

## THE BULLETIN

*News and Reports from the Social issues Team*

**Issue 25 – March 2014**

---

### CONTENTS

The freedom and accountability of the press	<i>Rod Badams</i>	2
Developments in care and the response of the local church	<i>Roger Hitchings</i>	13
New official definition of marriage	<i>Editor</i>	18
Life issues ( <i>Abortion, Assisted reproductive technologies, Stem-cell technologies, Euthanasia and assisted suicide, News from the USA and elsewhere</i> )	<i>John Ling</i>	19
How the West Really Lost God – A New Theory of Secularisation: a review article	<i>Norman Wells</i>	33
<i>Lord of the Flies</i> revisited, 60 years after publication	<i>Peter Fearnley</i>	43
Latest news of significant individual cases ( <i>The Christian Institute and Christian Legal Centre</i> )	<i>The Christian Institute and Christian Legal Centre</i>	50

## The freedom and accountability of the press

More than a year after the findings and recommendations of the Leveson inquiry were published, the subject of press regulation is still one which deeply divides Britain.

Everyone agrees that there needs to be a system in place providing rigorous scrutiny of the activities of the press, and adequate opportunity for the aggrieved victims of press misconduct to obtain redress, where justified. What is not yet clear is whether a system can be established which achieves this, while satisfying the conflicting demands of all the interested parties.

On the one hand the government, with the support of Parliament, all three main political parties, and the victims whose treatment at the hands of the press formed a large part of the evidence at the Leveson inquiry, wants a system, backed by Royal Charter, which gives Parliament a role in how the press is to be regulated.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the British press is implacably opposed to any regulatory system which involves the government or Parliament, seeing any such step as a breach of the fundamental principle of press freedom, and a removal of the independence and autonomy which has characterised the role of the press in British society for more than 300 years. In the words of the press lobby, the political involvement suggested would represent a “crossing of the Rubicon”. As an alternative, the press has proposed, and adopted, a form of self-regulation much more robust than anything previously attempted, but without formal public accountability or statutory backing.

In the debate on what is required in respect of press regulation, it is possible to agree with everyone who has expressed a view. In the light of Leveson’s findings, one can stand sympathetically in the shoes of Gerry and Kate McCann, parents of Madeleine, the four-year-old who went missing in Portugal in May 2007, and who has not been seen since. The press, said Leveson, had “wreaked havoc with the lives of innocent people whose rights and liberties have been disdained. This is not just the famous but ordinary members of the public caught up in events (many of them truly tragic) far larger than they could cope with but made much, much worse by press behaviour that, at times, can only be described as outrageous.” A compulsory system of regulation, enforced by law, would be a strong deterrent against malpractice by the press and, if malpractice still occurred, would guarantee the right of redress for victims.

One can also stand, just as sympathetically, in the shoes of Fraser Nelson, editor of *The Spectator*, the oldest surviving continuously-published periodical in the world, which first appeared in 1711 and has reached 2014 without having been, even for a single minor moment, accountable to the State.

“In the basement of 22 Old Queen St” he says, “lie our archives, showing how we have been implacably opposed to the principle of State regulation of the press — not because it protects the press, but because it protects the public.”<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the direct inheritors and stewards of such a history should deeply and genuinely feel that press freedom is a precious and pivotal safeguard of democracy, and that the status of Britain as a free nation would be threatened by any trespass of political authority into the liberties of the press. To them it would usher in a “Big Brother” culture, whose mechanisms of control could, once introduced, be more tightly applied as time went by.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2012/11/why-the-spectator-will-say-no-to-any-state-sponsored-press-regulation/>

Leveson certainly recognised the role of a free press, saying it “holds power to account, challenges authority, investigates and provides a forum for debate”. But he went on to assert that “the price of press freedom should (not) be paid by those who suffer, unfairly and egregiously, at the hands of the press and have no sufficient mechanism for obtaining redress”.

Recognising the validity of both of these conflicting perspectives, what is society to do? The traditional approach to dilemmas of this kind is to look for a compromise which “balances” the opposing view-points. Christians will instinctively want society to do what is right, rather than to adopt a pragmatic approach which simply seeks to take on board as much as possible from all the competing wish-lists.

