

THE BULLETIN

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Editor: Matthew Evans, office@affinity.org.uk

The Struggle for Free Speech in Universities

It is Happening Now

In 1974, Herbert Marcuse was asked whether he thought the New Left was history. He replied: 'I don't think it's dead, and it will resurrect in the universities.'¹

And so it came about, more or less.

If you read James Mildred's article in the February 2021 edition of *The Bulletin* entitled *The Challenge of Free Speech in the UK* and/or Melvin Tinker's article *The Challenge of Cultural Marxism* in the July issue, then you will realise that Christians have a problem. It has its origin in New Left thinking and it is working out in postmodernism. The particular issue we have now is the curtailment and possible closing down of the ability to express freely biblical truth and its implications. It has been happening for years and is palpably getting worse; Christians and the wider church need to recognise the problem and decide what they will do about it and how. This article focusses on the situation in our universities.

It is important to note that this is not just a problem for Christians and it is not just they who are pointing out, grappling with, and seeking to overcome the challenge. This is a problem for anyone who believes in the importance of being able to present, examine and discuss competing ideas and views in a civil manner. Witness, for example, the writings of Douglas Murrey (*The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*), Gad Saad (*The Parasitic Mind: How Infectious Ideas are Killing Common Sense*), Stephen R. C. Hicks (*Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, including the essay, 'Free Speech and Postmodernism'), Iain McGilchrist (*The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*) and Jordan B. Peterson (*Postmodernism and Cultural Marxism*²)

The situation in our universities reflects wider society in a more concentrated way and is summarised in this extract from a letter from the Dean of Students at Chicago University to new students in 2020:

Once here you will discover that one of the University of Chicago's defining characteristics is our commitment to freedom of inquiry and expression. Members of our community are encouraged to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn, without fear of censorship. Civility and mutual respect are vital to all of us, and freedom of expression does not mean the freedom to harass or threaten others. You will find that we expect members of our community to be engaged in rigorous debate, discussion, and even disagreement. At times this may challenge you and even cause discomfort.

Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called 'trigger warnings', we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.

Fostering the free exchange of ideas reinforces a related University priority – building a campus that welcomes people of all backgrounds. Diversity of opinion and background is a fundamental strength of our community. The members of our community must have the freedom to espouse and explore a wide range of ideas.³

This points to what is being lost both abroad and in our own universities. It might be read as, around us there is a fear of censorship of speech, writing, listening, challenging and learning; but not so here. In many

¹ Hicks, Stephen R. C., *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Expanded Edition), 101, Ockham's Razor, Kindle Edition.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLoG9zBvvLQ>

³ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/25/u-chicago-warns-incoming-students-not-expect-safe-spaces-or-trigger-warnings>

of our institutions civility and mutual respect have given ground to hysteria and persecution, but we believe these hitherto longstanding characteristics are vital conditions for rigorous debate. We expect this will result in, on occasions, challenge and discomfort, but all for your greater good. Trigger warnings (notices that material may offend) are prevalent but they are unhelpful and restrictive; de-platforming is common but unacceptable; safe spaces can be unsafe and are unnecessary; freedom of speech is paramount. We have set ourselves against key tenets of postmodernism and against pre- and post-Marxist philosophical principles and their contemporary implications for the freedom of expression in the sphere of education.

Good for them! May practice mirror proclamation.

Here in the UK, Oxford University says it is committed to freedom of speech but Selina Todd, professor of modern history at the university, reports harassment and intimidation over several years following her suggestion that being transgender was a modern phenomenon. Academics and students signed a letter labelling her as ‘transphobic’. She reports her reputation and research is constantly smeared and undermined and that the situation is critical.

Bristol University says it is committed to freedom of speech and to the rights of students and staff to discuss difficult and sensitive topics. Raquel Rosario Sanchez, a researcher in women and violence at the university, is taking the university to court after it dropped an investigation into a complaint she made of bullying by a transgender student. She faced abuse and masked protestors when she attended complaint hearings to give evidence.⁴

In a letter to The Sunday Times of 17 October 2021, 240 academics from a wide range of universities, including those at London, Oxford, Cambridge, Essex, Manchester, York, Durham and the Open University, called on Baroness Falkner as Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to undertake a review of policies and practices in UK universities that impose a radical gender orthodoxy and discriminate against those who recognise that sex matters. The letter was under the banner of the organisation Sex Matters,⁵ set up ‘to reestablish that sex matters in rules, laws, policies, language and culture’. The organisation has currently logged over ninety news reports of bullying, harassment and no-platforming at UK universities since 2016 relating to those who question transgender orthodoxy. The list excludes academics who cannot speak freely. Thirty-nine cases are so far recorded for 2021, 15 in 2020, 20 in 2019, 16 in 2018, 2 in 2017 and 2 in 2016.

Also, in October this year, over 220 legal academics signed an open letter in support of Sussex University’s defence of academic freedom, following the much-publicised case of Kathleen Stock.⁶ A similar open letter of support for the university’s stance was signed by 240 UK philosophers.⁷ Kathleen Stock, a professor of philosophy at the University of Sussex, does not believe people can change their biological sex, an opinion she has been vocal about in her academic work and on social media. Critics have accused her of being transphobic.⁸

Postmodernism Summarised

This article began with a quotation from Herbert Marcuse from 1974. By that time the terror tactics of the Left which were so evident in the 1960s and early part of the 70s – exemplified, for example, by the Baader-Meinhof Gang – had all but been defeated. The wider socialist vision was in ruins as communism collapsed.

But not quite. A new weapon emerged: meaningless words.

⁴ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/200-academics-tell-of-death-threats-and-abuse-as-battle-rages-for-free-speech-hp99fnzjh>

⁵ <https://sex-matters.org/>

⁶ <https://openlettertosussexfromuklegalscholars.uk/>

⁷ <https://openlettertosussexfromukphilosophers.wordpress.com/>

⁸ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kathleen-stock-the-sussex-university-professor-in-trans-row-urged-to-get-bodyguards-2khmgzk98>

Stephen Hicks comments:

...postmodernists need not believe much of what they say. The word games and much of the use of anger and rage that are characteristic of much of their style can be a matter – not of using words to state things that they think are true – but rather of using words as weapons against an enemy that they still hope to destroy.⁹

The enemy is capitalism and its political and social bedrock.

The argument for free speech as described in John Stewart Mill's 1859 essay *On Liberty*, is an often-quoted and powerful articulation of the need for this freedom:

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. Were an opinion a personal possession of no value except to the owner; if to be obstructed in the enjoyment of it were simply a private injury, it would make some difference whether the injury was inflicted only on a few persons or on many. But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.¹⁰

For the postmodernist this statement has no meaning or value for them and is simply the attempt of a particular section of the elite to maintain their very patriarchal position of power. On this basis it can be rubbished and rejected.

Postmodernists recognise that this stance contradicts their own statements on postmodernism. For example, they believe all truth is relative, but they also believe postmodernism tells the truth as it is. But contradictions do not matter because words to them are verbal bullets, not vehicles of meaning. A contradiction is simply something that doesn't make sense in a framework of reference that postmodernists reject. If someone says, as Kathleen Stock mentioned above has done, that someone cannot change their sex, the postmodernist approach is to deny the validity of this view and label the purveyor as, say, transphobic – and if this fails to silence them, then use harassment.

At a deeper philosophical level postmodernists believe that:

- our thinking, our processes of reasoning, are socially conditioned and therefore reason is not a way of knowing reality. (Christians recognise reason has its limits and is subject to sin, but is nevertheless a God-given faculty for arriving at truth);
- speech is a form of social conditioning that is instrumental in making us who we are. (Christians believe we are made in the image of God, that fundamentally and crucially we share attributes and characteristics of God and that we carry a God-given conscience within reflecting godly standards, although marred and distorted by sin);
- egalitarianism and altruism are universal principles that should be applied across society. (Christians recognise God made us different in a myriad of ways as well as having characteristics in common – this is beneficial – and that we answer to God individually on the basis of what we are given and what we have done with it. While we have sympathy with aspects of altruism, what it means in the postmodern context is the egalitarian redistribution of advantage to the disadvantaged in order to ensure an (unobtainable) equality of outcomes. This is applied to speech as a need to limit the speech of stronger groups, or strengthen the speech potential of weaker groups, in order to equalise the overall power of speech.

⁹ Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, 110.

¹⁰ Mill, John Stuart, *On Liberty*, 18, Amazon Classics.

All this translates into the view that speech is a form of social power, fairness in speech is having an equal ability to speak, that this ability is unequal across races, sexes and so-called minority gender groupings and that stronger racial, sexual and other groups use their superior ability to speak to the disadvantage of other races, gender groups and women. As a consequence, speech, as noted earlier, is a weapon and not a tool for free individuals to communicate and gain insight, knowledge and understanding. For the postmodernist 'debate' is about the accrual of power.

Consequently, for postmodernists, speech (or freedom of expression) codes, which set the rules of the speech 'game', are crucial and necessary to render the game fair. Added to this, postmodernists regard speech as a form of physical action and as such it is, they argue, capable of harm – physical harm. Therefore, the rationale goes, there are circumstances in which beating with words must be curtailed as beating with a stick would be.¹¹

The following section looks in particular at the implementation of speech codes in universities and the effects on free speech.

Headlines and Data

The spectrum of views on free speech are strongly linked to political ideology. Right wing media typically portray the threat within our universities as 'dire'¹², while those on the left commonly take the view that it has been a 'right wing myth for 50 years'¹³. A number of organisations have attempted to get to grips with the scale of this issue to determine which of these positions is nearer the truth.

In March 2018, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, comprising members from both sides of the House of Commons and the Lords, produced a report on 'Freedom of Speech in Universities'. Their conclusions on the scale of the problem were:

Any inhibition on lawful free speech is serious, and there have been such incursions, but we did not find the wholesale censorship of debate in universities which media coverage has suggested. There are real problems which act as disincentives for students to put on challenging events and whilst most student union officers who responded to our survey (comprising 33 responses in all) say they are confident that they and their companions can speak freely, such disincentives could be having a wider 'chilling effect', which is hard to measure. A much broader survey of students' opinion would be needed to assess levels of confidence amongst the student body as a whole.

For reference, there are just over 140 universities in the UK, so the 33 responses represent about 23% of the total. The Committee also took evidence from a range of other sources. It noted that,

We also found that many of the incidents in which free speech is restricted often revolve around discussion of key controversial or divisive issues, which can stir up strong emotions. Amongst the things around which there is emotional debate are speech which is thought to incite or support terrorism; pro-life or anti-abortion views; Transgender issues; Islamophobia; Israel/Palestine conflict; right wing vs left wing views; and Humanist/secular groups critiquing religion.

Civitas, generally regarded as a right-wing think tank but said to employ those from the left-wing of the political spectrum, published a report in December 2020 entitled *Academic Freedom in Our Universities: the Best and the Worst*¹⁴. Their review covered 137 registered UK universities over the period 2017 to 2020.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/14/opinion/sunday/when-is-speech-violence.html>; http://susanbrison.com/files/B.16.-speech_harm_and_the_mindbody_problem_in_first_amendment_jurisprudence.pdf

¹² e.g., Andrew Doyle for the *Daily Mail*, 17 December 2020.

¹³ Evan Smith, *The Guardian*, 22 February 2020.

¹⁴ <https://www.civitas.org.uk/publications/academic-freedom-in-our-universities/>

This followed ‘a new and unique approach, methodology and data to measure restrictions on free speech’. They ranked universities into three groups: Most Restrictive (to free speech); Moderately Restrictive and Most Friendly.

Most Restrictive: 48 of the universities (35%) – including the three highest ranked UK universities – are performing badly on free speech and the government should take some action to resolve the issues by a change of policy and legislation.

Moderately Restrictive: 70 of the universities (51%) are not performing as well as they should, and the Office for Students (OfS) should tell the university how it could improve.

Most Friendly: 19 of the universities (14%) have allowed some restrictions to free speech in its actions and regular policies but not at the level which might warrant external intervention.

Headline findings include:

- That speech could be curbed by perceived transphobic episodes in up to 65% of the most restrictive universities, just under half (47%) of moderately restrictive universities, and just over a third (36%) of even the best-ranked (most friendly) universities
- That curbs to free speech due to a ‘cancel culture’ of open letters and or petitions remains relatively high across the spectrum of institutions – evidenced in 69% of the most restrictive universities, 48% of moderately restrictive universities and 47% of the most friendly universities;

They identified that,

although 73% of the most restrictive universities, 74% of moderately restrictive universities, and 58% of the most friendly universities do have a Free Speech Policy, this has not only set out multiple curbs to free expression but the Education Act of 1986 explicitly requires one in each university. If universities do provide a Free Speech Policy, it can often have little significance for their overall Censorship score.

