

THE BULLETIN

News and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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Norman Wells (1963 – 2020)



Photo: Betsy Nicholas

It was with profound sadness that we heard on 1 April 2020 of the death of Norman Wells, our brother in Christ and member of the Affinity Social Issues Team, as a result of contracting Covid-19. Norman was a much-valued part of our team as well as the Director of the [Family Education Trust](#). Our hearts go out to his wife Nicola and nine children; we remember them in our prayers.

Writing on the Christian Institute's [website](#), their Director, Colin Hart, paid tribute:

'I knew Norman for over twenty years as a campaigner for the family, with clear biblical convictions. He was much to be admired for his quiet, painstaking research and crystal-clear writing. He was a passionate advocate for marriage and the family, and very influential, though he never sought the limelight. He will be greatly missed.'

Andrea Williams, CEO of Christian Concern, said: 'Norman was a faithful man. An intelligent man. A modest man. A strong man. A man who loved his family. Jesus was Lord of his life.'

Bioethicist John Ling said Norman was 'quiet but always insightful, thorough and reliable in whatever he said or wrote. He was easy to admire and love. It was our privilege to know Norman. We honour the man, but we bless his Saviour.'

Rev Roger Hitchings added: 'We have lost a true Christian gentleman, the epitome of gentleness, faithfulness and passion for Christ's honour. May we serve as faithfully and be equally ready when our call home comes.'

As our own tribute to Norman, we reproduce in this edition of the Bulletin two items he wrote for the July 2015 issue which perfectly represent his clearly-argued, biblically-informed, thoughtful writing. The issues he highlighted then are just as relevant and important for Christians to grapple with today. We hope many readers will benefit again from Norman's quiet, passionate wisdom as they read these articles today.

Gospel Truth in Contemporary Culture

A report on a debate between John Stevens and Joe Boot

How should Christians respond to the challenges that face them in today's world?
How should we view ourselves – as resident aliens or as alien residents?
What place should God's law have in the government of the nation?
What is the mission of the church in the world?
What impact can we expect to have and how much can we realistically hope to achieve?

These were some of the questions addressed at a debate organised by Christian Concern and held at the Barbican Centre in central London on Tuesday 23 June.¹ The debate was chaired by Dr Daniel Strange, Lecturer in Culture, Religion and Public Theology at Oak Hill College. In an essay published several years ago, Dr Strange outlined two differing models of social engagement espoused by evangelicals – the 'two kingdoms' approach and the 'transformationist' approach.² Although neither of the participants in the debate used these terms to describe his vision, these were broadly the perspectives espoused respectively by John Stevens, National Director of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and Dr Joe Boot, founder of the Ezra Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Ontario, Canada.

Each speaker was allowed 30 minutes to set out his position, after which each was permitted a further 10 minutes to respond to the other. The evening concluded with questions submitted by the audience being put to the participants by the chairman.

John Stevens: A modified 'two kingdoms' perspective

John Stevens began by urging Christians to face up to the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves: we live in a post-Christian society which has seen the collapse of Christian belief with the result that Christianity is no longer the foundation of our culture. Over the past 150 years, and particularly during the past half-century, we have witnessed the dismantling of the Christian foundations of our legal system. The recent legislative changes in relation to homosexuality are the inevitable outworking of a train of events set in motion 50 years ago. British churches are increasingly marginalised and powerless, and most campaigns against the erosion of our cultural heritage have been lost.

Stevens argued that we must engage and that the Bible equips us to engage. The Christian faith is a public faith. The Lordship of Christ must impact on every area of life: our family life, our work life and our civic life. There is no place for a privatised Christian faith. By teaching and example, the Bible shows us how to engage with public culture, but it does not provide a single model of engagement. The way that we engage is determined by the context of the challenge we face. At one point in her history, Israel was a nation among the nations; at another she was in exile. Jesus ministered in a Jewish context within a pagan Roman-dominated world, while the apostles laboured firstly in the Roman Empire enjoying the protection of the state, but then increasingly they found themselves persecuted by the state. Different approaches are required in different contexts.

In outlining a theological framework for engagement, Stevens laid down five foundations:

1. The nature of the world

The history of the world is dominated by a fundamental cosmic clash between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The 'world' in the New Testament is represented as a culture in rebellion against God, under the dominion and rule of Satan. Even though God is sovereign over everything and Jesus is Lord, Satan is the one who is ruling over this world, and God is engaged in a cosmic rescue mission. Those who belong to his Kingdom are 'in the world, but not of the world'; they labour in hostile territory. The Kingdom

¹ The debate may be viewed in its entirety online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlLt4Cqf0Mg>

² Daniel Strange, 'Evangelical Public Theology: What on Earth? Why on Earth? How on Earth?' in Chris Green (ed), *A Higher Throne: Evangelicals and Public Theology*, Apollos, 2008.

may break into this world, but Scripture gives us no grounds for any expectation that this world will be the Kingdom. The world needs to be conquered for the Lord Jesus.

2. The mission of God

The mission of God is to re-establish his Kingdom and his good, just rule. Israel failed in her calling to re-establish God's rule, but through Jesus, the true Israel, God's Kingdom rule is re-established. He is doing this through the election and redemption of his people and the revelation of his will to them. Rather than establishing his Kingdom by redeeming and renewing the culture, God is establishing a replacement culture which will culminate in the new creation. He limits the activity of Satan for the sake of his church, gives common grace to both the wicked and righteous, and grants his people an influence in the world. But, at the same time, God grants people freedom to sin and even hands them over to the ruling power of sin to bring home to them their bondage so that they might turn to Christ for salvation.

3. The role of the law

The law reveals God's holy character and what he demands. It was not given to humanity in general, but to a redeemed people. The law is fulfilled in Christ and is intensified and internalised in him. God has not lowered his standards since the coming of Christ; rather, they have been raised. Virtually all Christians agree that the law cannot be applied directly to the church and the world today. It is necessary to work through which commands carry forward under the New Covenant and which do not.

The law alone cannot restrain sin and bring in God's Kingdom. Indeed, rather than deal with sin, it provokes it. There is no expectation in the New Testament that unbelievers will live under God's law, or that it is the mission of the church to impose it on them. The law was given to a covenant people, and God has not made covenant promises to Britain, the United States or any other nation. The law is to be fulfilled and obeyed in the church. Jesus and the apostles did not see it as their mission to bring the pagans under God's law without their conversion to Christ.

4. The function of civil government

Civil government was established by God as one of the ways in which he restrains wickedness. The New Testament has limited expectations of civil government. The government bears the sword, which refers to the exercise of the death penalty (Romans 13:4), but the great purpose of civil government is to bring about civic peace and provide gospel freedom (1 Timothy 2:1-2). That is what the apostles fought for. There is no expectation in the New Testament that the state is to coercively impose God's moral law in its entirety. British Christians have tended to make an idol of the state and to expect too much of it in terms of promoting social justice and imposing morality. We have accepted the idea that the state is to work by coercion on an unwilling people, which is not in line with the biblical model.

5. The time in which we live

We live in 'the last days' – the period between the ascension and the return of Christ. It is a time of overlap between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God, when the present evil age overlaps with the age to come. That conflict will continue until Jesus returns. While the gospel will save a great multitude that cannot be numbered, there is no biblical promise that the gospel will triumph in our culture. Our expectations are deeply affected by our eschatology.

Stevens then proceeded to outline the function and role of the church in the world under eight headings:

(a) The primary task of the church is evangelism and discipleship

Our great task is to preach the gospel and then to teach obedience to all of Christ's commands. The New Testament gives priority to the work of the gospel. Much of what today passes for 'cultural engagement' is not found in the New Testament. The way we fulfil the cultural mandate is primarily through fulfilment of the great commission. It is through the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of the Word of God that a rebellious creation is brought into subjection to the rule of God. Unless we grow the Kingdom, our influence on society will be limited. Prayer is a vital component in the work of the church. We need to recognise that we are a small minority. People do not share our values because they do not share our faith.

(b) The church must be a holy community

It is through the church that God's Kingdom breaks into the world. The church is to display life under the rule of the King. But various sections of the professing church in Britain are utterly compromised and not modelling the Kingdom. If we are to challenge society, we need to put our own houses in order. The offences which incurred the death penalty in the Old Testament require excommunication from the church in the New Testament. Many who profess to be Christians but who reject biblical standards frequently undermine our campaigns. There are times when we need to separate.

(c) The church must speak prophetically

The church is to declare the Lordship of Christ, expose the consequences of sin, warn of the coming judgment of God, and remind people that they must give an account to God. In Jesus' preaching the announcement of the Kingdom was linked with a call to repentance because the message of the Kingdom is ultimately a warning of coming judgment. The church must speak holistically about all sin – sexual sin and social sin. We must continue to prophetically declare the truth even if we lose particular battles.

(d) The church must fight for religious freedom

The maintenance of religious freedom is one of the main functions of the state. The apostle Paul appealed for protection under Roman law, and Daniel took a stand for religious freedom. It is right to fight for religious liberty, but in doing so we need to stand for the freedom and liberty of all. The battle for religious freedom should not be a fight for privilege. The Old Testament law does not make provision for a plural society. Only a minority of aliens lived in Israel and they had to conform. Our situation is different and so religious freedom in our society must encompass the reality of different religious groups.

(e) The church must fight for the protection of the powerless

Both the Old and New Testaments show that God has a particular heart for the powerless – for widows, orphans, the poor and aliens. We must speak up on behalf of the unborn, infirm, infants and the incapable. The church is to have a particular concern for those who are powerless and would otherwise be victimised and oppressed. It is part of our prophetic task to speak on their behalf.

(f) Christians must submit to the civil authority as far as possible

Daniel was willing to be educated by the Babylonians and Jesus told his followers to pay taxes to Caesar even though those taxes were not endorsed by the Old Testament law. In the New Testament, slaves are commanded to submit to their masters and not rebel. Believers are urged to give honour and respect to the authorities and pay their taxes. Roman soldiers and civic officials who were converted did not immediately leave their positions. There is a very high measure of submission even to things not commanded under the law. As we engage with our culture, we must obey the law as far as is possible and not to deliberately flout it in order to make a point.

(g) The church must be prepared to practice civil disobedience

Where the law conflicts with the command of God, believers must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29) and follow the example of the Israelite midwives in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon. But when we exercise civil disobedience, we can expect to suffer as a result. Suffering should come as no surprise to us. The early Christians rejoiced in the midst of persecution and saw it as an opportunity for witness. The New Testament teaches that one of the primary places in which we shall be called to testify to Christ is in court. It should not shock us when that is the consequence of standing for Christ.

(h) Christians should expect to be excluded

As our society turns away from Christ, it should not surprise us if Christians are excluded from various jobs, offices and opportunities. Increasingly, the gay agenda demands that we not only *tolerate* the civic rights of homosexuals, but that we *affirm* the gay lifestyle. It is not really about toleration at all, but forced acceptance. The equality policies of many companies present challenges to Christians in a wide range of occupations. It would now be unthinkable for an Education Secretary, an Equalities Minister, or an Army General, for example, to say that he or she does not support same-sex marriage. Doctors, midwives and nurses face challenges, as do judges who are required to uphold the law as imposed by the state.

Joe Boot: A 'transformationist' perspective

Joe Boot began by citing instances of believers confronting ungodly rulers and cultures about their sin: Moses confronted Pharaoh, Nathan confronted David, Daniel confronted Nebuchadnezzar, Jonah confronted Nineveh, Amos prophesied against the pagan nations in terms of the standards of God's law, Esther confronted Xerxes, John the Baptist confronted Herod, Peter confronted the Jewish Sanhedrin, Paul confronted the Roman authorities, and Jesus told Pilate that his authority would amount to nothing if he had not received it from above.

The authority of Jesus is set forth in Psalm 2, which concludes with a direct address to the kings of the nations:

*Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish in the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed are all those who put their trust in him. (Psalm 2:10-12)*

Christ and his Word are not true only if kings, politicians and magistrates acknowledge their authority. Kings and rulers are not commanded to be neutral to religious claims as if they are entitled to stand in judgment upon God. Rather, they are to submit to the Son. All things are being made subject to Christ. He has taught us to pray, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven.'

Boot then proceeded to address two questions: What is culture? and What is the gospel?

1. What is culture?

The English word 'culture' is derived from a Latin root related to the word 'cultus', referring to worship or cultivation. Culture is the public expression of worship. It is the state of being cultivated by intellectual and moral 'tilling' and forms a type of civilisation. The cultus is always communitarian and not individualistic. It is transmitted through the family, education, law and the other institutions of society. Henry Van Til defined culture as 'religion externalised' – the expression of the religion of the people in terms of which they will cultivate their society. In biblical terms, culture is what we make of God's creation.

Our first parents were set in the garden as royal priests in God's cosmic temple to subdue all things and turn creation into a God-glorifying culture, cultivating all things in terms of his will and purpose as an act of worship. At the beginning, God gave the cultural mandate and gave man dominion over the earth. As Herman Bavinck put it, culture is the purpose for which God made man in his image.

Romans 1 teaches that there are only two basic types of culture: a culture based on the worship of the Creator, or a culture based on the worship of creation. There is no such thing as a neutral culture.

When man exchanges truth for the lie, he autonomously defines truth, law, morality and spirituality outside God's revelation, and an idolatrous cultus follows, together with unrighteous practices. As this progresses, unrighteousness is steadily condoned and approved socially. This is done by wilful suppression of the truth and leads to a downward spiral in which public endorsement of unrighteous practices leads to the further suppression of the truth, promoting yet more unrighteousness, with further demands for affirmation and approval of sin in law, education and every sphere of life. Subsequently, the coercive power of the state codifies the lie that the collective self is not subject to the law of God.

Lordship and sovereignty either belong to Christ, with the law of a transcendent God binding all men, or else they lie within creation itself. G K Chesterton observed:

It is only by believing in God that we can ever criticise the government. Once abolish the God, and the government becomes the God. The fact is written all across human history... Wherever the people do not believe in something beyond the world, they will worship the world. But, above all, they will worship the strongest thing in the world. And, by the... practical working of almost any system, the State will be the strongest thing in the world.

When people choose to worship the creature rather than the Creator, all judgments as to what constitutes moral truth become arbitrary social conventions. We need to ask what criteria we use in determining what is for the common good. Is the common good to be defined by God, or is there some other standard? If creation is worshipped and served, then man is God, and the state becomes the giver and taker of all things. According to Rousseau, 'The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No group, no individual, may exercise authority not emanating from it.'

It is inherent in Paul's teaching that the state is obligated to be Christian, since all men are obligated to repent and believe the gospel. The God-ordained institutions of culture – whether the family or the state – must serve God. When institutions fail to serve God they institute tyranny and advance idolatry. To promote, support, or remain silent with respect to unrighteousness in the social order is to sponsor idolatry. To promote the mythical notion of the 'neutral' state that stands in judgment over God's Word and sponsors religious or moral pluralism is to support the worship of creation.

Christians will always be targeted by a 'neutral' state because, like first century Rome, it will perceive in the declaration of Christ as Lord and King a rival cultus that makes the state subject to God and his Christ.

Christ is not one competitor among many. All social structures are inescapably religious and will discriminate against some worldviews. We cannot support freedom for all without sponsoring idolatry. Is the common good to be defined by God in his Word, or by some other standard?

2. What is the gospel?

Adam and Eve were called to rule and subdue the earth, but they rebelled. Thereafter, the promise of the gospel issued to them in Genesis 3:15 is unfolded in the plot-line of Scripture. The seed of the woman represents Christ and his people united to him, and the seed of the serpent stands for those who are united with Satan. This Satan-crushing gospel is the gospel of Christ's Kingdom. The gospel brings deliverance and liberty (Luke 4:16-21) and for centuries multitudes who are not born again have enjoyed its benefits.

