

THE BULLETIN

News and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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CONTENTS

Biblical Christianity's Impact on Educational Provision	Sharon James	2
Banning Conversion Therapy or Banning the Gospel?	Simon Calvert	7
Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Dangerous Path to Go Down	G Macdonald & D Cuffe	9
Coronavirus Update 8	John Ling	14
The Challenge of Cultural Marxism	Melvin Tinker	21
Book review: The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self	Tim Dieppe	27
Book review: Live not by Lies	Regan King	29
Update on Life Issues	John Ling	32
Update on Recent Cases		36

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How Christianity Changed the World: Biblical Christianity's Impact on Educational Provision

This article is the fifth 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 successive issues of the Bulletin. Sharon's book on this theme is published by Christian Focus: <https://www.christianfocus.com/products/2954/how-christianity-transformed-the-world>

This series of articles offers some snapshots from history to demonstrate that the world has been changed immeasurably for the better because of the life and witness of Christ's followers. In this fifth article we see that Christians have been passionate providers of universal education from early times.

The Divine Mandate to Study

The Indian scholar Vishal Mangalwadi (b. 1949) converted to Christianity when he investigated the Christian holy book and realised that the thread running throughout is God's desire to bless all nations. As he investigated the impact of the Bible on his own nation of India and the world, he found that 'The Bible created the modern world of science and learning because it gave us the Creator's vision of what reality is all about.'

We are able to study because the cosmos is ordered

It can be investigated, discovered and explored, because it is created by God who is characterised by Order, Truth, Reason, Beauty, Love and Justice. As John Calvin wrote, 'Not only the natural, but also the human social world is a dazzling theatre of God's glory.' The Creator has provided an astonishing array of natural resources to be developed. He gave people the God-like capacity to develop those resources by means of reason, creativity, intelligence and hard work.

We are able to study because we are made in the image of the Triune God

We reason, observe, experiment, deduce, speak, infer, argue, communicate, love and relate because God created us in his image. God has endowed every human being with the capacity to reason. That should be developed; it is criminal not to educate every child. Every child's unique gifts and capacities should be nurtured and developed. It is also criminal not to go on learning all through our lives, developing the mind that God has given us.

God has endowed every human being with the capacity to know, enjoy and serve him. How do we know God? Through his Word. So all people need to be able to read the Bible, and have access to the Bible in their own language. Hence Christians have been at the forefront of literacy provision worldwide.

God has also given all human beings the divine mandate to manage the natural world:

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'
(Genesis 1:27-28)

The biblical term 'subdue', or rule, or exercise 'dominion', simply means to steward and manage the earth on behalf of the great King. To do that we need to study and understand the creation. This is often called 'general revelation' because understanding it is accessible to all people whether or not they are Christians: 'The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.' (Psalm 19:1)

Christian Commitment to Education

Science represents our effort to understand God's handiwork. The Bible teaches that a rational being created and sustains the natural world. Human beings, as rational beings, can, in turn, discover the laws of nature, and then act on nature, effectively and rationally. This was the key to many intellectual undertakings, among them the rise of science.

The Bible places a high premium on knowledge. But this does not come via mystical experience or mere devotion and meditation. It comes from study and hard work, investigating the natural world, and building on the work of others. That is why we need education.

Historically, it has always been Christians who have been passionately committed to education for all, and in many countries of the world they have been the first to seek to provide schools, colleges and universities.

Jesus Christ told his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, *teaching* them to obey all that he had commanded. The early church took this seriously. At an early date catechetical schools were established where they taught Christian doctrine, but increasingly mathematics and medicine as well.¹ That is why, by the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) said that Christian women were better informed in divine matters than pagan male philosophers.²

Augustine himself, a North African bishop, was one of the greatest intellects in history. He reflected deeply on the fact that all humans are created in the image of God: Whether or not they are Christians, they are not only rational but also truth-seeking. He wrote:

*Has not the genius of man invented and applied countless astonishing arts, partly the result of necessity, partly the result of exuberant invention, so that this vigour of mind... betokens an inexhaustible wealth in the human nature which can invent, learn, or employ such arts. What wonderful – one might say stupefying – advances has human industry made in the arts of weaving and building, or agriculture and navigation! What skill has been attained in measures and numbers! With what sagacity have the movements and connections of the stars been discovered! [And all this is due to the] unspeakable blessing that God has conferred upon his creation – a rational nature.*³

Augustine believed that Christians can and should benefit from all the learning known to pagan philosophers, so they should be taught languages, history, grammar, logic and sciences. He wrote a comprehensive text book of all the various branches of learning to date which became the standard text for European universities through the Middle Ages. Augustine used his mighty intellect to formulate theology and philosophy, the impact of which has echoed down through the centuries.

As the Western Roman world disintegrated, Christian monasteries preserved the literary remains of ancient Rome. In the east, it was a Christian civilization that united the intellectual cultures of the Greek, Egyptian and Syrian worlds, and that preserved Hellenic wisdom in academies and libraries in Greece, Syria and Asia Minor. During the Middle Ages, Christian monasteries and cathedral schools developed into the earliest universities, in places such as Bologna, Padua, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge.

The Great medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas lived in the thirteenth century (1225-1274). He also was confident that Christians can learn from unbelievers because the rational Creator God has placed his natural law on their hearts: All truth is God's truth. We can be confident as we study that God's general revelation (nature) never contradicts and always harmonises with his special revelation (Scripture).

¹ Alvin J Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 172.

² *Ibid.*, 172.

³ Quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (New York: Random House, 2005), 9-10.

Moving onto the Reformation, Martin Luther said it was a crime for parents not to ensure the education of every child. So, during the Reformation in Europe, there was a surge in the building of girls' schools in Protestant areas.

The great reformed theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) was clear about the terrible effects of sin. He was equally clear that in common (or everyday) grace God has endowed all human beings with reason. He said that we should be humble and willing to admire and learn from the wisdom of the past – including from unbelievers; but wherever we find wisdom we must give God the glory.

Anna Maria Van Schurman (1607-1678) was a skilled linguist, with knowledge of thirteen languages. Brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church, in 1638 she published a treatise on the need for women to be educated. 'Ignorance is not fitting for a Christian woman', she wrote.

A famous Protestant educationalist was John Comenius (1592-1670) of Moravia. He started schools for poor children, both girls and boys. He wanted everyone made in God's image to learn of God, man and nature. Because of his Reformed convictions, he spent much of his life as a religious refugee in poverty. He still managed to write around 90 books on education. His advice was sought at the highest level in England, Sweden, the Netherlands and Austria. His conviction was that education should be a happy experience for children, that all learning should be carefully adapted to the stage of development of each child, and that children should learn by inquiry, not just having information dumped on them.

In 1658 he produced and published *The World of Things Obvious to the Senses drawn in Pictures*.⁴ Many believe this to be the first children's picture book. It started with several pages of pictures of animals, then pictures showing everyday activities like tending gardens and brewing beer. The book went on to cover theology, anatomy, biology and astronomy. It was aiming to teach about the whole world via the senses. This visual approach was a breakthrough, as was Comenius' decision to publish both a German (i.e., vernacular) edition as well as one in Latin. At one point it was the most used textbook in Europe for elementary education, and was translated into most European, and some oriental, languages.

Coming back to Britain, Isaac Watts (1675-1748) is best known as being one of the greatest hymn-writers of all time ('Jesus shall reign where'er the sun'; 'Joy to the World'; 'Alas, and did my Saviour bleed', 'Our God our help in ages past' and 'When I survey the wondrous cross' are just some of his best-known hymns). He was a gifted pastor and preacher as well as a hymn-writer. He also spent several years as a tutor. He was passionate about the importance of teaching children well from the earliest age, and equally passionate about the responsibility to go on learning all our lives. Isaac Watts regarded teaching as one of the noblest occupations:

*How beautiful to see a teacher bearing patiently with those who are slow of understanding, and taking time and diligence and pains to help the learner understand without rebuking them for being slow!*⁵

His text book on educating children, entitled *A Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth* was enormously popular; it conveys his passion. Because God has given everyone a rational nature and a soul that will never die, he stressed the need to give girls as well as boys an excellent education. He believed that teachers do not just convey information; they teach by the way that they live. Teachers must be kind and teach children to be kind; they must be cheerful and encourage children to be cheerful. They must avoid being boring at all costs: they should use plenty of visual aids, diagrams, maps and different colours. Lessons must be based on observation, not just instruction. Youngsters must be encouraged to be curious and to think for themselves; and to think clearly and logically. They should be taken out on trips; as much travel as possible should be encouraged. They should be trained to be diligent and to read widely. They are to be inspired to regard improvement of the mind and of the character as a life-long project. Above all they are to be pointed to their Creator. And as knowing God brings joy, teachers must demonstrate that joy. As a line in one of his hymns states: 'Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less'.⁶

⁴ <https://publicdomainreview.org/2014/05/14/in-the-image-of-god-john-comenius-and-the-first-childrens-picture-book/> (accessed 11 December, 2019).

⁵ David Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered*, (Gospel Standard Trust, 1974) 36-7.

⁶ 'Come we that love the Lord'.

Isaac Watts wrote text books on a range of subjects: language, logic, mathematics, science. And they were used in Britain and internationally up to university level.

He also cared about teaching little toddlers. His best-selling work was *Divine songs attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* published in 1715. It went through over 1,000 editions, and sold more than 7 million copies in various countries (the population of Britain in Watt's lifetime was about 6 million). One of the most well-known poems for children was entitled 'Against Idleness and Mischief' which begins:

*How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour*

This was so universally known by children in the nineteenth century that Lewis Carroll was famously able to parody it in *Alice in Wonderland*, knowing that everyone would understand what he was doing:

*How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail*

Also very popular was Isaac Watts' work on *The Improvement of the Mind*, a text book on ways to continue to increase in wisdom, godliness and usefulness throughout life. It contains practical instructions on study skills, wise reading, useful conversation and ways to make social occasions edifying.

In the eighteenth century, those who could not in conscience conform to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church (Dissenters) were not allowed to go to university. They developed their own Academies which played a significant role in educational provision. Watts' text books and resources were hugely popular in these institutions.

One of the most humbling aspects of looking back at these eighteenth-century Dissenters was their voracious thirst for learning. So many of those who had to leave school at an early age applied themselves diligently to education in their spare time, many learning Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other languages. Famously William Carey, who came from a pitifully poor background, taught himself Latin at age twelve, and later mastered Greek, Hebrew, French and Dutch; as a missionary in India he learned dozens of languages and dialects.

One result of the social impact of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century revivals in Britain and beyond was that the voluntary efforts of Christians led to an extraordinary expansion of education for all children, including the very poorest. One well-known pioneer was Robert Raikes (1735-1811), the crusading editor of the *Gloucester Journal*. Shocked at the conditions in the local prison, he became convinced that 'vice could be better prevented than cured' – education would be the best prevention. He discussed this with a neighbouring vicar, and they came up with idea of schools that could be run by volunteers on Sundays. (This was the only day that the poorest children would be able to attend as they were sent out to work on the other six days.) The teaching would include not just the Bible but basic literacy as well.

One Sunday afternoon in July 1780 a Christian woman called Mrs Meredith welcomed poor children into her own home in Sooty Alley, Gloucester – the first Sunday school! The idea took off; by 1831 about 25% of England's 1.25 million children were going to Sunday schools. This depended on the voluntary efforts of tens of thousands of Christians.

Another pioneer of education for all was Hannah More (1745-1833). She was a successful and hugely popular writer whose works at one time outsold Jane Austen's by ten to one. One of the stars on the London social scene, she was converted through reading a book by the evangelical John Newton (author of 'Amazing Grace'). After her conversion she poured her writing ability into the cause of the gospel and doing good to the poor.

Modern feminists always praise Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), who argued that women should receive education like men; they rarely mention Hannah More. But More, like Wollstonecraft, wanted to see girls

educated and wrote the best-selling *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* in 1799. But, unlike Wollstonecraft, Hannah More put her words into action. After her conversion to evangelical Christianity, she gave generously and sacrificially of her own time and resources to establish schools for poor girls as well as boys. She established schools for the poor in the face of strong opposition.

The work of schools founded and run by Christians had a huge impact. During the nineteenth century, some children were so destitute they felt ashamed to go to Sunday School. Many Christians responded by opening what became known as 'Ragged Schools' which not only gave free teaching, but food and clothes as well. Again, these were staffed by thousands of Christian volunteers. Many could be named as pioneers of these establishments, but one was a Christian called John Pounds, a Portsmouth cobbler, known as 'the crippled cobbler'. He taught children reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as skills such as carpentry, cooking and shoe-making. Other schools were set up on what was called the Lancaster-Bell or 'monitorial' principle, where older pupils helped to teach the younger ones.

Aside from all this, many Christians just got on with meeting the needs that faced them in their own communities. During the 1840s, for example, Richard Dawes became vicar of a village called King's Somborne in Hampshire. Finding that there was no school there, he used £500 of his own funds to start one; he ran it himself and taught 158 pupils. Like John Comenius and Isaac Watts, Dawes wanted to make education pleasurable and relevant. He emphasised nature observation, conducting experiments, and taking the children out on trips.⁷

Largely because of this huge and often voluntary devotion to education of so many Christian people in Britain, most of the working class achieved a basic level of literacy during this time. It was a remarkable achievement given the long working hours for children as well as their parents, and the absence of any government provision.

Internationally, Christian commitment to education for all has played, and continues to play, a major role. Ann Judson (1789-1826) was a pioneer of female education in Asia. Following her conversion at around the age of sixteen in 1805, she soon started teaching in school as she had great desire to impart the knowledge of God and his world to others. Aged twenty-one, she and her husband Adoniram left family, friends and all they knew in New England and started a Christian mission in Burma where Ann started schools for girls. She was only one of many Christians to promote female education in cultures where it was strictly forbidden.

Vishal Mangalwadi writes, 'Western missions... birthed, financed, and nurtured hundreds of universities, thousands of colleges and tens of thousands of schools. They educated millions and transformed nations.'⁸ So, for example, in 1999 Mizoram, India's most Christian state (98%) had the highest literacy rate in that nation at 95%. Kerala, the oldest Christian community in India, had a literacy rate of 93%.⁹

God made us in his image; he has endowed all human beings with reason, and with the capacity to know him. He has called all human beings to develop and manage his world on his behalf. That is why Christians through history have taken a lead in educating boys and girls, men and women. We want all to be educated, so that they are equipped to obey God by fulfilling the creation mandate. But supremely we want all, whatever their sex, status or race, to be able to read God's Word so that they can know and honour him. We want all to be saved, and to bring God praise by playing their part in obeying Christ's Great Commission.