They also noted that equalities regulation had restricted free expression, for example, bullying and harassment policies are able to curb free speech by imposing on average 182 restrictions in the most restrictive universities, 90 in the moderately restrictive universities and 15 in the most friendly universities.

The online magazine *Spiked*, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, produced a report in December 2018 which ranked free speech in universities. One hundred and fifteen institutions were covered over a four-year period and they found:

- 54% [62] of institutions were ranked Red, meaning they actively censor speech by banning certain views from being expressed on campus and / or ban specific texts, speakers and groups from campus on the basis of their content / views.
- 40% [46] were ranked Amber, meaning they chill speech through unnecessary regulation, burdensome speaker-vetting procedures or guidance warning students against engaging in vague categories of expression – for example, ‘offensive’ or ‘provocative’ speech.
- 6% [7] were ranked Green, meaning they place no significant restrictions on speech, as far as we are aware.¹⁵

The *Spiked* report also noted that, ‘In 2018, religion policies were the most prevalent category of censorious policy we found, with 48% of institutions warning students and speakers away from offending faith groups, or placing conditions on faith-based societies and events.’ They also found, ‘transgender policies were among the most prevalent category of censorious policy we found, with 46% of institutions holding policies that either ban transphobia outright, urge or require students to use transgender

¹⁵ The report is no longer available.

pronouns, or otherwise regulate discussion of transgender issues.’

In 2019 the Policy Institute at King’s College, London noted that,

Universities increasingly face criticism over freedom of expression, from a perceived increase in regulation, such as safe-space policies and no-platforming, to claims they are succumbing to demands of a new generation of “snowflake” students. Yet the extent of this commentary is often disproportionate to the number of instances where freedom of expression has actually been violated – and, more importantly, is seldom informed by what students themselves actually think about the issue.

In July/August of that year they carried out an online survey of a representative sample of 2,153 students asking whether they agreed or disagreed with a list of 27 statements. Over the same period they carried out a parallel online survey of 2,179 members of the public for comparison. Some of the results are interesting, others seem loaded and crafted to produce particular outcomes.¹⁶

For example,

- ‘Universities are taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely.’ (14% disagreed, 80% agreed). Hatred is not defined and who would not want to enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely? The issues in this situation are, what constitutes hate speech and what level of discomfort and challenge should be tolerated? Both are difficult to address.
- ‘University officials have the right to ban persons with extreme views from speaking on campus.’ (33% disagreed, 62% agreed). ‘Extreme’ isn’t defined.
- ‘Universities should be able to establish policies that restrict expressing political views that are upsetting or offensive to certain groups.’ (37% disagree, 51% agree). As noted here and elsewhere, much of the debate around freedom of expression hinges on the effects of the policies put in place in universities, which depend on the interpretation of words such as ‘upsetting’ and ‘offensive’.
- ‘“Safe space” policies and a culture of “safetyism” in universities is threatening freedom of expression’. (48% disagree, 35% agree).
- ‘If someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views’. (66% disagree, 25% agree). There appears to be no mention of harassment or intimidation or whether violence includes so-called speech violence.

The report opens with a long statement which is used by King’s and its Students’ Union and which is said to be inspired by the ‘Chicago Principles’. These principles are summarised in the extract from the Dean of Students letter to students starting at The University of Chicago in 2020, cited earlier in this article. The statement reads:

Intellectual inquiry necessarily involves ideas that are in dispute, that may cause controversy, that may cause offence and that may provoke a reaction amongst audiences in the university community and beyond. Universities should be committed to a safe and civil environment for the exchange of ideas and the cultivation of knowledge. This commitment will at times see universities serving as places in which intellectual, moral, or political disputes come to the fore. At such times, the role of a university is to ensure that all parties feel confident and safe in expressing their views except when this speech discriminates based on race, class, disability, sex, age, gender, identity, transgender status, religion or sexual orientation.

¹⁶ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/freedom-of-expression-in-uk-universities.pdf>

81% of students surveyed in the King's study agreed with this statement. However, despite being based on the Chicago Principles it isn't as clear as the Chicago letter cited earlier, nor is it clear that it is actually protecting free speech rather than, for instance, simply nodding to the concept and some of its associated ramifications. It appears to depend on how the term 'discriminates' is understood and applied. In the Civitas report King's College London was characterised as Moderately Restrictive and appeared as one of the 62 worst institutions for freedom of expression ranked Red in the Spiked report. In contrast, the canvassed views of 37,000 students ranked The University of Chicago the second highest open environment for student free speech and open inquiry out of 159 US colleges.¹⁷

How Does the Data Speak?

We can see that policies and rules affecting freedom of expression have made substantive inroads into universities and students' unions in recent years and that free expression policies which are intended to protect it often do not. We can see that transgender issues, which have arisen overnight, have displaced centuries of biological understanding of sex differences with a form of biophobia. They have the flimsiest of ideological foundations but have become a major battle ground. Since the rules of the free expression game are being imposed to various degrees, substantially so in many, perhaps the majority of our universities, it is reasonable to conclude that the threat to free expression is high – it is certainly not myth.

The Joint Committee report concluded that the restrictions on freedom of expression in our universities were less than the impression that might be gained from media reports. This is not surprising as in general the reaction that media reports on topics such as this provoke is the reaction which such reports are, at least in part, designed to provoke, namely, the grabbing of attention and the generation of concern. This 'grabbing of attention', coupled with concern and fear is also at the heart of the strategy of those who desire a postmodernist clampdown on freedom of expression. It might well be true that the situation is less than dire as pointed out by the Daily Mail, but then again dire is an extreme condition.

The Joint Committee went on to note the difficulty of trying to obtain a measure of the chilling effect of anti-freedom of speech policies and activities. This effect manifests itself as removing the motivation to contest or promote an issue or viewpoint, avoiding conflict and, in the extreme, becoming apathetic. Consequently, if this is the case and the chilling effect is increasing, we might well expect to see, at some stage, a decrease in the numbers of freedom of speech incidents, since people will have been 'chilled' into apathy and inactivity. It is perhaps obvious that the numbers of such incidents are a balance between the increasing numbers of rules which limit free speech and the reaction to their interpretation and implementation. We might, therefore, in the short term be happy to see an increasing number of incidents as a measure of the push back to anti-freedom of speech policies and activities.

In November 2020 the committee launched another inquiry which, amongst other matters, focused on how the situation has changed in universities in the two years since the committee's last report on the issue. Affinity along with other organisations including Christian Concern and The Christian Institute submitted evidence. The deadline for written submissions concluded in January 2021 and the committee is yet to report.

In May this year the government introduced The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill which will if approved bring in new measures that will require universities and colleges registered with the Office for Students to defend free speech and help stamp out unlawful 'silencing'. The Bill, which is the implementation of an election manifesto commitment, includes a requirement that the governing body of a registered higher education provider must promote the importance of '(a) freedom of speech within the law, and (b) academic freedom for academic staff of registered higher education providers and their constituent institutions, in the provision of higher education'. In addition, a students' union at a registered higher education provider '...must take the steps that, having particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech, are reasonably practicable for it to take in order to achieve the objective of securing

¹⁷ <https://rankings.thefire.org/>

freedom of speech within the law for (a) members of the students' union, (b) students of the provider, (c) staff of the students' union, (d) staff and members of the provider and of its constituent institutions, and (e) visiting speakers.'

The Bill is currently at the report stage in the House of Commons. Those in the media on the left of the political spectrum see no requirement for a bill of this kind since they maintain there is no significant issue to address. The Bill may be a positive thing (the concern for freedom of speech is encouraging) and it may have beneficial effects as intended but, it may also simply transfer some battles from the campus to the courtroom. We wait to see its effects should it become law.

What Can We Do?

It behoves Christians to be informed about the issues surrounding freedom of expression and to understand what this means now (for example, the Christian Legal Centre received 895 enquiries from Christians in 2020, a significant number of which came from those who were facing or had faced disciplinary action in relation to homosexuality and gender identity) and what it may well mean in the future for their ability to proclaim, discuss and represent biblical truth and views. They should seek to challenge this decline of common sense graciously and persuasively, picking their battles wisely and supporting those who need to challenge cases in the courts. Christian leaders and churches should gear up to the threat and act accordingly. They should not leave themselves open to the charge of inattention and inaction as they were when the 1967 Abortion Act was passed.

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

A History of Christian Cultural Engagement

The following is based on a lecture I gave as part of a mini-lecture series, in partnership with Dr Dan Strange and the Crosslands Forum.

Introduction

Church history is a constant source of encouragement and challenge to us today. Learning from past successes and failures serves us well. The book of Proverbs talks about the value of 'old paths' and the Prophet Habakkuk is inspired by God's mighty deeds in history as he pleads with the Lord to renew them in his own day.

God's dealings with his people can be traced from so many different angles. From the revivals in different countries around the world, to the remarkable way his people have coped in times of rampant persecution. Throughout history the church of Jesus Christ has engaged with its culture.

That really is the purpose of this article – to take a birds-eye sweep of history to listen and learn from our past. Firstly, I aim to show that historically, in different generations, Christians have engaged in culture. Secondly, I want to encourage us that this engagement has made a genuine and positive difference in society. Thirdly, I want to bring out some of the theological impulses behind this engagement.

To do this, we will sweep through five key sections of church history, from the early church to the Reformation, the period of revivals followed by a decline in engagement and finally, the more recent recovery of a theology of cultural engagement.

The Early Church

Let us start by going right back to the period just after the Apostolic Age. As ever, context is of paramount importance. In 64AD, the Emperor Nero began persecuting the church. For the next 250 years it continued in different forms until 312AD when Constantine became a follower of Jesus. During this time of persecution, Christians were burned alive, crucified, fed to the lions and treated in the most unimaginably awful ways. More broadly, it was also a time when the people of the Roman Empire were very vulnerable to plagues and food supply crises.

This context helps us appreciate why, in the writing of the theologians of the time, you find great stress on the antithesis between followers of Christ and those of the world. One ancient theologian, Tertullian (155-220AD) talked about Christians as a 'third race' distinct from Gentiles and Jews.

Later, the North African theologian, Augustine (354-430AD) wrote *The City of God* which developed the antithesis idea further. There is, said Augustine, the city of the world and the city of God – the two are separate and distinct. While Christians are in the city of the world, their true belonging is to the city of God.

Based on this, you might think the early church fathers primarily taught that Christians should withdraw from the world. But a closer inspection of what they said and the picture that emerges is quite different.

Firstly, the early church fathers saw the power of human beings as culture makers. Here is Augustine:

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.

For Augustine, he never lost sight of the fact creation was originally good. And yes, while sin has distorted both human beings and the physical world, in Christ, we are restored to create culture as never before.

Secondly, the early church saw that part of its duty is to seek the welfare of the city.

Historian Bruce Winter argues that one key characteristic of the early church was that the Christian community required all its citizens, whatever their financial resources, to contribute to the welfare of the city even in the face of persecution.

Winter concludes that the Christian social ethic ‘...was an unprecedented social revolution of the ancient benefaction tradition. Every Christian had an obligation to promote the welfare of the city and help the poor, even without the rewards that were traditionally accorded the benefactor.’ In other words, you were to do so, no matter the cost to you. This was a sharp contrast to the benevolence of the Roman Empire which was often only done to receive an award. Aristides, writing in 150AD summed it up:

They labour to do good to their enemies. They despise not the widow and grieve not the orphan. He that has, distributes liberally to he that has not. If there is a man among them that is poor and needy and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they might supply the needy.

Thirdly, this was in part because the church fathers understood that while Christians are different, we share much in common with the world around us. Tertullian writes:

We sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce... We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your trafficking’s – even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit.

Alongside these theological examples, there is also the practical evidence of the sheer impact Christianity had on the ancient world. Consider the following as just a few examples:

Firstly, Christianity gave proper dignity to women and girls. It was thanks to Christian influence that in 374AD, the notorious *Patria Potestas* (which gave absolute rights to the husband and father over the lives of his family) was repealed. Secondly, Basil of Caesarea’s concern for victims of prostitution led to Imperial legislation to eliminate the practice.

Thirdly, church theologians made an immense contribution in the realm of education. Augustine passionately believed in the importance of education for all. He famously said most Christian women he knew were better educated than pagan philosophers! He also wrote textbooks to further the education of the people.