The apostle John condemned the practice, promotion or approval of sin as demonic and declared that the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). The works of the devil are seen in such evils as abortion, same-sex marriage, pagan education, prostitution, pornography, slavery, political idolatry and the persecution of Christians. All these are part of what Christ came to destroy, and Romans 16:20 shows that as part of the seed of the woman, Christians are to have a part in that destruction as Satan is crushed under our feet.

Psalm 110:1 teaches that Christ is vanquishing his enemies and subduing all things. The death and resurrection of Christ are about far more than forgiving our personal sins. Christ's work is to crush all his enemies – sin, death, Satan and all his works throughout time. The sweep of redemption is as broad as the sweep of the curse. Believers form a royal priesthood, restored to man's original mandate to subdue all things under the Lordship of Christ. One of the works of the Kingdom is to teach God's law (1 Timothy 1:8-11). Part of the purpose of that law is to restrain evil.

This Satan-crushing gospel produces results that benefit the whole of society. In the establishment of Christian schools, hospitals, universities, and charities, Christ has been crushing Satan. Likewise through legislative changes such as the abolition of slavery and child labour, and through prison reform, and in the work of foreign missions. As believers recapture the arts, science, medicine, education and welfare for the glory of God, Christ is crushing Satan. So too, when families and churches catechise their children, and when laws that promote sin and idolatry are repealed.

The gospel is about far more than keeping souls out of Hell. It is about preaching the reign of Jesus Christ. If culture is the expression of worship, and if the gospel restores man to true worship, then it restores man to true culture. The gospel is a culture and it carries within it its own plausibility structure. If we fail to protect marriage, the family and a right understanding of human sexuality, we destroy the plausibility structure of the gospel of the *Father* who sent his *Son* to redeem for himself a *bride* to whom he would be the *husband*. The public defence of God's creational norms and moral law is therefore gospel work.

In recent decades, Christians have surrendered education, law, charity and medicine to the state in ways that previous generations of evangelicals could never have envisaged. We have retreated into a pietistic bubble and limited Christ's jurisdiction to the institutional church. Freedoms not fought for are soon forfeited. If we truly love our neighbour, culture and public life will be of great importance to us. As C H Spurgeon declared:

I long for the day when the precepts of the Christian religion shall be the rule among all classes of men and all transactions. I often hear it said, 'do not bring religion into politics'. This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all men as a candlestick. I would have the cabinet and members of Parliament do the work of the nation as before the Lord.

Part of the reason for the decline of Christian influence is that we have retreated from areas of biblical responsibility. When we abandon Christian education and hand education over to the state, we abandon the environment in which faith is nurtured. We need to take back the spheres we have relinquished and return to a fidelity to the Lordship of Christ in every sphere.

Areas of agreement and disagreement

In the ensuing discussion, several points of agreement emerged:

- The priority of evangelism
- Gospel growth leads to transformation
- No one can be coerced into professing Christ and following him
- The Bible envisages a small and limited government
- The law is normative in terms of God's standards
- The state cannot be neutral
- It is the task of the church to expose the inconsistencies of secular humanism

With regard to the size of the government, John Stevens agreed that we have handed over to the state functions that should be performed within the church and the family and suggested that 'most British Christians are worshippers of the state'. Around the beginning of the 20th century, British Christians had abandoned confidence in the gospel and Christian voluntarism and had tended to look to the state as the saviour. Recognising that the state is not neutral, but rather hostile, the question for Stevens is how Christians are to live in a hostile state. He argued that we need to seek as much gospel freedom and opportunity as possible.

Areas of disagreement included:

- The appropriateness of Christians supporting the civic rights of others. For example, should Muslims have religious freedom and be permitted to erect mosques? Should Sharia law be respected and should Jews be permitted to operate their own family courts?
- The extent to which common grace wisdom arguments should be used to build a consensus. Can Christians work as co-belligerents on some issues with Muslims and others with whom they fundamentally disagree on many points?
- The role of the law of God in the state. Does the church have a role in calling for the restoration of Old Testament judicial penalties? Or are we, rather, to see the outworking of God's law in church discipline (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5)?

- A difference in eschatology. Is the postmillennial expectation a type of 'utopianism' or is it encouraged by Scripture?
- How the decline happened. Was it because Christians abandoned the public square or because the church has tried to hold on to laws that reflect Christian morality in a nation that has abandoned the Christian faith?

On the question of the applicability of the law of God to the modern state, Joe Boot noted that the Lord Jesus Christ upheld the law in its entirety in Matthew 5, and that Peter presupposed the continuation of the whole law in Acts 10 and required special revelation to recognise that the ceremonial and dietary laws were no longer binding. Boot argued that we must presume continuity in the absence of a revelation from God showing discontinuity. He viewed God's law as a gift of grace for the government of all nations.

Boot rejected the charge of utopianism, and characterised Stevens' more modest expectations as a form of 'primitivism'. Unlike Stevens, Boot did not view the condition of the early church living in the midst of a hostile world as normative for the entire church age. Rather, he believed that God has ordained progress in history through the power of the gospel.

All in all, it was a most profitable and thought-provoking evening. Christian Concern are to be congratulated for convening the debate. There would be value in further discussions in which iron can further sharpen iron as we all wrestle with the challenge of living in a nation that is systematically dismantling our biblical heritage and seek to respond in a manner that is honouring to God.

Norman Wells

Gospel Truth in Contemporary Culture: Further Reflections on Five Central Issues

In the course of the debate between John Stevens and Joe Boot, a number of theological issues were raised that require careful consideration when determining the extent to which Christians should engage with the culture, what the nature of that engagement should be, and what we can expect to accomplish. Here we reflect further on just five of those issues: the reign of Christ, the defeat of Satan, the role of civil government, what we mean by 'the church' and the relationship between the great commission and the cultural mandate.

The reign of Christ

What do we mean when we make the confession, 'Jesus is Lord'? How far does his lordship extend? For many modern evangelical Christians it often means little more than that Jesus is 'King of my heart' and 'Head of my church'. But the language of the New Testament goes far beyond that.

Immediately prior to his ascension into heaven, the risen Lord Jesus Christ declared: 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth' (Matthew 28:18). And the apostle Paul writes of Christ that God the Father 'put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all' (Ephesians 1:22-23). Note that the apostle does not say that Christ is the head over the church (though he certainly is that), but that he is 'head over *all things*' and governs all things for the good of his people.

The 'all things' unquestionably must include the nations of the earth and their rulers. Is it therefore improper for Christians to pray and to seek to exercise an influence on national leaders to the end that they acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, submit to his rule, and enact legislation and pursue policies that reflect his mind?

One day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15), and on that day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). But when Paul writes that 'he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet' (1 Corinthians 15:25), he seems to be expecting a progression in Christ's work of subduing his enemies in the present age. As Geerhardus Vos wrote:

Here the kingship of Christ is equivalent to the process of subjecting one enemy after another... Christ's kingdom as a process of conquest precedes the final kingdom of God as a settled permanent state.³

We do not know when this age will come to an end, and the Lord Jesus warned us that we can expect to face many tribulations along the way (John 16:33). Nevertheless, if Christ's reign means anything at all, do we not have a basis for anticipating progressive gospel triumphs before Christ returns in glory?

The defeat of Satan

Immediately after man's fall into sin, Satan's condemnation was announced (Genesis 3:15). From then on, there was bitter conflict between the children of God and the children of the devil in every generation, beginning with Adam and Eve's own children, Cain and Abel (1 John 3:10-12). It was only a matter of time until the enmity would reach its climax and, through his own suffering, 'the seed of the woman' would deliver the decisive blow and crush the serpent's head. Satan's final doom was effectively sealed at the cross. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it: 'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil' (Hebrews 2:14).

³ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, American Tract Society, 1903, 90-91.

Since that time, Satan's power has been severely limited. The glory of the Lord has been declared among the nations and his wonders among the peoples (Psalm 96:3) and 'all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God' (Psalm 98:3; Is 52:10). Nevertheless, the New Testament still describes him as 'the god of this age' (2 Corinthians 4:4) and as 'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2). He is designated 'the tempter' (1 Thess 3:5; cf. 1 Cor 7:5) and our 'adversary' who maliciously 'walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Peter 5:8).

In terms of his present activities, the devil is able to snatch away the word of God from the hearts of its hearers (Mark 4:15) and to 'transform himself into an angel of light' in order to deceive the unwary (2 Corinthians 11:14). He blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), employs a range of devices to take advantage of believers (2 Corinthians 2:11), and can, subject to the will of God, hinder ministers of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Believers are exhorted not to give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27) and to 'put on the whole armour of God, that [they] may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil' (Ephesians 6:11). James exhorts Christians to 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you' (James 4:7). Perhaps significantly, believers are nowhere exhorted to crush the devil. That is God's work and will be performed in God's time, and it will be accomplished under the feet of God's people (Romans 16:20).

So are we warranted to view every gospel advance and every cultural change accomplished by the Lord's people as an instance of the crushing of Satan under the feet of believers? That every conversion entails a turning from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18) and that the gospel has social and cultural effects that present a threat to Satan's dominion is beyond question. But are they serial fulfilments of Romans 16:20?

We would suggest that the victories which we witness and experience in this life are both the fruit of the crushing blow dealt to Satan by Christ at the cross *and* anticipations of the full and final victory that we shall share with our living head when Satan is finally and for ever trampled into the dust by the power of the God of peace, under the feet of his people. It is not in this life, but at the return of Christ in glory, that 'dust shall be the serpent's food' (Isaiah 65:25).

The role of civil government

The apostle Paul exhorts us to pray 'for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence' (1 Timothy 2:1-2), but are we to take it from this that the function of civil government is limited to securing peace and freedom for churches to worship and evangelise without interference?

While such conditions are desirable and should be priorities in our prayers both for our own land and other parts of the world, the calling of the governing authorities would appear to go beyond that. In Romans 13, Paul not only teaches that national rulers are 'appointed by God' as a divine ordinance, but three times he refers to them as 'God's ministers'. In Romans 13:4, he twice applies the word 'diakonos' (servant, minister, deacon) to them, and in Romans 13:6, he employs the word 'leitourgos' (a word which, with one possible exception, the New Testament employs in connection with the service of God).

As for the function of the civil ruler, the apostle teaches that he is 'God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil'. Whose wrath? His own or God's? Lenski notes that the word 'wrath' appears eleven times in Romans and in each instance it is the wrath of God that is referred to. He comments: 'here it is the divine wrath as executed by God on the evildoer through the government as his 'minister''.⁴ John Murray agrees that the wrath of God is in view and comments: 'Thus the magistrate is the avenger in executing the judgment that accrues to the evil-doer from the wrath of God... [H]e is the agent in executing God's wrath'.⁵

⁴ R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Hendrikson Publishers, 1998, 793.

⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, 1965, Vol 2, 153.

But this raises the question of the standard by which the magistrate is to exercise judgment. If the state is God's minister to execute the wrath of God against evildoers, how is the state to define evil? Lenski contends that:

The New Testament... lays down no laws for the secular state on any matter. This is left to the natural sense of right and justice found among men, who also bear the responsibility for the laws they put into force and must bear the consequences, whether these are beneficial or detrimental. Shall a state inflict or not inflict the death penalty for extreme crime? The answer is one that the state must give.⁶

However, if the state is to execute the wrath of God, does that not rule out the arbitrariness that will inevitably ensue if each government effectively does what is right in its own eyes? If the ruling authorities are truly to function as 'ministers of God', does that not imply an obligation to govern according to divine standards?

What do we mean by 'the church'?

At times the debate as to whether the church should be involved with politics and engage with the culture becomes confused when the word 'church' is being used in different ways. Sometimes 'church' is used to refer to a denomination, at other times to a local church, and at still other times to individual Christians as they pursue their callings in the world.

So, for example, when an Anglican or a Presbyterian says that 'the church' should send out a clear message to the government that it should or should not pursue a particular policy he may mean that the senior representatives of the denomination (archbishops, bishops or moderators) should make representations to the government and/or that the various councils of the church (synods, assemblies or committees) should make a formal resolution and issue a statement on the issue under discussion. An Independent, however, is more likely to think in terms of the elders of the local church making a clear statement on the government's proposals on behalf of the church and, if the church belongs to a larger umbrella grouping (e.g. EFCC, FIEC, GBA), he may feel that the officers of the wider fellowship of churches also have a role to play.

Many evangelicals are concerned that the involvement of 'the church' in politics, cultural engagement and ministries of mercy (whether at a denominational or local church level) could prove a distraction from the primary calling of the church to worship, evangelism and discipleship, and could lead to the adoption of some kind of 'social gospel'. The question, therefore, needs to be raised as to how Christians are to show love towards their neighbours and seek the welfare of the city where the Lord has placed them (Jeremiah 29:7). Should it be done primarily by Christians acting together in the context of the local church (or associations of local churches) or individual believers acting independently of the oversight of the local church?

For example, most evangelicals would agree that a crisis pregnancy centre that seeks to encourage women to continue with their unplanned pregnancies and offers advice and support performs a valuable function. But should such a service operate under the oversight of a local church, or should it be established as a separate charity with an independent board of trustees?

The New Testament commends congregational demonstrations of practical concern and financial provision for needy believers elsewhere (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:26-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8-9) and, subject to strict criteria, requires churches to provide for the needs of widows who lack means of support from within their own families (1 Timothy 5:3-16). But charitable works are by no means to be confined to corporate activities under the oversight of the local church. Individual believers are also to perform good works on their own initiative. This is explicitly taught by the Lord Jesus himself in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and there is nothing to suggest that the good works and charitable deeds performed by Dorcas in making tunics and garments for the poor was a ministry of Joppa Evangelical

⁶ Lenski, *op. cit.*, 792.

Church (Acts 9:36-42). Rather, she provides an outstanding example of a humble believer selflessly employing her gifts and opportunities on behalf of those in need.

In our discussions of political involvement and cultural engagement it is helpful to carefully define what we mean by 'the church' and to clearly differentiate between the role of the institutional church (the church as the gathered community) and the role of individual Christians (the church scattered in the world). The Christian life is much bigger, broader and more multi-faceted than 'church life'. There are many good works that lie outside the remit of the church as an institution but which individual believers may and should engage in according to their gifts, callings and opportunities. Equally, there are many worthy causes which it may not be right and appropriate for the church to support as the church, but nonetheless merit the support of church members in their personal capacity.

In this context, John Murray helpfully distinguishes between the responsibility of the church and the responsibilities of its members:

To the church is committed the task of proclaiming the whole counsel of God and, therefore, the counsel of God as it bears upon the responsibility of all persons and institutions. While the church is not to discharge the functions of other institutions such as the state and the family, nevertheless it is charged to define what the functions of these institutions are... To put the matter bluntly, the church is not to engage in *politics*. Its members must do so, but only in their capacity as citizens of the state, not as members of the church.⁷

The relationship between the great commission and the cultural mandate

Has the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 superseded the cultural, or creation, mandate of Genesis 1:26-28? Does God's mandate to Adam in Eden find its fulfilment in Christ's commission to his church? At one level that would appear to be a reasonable conclusion to draw. It was as divine image-bearers that the first man and the first woman were commanded to fill and subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over every created thing. Adam and Eve, together with their progeny, were to serve as God's representatives on earth and to fit the entire planet to serve as a habitation for God to the praise of his glory. As Beale and Kim put it: 'Worship is...the goal of mission in Eden, filling the earth by multiplying image-bearers in the temple of God's presence who would worship and reflect God's glory to the ends of the earth.'⁸

As a result of the fall, the image of God in man has become distorted, man has been banished from Eden, and the earth is no longer the dwelling-place of God. In his natural condition, man is therefore ill-equipped to exercise godly dominion on the earth. It is only through Christ that the image of God is renewed in us (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24) and therefore it is only through the fulfilment of the great commission that fallen men, women and children will come to the Saviour and be made new. Only as the gospel is proclaimed among the nations will local sanctuaries of God's people be established in which the praises of God will be sung to the ends of the earth.