Sharon James

⁷ James Bartholomew, *The Welfare State We're In* (Politico's, 2006) 154-6.

⁸ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that Made your World*, (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson) 207-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

Banning Conversion Therapy or Banning the Gospel?

Evangelical Christians should be in no doubt that activists behind demands to 'ban conversion therapy' have the beliefs and practices of the evangelical church firmly in their sights.

Having initially, and understandably, engaged public sympathy by recounting stories from fifty years ago, or from abroad, of homosexual people being given electro-shock therapy or even being victims of the horrific practice of 'corrective rape', activists have dramatically changed their focus.

Now they are talking about prayer, bible studies and Christian parenting.

The Christian Institute has been very clear that we do not oppose a ban that protects people from harmful pseudo-medical practices. And, of course, harassment and physical and sexual abuse are already illegal.

But activists from the 'Ban Conversion Therapy (BCT) campaign want much more than this. They want ordinary church activities such as prayer to be brought within the ambit of a conversion therapy ban. They even explicitly argue that 'gentle non-coercive prayer' should be banned if it does not endorse LGBT ideology.

This emerged in a disagreement between BCT chair Jayne Ozanne and the Bishop of Manchester. To be clear, the Bishop, David Walker, supports banning conversion therapy. He even supports prosecuting prayer. But he stops short of banning 'gentle non-coercive prayer'. [Here's how The Guardian](#) reported his remarks:

[The Bishop said] 'Where activity has harmed someone, the person who has caused the harm should face prosecution.' That activity should include prayer aimed at changing someone's sexual orientation, he added. He said he was not referring to 'gentle non-coercive prayer, but where there is a level of power imbalance and a level of force'.

But Jayne Ozanne, a former Government LGBT advisor, hit back [in the same article](#) saying:

I'm very grateful to Bishop David for his clear support for a ban, although I would strongly refute that 'gentle non-coercive prayer' should be allowed.

She continued:

All prayer that seeks to change or suppress someone's innate sexuality or gender identity is deeply damaging and causes immeasurable harm, as it comes from a place – no matter how well meaning – that says who you are is unacceptable and wrong.

The idea that 'gentle non-coercive prayer' should be included in a list of illegal actions is alarming. In any event, it would violate the human rights of believers.

This view is confirmed by a legal opinion from Jason Coppel QC, one of the UK's leading human rights lawyers, which says a conversion therapy ban encompassing ordinary prayer "would be likely to violate Convention rights".

The Christian Institute instructed Coppel to examine the wording of a ban advocated by BCT and asked him to consider several scenarios of ordinary evangelical church practices. In his [written advice](#), Coppel said the scenarios involving evangelism, church membership, baptism, communion, private prayer and Christian parenting could all fall foul of a broad conversion therapy law of the kind advocated by BCT.

Coppel also pointed out that such a law would be in breach of the human rights of evangelicals. Regarding Christian beliefs on sexuality, Coppel says:

The Courts have consistently regarded such beliefs as protected by Article 9 ECHR and worthy of respect as such. [para. 21] ... These beliefs must be treated by the State with neutrality and impartiality [para 34].

The Christian Institute sent Coppel's written advice to the UK Government and threatened a judicial review if it caves to demands to outlaw prayer as part of a conversion therapy ban.

Those pushing for the ban to include ordinary prayer seem to attribute the worst possible motives to those of us who hold different theological beliefs from them. They are not willing to listen to mainstream evangelical groups or to their concerns. Now they have gone a step further by stating that the legislation should cover not only practices they consider coercive but all forms of prayer, no matter how mild.

Jayne Ozanne's response to the Bishop of Manchester is very revealing. It shows the focus is not about protecting people from genuinely abusive behaviour. It's about criminalising mainstream theology that campaigners on the fringes of the church don't agree with.

Other ban advocates agree with her. Matthew Hyndman, co-founder of BCT, [said](#):

Those who resist legislation against conversion therapy often resist the idea of a prayer or a pastoral conversation being subject to the scrutiny of law. However, if these things take place in an overwhelmingly homophobic or transphobic context the pernicious power of prayer must be dealt with.

Evangelicals know that failing to endorse LGBT ideology is routinely denounced as 'homophobic' and 'transphobic'.

Referring to a ban in Australia which comes into force next year, and which [explicitly outlaws prayer](#), Conservative MP Alicia Kearns [told the BBC](#), 'The model that's been passed in Victoria is a good one.'

So the activists are serious.

But in Britain we worked out centuries ago that prosecuting people for praying 'the wrong kind of prayer' was oppressive, counter-productive and wrong.

And the Government would do well to remember that the courts have consistently ruled that mainstream Christian beliefs about sexual ethics and gender are protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and worthy of respect in a democratic society. No matter what some activists might think, you cannot outlaw other people's beliefs just because they offend you.

The UK Government will consult on its proposals for a ban in September. If you would like The Christian Institute to contact you with advice on how to take part in the consultation, join their mailing list by clicking [here](#).

Simon Calvert

Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Dangerous Path to Go Down

Developments in the UK and Experience Overseas

Having been rejected multiple times by Parliamentarians and judges, encouraging assisted suicide (when the patient self-administers lethal drugs) and euthanasia (when a doctor administers the lethal drugs to a patient) remain illegal in the UK – but activists continue to push for a change in the law. In May, a new bill was introduced in the House of Lords by Baroness Meacher. The ‘Assisted Dying Bill’ is promoting assisted suicide for terminally ill adults with a prognosis of six months or less to live.

The passive language is a crucial tactic in the push for a change in the law: ‘assisted dying’ has no meaning in law and its definition is malleable. What is being referred to changes depending on who you’re talking to and in which country you reside. In Ireland and New Zealand, the term includes euthanasia, but here in the UK it is used by Dignity in Dying and their allies to refer to assisted suicide for those thought to be terminally ill. Other British groups, such as Humanists UK or My Death My Decision (MDMD), include both assisted suicide and euthanasia in their understanding of the term.

Veteran campaigner Michael Irwin, now of MDMD, observed in the course of an interview with *The Guardian* this year that:

the word ‘suicide’ was effectively forbidden in mainstream right-to-die activist circles – sick patients felt affronted by it, and political advocates wanted to detach their movement from it – but Irwin said he wanted to ‘reclaim’ suicide as a ‘rational and positive act when a mentally competent, very elderly individual has carefully considered the main pros and cons for wanting to stay alive.’

He, like many ‘assisted dying’ campaigners, sees assisted suicide for terminally ill people as an inadequate first step, and looks ahead to expansion in the name of inclusion with the law being expanded to include euthanasia for non-terminally ill people and elderly people whose lives are deemed to be ‘complete’.

The disability rights advocacy group Not Dead Yet made clear their horror at the Meacher Bill stating:

For essential support to become merely the alternative option to assisted suicide terrifies us. That is why no organisation of terminally ill or disabled people has sought a change in the law. We need help to live – not to die. That means investment in palliative care, pragmatic solutions to social care provision and continued financial support for our world-class NHS. These are the issues our parliamentarians should be concentrating on, rather than the Pandora’s Box of assisted suicide which might help the few, but at the expense of the many.

The Bill will be debated in the Autumn – by which time it will not be alone.

In June, Liberal Democrat MSP Liam McArthur announced his intention to bring a similar bill before the Scottish Parliament. His bill would legalise assisted suicide for terminally ill, mentally competent adults in Scotland, and a consultation – the first stage of the legislative process – is expected to commence in the Autumn.

Care Not Killing considers that it is particularly insensitive to bring forward these bills at a time when so many people have lost loved ones as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. People with disabilities have again been to the fore in questioning the need for and safety of such a law. Pam-Duncan Glancy, a wheelchair user newly elected as a Labour MSP, tweeted:

I am deeply worried about this. Disabled people do not yet enjoy our right to live equally. I’d far rather we had a right to live enshrined in law, long before we have a right to die. Until all things are equal, this is dangerous for disabled people.

Oregon

The Meacher Bill (and likely the as-yet unpublished McArthur Bill) is modelled on practice in the US State of Oregon, which legalised assisted suicide for those thought to have six months or less to live in 1997. How does it work there?

A total of 245 Oregonians died by assisted suicide in 2020; that figure represents a 28% jump from 191 in 2019, and is more than nine times as many as died in 2000. Oregon is a comparatively small state with a population of 4.2 million; those 245 deaths would extrapolate to some 3,880 for a UK-sized population.

We are often told that assisted suicide can be closely monitored, yet of the 370 prescriptions for lethal drugs issued in 2020, the ingestion status is unknown in 80 cases; we don't even know if 44 of those are still alive.

Advocates of assisted suicide who try to bat away warnings of incremental extension (or the slippery slope) to include other conditions can no longer claim that the Oregon law remains unamended. The law in Oregon now provides an exemption to the statutory waiting periods for patients expected to live fewer than 15 days from the time of their first oral request for medication. The Oregon Health Authority annual report for 2020 notes that 75 patients (20%) were given exemptions.

It states also that 'a total of 142 physicians wrote 370 prescriptions during 2020 (1-31 prescriptions per physician)'. The clarification that '79% of physicians wrote one or two prescriptions' really only draws attention to the fact that 21% wrote more, with at least one prescribing lethal cocktails every 11 or 12 days. The gravity of this fact is reinforced by the report noting that some assisted suicides were approved by doctors who had known the patients in question for less than a week. Only 3 out of the 245 who died were referred for psychological or psychiatric evaluation.

Assisting the suicides of those who have clinical depression in Oregon is particularly concerning. Studies show that 25% of people with terminal illness are clinically depressed. In Oregon, only 2-3 patients per year who seek an assisted suicide are referred for psychiatric evaluation. The number of such referrals has stayed more or less static since the law was introduced. Thus in 1998, when 16 people were helped to die by assisted suicide most of those with clinical depression were referred for psychiatric assessment. By 2020, however, some 60 people or so should have been referred for psychiatric or psychological assessments as opposed to the 3 referrals which in fact occurred.

Another concern about Oregon is the fact that the suicide rate in that state has increased by 33% since 2001. There is some evidence to suggest that the legalisation of assisted suicide has contributed to this increase in the suicide rate among the general population. That should not come as a surprise as the rationale behind the drive for legalising assisted suicide or euthanasia is a belief in personal autonomy as an absolute. If that is the motivation, then why would arbitrary limits be placed on who can and cannot have assistance to commit suicide? Unsurprisingly, the suicide rate in Oregon is consistently higher than the US national average; by over 30% in 2019.

The annual report for 2020 notes that five who died suffered complications, including difficulty ingesting and a seizure; a footnote quietly adds that 'information about complications is reported only when a physician or another health care provider is present at the time of death'. This goes some way to explaining why, in more than 70% of assisted suicides last year, we don't actually know if the patients suffered complications.

Oregonians who died by assisted suicide in 2020 took up to eight hours to die after ingesting medication; the range extended to 47 hours in 2019, and to 104 hours previously. Again, it is worth noting that we don't know how long death took to occur in almost half of 2020 cases.

While cancer remained the most common underlying illness (66%), this was down significantly from the 76% average across 1998-2018. Five of those dying in 2020 (2%) were living with 'endocrine/metabolic

disease (e.g., diabetes)', while 9 (3.7%) cited 'other illnesses' including 'arthritis, arteritis, blood disease, complications from a fall, kidney failure, medical care complications, musculoskeletal system disorders, sclerosis, and stenosis'. Oregon's law has only been formally extended once (as noted above), but officials admit freely that they now consider patients to be eligible if they refuse otherwise life-sustaining treatment, without formal amendment of the legal requirement that 'an incurable and irreversible disease that has been medically confirmed and will, within reasonable medical judgment, produce death within six months.'

Even without the loosening of the terminal illness requirement, predicting death within six months is widely considered to be more of an (unreliable) art than a science, and once again, patients lived far longer than six months – some for almost three years (1,080 days). Health officials are clearly sensitive to this as the report now notes how many 'outlived 6-month prognosis' – eight in 2020. This artificial figure obscures a fundamental point: the six-month prognosis concerns the time left to patients before their underlying illnesses cause death, and we cannot know how many of the 245 would have lived perhaps longer than six months had their suicides not been assisted.

Once again, a majority of participants cited a fear of being a 'burden on family, friends/caregivers' (53.1%), with the most-cited factors remaining existential and social: 'less able to engage in activities making life enjoyable', 'losing autonomy' and 'loss of dignity'. 'Inadequate pain control, or concern about it' was cited by fewer than one in three, while 15 were driven at least in part by 'financial implications of treatment'. The annual reports from Oregon, year after year, serve to tell a story of rising numbers of deaths in a poorly monitored system, based on fears that have little to do with the bounds of medical ability and everything to do with how we support people under great strain.

Canada

Since rebranding after seven decades as the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, 'Dignity in Dying' present their proposals as the only show in town, and seek to stymie discussion of the lessons of any non-Oregon model of 'assisted dying'. However, the Cross-Party Group of MSPs at Holyrood supporting a law change have heard at length from Canadian experts and practitioners.

Canada's federal law allowing euthanasia and assisted suicide or 'Medical Aid in Dying' (MAiD) where an individual's death was reasonably foreseeable passed in 2015, and took effect in summer 2016. In the remainder of that year, there were 1,015 deaths under the new law. In 2020, 7,595 cases of MAiD were reported, representing 2.5% of all deaths in Canada. Overall there has been a 648% increase in MAiD deaths in the first five years of the operation of the law and the total number of such deaths reached 21,545 by the end of 2020.

In 2019, the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association (CHPCA) and the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians (CSPCP) released a joint statement noting that:

Less than 30% of Canadians have access to high quality hospice palliative care, yet more than 90% of all deaths in Canada would benefit from it. Despite this startling discrepancy, access to hospice palliative care is not considered a fundamental healthcare right for Canadians. In contrast, MAiD has been deemed a right...

Too many Canadians have seen this reflected in their own lives: instances where those requiring expensive care have seen this cut or refused, but have been offered the drugs to kill themselves. Cases like Roger Foley from Ontario who suffers from a neurological disease. He recorded hospital staff offering him a 'medically assisted death', despite his repeated statements that he did not want to die and wanted to return to his home.

