction, they have no way of being heard by either their parents or physicians.

The effect of the prohibition on "conversion therapy" in the United Kingdom

This brings us to the need for Christians supporting those with gender confusion and working towards healing to get to grips with the prohibition on so-called "conversion therapy" imposed upon all the mental health organisations in the United Kingdom. There is a need to assess the principles behind the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the United Kingdom along with the claims made by the government in its push to ban such therapy. The second version of the Memorandum was published in October 2017 and added "gender identity" to same-sex sexual attraction.

and Stanley Ruzczynski (eds.), *Lectures on Violence, Perversion and Delinquency*, London: Karnach Books, 2007. He described how colleagues who worked with violent sex offenders could not cope with hearing him talk about his own clients who now regretted having undergone castration and other forms of mutilation of healthy body parts in pursuit of their transsexual fantasies.

²⁴ Kenneth J. Zucker and Susan J. Bradley, *Gender Identity Disorder and Psychosexual Problems in Children and Adolescents*, New York: The Guildford Press, 1995.

²⁵ The main secular feminist resource to help parents and teenagers is <http://www.transgendertrend.org>.

²⁶ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/what-might-cause-rapid-onset-gender-dysphoria/>

Professional judgment and personal preferences denied

The Memorandum defines conversion therapy as:

... an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis.

This means that a therapist or counsellor who is a member of any of the mental health professional bodies who have signed this Memorandum must not offer a client help to dissolve or deconstruct a transgendered self-identity in favour of helping a client develop an identity more fitting with their sex, such as a man ceasing to identify as a woman and developing his identity as a man, and similarly for a woman.

Professionals are not even allowed to hold that some gender identities are preferable to others. This amounts to thought-control of mental health professionals, something that completely undermines the whole ethos of modern mental healthcare, and which is more akin to the abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union. It is especially damaging to psychiatrists, who are required to have medical training initially, as it forces them to ignore the radical and unhealthy disassociation from the body that is central to gender dysphoria. Perhaps this is why the Royal College of Psychiatrists did not sign this second version of the Memorandum.

If the client disagrees with the therapist, who is right? Clients are being denied the right to access treatment that helps them pursue and realise their own personal life goals, such as resolving gender confusion successfully and aiming to develop identity in a manner fitting with their sex as opposed to being contrary to it.

Transgender activism central to government aim of “ending conversion therapy”

A group called Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility met with officials from the Government Equalities Office in July 2019 and have published notes from that meeting which can be accessed at <http://www.pcsr.org.uk/report-arising-from-meeting-with-equalities-office-july-2019/>.

The PCSR expressed concern that the government's LGBT Panel, which is currently concerning itself with supporting “research” to try to aid its aim to “end conversion therapy in the UK”, has no therapists or counsellors on it. (There isn't a single psychiatrist either.) No comment has been made by the GEO about this, but it does reflect very badly on it. To make things worse, journalists have noted that the Panel is largely made up of transgender rights activists and allies. This confirms what the Memorandum of Understanding already exhibits, namely an ideological undermining of serious and responsible mental healthcare.

The notes also reveal that the Government Equalities Office is targeting children in the care system, teenagers and the elderly in its efforts. Here is what is recorded, paraphrasing the Government Equalities Office officials:

The Equalities Office are collecting data to build an evidence base so that they can signpost or help build solutions: Who's doing it, why, who does it impact, how are elderly people, younger people and people in social care impacted, what services exist to refer people who have been impacted by CT?

This is important because carers and social workers as well as counsellors in schools would therefore be key targets. Why would the LGBT Panel be particularly concerned about elderly people and young people in the social care system? The answer is that transgender activists have realised that care workers are not favourably disposed to transgender ideology, and that people with dementia are reverting naturally to identifying as members of their sex. As for young people in the social care system, this “concern” is far

more sinister and needs to be probed relentlessly. The admittedly inadequate data that there is on the children referred to the GIDS since its inception in 1989, shows that they were three times more likely to have come from broken homes.

Help to be free of gender confusion has gone underground

As readers can see, this article is not written or structured in a normal fashion. There is no one Christian ministry in the UK that is focussed exclusively on helping people to be free of gender confusion, because this kind of work has been taken underground. The reason is obvious – the climate of calling anything critical of transgender or LGBT philosophies as “hateful” and “harmful”. We already know that churches and faith-based organisations are being targeted by the GEO on this issue. Now we also know that the caring professions more broadly are being targeted. This puts Christian work with children, young people and the elderly at particular risk. Those in ministry must therefore work hard to understand the social, policy and legal climate and how it is impacting mental healthcare, free speech and religious freedom. This is essential in order to figure out who can be of help, and in which setting. Those with pastoral responsibilities and vocations need to realise that an unknown number of very vulnerable people with varying degrees of gender confusion who need help are being seriously let down by this “conversion therapy” ban, along with their families.

What is needed is people who have the courage to break out of the silence that has befallen society and develop good pastoral resources for people who are living in the UK today.

Carys Moseley

The Toxicity of Public Debate

Introduction

On Thursday 16 June 2016, Britain was shocked by the murder of Jo Cox MP. She was stabbed numerous times and shot by a man who allegedly shouted “Britain first” as he murdered her in broad daylight, outside a library in Birstall. Campaigning for the EU referendum was immediately suspended, and MPs and Peers went back to Westminster to pay tribute and debate the awfulness of the incident. One of the themes noticeable as people reflected on the loss of Ms Cox was a lament for the state of public debate.

Since her death, public debate has become ever more toxic. The EU referendum result which came just weeks after the MP’s death, led to three years of constant political tension and turmoil. The level of debate inside the Westminster Parliament plumbed new depths, with MPs entrenched on either side of the Leave/Remain divide. Every key Brexit debate seemed to only make the situation worse.

Working for CARE means a lot of my time is spent observing Parliament and the debates that take place. This puts me in a good position to offer some reflections on the state of public debate and how Christians might respond.

Any discussion of toxicity in public debate needs to also consider the obnoxious rise of an insecure liberalism that accepts no creed other than its own. Recent years have also seen concepts such as “non-crime hate incidents” and “non-violent extremism” where the definitions are incredibly subjective and can cause real havoc for free speech.

The recent suicide of Caroline Flack, a TV presenter and actor led to an outpouring of both grief and anger, especially with the media for feeding and generating stories that provoked strong responses online. There is no doubt that platforms like Twitter have contributed to a decline in standards of public debate. So, we will briefly consider the role social media has played in the decline.

Finally, it is important that as Christians we think about how we should respond. God’s Word to us is an invaluable guide and will help shape our thinking. God calls us to be salt and light in the world and to make a difference in every area of public life, including public debate. We must exemplify a better approach, one modelled on the Saviour himself.

Intimidation of MPs

It is helpful if we ground our examination of toxicity of public debate in clear examples. Let’s start with what has gone on in Parliament. On the 9 May 2019 Peers gathered in the House of Lords to debate a motion put down by Lord Harris of Haringey. The motion read as follows: “That this House regrets the conduct, and toxicity, of debate in public life; of the divisions in society which result from that; and calls on Her Majesty’s Government to take steps to address such divisions.”

During the debate, the following was highlighted: in 2017, the number of offences recorded against MPs by the Metropolitan Police was 151. This doubled to 342 in 2018 and by May 2019, 600 incidents had already been recorded. Some MPs have been advised by the police not to use any form of public transport. Tory MP Simon Hart said during a Westminster Hall debate that the Whips’ Office received “at least three credible threats to colleagues every week”. Labour MP Diana Abbot said when she became an MP in 1997, it was common to receive one racist letter a week. Now, on some days hundreds of items of abuse are received. SNP MP Dr Lisa Cameron said she had put in place extra security in her garden so her children can play safely. Research suggests intimidation of MPs spikes following key events. For example, significant moments in the Brexit negotiations brought a rise in cases of MPs being abused.

What are we to make of this? There are of course inherent risks in the work and job of an MP. Public exposure means people can scrutinise and pass judgment on them more easily. Inevitably, they need a

thick skin to survive. It has always been this way. But what has changed is the ease with which people now feel they can torment, criticise and bully MPs and other elected officials. I think some of this can be traced back to the MPs expenses scandal of 2009. The lifting of that lid generated a huge public backlash – understandably – and helps explain the public’s general attitude towards those elected to represent us.

Language used in Parliament

But not only has there been a rise in intimidation of MPs and officials, there has also been a marked decline in the standard of language used in the Westminster Parliament. It seems as if we have forgotten the power of language and the way words can be like daggers and swords. This is captured by the increased use of the word “traitor”. Both sides of the Brexit debate have used this term to attack others. A recent surge of toxic tweets was reported after the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, used “inflammatory language” following the Supreme Court’s ruling that his attempted prorogation of parliament was illegal.

I think the cause of this sort of language being employed is largely the consequence of holding a binary vote like the EU referendum. It was always going to create a fault line with people lining up on one of two sides. While there is lots of nuance in the views people hold, this is largely lost in Parliamentary debate because the media and social media are really only interested in the entrenched and extreme views on both sides of the argument.

Actually, I think the increased use of inflammatory languages goes back to the Scottish Independence referendum of 2014, where the public debate was incredibly acrimonious. As a nation, we are unused to binary referendums. But in the last six years we have had two and the most recent one – on membership of the EU – was deciding something so core to the future of the nation. Such votes force people into two opposite camps which can enflame tensions.

Attacks on journalists

Another way the toxicity of public debate can be observed is the way journalists are treated. There is much more to say on this than there is space, but a few examples will suffice. In 2014, the former Scotland First Minister Alex Salmond singled out Nick Robinson for criticism, leading to a torrent of online abuse. Thousands of independence supporters called for his resignation and protested outside BBC offices. In 2017, Laura Kuenssberg had a bodyguard when she went to the Labour Party conference. In February 2020, BBC South East’s Political Editor, Lauren Moss said she had screamed abuse and a cup of hot chocolate thrown at her by a random passer-by because of how much he hated the BBC. Journalists have their faults, but as contributors to public debate they are often on the receiving end of vile abuse.

The media are part of the problem

At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the media is part of the problem. The way digital media platforms churn out an absurdly high number of stories definitely contributes to the degrading of journalism. It aids sensationalistic headlines which in turn, prompts strong reactions from the public.

Social media

So far, we have observed that attacks on MPs and threats to their lives have increased and the public’s relationship with elected representatives has grown more tense. In parallel, journalists have also been on the receiving end of increased hostility. We grounded this in the EU referendum, the Scottish referendum and the MPs expenses scandal.

Now we return to the question of why and how this happens. To answer, we need to look at social media. Somewhere in recent years social media lost its way. It has become a space where toxicity is fuelled by anonymous key board warriors who use platforms like Twitter and Instagram to insult and criticise others. But what is it about social media that makes it such a devastating carrier of harm?

Of course, there is a deadly irony here. Social media was supposed to bring us all together, not tear us apart. Some persuasive analysis suggests that what social media does is group users with other likeminded people. This means they live in a sort of digital echo chamber and over time, it erodes their ability to listen to and accept that other people have different views. But there are a few other factors at play as well.

Firstly, there is the **speed of social media**. The fact that tweets can be a maximum of 280 characters encourages quick, ill-thought-through replies. Even using a thread of tweets to develop a point, the whole platform and the speed with which people reply means the emphasis is not on reasoned debate. Twitter is not designed for considered, nuanced contributions to public discourse.