All too often, evangelicals have tended to interpret the great commission too narrowly and understood it to be little more than a call to bring people to Christ, to baptise them and to involve them in the life of the church. The injunction of the risen Jesus to 'teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you' is frequently overlooked and not given due weight. As John Frame has observed:

The great commission tells us not only to tell people the gospel and get them baptised, but also to teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us. Everything. The gospel creates new people, people radically committed to Christ in every area of their lives. People like these will change the world. They will fill and rule the earth to the glory of Jesus. They will plant churches, establish godly families, and will also plant godly hospitals, schools, arts, and sciences. That's what has happened by God's grace. And that is what will continue to happen until Jesus comes.⁹

⁷ John Murray, 'The Relation of Church and State', in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol 1, Banner of Truth, 1976, 255.

⁸ G K Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God dwells among us: Expanding Eden to the ends of the earth*, IVP, 2014, 29.

⁹ John M Frame, 'Christianity and Culture', Lectures given at the Pensacola Theological Institute, July 23-27, 2001

http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/Frame.Apologetics2004.ChristandCulture.pdf

Far from rendering the cultural mandate redundant, redemption through Christ enables, equips and motivates men, women and children renewed after the image of God to more adequately represent their Creator in the world and to bring everything into subjection to him. The fact that 'The earth is the Lord's and all its fulness' (Psalm 24:1) teaches us to do away with any concept of a sacred-secular divide. Thomas Howard and J I Packer put it well:

To affirm and bask in the goodness of the world, to praise God for the wonders of creation, to practice responsible stewardship of this small planet, and to honour its Maker by using its resources widely for the welfare of the race and the enriching of human life are all integral aspects of work that Christians are called to do. Any idea that consistent Christianity must undermine or diminish concern for the tasks of civilisation should be dismissed once and for all.¹⁰

Or as Abraham Kuyper famously expressed it more succinctly: 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human life of which Christ, who is Sovereign of all, does not cry: 'Mine!''¹¹

Norman Wells

¹⁰ Thomas Howard and J I Packer, *Christianity: The True Humanism*, Regent College Publishing, 1999, p.180.

¹¹ Abraham Kuyper, 'Sphere Sovereignty', a public address delivered at the inauguration of the Free University, 20 October 1880, translated by George Kamps.

Biblical Christianity Promotes Religious Freedom

This article is the second 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.

One of the most common accusations levelled at Christians is the claim that Christianity has a shameful record of intolerance and persecution. What about the Crusades? Or the Inquisition?

How should we respond?

We don't have to be intimidated by these claims. It is the biblical world view that provides the most secure foundation of the rights of the individual, including the right to religious freedom.

Jesus taught that we are to, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' (*Mark 12:17*)

Caesar (*aka* the State) does not have the right to demand everything from you. You were not made in the image of Caesar. You were made in the image of the one who made Caesar. Caesar has no right to tell you what to believe. God, your Creator, alone has authority over your soul. God calls citizens to obey civil authorities (*Romans 13:1-8; 1 Peter 2:13-14*), but obedience is not to be unlimited. When there is a clash of demands, we obey God rather than men (*Acts 5:29*). We can infer from this that governments should not coerce the consciences of their citizens. As the apostle Peter wrote, we are to *honour* the Emperor – but we are to *fear* God (*1 Peter 2:17*).

To understand the basis for respecting religious freedom we need to go back to creation. Man and woman are made in God's image; they are rational beings, given the capacity to worship, love and relate. Genuine worship, love and relationship cannot be coerced. God calls his people to '*choose the good*' (*Deuteronomy 30:15*). The Old Testament contains numerous condemnations of external religious ritual, performed without the free and willing love of the heart. God promised the good of the land to those who *willingly* obey him. (*Isaiah 1:19-20*).

Building on this biblical foundation, several of the early church fathers developed arguments in favour of religious freedom as an individual natural right possessed by all people, regardless of religious convictions. Tertullian (c.155-240 AD) used the phrase 'religious liberty' for the first time in history in his *Apology*, written c.197 AD. He warned magistrates:

See to it that you do not end up fostering irreligion by taking away freedom of religion and forbid free choice with respect to divine matters, so that I am not allowed to worship what I wish, but am forced to worship what I do not wish. Not even a human being would like to be honoured unwillingly.¹²

Tertullian went on to argue that religion consists of more than rituals – it has to come from inner conviction; superficial observance makes a mockery of genuine piety. Persecution will never result in genuine devotion. Ten years later, when Christians were undergoing persecution in Carthage, North Africa, Tertullian wrote a letter to the Roman Governor in which he argued:

It is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man's religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion – to which free-will and not force should lead us.¹³

When the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, this did not 'impose' Christianity on the Empire (that would, regrettably, come later). The Edict allowed Christianity to operate freely. The Edict has

¹² Quoted in Wilken, R L, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, Yale University Press, 2019, 11.

¹³ Quoted in Hertzke, A D and Shah, T S, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Volume I Historical Perspectives*, CUP, 2016, 8.

been called 'the world's first universal declaration of religious freedom'. Christians and all others were to have the free and unrestricted right to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best.

The theologian Lactantius (c. 250-325) lived in North Africa in the fourth century. He proposed a policy of religious freedom to Emperor Constantine, a policy demanded by both justice and piety:

...the butcher's trade and piety are two very different things... if you want to defend religion by bloodshed, torture and evil, it will not be defended – it will be polluted and outraged. There is nothing that is so much a matter of willingness as religion...¹⁴

Lactantius taught that humans made in God's image are endowed with a conscience, and he defended the right of each individual to follow their conscience. He was adamant that laws may punish offences, but they cannot change the conscience.

Disastrously, within about ten years, Constantine's policy had become more coercive. Over time 'the Church was transformed from a voluntary association into a public institution',¹⁵ and 'obedience to Caesar and obedience to God began to merge'.¹⁶ By the fifth century some Christian theologians such as Augustine were arguing for coercion against the Donatists and others deemed to be heretics.¹⁷ In subsequent years, the early foundational thinking in favour of freedom of conscience did re-appear.

Alcuin (c. 735-804) was one of the leading educationalists of the eighth century. Born in Northumbria, he transformed the curriculum at the Cathedral school in York. He was then invited by Charlemagne to join his court in Aachen in 782. Alcuin taught Charlemagne himself, as well as his sons and daughters. He was internationally recognised as one of the most brilliant men of the age. He tried to persuade the future Emperor not to impose Christian ways on the Saxons. He wrote:

Faith arises from the will, not from compulsion. You can persuade a man to believe, but you cannot force him. You may even be able to force him to be baptised, but this will not instil the faith within him.¹⁸

This biblical principle was undermined, and all too often forgotten during the 'sacral' era. This was the period of history when it was assumed that a territory had to have a single faith. It was thought that there would be disorder and fragmentation if that unity were undermined. The terrible outcome of that was the persecution of dissenters. *The Pilgrim Church*¹⁹ is an account of dissent through those centuries during which religious unity was enforced. It gives a vivid picture of believers' churches (or gathered churches) which were all too often vilified as heretical and violently persecuted.

Today, Christians would unequivocally agree that such persecution was wrong, and not a real reflection of true Christianity. We understand (and concede) that the accusations of atrocities sometimes made against Christianity may be warranted criticism of the intolerance which was the inevitable result of 'sacral' thinking.²⁰

By the sixteenth century, the 'sacral principle' (that church and state were coterminous), had obscured the biblical truth of religious freedom. During the Reformation, the mainstream or magisterial reformers such as Luther and Calvin recovered the biblical truth about salvation, but they maintained the territorial (or 'sacral') principle that everyone in a territory should belong to the same church. They bitterly opposed

¹⁴ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, V 19, 23 quoted in *Christianity and Freedom*, 9-10.

¹⁵ *Liberty in the Things of God*, 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷ In the first instance, the use of force against the Donatists was justified because some of them had turned to violence. *Liberty in the Things of God*, 31.

¹⁸ *Christianity and Freedom*, 68.

¹⁹ Broadbent, E H, *The Pilgrim Church*, Lulu Press, reprint 2018.

²⁰ Although we should, equally, be aware that there has often been exaggeration and distortion in descriptions of both the Inquisition and the Crusades. See Stark, R. *Bearing False Witness: Debunking Centuries of Anti-Catholic History*, Templeton Press, 2016; and Stark, R. *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades*, HarperOne, 2009.

those who believed that Scripture demanded gathered churches of professing believers. The magisterial reformers stood *with* the Roman Catholics in enforcing the death penalty on those who believed that baptism should follow profession of faith, rather than be administered to all infants born within a certain territory.

The so-called 'Anabaptists', and then the Baptists, recovered the foundational biblical principle of liberty of religion. One leading Anabaptist was Balthasar Hubmaier. He wrote a powerful plea for religious freedom in 1524: *Concerning Heretics and those who burn them*. He accepted that magistrates have a duty to uphold law and order, but he denied their power to enforce religion. He wrote:

Now it is obvious to everyone... that the law which demands the burning of heretics is an invention of the devil.²¹

Similarly, Claus Felbinger:

God wants no compulsory service. On the contrary, He loves a just, willing heart that serves Him with a joyful soul and does what is right joyfully.²²

The *Schleitheim Confession* (an Anabaptist confession of faith) was written in 1527, in a context where magistrates used torture and the death penalty to enforce religion. It acknowledged that God gives magistrates authority to punish evil and promote good (Romans 13) but it *denied* that God gives magistrates authority to enforce religion. It is a commonly repeated slander that Anabaptists rejected *all* civil authority. What this confession *did* reject was the idea that true believers could serve as magistrates. That is because in their particular historical context serving as a magistrate would necessarily involve the enforcement of religious intolerance.²³

The first full defence of religious liberty in English was written by the Baptist Thomas Helwys (c.1575-1616) in 1612. His biblical treatise against religious persecution was called *The Mystery of Iniquity*. He had the audacity to send a personally inscribed copy to King James I, writing:

If the King's people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all human laws made by the King, our Lord the King can require no more, for men's religion to God is betwixt God and themselves, the King shall not answer for it; neither may the King be judge between God and men.²⁴

Helwys believed that to be genuine, religious faith has to be voluntary. Forced faith is no faith at all. The king has no power to coerce the soul. Each individual answers to God alone in matters of religion. Helwys argued that freedom of conscience should be granted to all, including Catholics, Jews and Muslims. James I was not impressed. Helwys was imprisoned in Newgate, in horrible conditions, and died there in 1616.

The next landmark biblical defence of religious freedom, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience Discussed*,²⁵ was written in 1644 by the Baptist Roger Williams (1603-1683). He had come to strong Puritan convictions while studying at Cambridge University and in 1631 he sailed to Massachusetts. He argued that force never produces genuine faith, that forced worship is abominable to God and that people's consciences ought never to be violated or constrained. He maintained that the magistrate has no place in controlling the church:

That religion cannot be true which needs such instruments of violence to uphold it.²⁶

²¹ Estep, W R, *The Anabaptist Story*, Eerdmans, 1975, 197.

²² *The Anabaptist Story*, 197.

²³ Williams, G H, *The Radical Reformation*, Westminster Press, 1962, 184-5.

²⁴ <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/resources/iniquity.htm> (accessed 11 December, 2019)

²⁵ In modern English, we might say 'The Bloodthirsty Principle of Persecution'. Online version:

<https://archive.org/details/cu31924029333014/page/n21>

²⁶ Roberts, M, *The Subversive Puritan, Roger Williams and Freedom of Conscience*, Evangelical Press, 142.

He compared forced conversion to spiritual rape.²⁷

The Protectorate (1653-9) offered a brief interlude of greater religious freedom in England. Oliver Cromwell believed that freedom of conscience should be extended not just to professed Christians, but also to Jews (and to any who were not a threat to the civil order).²⁸ But the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 ushered in an era of fierce persecution. The great Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) argued in *Truth and Innocence Vindicated* that thought and worship should be free. He criticised magistrates for invading God's prerogative to govern the souls of men. He drew on the writings of Tertullian and Lactantius, and argued that liberty of conscience is not based on the law of society, but on the law of nature. Liberty of conscience is a consequence of human freedom: 'Liberty is necessary unto human nature.'²⁹

William Penn (1644-1718), was converted in 1659 at the age of 15. Aged 22, he joined the Quaker movement, which meant that his family, for a while, disinherited him. He was imprisoned several times in the Tower of London due to his faith. Famously, in 1670, a judge ordered the jury to find him guilty; they refused. The judge then fined and imprisoned the jury. This created a famous test case when twelve other judges found in favour of the jury, and ruled that juries should not be subject to intimidation. William Penn was the founder of the colony of Pennsylvania, and was famous for his fair and good relations with the Lenape North American Indians. He insisted that faith is the gift of God, so it cannot be forced, and that force may make hypocrites, but it can make no converts. He argued that denial of liberty of conscience is:

...an affront to God, for it invades the divine prerogative, and divests the Almighty of a Right due to none beside himself.³⁰

John Locke (1632-1704) wrote his *Letters Concerning Toleration* between 1689 and 1692 in the aftermath of the European wars of religion. He argued that toleration is the chief characteristic mark of the true Church and that belief cannot be compelled by violence.³¹

At the roots of the Christian articulation of the importance of religious liberty are the following principles:

- Religion is an inner conviction that cannot be coerced
- Every human being is made in the image of God so should be afforded dignity
- Each individual should be free to follow their religious conscience
- God is only honoured when devotion and worship are willingly and freely given

At one time these were radical ideas, but today, whatever our genuine differences of conviction about either baptism, or the established church, we would all agree on the need for freedom of conscience.

The situation today

Where the transcendent God is not acknowledged, all too often the State 'becomes God' and takes on the function of controlling belief. For example, as mentioned in part 1 of this series, 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.

But when the transcendent God is respected, we understand that each individual made in his image is answerable to their Creator for the state of their heart. We are to obey God not Caesar if there is a clash of loyalty.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 133.

²⁸ Which is why Roman Catholics were not included; they were thought to be a threat to the civil order as their first loyalty was to the authority of the Pope.

²⁹ John Owen, quoted in *Liberty in the Things of God*, 164.

³⁰ Penn, W, *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience*, quoted in *Liberty in the Things of God*, 167.

³¹ *Liberty in the Things of God*, 169 ff.

Christians understand that we don't just appeal for religious 'toleration'. That implies that it is a gift that can be given or withheld by the civil authorities. Rather we insist that religious freedom, or liberty of conscience, is a natural right that belongs to all people made in the image of God. A biblical understanding of this principle is the only sure bulwark against totalitarianism – the overweening claims of an all-powerful state. That is why Christians today play a disproportionately large role in advancing religious freedom as a universal right:

Because Christianity denies that the state is the ultimate arbiter of human life, it challenges all attempts – whether Communist, theocratic, ethnic nationalist, or authoritarian – to impose a single authority in state and society... Careful field research demonstrates the outsized role of Christian communities in defending religious freedom and human rights... Pledging fealty to an authority higher than the state, Christians strive to carve spaces for autonomous civil society and conscience rights that underpin democratic governance.³²

Certainly, we should grieve that through the centuries there have been times when the institutional church, in the name of Christ, has engaged in religious persecution and intolerance. But we need to be clear that these were an appalling perversion of biblical teaching, and we can be confident: God's Word is the foundation for upholding religious liberty.

Sharon James

³² Hertzke, A D, 'Introduction: Christianity and Freedom in the Contemporary World', in *Christianity and Freedom*, Volume 2, CUP, 2016, 4, 11.

The Use of Ultrasound in Crisis Pregnancy

In the UK, pregnant women are routinely offered an ultrasound scan at 11-13 weeks for dating purposes, and at 18-20 weeks to detect any foetal anomalies. More recently, 3-D images (and even so-called 4-D, which is animation of sequential 3-D images) have brought home the reality of life in the womb.