On 11 September 2019, a Quebec Superior Court judge ruled invalid the Criminal Code requirement that a natural death be 'reasonably foreseeable', and also the Quebec law requirement that people must 'be at the end of life', before being eligible for euthanasia. 'An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical

assistance in dying) received Royal Assent on 17 March 2021, and as well as removing the terminal illness eligibility criteria included requirements: that Justice and Health Ministers ‘cause an independent review to be carried out’ regarding extension of MAiD to ‘persons who have a mental illness’, with a report required within a year; and that a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament also present a report within a year regarding the extension of MAiD to ‘mature minors, advance requests, mental illness’.

Ahead of the law’s extension, a 2019 Parliamentary report found that under the original law, 6,465 people were expected to die by MAiD in 2021 – 2.2% of all deaths – with net healthcare savings of \$86.9m. Given the actual number of MAiD deaths in 2020, this is likely a significant underestimate. The report predicted that amending the law would add 1,164 deaths in the first year alone, leading to increased healthcare savings in 2021 of \$149m – almost £87m.

Implications for the UK

Academics in the UK have argued ‘that the economic costs of denying assisted dying should not be ignored; they should not be the key driver of any legal change, but it would be irresponsible not to consider them.’ We are all familiar with reports of ‘postcode lotteries’ when it comes to access to treatment, and it would be an expression of wilful naiveté to suggest the financial considerations would not interact with legalised assisted suicide as the age of recession and austerity is succeeded by the almost unfathomable economic hangover of Covid.

All of these laws require the participation of doctors, who assess and then prescribe or even administer lethal medication. There is a battle going on within the medical profession at present with assisted suicide and euthanasia campaigners attempting to persuade British medical bodies to adopt positions of neutrality. However, doctors working most closely with patients approaching the end of their lives remain overwhelmingly opposed to a change in the law.

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) conducted a membership poll in 2019. Opposition to assisted suicide remained the most favoured stance (43.4%), and more than 80% of palliative care physicians wanted the College to remain opposed. Nevertheless, an unprecedented supermajority requirement saw the Council of the College adopt neutrality as the RCP’s new position.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) reaffirmed its opposition to assisted suicide in February 2021, following a consultation of members in which 47% opted for the status quo and 40% expressed support for a position in favour of assisted suicide. Just 11% opted for neutrality.

The British Medical Association (BMA) published the results of its own membership consultation in October 2020. The BMA poll showed that:

- 70% and 79% of palliative medicine doctors wanted the BMA to stay opposed to assisted suicide and euthanasia respectively. Personal opposition was higher at 76% and 83% and those unwilling to participate sat at 76% and 84%.
- Those most supportive of change were those not actually currently practising medicine: medical students (9% of respondents) and retired members (11% of respondents) were (respectively) 53-20 percent and 50-27 percent in favour of BMA support for a law change.
- Only 73% of those wanting the BMA to support assisted suicide, and only 68% of those personally in favour, said they would be willing to participate in the process if legal. Similarly, only 69% of those wanting the BMA to support euthanasia, and only 64% of those personally in favour, were willing to participate.

Of course, some doctors make no bones about their enthusiasm and willingness to participate. We have already noted that in Oregon, some doctors are approving patients they hardly know for assisted suicide every other week, while activists like Michael Irwin – struck off the medical register after attempting to assist a friend’s suicide – favours assistance being available in a swathe of situations. Asked in 2016 about

those 'suffering from depression, constant migraines or a long-term condition like asthma', Irwin said: 'Severe asthma is a serious medical condition. If a competent adult is suffering unbearably from this - for a very long period of time - then that individual might have to consider doctor-assisted suicide - it would have to be a joint decision between the patient and the doctor.' Once the principle is in place, all barriers of diagnosis and prognosis are arbitrary, porous and open to challenge.

Campaigners focus on opinion polling which regularly appears to indicate public approbation for 'assisted dying'. But claims based on polls have to be taken with a 'pinch of salt' as the results often depend on what leading questions have been asked. Other polls show significant levels of public concern.

- A February 2019 poll showed that 51% of respondents 'would be concerned that some people would feel pressurised into accepting help to take their own life so as not to be a burden on others' if assisted suicide were legal (with only 25% disagreeing).
- A September 2015 poll showed that 86% of respondents 'were concerned... NHS managers or politicians would prioritise assisted dying over end-of-life care to save money'.
- A November 2014 poll showed that 58% of respondents agreed that 'if the law is changed so that people are able to be given lethal drugs to end their life prematurely, it will be impossible to make the system completely safe from abuse by unscrupulous relatives or others who could influence the process' (just 18% disagreed).
- Finally, a July 2014 ComRes poll saw support for euthanasia drop below 50%, level with opposition, when the five main arguments against it were heard

This is a debate which too often generates more heat than light, but the 2015 Commons debate on an 'assisted dying' bill demonstrated that when undecided MPs heard from experts and considered the evidence, it became clear that good intentions could never override the dangers of legalising assisted suicide. We have seen that such laws are uncontrollable, unethical and unnecessary and we will continue to fight for the true dignity and choice of fulsome support for the living and access to care for the dying.

*Dr Gordon Macdonald (Chief Executive, Care Not Killing)
and Daniel Cuffe (Campaign Manager, Care Not Killing)*

Coronavirus - Part 8 (June 2021)

(Previous editions of this update may be found on John Ling's personal website: <http://www.johnling.co.uk>)

The Covid-19 numbers

First of all, a significant newsflash. On Saturday 26 June, we welcomed a new one, a new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Out went Matt Hancock, in came Sajid Javid. We wish the newcomer well.

From my side of the keyboard the Covid-19 numbers do not look particularly reassuring. It was all going so well. During most of May, new cases in the UK were down to 2,500 or so each day. Then as May waned there was a worrying upturn to 3,000 a day. By the beginning of June, this had risen to 5,000 cases, though daily deaths remained few, or, on 1 June, even zero. By mid-June daily new cases had hit 7,500 and ended the month at a rather alarming 26,000. Most of these were attributed to the Delta (Indian) variant and geographically in the North-west of England. Will the statistics go horribly exponential? True, the surges have been small, but that is exactly how exponential growth starts. Is this the dawning of a brutal third wave, or just a harmless ripple? Scientists and politicians remain undecided.

Overall the total numbers of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the UK have now reached approximately 4.8 million and 128,000 respectively. However, hospital admissions are beginning to rise again by a little over 200 a day with 1,700 currently hospitalised and 280 on ventilators. Daily death numbers have also risen slightly, but to fewer than 25. This latter datum is additional evidence that the vaccination roll-out has successfully weakened the link between the disease and death – during January 2021, the death figure averaged 1,000 per day.

That notwithstanding, the UK vaccination roll-out has proceeded apace. A total of 77.6 million doses have been administered, consisting of 44.7 million first doses and 32.9 million second doses. Overall, 65% of the UK's adult population has now been single-jabbed.

But this is still perilous territory. As lockdown restrictions are eased, less precautions are followed, more contacts occur, more cases will arise. Nobody wants a full-blown, third UK wave of Covid-19. Remember – this wretched Covid-19 pandemic is not over yet.

The global picture is more assorted. There has now been a total of 180 million Covid-19 cases and 4 million deaths worldwide. Currently, India is the most infected country (46,000 new cases per day) followed by Brazil, Colombia and the UK (26,000). Countries reporting the most deaths are the USA (a total of 600,000) followed by Brazil, India, Mexico, Peru and the UK (128,000). In terms of deaths per million population, Peru tops the table (5,828) with the UK ranked at number 17 (1,888).

Freedom Day rescheduled

By mid-June, the scientists and politicians were mostly convinced that the Covid-19 figures were going the wrong way. So, on 14 June, the prime minister, Boris Johnson, announced that the easing of lockdown measures, planned for 21 June, would be delayed for up to another four weeks. Freedom Day was reallocated to Monday 19 July. 'It was', he maintained, 'the final stretch'. And despite the frustrations of many, the move made sound sense. The extra month of lockdown restraint would allow second vaccine doses for the over-50s and first doses for everyone else in the UK. School holidays will have started, so there will be less close personal contact and safer outdoor activities. 'Caution' and 'irreversible' were the prime minister's watchwords. But, of course, no political, copper-bottomed guarantees were forthcoming.

It's all Greek to me

In October 2020, a Covid-19 variant was discovered and named 501Y.V2. Other researchers called it B.1.351, or 20H/501Y.V2, or even GH/501Y.V2. It became commonly known as the 'South African variant'.

Some thought this alias carried a geographical stigma. And that unease was heightened when the so-called 'Indian variant' began to infect much of the world.

What to do? How to stop the perceived abusiveness? On 31 May, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a new, and apparently more courteous, naming scheme. Here are the basics:

<i>New</i>	<i>Scientific</i>	<i>Old</i>
Alpha	B.1.1.7	Kent
Beta	B.1.351	South African
Gamma	P.1	Brazilian
Delta	B.1.617.2	Indian

Let us hope we never get to Epsilon, and especially not 19 variants later, to Omega. Will the new Greek/WHO system catch on? That is really up to you.

The Delta variant

Delta, also known as B.1.617.2, belongs to a viral lineage first identified in India during a ferocious wave of infections there in April and May. The virus grew rapidly in some parts of the country, and showed signs of resistance to vaccines. But determining its properties was especially challenging because of confounding factors, such as new cases in excess of 400,000 per day and the continuation of mass political rallies and public meetings.

Two months later, we are better informed. Delta seems to be around 60% more transmissible than the already highly infectious Alpha variant as identified in the UK in late 2020. Severely Delta-infected people are about twice as likely to end up in hospital as those infected with Alpha. Delta is moderately resistant to vaccines, particularly in people who have received just a single dose. Of course, those at greatest risk are people who have no access to Covid-19 vaccines, particularly for instance, those in Africa, where most nations have vaccinated less than 5% of their populations. Now detected in at least 85 countries, Delta's rise could yet be devastating.

The Delta variant continues making headway throughout the UK. Already it may have precipitated a third UK wave and that possibility has forced the government to postpone Freedom Day until 19 July. And Delta has been associated with disappointingly-poor vaccine data. For example, a second dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine boosted protection against Delta to only 60% (compared to 66% against Alpha), although two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab were 88% effective (compared to 93% against Alpha).

By the end of June, cases of the Delta variant in the UK were doubling roughly every 11 days. But even people with one vaccine dose are still 75% less likely to be hospitalised, compared with unvaccinated individuals, and those who are double-dosed are 94% less likely to be hospitalised.

But make no mistake, Delta is set to flourish globally, and not just in poor nations, as in Africa where it has already been detected in Malawi, Uganda and South Africa. Rich countries are also under threat. For instance, virologists expect Delta to become the dominant strain in the USA, where regional vaccination rates are vastly disparate. Vigilance and vaccines are the order of the day to fight and defeat Delta and any of its emergent allies. This is a hazardous contest.

New vaccine news

The Novavax vaccine, which uses a constituent protein subunit of the coronavirus, a different technology from the other Covid-19 vaccines authorised in the West so far, is back in the news. And it is good news from a 30,000 person trial conducted in the USA and Mexico. The Novavax vaccine was 90.4% effective against symptomatic Covid-19 infections and 100% protective against the moderate and severe disease. Against eight viral variants of interest and concern, its efficacy was 93.2%. And the vaccine appeared safe and well-tolerated with only mild side effects.

And there has been good preliminary news of a much-awaited nasal spray vaccine against Covid-19 – no needles, no syringes, no jabs, no squeals, little waste. Scientists in America have reported that a nasal spritz of a therapy based on engineered immunoglobulin M (IgM) neutralising antibodies is effective against the Alpha, Beta and Gamma variants. Squirts of the IgMs six hours before or six hours after infection, sharply reduced the amount of virus in the lungs two days after infection. Sadly, this work was murine-based, that is carried out in mice, not men. But... it is a start.

Now some bad news. Already two messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines (from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna), have proved to be spectacularly effective at overcoming Covid-19. However, another mRNA vaccine has recently crashed. In the last edition of Coronavirus – Part 7 (May 2021), successful results from the Phase 2b/3 trial of the mRNA vaccine, known as CVnCoV from CureVac, were anticipated. Furthermore, regulatory approval from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) was expected in early June. But the trial failed. On 16 June, researchers from the German company, CureVac, based in Tübingen, announced the results of its 40,000-person, Phase 2b/3 clinical trial. They reported that its two-dose vaccine demonstrated an interim efficacy of only 47% against Covid-19. In total, 134 cases of Covid-19 were detected among the participants, albeit in the environment of at least 13 variants. This was hugely disappointing. However, the trial will continue as its volunteers are being monitored for additional cases of Covid-19, with a final assessment expected in July.

Vaccination strategies – the carrot

We all respond to rewards, be they carrots, cash – or guns! It is the basis of operant conditioning. And nowhere has adopted this psychological trickery to the level of the USA in order to boost Covid-19 vaccination rates.

For example, to encourage residents of West Virginia to get jabbed, the state is offering the chance to win deadly weaponry (what?!) as part of a prize-winning vaccination lottery. For receiving a first jab, 'lucky' winners will receive one of five custom-made hunting rifles, or one of five bespoke shotguns. Other prizes include two customised pick-up trucks, five life-time hunting and fishing licences and 25 weekend getaways to West Virginia state parks. There are also mundane cash incentives of weekly \$1 million payments.

Several other US states have also started vaccine lotteries. Perhaps the most bizarre scheme is that from Washington State – it allows adults, over the age of 21, to claim a free, pre-rolled marijuana joint when they receive either a primary or booster Covid-19 vaccination shot. The scheme is known as 'Joints for Jabs'.

Will these strategies encourage the vaccine-reluctant to come forward and bare the deltoid? Probably. But beware of the stoned guy carrying that hunting rifle. And I thought California was 'the land of fruit and nuts'!

And not to be outdone by the decadent West, the Russians have also adopted vaccine incentive schemes. For example, the mayor of Moscow announced in mid-June that, in an effort to speed up its sluggish Covid-19 vaccination rate, residents who get a Sputnik V shot will be entered into a lottery draw with cars as prizes. Apparently five cars, each worth 1 million roubles (about £10,000), will be given away every week.

Has the UK even discussed such niceties? Perhaps we should. Perhaps I should have delayed.

Vaccination strategies – the stick

At the other end of the scale of enticements are forced vaccinations driven by a proverbial stick. These are hugely divisive. Just thinking about the complexities of their legalities, ethics and logistics brings on brain-ache. Could it yet be a case of 'no jab, no job'? For months, some UK hospitals and other businesses have been pushing for mandatory jabs.