Secondly, there is the **anonymity Twitter provides**. To my mind, this is the single biggest reason Twitter especially, and social media in general, has facilitated the decline in public conversation. People can call other people all manner of terrible things from the comfort and security of their own homes without having to worry about any of the consequences.

Thirdly, there is the simple fact is that **social media does not require users to be polite and kind**. It is easier to assassinate someone's character from the security of an iPad or iPhone than to do so in person. When responding to someone on social media, the effect words have goes unseen, whereas in person it is possible to read body language or other responses and adjust tone and temper accordingly. Social media rewards cowardice and provides ways to engage and connect with people to whom we would never otherwise speak.

Social media has helped the spread of ideas enormously. But its original purpose to connect friends and family has been corrupted. There is a heightened sense of the damage over-exposure on social media can do to an individual. Strikingly, the British actress Julie Walters said recently that her advice to any new actors starting out would be to stay off social media. Studies indicate that too much time on social media is bad for mental health.

The right to speak

Running in parallel with the examples of abuse towards MPs and journalists, another manifestation of toxicity in public life is the suppression and silencing of views considered unfashionable.

Here we come to the real tension that is at play. For all the evidence of a coarsening public debate, there will always be those who, quite understandably, are loathe to do anything about it because of "free speech". It is a long-held tradition in this country that we are free to say what we think. Free speech means the freedom not only to express our views, but crucially the freedom to offend others. The rise of "no-platforming" is a ridiculous and horrible trend that will only be counterproductive. Those who seek to silence so-called radical views, simply turn themselves into a moral thought police, deciding what is right and what is not.

Most sinister of all is the emergence of what Lord Alton has called a "mutant liberalism". Many who would proudly call themselves liberal are incredibly intolerant of those who take a different view. As an example, consider Tim Farron, the former leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, who was hounded by the media because of his orthodox, historical Christian views on sexuality. It distracted from the Lib Dem's General Election campaign in 2017 and forced him to quit a week after the vote took place. Or in the December 2018 election, the Lib Dems expelled a candidate called Rob Ffello because of tweets from years ago which evidenced his pro-life views. Mr Ffello made the mistake of stepping out the bounds of liberal orthodoxy and suffered as a result.

It cannot be said often enough: for a society to be truly pluralist we need to be free to actually believe things or else we should give up the pretence. The recent furore over Franklin Graham (all public venues which had been booked for his UK meetings later this year have cancelled, citing his views on gay marriage) evidenced all too clearly that there is a powerful agenda to suppress Christianity and keep it out of the public conversation. The anger and bitterness of those who oppose Christian doctrine on sexuality and marriage

knows little or no bounds. Convinced with a fanatical, evangelical zeal, today's "woke" progressives suffer no fools and allow no deviance from their agreed set of beliefs and values.

A Christian response

We have only been able to scratch the surface in this article on the whole question of toxicity in public debate. The unavoidable truth, biblically speaking, is that the main reason our public discourse is in its current state is due to sin and humanity's inherent selfishness. In a therapeutic culture where our feelings are king, we are more liable to be offended, and quicker to blast those who take a different path to us. It is the gospel which sets us on a different path, freeing us from having to live dependent on the approval of others.

What shall we say in response to all this?

First, **we need to repent**. We need to turn from our own sin in this regard. How sad it would be if we held our heads up high and acted as if we in the church have never failed in this regard. As Christians, we are not immune to letting our Lord down. Social media is as big a danger for us as for anyone else. And sometimes, the way Christians argue over theological issues on social media is a scandal all by itself. I know myself I have got this badly wrong in the past and spoken in anger and haste when more thought was required. But not just on social media. How many grudges have I held? How many spoken conversations where my tone needed to be gentler and more respectful?

Secondly, **we need to remember to be quick to listen and slow to speak**. James 1:19 says: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...". Proverbs 17:28 is even more blunt about the importance of listening: "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent."

Listening suggests we accept that what other people have to say *matters* and that we are not in the position of talking for the sake of talking. Temperamentally, some are better listeners than others and some are more natural communicators than others. But the verse from James is speaking to all Christians, both the silent type and the chatterbox. It is a general rule and command that we should be slow to speak and slow to become angry. Maybe, just maybe, the two are connected! As we choose to listen first and listen more, we will find ourselves less angry and in turn, we will do less damage with our words.

Thirdly, **we should consider the power of our words to build up and destroy others**. James 3:1-12 is the section of the New Testament that deals with the importance of the tongue in the most extended way. Space and time mean I cannot go into fuller details. But let me finish with just a few observations.

First, the Lord's half-brother draws attention **to the challenge of taming the tongue**. This is not a new problem. Yes, public debate has become more toxic, but whether you are a Christian or not, this is a peculiar challenge. As James says, we use our tongues to build up and to tear down. We are, as it were, all double-tongued. It is striking that James includes himself in the definition of those who need to learn to do this better.

Secondly, the tongue has a **peculiar power to ruin**: "And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness...". Later he adds that the tongue "is a restless evil, full of deadly poison". The evidence of this is demonstrated in replies to tweets, and the way the media often inflame and exacerbate different problems. In the quality of public debate in Parliament and other Assemblies, there is an additional challenge.

Thirdly, the tongue has a **disproportionate ability to effect other people**. James compares the tongue to the rudder of a ship, drawing out the point that, though small in size in comparison to the whole ship, the rudder determines the direction. He also compares it to the bit in a horse's mouth which, again, is small in comparison to the horse and yet controls the direction of the beast. So, too, the tongue is a tiny part of the human body, yet it effects its entire direction. With it we curse people, says James, who are made in God's image.

Let that truth be the final reflection. The toxicity of public debate which has coarsened and got worse in recent years is linked to the declining view in society of who we are as humans. Strange notions about the origins of the world have convinced people that humans are little more than highly-evolved bags of chemicals. But the biblical vision is so much more. Whoever we speak to, let's remember we are speaking to someone made in the image of God. This should motivate and shape the way in which we engage and interact with all people and inform how we engage with them.

As Christians, our response should be to look to the power of example. Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of measured, fair and gracious engagement in public debate. He always knew when to speak more strongly and when to speak gently; he listened and heard people; he debated and argued. He is our supreme example in all this. With the help of his Spirit, we must be salt and light in public debate as best we can and show people a better way.

James Mildred

Book review: Primal Screams

***Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*, Mary Eberstadt, Templeton Press, hb, 179pp, (2019), £15.64 (Amazon)**

The precise origin of the term “identity politics” is uncertain, but there is general agreement that it has been in use for some 50 years or more. Nevertheless, it has come to the fore both in terms of an expression and a concept in more recent years. Various defined, Douglas Murray has helpfully described the effect of identity politics in the following terms:

It atomizes society into different interest groups according to sex (or gender), race, sexual preference and more. It presumes that such characteristics are the main, or only, relevant attributes of their holders and that they bring with them some added bonus. For example (as the American writer Coleman Hughes has put it), the assumption that there is “a heightened moral knowledge” that comes from being black or female or gay. It is the cause of the propensity of people to start questions or statements with “Speaking as a...”²⁷

In *Primal Screams*, Mary Eberstadt, a Senior Research Fellow at the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington DC, observes that sexual identity, racial identity and ethnic identity have become essential to the politics of the left, but in addressing the issue she hopes to engage people across the political and cultural spectrum.

“The Great Scattering”

Her starting point is that “the modern clamour over identity cannot be understood without grasping the massive, radical and largely unacknowledged communal dislocations” (p.9) incurred by the human race in the West since the 1960s. The unprecedented degree of familial dispersion witnessed over the past six decades is dubbed “the Great Scattering” and attributed to the sexual revolution.

Dr Eberstadt argues that the de-stigmatisation of nonmarital sex in all its varieties and the sharp rise in behaviours that were previously rare and/or stigmatised have brought destruction on humanity. In making this assertion she stresses that she is not concerned with the choices that individuals make about how to lead their lives, but rather with the collective environmental impact of millions of such choices taken over the course of many years.

As a result of the sexual revolution, increasingly people no longer define themselves and their purpose with reference to their immediate family, extended family or real-life larger communities. Radical individualism is marked by an unparalleled atomisation and estrangement from family members, leading to a breakdown of social learning which is one of the family’s primary functions. Eberstadt remarks on the irony that “the most sexually *practised* generation of humanity may also be the most sexually *illiterate*” (p.11). She represents the current clamour over identity as an authentic “scream” for answers to questions of belonging – hence the title of the book. Her primary argument is that such unrest did not spring from nowhere, but is the product of family liquidation.

In asking what the current non-stop obsession with identity is telling us about ourselves, our society and our civilisation, Dr Eberstadt is careful to emphasise that post-1960 levels of fatherlessness, divorce, shrinking families and abortion are not the only phenomena propelling identity politics and acknowledges that real crimes and injustices have been committed against sexual, racial and other minorities. However, she maintains that: “The fact that racism and sexism exist does not make the crackup of the Western family any less integral to the post-1960s human story.” (p.15)

The familial dimension

The opening chapter of *Primal Screams* offers an overview of the debate surrounding identity politics to date. Eberstadt cites the American historian, social critic and public intellectual Arthur M Schlesinger, who in his bestselling book *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, wrote: “The more

²⁷ Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019, 3.

people feel themselves adrift in a vast, impersonal, anonymous sea, the more desperately they swim toward any familiar, intelligible, protective life-raft; the more they crave a politics of identity.” (p.22) Various attempts have been made to identify the root cause(s) of identity politics, but in this book Mary Eberstadt focuses on the familial dimension which has hitherto been largely overlooked by social commentators.

In Chapter 2, Dr Eberstadt advances “A New Theory: The Great Scattering”. Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, most children and young people grew up with the general expectation that they would marry and have a family, and that their immediate and extended family would remain their primary community. However, “the post-1960s order of sexual consumerism has upended every one of these expectations” (p.38). Erotic leanings and ethnic claims have now become substitute answers to the question, “Who am I?”

As a result of the sexual revolution, more and more people in the West are living in an unnaturally detached way. There is a direct link between recreational sex and the loneliness of the elderly. Eberstadt writes:

Not only have divorce and cohabitation loosened the gravitational pull of family; simultaneously contraception and abortion have also shrunk the nucleus further. The result is a new generation of elderly, some of whom reach the end of their years not only sans teeth and sight, but sans spouse, sans children and grandchildren... [S]ubstantial numbers of older people now hail from small, broken, isolated and distant families. (p.55)

She therefore concludes that, “the diminution and rupture of the human family and the rise of identity politics are not only happening at the same time”, but “[t]hey cannot be understood apart from one another” (p.61). Having advanced her basic thesis, Dr Eberstadt presents the supporting evidence in four brief chapters.

Survival strategies

In Chapter 3 (Understanding the “Mine!” in Identity Politics), she observes that “some people, deprived of recognition in the traditional ways [i.e. within the family], will regress to a state in which their demand for recognition becomes ever more insistent and childlike”, leading to an “infantilised expression and vernacular” (p.64). This “chronic regression to preadolescent language and behaviour” testifies to the “prerational origins” of identity politics (p.69).