What is right and moral in connection with social policy is on some issues quite different from what may be mutually acceptable or “balanced”. While the position of compromise is usually in the middle of the spectrum of practical options, what is right and moral may be anywhere along its path.

Given that “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” [Psalm 24:21], doing what is right will involve procedures consistent with God’s world-view and with the principles made clear in the Bible.

### The story so far...

The government set up the Leveson inquiry in July 2011 as a result of the public and political concern which arose in connection with the News International telephone-hacking scandal. It was charged with the task of investigating the “culture, practices and ethics” of the British press, and at public hearings held between November 2011 and June 2012, it heard from 337 witnesses.

Witnesses included a variety of celebrities whose ‘phones had been hacked, but more poignantly there was evidence relating to the high-profile cases of Milly Dowler, the 13-year-old abducted and murdered in Walton-on-Thames in March, 2002; Madeleine McCann, who was a few days short of her fourth birthday when she disappeared in Praia da Luz, Portugal, in May 2007; and Christopher Jefferies, a landlord who was falsely portrayed as an alleged murderer in the case of Joanna Yeates in Bristol in December 2010. Several prominent politicians also appeared, including Lord Prescott and two former prime ministers, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Leveson’s 2,000-page report was published on 29 November 2012, and proposed a new independent regulatory body to replace the Press Complaints Commission, long regarded as weak and too closely linked with the press industry. To give greater authority and certainty to his proposed regulatory system, Leveson recommended that it should be backed by legislation.

To try to identify what is “right”, this article will explore any principles in the New Testament relevant to freedom of expression. Secondly, it will seek to apply those principles to the issue of press regulation. Finally, it will draw conclusions, and, if possible, suggest a way forward on press regulation compatible with those biblical principles.

### **New Testament principles which bear on the issue of freedom of expression**

In the New Testament there seem to be three principles bearing on the issue of freedom of expression:

- [1] There is an absolute presumption of freedom of expression.
- [2] Freedom of expression should be protected throughout the human world to enable the gospel to be preached and the word of God declared.
- [3] Although freedom of expression is absolute, there is accountability.

#### **1 The presumption of freedom of expression**

In Matthew 3:7 we read that John the Baptist, seeing a group of Pharisees and Sadducees approaching, publicly addressed them as *You brood of vipers!* He was not arrested, which seems to indicate that there were no civil laws in place governing public expression. When he was later arrested it was not for public

Prime Minister David Cameron's immediate response to the proposals expressed "serious concerns and misgivings" about the involvement of legislation in the suggested reforms. He saw such a step as a breach of the long-established principle of press freedom in Britain, which had always been defined as requiring the separation of the press from even the slightest hint of state control or oversight. The press welcomed Mr Cameron's reservations, but the main victims' group, Hacked Off, expressed anger and a sense of betrayal over what they regarded as the Prime Minister's back-tracking.

Prior to the release of the Leveson report, Mr Cameron had said on the Andrew Marr Show that he was likely to accept the Leveson recommendations, unless they were heavy-handed or "bonkers". However, in the same interview he had also said: "We don't want heavy-handed State intervention. We've got to have a free press."

To seek a way forward, Hacked Off was drawn into all-party talks in March 2013 in an attempt to agree compromise proposals. The outcome was a proposed scheme which was still voluntary, but based on the authority of a Royal Charter rather than legislation.

The press was as implacably opposed to the Royal Charter proposals as it was to a scheme based on legislation. However, its attempts to derail the Royal Charter scheme in the High Court, and to persuade the Privy Council to approve the press's own scheme in its place, both failed. The Privy Council viewed the press's scheme as not independent enough and giving inadequate access to arbitration.

On 30 October 2013, Parliament approved the Royal Charter scheme, though with amendments intended to make it more acceptable to the press. The Royal Charter proposals provided for fines of up to £1m – to which the press had no objection – but more significantly gave Parliament the power to make changes to the regulatory arrangements, on the authority of a two-thirds majority vote in both Houses of Parliament. Following its approval by Parliament, the Charter received the Royal Seal.