Is this example from the USA a possible blueprint for others? Johns Hopkins Medicine, the colossal healthcare facility in Baltimore, Maryland, is requiring clinical and non-clinical personnel to be fully

vaccinated against Covid-19 by 1 September 2021. The edict applies to all faculty, staff, temporary staff, students, postdoctoral fellows, house staff, providers, volunteers and vendors.

The organisation insists this move is essential to protect the health of patients, staff and the surrounding community. Requests for exemption, on religious or medical grounds, are allowed. Personnel who remain unvaccinated after 1 September will be asked to submit to a Covid-19 test every week. In addition, Johns Hopkins Medicine will continue to require clinical staff to wear appropriate personal protective equipment, and patients must continue to wear face coverings inside Johns Hopkins Medicine buildings. Patients are currently not required to be vaccinated.

A similar move is afoot among US universities. From late March, a few US colleges and universities began issuing requirements for students to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 if they want to return to campus this autumn. Some policies include academic and other staff. The practice has blossomed – what began as a handful of institutions rapidly turned into dozens by mid-April and soon after to 350 and more.

Vaccination strategies – the stick in the UK

Are these the sort of protocols that will inevitably be enforced, sooner or later, in the UK? They will be resisted by many citizens, politicians, lawyers, trade unions and other groupings. Yet already the UK government has dipped its toe into the icy waters of confrontation. According to advice provided to the government by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) social care working group, 80% of staff and 90% of residents in each care homes must receive at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine in order to provide a minimum level of protection against outbreaks. However, only 65% of care homes in England are currently meeting this target, falling to 44% of care homes in London. Back in April, a five-week government consultation entitled, 'Making vaccination a condition of deployment in older adult care homes' was launched. The deadline was extended to 26 May. The consultation outcome was published on 15 June and then updated on 16 June.

In short, the government has announced that everyone working in a care home in England must be vaccinated. The new legislation means that from October – assuming Parliamentary approval and a subsequent 16-week grace period to get jabbed – all care home staff must have had two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine, unless they have a medical exemption. The requirement will apply to full-time and part-time staff, those employed by an agency, volunteers and others, such as tradespeople, hairdressers and beauticians deployed in the care home.

As far back as 30 May, the UK government's vaccine minister, Nadhim Zahawi, revealed that officials were considering requiring NHS workers to be vaccinated against Covid-19. He stated, 'It's absolutely the right thing and would be incumbent on any responsible government to have the debate, to do the thinking as to how we go about protecting the most vulnerable by making sure that those who look after them are vaccinated.' And Zahawi continued, 'There is precedent for this. Obviously, surgeons get vaccinated for hepatitis B, so it is something that we are absolutely thinking about.'

And so it has come to pass. Ministers are now considering extending the vaccination requirement to all NHS staff. On 17 June, the government opened a public consultation on requiring vaccination as a condition of employment for NHS workers in an attempt to reduce transmission in hospitals and to save lives. OK, here come the questions. What about other so-called front-line workers, such as teachers, police officers, ambulance and court staff? And shop staff? And what about an employment law to allow employers to sack employees who refuse to be vaccinated without a valid medical reason. And what constitutes 'a valid medical reason'? And will the government be sued under European human rights legislation for breaching personal freedoms? And will the plans backfire so that staff resign rather than get vaccinated? As the British Medical Association has warned, 'compulsion is a blunt instrument that carries its own risks'.

This is a prickly topic that will not solve itself. If the world has to live with Covid-19 for the foreseeable future – and it does – then some guidelines, directives, regulations and laws for wearing face coverings, social distancing and the like, plus compulsory vaccinations would seem to be unavoidable.

China's vaccination achievements

For more than a week in mid-June, an average of about 20 million people were vaccinated against Covid-19 every day in China. What logistics! At that rate the entire UK adult population could be single jabbed in just two days.

Chinese citizens have been given – probably with no choice – one of two vaccines approved by the WHO for worldwide use. One is CoronaVac manufactured by Sinovac, a Beijing company. In clinical trials it has shown an efficacy of 65% against symptomatic Covid-19 and 86% protection against the severe disease and death. It has already been approved for use in 29 countries. The other vaccine is a product from the state-owned firm Sinopharm and has a demonstrated efficacy of 79% against both the symptomatic disease and hospitalisation.

Both of these approved Chinese vaccines are two-dose vaccines to be administered between two to four weeks apart. Both are easier to store in domestic fridges than other approved vaccines – a considerable advantage in resource-poor settings. Both use well-established technology based on an inactivated virus. Both offer less, but judged to be sufficient, protection against the disease than do the novel mRNA vaccines with their 95% efficacies.

Meeting the global need

These vaccines from China, with that country's enormous potential for manufacturing, could become central players in curbing the global pandemic. The grand project is to vaccinate 70% of the world's population with 11 billion doses in order to achieve the estimated threshold for herd immunity. And these Chinese vaccines could become key suppliers to COVAX, (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access), the worldwide initiative for supplying vaccines to low-income countries. Certainly, their ease of storage and transport will bring big advantages to those nations.

But such nations need cash as well as vaccines. A recent pitch from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) entitled, 'A Proposal to End the COVID-19 Pandemic', promoted a rational action plan with targets, schedules and costs. It builds on the current work of the WHO and partners, such as COVAX, the World Bank Group and the World Trade Organization. It states, 'The proposal targets: (1) vaccinating at least 40 percent of the population in all countries by the end of 2021 and at least 60 percent by the first half of 2022, (2) tracking and insuring against downside risks, and (3) ensuring widespread testing and tracing, maintaining adequate stocks of therapeutics, and enforcing public health measures in places where vaccine coverage is low.'

It continues, 'The benefits of such measures at about \$9 trillion far outweigh the costs which are estimated to be around \$50 billion – of which \$35 billion should be paid by grants from donors and the residual by national governments potentially with the support of concessional financing from bilateral and multilateral agencies.'

Will this Proposal work? Will it bring the pandemic to an end faster in the developing world? Will it reduce infections and loss of lives? Will it accelerate the economic recovery? Will it benefit people's health and lives? Who can say? What alternative plans are available? Surely it must be worth a punt.

Covid-19 has undeniably created a global 'rich versus poor' conflict. The pandemic was on the agenda of that mid-June meeting of the world's richest G7 leaders at Carbis Bay in Cornwall. Ask some pertinent questions. Were there any signs of a cobelligerent unity in fighting the virus? Will the poor be helped? Apparently, yes and yes. At the end of the summit, the host, Boris Johnson, judged that countries were now rejecting 'selfish, nationalistic approaches' to the pandemic. And the G7 leaders pledged one billion Covid-19 vaccine doses to poor countries. 'It was', said Boris Johnson, 'a big step towards vaccinating the world'. In addition, the prime minister promised to donate at least 100 million surplus Covid-19 vaccine doses within the next year, including 5 million beginning in the coming weeks, either directly or through the COVAX scheme.

Jabs for adolescents

On 4 June, the UK vaccine regulator approved the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in children aged 12 to 15. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said, after conducting a 'rigorous review', that this vaccine is safe and effective in this age group and the benefits outweigh any risks.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has already been approved for use in people aged 16 and over. The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) will now decide whether children, those under 12, should be vaccinated. In addition to approval, the JCVI must advise the government whether these cohorts should be included in the UK's vaccination roll-out.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

Friday 23 July is the scheduled opening ceremony for the Games of the XXXII Olympiad, better known as Tokyo 2020. Will it ever start? It has already been postponed from last year. Will it ever get to the closing ceremony on Sunday 8 August 2021? Will all of the 339 events in 33 sports have been completed?

The hosts are understandingly concerned, even worried. Japanese scientists are warning that allowing spectators, even competitors, to attend will cause the virus to spread domestically and internationally. Their recommendation is to bar, or at least limit, spectators. This is counter to the Japanese government scientists, who, along with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), remain adamant that the Games should go ahead. Already international tourists have been forbidden to enter Japan to watch the Games. Instead, millions of Japanese citizens could be pressed to attend the various venues as spectators.

There are two other issues to factor in. First, Japan has had a slow vaccination rollout covering less than 10% of the population. In early June, the country was coming out of its fourth wave of Covid-19 infection. If the Games go ahead, only the elderly, 65 and older, will have been double vaccinated. Second, recent public opinion polls indicate that between 60% and 80% of the Japanese population favour cancellation. On the other hand, the Japanese government and the IOC are mindful of the huge sums of money involved. Sadly, Covid-19 may yet be a multiple Olympic winner.

Long Covid

Long Covid is variously described as the long-term adverse sequelae after a SARS-CoV-2 infection, or as a poorly-defined syndrome that exhibits at least one lingering symptom after a Covid-19 infection.

Because the number of Covid-19 cases in the world has now exceeded 180 million, it is time to ask some pointed questions. What are the long Covid figures? A US review of several studies published in March reported that between 33% and 87% of post-hospitalised patients reported at least one symptom persisting after several months. Those are among the severely ill Covid-19 patients. What about the non-hospitalised Covid-19 patients? A general study by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), published in April 2021, estimated that 1.1 million UK people who had suffered from Covid-19, still reported adverse symptoms. When a cohort of 20,000 Covid-positive people were tracked, the ONS found that 13.7% reported symptoms after at least 12 weeks. A June study from Imperial College London estimated that almost 6% of adults in England have suffered from long Covid. And remember, all such numbers are generally regarded as underestimates.

Although our understanding and treatment of this lingering illness have increased, many mysteries remain. While most people with Covid-19 recover and return to normal health, some patients have symptoms that can last for weeks, or months, maybe even years. In other words, for some people Covid-19 is more than an acute disease, it develops into long Covid.

These long-term symptoms typically include fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, joint and chest pain. In addition, there are reports of smell and taste problems, sleep issues, difficulty with concentration, memory troubles, depression and anxiety. One UK study found that after six months, the most common symptoms

were fatigue, post-exertional malaise and cognitive dysfunction. And these symptoms fluctuate with patients often going through phases of improved health followed by periods of relapse.

Moreover, long Covid seems to be more common in women than in men. It is most common in middle-aged people, those between 35 and 49 years old. And it is least common in younger and older people.

Long Covid has now become recognised as a serious public health problem. Since January 2021, the WHO has recommended that all Covid-19 patients should have access to follow-up care to minimise long Covid. Since February 2021, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced that it would spend \$1.15 billion over four years to research long Covid, quaintly renamed as 'post-acute sequelae of Covid-19' (PASC). Again, since February, the UK's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has invested £18.5 million to fund four studies of long Covid. And in March 2021, it unveiled additional funding worth £20 million.

So, what causes long Covid? It is unlikely to be the virus itself. Infected people are clear of the virus after a few weeks. What about viral fragments? These are known to persist for months. Or is it caused by the immune system going haywire? Is it therefore an autoimmune disease? On that hypothesis, the jury is currently out. Yet studies have found unusual concentrations of cytokines, chemicals that help to regulate immune responses, in the blood of people who have had Covid-19, which suggest that their immune systems are skewed.

Some current studies are examining blood and saliva samples of Covid-19 patients at 4-monthly intervals for factors, such as inflammation, cardiovascular problems and other significant changes. Additional studies are taking a different approach by researching physical impairments, mental health difficulties and cognitive impairments. These are scattergun approaches because the biology of long Covid remains largely a mystery.

Here is a fascinating question – is long Covid similar to other illnesses that linger after viral infections? A possible link might be to myalgic encephalomyelitis, also known as chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS). People with this debilitating illness typically become exhausted after even mild activity and exhibit other symptoms common to long Covid. After all, ME/CFS is also a post-viral illness. Yet differences are evident. For example, long Covid sufferers are more likely to report shortness of breath than are those with ME/CFS.

What treatments are available for long Covid patients? Not many. By May, the NHS had provided £24 million for a network of 80 and more clinics to start assessing and helping people with the condition. Yet no evidence-based treatments currently exist. The real need is for multidisciplinary teams because long Covid affects so many parts of the sufferer's body and mind. Perhaps the immediate need is for rest, maybe for several weeks or even months. And learning from the quarrelsome history of ME/CFS, long-Covid needs to be recognised as a genuine disability by healthcare professionals. The number of people with long Covid implies the need for more care and support.

Not all is downbeat – a few putative medicines are already being tested. For example, PureTech Health, a biotechnology company in Boston, Massachusetts, has started a clinical trial of deupirfenidone, its own anti-fibrotic and anti-inflammatory agent. Preliminary results are expected in the second half of 2021. And intensive-care specialist, Charlotte Summers and her colleagues at the University of Cambridge, have launched a study called HEAL-COVID, which aims to prevent long Covid ever taking hold. Participants, who have been previously hospitalised with Covid-19, are given one of two drugs after being discharged. They are apixaban, an anticoagulant that might reduce the risk of dangerous blood clots, and atorvastatin, an anti-inflammatory agent. Results are awaited.

Long Covid is proving to be a huge medical challenge. It is beset by hitches and glitches. Since its aetiology currently remains a mystery, it is like fighting with an unknown adversary – and that is never an easy way to win a battle.

John Ling

The Challenge of Cultural Marxism

Last month the Affinity Social Issues Team were delighted to welcome Melvin Tinker as he joined them online to talk about the subject of his recent book, *That Hideous Strength: How the West was Lost* and its highlighting of the dangers of 'Cultural Marxism'. This is a transcript of what he said:

Let me begin by putting it to you that heresy together with its accompanying sisters – hysteria and persecution – is alive and kicking in the West.

For example:

- The high priestess of modern feminism, Germaine Greer, has been excommunicated from the 'church' of feminism, and declared to be a 'non-feminist' by Eve Hodgson. Why? Because she dared to challenge the new orthodoxy that a man can become a woman either by declaring themselves to be so, or having a physical operation. The same has happened to J. K. Rowling, who has been designated a TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist). As traditionally has happened with heretics, they are forced to recant or be silenced.
- Global star Kanye West has been thrown out of the 'church' of black, denounced as being 'non- black' by Ta-Nehisi Coates. This is because he said he admired the right wing political/cultural commentator Candice Owens and if that were not enough, he then went on to commit *the* cardinal sin by declaring himself an admirer of Donald Trump. The new political definition of black is that you *cannot* support Trump, no matter what your skin colour or genetic heritage.
- The entrepreneur, Peter Thiel, though 'married' to a man, has been evicted from the 'church' of gay by Jim Downs, again for the same reason – he supports Trump so he *can't* be gay, for 'real' gays are anti-Trump.