Chapter 4 (Feminism as Survival Strategy) focuses on the vulnerability of women as a result of the sexual revolution and the way in which identity politics amounts to a survival strategy within that context. Dr Eberstadt writes:

The sexual revolution reduced the number of men who could be counted on to serve as protectors... Broken homes put father figures at arm’s length, at times severing that parental bond for good. The ethos of recreational sex blurred the line between protector and predator, making it harder for many women to tell the difference. Simultaneously, the decline of the family has reduced the number of men offering affection and companionship of a nonsexual nature – fewer brothers, cousins, uncles, and others who could once have been counted on. Also simultaneously, the overabundance of available sexual partners has made it harder to get the attention of any one of them...

[W]omen, for all their empowerment on other fronts, are also now more vulnerable than before, thanks to the changes wrought by the very revolution that feminism embraces... Many women are now exactly what feminist identitarians say they are: victims – only not in the way that feminism understands. (pp.74-76)

In Chapter 5 (Androgyny as Survival Strategy) the focus moves to the way in which “the Great Scattering has increased pressure to gravitate away from the traditionally masculine and feminine and instead toward a more ambiguous, androgynous mean” (p.82). Eberstadt argues that “the new androgyny” which pervades Western culture is driven by the collapse of family and community. She writes of:

...a cultural incentive system that has increased the rewards for women to behave in stereotypically male ways and reduced the social approbation for those who would persist in traditional female ways – marrying, raising a family of size, devoting time and talent to what used to be called domestic arts, volunteering, and otherwise contributing to the world apart from the paid marketplace. (pp.84-85)

“The collective human howl of our time”

Finally, Chapter 6 (How #MeToo Reveals the Breakdown of Social Learning) reflects on how many women have been socialised ideologically to believe that they do not need any protection at all – from a father, husband, brother, or any other male relative. Dr Eberstadt writes:

In sum, #MeToo suggests that the world after the sexual revolution is one in which many women, thanks to family shrinkage and breakup, have fewer ties to men who are not potential predators; in which many men, thanks to the same forces, have little or no intimate but nonsexual knowledge of the opposite sex, and unsound sexual tutelage in the form of pornography; in which fundamental truths about disparities of size and strength are denied for ideological reasons; and in which the question of romantic identity for many is confounded by all of the above. (pp.100-101)

She concludes that the hysteria of identity politics is nothing more or less than “the collective human howl of our time, sent up by inescapably communal creatures trying desperately to identify their own” (p.109).

As the short commentaries from Rod Dreher, Mark Lilla and Peter Thiel which form Part Two of the book indicate, not all will be convinced by Mary Eberstadt’s thesis at every point. Nevertheless, there can be no question that *Primal Screams* makes an incisive contribution to a contemporary phenomenon and highlights the far-reaching and adverse impact of the sexual revolution. As such, it provides sobering food for thought to contemporary evangelicals among others, since we too need to take care that we do not inadvertently imbibe the spirit of the age and lose sight of the importance of family identity both in Scripture and experience.

Norman Wells

Book review: Gender Ideology

***Gender Ideology: What do Christians need to know?* Sharon James, Christian Focus Publications, 131pp, (2019), £7.99**

The idea that we have a “gender identity” that is independent of our biological sex is now being promoted by activists within the World Health Organisation, the United Nations and European institutions, and increasingly features in Relationships and Sex Education classes in schools and even in children’s television programmes. In extreme cases, parents who have attempted to protect their children from this theory have had them removed from their care.

The speed with which this new ideology has gained traction and taken hold has understandably left parents and others perplexed, bemused and confused. Sharon James has therefore written this slim and accessible volume to explain in simple terms what is going on, to give parents confidence in the biological fact that each of us is born either male or female, and to better equip us all “to protect the next generation from believing lies that lead to lasting physical and emotional harm” (p.16).

The importance of the issue

Dr James writes out of the firm conviction that if we ignore this issue and remain silent, the number of people who suffer as victims of gender ideology will only increase. While most adults instinctively know that the “binary” division of humanity into male and female is objective reality, children are more impressionable and therefore vulnerable to being taken in by myths that may be presented to them as facts in the classroom. It is therefore vital that parents are aware of what their children are being taught and understand why the new gender ideology is dangerous and wrong.

A chapter titled “*Can we Really Change Sex?*” and other FAQs succinctly addresses ten of the most frequently asked questions:

- What’s the difference between “sex” and “gender”?
- What does “transgender” mean?
- What about trans people, or transsexuals?
- What is “gender dysphoria”?
- Can gender dysphoria be treated?
- What causes gender dysphoria?
- How common is this condition?
- What about “intersex” people?
- What about those who refuse to identify as either sex?
- Can you change sex?

Dr James then proceeds to devote an entire chapter to a critique of “gender theory”, beginning with the formulation of the Yogyakarta Principles by a gathering of self-styled “human rights experts” in 2007. By committing themselves to implementing this radical LGBT charter, the UN, the EU and several national governments have effectively pledged to embed gender theory into law and education.

While relatively few will have heard of the Yogyakarta Principles, the Genderbread Person is much more familiar to teachers and pupils. The cartoon figure is a popular tool for presenting the false claims of gender theory: (i) Binary is bad; (ii) Gender is a spectrum; (iii) Boy/girl; man/woman are just social constructs; (iv) We all have a “gender identity” which may be different from our biological sex. Dr James briefly dismantles each of these myths, before going on to warn against some of the misleading vocabulary employed by gender activists and exposing some of the contradictions in gender theory.

She quotes from a comprehensive survey of the scientific evidence which took account of over 200 peer-reviewed studies from the spheres of biology, psychology and social science and concluded:

The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex – that a person might be “a man trapped in a woman’s body” or “a woman trapped in a man’s body” – is not supported by scientific evidence. (p.43)

Having weighed gender theory and found it wanting, Dr James traces its origins and briefly introduces us to eight pioneers of the sexual revolution, some of whom are better known than others: Karl Ulrichs, Sigmund Freud, Magnus Hirschfeld, Alfred Kinsey, Harry Benjamin, Wilhelm Reich, John Mooney and Robert Stoller. She follows this by a short discussion of the contribution of two pioneers of cultural revolution: Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse, and the convergence of identity politics, radical feminism and Queer Theory.

Biblical foundations

After four chapters devoted to an ideology at odds with nature, Chapter 5 comes as a breath of fresh air. Here, we are taken way beyond the relatively recent origins of gender ideology to the origin of the human race as designed by the Creator. Sexual difference and complementarity are firmly rooted in the created order. Dr James writes: “To disparage the physical human body is to disparage the God in whose image we are made. To downplay the male-female distinction is to reject God’s design.” (p.76)

The notion that our subjective feelings are more important than our physical bodies amounts to a new form of Gnosticism. “Gnosticism divides what God has united. He made us whole people. Our body, our mind, and our spirit or soul are not to be divided or played off against each other.” (p.78) Dr James demonstrates the serious and far-reaching consequences of the new Gnosticism:

It is common today to make a false distinction between biological life (the physical body) and “personhood”. This false distinction is used to justify abortion (the embryo is clearly human, but is denied “personhood” as it can’t yet communicate/relate, etc). This false distinction can be used to justify killing people who have “lost capacity” due to accident, illness, or old age (the argument is that they are no longer “persons” if they can’t communicate, etc). Those with “personhood” are protected, but “bodies” have no inherent rights or dignity. They can be killed, used for “spare parts”, or experimented on. (p.78)

It would be easy for us as evangelicals to imagine that we are immune from gender ideology and that it does not present any threat to us. However, Sharon James warns that many sections of the church have embraced “excessive individualism” and are inclined to exalt individual human experience above Scripture: “If the Bible contradicts what ‘I sincerely and deeply feel’, then my ‘sincere and deep feelings’ win” (p.83). She writes: “For some Christian leaders, the worst crime is to make people feel guilt or shame”, and many believe that “it is abusive to make anyone feel shame or guilt” (p.84). While such sentiments have historically been more associated with theological liberals, there are indications that the pursuit of “seeker-sensitivity” and the practice of “relational evangelism” among erstwhile theological conservatives is rendering evangelical churches vulnerable to the same error. “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls.” (1 Cor 10:12)

Standing firm with compassion

In the face of pressure to conform to contemporary mores, Dr James urges us to stand firm on the foundation of the unchanging truth of God’s Word. In a therapeutic culture in which it is viewed as hateful to challenge any individual’s claim to his or her own unique “identity” or “orientation”, we must not be intimidated. But this does not mean that we should be pastorally insensitive:

We need to distinguish between people who are caught up in this confusion and suffering greatly, from activists who are lobbying for transgender rights. Those who are suffering must be treated with respect and compassion. Christians often stop there, and fail to challenge the false teaching that is causing confusion. We must not be naive. Activists for trans rights are not only wanting toleration for a small minority of troubled people. They want to enforce a false ideology on everyone else. They want to change the way we speak, and change the way we think. This is a unique form of intolerance. We are told to address men as if they are women, women as men, or people who demand it as “non-binary”. A new faith is being imposed by force. (p.86)

The penultimate chapter focuses particularly on the “transgendering” of children. It draws a distinction between child-onset gender dysphoria and rapid-onset gender dysphoria, before proceeding to discuss some of the cultural influences leading to gender confusion among children and young people and the pressure to promote gender theory to children through schools. The chapter concludes with some wise, practical counsel for Christian parents and quotes the finding of the editors of a recent symposium of essays on the topic that: “transgendering children is not progressive, but politically reactionary, medically dangerous, and abusive of children” (p.114).

In the concluding chapter Dr James highlights the profound disrespect inherent in gender ideology: disrespect for the human body, for the consciences of medical professionals, for the vulnerability of children, for the rights of parents, for privacy and safety, for the testimony of people who subsequently regret their transition, and for God himself. In response, she issues a tenfold call to respect.

Sharon James has placed us in her debt for providing a surefooted guide to one of the most complex and perplexing issues of our time. Her analysis is clear, succinct, pastorally sensitive and doctrinally uncompromising, with suggestions for further reading at end of each chapter for those who wish to study the topic in greater depth. She concludes with an appeal to “hold on to the truth and to do so in a way that is informed, compassionate and which communicates the goodness of God’s truth for everyone”. Her book will prove an invaluable tool to that end.

Norman Wells

Book review: In God's Company

***In God's Company: Christian Giants of Business*, Peter Lupson,
Day One, 191pp, (2019), £8.00**

Biographies of pastors, preachers and missionaries are legion, but far less attention has been devoted by Christian publishers to those who fulfil their Christian calling in other spheres, not least in the world of business. This book, focusing on seven men who sought to apply the principles of Scripture to their working lives and live as faithful stewards of the gifts, opportunities and resources entrusted to them, is therefore particularly welcome.

Former schoolteacher and examiner Peter Lupson tells the stories of seven "giants of business": William Colgate, Thomas Cook, Henry Crowell, William Hartley, Henry Heinz, James Kraft and Anthony Rossi.

Each of them – world leaders in their field – built empires with billions but did so with absolute integrity, caring about the quality of their products, service to their customers and the treatment of their employees. (p.11)

The biographical accounts contained in this volume relate how the Lord Jesus Christ inspired and sustained each of them in the face of scepticism and ridicule, bitter opposition and, in some cases, personal tragedy. Several features stand out that are common to the experience of all seven to varying degrees.