Within days, most of the major press titles in Britain, including *The Times*, *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*, firmly rejected the Royal Charter scheme. Instead, they

condemnation of Jewish leaders, but for what he said about Herod's personal lifestyle (Mark 6:18). It was a "political" arrest, rather than one connected with the regular operation of the rule of law. While preaching at the River Jordan, John does not appear to have exercised any caution about the kind of language he was using. His chief concern was to make the Pharisees and Sadducees aware of his warnings of judgment.

More significant, though, is the fact that Jesus also uses the expression *You brood of vipers!* (Matthew 12:34), when speaking to a group of Pharisees. The fact that Jesus – "who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21) – used such uncompromising terminology in his criticism of the Pharisees is proof that God's moral law is not transgressed by the use of such language in such a context. If it had been, then Jesus would have been guilty of sin. It is clear therefore that offensive language can be consistent with moral rectitude.

This point is reinforced by an incident recounted in Matthew 15. After a session of public teaching by Jesus, the disciples specifically inform him that the Pharisees had been "offended" by what he had said about them (Matthew 15:12). He had described them as "hypocrites" (Matthew 15:7). This report by the disciples did not lead to any softening of Jesus' tone (Matthew 15:14).

In the societies in which the New Testament is set, it seems to be assumed that everyone can speak without fear. What a delightful contrast this is to the risk faced by street preachers in Britain in 2014, a significant number of whom have been wrongly arrested for saying things considerably less offensive than *You brood of vipers!*

## **2 Absolute freedom to preach the gospel**

Under this heading we need to examine what is going on in Acts 4 and 5, in which there are several texts often cited to justify a Christian's disobedience to man's law, if that law is in conflict with the commands or will of God. The context is the declaration of the gospel, and there are two verses which show unarguably

continued to pursue the implementation of their own scheme, which set up a new body called the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). The press scheme includes no provision for any accountability to, or involvement by, either government or Parliament.

On Sunday 3 November, by which date it was already clear that the British press would not be cooperating with the Royal Charter proposals, Mrs Maria Miller, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, was reported by *The Independent on Sunday* to have described the Charter as “redundant”. Although Mrs Miller is not directly quoted, the reporter who interviewed her wrote: “The government is not going to force newspapers to recognise the Charter, but will leave inducements in place in the hope that the industry will change its mind and sign up voluntarily.”

On 3 February 2014 an advertisement was placed in *The Guardian* seeking a chairperson for the press’s own IPSO. Applications were due in by 25 February. The press industry hopes to have its scheme up and running by May this year.

At the moment, therefore, Mrs Miller’s hope that the press will “change its mind and sign up voluntarily” seems forlorn. The Royal Charter does indeed look “redundant,” lacking any means to compel it into being.

that the freedom to preach it is absolute. In Acts 4:18, the Jewish leaders charge the apostles not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus; but in Acts 5:20 the angel countermands this: “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” It is against this background that the apostles say: “We must obey God rather than men” (5:29). Continuing to preach was not a bright idea of their own, based on bravado or an arrogant, presumptuous or self-righteous disdain for the rules which men make. It was nothing more nor less than a humble act of obedience.

This incident confirms the principle that circumstances can arise in which it will be necessary and justifiable for Christians to disobey a law of the land. Although in Acts the “law” involved was an ad hoc measure imposed by a religious authority, the principle clearly extends to the whole spectrum of formal state legislation.

However, we need to see these verses as more than merely a justification for civil disobedience; they are a blueprint for state legislators throughout the world when formulating their laws on freedom of expression.

Secular legislators should recognise that in God’s world-view it is imperative that man is free to preach and hear the gospel. The angel in Acts 5:20 was only particularising the general command to the apostles to *go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation* [Mark 16:15]. This is a universal instruction. God did not say: “Except in those places where there is a law against it.” The parallel duty of secular authorities therefore is in *all the world* to allow and facilitate this gospel proclamation, so that man’s social and civil order is consistent with God’s authority (Psalm 24:1; Acts 10:36), world-view and purpose. To achieve this, secular law will need to guarantee freedom of expression. National governments should never impose laws which prevent or hinder gospel preaching, and Christians should do all that they can to ensure that their own governments provide for this essential freedom.