What is it that has led so many to disappear down the rabbit hole in order to embrace the semantic *laissez-faire* of Humpty Dumpty with a vengeance, such that words not only mean whatever we want them to mean, but become weapons of mass deception to denigrate those considered to be violators of the new sacred orthodoxy of identity politics – the brutal game in which winners are victims, and losers are the privileged? Welcome to the Orwellian World of cultural Marxism or neo-Marxism, or as it is sometimes called, Critical Theory.

Let me offer a simple definition of cultural Marxism. It is an ideology which believes that human beings need to be liberated from what are considered to be repressive social institutions like the family and the church, as well as traditional views and authorities which prevent the individual from realising their true self, fulfilling their inner desires and aspirations, becoming whoever or whatever they want to be – complete freedom.

There are three questions I want us to think about: Why has this revolution occurred; How has it happened and What are the possible responses?

The 'why' question

We may think of it like this: If you wanted to undermine Western Civilisation, rooted in the Judeo-Christian world view, how might you go about it?

How about labelling the whole of our past as sexist, racist, patriarchal and fundamentally unjust and so not worth preserving? How about persuading people that they will only be 'free' if the powerful are toppled from their positions of power and that power is redistributed amongst minority groups? How about getting people to believe that if they don't 'get it' that anyone who's a white, male, cis, able-bodied, heterosexual

is loaded with privilege and power, they themselves have been brainwashed by the system, a sign that *they* need liberating and re-educating?

We have in operation the 'doubting game' – getting people to doubt those things which for centuries have been taken as givens and then present the glowing alternative which cannot be doubted – what is dubbed 'radical democracy'.

The 'how' question: How has this happened?

To begin to formulate an answer we need to delve a little into communist history.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, in anticipation of a revolution in Germany, which failed. *Das Kapital* volume 1 followed in 1867. Half a century passed before the October Revolution of 1917 saw Russia become the first state where communists successfully seized power. But Russia was an agrarian economy, not an industrial one like Britain and Germany. And it was the *industrial* powers which Marx had regarded as vulnerable to revolution from below. For believers in Marxism, this posed a frustrating puzzle.

In 1921, after a successful career as a journalist and commentator for socialist newspapers, one of the key figures in the development of cultural Marxism, Antonio Gramsci, began to turn his attention to interests which were not just theoretical but *practical*. The world that drove Gramsci to develop his theories was that of inter-war Europe. He was facing two questions which would also vex the Frankfurt School, the group of academics and agitators which formally forged what is called Critical Theory, people like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse.

The two questions were these: First, why hadn't the inevitable revolution Marx predicted taken place; and Second, how can communism be brought not just to Russia, but to the Western nations?

Marx believed that there was no such thing as a fixed human nature, rather that people were shaped like clay by their socio-economic conditions. In 1859 he had written, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.' Gramsci took this one stage further which differed significantly from Marx, namely, that *culture itself*, influenced by a dominant group, is a major *shaping force*, not just political and economic factors. Putting it crudely, for Marx politics and economics shaped culture; for Gramsci, culture shaped politics and economics. As Andrew Breitbart has put it, 'Politics is downstream from culture'.

Gramsci developed the key idea of 'hegemony' (from the Greek *hegemon*, 'ruler'). This is the process by which a dominant class exerts and maintains its influence over people through *non-coercive* means such as schools, the media and marketing. It works by changing what people consider to be 'normal', those things which are just taken for granted as being 'right'. It is the presumption which declares 'Of course, everyone nowadays knows that...' (fill in the blanks). The aim is to get people to think and especially *feel* for themselves that certain values and practices, such as same-sex marriage, the ability to define for oneself one's gender and so on are 'obvious', 'common sense', 'just' or even 'natural'. Then you do not argue about these things because it is assumed there is nothing to argue *about*. But if you do start arguing that, for example, homosexual practice is wrong, you will be howled at, as if you were claiming the world to be flat. No one believes that nowadays and so your viewpoint can conveniently be ignored or if you persist, action will be taken against you.

For Gramsci, change occurs by capturing society through infiltrating and dominating key culture-making institutions (churches, schools, the media) and civil institutions (the police, law courts, public services and so on). In short, it is a matter of winning society by changing its *culture*, hence *cultural* Marxism. However, once the cultural heights have effectively been captured, non-coercion can rapidly give way to outright coercion.

Here a crucial distinction was introduced by Gramsci between a 'war of position' and a 'war of manoeuvre'. The war of manoeuvre was the conventional idea of a final revolutionary offensive that would impose a

socialist system – like the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917 Tsarist Russia. But for Gramsci, the revolution had to be preceded by the war of *position*, which sought to shape the cultural environment of a society to make it receptive to revolutionary ideas.

The ‘Gramsci strategy’ is made up of several elements:

- **Positive tolerance**

In what was to become one of the foundational works of identity politics, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, wrote *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which builds on Gramsci in order to find a way for the Left to establish its *own* hegemony to bring about what they term, ‘radical democracy’. They propose that given the social complexity that now exists, what is required to effect social change is not simply the mobilisation of a single class (e.g., the proletariat) but a bringing together under one umbrella *all the diverse groups* which are engaged in their own struggles: urban, ecological, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, sexual minorities. They argue that *the* narrative which will enable the energy of these disparate groups to be harnessed for social change is the use of *power*. This, they claim, is a product of the social organisation of Western society which is not only capitalist but *inherently* sexist, patriarchal and racist. Even if there are tensions and contradictions between the groups they are *not* to criticise each other – they are to be positively tolerant. Whilst in recent years many shrill voices have been raised highlighting the ‘big three’ evils of our day (sexism, patriarchy, racism) it is the last one – that of inherent racism – which has for the moment taken centre-stage.

- **Zero tolerance**

Zero tolerance of any position taken by the ‘Right’, that is, conservative forces; you don’t give them a chance or a voice (GB news). All those on the political right are labelled oppressors and those who are classed as minorities are the oppressed. What cultural Marxism does is to seek an *ever-expanding coalition* of victim groups: racial, ethnic, religious, gender, *ad infinitum*. The mantle of victimhood then sanctifies all, and so is ultimately sought after by all. Linked to this is a sense of entitlement by the members of the alleged victim group.

- **Capturing the ‘commanding heights’ of culture**

This involves what has been called ‘the long march through the institutions’. Here is how one writer (Jefrey Breshears) describes the different stages in that ‘long march’ in the United States:

‘Throughout the 1960s, with the escalation of the Vietnam War, many college and university graduates enrolled in master’s programs in hopes of evading the draft, and some of the most radical eventually earned Ph.D.s with the intention of fundamentally transforming American society through the education system... Others opted to avoid the draft by enrolling in seminary and becoming ministers in liberal Protestant denominations or priests in the Roman Catholic Church... by the early 1980s they were firmly entrenched in most universities and attaining tenure... just as former Sixties activists came to dominate in higher education, they moved into key positions of influence in the mainstream media. As their cultural influence and power increased over time, they grew bolder and more aggressive.’

I think you see something similar having happened in this country, particularly the humanities in the universities and the media – especially the BBC (read Robin Aitkin’s *The Noble Liar*).

- **The destabilisation of language**

This enables a new language to be devised by which the power of the elite can be exerted. The goal for Herbert Marcuse, was to, ‘break the established universe of meaning’. Think for example of the tectonic shift in meaning of the word ‘tolerance’. The old tolerance was the need for a society to accept the *existence* of different views. The new tolerance is the acceptance *of* different views. To accept that a different position exists and deserves the right to exist is one thing, to accept the position *itself* as authentic means one is no longer opposing it. And those who oppose it are to be opposed.

- **The assigning of value to people according to their group identity (identity politics)**

There is dark downside to such a categorisation which has been picked up by the former Marxist, David Horowitz:

'By obliterating the particulars and casting parties as genders rather than individuals, the question of guilt and innocence is pre-ordained... In identity politics only collective rights matter – not individual rights. What matters is one's membership in a 'victim' group or 'oppressor' group. Membership is based on characteristics the individual cannot change. Identity politics is a politics of hate and a prescription for war.'

If you belong to a designated 'oppressor group' – for example, privileged white male – you are 'guilty' simply by virtue of *belonging* to that group, regardless of how you may have acted as an individual. At least if an *individual* considers actions he had previously taken to be morally wrong, then he can change or, to use the religious term, repent and so be offered forgiveness. Such a possibility however, is *not* open to a *group*, and so the designated 'oppressor group' must *forever* be burdened with a stigma so long as it continues to exist.

Laclau and Mouffe propose that part of the socialist strategy to bring about the new Hegemony of the Left is for what they call external 'actors' to those who are in unequal power relations to draw *attention* to the fact. Thus advocates of identity politics and intersectionality incessantly remind us that our societies are racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic and the list goes on. These oppressions form part of an interlocking web which somehow must be unpicked if radical democracy is to be achieved. If you understand classical Marx as a battle between the 'haves and the have-nots', 'the cultural Marxist tension is between the 'chavs and the chav-nots'.

There are three destructive effects of cultural Marxism:

First, *everything becomes politicised and weaponised*. In this respect Marx has won, in that everything has taken on universal political significance. This is now part of the intuitive way in which we *all* think about society – whether we are on the Right or the Left.

Secondly, *we are doomed to perpetual conflict*. The cultural Marxist focus on groups at the expense of the individual, coupled with the fact that equality of outcomes can never be realised, means that conflict will be endless. One of the desperate features of our society is that of grievance and vengefulness which are multiplied and amplified with breathtaking speed via social media. There is no end-game as such to Critical Theory: the game *is* the end – the constant destabilising of all claims to power in their various expressions.

Thirdly, *truth is sacrificed on the altar of ideology and our hold on reality becomes increasingly tenuous*. When Heather MacDonald, the author of *The War on Cops: How the New Attack on Law and Order Makes Everyone Unsafe*, was invited to speak at Claremont McKenna College in 2017, many students objected to her being given a platform because it would be tantamount to 'condoning violence against black people'. The students wrote:

Historically, white supremacy has venerated the idea of objectivity, and wielded a dichotomy of 'subjectivity vs. objectivity' as a means of silencing oppressed peoples. The idea that there is a single truth – 'the Truth' – is a construct of the Euro-West...

So, claims to be concerned for truth are simply discarded as a case of 'Euro-West construction' in order to silence oppressed people groups. This is a clear instance of what C. S. Lewis terms, 'Bulverism'. The fallacious nature of this is easily exposed by simply asking whether the statement that the alleged dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity is itself an objective statement, in which case it is conceded that there *is* such a thing as objectivity and therefore not the sole preserve or construction of the Euro-West. If it is subjective, it can be discarded as being of little consequence and we can all move on. The important point is that reasoned discourse is at a discount thus leaving society vulnerable to the prey of those who have the loudest voice or the biggest clubs to beat you with via the social platforms now available.

In 1975 the sociologist Alvin Gouldner, published an article in the journal *Telos* in which he made an important distinction between revolutionary intellectuals and what he called the 'intelligentsia'. The intelligentsia refers to members of the highly-educated middle class who inherit and *manage* the power that comes from the revolutionary ideas of the true intellectuals. The key word is 'manage'. Gouldner writes, 'It is not the proletariat who came to power under "socialism", but first, privileged intellectuals, and, then, privileged intelligentsia.' The intelligentsia don't have all that much originality, he says, but they do have *power* using their technical and managerial skills to expand the ideas of the intellectuals in the name of 'liberation'. Therefore, you have a new elite with a managerial mentality and skills in politics, education and the media. These are the 'experts' who are to be believed and obeyed. And whilst they may not be too drawn to the old socialist fallacy of the equality of *economic* outcomes, there is the delusional pursuit of the equality of *social* outcomes.

There are parallels to what is happening in our society and the former communist countries. Vaclav Havel was one of the leading members of the Charter 77 Movement which led to the 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia in 1989. Their motto was 'Live the Truth'. He was well acquainted with a government that held onto power despite its own bankruptcy, what he called a 'post-totalitarian society', one which was not a traditional dictatorship, but was still totalitarian in imposing its ideology on the citizenry. In 1978, he wrote *The Power of the Powerless*, a classic expression of life in a regime that didn't work, but that required everyone to keep their mouths shut. It contains a famous passage about a greengrocer who puts up a sign supplied by the communist party, declaring 'Workers of the world unite!' What, Havel asks, does the sign really *mean*? His answer was:

Verbally, it might be expressed this way: 'I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace.' This message, of course, has an addressee: it is directed above, to the greengrocer's superior, and at the same time it is a shield that protects the greengrocer from potential informers.' A 'post-totalitarian' system that did not rely simply on direct force and intimidation to impose its will could, nonetheless, exert an unbreakable control over its citizens through this kind of requirement for ideological correctness. The greengrocer does not believe the sign, but fear of the consequences keeps him obedient. Further, the 'ideological excuse' – that the sign is superficially in favour of a higher cause – allows the greengrocer to lie to himself that his behaviour is not cowardice and a breach of conscience. If it said, 'I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient', he would not be able to ignore the truth.

It does not require that much of a leap of the imagination to see how this translates into our context. Whilst most people may never have even heard of cultural Marxism, they are aware of beliefs and practices which are undergirded by it and are expressions of it – things like diversity, inclusivity, white privilege, black lives matter, trans rights and so on. Like Havel's grocer they are also aware of what is expected of them in adopting and displaying the 'signs' which affirm and promote the progressive ideology. In part this explains the display of rainbow flags at police stations, Sainsbury's stores and Anglican cathedrals. It is why National Trust workers are obliged to wear rainbow lanyards and football players are required to 'take the knee'.

Where do we go from here? This is the *what* question, what responses are open to us?

James Davison Hunter, who brought the term 'culture war' to popular prominence with his 1991 book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, has shown that cultures are changed by *networks close to the centre of elite power*. Similarly, Peter Berger contends, 'Ideas don't succeed in history because of their inherent truthfulness but rather because of their *connection to very powerful institutions and interests*.' Why is academia so important? It is because it constitutes a meeting point where elite power, top minds and new ideas interact. Small networks of very clever people – like the Frankfurt School – can come together and develop new ideas in a sustained fashion over several years.