Providence

Again and again, apparently small events and passing remarks proved pivotal and of great significance in the life stories of these men. For example, William Cook traced the origins of his travel business to a thought that "flashed through his brain" as he made a journey by train from Leicester to Loughborough to attend a temperance meeting. A few years later the financial pressures he experienced in his printing business were to prove a gateway to the expansion of his fledgling travel enterprise. After Scottish railway companies ceased to co-operate with Cook, following "the leadings of Providence", he arranged tours to Switzerland and the closure of the Scottish door opened an even wider one in continental Europe.

Or to take another example, William Hartley only began making jam when the company supplying jam to his wholesale grocery business became unreliable. What began as a sideline became so successful that before long demand exceeded supply and William gave up his wholesale business to concentrate solely on jam making.

Honesty and integrity

Shortly after William Colgate's first business venture had collapsed, he received some advice from a canal boat captain that never left him: "Be a good man; give your heart to Christ; give the Lord all that belongs to him of every dollar you earn; make an honest soap; give a full pound; and I am certain you will be a prosperous and rich man." (p.17) When the Colgate Company was formed in 1806 it was initially a one-man operation, but rapidly expanded as it gained a reputation for honesty and excellent customer service.

Henry Heinz practised two mottoes he coined: "To do a common thing uncommonly well brings success", and "Quality is to a product what character is to a man" (p.119). It was the quality of Heinz's product that enabled his company to grow from a small, local operation to one that began to make its mark nationally. Heinz stated: "The ruling principle of our business must be to secure the permanent satisfaction of the customer and the full confidence of the trade." (p.121) After his business crashed and he was made bankrupt, Heinz was deserted by his partners and a smear campaign was launched against him. But he believed he had a moral obligation to pay his debts even when he was not legally bound to do so.

Thomas Cook was not motivated by profit in his travel business. Persuaded that foreign travel could break down distrust between nations as people of different nationalities met each other, he viewed his work as "a mission of goodwill and universal brotherhood" (p.53).

And we learn that William Hartley was not driven by personal ambition, but considered the purpose of his life to “serve the Lord every day to the best of my ability” (p.91). Similarly, James Kraft stated: “I would rather be a layman in the North Shore Baptist Church than to head up the largest corporation in America. My first job is to serve Jesus.” (p.143) Like all the other men featured in this book, he attributed his business success to God’s guidance in answer to prayer.

Care for employees

Several references are made to the consideration that these giants of business showed towards their employees. William Hartley stands out as a particular exemplar. He employed a doctor and nurse to provide free medical care and personally financed a pension fund for his employees. He also built a garden village alongside the factory to create a pleasant and healthy living environment for his workforce.

Hartley believed that he had a moral obligation to share his wealth with his employees. He paid fair and generous wages with rewards for exceptional service. He regarded his staff as equal partners in a shared enterprise and introduced a profit-sharing scheme with profits distributed according to individual performance. He also set up a benevolent fund for employees who suffered hardship, though he refrained from providing help with debts incurred through drink or gambling.

Philanthropy

Henry Heinz counselled: “Make all you can honestly; give all you can wisely”, (p.138) and James Kraft testified: “The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord.” (p.151)

Space forbids a full catalogue of the philanthropic endeavours of Messrs Colgate, Cook, Crowell, Hartley, Heinz, Kraft and Rossi. In several instances it is noted that as their wealth grew, so too did the proportion of their income that they devoted to worthy causes.

William Colgate, for example, formed a society to provide free Bibles for the poor and subsequently played a key role in the formation of the American Bible Society and served on its board. While on his travels, Thomas Cook was distressed by the extreme poverty he witnessed on the Isle of Iona. In response he raised money to buy 24 boats, equipped with nets and tackle, to enable the islanders to make a living from fishing.

We learn that in later life Henry Crowell, founder of the Quaker Oats Company, devoted at least 65 per cent of his annual income to support missions and missionaries, prison ministries, Bible translations and to provide relief for the poor, widows and orphans. He also provided the Moody Bible Institute with a solid financial base, launched its own radio station and set up the Moody Press.

Anthony Rossi viewed his business as a vehicle to generate income to use in God’s work. In retirement he established the Aurora Foundation to provide funding for educational institutions, Christian missions and numerous charities worldwide. One of the foundation’s projects was the building of Bradenton Missionary Village to provide accommodation for retired missionaries. Rossi also formed the Bible Alliance to provide blind people and prisoners with cassette recordings of the Bible and Christian messages. He declared: “In Tropicana I had the pleasure of providing orange juice, a product healthful for the physical life. But today, mine is the greater pleasure to be providing that which can bring health to the soul.” (p.189)

William Hartley believed that generosity is not measured by what people have but by what they have left. In addition to funding the Primitive Methodist Chapel Aid Association and the denomination’s theological college, he provided finance for the construction of hospitals, the endowment of beds and medical research. He financed cancer research at Liverpool University and also supported the university’s School of Tropical Medicine, not least because of its benefits for missionary work. The breadth of his interests is reflected in the fact that as well as founding a hospital and building almshouses in his home town of Colne, he also rescued Everton Football Club from financial ruin. In order to discourage an over-reliance on handouts, Hartley sometimes adopted the principle of “challenge offers” whereby he would donate a specified amount towards a stated target on condition that the balance was provided by the collective efforts of others.

Conclusion

In God's Company by no means presents accounts of unmitigated success; there are plenty of failures, setbacks, struggles and trials along the way. In some cases, the companies founded by these Christian entrepreneurs remained faithful to the principles on which they had been established for many decades. In the centenary year of Colgate and Company, for example, William Colgate's grandson Richard declared that one thing that had remained constant during the history of the company was "the old-fashioned, honest business methods" established by its founder: "We want to grow. We want to increase. We are all Americans – but we do not wish to grow or increase at the expense of honesty and uprightness and strict business principles." (p.36)

However, it is sad to read of the tensions that arose between Thomas Cook and his son John, who did not share his father's outlook and motivation. John was profit-driven and was infuriated that his father gave priority to Christian and philanthropic activities.

In summing up the spirit of this very worthwhile book, we shall leave the last word to William Hartley:

My last word must be that we...followers of Jesus Christ, must carry into our life his spirit and teaching, and that whatever we think Jesus Christ would have done had he been in our place, whether we are employers or employed, whether we are in business or out of business, that we are compelled to do. This is the secret of all true success; the consecration of ourselves and our substance to him who loved us and laid down his life for us. (p.115)

Norman Wells

Book review: If I Could Speak – Letters from the Womb

***If I Could Speak: Letters from the Womb*, Mark Jones,
Christian Focus, 72pp, (2020), £9.99**

Abortion statistics for the UK are eye-watering and outrageous. There are about 220,000 abortions per year. That is 25 every hour, of every day. At least one baby will have been murdered in the time taken to read this short review. But sometimes the statistics are not enough to capture our hearts. “If I Could Speak” by Mark Jones imagines a series of letters from a female baby in the womb, roughly twenty weeks old, self-named Zoe, whose parents are considering an abortion.

She writes about her development from the fertilised egg, becoming the size of a poppy seed after four weeks, to having a beating heart at five weeks and through the development stages, acquiring a nose, mouth, heart, lungs, brain and senses until, at nineteen weeks, this baby – now the size of a peach – can hear the voice of her mother. The text moves between the scientific and the emotional; Zoe imagines how life might be if she is allowed to live and questions her parents’ plan to abort her. To her mother she writes:

Am I an unwanted guest who arrived because of decisions you and my dad made? I don’t want to make you feel too guilty, but I do want to know why two rational, consenting adults can make a decision (for immediate enjoyment purposes) but also question whether they should be accountable for the possible effects of their actions... Do you not think it reasonable for me to simply ask you and daddy whether you are both prepared to be responsible for putting me here in your belly?

To her father she writes:

Many fathers, I am told, don’t always want the child they are responsible for. They wanted and enjoyed the sex that brings about children, but for some reason they think it is okay to pursue pleasure but not responsibility. A child wondrously emerges, yet we are merely viewed as a glob of cells without any real identity. Such a view helps many fathers avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

The letter entitled “I’m scared” is the most disturbing as Zoe anticipates in graphic detail the brutality of a surgical abortion. She writes that they will, “insert instruments to dismember me and extract me from your uterus.... the trickiest part of the abortion is finding, grasping and crushing my head... I will fight. But as a helpless, dependent baby I don’t stand much of a chance.” She likens her fate to prisoners at a Nazi death camp. It is gut-wrenching reality.

Zoe’s final letter centres on forgiveness – even though her parents make the decision to kill her in the womb. The last chapter of all is a letter, not from the baby, but from the mother, and you will have to read the book yourself to see what she has to say. This is undoubtedly a deeply moving book. Giving Zoe a “voice” works well; she is thus enabled to lead the reader through the scientific, moral and emotional arguments for her right to life.

The book ends with gospel hope – even for those who have been involved in abortion. If there was a criticism, I think it would be that the chapter on forgiveness, including a discussion on moral relativism, is quite complicated. I would also have appreciated some clearer challenge and comfort to those directly affected by the subject matter.

The book is well-produced and laid-out with beautiful pictures to keep you turning its 69 pages. While it is not an easy read, it is a good one and I would warmly recommend it.

Graham Nicholls

Update on Life Issues - February 2020

Abortion

Decriminalisation in Northern Ireland – the bioethical change

Is this not the worst bioethical news of the century? Northern Ireland, that great bastion of pro-life sentiment and deed, has had abortion-on-demand foisted on it by the government in Westminster. The people of the Province did not request it, nor did the Stormont government choose it. The sheer audacity, the democratic disdain, the moral decay, the destructive outcome, the inescapable sorrow – they all beggar belief. What have we done?

Perhaps the raw truth is we have done nothing, or at least, not enough. We have let a few stark, bigoted voices overrule the truth. Did we object? Did we fight? Everyone knows that the most enduring human right is the right to life. It is written on paper for all to read – Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights declares, “Everyone’s right to life shall be protected by law”. Therefore abortion, the taking of human life, is always legally and morally wrong, whatever the gestational age.

Now the people of Northern Ireland will suffer like those of us in Great Britain with the long-term fallout of our wretched 1967 Abortion Act. Yet the law in the Province is set to be worse because there will be no such restraining law there. Abortion is to be decriminalised, which means no-one will be prosecuted, no-one will be refused, abortion will be lawful for any woman, anywhere, for any (and no) reason, at any gestational age. Is this not the worst bioethical news of the century? As we trample on the tiniest of those made in the image of God, may God forgive us all. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

Decriminalisation in Northern Ireland – the political process

The abortion policy of the Province has long been a devolved political issue. In January 2017, the Stormont Assembly collapsed in a row between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). In July 2019, a few extreme pro-abortion MPs at Westminster seized on this impasse and succeeded in passing the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill through its final stages in the House of Lords and the Commons. That Bill, which was primarily concerned with budgets and elections, had been cunningly amended so that sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act would be repealed. The ensuing Act set the decriminalisation enactment date for 21 October 2019. Stormont remained stubbornly non-operational and so, on that day, abortion was automatically decriminalised across Northern Ireland, that is, abortion was removed from the criminal law and placed under mere medical regulations. Furthermore, the 2019 Act necessitated access to abortion to start by 31 March 2020.