Naturally, if a secular state ensures that its laws allow complete freedom to preach the gospel, it is likely that those same laws will also enable a great many false teachings, ideologies and practices to be advanced just as freely. That is no problem, since we respect man’s mind and intellect, which God has created, even when that mind is darkened and fallen, comes to wrong conclusions and makes foolish judgments. We are pleased when man uses his mind, knowing that God uses that means to cause spiritual truths to be “spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:13-14). In the light of this, we should oppose any moves in law to differentiate between faiths in respect of freedom of expression. Freedom of expression cannot be partial. It either exists or it does not.

When in 2002 French author Michel Houellebecq said that “the dumbest religion, after all, is Islam” he was sued in the French courts by a number of Islamic mosques. He was acquitted on the basis that the law allowed freedom of speech, but a spokesman for the Paris Mosque said: “Islam has been reviled, attacked with hateful words. My community has been humiliated.”

More recently, the publisher Penguin has been criticised by writers and intellectuals for “caving in” to Hindu fundamentalists who had launched a law suit in the Indian courts. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, the legal system in India regards offending religious sentiments as a criminal offence. To stave off a possible legal judgment, Penguin came to a settlement involving the withdrawal of *The Hindus, An Alternative History* by an American academic, Wendy Doniger, which the litigants claimed demeaned their gods and humiliated their devotees.<sup>2</sup>

These two instances show that religion-related freedom of expression is constantly under threat, sometimes from groups which sincerely believe that right and justice is on their side. Such attempts to limit freedom of expression have no biblical justification.

### **3 The principle of accountability justifies regulation**

Jesus promised that “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matthew 12:36). This statement establishes the principle of accountability.

It cannot be argued therefore that freedom of expression is an intrinsic, absolute freedom, and that regulation of any kind would be wrong in principle. What needs to be determined is the form of regulation which would be compatible with Bible principles.

Nor can we argue that the only legitimate accountability can take place at the day of judgment. The fact that Jesus promises that “every careless word” will be judged at the day of judgment does not mean that man is barred from setting up his own systems for the everyday judging of issues surrounding freedom of expression. His emphasis in Matthew 12:36 is not on the time and place of judgment, but on the principle of personal accountability.

Accountability can therefore be achieved by other forms of regulatory procedure, but, to comply with biblical principles, it will need to take account of certain criteria, which we will explore later.

Whatever scheme may be specifically established for the regulation of the press, it needs to be remembered that there are also provisions within the criminal law to which individuals and the press are already subject. In some of the circumstances which arise, these criminal law provisions may be a more appropriate instrument of discipline than a scheme for voluntary press regulation can be. Both are entirely valid in fulfilling the New Testament principle of accountability.

It should be noted that biblical morality does not legitimise every kind of freedom of expression. The Apostle Paul strongly associates two kinds of verbal expression – reviling (1 Corinthians 6:10) and foolish talk and crude joking (Ephesians 5:4-5) – with a failure to inherit the kingdom of God. Such language clearly implies a moral shortcoming, and therefore sinfulness.

In English vocabulary, there may seem little difference between what is meant by “reviling” in 1 Corinthians 6:10, and the strong condemnatory language used by Jesus in Matthew 15 and other Gospel passages. There must be a difference, since the first disqualifies a person from the kingdom of God, and the second is compatible with Jesus’ sinless perfection.

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 2014.

The word rendered *reviling* [ESV] and *revilers* [AV, NKJV] in 1 Corinthians 6:10 is translated *slanderers* in the NIV, which indicates that the language in issue is not merely insulting, but is motivated by a malicious and wilful dishonest intent. Moreover, we know that Jesus was not guilty of whatever is meant by *reviling* in 1 Corinthians 6:10, as we are told in 1 Peter 2:23 that *when he was reviled, he did not revile in return*. The same Greek word for *reviling* is used in 1 Corinthians 6:10 and 1 Peter 2:23.