One of the problems we now face is that because of the capture of our universities by the left, the post-totalitarian regime described by Havel is effectively in operation which makes it very difficult for alternative views which would challenge the status quo to be aired and so the power becomes further consolidated as

dissent will not be tolerated. A recent example of this occurred in 2017 at Oxford University when Dr Nigel Biggar, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology, organised a conference on 'Ethics and Empire' in which he drew together scholars from different disciplines to discuss the subject in a reasoned, academic manner. Biggar himself eventually published a paper which showed that British Colonialism was not all bad. The response from some of his colleagues at Oxford, and others around the world was such that you would have thought he had organised a conference to discuss the merits of National Socialism and the Holocaust! Nigel was genuinely surprised and shocked by the reaction. He later arranged another private meeting of academics inviting a junior member of an Oxford faculty who had just completed his DPhil. The junior member agreed to attend under the strict condition that his attendance was kept completely secret because, he said, there were two senior colleagues in his department who, if they knew he had even *spoken* to Nigel, would ensure that his academic career would end before it had begun.

What are the options?

1. *Faithful presence*. This is favoured by Davison Hunter. He does not expect any great influence as a result but it is a position of integrity and will invariably involve great cost. And so rebels such as Laurence Fox, Andrew Doyle, and Douglas Murray are not to underestimate their influence and reach, especially with new social platforms being available (for the time being at any rate). The faithful presence stance would also cover the importance of bodies like the Christian Institute and Christian Concern which give public support and legal defence. A theological version of this has been put forward by Mike Cosper, called it 'The Esther Option'. (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/esther-option/>)
2. *Faithful presence and alternative structures*. This was Havel's position. There was very little possibility of withdrawal for him and others like him anyhow, but he did envisage encouraging a 'second culture' with basic elementary, organisational forms, waiting in the wings as it were in order to step in when the post-totalitarian society finally collapsed.
3. *The Benedict Option*, championed by Rod Dreher. He argues that the present spiritual crisis in the West is akin to that faced by society at the end of the fifth century at the time of Pope Benedict. He set up monasteries as a kind of ark to preserve Christian culture. He is adamant that this is not a 'head for the hills' approach, but a means of preparing Christians to get more serious about discipleship, becoming more distinctly Christian with the priority being the local community and churches modelling an alternative culture. Marc Sidwell makes two revealing points about this approach. First, it underestimates the reach of the social engineers which extends to the periphery of society. Secondly, although monasteries were *physically* isolated, they deeply connected to power, patronage and elite intellectual life and so were able to influence change because of that, along the lines suggested by Davison Hunter. If that is so, then the parallel between the present crisis in the West and the fifth century and a possible response is not so close.
4. *Do a Gramsci* which appears to be what Marc Sidwell is advocating (*The Long March: How the Left won the culture war and what to do about it*). He says, 'The most successful new institutions for lasting cultural change exploit the latest technology, but they also combine with elite connections, access to significant funding, top minds and the development of bold new ideas.' He adds, 'Changing the culture through the institutions is possible, but the only route that evidently works is at the highest level. It is expensive, demanding, uncertain and, above all, frustratingly slow.' Indeed, it may be too slow given the continuing downward spiral of the culture wars with the rise of what Rod Dreher calls 'soft totalitarianism'.

Of course, none of these options are mutually exclusive and, depending upon circumstances and opportunities, different people and groups will pursue different routes.

Melvin Tinker

Book review: The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution

Carl R. Trueman

Crossway, 432pp, 2020, £17.30 hardback (Amazon)

How did society ever come to accept that someone can be ‘a woman trapped in a man’s body’? This is the question that prompted Carl Trueman to write this book. Just a few generations ago, a claim to be ‘trapped in the wrong body’ would have been regarded as nonsensical, yet today even questioning such a claim is regarded as immoral or as evidence of being ‘transphobic’. How did we get to this point, whereby the separation of gender from sex, of biology from identity – a statement that collapses feminism and dismantles family – became plausible?

Trueman starts by looking at the work of Phillip Rieff whose book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, articulates a simple model to describe how cultures have developed over time. First was political man, exemplified in Plato and Aristotle, who obtained his sense of self primarily from engaging in public life. Second is religious man which describes the Middle Ages when people found their primary sense of self from involvement in religious activities. Third came economic man where the sense of self is obtained primarily through economic activity – this is Marx and modernity. Finally, we have psychological man whose identity is primarily found in the inward quest for psychological happiness. It is this later shift to the emphasis on individual satisfaction, which Trueman calls ‘expressive individualism’, and which accurately describes contemporary culture. It makes our culture highly individualistic, and ultimately relativises all meaning and truth to personal taste.

Here already we can see how psychological man makes the individual sovereign and enables him to make his own identity. Practices and preferences become linked to identities, and since identities are sovereign, they become beyond critique. It is not enough for society to tolerate my identity; it must recognise it and approve of it. Hence, we have ‘hate speech’ which does psychological harm, and therefore ought to be prohibited. Freedom of speech therefore becomes part of the problem, rather than a solution. Naturally there should also be legal recognition and rights for all sorts of identities, which leads to same-sex ‘marriage’, for example.

A therapeutic culture will justify abortion on the grounds that the birth might harm the woman’s subjective well-being. Welcome to twenty-first century UK, where 98% of abortions are justified on just these grounds. Sexual practices of all kinds will also be justified on the basis of psychological benefits. Trueman wonders how long it will be before incest, paedophilia and zoophilia are accepted on the basis that not to do so would harm someone’s sense of identity?

In this brave new world, ethics is reduced to emotivism. There is no objectivity: If you believe homosexual practice is wrong, what you really mean is that you personally disapprove of it. Reason is irrelevant; those who disagree with the prevailing ethical norms are considered to have irrational prejudices and are labelled as such – hence the proliferation of phobias. Identities are indisputable.

Trueman traces the development of these ideas, demonstrating the influence of the likes of Rousseau, Wordsworth, Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Marx and Darwin, all of whom laid foundations for the sexual revolution that we are now reaping the fruits of. Their ideas all contribute in different ways to the plausibility of claiming to be ‘born in the wrong body’.

Finally, Trueman gets to Freud, who rooted human fulfilment in sexual expression. Trueman explains: ‘before Freud, sex was an activity, for procreation or for recreation; after Freud, sex is definitive of who we are, as individuals, as societies, and as a species’ (221). It does not matter that his theories have now been discredited, his ideas live on as axiomatic foundations of our culture.

As Trueman makes clear: 'Once identity was understood to be sexual, then it was only a matter of time before sex became political' (266). Here Trueman examines Critical Theory – a modification of Marxism into the world of identities. Now the traditional family becomes a unit of oppression because it restricts people's expression of their identities. Children must be liberated to discover their identities through sex education, setting the stage for a struggle between the state and parents.

It is fair to see all this as in some ways a deliberate and decisive battle with Christianity. Central to Christian ethics is sexual morality; destroy that and you destroy Christianity. Pornography has its ever-increasing role to play in trivialising sex and detaching it from any ethical context. As Trueman comments: 'The triumph of pornography is both evidence of the death of God and one means by which he is killed' (297).

In legal terms, the triumph of the sexual revolution was the legalisation of same-sex 'marriage'. Trueman shows how the legal ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015 did not arise in a vacuum. Other legal cases paved the way for reinterpreting the US Constitution to require recognition of 'one's own concept of existence' (303), for example. Thus, even the law becomes based on expressive individualism, and 'marriage' is not just redefined, it is destroyed. The combination of no-fault divorce and same-sex 'marriage' serves to render 'marriage' meaningless. What is to stop it extending to more than two people, or even beyond people to animals or objects?

Now it is all too easy to see how transgenderism became plausible: Identity is king, and we create our own identities. How dare you challenge my identity? But society cannot survive with no objective basis for morality, law, or ethics for very long. Expressive individualism is inherently unstable. If gender really is a construct, then so are the whole range of sexual identities too. One day this crazy world will finally collapse, and those who supported it will clearly be on the wrong side of history. But in the meantime, how should the church respond?

Trueman concludes with what he calls an 'unscientific prologue' which offers some introductory thoughts on the way forward for the church from here. Step one is to understand where we have come from, and there is no better book than this one to help with that. Trueman cautions the church not to adopt or accept the narratives of the revolution. We should seek to present a reasoned case for Christian morality rather than emphasising testimonies, personal experience, and identities. The church must also cultivate community, and recover natural law and a high view of the physical body. Trueman sees parallels in today's culture with that of the second century church when similar challenges were overcome by a marginalised church in a hostile sexualised culture.

If, like me, you have ever wondered how transgenderism triumphed in our culture, then this is the book for you! It is not a light read, but it is rich and rewarding in its analysis. Trueman's 'concluding unscientific prologue', only really hints at the way forward. One could wish for more. That said, Trueman demonstrates with this book that understanding the past is crucial to understanding the present.

Trueman has served the church well with this book. A wealth of research is distilled into this volume. Cultural analysis doesn't come better than this. If you want to understand how the sexual revolution triumphed you should read it.

Tim Dieppe

Book review: Live Not By Lies

Live Not By Lies: A Manual For Christian Dissidents

Rod Dreher

Sentinel, 240pp, 2020, £22 hardback (Amazon)

In *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, Rod Dreher analyses the current trajectory of Western society, warning of a rise in what he refers to as 'soft totalitarianism'. Drawing from the experiences of eye witnesses to Soviet-era totalitarian regimes, Dreher warns that many today are surrendering their historically-cherished political rights within democracy in exchange for personal pleasure and convenience. In idolising safety, wellbeing and personal happiness as the ultimate goals in life, even Christians have embraced so-called 'moralistic therapeutic deism' which relativises truth and leads to much cultural confusion (11-12).

Dreher finds inspiration for *Live Not By Lies* from Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's essay of the same name. He outlines Solzhenitsyn's description of how to live such a life in ways that transcend the political divide. One who refuses to 'live by lies' will show a commitment to the truth by, among other things,

- not writing, affirming or distributing anything that distorts the truth
- not taking part in a meeting in which the discussion is controlled and truth cannot be voiced
- not voting for a political candidate or proposal considered to be dubious or unworthy (18)

Soft totalitarianism

Dreher describes much of what is happening to us in terms of 'soft totalitarianism'. What is it?

1) It manipulates isolation via the power of corporations and Big Tech to drive ideology

A totalitarian state is one that aspires to nothing less than defining and controlling reality. Truth is whatever the rulers decide it is... wherever totalitarianism has ruled, 'It has begun to destroy the essence of man.' (8)

Interestingly, Dreher does not see compliance with today's 'progressive' beliefs as enforced primarily by politicians, but by elites and private corporations, those whose wealth and power often drive the composition and actions of governments. This is quite consistent with concerns raised by 2020 documentary *The Social Network*, which suggested that Big Tech (Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Apple etc.) is gaining unhealthy levels of power and control over our lives. People are vulnerable to such behaviour as they are increasingly isolated and lonely, cut off from meaningful and responsible community, despite being more connected via technology (31). And so under the guise of a benevolent striving for just societies, Big Tech changes definitions and truth is reframed according to subjective principles.

2) It defines its own standard of justice

Soft totalitarianism often masquerades under the heading of 'social justice', but it is something very different to that which Jesus teaches, which

presumes a transcendent moral order, proclaimed in Scripture... Christian social justice sought to create conditions of unity that enabled all people – rich and poor alike – to live in solidarity and mutual charity as pilgrims on the road to unity with Christ. (64)

Thus, Christian social justice recognises who we are as male and female, acknowledges personal sin and culpability, and is faithful to Scripture and cannot therefore join hands with the soft totalitarian reframing of justice which see the Bible's teaching on life, marriage and identity as unfair and evil. (65)

3) It demonises individuals who dare to oppose new standards of 'progress'

Soft totalitarianism is not achieved by means of blatant power and control as was, for example, Soviet-era totalitarianism; rather it presents itself as a liberal force for good. Unlike older forms of liberalism which allowed for different points of view and was tolerant of such, Dreher points out that this new liberalism has little room for opinions that fall outside its self-defined orthodoxy. He warns that Christians who stand up in defence of the traditional family, male and female gender roles, and of the sanctity of human life risk becoming pariahs, leading to a loss of livelihood and reputation (xii, xiii, 9, 13).

Preying on social isolation, often exacerbated by modern technology, and manipulating a distrust of hierarchies and institutions, soft totalitarianism seeks to disrupt and reset God-given norms for healthy human flourishing. Any who dissent are demonised as victimisers who should be silenced in order for truth, righteousness and justice to prevail. Dreher quotes Rene Girard's warning: 'The current process of spiritual demagoguery and rhetorical overkill has transformed the concern for the victims into a totalitarian command and permanent inquisition.'

Overly pessimistic or genuinely realistic?

Dreher does well to steer clear of partisan politics, highlighting principles applicable to both the left and the right of the political spectrum. The outlook he paints is indeed bleak. One reviewer on The Gospel Coalition website referred to the book as 'overly pessimistic'¹⁰ and suffused with 'hopelessness', while conceding that Dreher's challenge to transformed practice of faith is essentially sound and commendable.

Responding to the assertion that *Live Not By Lies* is fear-driven, Dreher says,

I am trying to instill the rational kind of fear into my readers. I believe one of the greatest enemies of the church in this time and place is the middle-class complacency that everything is going to be okay if we just sit still and wait this out... we should listen to the immigrants who grew up under communism when they express their alarm at what they're seeing happen right here...'¹¹

Indeed, while Dreher highlights the trajectory of much of Western society, far from being hopeless, I find his realistic presentation and the solutions he offers rather hope-filled, particularly in reminding Christians of the importance of family life and Christian community.

Resisting soft totalitarianism

In clear fashion, drawing on many accounts of Christians from behind the Iron Curtain, Dreher provides some principles for resisting the encroachment of soft totalitarianism:

1) Building model Christian families

Given the current onslaught against the biblical model of family life, it should be no surprise that this is one of Dreher's first concerns:

In the coming soft totalitarianism, Christians will have to regard family life in a much more focused, serious way... the days of living like everybody else and hoping our children turn out for the best are over... if you want to love and serve the church, the community and the nation you must first learn to love and serve your family. (149-150)

¹⁰ Trevin Wax, 'Are Western Christians Facing a Totalitarian Threat from the Left? Review: *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*', The Gospel Coalition, 18 September 2020.

¹¹ Rod Dreher, 'Evangelical Dislikes *Live Not By Lies*', *The American Conservative*, September 2020.