Fourthly, in the realm of healthcare, it was a Christian noblewoman, Fabia, who founded and ran a hospital for the sick and the destitute. Prior to this, the only hospitals were reserved for the Roman army. Basil of Caesarea built the *Basileias*, the first Christian hospital for the care of the sick, the poor and the dying.

This was of course an era when the state was not as involved as it is today in the lives of citizens. The early church, by its obedience to Christ, and further motivated by the teachings of various church fathers, was engaged and active in culture. And under the grace of God, they made a difference.

The Reformation

The sacred/secular divide grew very strong following the days of the early church. Various human made doctrines crept in to keep people from gaining access to God – the doctrines of purgatory and baptismal regeneration and the growing power and authority of the priesthood. The Middle Ages was largely a time of darkness.

Amidst the gloom, however, gospel light still shone in various places. We often focus our minds on the Reformation in Germany, Switzerland and later in the UK. But I was astonished to discover, in the 13th Century the Reformation began much earlier in what is now the Czech Republic. Under the leadership of Jans Milic, the Czech people experienced reformation which included a willingness to engage in culture. For example, in Prague, the 'New Jerusalem' was established which was the very opposite of a monastery because it provided a haven for converted prostitutes.

Later, once Luther realised the righteousness of God in Romans 1 referred to God's gift of righteousness through faith in the Lord Jesus, gospel light began to flood the continent. The important thing to note, however, is that the Reformation was more than just a recovery of core gospel truths. It was a recovery also of a transformative, engaged Christianity where God's people were called and commanded to be engaged at every level of society.

To help us see this, let me summarise several key theological truths that the Reformation helped bring to light:

Firstly, the dignity of work. The rediscovery of this element of the Christian life had a profound effect on how Christians saw their jobs, no matter how 'menial'. J.K.Smith writes:

By refusing a kind of two-tiered view of the Christian life, these late medieval Reform movements emphasized what he calls 'the sanctification of ordinary life': that those engaged in the nitty-gritty of domestic life – having families and raising children and making horseshoes and tilling the earth – live their lives just as much coram Deo ("before the face of God") as those who renounced domestic, "earthly" life (monks, priests, nuns). There is no all-star team in the Christian life; we are all called to holiness and we can pursue holiness in any and all of our earthly vocations. In a sense, then, the Reformation recovered a more affirmative theology of creation, creaturehood, and so-called "earthly" work.

Luther would encourage Christians to go to work thinking: 'Today, I serve the Lord'. Later, John Calvin took this further, emphasising the dignity of work and the importance of Christians helping transform the social order. Calvin believed Christians should work to improve institutions and practices around them, from education to the administration of justice.

Secondly, the Reformation helped to shape the doctrine of God's common grace. Theologian John Murray defined common grace as: 'Every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.'

Practically, this means that Christians can learn from and work alongside non-Christians in pursuit of common goals and culture making. We do so recognising the differences, but unafraid to be co-belligerents in pursuit of truth. Here is Calvin: 'If the Lord has willed be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use their assistance.'

Thirdly, the Reformation taught the absolute authority of the word of God. This authority extended beyond the Christian's life and the worship and pattern of the church. Every aspect of social life was to be brought under the word of God. This is what Calvin attempted in Geneva, the creation of a Christian Commonwealth where the many different nationalities that resided there due to wars across the continent would live in a city where God's word held sway.

Finally, the Reformation saw an emphasis on the lordship of Christ. One historian said that for Calvin, the church was the intermediary between the exalted, risen Lord Jesus and the secular order.

This link drove Calvin to describe Christians in this way:

*Common sense, indeed, pronounces, that the wealth of the world is naturally intended for our use; but, since dominion over the world was taken from us in Adam, everything that we touch of the gifts of God is defiled by our pollution; and, on the other hand, it is unclean to us, till **God graciously come to our aid, and by ingrafting us into his Son, constitutes us anew to be lords of the world, that we may lawfully use as our own all the wealth with which he supplies us.***

All of the theological impulses outlined above helped transform the church's attitude towards culture. The impact was astonishing. Here is Garry Williams:

*As we read about our family history, one thing becomes very clear: our Christian predecessors themselves engaged with their culture at every level. **The Reformation was a gospel movement with political, legal, economic, educational, and artistic outworking's. These usually occurred without the Christians' anxiously wringing their hands and debating how engaged they should be (another difference from our era).** They occurred quite simply because Christians obeyed the Great Commission: they preached the gospel and then sought to live obedient lives. As they did that, they served as magistrates or lawyers or teachers or artists or farmers who sought to serve as though serving Christ (Col. 3:23), and thus, through their faithful obedience and without displacing the proclamation of the gospel, they inevitably formed Christian cultures. If they had not done so, it is unlikely that we would even have heard of them, since the wider impact of a disengaged, privatized faith would have been so minimal.*

It is a fascinating question for us to ask: do we wring our hands, debate, discuss and tie ourselves in knots over cultural engagement? If so, why? As Williams suggests, it seems previous generations simply did cultural engagement, out of an obedience and love to God.

Time of Revivals

Moving on from the Reformation, we enter the period of revivals across the UK. From Cambuslang in Scotland to Belfast in Northern Ireland to parts of England and Wales, the 18th-19th centuries was a period where God revived his work time and again.

It was also an era where Christianity's hold over the nation grew very strong, with institutions being formed which were built on elements of historic Christian teaching.

The best way to grasp the impact of Christians on culture during this time is to highlight just a few amazing individuals:

John Wesley (1703-1791) was a great social reformer, as concerned by the moral state of society as in preaching the gospel:

Wesley practiced what he preached. He campaigned against the slave trade, agitated for prison and labour reform (including child labour), set up loan funds for the poor, opened a dispensary to distribute medicines to the poor, worked to solve unemployment, and gave away considerable sums of his personal money to people in need.

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was an undisputed hero of those who loved Christians to be socially engaged. His output was truly remarkable and his organisational abilities and seemingly indefatigable energies led to some amazing initiatives, including:

- Being a member of at least 69 different benevolent societies.
- Founding a Christian newspaper
- Founding the RSPCA
- Being a founding member of Britain's Royal Institution which was dedicated to scientific research.
- Working for education reform, prison reform, for improved conditions in factories, and for shorter working days and public health initiatives.

The Clapham Sect: Wilberforce's companions who lived and worked in the same area of London. Hannah Moore, for example, was a passionate advocate of education for women and girls.

Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) showed remarkable devotion to prison reform. She introduced education, discipline and bible teaching to women prisoners in halfway houses. She established a night shelter and formed societies to minister to vagrant families.

Lord Shaftsbury (1801-1885) was an evangelical, committed Christian. His Lodging House Act 1851 ensured the licensing and inspection of lodgings. Charles Dickens called it the best piece of legislation that ever proceeded from the English Parliament. He promoted care for people with mental illnesses. He championed education for children and was, for 40 years, the chair of the Ragged Schools Union.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) was committed to a living, working faith. Founded 66 parachurch organisations, including orphanages, shelters for victims of domestic abuse, ministries for London's police.

Revival and awakening strengthened the church and saw many saved and was also a trigger for huge social engagement. One evidence of the Spirit's work is when his people engage and work towards a better world. Francis Schaeffer writes:

The great moments of church history have come when these two restorations have simultaneously come into action so that the church has returned to pure doctrine and the lives of the Christians in the church have known the power of the Holy Spirit. There cannot be true revival unless there has been reformation; and reformation is not complete without revival.

Decline

In the late 19th Century, a decline set in and over the decades, the church began to withdraw from culture and society. Why?

For one, there was the rise of the social gospel – the emphasis here moved away from the finished work of Christ towards 'self-improvement'. In the minds of evangelicals, it was linked to theological liberalism. The answer for many was to pull up the drawbridge and to disengage for fear of being seen as on the wrong side.

Then there was sweeping institutional change. Christianity's influence began to wane thanks to the rise of scientism, modernism, the Enlightenment and Darwin's alternative theories about the creation of the world which all weakened Christianity's grip on culture.

The unparalleled hardships experienced by many during both World Wars paved the way for a huge expansion of the state into people's lives as a new social contract was formed between Government and the people. Many of the ministries of the church were replaced by those of the state.

There was also a spiritual aspect to the decline. Here is what Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: 'The Church became polished and polite and dignified, and the supposed worshippers were unconsciously occupied with themselves and forgetful that they were in communion with the living God.'

Recovery

From the 1970s onwards, there has been a recovery of the sort of social-transformative Christianity which has been seen throughout history.

One catalyst for this was Francis Schaeffer. He wrote: '... Christians should prepare to take the lead in giving direction to cultural change.' And this renewal, would come through the church: 'I tell you in the name of God He will judge our culture unless there is a return to a Christian base for the culture – and that begins with true repentance and renewal in the church.'

In September 1971, meanwhile, the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFoL) happened. This saw tens of thousands of Christians come together in Trafalgar Square to take a stand and speak out against the great moral changes sweeping the nation. In time, the work of the NFoL switched to helping draft and shape legislation and from this ministry, the work of Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) was born in 1983.

Then, in 1974, John Stott began to call on evangelicals to take evangelism and social action seriously. In the mission statement that emerged from the famous Lausanne Conference, evangelism and social action were brought back together.

We must repudiate as demonic the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelism and social action." Secondly, and positively, we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. (Lausanne Covenant)

Since then, there has been far greater interest, broadly speaking, among conservative evangelicals for a robust, public square presence and witness. While disagreement remains about legitimate expectations for social change, few would disagree that Christians should get involved in culture, with a desire to bring glory to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The final word is from Don Carson who wrote this:

Sometimes a disease can be knocked out; sometimes sex-traffic can be significantly reduced; sometimes slavery can be abolished in a region; sometimes more equitable laws can foster justice and reduce corruption.... In these and countless other ways cultural change is possible. More importantly, doing good to the city, doing good to all people (even if we have a special responsibility for the household of faith), is part of our responsibility as God's redeemed people.

James Mildred

Coronavirus - Part 12 (October 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, a brief preamble. How do you portray a pandemic? With obvious difficulty, because however elegant or truthful or colourful your vocabulary, it will prove to fall short. So we also rely on non-verbal statistics. And the numbers presented here, month by month during the last year, have painted a statistical picture – also inadequate but at least readers are aware of something of the magnitude of this Covid-19 disaster. Consider, for example, the almost 250 million global cases and the 5 million deaths. But these huge pandemic numbers are ungraspable as well as anonymous. Other pandemic numbers are smaller, more bite-size, like the 2,068 deaths per million population in the UK, or the national R value (reproduction number) of between 1.1 and 1.3. But they too are essentially depersonalised arithmetic.

In truth, these mathematical descriptors lack the human touch. Numbers cannot express suffering and sorrow. Statistics cannot communicate physical and mental pain. Figures cannot articulate the tribulations of dying and death. Yet each Covid-19 datum represents a real person, someone precious, made in the image of God – even when Covid-19 challenges such sentiments. So, while the following paragraphs are full of those dispassionate numbers, think individual tragedies, personal sufferings, anxious minds, crushed hearts and interminable tears. Respond to this wretched virus with a little human kindness.

Now, back to those cold, raw data. They are as gloomy as ever. On 30 October, the number of UK cases since the pandemic began broke through the 9 million barrier. During October, the UK had the highest numbers of Covid-19 cases and deaths in Western Europe. Whereas France, Germany, Spain and Italy successfully suppressed their waves of variant infections, the UK numbers have slowly risen by an average of 42,000 new cases and 150 deaths every day. Many of these infections are attributed to a rise among schoolchildren and the use of additional testing. Whatever, we remain in a largely unchanging, precarious position.

Hospitals have been coping with no serious signs of being overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients – yet. However, the winter flu season is approaching and a combined Covid-19 plus winter respiratory infections could dangerously test the NHS. Already the numbers of Covid-19 patients on the wards have begun to rise to approximately 9,000 with 950 on ventilators.

Vaccination numbers offered a hopeful glimmer. In total 49.9 million people in the UK have now had a first dose, and 45.7 million are now double-vaccinated. So 95.6 million doses have been administered to 73.3% of the UK population having been at least single jabbed. The new-look third boosters have so far been delivered to 7.3 million of the 10 million eligible residents of England. However, the original vaccination programme has lost momentum. At the end of October only about 40,000 first doses were jabbed each day, whereas in July the average was 100,000.

Globally, the grim picture persists. Total worldwide cases are approaching 250 million with global deaths advancing to 5 million. These are numerical benchmarks indeed. The USA still tops the daily infection table with an average of 100,000 cases per day, followed by the UK with 42,000 per day and then Russia and Turkey. The USA also dominates the total death table at 743,000 trailed by Brazil and India with the UK in eighth place (140,000).