Pregnant women are rarely scanned before 11 weeks, unless there is a complication. For this reason women in early pregnancy often have little understanding of the development of the baby inside their womb. Sometimes relatives and health professionals reinforce the idea that the developing baby is not yet a life. This perception will influence women considering having an abortion towards going ahead with the procedure, since they do not realise the nature of what is at stake. Yet from the very early days of pregnancy an ultrasound scan bears witness to new life. A heart beat can be seen from 3 weeks and 5 or 6 days after fertilisation (yes, the 'timetable' is that precise) and independent movement from 6 weeks after fertilisation. Through ultrasound we have the immeasurable privilege of seeing what the psalmist described as the baby being 'intricately woven' in the 'secret' place of the mother's womb (Psalm 139:15).



Although no longer routinely required in RCOG recommendation,³³ most women requesting an abortion are given an ultrasound scan prior to the procedure to check on gestation and for anomalies. The RCOG recommend³⁴ that women who do have a scan are offered the opportunity to see the scan images if they wish. In practice this is not always done, perhaps for fear of influencing their decision. Our local hospital had a policy of not showing a scan of twins to abortion-minded women, because so often the recognition of 'a special pregnancy' turned the mother's decision in favour of preserving life. This reveals something of the pro-abortion mindset of those providing abortion services.

Since 2008, our pregnancy centre (Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre) in Newcastle upon Tyne has been offering an ultrasound scan to women facing unplanned pregnancy. Since its opening two further centres have opened, in Sheffield and Salisbury, based on the same model. We believe that there is the potential for many more. As Baroness Cox said when she officially opened our centre,

So often in these circumstances, women are told that there is only a blob of tissue in their womb. The scan will help them realise that there is a little life inside of them. I hope this will be the first of many such services around the country.

Over one hundred women with unplanned pregnancy attend our centre each year. About 15% of these are referred by their GP; the rest self-refer having heard about us through word of mouth or the internet.

³³ The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion. RCOG Evidence-based Clinical Guideline Number 7 November 2011, 51-52.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

Women who attend are initially offered a consultation with one of our advisors who is able to provide information on issues relating to pregnancy, parenting, adoption and abortion. During the consultation women are helped to discuss the circumstances of their pregnancy, explore their concerns, and consider the moral, emotional and spiritual implications of pregnancy and abortion. Our centre also offers ongoing care and support for women, their partners and families. During a first appointment the opportunity for an ultrasound scan is offered, either immediately after the consultation or some days later according to preference and availability. Over 90% of women who attend the centre choose to have a scan.

The scan is not intended to detect foetal abnormalities nor be used as a medical service for those with pregnancy complications such as threatened miscarriage; each woman signs a form to acknowledge the limitation of the scan (we have established referral routes with local early pregnancy assessment centres for women whose scans appear abnormal). The purpose of the scan is informative, not diagnostic. It enables the woman to visualise her developing baby, as well as confirming gestational age, including looking for a heartbeat. Though our machine has the technical capacity, we do not provide 3-D scans. Though they may produce striking images in late pregnancy, early 3-D scans are less easy to interpret than 2-D scans, which clearly show the baby's outline and heartbeat.

All our staff are fully trained in early pregnancy ultrasound scanning, which includes a 2-day course, supervision of 150 scans and external assessment. For this purpose we offer early scans to local volunteers, which has turned out to be very popular and an unintended, but very effective, way of advertising the service. The ultrasound service is registered with the Care Quality Commission.

Whilst the service has occasionally been treated with suspicion by local health services, we are grateful that the centre has gradually established a good reputation amongst health professionals and the general public. Some have criticised our use of ultrasound scanning as emotionally manipulative. In response we would point out that every woman attending our centre chooses whether she has a scan or not, and that we are simply showing a truth in images – the visible presence of life – that may be denied by those around her. As Christians, we serve the Lord God of truth. We understand that, though the truth may disturb, ultimately it will be of benefit. A feedback questionnaire from women who attend confirms that they feel that their views are respected and they do not feel judged or pressured.

One woman's story:

Susan lived alone with her 18-month-old son and was pregnant again with a new partner. She had a history of drug and alcohol abuse and suffered domestic violence in the past. We were able to offer her time to talk about her situation, discuss the process of abortion, foetal development and other issues such as her financial and housing problems. Susan felt pressured into having an abortion by family and friends but also thought it was the best option for her and her son. She was keen for a scan which showed a 9-week baby with a heartbeat and limb movement. Susan was overwhelmed to see how developed the baby was and was very focused on how it was moving its feet. She felt this made it 'more human' and she wouldn't be able to have an abortion after knowing that it was a 'real baby'.

The scanner's perspective:

It is very powerful to see the effect a scan can have on a woman. We can sit and talk about a baby's development for hours but nothing has the same impact on people as seeing their own baby through ultrasound - especially when the heart beat and movement can be seen so early on.

What has been the response of abortion-minded women to a scan? More extensive data is available from the US in terms of the impact of ultrasound scanning in unplanned pregnancy. Centres there describe very high rates of women keeping a pregnancy following an ultrasound scan.³⁵ Heartbeat International report the number of pregnancy centres using ultrasound to have grown from 500 to 1500 in the last few years. Focus on the Family's Option Ultrasound program estimates that around 358,000 babies and mothers have been saved from abortion through the impact of ultrasound.

Through our service we have only limited means of quantifying the response, but we can confirm that the impact of an early scan is often profound, as illustrated in the case study. Whilst we generally do not know the outcome, we are aware of many women on Tyneside who have decided to continue with their pregnancy after visiting the centre. We would be pleased to help anyone interested in setting up a similar service in their area.



Chris Richards

³⁵ For example, <http://www.lifenews.com/2015/03/05/78-of-women-considering-an-abortion-choose-life-when-they-see-an-ultrasound/>

Lessons from Spurgeon on Coronavirus

Tim Dieppe takes a close look at how Charles Spurgeon preached during a cholera epidemic and what we can learn about how to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers of the Victorian era. Known as the 'Prince of Preachers', it is estimated that he preached the gospel to over a million people,³⁶ and personally baptised 15,000 new believers converted under his ministry. He was called to pastor New Park Street Chapel in Southwark, London in April 1854 when just 19 years old. Later that summer there was a cholera epidemic.

Lessons from the cholera epidemic

This resulted in over 600 deaths,³⁷ a mortality rate of 12.8% in some parts of the city. Three quarters of the residents of Soho fled the area in one week. I think there is much to learn from how Spurgeon responded to cholera that is relevant to how we should respond to coronavirus today. Geoff Chang has helpfully written³⁸ about Spurgeon's pastoral response, drawing largely on his autobiography. In this article, I want to look at what Spurgeon said in his sermons at the time to see what lessons can be drawn from them.

Fear of death

In a sermon preached on 18 February 1855³⁹ he spoke of the fear of death:

Who is the man that does not fear to die? I will tell you. The man that is a believer. Fear to die! Thank God, I do not. The cholera may come again next summer – I pray God it may not; but if it does, it matters not to me: I will toil and visit the sick by night and by day, until I drop; and if it takes me, sudden death is sudden glory.

On 14 October 1855,⁴⁰ in a sermon on Psalm 90:1 he spoke of experiencing God's protection:

Hast thou known what it is to dwell securely in God, to enter into the Most High, and laugh to scorn the anger, the frowns, the sneers, the contempt, the slander and calumny of men; to ascend into the sacred place of the pavilion of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and to feel thyself secure? And mark thee, thou mayest do this. In times of pestilence it is possible to walk in the midst of cholera and death, singing *'Plagues and deaths around me fly, Till he please, I cannot die.'*

It is possible to stand exposed to the utmost degree of danger, and yet to feel such a holy serenity that we can laugh at fear; too great, too mighty, too powerful through God to stoop for one moment to the cowardice of trembling.

Assurance of salvation

On 15 April 1855,⁴¹ he used cholera to illustrate how one can experience assurance of salvation:

You cannot say, can you, that you have all your salvation? But a Christian can. He can walk through the cholera and the pestilence, and feel that should the arrow smite him, death would be to him the entrance of life; he can lie down and grieve but little at the approach of dissolution, for he has all his salvation; his jewels are in his breast, gems which shall shine in heaven.

³⁶ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/blog-entries/who-is-charles-haddon-spurgeon/>

³⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1854_Broad_Street_cholera_outbreak

³⁸ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/blog-entries/spurgeon-and-the-cholera-outbreak-of-1854/>

³⁹ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/spiritual-liberty/#flipbook/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/spiritual-liberty/#flipbook/>

⁴¹ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/davids-dying-song/#flipbook/>

Conviction of sin

On 18 January 1857⁴² Spurgeon spoke of the conviction that the cholera epidemic brought, but then how many had subsequently turned away from God:

How many of the same sort of confessions, too, have we seen in times of cholera, and fever, and pestilence! Then our churches have been crammed with hearers, who, because so many funerals have passed their doors, or so many have died in the street, could not refrain from going up to God's house to confess their sins. And under that visitation, when one, two, and three have been lying dead in the house, or next door, how many have thought they would really turn to God! But, alas! when the pestilence had done its work, conviction ceased; and when the bell had tolled the last time for a death caused by cholera, then their hearts ceased to beat with penitence, and their tears did flow no more.

'The Voice of Cholera' Sermon

On 12 August 1866,⁴³ Spurgeon preached a sermon on Amos 3:3-6 titled 'The Voice of Cholera'. A new epidemic of cholera had broken out in the East End which claimed 5,596 lives.⁴⁴

Cleanliness is valuable

Spurgeon praises advances in cleanliness, better dwellings for the poor, and scientific research which had successfully mitigated the spread of cholera. He criticises those who thought that the disease should be left to its own devices. In a representative section, he says:

It seems to me that this disease is to a great extent in our own hands, and that if all men would take scrupulous care as to cleanliness, and if better dwellings were provided for the poor, and if overcrowding were effectually prevented, and if the water-supply could be larger, and other sanitary improvements could be carried out, the disease, most probably, would not occur; or, if it did visit us occasionally, as the result of filth in other countries, it would be in a very mitigated form.

The gospel has no quarrel with ventilation, and the doctrines of grace have no dispute with chloride of lime. We preach repentance and faith, but we do not denounce whitewash; and much as we advocate holiness, we always have a good word for cleanliness and sobriety.

Judgment of God

But then he goes on to say:

On the other hand, it is even more common for those who look to natural causes alone to sneer at believers who view the disease as a mysterious scourge from the hand of God. It is admitted that it would be most foolish to neglect the appointed means of averting sickness; but sneer who may, we believe it to be equally an act of folly to forget that the hand of the Lord is in all this.

He sees the cholera epidemic as a judgment of God and therefore calls for prayer and repentance for the people of London and the nation as a whole. He highlights four sins in particular that the people of London should repent of: drunkenness, licentiousness, neglect of worship, and Popery in the church – by which he means neglect of the gospel in the Established Church:

In our Established Church the gospel is no longer dominant, albeit that a little band of good and faithful men still linger in it, and are like a handful of salt amid general putrefaction.

⁴² <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/confession-of-sin-a-sermon-with-seven-texts/-flipbook/>

⁴³ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-voice-of-the-cholera/#flipbook/>

⁴⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cholera_outbreaks_and_pandemics#Fourth,_1863-1875

And so, making use of his text from Amos:

Can two walk together, then, except they be agreed? And as these things cannot be supposed to be agreeable to the mind and will of God, we cannot wonder if there should be a plague upon our cattle, and then a plague upon men, and if these should come sevenfold as heavy as they have ever come as yet.

Then, interpreting the next phrase of his text to mean that God never speaks without reason, he argues:

My brethren, our God is too gracious to send us this cholera without a motive; and he is moreover too wise, for we all know that judgments frequently repeated lose their force... Think you the Lord does this for nothing? The great Lion of vengeance has not roared unless sin has provoked him.

He then challenges the Christians as to how far they have been complicit in the sins he has listed:

Since I have already indicated our great public sins, I should like to ask Christians present how far they have been concerned in them... And so with the other sins which we have indicated. Have we all borne our earnest, fervent protest against them?

Spurgeon uses his text to argue that nothing happens by chance:

God ruleth and overruleth all things, and he doeth nothing without a motive... Let us conclude most surely that a purpose, consistent with the love and justice of God, lies hidden in the present harvest of death.

For the spread of the gospel

And what is this purpose?

If you ask me what I think to be the design, I believe it to be this – to waken up our indifferent population, to make them remember that there is a God, to render them susceptible of the influences of the gospel, to drive them to the house of prayer, to influence their minds to receive the Word, and moreover to startle Christians into energy and earnestness, that they may work while it is called to-day... Already I have been told by Christian brethren labouring in the east of London, that there is a greater willingness to listen to gospel truth, and that if there be a religious service it is more acceptable to the people now than it was; for which I thank God as an indication that affliction is answering its purpose.

God has done it

The final clause of his text is: *'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?'* Spurgeon argues:

Here is not intended moral evil — that rests with man — but physical evil, the evil of pestilence or famine! Shall there be cholera in the city, and God hath not done it? My soul cowered down under the majesty of that question, as I read it; it seemed to stretch its black wings over my head, and had I not known them to be the wings of God, I should have been afraid. The text talked with me in this fashion: It is not the cholera which has slain these hundreds, the cholera was but the sword; the hand which scattered death is the hand of a greater than mere disease. God himself is, traversing London.

Spurgeon concludes by exhorting his hearers to submit to God in repentance and prayer.

Lessons from Spurgeon

Spurgeon did not face coronavirus, but he did face the deadly cholera. He boldly preached that God was ruling over it and using it for his purposes. He struck a helpful balance between the extent to which we can take responsibility through cleanliness and the use of science, and the fact that God is nevertheless very much involved and using it for his purposes. Spurgeon called the nation and the city to repentance. He urged Christians to be vigilant in protesting about the sins of the nation. He called individuals to repent of their sins and get right with God. These are all helpful guides for how the UK church can respond to coronavirus today.

Tim Dieppe

Veganism: A Moral Matter?

Food. We all have our preference, our likes and dislikes. Food can be a means of bringing people together and a focus of vigorous friendly debate. Does pineapple belong on pizza? Should a scone be served with clotted cream or jam or both? How do you pronounce 'scone' anyway?

Not all discussion around food is just friendly banter. The procuring and preparing of certain foods is significant on a religious level and the Bible contains passages in both Old and New Testaments that speak to these matters. For many people around the world food is a religious and, increasingly, also a moral matter. In recent years one particular food ideology has gained traction in our culture: veganism.

Introducing veganism

Veganism – to be distinguished from its slightly less dogmatic and assertive cousin vegetarianism – is not just about diet. It campaigns for the removal of animal products from food, cosmetics and clothing, among other things. At its core, veganism is a philosophy of life that recognises animals as of at least equal value to human beings, if not more so. Many of its proponents religiously practice its tenets and believe it should be enforced for the good of the world.

There are over 600,000 vegans in the UK, up from around 150,000 in 2006.⁴⁵ While this is only a small percentage of the population, vegans are well motivated to convert others to their cause – the well-publicised annual 'Veganuary' encourages others to go vegan (although with a lopsided sex demographic of 87% female in 2019).

Despite its relatively small number of adherents and some concerns over its medical advisability, veganism presents itself as the only moral dietary option. What, if anything, does the Bible have to say to veganism's claims and what, if any, pastoral implications are there in a context where there is growing interest and acceptance of veganism?