The Act not only insisted that from 22 October abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland, but it also placed a moratorium on abortion-related criminal prosecutions. As a bioethical crumb, since 22 October, the abortion of a child “capable of being born alive” remains unlawful, except when the purpose is to preserve the life of the mother.

In the meantime, last November the UK government launched a public consultation on its proposed framework for abortion in Northern Ireland. It closed on 16 December. The government intends to publish its response and details of the action it will take within 12 weeks, that is, before early March.

These details of the proposed practice of abortion in Northern Ireland are now awaited. Will it be unconditional up to 12 or 14 weeks? Or 22 or 24 weeks? Or later under some circumstances? Will foetal abnormality and risk to the life of the mother be up to birth? Will the “two-doctor rule” be abandoned? Will patient-doctor abortion consultations be conducted over Skype? Will healthcare workers other than medical practitioners be allowed to procure abortions? What about protection of those who conscientiously object to abortion? Whatever, the proposed changes will certainly not be, as an editorial in the British Medical Journal declared, “Toward healthier abortion...” How can killing the unborn ever be described as health-giving?

And while the current focus is on Northern Ireland, the momentum of decriminalisation is expected to spread across to England, Wales and Scotland. And with such a pro-death ideology taking hold across the UK, how long before those ugly sisters of assisted suicide and euthanasia are legalised? Is this not the worst bioethical news of the century?

The world's biggest killer

What was the cause of most deaths globally in 2019? Cancer? HIV/AIDS, smoking, various diseases? No, none of those. It was abortion with an estimated 42.3 million. Those other causes account for 8.2 million, 1.7 million, 5 million and 13 million respectively. Worldometers (<https://www.worldometers.info/>) estimates that there were 58.6 million deaths worldwide in 2019. But that total does not include the 42.3 million aborted unborn because Worldometers perversely fails to recognise their human being status.

If I Could Speak: Letters from the Womb

This is the title of a 72-page booklet written by Mark Jones, the minister of Faith Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Vancouver, Canada. It was released in the UK on 10 January 2020 by Christian Focus and costs £9.99.

The publisher's blurb commences, "Dear Mommy... So begins the correspondence from an unborn baby to her mother. Making an impassioned plea to her mother to not abort her, she shares her hopes and fears with the woman who can control whether she lives or dies. These letters are an appeal to all who read them to choose life."

Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Surrogacy revisited and updated

As with all assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), surrogacy is weird and never a good idea. Not only is it unnatural, it is also morally problematic and personally troublesome – a can of bioethical worms. True, it is less commonly practised than IVF, but there are moves afoot to make it more readily-available and less bound by regulations.

The Warnock Report (1984, p. 42) gave this definition: "Surrogacy is the practice whereby one woman carries a child for another with the intention that the child should be handed over after birth." The main legislation concerning surrogacy is the 1985 Surrogacy Arrangements Act and the 2008 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act.

There are several variations on this theme. First, there is traditional, partial, or straight surrogacy. This is the most common type when a husband is fertile, but his wife is unable to sustain a pregnancy, possibly because of illness, or because she has had a hysterectomy or maybe she is a "new" career woman and just too busy to be pregnant. The hired surrogate woman, a friend, a family member is then inseminated, artificially or naturally, with the husband's sperm. Because she is using her own ova, she is the biological, genetic and legal mother of the child.

Second, there is full, gestational, or "host IVF" surrogacy. Embryos are created by IVF using gametes either from the commissioning/intended parents, or sperm and ova donated by others. The resulting embryos are then transferred to the surrogate and because she does not provide any ova, she has no genetic relationship to the child, but she is still the biological and, by birth, the legal mother.

Under current UK law, the surrogate woman who gives birth to a child is automatically regarded as the child's legal mother. A parental order obtained from a court is the means by which legal parenthood is transferred from the surrogate to the intended parent or parents. Applications for parental orders must normally be made in the first six months after birth. Commercial surrogacy is banned in the UK so surrogates can be reimbursed only for "reasonable expenses", which typically range from £12,000 to £15,000. And no surrogacy agreements are legally binding.

Surrogacy has already changed during the last decade. For instance, the number of parental orders has tripled from 121 in 2011 to 368 in 2018. And there are increasing numbers of gay men wanting children and inevitably having to hire a surrogate woman. Since 2010, gay male couples have been allowed to apply for parental orders. Since January 2019, single persons can also become legal parents through surrogacy. Since 2015, mitochondrial donation, commonly known as 3-parent IVF (mother, father plus surrogate), has been legal in the UK.

Perhaps not surprisingly, surrogacy is a practice ripe for litigation. Here is the recent, strange and tangled case of the Whittington Hospital NHS Trust. A 29-year-old woman, known only as XX, developed cervical cancer which went undetected for several years despite smear tests and biopsies. The Trust admitted negligence. She and her partner wanted children and she had delayed chemo-radiotherapy to undergo procedures to collect 12 ova which were then cryopreserved. The subsequent cancer treatment caused her to become infertile and unable to sustain a pregnancy. XX therefore hoped to use surrogacy in either America or the UK. She preferred the former since commercial surrogacy is illegal in the UK and pre-birth orders, giving her legal status as the mother, are not available here. She took the Trust to court to cover the costs for the Californian option.

In June 2017, the High Court awarded her £580,000 in negligence damages, but denied her the cost of four surrogacies in the USA. In December 2018, the Court of Appeal overturned the High Court ruling and unanimously awarded her another £560,000 to cover the US surrogacy costs. On 16 December 2019, the NHS Trust appealed that decision saying that paying for commercial surrogacy would be “contrary to public policy”. Five Supreme Court justices, in what was Lady Hale’s last hearing, heard the case. Their judgement is awaited.

Surrogacy has even surfaced on that Radio 4’s guardian of traditional countryfolk’s values, *The Archers*. Aleksandra “Lexi” Viktorova, a Bulgarian fruit picker on Home Farm, became a surrogate for the “married” gay couple, Adam Macy and Ian Craig. The pregnancy was conceived by an ovum donor and Adam’s sperm – Ian was discovered to be infertile. Jennifer Aldridge, Adam’s mother, is convinced that Lexi will flee with baby Alexander Macy-Craig (or Xander for short) to Bulgaria. Well I never! Of course, it is fictional, but...

These are some examples of changing attitudes towards surrogacy. They have created a head of steam declaring that the UK’s surrogacy laws are out of date and need amending.

The government has asked the Law Commission to review UK surrogacy law. Its aim is to make surrogacy laws work for the parents, the surrogate and, most importantly, the child. A public consultation, contained in a 502-page document, entitled *Building families through surrogacy: a new law*, ran from 6 June to 11 October 2019. It is expected that a final report with recommendations for reform of the law, and a draft Bill, will be forthcoming in 2021.

The Law Commission has already proposed that parental rights should commence at birth. However, it also wants the surrogate mother to retain a right to object for a short period. Furthermore, it calls for specific regulation of surrogacy arrangements to include safeguards, such as counselling and independent legal advice, to reduce the risk of arrangements breaking down. And it proposes that all advertising restrictions, including social media, should be lifted. And it thinks that international surrogacy arrangements should be recognised. Critics fear that these proposals would target women as young as 18, who had not previously had a baby, to become surrogates. Would students use surrogacy to pay off their debts? Would surrogacy become more commercialised? Would it become more mainstream, more common?

Surrogacy UK, an organisation which represents about 150 active surrogates and 500 intended parents, of which almost 50% are same-sex couples, broadly agrees with the Law Commission’s proposals, but wants any surrogate’s objections to be tested in court. It also wants the surrogate to lose all rights over the child. This, it says, would protect surrogates from the risk of intended parents abandoning a child with a disability, or not paying the medical bills. Surrogacy UK is also calling for safeguards so that payments cannot be disguised as expenses. And intended parents should pay for a surrogate’s life assurance, legal bills and IVF treatment, often resulting in a total cost of between £30,000 and £40,000.

Sarah Jones, chairwoman of Surrogacy UK and four times a surrogate, has said, “We are pleased to see that there has been no movement towards permitting commercial profit-making surrogacy organisations. We hope that the Law Commission will resist any movement away from an expenses-only model. Surrogacy should be about making families, not money.”

Surrogacy, whether it is traditional or gestational, is an attack on the biblical pattern of family, where children are conceived, born and nurtured within the family unit of mother and father. Because surrogacy is fundamentally wrong, tinkering with the concept and tweaking its legal status will not make it right. It is best avoided.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

World Medical Association declaration

You might think that the world is rushing headlong into legalising euthanasia and assisted suicide. You would be wrong. True, in June and December 2019 the Australian states of Victoria and Western Australia respectively became the latest jurisdictions to legalise assisted suicide, joining Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and a handful of US states.

What about the UK? Are we inching towards legalisation? Not so. Assisted suicide remains illegal in the UK because of the robust 1961 Suicide Act. Yet in March 2019, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) rigged a poll (which is currently being contested through the courts) and moved its stance of opposition to one of neutrality. In November, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) similarly consulted its 53,000 members with a 13 December 2019 deadline. The results are awaited. And on 6 February 2020, the British Medical Association (BMA) started to survey its 160,000 members on whether its official position should change from opposition. The outcome will be announced in advance of the BMA’s Annual Representative Meeting in June at Edinburgh.

Let’s get some perspective. Apart from those jurisdictions listed above, the practice of assisted suicide is repudiated nearly everywhere else around the world. Resounding evidence to support such a statement comes from the recent meeting of the World Medical Association (WMA), which has had a long-standing policy opposing euthanasia and assisted suicide.

During October 2019, at its 70th Annual General Assembly in Tbilisi, Georgia, the WMA adopted a revised *Declaration on Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide*. It contains three bold statements. First, “The WMA reiterates its strong commitment to the principles of medical ethics and that utmost respect has to be maintained for human life. Therefore, the WMA is firmly opposed to euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.”

Second, the WMA affirmed, “No physician should be forced to participate in euthanasia or assisted suicide, nor should any physician be obliged to make referral decisions to this end.”

And third, “Separately, the physician who respects the basic right of the patient to decline medical treatment does not act unethically in forgoing or withholding unwanted care, even if respecting such a wish results in the death of the patient.”

Of course the WMA, with its membership of 114 national medical associations and more than 10 million doctors, will now be under pressure to change its policy. With that in mind, the WMA issued this strong proclamation in May 2019, “Only a small minority of physicians support E&PAS [euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide]. The vast majority of doctors around the world wish only to foster the will to live and to cope with illness and suffering, not to facilitate acts of suicide or to create ambiguity around what constitutes a medical treatment.”

Assisted suicide on the Isle of Man

On 21 January, members of the House of Keys on the Isle of Man debated the motion, "That Tynwald is of the opinion that legislation to allow for voluntary assisted dying should be introduced." It was proposed by Alex Allinson MHK and debated for five hours. In the end, an amendment "to note the debate" received unanimous support. If there had been sufficient backing for his motion, Dr Allinson had planned to bring forward a private member's bill in March followed by a public consultation in the summer. The issue was last debated on the Isle in February 2015, when a similar bid was thrown out by members of the House of Keys by a majority of 17 v. 5.