As ever, this Coronavirus has created a pandemic that is both global and local, as well as statistical and personal. And tenacious. It has not finished with us yet.

The Covid-19 Report

On 12 October, the first official Report into the UK's response to the pandemic was published. It represents the unanimous conclusions of the 22 Conservative, Labour and SNP MPs who sit on either the health and social care committee, or the science and technology committee. Entitled, 'Coronavirus: lessons learned to date', this 147-page document does not make for happy reading. Helpfully, it includes 77 conclusions and recommendations.

The Report pulls no punches – the government made big mistakes. And Covid-19 hit the UK particularly hard 'because of the official scientific advice the government received, not in spite of it'. 'This happened despite the UK counting on some of the best expertise available anywhere in the world.' The government's policy, informed by the science and scientists, was to manage the pandemic in the hope of achieving herd immunity. This strategy delayed introducing the first lockdown, which in turn cost thousands of lives.

The Report focuses on several key areas. There was an adverse 'groupthink' among ministers, scientific advisers and civil servants. It resulted in dithering, so, for instance, the 2020 lockdown was too slowly implemented. The Report describes this as ranking as 'one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced'.

Then there was the farrago of the NHS Test and Trace (NHST&T) scheme. It cost an estimated £37 billion yet was never fit for purpose. The Report highlights its 'slow, uncertain, and often chaotic performance' in 2020. 'It ultimately failed in its objective to prevent future lockdowns.' The failures associated with social care are also recorded. It was given insufficient priority that resulted in 'devastating and preventable repercussions for people receiving care and their families', including many thousands of deaths.

The one bright light was the success of the vaccination programme. The Report lauds it as 'one of the most effective initiatives in the history of UK science and public administration.' Although the UK's preparedness in the face of a pandemic had been widely proclaimed in advance, the practical reality was that the country's response lagged behind that of many others. 'Our inquiry found that the UK's preparedness for responding to covid-19 had important deficiencies.'

Government officials failed to challenge the scientific consensus which meant that only a limited scope of options were considered, particularly excluded were those being used successfully in East Asian countries. Moreover, there was a fatalistic 'accepting that herd immunity by infection was the inevitable outcome'. The Report also pinpoints other specific failures of judgment, for example, in sport. The government's action plan of 3 March 2020 showed it had no intention to bring in a strict lockdown. Otherwise, why was the Liverpool v. Atletico Madrid football match on 11 March allowed to take place at Anfield, and why was the Cheltenham Festival allowed to proceed for four days between 10 and 13 March? There were crowds of over 50,000 at Anfield and 250,000 at Cheltenham. 'Subsequent analysis suggested that there were an additional 37 and 41 deaths respectively at local hospitals after these events.'

Overall, the Report blames the UK's slow initial response to the pandemic which cost lives. It declares that the government was ill-prepared to tackle any forthcoming and unavoidable pandemics, as was proved by the Covid-19 failures. And there will inevitably be another pandemic coming. The hope is that the authorities will have learned the lessons of Covid-19 and be able to respond better next time. In the meantime, we await the more detailed public inquiry to be launched in Spring 2022.

Five commonest myths about vaccination

In early October, YouTube joined Twitter and Facebook in banning misinformation about Covid-19 vaccines. Yet misinformation and many myths about these vaccines still persist, even abound, on these social media platforms and elsewhere.

Fortune magazine (2 October edition) spelled out the most common myths in an article by Dana Smith under the title, 'Five biggest myths about the COVID-19 vaccines, debunked.' Fans of the myths should bear

in mind at least two caveats. First, the Covid-19 vaccines have proved to be overwhelmingly effective – reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death by about 95%. Second, they are also incredibly safe – severe side effects and deaths are exceptionally rare. Smith quotes figures of just 0.002% for adverse effects and a mortality rate of 1.6% for confirmed cases. So, here are the top five:

Myth 1: The mRNA vaccines change your DNA.

Myth 2: The vaccines negatively affect fertility.

Myth 3: The vaccines were rushed, and we don't know what the long-term side effects will be.

Myth 4: If you have already had Covid-19, you don't need a vaccine.

Myth 5: The vaccines don't protect against transmission.

Such statements are being enthusiastically spread by anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists, but they do not stand up to orthodox scientific interrogation – yes, they are all utterly untrue. Such myths are typically based upon a few isolated incidents and anecdotes rather than the broad sweep of hundreds of human clinical trials, millions of cases and billions of samples instigated, investigated, analysed and presented by seasoned scientists and medical personnel. In other words, follow the science, not the pseudoscience!

A new Delta variant, AY.4.2

Currently the Delta variant (B.1.617.2) is the dominant Covid-19 mutation in the UK. However, data published by the UK Health Security Agency on 15 October suggest that 6% of cases are of a new type, namely AY.4.2, also called Delta Plus. It may contain mutations that give the virus survival advantages. AY.4.2 was first identified in the UK during July 2021. It includes spike mutations A222V and Y145H. A few cases have also been identified in the USA and Denmark, but new AY.4.2 infections have since declined there.

Experts considered that AY.4.2 was unlikely to escape vaccines, or immunity, or be especially transmissible, or more contagious, or pose a serious threat to human health. Therefore it had not been allocated the status of a Variant of Concern, a VOC. However, on 22 October, because of 'a slowly increasing proportion of cases in the UK', the Health Security Agency designated AY.4.2 as a new Variant Under Investigation, officially known as VUI-21OCT-01.

Currently, there are 4 VOCs, 5 VUIs and 5 variants 'in monitoring' in the UK. They will all be kept under surveillance. Meanwhile, the major Covid-19 vaccine makers are updating and testing their products ready to roll out quickly against any new variant strains and especially against the emergence of an 'escape variant', a strain that becomes dominant and resistant to current vaccines.

Vaccines and transmission

Previous research had suggested that vaccinated and unvaccinated people were roughly equally infectious. In mid-October, results from the first study to examine directly how well the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines prevent the spread of the Delta variant were published. The article was entitled, 'The impact of SARS-CoV-2 vaccination on Alpha & Delta variant transmission' by David Eyre et al., and published as an online preprint at medRxiv (15 October 2021).

The work, which has yet to be peer reviewed, analysed testing data from 139,164 close contacts of 95,716 people infected with Covid-19 between January and August 2021, when the Alpha and Delta variants were competing for dominance in the UK.

The Delta variant is highly transmissible. These results showed that people, who were vaccinated and subsequently infected by the Delta variant, in so-called 'breakthrough infections', were less likely to transmit the virus to their close contacts, compared with their unvaccinated counterparts. In this, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was more effective than the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. Moreover, though vaccination reduced Delta transmission it was only about half as effective compared with transmission limitation of the Alpha variant. Also there was a higher risk of having a 'breakthrough infection' caused by Delta than one caused by Alpha.

However, this beneficial effect against Delta transmission was small and waned rapidly to levels similar to unvaccinated individuals three months after the second dose of both vaccines. The authors concluded that, ‘Booster vaccinations may help control transmission together with preventing infections.’

Vaccine complications

There are emerging reports of rare neurological complications associated with Covid-19 infections and with Covid-19 vaccinations. These are being misinterpreted and creating unfounded anxiety. A landmark study, published at the end of October, puts the matter in perspective and provides well-founded reassurance.

The study, entitled, ‘Neurological complications after first dose of COVID-19 vaccines and SARS-CoV-2 infection’ by Martina Patone et al., was published in Nature Medicine (2021, 25 October).

The investigators examined the NHS records of 32 million adults in England in order to assess the frequency of rare adverse neurological events resulting in hospital admissions after a first dose of either Oxford-AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech jabs, or after a Covid-19 positive test, indicating a Covid-19 infection.

Several neurological conditions were recorded but their incidences were mostly numerically minor. The major observations were an increased risk of Guillain–Barré syndrome and Bell’s palsy with the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and of haemorrhagic stroke with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. However, there was a substantially higher risk of all neurological outcomes in the 28 days after a positive Covid-19 test. For example, there were an estimated 38 excess cases of Guillain–Barré syndrome per 10 million people receiving the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, but 145 excess cases per 10 million people after a positive Covid-19 test. The researchers concluded, ‘In summary, although we find an increased risk of neurological complications in those who received COVID-19 vaccines, the risk of these complications is greater following a positive SARS-CoV-2 [Covid-19] test.’

These findings should inform healthcare professionals and policy makers in this country and internationally. In addition, the results should reassure people that the risks of adverse neurological events following Covid-19 infections are much greater than those associated with vaccinations. In other words, being vaccinated offers the best protection for overall health.

Shots for children

Vaccinations for 12- to 15-year-olds in the UK started on 20 September. So far, at the end of October, uptake has been poor with only about 21% of that age group in England having received one shot. This is in contrast to Israel, where more than 50% of that cohort have had at least one shot. Most other European countries have also begun vaccinating their over-12s.

Now attention is turning towards the under-12s. At the end of October, advisers to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended that a low-dose version of the vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech be given emergency approval for use in the nation’s 28 million 5- to 11-year-olds.

The decision was made on the basis of a clinical trial that involved around 4,650 children – nearly two-thirds of the youngsters received a one-third dose of the adult vaccine and the rest received a placebo. They all had two doses, three weeks apart.

Data from the trial showed the vaccine to be effective and safe. It was nearly 91% effective in preventing symptomatic infections – this was based on 16 Covid-19 cases in children given placebos versus three cases in the vaccinated children. And there were no reports of severe cardiac illnesses, like myocarditis or pericarditis, as previous studies had reported, especially among young men. Vaccinated children also exhibited milder symptoms of minor side effects. The advisers’ conclusion was that the benefits outweighed the risks. Overall, Covid-19 is far less lethal among children than adults. Of the 6.3 million US children who have caught the disease, around 440 youngsters aged 5 to 18 have so far died from it. That is noticeably low compared with some 735,000 deaths across all US age groups.

At the end of October, the FDA issued emergency approval for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to be used in children aged 5 and up. A final decision from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) is now awaited – it is expected on 2 November. Then administrative decisions to actually use the vaccine must be made. Then individual children and their parents must decide whether to get vaccinated. In these matters, the USA is far ahead of the UK because vaccinations could begin there in November with the first children fully vaccinated by Christmas. The UK government has yet to announce any Covid-19 policy for vaccinating the under 12s.

Other countries are already vaccinating their under 12-year-old children. For instance, in the past three months Chile, China and Cuba have begun. Others are closely watching the US approach. Meanwhile, at the end of October, Moderna reported that its low-dose version of its vaccine is safe and effective for children aged between 6 and 11, but the company has yet to apply for FDA authorisation. Both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are also trialling their vaccines in children under 5 and as young as six months old.

Jabs for jobs

Mandatory vaccination – this has become a recurring, and divisive, hot topic. The UK Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, has already stated that care home workers who are not prepared to get the Covid-19 vaccine should get another job. Furthermore, he has said he is not prepared to ‘pause’ the requirement for care staff in England to be fully vaccinated by 11 November. Meanwhile, the National Care Association has urged the government to delay the vaccination deadline to allow staff more time to get jabbed. And there are warnings that some homes will be unable to cope if workers are forced to leave their employment.

Moreover, on 14 September, Boris Johnson announced the UK government’s winter strategy. It consists of a Plan A with a contingency Plan B. The latter will be activated if Plan A proves to be insufficient to prevent ‘unsustainable pressure’ on the NHS. The government has announced that included in Plan B could be vaccine certification, also known as vaccine passports, and less commonly as vaccine mandates.

From 1 October, the Scottish government announced that Covid-19 vaccine certificates will be needed to enter high-risk, large events, such as sports matches, music events and entrance to nightclubs. Proof of double vaccination will be via a paper copy or a QR code on a new app, though the latter has been plagued by technical problems since its launch. From 18 October, after an 18-day grace period, the scheme became legally enforceable. Its objective is to limit the spread of the virus and to increase the uptake of the vaccine.

Meanwhile in the USA, President Biden has recently urged companies to impose vaccine mandates. It has already begun. For example, United Airlines has reported that 99% of its US workforce has complied with the company’s vaccine requirement. To increase vaccination rates in New York City, the mayor, Bill de Blasio, recently issued a mandate, that all of its 46,000 unvaccinated city workers, police officers, firefighter and others, must get jabbed by the end of October, or lose their pay checks. The NY carrot is an extra \$500 in their pay packets.