A brief biblical overview of meat vs plant-based diets

God created humanity with the capacity to eat and enjoy food. From the beginning, this diet appears to have been vegan:

And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. (Genesis 1:29-30)

Of importance to note is that this diet was the same across species – a carnivore diet did not exist from the beginning. With the Fall of mankind (Genesis 3), and the entrance of death and decay into the world it is possible that mankind's descent into wickedness and evil included going beyond the dietary parameters set by God in his creation covenant. It is evident in Genesis 4 that animal sacrifice was being practiced. Why not taste the meat of what would have smelled not dissimilar to our barbecues today? James Hughes suggests the possibility that in the days leading up to the Flood, as mankind grew in evil to the point it completely consumed them (Genesis 6:5), meat eating – even cannibalism – may have been practised.⁴⁶ He comments:

Some men may have eaten meat for either of the following reasons:

⁴⁵ Lora Jones, *Veganism: Why are vegan diets on the rise?*, BBC News, 2 January 2020 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44488051> last accessed 09/06/2020).

⁴⁶ James Hughes, 'Why did God permit man to eat meat?' for Evangelical Presbyterian Church Toronto (updated version August, 2019), http://www.epctoronto.org/Press/Publications_JRHughes/Why_Meat_Web.htm (Last accessed 19/06/2020).

- They may have resorted to cannibalism. Cannibalism is found among the most degraded portions of mankind after the Flood, so it is not far-fetched to surmise that this same evil also occurred before the Flood. If men ate the flesh of other men, it is not inconceivable that they also found a reason in their invented religions to eat animal flesh.
- It appears that God introduced animal sacrifice after the Fall (Gen 3:21; 4:4,5) as a symbol of atonement from sin. It may be that men lusted after the 'food of God' and took animal flesh for food so that they could be 'like God'.

Regardless of the possibility that mankind ate meat prior to the Flood, God makes a covenant with Noah following the subsidence of the waters that specifically allows him to eat meat:

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (Genesis 9:3)

Various environmental, nutritional and scientific theories have been suggested for this change,⁴⁷ but the fact is we are not given a specific reason for it. Later in history, God makes a covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with his law recorded on many of the pages of the Pentateuch. As part of this law, differentiation was made between 'clean' and 'unclean' animals in Leviticus 11. Meat-eating was thus a natural and acceptable aspect of Jewish diet.

Thus, while meat eating in the pre-exilic period was normal,⁴⁸ we are reminded in the book of Daniel that it was not always righteous. The 'king's meat' allotted to the youths in Daniel 1 with which Daniel would not defile himself would have probably included unclean animals and was probably also dedicated to pagan gods. Thus, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael requested and ate only vegetables.

In New Testament times, Jesus declared all foods clean. In the context of dismissing the complaint that his disciples ate with unwashed hands, Jesus signals the end of the Jewish food laws:

Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled? (Thus he declared all foods clean.)' (Mark 7:18-19)

Jesus makes the emphatic statement that what an individual eats does not affect their spiritual standing before God. The point is reiterated in Peter's vision in Acts 10 in which he is shown a range of animals and is told to 'kill and eat'. Upon protesting that he has never eaten any unclean thing, Peter is told, 'What God has made clean, do not call common' (Acts 10:15). In 1 Corinthians 10:25 Paul instructs his readers to 'eat whatever is sold in the meat-market' and he tells Timothy to beware of people who 'require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving' (1 Timothy 4:3). Elsewhere both meat-eaters and vegetarians are urged to not judge one another on matters of food and drink, but to be conscientious, respectful and united in Christ (Romans 14; Colossians 2).

On the basis of these and other passages, it is impossible to make a case that God views veganism as a holier way of life. Thus any suggestion that meat-eating, veganism or any other dietary practice is morally superior is misplaced at best. That said, let us seek to grapple with veganism's moral claims.

⁴⁷ Jim Stambaugh, 'Creation's Original Diet and the Changes at the Fall', Journal of Creation 5, no 2 (August 1991): 130-138; Hughes, 'Why did God permit man to eat meat?' gives a good overview of some theories as well.

⁴⁸ 1 Kings 4:22-23 says that the daily provision for Solomon's court was 'thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten fat oxen and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, beside deer, gazelles, roebucks and fattened fowl'.

Three areas where vegan ideology is right

This world, its systems and broken structures

Veganism expresses concern for the state of the world in which we live: one of abuse, exploitation, poor stewardship of resources, cruelty etc. This is not at all the way things were meant to be (vegans are conscious of some sort of moral objectivity).

Pastorally, identifying and interacting with the positives of vegan ideology is important for meaningful dialogue to take place. We can acknowledge that humanity and animals did, at one point, coexist with a plant-based diet; there was no abuse, exploitation or even death in the world. Ultimately we look forward to a new and better Eden – the new heavens and new earth of righteousness where there will be no more death.

Humanity is primarily at fault for the state of the world

Some who live on a vegan diet do so without the strict rules and restrictions of veganism. Nevertheless, proper veganism goes far beyond diet and is an all-encompassing ideology – see the website of PETA (People For the Ethical Treatment of Animals).⁴⁹ Without arriving at all the same conclusions of vegan ideology, Christians can agree that humanity is responsible for the evil state of our world. Acknowledging the consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3 and confessing humanity's culpability for the world's brokenness can go a long way toward meaningful dialogue when engaging with the religious moralising of veganism.

We should take steps to see positive change in our world

We should never dismiss a sincere desire to see change for good in the world. Christians, recognising that salvation is by God's grace, affirm that we are born again to perform good works (Ephesians 2:10), acting honourably for God's glory (1 Peter 2:12), including what we eat and drink (1 Corinthians 10:31). Veganism argues that positive change can be attained through the mass adoption of the vegan lifestyle. PETA says that this would save

...nine billion animals from slaughter each year, but also would save humans from a diet known to cause heart disease, cancer and obesity. Instead of feeding grain to livestock, a plant-based diet makes sixteen times more grain available to hungry people. Eliminating intensive factory farming of animals would save precious water and topsoil; in addition, without the ozone-damaging nitrates resulting from billions of pounds of manure, our air would be cleaner and we would take a giant step toward fighting global warming. In this way, animals, humans and the environment are interconnected – we all stand to gain by not harming animals.⁵⁰

Much debate can be and is had on the validity of these and other claims, but it is good to acknowledge, without necessarily agreeing on the conclusions, their desire to see the world made better.

Three problems with vegan ideology

I am not vegan. I have vegan friends, can and do cook vegan-friendly meals, and find some vegan food to taste good. During the COVID-19 crisis, the church I pastor, The Angel Church, has been a part of feeding local vulnerable, sheltering and isolated individuals. With only a couple of exceptions, these meals have been vegan. Prepared for £1 a head or less, the meals have been nutritious, tasty, and inexpensive. So am I now a vegan convert? No – fundamentally because I disagree with a range of conclusions of vegan ideology. I find particularly untenable three overarching claims:

⁴⁹ www.peta.org.org (last accessed 19/06/2020).

⁵⁰ 'Why should we worry about animals when there are so many problems involving humans?', PETA, <https://www.peta.org/about-peta/fag/why-should-we-worry-about-animals-when-there-are-so-many-problems-involving-humans/> (last checked on 19/06/2020).

Veganism says that animals and humans are of equal value

Biblically, it is clear that there is a difference between humanity and other living beings. Only mankind is 'made in the image of God' with a creative ability, responsibility, intellect, conscience and the capability of dominion – things which reflect the character of the holy Creator in ways that animals do not. This, however, contradicts the vegan construct of 'speciesism'. PETA clarifies:

Speciesism is the human-held belief that all other animal species are inferior. Speciesist thinking involves considering animals – who have their own desires, needs, and complex lives – as means to human ends. This supremacist line of 'reasoning' is used to defend treating other living, feeling beings as property, objects, or even ingredients. It's a bias rooted in denying others their own agency, interests, and self-worth, often for personal gain.⁵¹

GoVeganWorld, another vegan campaign organisation filled London with posters on public transport last year with pictures of various young animals accompanied by the caption: 'I'm me, not meat'.⁵² One featured a picture of a cow and its offspring declaring, 'Dairy takes babies from their mothers. Go vegan.' Another says, 'It's not a personal choice when someone is killed'. The campaign is designed to promote the view that humans and animals are really equals, something that a Christian worldview denies.

Veganism asserts that eating meat is unjust and immoral

In fairness, the vegans I know convey this belief in a friendly way. With some exceptions, their desire is to win people positively. I do respect that and their motives. While at a birthday party, a vegan friend of mine was trying to convert the waitress to the 'good news' of veganism. Afterwards he turned to me and said 'A lot of people think I'm crazy when I tell them about veganism. But I'm sure you get that a lot too. We're similar in that way.' I couldn't argue with that and thus began a substantial and friendly conversation about veganism, the gospel and mortality.

Is it true that some farming practices are quite brutal and cruel? Yes. Is this universally the case? No. Another 'almost vegan' friend confesses she sometimes eats eggs from some rescue hens that someone keeps running free in her back garden. There are good, sympathetic and sustainable farming practices which should be encouraged. Arguably, controlling the population of wild animals (game meat) is important to maintaining healthy and sustainable ecosystems.⁵³

The killing of animals is not equivalent to murder and the eating of animal meat is not morally equivalent to cannibalism as veganism purports. Both the Old and New Testaments specifically permit meat-eating and the New Testament letters clearly indicate that abstaining from meat is a matter of individual conscience, except when associated with idol worship or offending another Christian's conscience. God defines the standard of what is right and just and it is not ours to add to what he has revealed.

Veganism attains righteousness through diet and abstinence

Veganism often exhibits a self-righteous spirit that looks down on meat-eaters. I have been told that veganism 'is about being a better person', 'being vegan helps you to be a good person', and even 'veganism has improved me spiritually'. As Christians, we cannot entertain the notion of achieving righteousness through any good work, much less by abstaining from certain foods and drink. Indeed, 1 Timothy 4:3 shows that believing abstinence from certain foods is a pathway to righteousness is giving heed to 'deceitful spirits' and 'doctrines of demons'. The apostle Paul says to the church in Colossae:

Such restrictions indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-prescribed worship, their false

⁵¹ 'What is Speciesism?', PETA, <https://www.peta.org/about-peta/faq/what-is-speciesism/> (last accessed 19/06/2020).

⁵² For details on these campaigns visit GoVeganWorld.com.

⁵³ Whit Gibbons, 'Why is Hunting Good for the Environment?' for Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, University of Georgia, November 2003. There are many resources available on this, not to mention logical reasoning - a vegan friend of mine acknowledges she doesn't have the answers to the real problems posed ecologically were everyone to go vegan.

humility, and their harsh treatment of the body; but they are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:23, Berean Study Bible)

Thus, the idea that a vegan lifestyle does anything to fix the problems of the world and the deep-seated depravity of mankind is misguided. It may make one feel good about oneself and, for some perhaps, good health, but ultimately does not make us right in our relationship with God or our fellow man.

Conclusion

In the past year, veganism has gained momentum as another bandwagon from which to virtuously signal 'Look at me! I'm a good person.' In many cases veganism is guilty of the idolatry spoken of in Romans 1:25 where the creature is elevated and worshipped and the Creator denied. While there are Christians who choose to adopt a vegan lifestyle, and they should not be judged any more than meat-eaters over their dietary choice, we should be under no illusion that this makes one right with God.

It is important to understand social issues as presented by our ever-changing cultural landscape. Veganism is just the latest in a long list that Christians must investigate and respond to in a pastoral and biblical way while upholding the grace of God in salvation to everyone – vegan or meat-eater – who believes!

Regan King

Francis Collins wins the Templeton Prize

In May, it was announced that Francis Collins was the recipient of this year's Templeton Prize. The Prize, established in 1972, by the investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, is an annual cash award of £1.1 million (\$1.3 million) to a living person who has made 'an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery or practical works'. Recently Dr Collins was interviewed by Jonah McKeown of the *Catholic News Agency* (CAN) – some extracts from that interview are included here.

Dr Francis Collins is, in his own words, a 'serious Christian'. Others would call him an evangelical Christian. Since 2019, he has been the director of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), the nation's largest medical research agency, spread across 27 institutions and centres, and with an annual budget of some \$41 billion. He is currently overseeing the NIH's collaboration with several pharmaceutical companies and government agencies to develop a vaccine against COVID-19.

He first came to prominence among the scientific community as professor of internal medicine and human genetics at the University of Michigan. There he led research teams who discovered the genes responsible for diseases such as cystic fibrosis, neurofibromatosis and Huntington's disease.

He first came to public attention in 1993 when he was appointed director of the National Center for Human Genome Research, overseeing the collaborative international Human Genome Project, which, in 2003, succeeded in sequencing the three billion DNA 'letters' in the human genome.

Apparently, his current vaccine project is one of the biggest challenges of his career and, when he is not working, he is finding solace in prayer and reading the Psalms. He has said, 'Like all crises, like all occasions of suffering, this is an opportunity where we can learn and grow. And I'm glad that I worship a God who knows about suffering.' Also, 'I pray for wisdom, for guidance, I pray for forgiveness for making mistakes along the way.'

Francis Sellers Collins was born in Virginia and home-educated until age 10. He then studied chemistry at college and graduate level followed by his MD at Yale Medical School. Until age 27 he swayed between agnosticism and atheism and was '...very happy with the idea that God did not exist and that he had no interest in me'. Then he became a Christian, in part due to C. S. Lewis' masterful book *Mere Christianity*, which lays out a rational case for God's existence.

In particular, Collins was fascinated by Lewis' examination of the basis of morality – why is there such a thing as good and evil, and why does it matter? Collins claims, 'This is where I think the most strict atheists find themselves in a real quandary. Because if they try to argue that our ideas about good and evil are solely driven by evolutionary pressures that have helped us survive, the ultimate consequence of that are that those are fictional concepts – that we've all been hoodwinked into imagining that there is such a thing as good and evil, and that we should stop paying attention to that and do whatever we please. And even the most ardent atheist has trouble with that conclusion.'

Today, Collins is outspoken about his Christian faith. He wrote a book in 2006 entitled, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* in which he describes how religious faith can motivate and inspire rigorous scientific research. From 2007, he and his wife, Diane, founded the non-profit BioLogos Foundation, which aims to foster discussion about harmony between science and biblical faith through articles, podcasts and other media. He has declared, 'I've found such joy in the ability to bring together the spiritual and the scientific perspectives that I feel this urge to share. Not to turn it into too dry an intellectual, philosophical discourse, but to talk about the joy that I have experienced and by God's grace, in being able to read God's word in the Bible and understand God's works in nature.'

Collins is, of course, aware that some research teams in the global race to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 may employ the use of human embryonic and foetal tissue derived from abortions in their work. Last year,

the US Department of Health and Human Services imposed a moratorium on NIH foetal tissue research derived from elective abortions. In a 1998 interview with *Scientific American*, Collins stated that he is, '...intensely uncomfortable with abortion as a solution to anything' and does not 'perceive a precise moment at which life begins other than the moment of conception'. And now in 2020, Collins says he considers the question of whether it is ethical to use human embryos and aborted fetuses for research is an '...important issue to think through carefully. I would be the first to say we should not be creating or destroying embryos – human embryos – for research, and we should not be terminating pregnancies for research.' Yet he does display something of a utilitarian streak. He has stated, 'But if there are embryos that are left over after *in vitro* fertilization – and the hundreds of thousands that are never going to be used for anything, they'll be discarded – I think it is ethical to consider ways in which research might make it possible to utilize that information to help somebody. And likewise, if there are hundreds of thousands of fetuses that are otherwise being discarded through what is a legal process in this country, we ought to think about whether it is more ethical to throw them away, or in some rare instance to use them for research that might be lifesaving.'

Collins says he has found it fascinating to observe how much the modern field of bioethics rests on a Judaeo-Christian foundation. 'The fact that we do value such things as benevolence, non-maleficence – that is, don't hurt somebody on purpose – as autonomy, as equity, as justice; all of those principles come directly out of the Bible', Collins has declared. 'And so, a secular ethicist who adheres to those – and they will – may not have quite the same sense that I do about the foundation on which they rest, which for me is very much God-given.'