2) Anchoring yourself in Christ victorious

Christian families must be rooted in Christ; they must be distinct and set apart. Dreher's first and second points walk hand-in-hand:

For those whose creed is Christianity, then in the face of ubiquitous hatred and cruelty, faith is evidence that the true Truth, the real Reality, is the eternal love of God... If you are not rock solid in your commitment to traditional Christianity, then the world will break you. But if you are, then this is the solid rock upon which that world will be broken.' (152, 163)

3) Unity in small groups

Isolation is a tool of our adversary the devil. It is often rooted in pride and a feeling of self-sufficiency. Dreher sees the formation of small groups of Christians in churches as key to strengthening the entirety of the church. Here, as elsewhere in *Live Not By Lies*, Dreher's stories are particularly helpful and inspiring as they point to small Christian communities meeting illegally across the former Soviet Union who were at peace in Christ and would not be defeated. These groups provided accountability, enabled people to bear one another's griefs at the state of the culture, and allowed a framework from which to 'see, judge and act'.

4) Suffering with joy

Suffering with the undefeated joy of Christ is a principle found throughout the Scriptures. James and Peter wrote their letters with joyful Christ-centred suffering as a primary theme. At the heart of Dreher's work there is a concern that Christians in the West are not really ready to suffer for the cause of Christ; and yet this is no new thing. He reminds us that the threat of soft totalitarianism is not so much that of physical pain to gain conformity as it is the manipulation of our fear of discomfort; Christians will have to get used to alienation and ostracisation. We will need to stop being people pleasers and consider what God is most pleased with.

A call to dissidence without bitterness

Dreher gives many stories of redemptive forgiveness and what it looks like to suffer without bitterness. While the stories themselves are riddled with bleakness and tragedy, they are also filled with Christian hope. Rather than allow fear and bitterness to consume us, let us take our suffering and see it serve as a refining fire to purify our love for God and others. (206)

Published in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, *Live Not By Lies* presents a thought-provoking manual for engaging what may well be a more difficult coming normality than we are accustomed to. Former Prime Minister Theresa May and a significant number of MPs have expressed concerns over precedents set by certain COVID-19 regulations. Among Christians there has been discussion as to when it might be no longer right to submit to secular authority (Romans 13). These discussions are likely to be even more necessary if Dreher's Huxleyan vision of the near future is accurate. Wherever we land on these issues, seeing the spiritual opportunity in the challenges to come is crucial and *Live Not By Lies* may help us to think through such questions.

Regan King

Update on Life Issues - June 2021

Abortion

Abortion statistics for England and Wales 2020

The latest figures for abortions performed in England and Wales during 2020 were published by the Department of Health and Social Care on 11 June. They are statistically abhorrent and ethically reprehensible – the highest ever recorded. There is nothing commendable about these data. They are hideous and heinous. They mock us. They can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales-2020>

In total there were 210,860 abortions with the vast majority (99.6%) performed on resident women. The total for the previous year (2019) was 209,519. There is nowhere to hide. Even the somewhat opaque measure of ‘the age-standardised abortion rate (ASR)’ was 18.2 per 1,000 resident women aged 15 to 44. This too was the highest rate ever documented, exceeding the previous peak of 18.0 from 2019. Or simply consider that there were on average 810 abortions every weekday – every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...

Is there any comfort in the fact that the abortion rate for women under 18 decreased compared with 2019 (from 8.1 to 6.9 per 1,000 teenagers)? Not really. After all, there was an opposing increase for those over 35 (from 9.7 to 10.6 per 1,000 women). And the latest figures even show a rise in women undergoing repeat abortions from 83,624 in 2019 up to 87,926 in 2020. But perhaps the most bizarre datum of all recorded that 131 resident women undergoing abortions in 2020 had already had 8 or more previous abortions. In 2020, 88% of all abortions were performed under 10 weeks of gestation, increasing from 82% in 2019 and 77% in 2010. But are abortions less traumatic and more acceptable if they are carried out earlier?

Other grim statistics show that 99% of abortions in England and Wales were funded by the NHS (that is, by taxpayers), with 77% of these abortions sub-contracted out to the independent sector using organisations such as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS). And 85% of all abortions were medically induced (as opposed to surgically performed), within the first 10 weeks of a pregnancy – an increase from 73% in 2019.

Of the seven grounds for abortion, ground C, the so-called ‘social reason’, accounted for 205,930 (98.1%) of the total. The vast majority (99.9%) of these ground C abortions carried out because of an alleged risk to the woman's mental health. A further 3,083 (1.5%) were carried out under ground E, the suspected handicap reason, which accounted for 100 less than in 2019. Could this small sparing of life be the only comforting glimmer in the whole wretched shebang?

And of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has skewed abortion practice and statistics. As a result, the UK government gave temporary approval for women and girls to take both early medical abortion pills (mifepristone followed by misoprostol within the first 10 weeks of the pregnancy) at their own homes. The drugs were delivered by mail and became the so-called ‘pills by post’ or ‘DIY abortion’ procedure. Taking both abortion pills at home accounted for 47% of all abortions undertaken between April and December 2020.

But there are two caveats concerning these statistics. First, there is no recorded proof that the ‘pills by post’ were actually taken, or taken correctly. Second, the government data exclude early abortions caused by administration of the morning-after pill with its abortifacient mode of action.

Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization

This legal case could become the biggest abortion story in the USA for almost 50 years. At issue is a 2018 Mississippi law that bans abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, but lower US courts have decided to block this legislation. The central question has become, ‘whether all pre-viability prohibitions on elective abortions are unconstitutional.’

The big deal is that on 17 May, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) announced that it will hear the *Dobbs* case and pronounce a judgement on abortion. Such an exciting prospect has been simmering for years. The US pro-life camp has long hoped to appear before the highest court of the land to test the constitutionality of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling (and that of the 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*), in which the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution protects the right of every American woman to have an abortion before her foetus becomes viable, namely, during the first and second trimesters. That legislation has since resulted in more than 62 million abortions in the US. The SCOTUS is expected to hear arguments in October and to issue a ruling in the summer of 2022.

This *Dobbs* case – Thomas Dobbs, as the State Health Officer of the Mississippi Department of Health, is merely the name on the court papers – has already been promoted as, ‘the most consequential case for reproductive rights in decades.’ And newspaper headlines have stated, ‘alarm bells are ringing: activists brace for US abortion case that could rip up *Roe v. Wade*.’ Indeed, many believe that *Dobbs* could become a direct challenge to the colossus of *Roe v. Wade* and could even be used to overturn it. This is truly big, unprecedented, bioethical stuff. And if the SCOTUS rules favourably it could have implications for the practice of abortion around the world.

A lot has changed since 1973. For example, our understanding about unborn children’s development has advanced greatly, including the beginnings of heartbeats and brainwaves, plus their detection, and the rapid development of lungs, nerves, organs, muscles and so on. By 15 weeks these are all developing and becoming functional at phenomenal rates. Medical science, and specifically embryology, was quite primitive in 1973 but is amazingly sophisticated in 2021. Meanwhile, the pro-life camp has moved from defence to offence, exposing the absurdity of the so-called ‘woman’s right to choose’ mantra. Moreover, and not least, the SCOTUS now has a 6 to 3 conservative majority.

If the SCOTUS were to dispense with the ‘viability’ definition, abortion activists predict that half of the US states may ban all, or almost all, abortions. Pro-lifers therefore hope that the justices will allow states to protect the lives of unborn children for the first time in decades. In essence, abortion control would shift from one monolithic federal law to numerous state laws.

And what is the thinking about abortion among the US population? The majority of Americans (53%) describe themselves as pro-choice versus 43% as pro-life. Yet opinion polls consistently show that most Americans want abortions to be either illegal or strongly limited. A May 2020 Gallup poll found that 55% said abortion should be legal ‘only in a few circumstances’ (35%) or ‘illegal in all circumstances’ (20%). Similarly, a January 2021 Marist poll found that 76% of Americans (including 55% who self-identified as pro-choice) support significant restrictions on abortion. In fact, most Americans want the courts to reinterpret *Roe* either by stopping legalised abortion or by returning the issue to the states.

This is just the beginning of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. It is likely to roll on for many months, even years. It also has the potential to change our world – for the better.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Assisted Dying Bill [HL]

On 26 May, Baroness Meacher’s Assisted Dying Bill received its first reading in the House of Lords. In accordance with Parliamentary procedure, there was no discussion or vote. Its full second reading with a debate is likely to occur in the autumn.

Baroness Meacher, who, not coincidentally is chairwoman of the Dignity in Dying organisation (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society), won seventh place in the recent private member’s ballot. Hers is the first euthanasia-type bill to appear at Westminster for five years. The last was the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill introduced in 2015 by Bob Marris MP – it was roundly defeated by 330 v. 118.

The Meacher Bill's intent is, '... to legalise assisted dying in England and Wales as a choice for terminally-ill, mentally competent adults in their final six months of life. Two independent doctors and a High Court judge would have to assess each request, which if granted would enable a patient to die in a manner and at a time and place of their choosing.'

After tabling her new bill, Baroness Meacher predicted that assisted dying will be legal within 18 months. She believed public sentiment was now behind changing the 1961 Suicide Act.

Stem-cell Technologies

The 14-day rule

Back in 1984, the Warnock Committee, charged with drawing up regulations for human embryo research, was faced with the impossible task – if it recommended that experimentation on human embryos should be legalised, then it was obliged to specify an upper time limit after which research would not be permitted. After all, embryo experimentation could not go on for weeks or months, either technically or bioethically.

The Committee duly came up with one of the greatest biological fudges of the twentieth century – the 14-day rule. Ostensibly, that is when the so-called primitive streak conveniently appeared and disappeared, as a sort of ephemeral and insignificant marker. Nevertheless, the primitive streak, the initiation of organogenesis, the start of gastrulation, the last stage at which twinning may occur, or at which two embryos may merge (so-called tetragametic chimerism) were sold to quell the morally anxious. But such qualms were of little practical consequence and were mostly shelved because no-one in the 1980s could culture human embryos for even a few days – the eight-cell stage was just about the pinnacle of scientific achievement. Nevertheless, the 14-day rule was formalised and legalised in the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act.

But unsurprisingly the issue came back to bite the scientists. And like all bioethical endeavours it brought with it a slippery slope. Define some boundary, be it 14 days or 24 weeks, and it will soon be called insufficient and requiring an essential extension. Rumbblings in favour of a '14-plus day' rule had been overheard among the scientific undergrowth for several years. For example, during 2016, two research teams announced independently that they had managed to grow human embryos for 13 days. Then in May 2021, came the most important and coordinated pressure to extend that old pragmatic 14-day rule, or even abandon it. It was driven by the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) and its updated *Guidelines for Stem Cell Research and Clinical Translation*.

An ISSCR task force had been set up to rewrite its previous, now seemingly restrictive, *Guidelines* under the chairmanship of Robin Lovell-Badge of the Crick Institute, London. He argued in an interview with *Nature* that the current rule, 'prevents study of a critical period, between 14 and 28 days, when the beginnings of tissues are established.' This coincides with the so-called 'black box' period of human reproduction, between approximately day five and day 28.

The ISSCR has made clear that it has proposed no time limit nor do the *Guidelines* carry any legal force. But would even 28 days suffice? Of course not, a few years down the technological track and, like 14 days, 28 days will also prove to be insufficient. Just wait until artificial human wombs are functional. However, the 42 members of the Guideline Revision Task Force have produced a summary of the key updates and issues of the ISSCR *Guidelines* in *Stem Cell Reports* (8 June 2021, **16**: 1398-1408). From the following extract it is obvious that the 14-day rule is doomed.

'It has been possible to culture macaque embryos up to about 20 days, well beyond the 14-day equivalent and gastrulation in human embryos. This has not been done with human embryos because of the "14-day rule" that has been adopted in some guidelines, including those from the ISSCR, and enshrined in law in several countries, such as in the UK since 1990. There is now building pressure to extend or even abolish

this limit in order to permit research into very important stages of human embryo development, about which we know little, but where many cases of miscarriage or birth defects are likely to have their origins.’ As with all initially unpalatable, ethically-contentious proposals, be they, for example, the use of aborted foetal material or destructive embryo experimentation, there must be an accompanying sweetener, an inducement to assuage our doubts and fears. To aid the acceptance of its radical proposals, the ISSCR adds that, ‘Understanding the primitive streak, early germ layer development and primordial germ cell formation in humans is crucial to improve our understanding of and interventions for infertility, in vitro fertilization, pregnancy loss, and developmental disorders that occur or originate soon after implantation.’ Got the sweetened message? How could anyone be so mean as to oppose such proposals?

Although these new ISSCR *Guidelines* have no legal authority in any jurisdiction, they will convey enormous weight in any discussion of the practices and bioethics of human embryo-related research, be they human embryo experimentation, embryonic stem-cell technologies, mitochondrial-replacement therapies, organoids, embryo models, chimeras, genome editing and so forth.

Of course, the principal subject of the *Guidelines* is stem-cell research – it is even in the document’s title. But that is somewhat misleading because the front and centre of the discussion is the human embryo, the ineluctable source of embryonic stem cells. And human embryos must be destroyed to harvest embryonic stem cells. So why is there no acknowledgement in the *Guidelines* of the financial, technical and bioethical advantages of using ‘adult’ stem cells in experimental research and medical treatments?

One commentator has insisted that the Society’s framework, ‘proactively sets the stage for a thorough public deliberation.’ Who is kidding who? Any deliberation, debate or consultation will be masterminded by the experimenters. After all, the ISSCR task force signally failed to engage with the public while rewriting its *Guidelines*. Joe Public will also not be privy to the future discussions of the few and certainly not able to effectively challenge them. Debates among the like-minded are not proper debates. This is woke science – public engagement is a myth, public support is inevitable. The favoured outcome is almost already set in regulatory concrete. And what will these experimenters wish for? OK, 28 days will do, but no time barrier would be even better.

Instead of calling for a specific time limit, the ISSCR *Guidelines* suggest that research proposals to grow human embryos beyond the 14-day limit are considered on a case-by-case basis and subjected to local policies. Then, if approved, ‘a specialized scientific and ethical oversight process could weigh whether the scientific objectives necessitate and justify the time in culture beyond 14 days, ensuring that only a minimal number of embryos are used to achieve the research objectives.’ In other words, scientists will review each other’s projects and assess their progress and appropriateness and even determine at what point such experiments must stop.