OK, those are examples of governmental perspectives and policies. What do bioethicists think about mandatory vaccination? Are they bioethically justified? Here is the view from the UK’s Nuffield Council on Bioethics. In mid-October, Danielle Hamm, Director of the Council, stated, ‘We support the Government’s aim to increase vaccine uptake among health and social care workers in order to protect patients, service users, and co-workers from harm. All those working in health and social care should accept a primary responsibility to prevent avoidable harm to the people they care for. But we urge the Government to gather more evidence and explore other options more thoroughly before resorting to such a coercive approach.’

And a view from the USA comes from the Association of Bioethics Program Directors (ABPD), a group of nearly 100 members based at medical centres and universities across North America. In early October, it issued a statement entitled, ‘Time to Stand Up For The Morality of Vaccine Mandates’. It declared that, ‘To protect the health, safety and future prosperity of humankind, mandated vaccination is now necessary. The ABPD supports the use of vaccine mandates as an essential measure against COVID-19.’

The well-known bioethicist Art Caplan, professor of bioethics at New York University Langone Medical Center, stated in an explanatory note, 'Two primary arguments drive opposition to mandates. One is that governments ought not play a role in imposing vaccination requirements. They ought not intrude on personal liberty. But this absolutism in the name of liberty makes little sense. Certain dire challenges to human health, flourishing and viability require collective action organized, coordinated and directed by governments. Legislatures and courts have long given the authority to government and its agencies to follow sound scientific and medical advice to minimize the danger posed by grave public health crises. Covid-19 with its 4.5 million deaths, untold numbers of people with disabling complications, psychosocial havoc and burdens on health systems is recognized as a very serious public health emergency. It makes sound ethical sense to permit restrictions on both liberty and personal choice including mandating vaccination for all deemed medically eligible to combat a dangerous worldwide plague.'

Caplan continued, 'The other moral objection to vaccine mandates is that they intrude on the fundamental right to bodily integrity including freedom to reject medical intervention. It is true that the right to accept or reject medical care is a long-standing right in America and other nations. However, this right has as the ABPD statement acknowledges limits and consequences. One may reject vaccination but then be subjected to penalties including fines, loss of employment, loss of benefits, restrictions on travel, restrictions on accessing certain businesses and services and denial of entry to government positions. Rejecting vaccination may also mean that masking or testing requirements must be followed to move about in society. Individuals are free to reject safe and effective prophylactic medical care including vaccines but private and public entities are free to enact penalties in the name of protecting the public's health including those especially vulnerable to harm from Covid-19.'

Caplan concluded, 'I fervently hope the position statement from an organization representing moral expertise in matters of health care ethics will counter flawed moral objections to vaccine mandates so that the threat from Covid-19 can be greatly reduced in North America and around the world.'

While there is much agreement on the purposes and practicalities of mandatory vaccination, there is no consensus. While voluntary vaccination is increasing there will always be those who, though eligible, refuse to be vaccinated. They may yet pay the price of restriction at both work and play.

Concomitant Covid-19 and flu vaccinations

The prospect of one appointment with two jabs was welcome. But that has not been the reality for most over 50s in the UK. On the other hand, it is comforting to learn that double jabbing, or more formally, concomitant administration, is safe. Such a simple and cheaper dual scheme would also reduce the burden on healthcare systems.

The clinical trial involved 679 adult volunteers at 12 sites in the UK who were due for their second dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. Half had a flu vaccine in the other arm and half had a placebo. Three weeks later the volunteers were given the alternative jabs. After six weeks, the reported side effects were mostly mild or moderate with no appreciable difference between the two groups. Antibody responses were also similar. Maybe in the future such vaccines will be combined as a single injection as with, for example, the MMR.

These results were published as 'The Safety and Immunogenicity of Concomitant Administration of COVID-19 Vaccines (ChAdOx1 or BNT162b2) with Seasonal Influenza Vaccines in Adults: A Phase IV, Multicentre Randomised Controlled Trial with Blinding (ComFluCOV)' by Rajeka Lazarus et al., online in *The Lancet* (30 September 2021). Their conclusion was, 'Concomitant vaccination raises no safety concerns and preserves the immune response to both vaccines.'

mRNA vaccines for flu and other diseases

Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines have become the new kids on the block in the fight against Covid-19. The huge success of the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA-based vaccines has not only proved the efficacy of this novel technology, it has also started biotech companies thinking about wider applications.

Recalcitrant diseases, such as tuberculosis, HIV and malaria, plus rare illnesses, like Duchenne muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis, are in their frames. However, seasonal influenza is currently top of their to-do lists. At least a dozen vaccines have been produced. Three are now in Phase 1 clinical trials and the rest are in preclinical testing.

Trials are being conducted by the Big Three – Moderna, Sanofi-Translate Bio and Pfizer. For example, in late September, Pfizer dosed its first participants aged between 65 and 85. The trial will ‘evaluate the safety, tolerability, and immunogenicity of a single dose quadrivalent mRNA vaccine against influenza in healthy adults.’

However, known hurdles are acknowledged. For instance, though existing seasonal flu vaccines offer only 40 to 60% protection against infection there is, as yet, no guarantee that mRNA vaccines will fare any better. Will the mRNA be capable of delivering haemagglutinin glycoproteins, the main antigen found in flu vaccines? Also, producing mRNA vaccines effective against the several varieties of flu may be more complex than against lone Covid-19. And whereas Covid-19 vaccines initially faced no established challengers, competitive flu vaccines are already common – nine are currently available in the USA. Then again, will adverse side effects be a problem, as often reported after mRNA Covid-19 jabs?

These and other questions will be answered soon because the market for seasonal flu vaccines is both global and annual. Commercially, that seems like a pot of gold worth pursuing. After all, the two mRNA-based Covid-19 vaccines are expected to reach global sales of at least US\$50 billion during 2021.

Molnupiravir, the promising drug

The US pharmaceutical firms Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics have developed and tested molnupiravir, the first oral antiviral Covid-19 treatment. In early October, they announced that molnupiravir can cut hospitalisations and deaths among Covid-19 patients by about 50%. The study involved 775 people who had recently tested positive for the virus but were not seriously ill. Of those given a five-day course of molnupiravir, 7.3% ended up hospitalised or died, compared with 14.1% of patients in the placebo group who were hospitalised or died. The results look promising, though they have yet to be peer reviewed. Molnupiravir is still experimental and has yet to complete clinical trials, though authorisation for its emergency use from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is about to be requested.

Standard, current practice is that molnupiravir is given twice a day to patients who have recently been diagnosed with Covid-19. Such an oral medicine would encourage treatment earlier and easier and effectively at home. Just three steps – symptom, prescription, swallow. Indeed, during Phase 3 clinical trials, molnupiravir was so effective in patients with severe Covid-19 that the independent committee overseeing the study stopped it prematurely. And there is additional evidence that the drug can suppress the transmission of the virus.

A simple medication has been a goal of Covid-19 healthcare scientists since the pandemic began. Other antivirals exist. For instance, remdesivir is another, but it must be administered intravenously or by injection, unlike the preferable oral route for molnupiravir. Like remdesivir, molnupiravir is a nucleoside analogue, which means it mimics some of structures of RNA. But the two drugs work in entirely different ways. Remdesivir halts the formation of RNA chains, whereas molnupiravir, once incorporated into RNA chains, forces genetic errors in the virus. When sufficient mutations have occurred, and because these are random, the virus cannot evolve a resistance strategy fast enough, so the viral population disintegrates – this is known as lethal mutagenesis. And so the body’s immune system can fend off Covid-19.

What about adverse side effects? Could molnupiravir become incorporated into DNA and become mutagenic? What about molnupiravir and children? Preliminary data released by the companies showed that adverse events occurred in 35% of those who received molnupiravir and in 40% of those who received the placebo. Only time and more trial results will tell if serious effects exist. Already there is a serious disadvantage to molnupiravir – it currently costs \$700 for a five-day course of treatment. That effectively excludes it from low- and middle-income countries.

Even so, the UK government has recently bought 480,000 courses of molnupiravir. They are likely to be delivered before the end of November, if the drug is approved. Alongside that purchase the Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, announced that the UK has also bought 250,000 courses of Pfizer's antiviral treatment, code named PF-07321332/ritonavir. Though licensed as an antiviral for HIV/AIDS, it has yet to pass its final Phase 2 and 3 trials for Covid-19, though scientists are confident it will be effective. It is expected to be available in February 2022.

In the meantime, pharmaceutical companies across the world are busy in the hope of developing effective Covid-19 antivirals, preferably of the oral variety. The potential markets and the financial rewards are vast.

Ivermectin, the doubtful drug

Ivermectin tablets have been called a Covid-19 'miracle' drug. It has been promoted mainly by anti-vaxxers in numerous countries, particularly in Latin America, but also by people, driven by a lack of vaccine, who are seeking some alternative form of treatment. Inevitably, large pro-ivermectin Facebook groups have sprung up. But the promise of the drug, with respect to Covid-19, has recently been examined and found wanting.

As a common, over-the-counter drug, licensed since 1981, ivermectin has been used as an anti-parasitic medicine to treat humans and animals. It is effective against, for example, worms and head lice. More recently there have been calls to repurpose it against Covid-19. Several studies have allegedly supported this strategy. One such key investigation was led by Dr Ahmed Elgazzar from Benha University in Egypt, and published as a preprint on the Research Square website in November 2020 as 'Efficiency and Safety of Ivermectin for Treatment and prophylaxis of COVID-19 Pandemic.'

The study of some 400 Covid-19 patients in hospital purportedly showed that when they 'received ivermectin early [they] reported substantial recovery' and that there was 'a substantial improvement and reduction in mortality rate in ivermectin treated groups' by more than 90%. Those are unexpectedly massive effects which drew critical attention. Critics raised serious concerns about plagiarism, data manipulation and numerous other irregularities. On 14 July 2021, Research Square withdrew this preprint 'due to ethical concerns.'

This is not the first study to conflict ivermectin and Covid-19. Other, seemingly positive, reports have previously been retracted. And there is concern that currently-published reports of ivermectin's effectiveness could be flawed, statistically biased, poorly designed and poorly controlled. And some conspiracy theorists maintain that ivermectin does indeed work and that drug companies are deliberately depriving the public of a cheap Covid-19 medicine.

To date, the most favourable assessment is that the curative case for ivermectin has yet to be proved beyond reasonable doubt. Results from larger, more high-quality trials are needed. They are coming. In the meantime, get a vaccine!

Covid toe

Of all the serious side effects associated with Covid-19 infections, be they respiratory, muscular, long Covid, or even death, one of the least dangerous and debilitating must be Covid toe. It is described as an outbreak of chilblain-like lesions (CLL) and redness on the hands and feet that has been reported extensively during the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, though less commonly during the Delta variant wave. The condition can sometimes last for months, yet its underlying pathophysiology is unclear.

An observational study was conducted during April 2020 at Saint-Louis Hospital, Paris, France. All 50 patients who were referred there with CLL during this pandemic period were included in this study. Those with a history of chilblains or chilblain lupus were excluded. The aim was to study skin and blood endothelial and immune system activation in patients with CLL in comparison with healthy controls. The researchers reported that, 'CLL were characterized by higher IgA tissue deposition and more significant transcriptomic activation of complement and angiogenesis factors compared with SC [seasonal chilblains].'

They also observed ‘a systemic immune response associated with IgA antineutrophil cytoplasmic antibodies in 73% of patients, and elevated type I interferon blood signature in comparison with healthy controls.’ In other words, the results suggested that Covid toe may be caused by the immune system’s response to attacking the Covid-19 virus as well as an endothelial dysfunction. The condition appears to be self-limiting though local or systemic anti-inflammatory treatment could probably help reverse the cutaneous manifestations.

This study by Laure Frumholtz et al., was published in The British Journal of Dermatology (online, 5 October 2021) under the title, ‘Type I interferon response and vascular alteration in chilblain-like lesions during the COVID-19 outbreak.’

John Ling

Book Review: Islamic Monocultures – the Fruit of Multiculturalism

Among the Mosques: A Journey Across Muslim Britain

Ed Husain

Bloomsbury, 352pp, 2021, £15.19 hardback (Amazon)

Author, commentator, and former Islamist Ed Husain has written a disturbing account of life among Britain's Muslim communities. He raises serious questions about where the doctrine of multiculturalism has led us, and what the future may hold.

The fastest growing community

As Husain, points out, Muslims are the fastest growing community in Britain. While the population of the UK grew by 10.9% between 2001 and 2016, the Muslim population doubled to 3.2 million, and is projected to reach 13 million by 2050. Husain is a Muslim himself, and points out that, 'The problem is not that the Muslim population is increasing: the question is what *type* of Islam is on the rise in British mosques' (p.4, emphasis his).