Moreover, Collins has said if he could go back in time to talk to his 27-year-old atheist former self, he would encourage that young man to begin contemplating questions like, 'Why is there something instead of nothing? Is there a God, and how would you know if there were? What is love about? What is beauty about? Why are we here? Those are not questions where the scientific approach is going to give you much of an answer at all. Let's think about whether it's worth, before you die, giving a few minutes contemplation to that, and seeing if there's any other direction from which answers might come, other than the science lab.'

Finally, hearty congratulations, Francis, on winning the Templeton! We might at times wish your views and answers to some bioethical issues were clearer and more consistent. But we too are often muddled and the issues are thorny. That notwithstanding, we are glad that a brother in Christ is in such a powerful, policy-making position and on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we will give thanks for you and will pray for you.

Collins will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize in a virtual ceremony later this year. A million quid, eh? – I wonder if he tithes to his church.

John Ling

Book review: The Death of Western Christianity

***The Death of Western Christianity*, Patrick Sookhdeo
Isaac Publishing, 244pp, 2017, £12.99**

This is a well-written, bold and clear presentation of Dr Sookhdeo's thesis that Western Christianity has died as a result of, in the words of the subtitle, 'Drinking from the Poisoned Wells of the Cultural Revolution'.

In his introduction, by the use of various global and secular statistics, Dr Sookhdeo develops his argument, lamenting the decline of church attendance over recent decades. He does not hold back in explaining what he sees as the reasons for this trend:

Since the 1960s Christian leaders have progressively betrayed the gospel... humanist leaders were zealous and creative evangelists, surpassing the fervour of Christian missionaries.

In this book we have an analysis of Western culture, morality and materialism today (Chapters 2-4), a diagnosis (chapters 5-8), and a proposed solution (Chapters 9-10).

The author asks where truth may be found in a post-Christian era. 'Post-truth' ideology is defined and while recognising that 'there are no absolutes in postmodern thinking', he laments that people 'are too scared to challenge lies, because they themselves do not know what to believe'. Where does the visible church stand here? Dr Sookhdeo acknowledges it is not unaffected by this worldly infection and the implications of living in a post-truth era are spelled out. The intolerant marginalisation of Christianity is found to lie in the rejection of Christianity's claim that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ who alone is God's final revelation. Therefore, the West's problem today is its loss of a Christian identity; unbelief has created a vacuum and Islam is poised to fill the gap.

What is to be done? Dr Sookhdeo suggests that the church returns to the basics of the Christian faith as witnessed in its creeds, which should be re-introduced into its corporate worship services. Christian communities also need to train their young people and disciple its converts to believe that the Great Commission is still operative today.

Dr Sookhdeo is well equipped to write this book. He has been in the vanguard of holding forth the truth as it is in Jesus while being fully engaged for over forty years in evangelism and church planting. Through the work of Barnabas Fund he has provided the global church with aid in times of famine, war and natural disasters while also delivering essential training for Christian ministers. His expertise includes a thorough knowledge of Islam in its various forms and the forces that are now working havoc in Christendom. What Dr Sookhdeo says needs to be heard and taken to heart without losing heart. Acknowledging that things are this way we must surely ask, 'What can the righteous do?'

This book reminds me of that helpful volume, *Evangelicalism Divided* by Iain Murray (Banner of Truth, 2000) which records the crucial theological changes in the years 1950-2000, especially within the evangelical camp of the Church of England on the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Dr Sookhdeo's work is a contemporary sequel in this very sad saga of gospel decline in the West. He analyses the sick patient – the visible Church – and gives a clear diagnosis and prognosis.

This book is not easy reading as it documents attacks on the people of God. It exposes the hypocrisy of the visible church and reveals that the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office considers Christian missionaries to be 'spreading prejudiced views' and holding 'hateful attitudes towards homosexuals, transgender and intersexuality' (125).

This book is guaranteed to drive its readers to urgent prayer. This is needed because wisdom and grace are required from God to negotiate the present climate of opposition to biblical Christianity. Prayer for revival is urgent.

Rev Ian S McNaughton

Book review: Handle with Care

***Handle with Care: How Jesus Redeems the Power of Touch in Life and Ministry*, Lore Ferguson Wilbert**

B & H Publishing Group, 272pp, 2020, £15.99 (Kindle £5.59)

Abusing touch

Following sexual abuse allegations against the powerful film producer Harvey Weinstein in 2017, actress Alyssa Milano expressed concern over the scale of the problem of sexual abuse on Twitter later that year:

If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.

Within 24 hours, the words had been tweeted 500,000 times and more than 4.7 million different people had used the expression on Facebook. While the so-called *#MeToo* movement itself was not untainted by misuse (false accusations do happen⁵⁴), it did much to open the discussion regarding sexual abuse of women (as well as men).⁵⁵

With such abuse so prevalent in our world, it is no surprise that the idea of 'touch' or 'touching' has come to have negative and sexual connotations. Lore Ferguson Wilbert has written a unique book, filled with personal anecdotes, scientific facts (hugs are medically good for you), theological references and specific pastoral applications, all highlighting the necessity and power of human touch for personal, spiritual and relational wellbeing and pastoral care.

Redeeming touch

Wilbert, a regular contributor to *The Gospel Coalition* website, notes:

In the Old Testament books of the law there is a form of one statement made thirty-eight times: 'Do not touch'.

She then goes on to helpfully contrast this with the ministry of Jesus who touches and is touched – even when the touching is, according to Jewish Law, unclean. In the current COVID-19 crisis when 'cleanness', not touching and hand-washing are almost sacred rituals, we should be reminded of Jesus' care even for the most untouchable: the diseased, lepers and the dead. His physical touch brought them healing, cleansing and raising to life.

Some of Wilbert's writing makes difficult reading; I wondered at times if sharing some of her personal stories was strictly necessary. And yet, perhaps such transparency on her part is warranted to help us understand so that God's people might grow and be built up. I think she is probably right in acknowledging,

...most of our thoughts immediately run in the direction of erotic touch when we talk about touch at all. It's as if we cannot separate good, healthy, normal, human touch from what we envision to be its most intimate case scenario – or its most perverted forms... For fear of sinful sexual touch (erotic touch outside the covenant of marriage) we limit all or most touch. Yet our bodies are very literally aching to be touched.

⁵⁴ Karlyn Borysenko, 'The Dark Side Of #MeToo: What Happens When Men Are Falsely Accused', *Forbes*, 12/02/2020 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlynborysenko/2020/02/12/the-dark-side-of-metoo-what-happens-when-men-are-falsely-accused/#54acc996864d> (last accessed 19/06/2020).

⁵⁵ Thankfully, it is being recognised more that abuse is not perpetrated solely by men against women: Sylvia Ann Hewlett, '#MenToo: male victims of workplace sexual harassment share their shocking stories', *The Sunday Times*, 16/02/2020.

Self-care

Chapter Four particularly resonates with its reminder that our bodies – which God made – matter to him and so we should take care of them, not scoffing at terms such as ‘self-care’. We are psychosomatic, holistic beings – created with mind, body and spirit in one entity. Due to the effects of the Fall, we experience hurt, pain, exhaustion and stress. It is important to take care of and be good stewards of the bodies God has given us. This need not be selfish; rather, in this we are rested and enabled to better serve others. Wilbert roots this insight in a deep appreciation of Christ’s incarnation and that our bodies are part of God’s design for us as whole beings.

Are you touching any singles?

Having lived as a single woman to the age of 34, Wilbert helpfully comments on the needs and concerns of singles and the complications and loneliness of living with the absence of healthy touch (chapter 5). As with the rest of this volume, there is much food for thought here. For anyone who is more reserved or introverted, some of her suggestions may seem strange and perhaps intimidating, but she starts a conversation that needs to be had: do we let our sensitivities keep us from showing Christ-like care by touch? Wilbert helpfully outlines appropriate parameters for what constitutes healthy and unhealthy touch in this and other contexts.

Get out of the comfort zone and show Christ’s love

Wilbert writes:

We abide in the truth that we are infinitely loved by God and the loving way to interact physically with any human, male or female, young or old, is to care more about the other than we do ourselves.

As such, Christians need to realise that if we are not at the forefront of defining (biblically), advocating, and providing healthy touch, people may look for, experience and be harmed by unhealthy touch. I have heard something said along the lines of, ‘Perhaps if we valued and accepted healthy non-sexual touch more we would see less of the unhealthy sexual touch so prevalent in western society’. I think there is something to this. While I think Wilbert may be overly critical of the ‘Purity Movement’ of the 90s and 2000s, I think she does have a point in highlighting its emphasis on negative prohibitions often without balancing positive affirmations of things such as healthy touch.

Ultimately, looking to Christ’s example is key in redeeming our cultural abuses of touch. The book also contains a letter to those who have been abused and questions for reflection as a useful and thought-provoking resource. I don’t necessarily agree with all her conclusions or applications, but *Handle with Care* stands apart for stimulating reflection on a subject that, I fear, is often not considered. Recommended.

Regan King

Update on Life Issues - June 2020

Abortion

Abortion statistics – 2019

Brace yourself, these are the worst statistics ever, ever since the 1967 Abortion Act legalised the procedure. Published on 11 June, the 2019 abortion figures for England and Wales record a total of 209,519, which is the sum for 207,384 residents plus 2,125 non-residents. The rate of abortion during 2019 was the highest ever at 18 per 1,000 resident women aged 15-44. Although most (82%) were performed under 10 weeks of gestation, 2% were at 20 weeks and over. The number after 24 weeks (the normal legal limit) was 279. And 126 abortions involved 'selective reduction' as a result of overzealous IVF treatments. The detailed data can be viewed [here](#).

Then consider these weighty facts and figures. Almost all (99%) of these abortions were NHS-funded with 74% sub-contracted to the independent sector clinics, such as Bpas and Marie Stopes. Medically-induced (as opposed to surgical) abortions accounted for 73% of the total.

Numbers carried out under the different grounds were similar to previous years. For example, 202,975 (98%) were performed under ground C, the comprehensive 'social clause' compared with 196,083 (97.7%) in 2018. Of these 99.9% were again reportedly due to a risk to the mother's mental health. A further 3,183 (2%) were conducted under ground E (the 'handicap clause') including 656 for Down's syndrome.

A total of 40% of women undergoing abortions in 2019 had had one or more previous abortions (88 women had already had 8 or more) and 55% were already mothers having had one or more previous pregnancies that resulted in a livebirth or a stillbirth.

It is instructive to compile an archetypal woman who aborted her unborn child during 2019. She is 22 years old, white, unmarried, living in London with a partner. She has never had an abortion before. Now she is 6 weeks pregnant. She attends an independent clinic for a medically-induced abortion, under ground C, funded by the NHS.

What should we think about all this? These figures typically get worse and worse each year, but these are the gravest ever. 4,000 each week, 800 every MTWThF, on your doorstep. Does it matter? Isn't it just the way things are? Should we care? Doesn't abortion solve a problem? After all, is it really a real child? Who wanted it anyway? We shame ourselves by such thoughts. They are sub-standard Christian notions. Each little number represents a now lifeless child and a childless mother. What should be the proper Christian response? Pray, educate, engage, care, support. Have you?

Abortion in Northern Ireland

This sad and convoluted saga has rumbled on. After a vote in July 2019, new regulations for the provision of abortion services were drawn up by Westminster that came into force in Northern Ireland on 31 March 2020. The matter was meant to be debated by 17 May, but the coronavirus crisis intervened. The new enactment date was moved to 14 May. Many in Ulster were incensed – abortion is a devolved matter and therefore should be decided not by Westminster but by the newly-restored Stormont Assembly.

Wednesday 25 March was a sad day for Northern Ireland. It was the day that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) published the new legal framework for abortion services across the Province. It means that abortion will be legal up to 12 weeks for any reason and up to 24 weeks in cases of risk to the mental or physical health of women. It will mean essentially 'abortion on request' up until 24 weeks. In addition, abortion on the grounds of serious disability, including 'non-fatal disabilities', will be permitted up to birth, namely, 40 weeks. The door of entitlement has been flung wide open because sex-selective abortions, abortions for Down's syndrome, abortions for cleft lip will all be sanctioned.

Moreover, these new regulations were approved contrary to the democratic rights of the people – 79% of respondents in a recent NIO consultation voted against the proposals. On 2 June, the Assembly voted, 46 vs. 40, to reject ‘the imposition of abortion legislation’ formulated at Westminster. The vote will have no effect on the new laws but it sent a strong message to Westminster that the regulations are not supported by Stormont.

Following that win at Stormont, momentum to undo some of the extreme abortion measures by Westminster continued to build. On 4 June, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP was granted an urgent question in the House of Commons with other MPs putting pressure on the Government to hand back control of abortion law to the Assembly. He argued that, ‘Since the Northern Ireland Assembly is sitting again, and has clearly expressed a view opposing the Westminster Government’s abortion regulations, they should be scrapped and the power to decide on this devolved matter returned to Stormont.’ However, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Robin Walker MP, insisted that the Government had a legal duty to proceed with these abortion regulations.

Mr Walker also told the Commons that, ‘The Regulations are due to be debated in this House at the Delegated Legislation Committee on Monday 8 June, and in the Lords after that.’ Voting was expected when MPs and Peers would have the opportunity to vote down the regulations. Ahead of those votes, Northern Irish Peer Baroness Nuala O’Loan and Northern Irish MP Carla Lockhart launched an open letter to Peers and MPs in England, Wales and Scotland to ask them to vote against the regulations.

On 8 June, a Delegated Legislation Committee sat to debate the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No.2) Regulations 2020. Despite excellent pro-life speeches by Carla Lockhart, Ian Paisley and others, the final vote was 15 vs. 2 in favour of imposing this Statutory Instrument. On Monday 15 June, there was a 90-minute debate in the House of Lords. Sadly, 355 Peers voted for the Regulations and 77 voted against. Two members, Baroness O’Loan and Lord Shinkwin, proposed motions to decline the Regulations. The former was rejected by 388 vs. 112 votes and the latter was ‘not moved’. Then on Wednesday 17 June, the Regulations proceeded to the House of Commons where 253 MPs voted in favour of them and 136 voted against.

The upshot – now the law in Northern Ireland allows for abortion, unconditionally, on demand up to 24 weeks. Safeguards, such as a requirement for two doctors to certify an abortion, have been abandoned. Abortions up to 12 weeks can be signed off by only one doctor, nurse or midwife. Sex-selective abortions are permissible. Unborn children with disabilities can now be aborted up to birth. In short, MPs from England, Wales and Scotland have imposed abortion laws on Northern Ireland that are more extreme than anywhere else in Great Britain. The lovely pro-life Province is no more. The decriminalisation of abortion across Northern Ireland is the sad and tragic end to this saga.

Abortion (Cleft Lip, Cleft Palate and Clubfoot) Bill (2019-21)

The 1967 Abortion Act generally allows abortions for any reason up to 24 weeks of pregnancy. After that point, abortions are permitted if the mother’s health is at serious risk, or if the unborn child could be born ‘seriously handicapped’. However, ‘seriously’ can be widely interpreted and can allow late-term abortions for unborn children with medical conditions, which can be easily corrected by surgery.

On 3 June, Fiona Bruce MP presented the above Private Members’ Bill to the House of Commons. Officially it is described as a ‘Bill to amend the Abortion Act 1967 to exclude cleft lip, cleft palate and clubfoot as qualifying physical abnormalities for the purposes of medical termination of pregnancy under section 1(1)(d).’

In other words, it seeks to clarify the 1967 Act so that these medical conditions cannot be used as grounds for abortion, as they currently are. As it was the First Reading of the Bill there was no debate. The Second Reading, where debate normally takes place, is scheduled for Friday 10 July 2020.