Assisted suicide in Westminster Hall

On the following Thursday, 23 January, in Westminster Hall, MPs discussed the motion, "That this House has considered the law on assisted dying." The 90-minute debate was secured by Christine Jardine, the Liberal Democrat MP for Edinburgh West. She said, "It's to spark discussion and public debate about where we are and what we want to do, look at what other countries have discussed and what they have done - with the aim of changing the law eventually, but that's a long way off." There were no firm proposals. The Government resisted a call to hold an inquiry into the current law and its workings - as Chris Philp (Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Justice) announced, "The Government do not have any plans at the moment to initiate any review or call for evidence."

But just three days later, on Sunday 26 January, it was reported that the Justice Secretary, Robert Buckland, though personally against legalising assisted suicide, has said he will, over the next few months, consider whether to instruct the Ministry of Justice to review the evidence. Then on 2 February, after pressure from pro-life opponents, Mr Buckland rowed back, saying that the Government has "no plans" to hold a review of the law.

Belgium's first euthanasia trial

On 12 January, the process of choosing a jury began for the trial of three Belgian doctors - two GPs and a psychiatrist - who stand accused of the unlawful killing of a patient in the country's first long-awaited euthanasia criminal prosecution. Drs Joris van Hove, Frank de Greef and Godelieve Thienpont are charged after Tine Nys, 38, a patient with a history of suicide attempts, was given a lethal injection of barbiturates on 27 April 2010. The case has been brought by Ms Nys's sisters, Lotte and Sophie, and other family members who say she was suffering from depression after a failed relationship, not a "serious and incurable disorder", as is required by Belgian law. In addition, they maintained that Tine's death was a botched affair.

More than 10,000 Belgians have been killed by doctors since the country legalised euthanasia in 2002. According to public data, during 2018, there were 2,357 such deaths. In only one other case has a legal issue been raised concerning the procedure, and this was summarily dismissed. The current charge of unlawful killing by poisoning carries a possible life sentence. This high-profile and controversial trial continued for three weeks until Friday 31 January when, after more than eight hours of deliberation, the jury in Ghent cleared the accused doctors - and the courtroom burst into applause.

Mr. Van Steenbrugge, a lawyer for one of the doctors, said the acquittal had sent a strong, reassuring message to doctors. "It was not manslaughter, it wasn't a crime," he said. "It was euthanasia." Mr. Van Cauter, the lawyer for the family, said of the decision, "It's a bit disappointing", adding that the way Tine Nys was treated, "was very sad".

Genetic Engineering

He Jiankui imprisoned

Back in November 2018, the Chinese scientist He Jiankui shocked the world by claiming to have created the first gene-edited human babies using the germline altering techniques of CRISPR-Cas9. Then mystery descended on the whole affair. He disappeared with his two co-workers, his work remained unpublished and the whereabouts and health of the twin babies, Lulu and Nana, plus a previously unconfirmed third baby, were unknown.

Then on 30 December 2019, the People's Court of Nanshan District of Shenzhen announced that He and his two colleagues had flouted regulations as well as research and medical ethics by altering genes in human embryos that were then transferred to two women. According to the State news agency, Xinhua, the Court declared that, "The three accused did not have the proper certification to practise medicine, and, in seeking fame and wealth, deliberately violated national regulations in scientific research and medical treatment." All three pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment and fined 3 million yuan (£300,000). His collaborators, Zhang Renli was sentenced to two years in prison, while Qin Jinzhou received an 18-month sentence, suspended for two years. They were also fined 1 and 0.5 million yuan respectively. In addition, they have all been banned for life from ever again working in the field of human reproductive technologies and from applying for research funding. That chilling news should deter most other germline mavericks.

The Chinese Academy of Science released a statement, saying it "firmly opposed" germline editing in humans. It added, "Under current circumstances, gene editing in human embryos still involves various unresolved technical issues, might lead to unforeseen risks, and violates the consensus of the international scientific community."

Gene-editing successes

Patients with sickle-cell disease (SCD) and beta-thalassemia are the first beneficiaries of some innovative gene-editing treatments. Victoria Gray, a SCD patient in the US, has been pain free since July 2019. Using CRIPR-Cas9 techniques her bone marrow stem cells have been tweaked into producing foetal haemoglobin, which effectively reverses her symptoms. A similar process has been used on a thalassemia patient in Germany, who has been symptom free since March 2019.

This is cutting-edge medicine. Whether the improvements are permanent or temporary remains to be seen. But they are both bioethical heralds of somatic cell gene therapy rather than the unethical germline variety.

Miscellaneous

The General Election – before and after

The UK held a general election on 12 December 2019. The result provided the Conservative Party with a landslide majority of 80 seats. In contrast to the USA, bioethical issues play very little part in UK elections. But the likelihood is that two extreme matters, namely, the decriminalisation of abortion and the legalisation of assisted suicide, will be raised in the new Parliament.

How do the three major political parties view these two issues? Prior to the election they revealed their stance in their manifestos. They are worthy, as a matter of historical record, to be retained (with thanks to CARE).

The Conservative Party

Abortion. The manifesto contained no policy that specifically addressed the issue of abortion.

Assisted suicide. "We will support our precious hospices, developing the plans already announced by Boris Johnson to secure their future, with a £25 million cash injection in August to support 200,000 people at the end of their lives."

The Labour Party

Abortion. "We will uphold women's reproductive rights and decriminalise abortions." And "Women in Northern Ireland should have access to abortions in Northern Ireland."

Assisted suicide. The manifesto contained no specific policy with regard to assisted suicide or end of life issues.

The Liberal Democrat Party

Abortion. “We believe that everyone has a right to make independent decisions over their reproductive health without interference by the state, and that access to reproductive healthcare is a human right. We will:

- Decriminalise abortion across the UK while retaining the existing 24-week limit and legislate for access to abortion facilities within Northern Ireland.
- Enforce safe zones around abortion clinics, make intimidation or harassment of abortion service users and staff outside clinics, or on common transport routes to these services, illegal.
- Fund abortion clinics to provide their services free of charge to service users regardless of nationality or residency.”

Assisted suicide. “Provide more choice at the end of life, and move towards free end-of-life social care, whether people spend their last days at home or in a hospice.”

“Regard every suicide as preventable. We will take an evidence led approach to prevention, making it easier for people at risk to get the help they need, and equipping more members of the public with the skills and confidence to talk about suicide.”

The bioethical shape of the new Parliament

Of course nobody yet knows if and when these issues will appear on the Parliamentary order papers. But there is no doubt they are already being discussed unofficially outside the chamber.

How might MPs vote? Again, nobody knows. Interestingly, it is reckoned that no prominent pro-life MPs on the mainland lost their seats. On the other hand, pro-choice MPs, such as Anna Soubry, Paula Sherriff, Chuka Umuna and Dennis Skinner did. The new intake of 140 MPs are largely untried. However, James Grundy, Ruth Edwards, Anthony Mangnall, Greg Smith and Carla Lockhart are among those known to be pro-life. They will be tested soon.

Principles of Biomedical Ethics at 40

No self-respecting bioethicist has not owned, or at least not read chunks of, Tom Beauchamp and James Childress’ 1979 masterpiece, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. It must rank as the most influential bioethical textbook of the twentieth century. It has given rise to the philosophical school of principlism, a practical approach to ethical dilemmas that is widely accepted, but which is also not without its critics.

The book argues for a framework consisting of four major principles that should universally govern medical ethics and practice. They are autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. From these big four, several minor rules have arisen to include veracity, confidentiality, privacy and fidelity. Yet for some 40 years these major principles have helped to stabilise the rush towards an unprincipled medicine as well as engender a more thoughtful and practical approach to the subject. We have all benefitted.

Beauchamp and Childress, or Tom and Jim, first met in the mid-1960s at Yale University where their education in religious studies overlapped for three years. After graduation both started doctoral research – Tom in philosophy at Johns Hopkins and Jim in religious studies at Yale. It was not until in the mid-70s that they met again and cooperated as faculty members at Georgetown University. It was then and there, in the associated Kennedy Institute, that the world’s first academic course in bioethics was started. They shared six lectures. Tom favoured a consequentialist approach, whereas Jim favoured deontology. Nevertheless, from these two approaches the common idea of applying basic moral principles to biomedical ethics was sown. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* was conceived – ethical theory and practical problems were conjoined. Oxford University Press excitedly guided its first bioethical project. The book is now in its eighth edition (October 2019) of 512 pages at £56.23 paperback, or £226.19 hardback from Amazon.

In an editorial in the October edition of the *American Journal of Bioethics* (2019, 19: 9-12) to mark the book’s ruby anniversary, the authors describe how the concept of a principles-based approach to bioethics came about. “We appreciated the need for an approach that recognized the value of ethical theory for practical judgments but that did not fetishize a single type of theory or promote a single principle over all others. We became convinced that several moral principles provide significant common ground relevant to

judgments in the biomedical sciences, medicine, and health care and that these principles could not be convincingly ranked a priori in a hierarchical order.” In other words, they considered their four principles to be part of a “common morality”, a mix of unphilosophical common sense and tradition.

Critics have variously argued that the four principles are too vague, too narrow, or just downright simplistic. Beauchamp and Childress have counter-argued, “We do not suppose that our principles and rules exhaust the common morality; we argue only that our framework captures major moral considerations that are essential starting points for biomedical ethics. Some critics contend that the principles in “principlism” are merely clusters of moral concepts too abstract, general, and vague to guide judgments about actions. In response, we show how processes of specification and balancing link broad principles and rules to the concrete moral judgments needed in practical ethics.”

Furthermore, Beauchamp and Childress maintain that their principlist approach is relevant, flexible and workable. “Because our principles are universally applicable, we defend a global bioethics and not merely customary, regional, or cultural rules. Our principles correlate with basic human rights and establish what is ethically acceptable for all societies. Nonetheless, the principles allow for justified differences in the ethics of professional practice in societies and cultures through processes of specification and balancing.”

There can be no doubt, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* is a great book, now in its eighth English edition and translated into six languages. It is secular in nature yet it jostles along with biblical ethics. Why? Because biblical ethics are uniquely original, universally applicable, ethically consistent and totally true. *Principles* is, by contrast, derivative. So be warned, “These [rules] are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings” (Colossians 2: 22).

Stem-Cell Technologies

Stem-cell therapy for the heart

Stem-cell therapies are complex. Even when they seem to work, their biological mechanisms remain largely unknown. For example, when stem cells are infused into patients who have suffered heart attacks, any improvements are thought to be caused by the stem cells differentiating into beating heart-muscle cells, called cardiomyocytes. This is now in doubt.

A team of researchers, led by Jeffery Molkentin, a cardiovascular biology researcher working at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Ohio, has demonstrated that stem-cell benefits can occur without this differentiation. Instead, the stem cells can trigger cells of the immune system, known as CCR2⁺ and CX3CR1⁺ macrophages, which help to repair connective tissue in the damaged area of the heart, which, in turn, improves the organ’s function. In addition, they discovered that zymosan, a chemical which is known to elicit an immune response, could initiate the repair. This work was reported as “An acute immune response underlies the benefit of cardiac stem-cell therapy” by Vagnozzi *et al.*, in *Nature* (2020, **577**: 405–409).