Husain travelled to ten towns across the UK to assess what the Muslim communities are like. The book recounts what he found in his visits to the following towns and cities: Dewsbury, Manchester, Blackburn, Bradford, Birmingham, Cardiff, Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and finally London. In each case he visited the leading mosque and sometimes one or two others. He asks questions and describes his observations and feelings. The book reads like a travelogue, with a conclusion at the end.

The Islamic Republic of Dewsbury

First up is Dewsbury, the European central office of the largest Muslim organisation in the world – Tableeghi Jamaat. It is a hard-line Deobandi movement, and today more than half of Britain's Mosques are Deobandi. The London tube bomber from 2005 came from Dewsbury, as did Britain's youngest ISIS suicide bomber, and also Britain's youngest convicted terrorist.

The main mosque in Dewsbury holds up to 4,000 worshippers – and this is just men; women are not allowed in the mosque. The women he sees on the streets are all dressed in black, wearing Islamic face coverings. Husain argues that such uniformity of clothing is not seen in Turkey, Syria or Egypt. There are no major retail outlets on the high street, not even a McDonalds. Predictably, Husain finds hard-line literature on the role of women in the Islamic bookshop.

Having previously read the highly recommended book, *The Islamic Republic of Dewsbury: A Requiem*, by local born and bred newspaper editor Danny Lockwood, I was aware of the seismic cultural shift in this town over the last few decades. It appears that Husain was not. Lockwood says there are no longer any licensed restaurants or clubs in Dewsbury. Saville Town is 99% Muslim with its own particular property bubble. There is a serious drug problem too, with 98% of the drug dealers being Muslim (Lockwood, pp.141-42).

Islamic culture

As Husain travels to other towns, they begin to merge into one in the reader's mind. Fundamentalist literature (of the kind banned in Saudi Arabia) appears to be on sale in virtually every Islamic bookshop he finds. Several mosques do not allow women inside, but some segregate the women. In Blackburn he finds it common knowledge that the Whalley Range area of the town is a no-go area for whites. When he drives up and down the high street there, he doesn't see a single white face.

Husain finds evidence of sharia courts and of women having Islamic marriages that are not recognised in UK law and which therefore offer them no protection if there is a divorce, or their husband engages in

polygamy. I have written about this problem before.¹ Husain says that some men have second wives and families abroad. In London he witnesses self-flagellation and finds there are videos of this taking place in multiple towns across Britain.

Multiculturalism has enabled monoculturalism

In some areas, Husain laments that ‘multiculturalism has now enabled monoculturalism’. I have written before about multiculturalism² – an ideology that is opposed to objective moral values, and therefore anti-Christian. Husain is right to point to its disturbing and paradoxical fruit. In his conclusion he notes that there is a growing communalism amongst Muslims in the UK whereby they identify primarily as Muslim and then in an increasingly political manner. He also notes the alarming ‘spread of caliphism as a social and political aspiration, on the grounds that Britain is flawed and failing’ (p.288).

Where are we heading?

Hussain asks:

What will happen when Birmingham or Bradford have a Muslim majority and organised caliphists hold the balance of power? Does the city begin by banning alcohol sales, using council funds to remove statues offensive to monotheism, enforcing new school uniforms for girls that exclude short skirts, banning nightclubs and gay bars, or making Fridays a local holiday for communal prayers?

Caliphism and clericalism are sequestering an entire community away from meaningful contact with mainstream Britain. The cordon sanitaire around many minds will become solidified unless we change course. (p.289)

Husain concludes by suggesting that we should celebrate six defining traits of British culture. These are: Rule of Law, Individual Liberty, Gender Equality, Openness, Uniqueness, and Racial Parity. Husain notes, ‘These six qualities are also the outcomes of a Protestant Christian ethic that has moulded today’s Brits’. (p.298) He is right about this, but without the Christian foundation from which they were built, these qualities are already crumbling around us. The doctrine of multiculturalism entails an abandonment of these values since no one culture can be seen as any better than another.

The parable of Batley

Events at Batley Grammar School³ took place after this book was written. The teacher who showed a cartoon of Muhammad in a lesson about blasphemy remains in hiding to this day. This must be the most powerful lesson ever taught by the school. Everyone now knows that we have a *de facto* Islamic blasphemy law in effect; break it and you end up in hiding. Even worse, there was a conspiracy of silence⁴ about this by all the mainstream candidates in the recent by-election. None of them spoke up in support of the teacher – they do not want to risk offending the Muslim voters.

What has happened in Batley is a parable for the nation. As the Muslim population grows, so does its political influence. Before long, all mainstream politicians will be desperate to win Muslim votes and will therefore avoid saying anything critical of Islamic practices or culture. Unless there is a dramatic shift, we are on the road to an Islamic Britain. Only a revival of Christianity can turn us off that track and take us to a better future.

¹ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/sharia-marriages-not-legally-recognised/>

² <https://christianconcern.com/resource/whats-wrong-with-multiculturalism/>

³ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/teacher-requires-protection-for-showing-a-cartoon/>

⁴ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-9728987/DAN-HODGES-wont-Labour-Tory-candidates-Batley-stand-teacher.html>

Book Review: For Those Being Crushed

For Those Being Crushed: Confronting our 'Social Justice' Blind Spot

Camilla Olim

Kingdom Publishers, 117 pp, 2021, £12.99

'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed' (Proverbs 13:8).

This is how Camilla Olim begins her book, *For those being crushed* and this verse sets the tone for the rest of what evangelist J. John has called a 'clear and challenging, passionate and persuasive, well-researched and well written' book. Olim writes primarily to Christians, and even more specifically to church leaders, giving a Scripture-soaked, Spirit-filled clarion call to confront an area of social injustice that few seem willing to confront: abortion.

The spiritual struggle

As CEO of one pro-life group in the UK, *Pregnancy Crisis Helpline*, I have been jarred by just how much of a blind spot the evangelical church has when it comes to discussing and dealing with abortion. I have seen this improve in some ways in the past five years, but there is still a tremendous amount of ignorance, indifference, or a mixture of both, in regard to abortion and how we as Christians should respond. Assuming no previous knowledge of the subject, the author begins by setting a scriptural foundation for the intrinsic value of human life from conception. Referring to passages written by David and Jeremiah in the Old Testament and the apostle Paul in the New, she writes:

Long before science confirmed it, these men of millennia past were clear that life's value is not determined by size, environment, and level of development or degree of dependency. They understood that God values life before its very conception... if the unborn child is human, as science and the Bible unequivocally demonstrate, then the unborn is our neighbour. (p.24)

Identifying the scale on which abortion occurs – around 800 every working day in the UK – Olim asks why it is so widespread. Showing connections to the ancient child sacrifice rituals condemned in the Bible, the author sees this as part of an ongoing spiritual war:

As image-bearers of God, Satan hates humanity... Professor John Wyatt put it once, he hates every human being because they remind him of the King. So, naturally, he loves abortion. He comes to steal, to kill, and destroy, and he loves to watch us willingly destroy one another and debase what God has lovingly created.

Considering objections

One of the potential reasons Christians may be reluctant to address abortion is misunderstanding the reasons a woman may seek one in the first place. There seems to be a belief that in many, if not most, cases women are left with no real choice but to terminate, and that while this is not ideal, due allowance must be made for the suffering that may be caused by continuing the pregnancy. Olim acknowledges,

...women are sometimes victims too. The suffering that may lead them to have an abortion is real – and this, I believe, is part of the reason why Christians in the UK are characteristically silent on the issue. (p50)

While urging empathy and compassion, the author exemplifies how this should not be at the expense of truth. She dispels much misunderstanding by pointing out that 98% of UK abortions having nothing to do with any identifiable physical threat to the mother, and that in 99% of the 98% of cases that are performed

for mental health reasons, no identifiable or diagnosed mental health threat to the mother is recorded. This does *not* mean that for the woman going through with an unwanted pregnancy creates no suffering or anguish; but even the presence of these, Olim ably and sensitively shows, does not make abortion a legitimate solution. Highlighting some underlying sociological issues that often lead to abortion – including the responsibility of men in the matter – the author offers the solution found in the gospel which brings help, healing and wholeness (p71).

Time to speak up!

Olim convincingly backs up her claim that abortion is a major, if not the main blind spot in evangelical churches. Gleaning lessons from the historical examples of men confronting blind spots of their day – Dietrich Boenhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr – she calls churches and their leaders to speak up. Yes, abortion is a sensitive issue, yet it must be dealt with! Francis Schaeffer said, ‘Of all the subjects relating to the erosion of the sanctity of life, abortion is the keystone.’ Olim asks,

If we demonstrate no value for the unborn, do our efforts towards vulnerable adults ring true? Can we truly speak on behalf of the poor, the marginalised, the disabled, and the oppressed if we will not speak for the most vulnerable of all?

I heartily commend Camilla Olim’s spiritual and thought-provoking analysis of abortion as a blind spot in churches. She is right – there is more we can and should be doing.

Regan King

Update on Life Issues - November 2021

Abortion

Texas Heartbeat Act

Currently, there is only one big bioethical story – the new Texas abortion law. It has provoked newspaper articles and letters, TV programmes, court hearings, debates, website hacking, marches, fights and much more. It is the culmination of 48 years of campaigning. In 1973, the US Supreme Court ruled, in the case of *Roe v. Wade*, that a woman had the constitutional right to an abortion before viability of her unborn, namely at about 24 weeks. To call it a contentious ruling would be a gross underestimate.

So, for almost five decades, the US pro-life constituency has been pressing for repeal, or at least some limitation, of this abortion legislation. For instance, in July 2013, the first Texas foetal heartbeat bill (HB 1500) was introduced by Phil King, a member of the Texas House of Representatives. However, the bill was never passed. Now, in 2021, a more serious challenge has finally emerged.

On 11 March 2021, the Texas Heartbeat Act (Senate Bill 8, SB8) was introduced into the Lone Star State legislature by Senator Bryan Hughes. After debates and votes in both the Texas Senate and House, it was signed into law by the Texas Governor, Greg Abbott, on 19 May. And it came into effect on 1 September. This highly-restrictive Act has banned abortion throughout Texas after six weeks of a pregnancy, that is, after the detection of a foetal heartbeat. It makes an exception for a medical emergency, but not for cases of rape or incest.

Pro-abortion healthcare workers and women's groups have criticised it because of its earliness of 6 weeks, problems associated with cardiac activity detection, its intrusion into women's rights, its disproportionate effect on black and low-income women and those who live far from abortion facilities, and so on. Yet the Act was democratically passed by members of both the Texas Senate and House, for instance, in the latter by 81 to 63.

Enraged, abortion providers, such as Planned Parenthood, and rights groups, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), asked the Supreme Court on 30 August to intervene and issue an emergency block on the legislation. The Supreme Court, with its 6-3 conservative majority, cited procedural issues and turned down the request, acknowledging that aspects of the Heartbeat Act would continue to be challenged in the lower courts. So on 1 September, the Act came into effect. And because an estimated 85% of Texan abortions are performed after six weeks, access to almost all abortions in Texas has since been denied.

President Joe Biden has criticised the Act, calling it 'extreme' and saying it 'blatantly violates the constitutional right established under *Roe v. Wade*'. The Biden administration announced it plans to sue Texas on the basis that the Act 'illegally interferes with federal interests'.

Accordingly on 9 September, the US Justice Department went to court arguing that the Act was unconstitutional. On 6 October, Judge Robert L Pitman issued an order blocking the Act. He called it 'flagrantly unconstitutional' and a violation of *Roe v. Wade*. The Judge said he would 'not sanction one more day of this offensive deprivation of such an important right'. However, on 8 October, the US Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals put an administrative stay on Pitman's order. As a consequence, most abortions in Texas remain illegal.

Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court declined to intervene and hence the Texas law remained temporarily in effect, but the Court unusually heard legal arguments on 1 November. In a three-hour meeting, the Justices were asked to decide whether Texas abortion providers and the Department of Justice – in effect the Biden administration – are allowed to contest the state's new Act. One of their arguments is that the law was

drafted in such a way as to evade legal review in federal courts. It is thought that a decision from the Supreme Court may come before the end of November and that it will allow the lawsuit of the abortion providers, but not that the Department of Justice, to proceed. That would be before the Mississippi court arguments begin on 1 December (see below). In the meantime, abortions in Texas have fallen by 50% since the law went into effect on 1 September.