This issue of abortion for such minor and correctable conditions is of personal significance to Fiona Bruce as

her son was born with a club foot. Decades after his club foot was corrected by two surgical operations and a year of physiotherapy, her son is now studying for a doctorate at Oxford.

IVF and ARTs

Surrogacy in Ukraine

Surrogacy is always a bad idea. The coronavirus pandemic has made it even worse. Consider the Ukraine, the hothouse for international commercial surrogacy. It is legal there. Also it is relatively cheap, medically advanced, and with plenty of willing, poor young women. Unlike most Asian countries Ukraine still welcomes overseas couples. Indeed, it recognises the commissioning parents as the biological parents. In addition, it does not limit payments to the surrogates.

An estimated 500 couples a year come to Ukraine to collect their babies from its 50 or so surrogate clinics. Enter the coronavirus. Such surrogate traffic ground to a halt. The babies and parents were trapped apart. From early June some foreign commissioning parents have been allowed in. But when will all parents meet their babies? What about commissioning parents losing interest? Who will pay for the babies' extra accommodation costs? Meanwhile, who will care for and cuddle these babies? A calamity? Yes, it is.

A baby girl for transgender parents

Be honest, you would never have predicted this predicament. In May, a British couple, who are both transgender, announced the birth of their first child. Hannah and Jake Graf's daughter was born in April via a surrogate.

Interviewed on ITV's *Good Morning Britain*, Hannah Graf, who came out as a trans-woman in 2013, said, 'I never thought I would be in this position to be in a relationship, or be married, or have kids. The fact that I have found Jake, we got married and having our little baby is amazing.'

After getting 'married' in 2018, Hannah and Jake found a surrogate through the National Fertility Society. The baby is genetically linked to Jake, who paused his testosterone therapy for six months during his transition in 2008, so that his ova could be harvested and frozen at a fertility clinic. Donor sperm then was used.

The couple want to share their story to let other transgender people know that having a family is possible. Hannah said, 'We have had such an outpouring of love coming towards us. From the LGBT community, from people who aren't able to have babies and are thinking about the surrogacy option, and people who are in a very low place because of coronavirus and just want a bit of joy in their world.' Well, who would have thought? Look where 40 years of changing public mores and assisted reproductive technologies have landed us.

A baby boy for a male same-sex couple

Ross and Chris Muller from Edinburgh, the first male same-sex couple to receive IVF on the NHS, have announced they are expecting a baby son via a surrogate this summer.

The Scottish Government had banned using NHS funding for fertility treatment via surrogacy – that meant that homosexual men were excluded. That ban was lifted in 2018. The NHS initially said it would not consider treating a male same-sex couple. But after intervention by their MP, the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary agreed to treat the Mullers.

The couple found their own surrogate in England. Eight embryos were created from donated ova and Ross's sperm. One was transferred to the surrogate last November, resulting in the pregnancy.

Chris hopes that sharing their experience will encourage other LGBTQ families to investigate their fertility treatment options. He said, 'A lot has changed since what we went through – the forms don't say 'mother and father', they say 'parent A and B' – it's little things like that. I think it will be a lot easier for people to go down this path if they want to.'

Man is still a mother

Freddy McConnell, born a woman, was, in 2017, issued with a Gender Recognition Certificate, which gave legal recognition to his male gender. Later that year, he underwent fertility treatment, became pregnant, and gave birth to a son in January 2018. But because he had given birth he had to be registered as his child's 'mother'. In 2019, the High Court ruled that McConnell was a 'male mother' – a person of the male gender who has given birth.

That 2019 case, before Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division, established an important opinion. It stated, 'The principal conclusion at the centre of this extensive judgment can be shortly stated. It is that there is a material difference between a person's gender and their status as a parent. Being a 'mother', whilst hitherto always associated with being female, is the status afforded to a person who undergoes the physical and biological process of carrying a pregnancy and giving birth. It is now medically and legally possible for an individual, whose gender is recognised in law as male, to become pregnant and give birth to their child. Whilst that person's gender is 'male', their parental status, which derives from their biological role in giving birth, is that of 'mother'.'

In May 2020, the Court of Appeal upheld that 2019 decision. In other words, McConnell again failed to be registered as the child's 'father' on the birth certificate. This trans-man, who gave birth, is still to be regarded as the child's 'mother'. Had McConnell's appeal been successful, his child would have been the first to be born in the UK without a legal mother.

McConnell has responded to the judgment, 'This isn't about a man having a baby. This is about all trans-people retaining their autonomy and their right to start a family in whatever way they wish, and having their identity recognised in that, or at least respected.' It is understood that he will seek permission to apply to the Supreme Court.

Surrogacy US-style

Barrie Drewett-Barlow is a British expat. He and his then-partner, Tony, were the first same-sex couple in Europe to have their names on the birth certificates of their children. Now they live in a US\$7-million mansion in Florida and run an international surrogacy agency.

Barrie and Tony have had a long partnership. They also have an unusual family life with their four sons and a daughter created with the help of a variety of ova donors and surrogates. In 2014, Barrie and Tony got 'married'. By October 2019, they had separated. And Barrie had partnered with Scott Hutchinson, who was half his age, and who used to date Barrie's 20-year-old daughter, Saffron.

This coming October, Barrie and Scott are expecting triplet daughters via a surrogate mother, selected because of her 'gorgeous looks' and high IQ. They all plan to live under the same roof. Tony has agreed to be godfather to the triplets. As Barrie has said, 'Tony is Dad, I'm Daddy and while at the moment Scott is stepdad, soon he's going to be Daddy Two.' Even that is not all – Barrie has also donated sperm to a lesbian couple in the UK and both of the women are pregnant and due to give birth in September.

As already stated above, 'Well, who would have thought? Look where 40 years of changing public mores and assisted reproductive technologies have landed us.'

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

MSP and euthanasia

A 34-year-old man, known only as MSP, was to be kept in intensive care at Barnsley Hospital in an induced coma and denied clinically-assisted nutrition and hydration (CANH) until he dehydrated to death. Mr Justice Hayden at The Court of Protection in London made this decision on 1 June in the case of Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust vs. MSP [2020] EWCOP 26.

MSP had a history of serious depression, self-harming, mental illness and chronic bowel difficulties. In October 2019, he had a temporary stoma inserted as doctors tried to overcome the bowel problem. He 'utterly loathed life with a stoma'. MSP repeatedly expressed great horror at that prospect and his parents believed, given his 'advance directive', drawn up on 4 February 2020, and their many earlier and subsequent conversations, that he would commit suicide if released from hospital. However, for reasons not entirely clear, the 'directive' was produced only post-surgery by MSP's parents and, because it was unwitnessed, it proved to be 'legally invalid'. Later in February 2020, he suffered a significant prolapse which he found distressing. On 14 May, MSP insisted that this temporary stoma be removed. A few days later, MSP was rushed to hospital with abdominal pain and sepsis. But after an attempt at corrective surgery, Mr M, the on-duty consultant gastroenterological surgeon, decided, because MSP's condition was life threatening, that the stoma would have to be permanent. MSP consented, having apparently changed his mind, perhaps when faced with the possibility of an imminent death. At that time MSP obviously had mental capacity. On 27 May the stoma was formed. The operation left MSP in intensive care, ventilated and heavily sedated.

Surprised by MSP's apparent change of heart, the Barnsley Hospital made an urgent out-of-hours application to Mr Justice Hayden to decide if life-saving treatment should continue in MSP's 'best interests'. On 1 June, Mr Justice Hayden made the order to withdraw life support. Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust said that following the Court's decision, 'The Trust will now proceed, in discussion with the patient's parents, to withdraw treatment. The patient will be provided with palliative care to ensure that, as far as practicable, he retains the greatest dignity and suffers the least discomfort until such time as his life comes to an end.' Lawyers for the Hospital reported on 10 June that MSP had died.

This case raises serious questions. First, MSP was not terminally ill. Second, on 27 May, he changed his mind by consenting to the permanent stoma operation. Therefore his last wish was to live. Third, he had a good 60% to 70% chance of surviving. Fourth, though stomas can require emotional adjustment they are commonplace life-savers – some 200,000 people in the UK live with them. Fifth, although MSP did have capacity enabling him to consent, he later lacked capacity because he was sedated. Sixth, if allowed out of the coma, he would probably have been able to breathe and eat and drink. Seventh, this was not medical treatment, this was not even 'palliative sedation', it was 'terminal sedation', a slow form of euthanasia commonly practised in the Netherlands by medical practitioners uneasy about administering a lethal injection. Eighth, major medical crises regularly lead to suicidal thoughts, but given time, a majority of patients recover a buoyancy and are glad to live again.

Yet, despite all these arguments, Mr Justice Hayden, apparently disregarding MSP's change of mind, and believing that MSP's true intention was still his February 'advance directive', even though it was not legally valid, ruled that MSP should be allowed to die rather than live with a stoma bag. He found that MSP had, 'made a practical, utilitarian calculation that life in these circumstances is not what he wants.' But was the withdrawal of food and water really in MSP's 'best interests'? The Judge insisted that, 'No amount of support, love or understanding could change MSP's mind.' Was this true? Was it ever tried? Had MSP simply been denied, by the Hospital and the Court, any opportunity to recover? This was not doing the right thing. This was wrong. Where is this type of medico-legal thinking and practice heading? Are we not again somewhere down that road of killing patients deliberately? The tragedy of MSP is a model case of non-voluntary euthanasia, where the patient is killed without an explicit request because he is incompetent, meaning he is senile, newborn or, of course, comatose. This is beyond troublesome.

Germany approves assisted suicide

Assisted suicide is a fundamental right. What? What! On 26 February, Germany's Federal Constitutional Court handed down a long-awaited judgement endorsing the legality of assisted suicide. It ruled that a 2015 law banning suicide with professional assistance – 'business-like facilitation' Dignitas-style – was unconstitutional, as it deprived terminally-ill patients of 'the right to a self-determined death'. The move is deeply controversial given Germany's record of human rights' abuses under the Nazi regime.

The existing law, Paragraph 217 of Germany's Criminal Code, was passed in 2015 to stop people from offering the kind of assisted suicide service that is legal in neighbouring Switzerland. The Government now says it needs to study the ruling before redrafting the legislation. The Court has conceded that some restrictions are still possible – as long as 'sufficient space remains for the individual to exercise their right to a self-determined death and to pursue and carry out the decision to end their life on their own terms.' As one observer summarised it, in Germany now 'everyone has the right to [assisted] suicide, regardless of age and illness.' So, its highest Court has not only decriminalised assisted suicide; it has described suicide as a fundamental human right. And because most German doctors oppose it, there is obviously a legitimate need for commercial suicide-assistance services.

This is even more radical than legislation in Belgium and the Netherlands, where patients are supposed to be terminally ill. In Germany any reason will be sufficient – fear of illness or old age, romantic disappointments, professional failure, or just the feeling that life is no longer interesting.

The Court's press release stated that suicide '... must, in principle, be respected by state and society as an act of autonomous self-determination.' This notion, the Court said is consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights and decisions by the European Court of Human Rights. The German Court continued, 'The right to a self-determined death is not limited to situations defined by external causes like serious or incurable illnesses, nor does it only apply in certain stages of life or illness.' And, 'This right is guaranteed in all stages of a person's existence. The self-determined act of ending one's life is a direct, albeit final, expression of the pursuit of personal autonomy inherent in human dignity.' In other words, autonomy is more important than life itself.

This is a serious paradigm shift in West European bioethical thinking and practice. While there is no consensus across Europe on this issue, the Bundesverfassungsgericht's decision will be a powerful influence on the judiciaries in other countries. It is an astonishing capitulation to extreme libertarianism.

Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in Germany have united against the ruling and issued a joint statement. It said, 'We fear that allowing organised services for suicide could subtly place old or ill people under pressure. The more natural and accessible options for assisted suicide become, the greater the danger that people in an extremely desperate situation will feel internally or externally pressurised ... to put an end to their own lives.' Das ist so wahr!

Genetic Engineering

Improved CRISPR-Cas9 genome-editing system

Conventional CRISPR systems include an enzyme called Cas9, which recognizes and cuts a target stretch of DNA – it is the 'molecular scissors'. To edit DNA sequences, the Cas9 enzyme must first detect a short genetic sequence, called a protospacer-adjacent motif (PAM), embedded in the target DNA. The most commonly-used Cas9 variant does not work properly unless it detects a PAM that has a chemical makeup known as NGG.

Now Benjamin Kleinstiver and his colleagues at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, report that they have engineered Cas9 enzymes (named SpG and SpRY) that can recognize a wide variety of PAMs, not just the NGG sequence. The authors used their new enzymes to edit the genomes of human cells in a laboratory, targeting many previously inaccessible regions of the genome. This updated, improved system

could aid the correction of mutations associated with conditions, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and chronic pain.

The work is reported as, 'Unconstrained genome targeting with near-PAMless engineered CRISPR-Cas9 variants' by R T Walton *et al.*, in *Science* (2020, **368**: 290-296).

CRISPR-edited cells safe in humans

The first human phase 1 clinical trial of cells modified with CRISPR gene-editing technology appears to be generally safe and lasting.

A team led by You Lu at the West China Hospital in Chengdu took immune system T cells from people with aggressive lung cancer and applied CRISPR to them to disable a gene called *PD-1*. Usually, this gene's product, PD-1 protein, sends signals that keep immune cells from mounting an attack against the body's own tissues, but active *PD-1* can open the door to the spread of cancer. In other words, knocking out *PD-1* on T cells should confer antitumour activity against the lung cancer.

The team injected each of the study's participants with edited versions of their own T cells. Participants experienced only mild to moderate side effects, and potentially dangerous off-target mutations caused by gene editing – the researcher's main fear – were limited.

This preliminary trial was significant, but also inevitably limited. The modified cells remained in the blood for about 4 weeks, showing that the strategy could possibly have a prolonged effect. And the trial involved only 12 people with cancer, and it did not lengthen the participants' lives.

The work is reported as, 'Safety and feasibility of CRISPR-edited T cells in patients with refractory non-small-cell lung cancer' by You Lu *et al.*, in *Nature Medicine* (2020, **26**: 732-740).

Miscellaneous

Coronavirus and bioethics

Anyone and everyone seemingly has something to say about coronavirus. Whatever. But let no-one underestimate the global devastation caused by this wretched little virus – this invisible enemy with the strain name of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (or SARS-CoV-2), which causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (or COVID-19). And the costs of this pandemic are mounting. Currently they include unexpected deaths, loss of jobs, family separations, doubting scientists, dishonest politicians, conspiracy theorists, business collapses, government U-turns, failed targets, disrupted education, food shortages, pulpit proclamations and so much more. It's enough to make the head ache and the heart faint. The future costs will be even larger and largely unknown. A long-lasting global recession is talked of, and, without an effective vaccine, COVID-19 may be with us, wreaking havoc, for many years to come.

Moreover, apart from the dire daily death data, the talk has mostly been about scientific and medical issues – the R values, social distancing, testing, tracking, tracing, vaccines, drug treatments, and so on. But what about bioethical issues and coronavirus? Not much of that from the media and the policymakers. Even so, there is a connection, albeit, largely overlooked. Take four such topics.

First – truthfulness and transparency. These are the proper marks of decent government. Anyone who has watched the daily TV updates from 10 Downing Street will know the failures on both of these counts. Misinformation, fake numbers and an uneasy, affected bonhomie have been their characteristics. How many people have been tracked and traced? What about ibuprofen as treatment? What about 1-metre social distancing? Has the Joint Biosecurity Centre been established? How many tests have been completed? Have care home residents been neglected? Just watch those scientists and politicians squirm. Come on men (and women), tell the truth.