What is the likely outcome of these new ISSCR *Guidelines*? We are now in a different world to that of 1984, the Warnock Report’s publication year. Not only are we now more scientifically advanced but we are also more bioethically backward – human embryos are generally regarded as little more than biological material. It should give morally-sensitive people only a little comfort that the *Guidelines* advise against germline editing of human embryos intended for reproductive purposes, as well as prohibiting any attempt to use human stem cell-based embryo models to establish a pregnancy. Stop! We need to pause and think. Does human life have *any* dignity, *any* intrinsic value? Are there *any* limits to destructively experimenting with unborn human life? Destructively experimenting with human embryos up to and beyond 14 days exploits extremely vulnerable human lives. The boundary should not be 14 or 28 days, it should be zero. To do it for longer, whatever the imagined benefits, is tantamount to wrong. History shows that science adrift from a robust bioethical framework rapidly becomes monstrous.

John Ling

Latest News of Significant Individual Cases

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

Scottish church closure

In January 2021, the Scottish Assembly made it a criminal offence for churches in the highest tiers, to hold in person services and, for example, to conduct baptisms.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, 27 Scottish church leaders, from a range of Christian denominations, brought the legal action stating that the unprecedented closures were unlawful and breached Human Rights law and the Scottish constitution. There has been no attempt to close churches in Scotland since the persecution of the Presbyterian church, instituted by the Stuart kings, in the 17th century.

At a full judicial review hearing at the Court of Session in Edinburgh earlier in March, the leaders sought a declarator (a declaration order) that the restrictions on churches were unlawful and a declarator which would allow people to attend church, should the tier system be reintroduced. The case was heard on the 11 and 12 March, and Janys Scott QC, who represented the church leaders, argued that the pandemic had highlighted an ‘irreconcilable conflict’ for church leaders between obeying the state and God. Scott told the court:

‘Church leaders do not lightly take to law... My note of argument makes no apology for starting with a statement – and that is Jesus is Lord because that encapsulates the issue as far as the petitioners are concerned. The Scottish ministers have presented these 27 church leaders and very many more ministers, church elders and ordinary members of congregation with a deep crisis.

As Christians their primary obedience is to God and not to the state and there is a fundamental obedience in regular communal public worship. Regular communal public worship is a central part of the Christian’s life of faith and of the church’s being.

And to be absolutely clear this is not about buildings – it’s about assembly of congregations; the sacraments of communion and baptism and the ministry between members of a church are integral aspects of expression on what it is to be a Christian and to belong to a Christian church. The petitioners would say that faith is a matter of hope in life and in death and it’s more than mere obedience and that it is essential particularly at a time of national crisis.’

Scott argued that the closure of churches is unlawful, criminalises public worship and goes against centuries-old practice that churches in Scotland have authority over their own affairs free from state interference. She accused John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister of holding a ‘condescending and inaccurate’ attitude towards public worship, by treating churches as if they are a ‘matter of personal welfare or comfort’. Scott said:

‘The Deputy First Minister does not understand... The primary purpose for worship is not for social or mental well-being. Public worship is a robust central aspect of the practice of the Christian both individually and as a church. It is important because it is no exaggeration to say that over the centuries Christians have died in the defence of the public worship in the church and Christians continue to die in the defence of the public worship in church. There is an irreconcilable conflict between the obedience of the Christian church to their God or God and obedience to the state.’

Scott told the court that past legal rulings and the nature of the constitution meant that the state couldn’t interfere with churches.

She also said the European Convention on Human Rights did not allow the Scottish Ministers to take the action of stopping public worship. She said:

'It's not for the government to question the legitimacy of beliefs or the manner in which they are expressed... The petitioners say that public corporate worship is essential to the church – it is of the essence, of the being of the church and that is a matter for them.'

In her concluding remarks Scott said:

'Without wanting to resort to hyperbole, what is worryingly insidious about the way this has been presented to us politically is, "oh no, we haven't closed your churches" – and that's in the face of a regulation that says places of public worship will be closed. That's what the First Minister said and that's what's been said in the course of argument for the Scottish Ministers. When one starts using double-speak like that one gets to exactly the issue which Article 9 is designed to forfend.'

I'm saying this from the perspective of a group of ministers and church elders who want to defend their right to worship, but it is there as an underlying point which is protected for good reason by the European Convention on Human Rights.'

In his judgment, Lord Braid said that the Scottish Ministers' decision to ban and criminalise gathered church worship during the current lockdown was unconstitutional and disproportionate. He went on to say that,

'...the Regulations do constitute a disproportionate interference with the article 9 right of the petitioners and others... Reverting to the constitutional issue, for the same reasons I therefore find that the Regulations are also a disproportionate interference with the petitioners' and additional party's constitutional rights.'

He argued that churches should therefore be allowed to open with immediate effect, rather than having to wait until Friday, as the Scottish government had previously said.

Handing down judgment, Lord Braid also ruled that online worship is not real Christian worship, stating that it is not for the Scottish Ministers to *'dictate to the petitioners or to the additional party, that, henceforth, or even for the duration of the pandemic, worship is to be conducted on-line. That might be an alternative to worship but it is not worship. At very best for the respondents, in modern parlance, it is worship-lite.'*

The judgment states that the Scottish government's worship ban is therefore a disproportionate interference of Article 9 ECHR rights. It is believed that this is the first successful legal case against covid regulations in the UK.

Bernard Randall

Rev. Dr Bernard Randall, who is ordained in the Church of England and is a former chaplain of Christ's College, Cambridge, is taking Trent College to court for discrimination, harassment, victimisation and unfair dismissal after the school initially reported him to the government's terrorist watchdog and subsequently sacked him for giving a sermon that encouraged respect and debate on 'identity politics'.

In June 2018, the independent school, which has a 'protestant and evangelical' Church of England ethos, invited the leader of Educate and Celebrate, Dr Elly Barnes, into the school to train staff. 'Educate and Celebrate' claims to 'equip you and your communities with the knowledge, skills and confidence to embed gender, gender identity and sexual orientation into the fabric of your organisation.' Dr Barnes openly declares that the ethos of Educate and Celebrate is to 'completely smash heteronormativity, that's what we want to do' – 'heteronormativity' being the belief that a heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman is what is normal.

Rev. Dr Randall, whose job description declared his role to 'be the particular voice and embodiment of ...

Christian values which are at the heart of Trent's ethos,' was alarmed when, during the training, Dr Barnes instructed staff to chant 'smash heteronormativity'. Dr Randall raised concerns but was assured by the headteacher that he would be involved in any decision-making process on whether the school would implement Educate and Celebrate's programme because of potential clashes with Christian beliefs and values.

In January 2019, at the next staff training day, Dr Randall was stunned to find out that the school had decided to adopt their year-long 'gold standard' programme. This would see an identity politics 'LGBT inclusive curriculum' implemented, even for the nursery provision at the school. When Dr Randall asked why he had not been included in discussions, he was told that it was because he 'might disagree'.

After asking students what subjects they would like to hear in his sermons during the summer term Christian chapel services, Dr Randall was approached by a student who asked him whether he would address the following: 'How come we are told we have to accept all this LGBT stuff in a Christian school?' He had also been approached by pupils who had said that they were confused and upset by the issues involved in the new LGBT teaching.

Delivering the sermon in the school's chapel entitled 'Competing ideologies', Dr Randall moderately and carefully presented the Christian viewpoint on identity questions, encouraged debate and stressed that no protected characteristic is more protected than another. He explained that for Christians, where there is disagreement, it is vital to love your neighbour, leaving no room for personal attack or abusive language towards anyone.

Presenting the Church of England's biblical position on marriage and human nature, he emphasised that children at the school were not compelled to 'accept an ideology they disagree with'. Rather, he encouraged the students, aged from 11 to 17, to debate and make up their own minds on the issue. The sermon was part of a service which also included hymns, prayers and a Bible reading.

The following week, he was pulled into a meeting with the Deputy Head and the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). In a hostile interrogation, Dr Randall was told that his beliefs were not relevant and did not matter, and that the sermon had hurt some people's feelings and undermined the School's LGBT agenda. He was also told it was 'offensive' to describe Elly Barnes as an 'LGBT activist', despite her describing herself as a 'DIVA Activist of the Year' on her Twitter profile at the time.

During the interrogation, Dr Randall was asked what the sources of Church teachings were. For the beliefs on marriage, sexuality and gender, he pointed to the Church of England's public liturgy, especially the Book of Common Prayer, and Canon law. Nonetheless, Dr Randall was immediately suspended, pending an investigation.

The DSL began the process of reporting Dr Randall, without his knowledge, to the government's counter-terrorism watchdog, Prevent, as a potentially violent religious extremist. He was also reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) as a danger to children, which is the same point of contact for reporting concerns over paedophilia. On 1 July 2019, an officer from the Prevent force replied to the DSL saying that the sermon posed no counter-terrorism risk, however, he gave his personal opinion that the sermon 'was wholly inappropriate for a school, and society in general'.

Following an investigation and disciplinary hearing, Dr Randall received a letter on the 30 August 2019 stating that the headmaster had concluded that his actions had amounted to gross misconduct and that he would be dismissed. On appeal, his sacking was overturned by the school's governors, but he was given a final warning instead.

Dr Randall was provided with 20 conditions that he had to comply with regarding any future sermons. Open censorship of his sermons followed. Within the 20 conditions he had to comply with, he was banned from broaching, 'Any topic or express any opinion (in Chapel or more generally around School) that is likely to cause offence or distress to members of the school body.' It also stated that: 'You will not publicly express

personal beliefs in ways which exploit our pupils' vulnerability.' He was told that every theme and piece of sermon content had to be approved by school leadership in advance and that a staff member would observe to ensure each stipulation was met.

When the country went into lockdown in March 2020, Dr Randall was immediately furloughed. As restrictions eased, the school refused to reinstate his timetable, planned to reduce his full-time hours to seven hours per week, and was eventually made redundant by the headteacher on 31 December 2020. His case was due to be heard in June 2021, but as a result of failings by the school's lawyers, the case has had to be adjourned until September 2022.

John Sherwood

Pastor John Sherwood was arrested in North West London on Friday 23 April 2021 and detained overnight – all for speaking about what the Bible says about marriage.

John, in his early 70s, is minister of a north London church, and was preaching with a colleague in the centre of Uxbridge, as he regularly does. After speaking on the final verses in Genesis 1, where it says that God created mankind in his own image, creating them male and female, a number of police officers appeared on the scene. Reportedly, three complaints had been received about the pastor's teaching, and the police accused him of causing 'alarm and distress' to the public.

After speaking to the police, John resumed his preaching, speaking on freedom of speech. However, a couple of bystanders in the crowd apparently shouted that John's preaching was 'homophobic' and 'hate speech'. John spoke to the police once more.

What quickly followed was a brutal arrest, where an officer took away the pastor's Bible and pulled him from the steps where he had been preaching. Three officers gathered around him to handcuff him and take him away.

Possible legal courses of action are being considered.

Dr David Mackereth

Dr David Mackereth had been an A&E doctor for 26 years in the NHS. He lost his job doing assessments for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) when he admitted that he would be unable to identify clients by their chosen gender instead of their biological sex.

Dr Mackereth maintained that using 'transgender pronouns' was against his conscience as a doctor and a Bible-believing Christian. In response, the DWP declared that failing to accommodate clients' preferences would amount to 'harassment' under the Equality Act and dismissed Dr Mackereth from his role as a Health and Disability Assessor.

Dr Mackereth took his case to the Employment Tribunal where the Christian Legal Centre's Michael Phillips, argued that the DWP discriminated against Dr Mackereth because of his Christian beliefs, including:

'His belief in the truth of the Bible, and in particular, the truth of Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." It follows that every person is created by God as either male or female. A person cannot change their sex/gender at will. Any attempt at, or pretence of, doing so, is pointless, self-destructive, and sinful.'

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

During proceedings in July 2019, Dr Mackereth said that he was asked in a conversation with his line manager, James Owen, 'If you have a man six foot tall with a beard who says he wants to be addressed as "she" and "Mrs", would you do that?' Dr Mackereth explained to the tribunal that he had been told he was 'overwhelmingly likely' to lose his job unless he agreed. In an email exchange with Mr Owen Dr Mackereth was told, 'If however, you do not want to do this, we will respect your decision and your right to leave your contract.' Dr Mackereth replied: 'I am a Christian and in good conscience cannot do what the DWP is requiring of me.'

Dr Mackereth gave evidence that he did not resign his position and was the victim of direct discrimination and harassment. He argued that he was dismissed 'not because of any realistic concerns over the rights and sensitivities of transgender individuals, but because of my refusal to make an abstract ideological pledge.'

In his judgment, Employment Judge Perry put 'transgender rights' ahead of Christian freedoms and in effect forced Christians to use compelled speech in order to not offend those who believe in gender-fluidity. The judge found that Dr Mackereth 'holds to the principles of the Great Reformation of the 16th Century including a commitment to the supremacy of the Bible as the infallible, inerrant word of God as his final authority in all matters of faith and practice.' That includes his belief in the truth of Genesis 1:27, and the logical consequence: scepticism about transgenderism and refusal to use transgender pronouns. The judge ruled that

'...belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals... in so far as those beliefs form part of his wider faith, his wider faith also does not satisfy Grainger [the requirement of being worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others].'

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

The decision has been appealed to the Employment Appeal Tribunal and a hearing has now been listed for October 2021.

Dr Dermot Kearney

Dr Dermot Kearney is an experienced medical consultant and former President of the Catholic Medical Association (UK). He was providing emergency abortion pill reversal treatment for women who have taken the first abortion pill. Many women experience strong regret immediately after taking the pill and search out help on the internet.

Dr Kearney has been blocked from providing the abortion reversal pills for up to 18 months while an investigation takes place. It is believed to be the first time a medical doctor has been prohibited from providing a treatment that saves lives.

The emergency abortion rescue service is provided to women who regret taking the first of two abortion pills, Mifepristone, which usually kills the baby, and want to try to save their pregnancies. Using the natural hormone progesterone inhibits the effects of Mifepristone, and the latest evidence suggests that the success rate in abortion pill reversal can be as high as 68% if treatment is started within 72 hours.

When women attend an abortion clinic in several states in the US, they are generally told that abortion reversal is possible after taking the first pill, whereas in the UK women are often told the pregnancy cannot be saved after taking this step.

Since the introduction of the government's DIY home abortion telemedicine service there has been a spike in women, often vulnerable and without access to proper medical care, quickly regretting taking the first abortion pill and seeking urgent help.

Several [women have spoken out](#) in support of Dr Kearney, including women who very grateful to have given birth to a healthy baby after taking the abortion pill reversal treatment. Their testimonies show that this treatment is highly valued and needed and is indeed life-saving.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Kearney is considering a challenge to the decision made by the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service at an interim hearing on 12 May 2021.

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