A novel feature of the Act is that it allows ‘a private right of civil action’ so any private citizen can sue anyone who ‘aids and abets’ an illegal abortion. Thus, an ordinary American, from Texas or elsewhere, can seek a minimum of \$10,000 (£7,200) in damages in a civil lawsuit against abortion providers and doctors and anyone else, maybe clinic staff, family members or clergy, who support the abortion. Opponents have called this ‘a bounty-hunting scheme’.

On 20 July, with the prospect that the Supreme Court’s consideration of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* could overturn the colossus of *Roe v. Wade*, Governor Abbott signed the so-called Abortion Trigger Bill. This proactive ‘trigger’ law would take effect after 30 days if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, or if a court ruling or amendment allowed states individually to prohibit abortions. The Bill would prospectively ban all abortions in Texas, without exemption, beginning from fertilisation. Texas has therefore joined at least 10 other US states which have already passed similar measures. These would allow each state to devise its own abortion laws and would in effect protect all unborn children from abortion.

And what does the great American public make of all this? Is Texas different from the other 49 states? When a Pew Research Center poll asked about abortion, the overall US figure was that 59% agreed it should be legal in all/most cases. On the other hand, the equivalent figure from Texas folk was only 45%. Moreover, another poll conducted in April found that nearly half of the state’s voters supported a six-week ban on abortions. In other words, Texas is fundamentally a pro-life state.

Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization

In the shadow of the novel and contentious Texas Heartbeat Act and its six-week ban of abortion sits *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. The Supreme Court will hear this challenge to Mississippi’s law that bans almost all abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy. The hearing is due to start on Wednesday 1 December. Judgement is expected in the Summer of 2022.

Lynn Fitch, the Mississippi Attorney General, has said that she is looking forward to the opportunity to convince the Court that there is no constitutional right to abortion and that *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned. This is a big and bold case. Abortion in America is in flux.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Assisted Dying Bill [HL]

Friday 22 October was another dreary, even dreadful, day for the ‘morally sensitive’. It was the day that Baroness (Molly) Meacher’s Assisted Dying Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Lords. The Bill would allow for someone, who is terminally ill and expected to die within six months, to request and be provided with a lethal prescription of assisted suicide drugs, following assessment by two doctors and approval from the High Court. It read like a draft from the Dignity in Dying organisation, formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society – after all, the Baroness is its current chairwoman.

The event started at 10.09 am and the House adjourned at 5.56 pm, so it lasted almost 8 hours. It was not really a debate since no-one was questioned. Instead, it consisted of roughly 3-minute speeches for and against the Bill’s proposals. Listening was hard work – some speeches were good, some bad, many repetitious. On balance, they seemed to be about 50 – 50 pro and con. Probably none of them changed anyone’s mind.

There was far too much anecdotal stuff. Peer after peer was eager to recount the frightful death of a relative or constituent in pain and misery. Where was the ethical approach to such a great subject? Are we now to be governed by feelings rather than principles? The one welcome theme was praise for the wonders of palliative care and the common call for its improved funding, though this is often a ploy used by pro-euthanasiasts to demonstrate their broadmindedness and integrity.

There were two personal highlights. One came from the astute Lord Carlile of Berriew. He questioned why, on their fourth attempt, had the Bill's supporters not yet dealt with previous holes in the safeguards. Furthermore, he pointed out that 'Clause 1 requires the consent of the Family Division of the High Court before suicide can be assisted.' And, 'Have the judges been asked? There are but 20 Family Division judges.' He proposed a calculation. 'Let us suppose that 25% of those judges objected to the jurisdiction on grounds of conscience ... and that there were 1,000 cases a year.' And 'Each case would be bound to take two or three days before the court. In a sentence, the Family Division would be swamped by those cases.' 'In my view, parliamentary Bills founded on such fragile safeguarding and analysis, especially after years of trying to produce acceptable safeguards, should really not be troubling your Lordships' House.' True, Baroness Meacher later replied that, 'The High Court has been consulted.' However, Lord Carlile's overload problem remains.

The second highlight came from the amiable Lord Winston. Concerning misunderstandings about the Bill, he said, 'It raises the most important moral question and needs clarity without euphemism. "Assisted dying" could equally be applied to palliative care, so the Bill's title does not represent what is really intended. The word "euthanasia" – from the Greek "eu", meaning well or good, and "thanatos", meaning death – is what we are actually talking about.' He wished to amend the motion by adding, 'but that this House considers that the bill should refer to euthanasia rather than assisted dying.' He later withdrew this on 'the convention of the House ... that we do not move amendments at the end of a Second Reading.' Yet Lord Winston had made a serious point. Many think that 'assisted suicide' would be a more precise title for the Bill rather than 'assisted dying', which is a good description of the work of palliative care.

In the end, there was no vote. This does not indicate a victory for the Bill's supporters, rather it is a Second Reading procedural convention. Hansard simply recorded, '*Bill read a second time and committed to a Committee of the Whole House.*' There it will be scrutinised line by line, with amendments discussed and voted upon. When that will occur is currently unknown. Because it is a Private Member's Bill, it would need government time to pass to the House of Commons and through its various Stages there. This currently seems unlikely. It is understood that the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, would oppose any assisted suicide legislation. Similarly, the Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, is 'understood to have made clear to friends that he does not intend to vote to relax the law'.

The history of assisted suicide legislation in the UK has been one of chipping away. The 1961 Suicide Act stands as the robust statute, decriminalising suicide and so protecting the vulnerable, but punishing anyone who assists. Since 2003, several attempts have been made with increasingly revised bills to amend the Act – all have failed. The last attempt in the House of Commons was in 2015 by Rob Marris MP – it too failed by 330 votes to 118.

This issue will not go away. We will again have to rehearse that assisted suicide legislation is unnecessary and dangerous. And again, we will have to prepare those slippery slope arguments. For instance, on the basis of the outcomes in jurisdictions where it is lawful, the stipulation of six months will soon be increased, other safeguards will be breached, eligibility criteria will be widened, patients with non-terminal illnesses will qualify, the vulnerable will be pursued, healthcare professions will be divided, doctor-patient relationships will be riven, substandard end-of-life care will be normalised, and the entire medico-legal framework of UK society will be changed for ever, for the worse.

The UK needs to legalise assisted suicide like the proverbial hole in the head.

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

Yet another Scottish assisted suicide proposal has been lodged at the Scottish Parliament. The proposer is Liam McArthur, MSP for the Orkney Islands, and a member of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

The Bill, technically only a draft proposal, would enable competent Scottish adults, who are terminally ill, to be provided at their request with assistance to end their life. Currently, a consultation period is underway. This is due to end on 22 December 2021, then the responses will be analysed and a final proposal presented to the Scottish Parliament as a Member's Bill. This may take months, perhaps even two years.

All the usual failings of such legislation are present in this proposal – patient vulnerability, slippery slopes, lack of safeguards, and so on. And there is a novel feature. It suggests that patients who are unable to travel due to terminal illness, or people living in small and remote communities, might be excused personal attendance with the required two independent doctors and instead be assessed by remote consultations, such as telemedicine, before being granted help to commit suicide by lethal drugs sent in the mail. It will be a sort of death via Zoom and post.

Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has spoken out against proposals to legalise assisted suicide citing fears about safeguards. Speaking before the previous Scottish debate on the issue in 2015, she said, 'I voted against it last time and I haven't been convinced of assisted suicide this time either. A major stumbling block is the issue of sufficient safeguards. I believe we should support people to live and I am therefore in favour of good quality palliative care.'

Since Scottish devolution in 1999, there have been several failed attempts to bring the issue onto the statute book. The most recent, in 2015, was proposed by Patrick Harvie, the Green MSP for Glasgow. It fell by 82 votes to 36.

Genetic Technologies

Brain organoids with eyes

Here comes another clash between scientific progress and conservative, orthodox bioethics. The culprit is a paper by Elke Gabriel *et al.*, entitled, 'Human brain organoids assemble functionally integrated bilateral optic vesicles' published in *Cell Stem Cell* (2021, **28**: 1740-1757).

This controversial work used 16 batches taken from four donors of human induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) to create 314 brain organoids, 72% of which formed a primitive eye structure called an optic cup. The method is therefore considered to be reproducible. These structures contained lens and corneal tissue and they responded to light and exhibited connections between the retina and regions of the brain. It was around day 30 that these brain organoids attempted to assemble optic vesicles, which developed progressively as visible structures within 60 days, similar to the rates recorded in normal human embryo development.

According to the team leader, Jay Gopalakrishnan of University Hospital Düsseldorf, 'Our work highlights the remarkable ability of brain organoids to generate primitive sensory structures that are light sensitive and harbour cell types similar to those found in the body.' And 'These organoids can help to study brain-eye interactions during embryo development, model congenital retinal disorders, and generate patient-specific retinal cell types for personalized drug testing and transplantation therapies.' That is a concise, Teutonic-like description of the work.

Many critics are less prosaic. They ask, whether there should be limits on growing human embryo-like structures which are becoming increasingly complex. For example, Paul Knoepfler of the University of California Davis School of Medicine is mildly concerned. He has written, 'As to the human embryo models that are starting to be so similar to actual human embryos, I think limits make sense. For human brain

organoids not so much. These structures are fairly far removed from actual human brains and reports of neural activity in them don't show anything like coherent function on a consistent basis.'

Here is a more bioethically-conservative perspective. Of course, developments like these can assist in the study of inherited eye disorders, drug testing, transplant therapies, and so on. But here is human brain tissue, albeit primitive. Yet this is exactly how human embryos develop, from undifferentiated stem cells to differentiated tissues and organs. What next? The Düsseldorf team already wants to extend the viability of these organoids to allow the development of more mature eye structures.

This and other examples of controversial human research, such as three-parent embryos, human-animal hybrids and embryonic stem-cell technologies, test bioethical boundaries. The problem is that such restrictions have a habit of being legally extended or criminally breached. Consider the current pressure to lengthen the 14-day rule for human embryo experimentation, or the global prohibition on human germline gene editing until the 2018 scandal of He Jiankui.

Experiments on non-embryos, such as brain organoids, throw a spanner in the bioethical works. Of course, such structures cannot become human beings, yet they look like the products of human development. At the least there is the yuck factor. And again, how closely must such embryo-like structures resemble natural embryos before they too are considered human?

Be warned, slippery slopes exist. This year's brain organoid may become a little more brain-like next year, and ad infinitum. There are some areas of research that should be halted and remain closed for ever. Is this one? Perhaps not yet, but in the future, probably yes.

Stem-cell Technologies

Ageing, bones and stem cells

Your body is full of biological surprises. For example, it started with just one cell, a zygote. And as you age it still fascinates. For example, think bones. As you get older your bone mass becomes less and your skeleton becomes more fragile. Such changes are hugely complex and involve a myriad of molecular and cellular processes. Besides ageing, post-menopausal women experience an additional route of bone loss associated with their declining levels of oestrogen.

Bones, like all other body parts, are constantly turning over. That is, their cells are simultaneously dying and renewing so that new material is replacing the old. In bones, this dual process of accretion and resorption is driven primarily by skeletal stem cells (SSCs) affecting the opposing actions of osteoblasts (accretion) and osteoclasts (resorption). Ageing brings about changes in the function of SSCs, which alters the balance of turnover of bone and hence its mass.

Recent experiments with mice have clarified the role of SSCs in the dynamics of this bone turnover. Thomas Ambrosi and colleagues at Stanford University School of Medicine, examined the effects of intrinsic ageing-driven changes in these SSCs as opposed to environmentally-driven changes. They removed SSCs from the bones of young (2-month-old) and aged (24-month-old) mice. These SSCs were transplanted into young recipient mice, in which the transplants formed small masses of bone tissue.

Two key differences between young and aged SSCs were reported. First, the bone mass produced by aged SSCs was much smaller than that produced by young SSCs. Second, aged SSCs exhibited an increased ability to promote the formation of osteoclasts, the blood-derived cell type responsible for bone resorption. Ageing therefore limits the ability of SSCs to maintain a healthy flux between bone accretion and bone resorption – so bone mass declines. Such insights into the complexities of bone ageing may suggest treatments for problems, such as loss of skeletal integrity, fracture healing and osteoporosis.

This work was reported as, 'Aged skeletal stem cells generate an inflammatory degenerative niche' by Thomas Ambrosi *et al.*, in *Nature* (2021, **597**: 256-262).