Second – resources. When medical resources are overstretched, as they undoubtedly have been, how is patient care to be allocated? In crude terms, who gets access to that last ventilator? The previously-healthy 45-year-old man, or the 90-year-old lady with Parkinson’s from the local care home? Not all patients are equal. Or should the worst off have priority? Who decides? On what grounds? Are we really ‘all in this together’? When push comes to shove are we, disappointingly, all pragmatists? Can money buy not just face masks, but also a jump up the queue? Is there a proper pecking order – me, family, church, neighbour, stranger?

Third – assisted suicide and euthanasia. What affect will the pandemic have on the debate around these issues? If COVID-19 brings on unexpected deaths and tidies up the numbers of long-term sick, surely that is a decent and positive outcome? After all, what’s wrong with survival of the fittest? Are we not really all utilitarians at heart? And should there be a ‘duty to die’?

Fourth – vaccines. They are heralded as the way out of this crisis, the ultimate ‘exit strategy’. Yet some past vaccines have been created using cells from (either recent or historic) aborted human embryos and fetuses. Will ethical COVID-19 vaccines be produced and widely available? We should be told. And if only unethically-derived vaccine is available, are we morally obliged to use it, not only for our own safety but, importantly, for that of others? Or is that just a convenient consequentialist argument? And are vaccine trials acceptable, giving placebos alongside unfamiliar medicines of unknown efficacy? When biology conflicts with social justice, what are we to do?

These are four issues and questions, and there are several more, mostly unasked and unanswered. See, awkward bioethics creeps in everywhere. After 2,000 years under the combined sway of the wholesome Judaeo-Christian doctrines and the Hippocratic Oath, medical ethics and practice, and us, have drifted way off course. For human life to thrive, it is more than a matter of technology and money, deep bioethical thinking and practice are also required to ensure that everyone is valued and protected. What about the disadvantaged and the vulnerable? What has happened to freedom, fairness and public health? Is bluster, obscurity and self-interest really the way to handle a pandemic? Oh, for some global, truthful, bioethical leadership.

Anosmia and ageusia

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us these two new words, unless, of course, you are already some sort of New Testament Greek scholar. While a new and continuous cough and a high temperature have long been recognised as possible symptoms of COVID-19, a loss of smell (anosmia) or taste (ageusia) were added to the list much later by the UK Government.

Lots of respiratory viruses can cause problems with smell receptors. And in, for example, South Korea, where testing for COVID-19 has been extensive, 30% of patients testing positive have presented with anosmia as their major symptom in otherwise mild cases. However, the onset of the hay fever season may well confuse such diagnoses. Maybe using perfumed soap should be the order of the day for those frequent hand-washing sessions. Warning – do not try eating it to test for ageusia.

Stem-cell Technologies

Stem cells and Parkinson’s

The idea of repairing the brain by replacing the neurons that die in Parkinson’s disease has been a long-standing dream for stem-cell researchers. Over several decades many cell types have been suggested as candidates. These include cells from the midbrain of aborted human fetuses and human embryonic stem cells, neither of which are bioethically acceptable to many. Therefore there is particular interest in any treatment using adult or induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs). Here is one such.

A team of investigators from the McLean and the Massachusetts General Hospitals has reported

remarkable results in a recent issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The article entitled, 'Personalized iPSC-Derived Dopamine Progenitor Cells for Parkinson's Disease' is by J S Schweitzer *et al.*, *NEJM*, (2020, **382**: 1926-1932).

The researchers reprogrammed a 69-year-old Parkinson's patient's skin cells to induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), then differentiated them into dopaminergic progenitor cells and transferred them (six months apart) into the left and right hemispheres of the brain of the patient. The idea is that the cells will implant and release the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is lacking in Parkinson's patients.

The patient reported an improvement in his quality of life. Routine activities, such as tying his shoes, walking with an improved stride, and speaking with a clearer voice, have become possible again. Kwang-Soo Kim, the team leader, said, 'Because the cells come from the patient, they are readily available and can be reprogrammed in such a way that they are not rejected on implantation. This represents a milestone in 'personalised medicine' for Parkinson's.'

Maybe. But they are results from only a single patient. And there are other peripheral problems. For a start, the patient, Dr George Lopez, helped fund the research. Would this have distorted his and the team's judgements? Is the patient above the science? Should a wealthy patient jump the queue? A proper clinical trial is called for.

Good news for fatties and baldies

Stem cells derived from fat can lead to hair regrowth for people with a common type of baldness, namely, androgenetic alopecia (AGA). South Korean researchers showed that the use of extracts of fat tissue – termed adipose-derived stem-cell constituent extract (ADSC-CE) – increased both hair thickness and density in patients. A double whammy for the obese and receding.

Dr Sang Lee from Pusan National University Yangsan Hospital and his colleagues conducted a randomised, placebo-controlled trial in middle-aged men and women to explore the effects and safety of ADSC-CE in AGA.

First, the team disrupted the membrane of stem cells found in fat tissues using a low-frequency ultrasound wave and enriched the secreted stem cells with protein. They recruited 38 patients – 29 men and nine women – with AGA for the clinical trial. One half of the patients applied the ADSC-CE lotion, twice daily, to their scalp with their fingers, and the other applied a placebo solution. After 16 weeks, the group that used the ADSC-CE lotion showed a significant increase in hair density of 28.1% in comparison to 7.1% in the control group, and also hair thickness with 14.2% greater in comparison to 6.3% in the control group. No side effects were recorded.

The research has been published as, 'A randomized, double-blind, vehicle-controlled clinical study of hair regeneration using adipose-derived stem cell constituent extract in androgenetic alopecia' by Young Jin Tak *et al.*, in *Stem Cells Translational Medicine* (18 May 2020).

USA and Elsewhere

The race to the White House

It will certainly be on Tuesday 3 November. And the winner will definitely be the 46th incumbent of the White House. And now we know it will either be the 74-year-old, Presbyterian, businessman, Donald Trump, or the 77-year-old Roman Catholic, lifetime politician, Joseph Biden unless, of course.... What a choice – the Republican Twitter bully vs. the gaffe-ridden Democrat. And bioethically they are oceans apart. On bioethical issues there is no contest. Trump has steered his administration in a positively pro-life direction, like no other previous president. By contrast, Biden is a pro-choice extremist, wanting *Roe vs. Wade* as federal law, abortion up to birth and the restoration of federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

Then there is the no-small matter of choosing running mates, potential vice-Presidents. Will Trump again pick the thoroughly pro-life Mike Pence? Will Biden pick the thoroughly pro-abortion Elizabeth Warren, or Kamala Harris, or even Michelle Obama?

Not long ago, this 2020 election looked as if the defining issue would be the value and protection of human life, especially unborn human life. Now it looks as if tackling the coronavirus pandemic and the planned return to normal life and the recovery of the economy will be centre stage. Or will racism trump all other issues?

Overturning *Roe vs. Wade*

The repeal of the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* case is still the major aim of pro-life supporters in the USA. Apart from Justice Clarence Thomas, it is not generally known where the other eight members of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) stand on overturning *Roe*. Hints are emerging. For example, their support for overturning legal precedent, known as *stare decisis*, and Justice Kavanaugh's recent decision citing the overturning of abortion precedent as one instance where the SCOTUS can go, and has gone, back on *Roe*, is an encouraging sign showing that the conservative Justices on the SCOTUS are open to reversing precedent and abortion precedent in particular.

There are nine members of the SCOTUS. Most observers believe there are from 3 to 5 votes in favour of repealing *Roe*, with Justice Thomas firmly in support. Justices Kavanaugh, Gorsuch and Alito are also likely to support reversal while Chief Justice Roberts is a 'maybe'. Some pro-life legal scholars think it would be helpful to replace one of the four pro-abortion liberal Justices with another conservative to make it even more likely that there are enough votes to overturn *Roe*. The only way to accomplish this is to secure a second term for President Donald Trump to have another four years enabling him to appoint more pro-life Justices and so move the Court away from its current abortion-on-demand ethos.

Louisiana law challenge

Could this be it? It has been a long time coming, but on Wednesday 4 March, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) heard oral arguments in the most high-profile abortion rights case in decades. Some have heralded it as 'The beginning of the end for *Roe*.'

In a case known as *June Medical Services vs. Russo*, the nine SCOTUS Justices heard arguments on whether Louisiana can impose restrictions on abortion doctors. The 2014 Louisiana law at the centre of the case requires abortion providers to have 'active admitting privileges' at local hospitals in order to treat patients with emergency complications should an abortion go seriously wrong. The fundamental question was this, does the imposition of these safety requirements violate a woman's access to abortion?

This current case is considered by the prosecution to be about legal precedent. Just four years ago, the SCOTUS ruled that a Texas case, known as *Whole Woman's Health vs. Hellerstedt*, was unconstitutional because 'admitting privileges' were seldom granted and rarely used and created obstacles for women to access abortion, a constitutional right established by *Roe vs. Wade*. The Louisiana law at issue here is the Louisiana Unsafe Abortion Protection Act (Act 620). It is similar to that Texas case. If upheld, the law would leave Louisiana with just one clinic and one doctor, who already has admitting privileges, to perform the 10,000 or so abortions that Louisianan women procure each year.

This is the first abortion-related case to be heard by both Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, two recently-appointed Justices, who are considered conservative and thus give the SCOTUS a conservative majority. Some abortion rights advocates believe the Court's majority may grant the opportunity from this case to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*. The Louisiana judgement will be announced at a date yet to be decided, though it is expected to be before the end of the 2019-20 term.

John Ling

(A fuller version of John's regular update of bioethical news and views can be found at 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. The first case mentioned is being handled by the Christian Institute, the rest by the Christian Legal Centre.

Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Service

On 6 May, the High Court heard a judicial review of Ofsted's actions against Cornerstone. It is a small independent fostering and post-adoption support agency that only places children with evangelical Christian foster carers. In doing so it relies upon exceptions to equality law passed by Parliament in 2010.

Having previously being rated 'Good' in all areas, an Ofsted report issued in June 2019 downgraded Cornerstone's fostering work to 'Requires Improvement'. It labelled the Christian ethos of the agency 'discriminatory' because it only works with evangelical Christian carers, and holds to the mainstream belief that marriage is between a man and a woman. The report has not been published, pending the conclusion of legal proceedings.

A ruling is expected in the coming weeks.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 DIY Home Abortions

Back in March, a notice appeared on the government website appearing to allow women to conduct their own medical abortions at home. Following an outcry, the notice was removed from the website, claiming that it had been 'published in error' and visitors to the website were assured that there would 'be no changes to the abortion regulations'.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, told the House of Commons 'There are no proposals to change the abortion rules due to Covid-19'. Health Minister, Lord Bethell, then told the House of Lords, 'We do not agree that women should be able to take both treatments for medical abortion at home. We believe that it is an essential safeguard that a woman attends a clinic, to ensure that she has an opportunity to be seen alone and to ensure there are no issues... It is not right to rush through this type of change in a sensitive area such as abortion without adequate parliamentary scrutiny'.

Just a few days later the Government made an extraordinary U-turn. In spite of all previous assurances, on 30 March, regulations were amended to allow women to abort their child at home.

Christian Concern has challenged the Government's decision by way of judicial review and on Tuesday 19 May, appeared in the High Court vis Skype seeking permission to challenge on the basis that it usurps proper parliamentary procedure and that policy changes were not only unlawful but also made without proper parliamentary scrutiny, making it unsafe for pregnant women.

Michael Phillips, counsel for Christian Concern, said the 1967 Abortion Act has had 'a coach and horses' run through it by allowing women to take pills at home during the lockdown and pointed out that 'women's lives have been put at risk because of this amendment'.

Mr Phillips asserted that Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care had not been given the full picture by civil servants, who were being informed by members of the abortion lobby, and that these civil servants were effectively acting as lobbyists for abortionists'. Mr Phillips argued that the Government had failed to fully take into account factors such as the physical and psychological risks to

women, the risk of women being coerced into an abortion, the risk of a woman taking abortion drugs prescribed for another person and the risk that they will be taken outside the 10-week gestation limit.

In their judgment Lord Justice Singh and Mr Justice Chamberlain refused permission for a judicial review and said the Government's decision was lawful. Christian Concern appealed and on 18 June, Lord Justice Lewinson granted permission for the case to be heard by the Court of Appeal. The date for the appeal hearing has yet to be set.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 Church Closure

Churches have been prevented from holding corporate worship since the Covid-19 lockdown was introduced. A group of high-profile church leaders, representing some of the largest and fastest growing churches in the UK and assisted by the Christian Legal Centre, asked the Government to reinstate self-governance of churches and to trust church leaders to re-open responsibly. Were the Government not to agree to these requests legal action, by way of a judicial review of the decision, would follow.

In a pre-action letter filed with the Government on the 29 May, the church leaders argued that blanket 'lockdown' restrictions imposed on all churches are both unlawful and unnecessary, and asked the Government to prioritise re-opening churches as part of the Government's 'exit-strategy'.

Faced with the pressure of this legal challenge to the lockdown regulations, some relaxation of the regulations for churches were announced on 23 June, one day before the legal deadline for application for judicial review, with Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, saying that church services could take place from the 4 July, but with a number of arbitrary restrictions including limiting the number people allowed inside the church building to 30 and restrictions on singing.

At the same time, no restrictions have been placed on the number of people allowed into pubs, restaurants, cinemas and indoor shopping centres, some of which have a capacity of 5,000 people. The church leaders have lodged the application for a judicial review, because of the important principles of religious freedom and church independence which are at stake. They argue that the Government should never have made in-person church ministry illegal in the first place and that there was a fundamental inconsistency in allowing churches to operate foodbanks, while making prayer meetings illegal.

Pastor Ade Omooba MBE, one of the church leaders seeking judicial review, said the group had faced no alternative but to take legal action: 'There is a highly significant principle at stake here on the freedom of the church to govern itself without state intervention. If it goes unchallenged the ramifications will be felt for years to come.' Lawyers supporting the church leader's application for judicial review, argue that the government's strategy regarding church closures has 'failed to take into account the importance of freedom of religion to the life of a believer.' They also argue that UK constitutional and Human Rights laws upholds the right to manifest one's belief in community is sacrosanct.

'No scientifically valid barriers to re-opening'

The case is backed by [expert environmental microbiologist, Dr Ian Blenkarn](#), who describes the government strategy of restricting church services as 'bizarre' 'contradictory' 'perverse' and 'unreasonable'. Concluding his report, he states: 'In light of the current knowledge of COVID-19 coronavirus infection, and the general principles of infection prevention and control, I can identify no scientifically valid barriers to reopening of churches for services as outlined here.'

Dr Blenkarn also states that fully operating church services: 'Will in all likelihood be considerably safer than many current commercial activities in the manufacturing and supply industries, including many shops and supermarkets that are currently permitted to operate.'

Church and government have distinct spheres

Also backing the church leaders' case is expert in Christian public theology, Dr Martin Parsons, who concludes his witness statement that English and Scottish law sets out:

Distinct spheres for church and government, with the government being specifically excluded from interference in matters of worship beyond minor details (adiaphora) in England and excluded from interference in all aspects of worship in Scotland.

Prior to the lockdown, nearly all churches had already put measures into place, suspending services and small groups. Whilst recognising the urgency with which the government acted in March, the letter says that blanket impositions on churches are unnecessary and stopping church leaders from putting responsible measures in place to restore worship.

In the government's proposed strategy to exit the lockdown, churches have been placed in the bottom category, suggesting that they are amongst the most dangerous and least important services to the community, subject to the severest restrictions for the longest period of time. The letter argued that the government should recognise the importance of churches and church ministries to society and allow churches to open earlier than at the very last stage of the easing of restrictions.

In response to the church leaders' letter, the government rejected the claims, stating that: 'parliament can legislate for Church of England matters' and that as a 'matter of constitutional law, parliament remains sovereign'. The claimant's asked for an expedited hearing, as the matter was of some urgency, but the request was refused, and a date has yet to be set for the case to be heard.

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