The experimental results were quite unexpected. Two types of stem cells were injected into artificially-damaged, so called ischemia/reperfusion (I/R) injured, areas of mice hearts to mimic the conditions of a heart attack. One type was mononuclear cells taken from bone marrow, as commonly used in human clinical trials, and the other was cardiac mesenchymal cells. Both stem-cell types improved heart function of the mice significantly better than when a placebo was injected. And when macrophage activity was suppressed no repair occurred in the mice that received the stem cells or in those that received zymosan. Yet even when the team injected fragments of dead stem cells this too improved heart function.

So, could it be that local and acute inflammation, induced by the immune system, is what drives the repair mechanism of stem-cell therapies, rather than the regenerative capacity of the stem cells themselves? And could this immune response be the underlying mechanism that brings about health benefits seen in successful stem-cell treatments for other diseases?

Stem-cell therapy for MS

From October 2019, a stem-cell therapy has, for the first time, been recommended for use on the NHS for multiple sclerosis (MS) sufferers in Scotland. This country has one of the highest rates of MS in the world with an annual incidence rate of 8.64 cases per 100,000 people and with around 85% of patients having the relapsing-remitting (RRMS) form of the disease.

Autologous haematopoietic stem-cell transplantation (AH SCT) has been described as a “game-changer” for MS after an international clinical trial showed that it could reboot patients’ immune systems and halt the progress of the disease.

The Scottish Health Technologies Group (SHTG) said there is now sufficient evidence for it to recommend making AH SCT available on the NHS in Scotland to MS patients who have highly active relapsing-remitting (RRMS), rather than the progressive, form of the disease, and who were not responding to drug treatments. A number of high-efficacy drug treatments have previously been approved but these therapies do not always work. The theory is that the novel stem-cell treatment works by enabling patients to “reset” their immune system to stop it attacking the central nervous system – as is the case in MS.

However, the SHTG has warned that potential patients must be made aware of the “demands, risks and uncertainties” of the treatment, which uses chemotherapy to wipe out a patient’s faulty immune system before replenishing it with a transplant of stem cells harvested from their own bone marrow. This pre-treatment can put patients at high risk from infections, which can be fatal. Nevertheless, some patients, who had been in wheelchairs prior to undergoing the stem-cell treatment, said their condition improved so dramatically it was like they had never been diagnosed with MS. Everyone likes a good story with a happy ending.

USA and Elsewhere

Presidential election year

2020 is election year for US presidential candidates. At the time of writing there is only one certain candidate – the current and 45th President, Donald J Trump. Whatever the personal, political and economic attributes of the man, one thing is certain – Trump has so far been a seriously good ally of the pro-life movement in America. On 22 January, the 47th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1974 landmark Supreme Court judgment that legalised abortion in the USA, President Trump declared it to be National Sanctity of Human Life Day. The associated proclamation read, “Every person - the born and unborn, the poor, the downcast, the disabled, the infirm, and the elderly - has inherent value ... As a Nation, we must remain steadfastly dedicated to the profound truth that all life is a gift from God, who endows every person with immeasurable worth and potential.” By contrast, if a Democrat were to win the election, he/she would undoubtedly be a poor ally, even an enemy of the cause. Each of the six Democrats currently running for nomination supports abortions up to birth.

March for Life 2020

On 24 January the US held its annual March for Life with its main rally in Washington DC but with other gatherings in several satellite cities across the country. It is the world’s largest annual human rights demonstration. The theme for the 2020 March for Life was “Life Empowers: Pro-Life is Pro-Woman”. The main event began with a rally at noon in downtown Washington, followed by a march to the US Supreme Court building.

The line-up of speakers included President Trump, the first sitting US president ever to attend the March for Life. Mr Trump declared to the crowds of tens of thousands, “We’re here for a very simple reason: to defend the right of every child born and unborn to fulfil their God-given potential.” The annual event marks the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1974 Supreme Court ruling that constitutionally allowed legal abortion for basically any reason. Since then, approximately 61 million unborn children have been legally aborted in the US.

Kentucky pro-life law stands

In 2017, the state of Kentucky passed a law, The Kentucky Ultrasound Informed Consent Act, that requires doctors to “display and describe” her foetus to a woman who wants an abortion. In other words, she must undergo an ultrasound scan and a description of what it depicts and hear the sound of the unborn child’s heartbeat. However, women can avert their eyes and cover their ears to avoid seeing the images or hearing the foetal heartbeat. The State Governor, Matt Bevin said, “We’re a pro-life state, we’re a pro-life administration and I’m a pro-life governor, and we won.”

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the law on behalf of Kentucky’s only remaining abortion clinic. The ACLU argued that ultrasound laws violate physicians’ speech rights under the First Amendment. In June 2019, the federal sixth circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati, Ohio, upheld the Kentucky law and denied a review. That decision was further challenged. Lawyers for Kentucky argued against a review because, “Nothing can better inform a patient of the nature and consequences of an abortion than actually seeing an image of the fetus who will be aborted and receiving a medically-accurate description of that image.” On 9 December 2019, the US Supreme Court refused to review the Appeals Court decision. The move is seen as a significant victory for the pro-life movement.

Three other US states currently have similar “heartbeat laws”. The Supreme Court will hear arguments in March in a different abortion case. It concerns a Louisiana law that requires abortion providers to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital. Pro-lifers are hopeful the Louisiana case, *June Medical Services LLC v. Gee*, could be the catalyst to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Slovakia almost followed suit

In late November, lawmakers in Slovakia debated a proposed law that would compel women seeking an abortion to first have an ultrasound and listen to the heartbeat of their foetus. This is akin to the Kentuckian law.

Many will decry such a move. It’s cruel, it’s against women’s rights, and so on. Those are logical responses if, if, if the unborn child were not a real, live human being. What is kind and gentle about abortion, where are the unborn child’s rights? How conditioned we have become by the encompassing attitude of progressive liberalism concerning the whole abortion issue. Slovakian women will still be able to go ahead and abort. All the proposed law would do is, “ensure that women are informed about the current stage of their pregnancy.” The authors of the bill have stated, “the proposed draft law has positive impacts on marriage, parenthood and family” and that “society does not consider the induced termination of pregnancy a good solution.” See how easily liberalism’s call for rights, privacy and autonomy can nowadays transcend all other concerns. Christians and others can be so confused, afraid and gullible.

The proposed bold bill narrowly failed on 5 December. A total of 59 MPs voted in favour, which was just 4 short of the simple majority of 62 MPs present. Only 24 MPs voted against and 40 abstained. If passed, this law would have been the first of its kind in the European Union. Across Europe, 39 countries have legalised abortion on request, on an industrial scale. Five countries – Andorra, Liechtenstein, Malta, Poland and San Marino – allow abortion only in rare instances, such as if the woman’s life is at risk.

John Ling

(A fuller version of John’s regular update of bioethical news and views can be found on his website: www.johnling.co.uk)

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.

Dr David Mackereth: 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 him 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, to be published this week, 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, emphasis added). 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 racist and neo-Nazi ideologies which have been held “not worthy of respect in democratic society” in earlier court 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 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.

Dr Mackereth is currently awaiting permission from the Employment Appeal Tribunal to appeal the decision of the Employment Tribunal. A decision is expected within the next two weeks.

Seyi Omooba: 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 a nigger 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 a “nigger”. 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, “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."

Proceedings in this case are listed before the Employment Tribunal to be heard from 30 April-7 May 2020.

Kristie Higgs: 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. 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's case has been set down for trial from 21-25 September 2020.

Richard Page

In May 2019, former magistrate Richard Page lost his appeal at the Employment Appeal Tribunal. The ruling could effectively bar Christians from holding positions in public office if they express a Christian view of marriage and family. The battle is not over for Richard; he "remains as faithful as ever to his beliefs and will bring his cases to the Court of Appeal". Andrea Williams comments on the judgments:

Disappointingly, but not unexpectedly, Mr Justice Choudhury of the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) ruled against Richard Page in his cases against the Lord Chief Justice and Lord Chancellor, and against the Kent and Medway NHS Trust. Richard was first punished in 2014 for saying in an adoption matter that a child does best with a mother and a father and eventually removed from his position as a magistrate. He was later also removed from his position as a Non-Executive Director of the NHS Trust for further expressing his belief in media interviews.

As a nation, we should all be very concerned that these rulings may mark another watershed moment in our nation's history where holding sincere biblical views can amount to a bar to public office. As Christians, we should do everything in our power to make sure that this is not the case. Richard remains as faithful as ever to his beliefs and will bring his cases to the Court of Appeal.

The real Richard Page

What has perhaps been lost in all of the debate surrounding his cases is the question of who the real Richard Page is. Richard has been supported now by Christian Concern for over five years. We have come to know the man, and his heart, well. While detractors, wishing to score cheap campaigning points, try to paint Richard in a one-dimensional light as merely being a homophobic ex-magistrate; nothing could be further from the truth.

Richard is first and foremost a family man. Beyond raising a wonderful family of his own and being a devoted husband, Richard and his wife Jane took in five hard-to-adopt adolescent foster children over the years. Richard also enjoyed a successful career in finance, the talent for which he brought to the NHS as a Non-Executive Director. He also gave back to the community with more than 15 years of exemplary public service as a magistrate, never having been the subject of negative feedback or complaint prior to the circumstances leading to his removal from the bench. Richard, for all intent and purpose, has been a pillar of society.

When approaching his judgments, I would highlight several points which simply do not withstand scrutiny. In legalese, we would refer to these findings as being made in manifest error.

A difference without a distinction

First, both judgments repeat the mantra that Richard was not being punished for what he believed, but the manner in which he expressed that belief. The notion that the manner in which someone expresses a belief and the right to hold a belief are separable however, simply does not withstand scrutiny. It is a distinction without a difference. It is also not supported by experience; whereby members of the judiciary much more senior than Richard (Lady Hale, the President of the Supreme Court, and Sir James Munby, recently retired President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales, for example) have made similarly contentious statements in the media and received no sanction. The only difference among them were their

viewpoints. The latter were applauded for their “progressiveness” whereas Richard was punished for daring to suggest that a child does best with a mother and a father. Precisely stated, it had nothing to do with the manner in which he made his comments (as the manner he did so has been shared by many others who were never similarly scrutinised); it had everything to do with the belief itself.

Bias is a two-way street

Similarly, it strains credulity to suggest that Richard brought the independence of the judiciary into question or showed inherent bias any more than did Lady Hale, Sir James, or any number of other prominent judges who have shared their beliefs in a public forum. In fact, the seniority of the other judges I have mentioned, because of their prominent public profiles, had a far greater impact over the public perception of the judiciary than Richard ever could.

Following orders

Third, in relation to the NHS judgment, the EAT repeatedly made note of the fact that by doing media interviews, Richard went against a direct order from the Trust to inform them of any media interview he might do concerning his case. The truth is that Richard participated in exactly one media interview after receiving the directive from the Trust. That interview was set up and profiled as a general discussion on intolerance towards Christians and nothing to do specifically with his case. The issue of Richard not following a directive was a very minor part of the original case which has now been conflated exponentially.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Finally, recalling that Justice Choudhury did not believe Richard’s right to freedom of religion was engaged because he was punished for how he expressed his belief, and not the belief itself, he nonetheless went on to say that had his faith been involved, he would have come to the same finding because the law allows for interference with a belief where a legitimate aim exists. He suggested that because LGBT people suffer disproportionately from mental illness, that Richard’s comments might somehow dissuade them from using the NHS health service. Apart from the absurdity of suggesting that the beliefs of one man in a Non-Executive Directorship would dissuade anyone from seeking medical assistance, the point is also wrong in law.