Miscellaneous

Nuala Scarisbrick (1939 – 2021)

In 1970, Nuala and Jack Scarisbrick co-founded LIFE – Save the Unborn Child. It was to become the largest and most influential pro-life charity in the UK. Informed by their Roman Catholic faith and influenced by some of their friends, they had come to realise that the 1967 Abortion Act was an iniquitous piece of legislation and that they had to do something to counter its adverse effects. They were adamant that declaring to be against abortion was not enough – positive, practical alternatives were needed. There could be no circumstances that justified aborting an unborn child. Consequently, Life took an absolutist stance. Thousands and thousands of women and their children are thankful that the Scarisbricks and Life have supported and defended them through difficult and unexpected pregnancies.

In the early days, Nuala and Jack were caring for pregnant girls by taking them into their own home. While Jack became the figurehead of the new charity, it was Nuala who oversaw the day-to-day running of Life. For 30 years, she took on the full-time but unpaid position of National Administrator. Jack described her as Life's 'chief animator'. The husband-and-wife team became the dynamic duo who drove the charity until they stepped down from their leadership roles in 2017.

And how thankful many of us are to have known Nuala, for so many years, the châtelaine of Life House, the matriarch of the Life family and the doyenne of all things pro-life. To know her was to admire her – tireless defender of the unborn, formidable organiser, generous hostess, steadfast friend, gifted teacher, wellspring and driver of ideas, fount of fun.

Nuala was a great encourager. In the early 1980s, many of us, educated by the Schaeffer and Koop book and films, entitled *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* were looking for an outlet to express our new-found pro-life credentials. Nuala cheered us on to form Evangelicals for Life, a specialist grouping within the main organisation. It helped broaden the UK's pro-life constituency so that being anti-abortion was no longer only a Roman Catholic endeavour.

She was also a formidable realist – when we told her we wanted to start the Aberystwyth Life Group, her response was that nonchalant, 'Oh, you want to give it a go do you?' but then reassuringly she drove from Leamington Spa to Aberystwyth to spend a weekend training us in Life education, caring and political advocacy. She was almost Wonder Woman!

Nuala Ann Scarisbrick was born in January 1939. She worked as a teacher, and married the distinguished Tudor expert, Professor John Joseph 'Jack' Scarisbrick in 1965. Their home was in Leamington Spa. They have two daughters, eight grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren with a tenth due imminently. How we loved her – how we will now miss her. Our heartfelt condolences go to Jack and the family – how especially privileged they were to have known Nuala for decades as wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Biological and chronological clocks

How old are you? Some reply with a chronological age. Some say they are only as old as they feel. The better informed declare they are as old as their arteries. Welcome to the inflammatory ageing clock (iAge). This is a new type of 'clock' that can assess chronic inflammation to predict whether someone is at risk of developing age-related disorders, such as cardiovascular and neurodegenerative diseases. The clock measures a person's 'biological age', which takes health into consideration and can therefore be higher or lower than a person's chronological age. Healthy people tend to have a biological age lower than their chronological age.

It has been described in a paper entitled, 'An inflammatory aging clock (iAge) based on deep learning tracks multimorbidity, immunosenescence, frailty and cardiovascular aging' by Nazish Sayed *et al.*, in *Nature Aging* (2021, 1: 598-615).

The concept behind the iAge is based on the idea that as a person ages, their body experiences chronic, systemic inflammation – their cells become damaged and emit inflammation-causing molecules. This ultimately leads to wear and tear on their tissues and organs. And because people with a healthy immune system will be more able to neutralise this inflammation, they will age more slowly. In other words, because inflammation is treatable, the iAge tool could help doctors determine who would benefit from medical intervention, such as anti-inflammatory drugs, that should potentially extend the number of years a person lives in good health.

To develop iAge, the team at Stanford University in California analysed blood samples from 1,001 people aged 8 to 96 years old. The researchers used health information and a machine-learning algorithm to identify protein markers in blood that most clearly signalled systemic inflammation. In particular, they pinpointed the immune-signalling protein, or cytokine, CXCL9. It is mainly produced by the inner lining of blood vessels (including arteries!) and has been associated with the development of heart disease.

The researchers tested iAge on a cohort of centenarians. The results showed the volunteers had on average a biological age 40 years younger than their chronological age. This further suggested that people with healthier immune systems tend to live longer. Measuring inflammation with the iAge clock could prove to be a useful predictor of patient health in a clinical setting.

Conscientious objection reversed

Talk about abortion or euthanasia and the issue of conscientious objection is never far away. Not long ago, it was simple. For example, Section 4 of the 1967 Abortion Act protected the ethical stance of healthcare workers by stating that individuals are under no obligation to 'participate in any treatment authorised by [the Act] to which [they have] a conscientious objection'. It has become a highly-contested and poorly-resolved piece of legislation.

Nowadays, it is more commonly argued that doctors have a duty of care to provide legal healthcare services. Take, for example, an article by Kyle Fritz, of the University of Mississippi, in *The American Journal of Bioethics* (2021, 1: 46-59), entitled 'Unjustified symmetry: Positive Claims of Conscience and Heartbeat Bills.'

Interestingly, the legal code of Fritz's home state, Mississippi, declares, 'A health-care provider may decline to comply with an individual instruction or health-care decision for reasons of conscience.' Fritz argues, quite unconvincingly, that if some doctors are permitted to *withhold* their services on the grounds of conscientious objection, why cannot other doctors *provide* their services for the same reason? He calls the current situation ethically 'asymmetrical'.

Fritz writes, '... one's integrity can be damaged not only by performing an action contrary to one's conscience, but also by not performing an action that one's conscience requires. So, if we should protect negative conscience clauses to protect integrity, we should also protect positive ones for the same reason.'

Fritz's approval is long and complex. The objection is more concise. If an act is deemed legal, say abortion, then a negative conscience clause is a performance of charity. The act can be performed by another. If an act is deemed illegal, say euthanasia, then a positive conscience clause is a performance of unlawfulness. And the law should never encourage that which is illicit.

What would be the outcome of implementing Fritz's thesis? If both negative and positive conscience clauses are allowed, then conscientious objection becomes meaningless.

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.

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 him 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.

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 to avoid offending 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.' He continued that, '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].'

If left unchallenged, this ruling has profound ramifications, as it excludes foundational Christian beliefs from the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination law. By holding a belief in the Bible to be 'not worthy of respect in democratic society' places it on a par with racist and neo-Nazi ideologies.

The appeal to the Employment Appeal Tribunal, listed for October 2021 has now been postponed until March 2022 as the judge appointed to hear the case was unwell.

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 for 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.

On 12 May an Interim Orders Tribunal imposed restrictions upon Dr Kearney's practice. Despite the safe delivery of a significant number of babies who would otherwise have been terminated, Dr Kearney was told *inter alia*, that 'He must not prescribe, administer or recommend progesterone for abortion reversal treatments'.

This decision was upheld as a further Interim Orders Tribunal in August 2021 and a review of the conditions is due in the New Year.

Nigel & Sally Rowe

Nigel and Sally Rowe are bringing a challenge to their sons' former Church of England primary school after being told that 'misgendering' a child could be considered a form of bullying. When a six-year-old boy in their son's class started to come to school sometimes dressed as a girl, Nigel and Sally Rowe, who live on the Isle of Wight, raised concerns with the Church of England school. They say that their son, also six years old, came home from school upset and saying that he was 'confused' by the situation.

Nigel and Sally met with the headteacher and class teacher, and followed up with a letter setting out some of the questions that they had. But the school's formal response was 'cold', they say, and didn't address their concerns. In the letter, the school suggested that an 'inability to believe a transgender person is actually a "real" female or male' and the refusal to 'acknowledge a transgendered person's true gender e.g. by failing to use their adopted name or using gender inappropriate pronouns', was 'transphobic behaviour'.

The policies adopted by the school were originally published in 2015 as the Cornwall Schools Transgender Guidelines, and have since been held up as best practice by other schools and local authorities, and even the Department for Education.

Nigel and Sally, who are currently home-schooling their two children, are now pursuing a judicial review over the Department for Education's refusal to intervene in their case and its promotion of the transgender guidelines in primary schools. In support of their challenge, Nigel and Sally have sought opinions from three eminent experts, Dr Paul McHugh MD, Dr Quentin Van Meter MD FCP and Graham Rogers. Copies of their expert opinions can be found at <https://christianconcern.com/cccases/nigel-and-sally-rowe/>

The Bristol Four

Four Christian preachers have won the right to appeal a judgment that ruled they had been lawfully arrested for preaching in Bristol City Centre. The four preachers – Mike Overd, Don Karns, Mike Stockwell and AJ Clarke – had originally brought claims against Avon and Somerset police for assault, false imprisonment and infringement of their Human Rights.

The case raises significant issues on the right to freedom of speech and the freedom of Christian preachers in the UK to manifest their religious beliefs and to have the right to freedom of assembly in public. The appeal will be heard by a High Court Judge sitting at the Bristol Court Centre this Thursday 21 October and Friday 22 October. At the centre of the case is a dramatic incident captured on body cam video footage revealing the shocking arrest of Mr Overd on 6 July 2016. The four preachers had been preaching on Christian beliefs, sin and life after death. On a number of occasions the preachers engaged with hecklers, and, over time, a large crowd gathered to listen. However, during the course of the preaching, a few within the crowd turned volatile, which was primarily due to the behaviour of known criminals who began to intimidate and shut down the preachers. Instead of dealing with abusive and threatening members of the crowd, on arrival, police officers arrested all four preachers on the basis of the reports that members of the public had been 'offended' by the preaching.

In the video footage, the arresting officer, PC Phillipou, said to Mr Overd after his arrest: 'There is a line of freedom of speech ... you were aggravating people ... challenging homophobia ... challenging Muslims...' Mr Overd is heard to say, 'We were just saying what the Bible says', to which the officer replied, 'That's fine'. Mr Overd then asked, 'Then why have you arrested me?' The recording shows the officer admitting that he

did not know why Mr Overd had been arrested and had to call colleagues for answers.

The four preachers were eventually acquitted of all charges and launched a civil action against the police for damages. After their case was heard in December 2020, Judge Ralton commented: 'There is the tension between freedom of expression on the one hand and harassment, alarm and distress caused by the expression.' He concluded that he had sympathy with both the street preachers and the police, but ultimately ruled that officers had not acted unlawfully when they arrested, and detained the preachers. Therefore he dismissed the preachers' claims.

Judge Ralton's decision was appealed to the High Court, where Mr Justice Henshaw granted permission, ruling, 'Seems to me that the Claimants have a real prospect of success on their contention that the very limited second-hand information which the arresting officers had about the actual contents of the Claimants' speeches ... did not provide grounds for reasonable suspicion that the Claimants were committing or had committed a racially or religiously aggravated public order offence.' He added: 'Rather than this being a case of the Claimants' speech being so provocative that members of the crowd might "without behaving wholly unreasonably" be moved to violence (Redmond-Bate), the main problem lay with a number of audience members already known to be dangerous who were themselves liable to instigate unlawful violence.'

Ahead of the hearing, Mr Overd commented: 'We are very pleased that the judge has given us permission to appeal. The police must be held to account for their actions. The freedom to preach the message of the gospel on the streets of the UK to the lost is one of our fundamental rights in this country. If we lose that right, we will begin to lose every other freedom.'

The appeal was heard on 21 & 22 October 2021 and judgment reserved.

Mary Onuoha

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Christian nurse Mary Onuoha is challenging her former hospital after being forced out of her job because she refused to remove her small, gold cross necklace, which she had worn for 40 years as a symbol of her deep Christian faith. Mary was told that the necklace was a health and safety risk and 'must not be visible', however no good reason has been shown as to why Mary's cross is a risk, and people of other faiths and none are allowed to wear jewellery, lanyards, saris, turbans and hijabs without incident.

Mary commented: 'This has always been an attack on my faith. My cross has been with me for 40 years. It is part of me, and my faith, and it has never caused anyone any harm. All I have ever wanted is to be a nurse and to be true to my faith. I am a strong woman, but I have been treated like a criminal. I love my job, but I am not prepared to compromise my faith for it, and neither should other Christian NHS staff in this country.'

Mary's case was heard at the South London Employment Tribunal from 3-13 October 2021. Judgment has been reserved.

Contributors to this issue of *The Bulletin*

James Mildred is Chief Communications Officer at [CARE](#).

John Ling is a freelance speaker, writer and consultant bioethicist. He is the author of three books on bioethical issues. He regularly updates his [personal website](#).

Tim Dieppe is Head of Public Policy at [Christian Concern](#).

Regan King pastors The Angel Church in Islington, London, is author of *#TBH: Basic Challenges to Millennials Who Can't Even*, and leads [Pregnancy Crisis Helpline](#).

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Editor: Matthew Evans, office@affinity.org.uk