For the NHS to interfere with Richard’s freedom of religion and belief, it requires much more than merely suggesting that a legitimate aim exists to do so. Proportionality and necessity are also required. There were much more tailored means that the trust could have utilised to both engage with the patients they say were particularly vulnerable and allow Richard to enjoy his fundamental freedoms of belief and expression. For example, if the trust was concerned, it could have issued a public statement to achieve this balance, reiterating that Richard was speaking in a private capacity and that his opinions were not necessarily shared by the trust and more so, that his position in the trust was wholly separate from any decisions made in relation to patient care.

Best interests of the child standard

What has also been missed in Richard’s case is that as a magistrate in the family division, he was doing exactly what he should have been doing. The law requires the family court, in an adoption matter, to serve the best interests of the child. Far from being just a Christian belief, Richard understood that the unique and complementary gifts brought to parenting by a mother and a father is also a fact supported by sociology, psychology and biology. This belief had nothing to do with same-sex couples, and everything to do with what is best for a child. While Richard would never judge anyone for who they are or for their personal circumstances – single parent, same-sex parent, or otherwise – he would nevertheless always endeavour to fulfil his judicial oath by doing what he believed was in the best interests of the child being adopted.

As I have said in the past and will repeat here, we should be grateful for Christians like Richard Page who bravely and dutifully stands in the firing lines so that hopefully you will never have to. Richard has now been given permission to appeal the decision of the Employment Appeal Tribunal. The cases against the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice, and the NHS have now been joined and will be heard together at the Court of Appeal.

Christian Hacking: Civil disobedience part of Christian history

Christian Hacking, 29 and wheelchair-bound after breaking his back in a climbing accident, was arrested by police in August 2019 when they determined that he was violating a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) by praying outside a Marie Stopes abortion clinic in Ealing. He was prosecuted for the offence, but charges were dropped because there was not “enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction”.

The PSPO had been issued by the local council against certain forms of protest within 100 meters of the clinic. His arrest has sparked much debate about whether it was spiritually or morally appropriate for Christian to be praying in a place where it was unlawful for him to do so. After all, Scripture is replete with verses about obeying earthly authority. Titus 3:1, for example, implores believers to “be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient...” However simple the question may appear on the surface, the answer of whether Christian Hacking was wrong to disobey the law is far more nuanced than one might think. Let’s take the question from several perspectives:

The legal view

Granted, the Ealing PSPO is quite clear that praying is among the enumerated activities disallowed within 100 meters of the Marie Stopes clinic. From a legal perspective, however, that is not the end of the story. Through the Human Rights Act 1998, the United Kingdom has transposed articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights into our domestic law. Article 9 protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion; including the right to pray publicly and to otherwise manifest your religion. Article 10 protects public protest and freedom of expression. While both rights are subject to certain limitations, they are nonetheless considered fundamental legal rights. Any interference with the right to publicly pray, according to the settled case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, must be necessary in a democratic society and proportionately tailored to serving a legitimate aim. Any such restriction must be reviewed by the court with the strictest level of scrutiny. Opposition to abortion is also a protected right under the Convention, as is the right to manifest that belief.

Precisely stated, the question of whether Christian violated the law is not black and white and includes a clash between laws; one prohibiting prayer in front of an abortion clinic and one prescribing prayer and opposition to abortion as protected legal rights. The question of whether the PSPO is violative of the European Convention is still being worked out before the courts and could ultimately end up before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). My opinion, as a long-time veteran of ECHR litigation, is that the European Court may very well find that the PSPO disproportionately limits the rights of those wishing to protest abortion and is therefore in breach of Articles 9 and 10 of the Convention.

Let’s now turn to the greater moral question of Christian’s actions.

Civil disobedience

Christians who are uncomfortable with Christian Hacking publicly praying in violation of the Ealing PSPO can take heart in the fact that Christian was merely partaking in an activity which our forebears did often, at great risk to their own lives, when Christianity was still illegal in the Roman Empire. We celebrate our early Christian martyrs precisely because their faith and love of God was greater than their fear of any unjust law. Those Christians also had a wealth of precedent, including Daniel’s refusal to bow down and worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue in Daniel 3. In fact, had the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah not disobeyed a direct order by Pharaoh to kill all of the male born Hebrew children being born at the time, Moses would have been a casualty of infanticide and salvation history would look a whole lot different than it does today.

Even in secular terms, we must ask what would the world look like right now without the likes of Rosa Parks, Lech Walesa and Dietrich Bonhoeffer? History proves that hearts and minds were changed *en masse* because of exemplary acts civil disobedience. Now of course, not all acts of civil obedience are equal, and some are in fact unhelpful.

Praying for the unborn child

It is therefore important to evaluate what is at stake. Here is the reality. From the moment of conception,

the human person has all of the genetic information necessary for his or her development. That unborn child is a growing human person. Being in the womb is as much a part of human life as childhood, adolescence or adulthood. Abortion ends human life. In fact, since the Abortion Act 1967 came into effect, it has ended more than 9 million lives. The Marie Stopes clinic in Ealing is responsible for thousands of abortions a year.

Prayer is the key that opens the door of darkness to the light. Given the reality of what is happening in Ealing, I would suggest that not only is prayer appropriate in front of abortion clinics, it is necessary! There is one very damning thing to be said about those who demand us to follow even the most unjust laws. If we were to believe such to be true, then the Nuremburg laws emboldening anti-Semitism and leading to the creation of Nazi death camps were to be followed, and the Nuremburg trials which punished concentration camp guards who simply “followed the law” would be wrong.

I tip my hat to Christian Hacking. When confronted with modern Britain’s gravest sin, he did what we all should do: he prayed boldly. While some might disagree with him doing so in breach of a PSPO, I would hope that you would nonetheless appreciate the faith with which he acted. May his actions quicken the end of the culture of death in the United Kingdom. Christian says:

My Christian faith calls me to defend the voiceless and what more peaceful way can I achieve this than through prayer. If abortion providers don’t want me praying outside their clinic they should buy the land and ring fence it, not arrest people for doing what they don’t like on public property.

Keith Waters: Pastor receives death threat for tweet about Pride

A Christian pastor and school caretaker who received a death threat for tweeting a warning to Christians that Pride events are harmful to children, is now taking legal action against the school for hounding him out of his job and capitulating to LGBT activism. The case raises the question of how far the LGBT community are prepared to go to silence mainstream Christian beliefs.

Pride not aligned with biblical teaching

On 1 June 2019, Pastor Keith Waters posted to Christians on Twitter, warning them to steer clear of Pride events that month. He stated simply: “A reminder that Christians should not attend LGBTQ ‘Pride Month’ events held in June. They promote a culture and encourage activities that are contrary to Christian faith and morals. They are especially harmful for children”. Keith had copied the tweet from a [US Catholic Bishop](#). He said his intention was to address Christians about gay pride events across the UK, as they often involve nudity, people in sadomasochistic outfits and displays of an overtly sexual nature.

Harassed for tweeting

Within minutes of posting the tweet, Keith received a response from a local journalist and LGBT activist accusing him of attacking the local LGBT community in Ely ahead of Pride events that month. The following morning, as Keith was preparing for a Sunday service at his church, a Cambridge based journalist arrived, harassing him and pressuring him to apologise for the tweet, which Keith refused to do. By Monday, just two days later, he was on the [front page of the Cambridge Evening News](#), and online abuse continued to grow.

Harassment followed at his home and on the streets of Ely. On one occasion, his wife answered the door to funeral directors who had been sent to “arrange his funeral”. Estate agents also contacted him, having been told he was moving from the area “in a hurry”, and he was at one point nearly knocked off his bike by an angry local resident in her car who wanted to remonstrate with him. False rumours were also spread that he was a child molester and there were calls from local councillors for Keith to be [investigated by police for a “hate incident”](#). Fearing for his, his family’s and his congregation’s safety, Keith decided to delete the tweet.

School investigation

Following on from this abuse and harassment, his caretaker role at the local primary school now came under threat as he was told he was being investigated for “bringing the school into disrepute”. One letter

sent to the school claimed that Keith's tweet had called for "violence against people who support the Ely Pride Festival" and an anonymous teacher claimed that his tweet fell "within the British government's definition of extremism" so action needed to be taken against him.

"An asset to the school"

Three years ago, Keith took a 60% pay cut from his role as an Estates Manager at one of Cambridge University's largest colleges to work as a caretaker at the Isle of Ely Primary School. He took the job with the agreement that he would combine the role with his duties as Pastor of Ely's New Connexions Church. As a liked and respected member of staff, in his final appraisal he was described as "an asset to the school". Keith also went above and beyond his duties as caretaker, drawing on his expertise to put in place fire safety regulations, and organising gardening lessons for troubled pupils who were physically threatening teachers.

Headteacher capitulated to LGBT mob rule

During the investigation, however, the school's headteacher caved in to a number of demands from a handful of LGBT activists, including some parents, and Keith was issued with a final warning for allegedly bringing the school into disrepute and breaking the school's code of conduct. As a result, Keith believed he could no longer combine his roles as pastor of his church and caretaker of the school, and decided there was no alternative but to resign. Now, supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Keith is suing for constructive dismissal, indirect discrimination and breach of public sector equality duty. He also believes that the school has interfered with his rights to freedom of religion, expression and thought.

"An attack on anyone who dares question Pride"

Keith commented:

Anyone who believes in freedom of religion and expression should be very concerned about my story. This was an attack, not just against my Christian beliefs, but against anyone who dares to question these matters in public. The biggest concern should be that a story like mine is becoming normal. I maintain that my tweet did not discriminate against anyone. It was directed to Christians and it did not criticise individuals or the LGBT community, only Pride events. Other people have been mortified at how I have been treated but are too fearful to speak out. Children should never be exposed to nudity or sexual acts, whether that's at Gay Pride or anywhere else. I am determined to fight for the freedom to say that, and believe that no one should lose or be forced out of their job for holding and expressing legitimate views.

"We are living in very dangerous times"

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

Our schools and churches need more community-minded people like Pastor Keith Waters, not less. For sending one tweet, that raised genuine concern for children, Keith has been threatened, harassed and hounded out of his employment. This is not a local issue distinct to Ely, but a growing intolerant and threatening trend towards, not just Christians, but anyone across the country who dares to oppose Pride. Pastor Keith Waters is right to say that Christians should not attend gay Pride events as they are harmful to children. They often exhibit nudity and explicit displays of an overtly sexual nature that no child should have to see. If a Christian pastor can no longer say this publicly without receiving death threats, then we are living in very dangerous times. As we launch this case, we call on the Church to do more to protect courageous Christians like Keith Waters, and to speak publicly on how God's good pattern of marriage between one man and one woman is a foundation for a healthy society. Celebrating sexual chaos and public immorality at gay Pride events is not good for anyone; it is not good for families or impressionable young children.

Keith's case has been accepted by the Employment Tribunal and he is currently awaiting a date for his hearing.

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