Although 1 Peter 2:23 clearly refers to the narrative concerning the trial of Jesus recorded in Matthew 27:12-14, it is obvious that it also applies to any other Bible references linking Jesus with *reviling*, otherwise the Bible would not be speaking with integrity.

#### **4 Accountability is individual**

The accountability of which the New Testament speaks is individual and occurs at the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36). Even though Jesus is addressing a group of people – *You brood of vipers!* (12:34) – it is clear that each person is on his own at the judgment. Jesus refers to “the good person” and “the evil person” as singular individuals (12:35). The biblical principle is personal responsibility for “every careless word”.

Human society when Jesus was on earth knew little of corporate bodies. There were national governments and civil authorities of various kinds; judicial systems and, in some countries, an organised academia. Commercial companies, however, were still in the future. Families or friends might have been engaged together in the same trades, and enterprises recognisable as primitive co-operatives, but essentially everyone was still an individual, and it was to the individual that Jesus addressed his teaching.

What Jesus might have said about capitalism and the corporate business world, or more specifically about global press and media empires, is unknown. Some might argue that because we do not know that, we are on weak ground in applying anything Jesus taught to the issues surrounding press regulation in 2014. After all, they might contend, Jesus was only addressing individuals about individual responsibility – not the powerful impersonal international corporations that exist today.

As far as the press is concerned, however, individual accountability is the relevant principle. By its very nature, all press activity is the result of the conscious and deliberate action and decision of individuals. In a great many employment contexts, some actionable failures are, for instance, the result of mistakes, poor equipment, lack of maintenance or false assumptions. Such inadequacies deserve the legal penalties which often result, but do not necessarily involve “wilful” actions.

In the press, however, all actions are wilful. What is written or broadcast is composed and intended to be written or broadcast. No-one has ever hacked someone else’s telephone or stolen their emails by accident. It is impossible inadvertently to offer money to an official for the release of information held confidentially. It is entirely appropriate therefore for a system of press regulation to be aimed at the conduct of individuals. We shall return to this point in connection with the current criminal charges and trials involving representatives of the press and with the question of what sanctions are appropriate to deal with press misconduct.

#### **5 Accountability is retrospective, rather than prescriptive**

Freedom of expression implies the right to use that freedom in a way which abuses the privilege. When there have been flagrant cases of abuse, such as those relating to Milly Dowler, the McCanns and Christopher Jefferies, there is a tendency to want to impose prescriptive laws, rules and restrictions aimed at protecting the rights of further potential victims of such abuses. The visible

public and political sympathy arising from the evidence given at the Leveson inquiry lay almost entirely with the victims, rather than with the attempts by the discredited press to defend the principle of freedom of the press.

In strategies for the public regulation of powerful entities, the question of whether that regulation should be prescriptive, retrospective, or a balance of both, always arises. In the case of press regulation, it is undeniable that the more the regulation is prescriptive, the less the press is free. Not only that, but prescriptive regulation would limit the freedom of all the players, whether innocent or guilty. In marked contrast to such an approach, retrospective regulation would have only one target – individuals who are thought to have breached the law, or a code of conduct, or whatever instrument of regulation is pertinent to a particular case.

The National Health Service proudly boasts that it is “free at the point of need”. When regulation is retrospective, the press is “free at the point of utterance”. With prescriptive regulation, it is not.

The accountability we find in Matthew 12 is entirely retrospective. Jesus clearly concedes this in v. 36 when he says that “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak”. In other words he is saying: “I know that you have complete freedom now to say anything you want to say, and I am not arguing or insisting that that should not be the case; but be aware that there will be a reckoning. Accountability will come at the day of judgment.” The verse is upholding absolute freedom of expression at the point of utterance.

Prescribed restraints, where they exist, might in practice reduce the number of “careless words” on which divine judgment is awaited, but that course is not presumed or advocated in the New Testament, where the only restraint indicated on freedom of expression is the fear of ultimate retrospective accountability.

In the secular climate of our present society, it might be argued that this is not a fear which many people would take seriously, or allow to influence them. The thought that it might exist would not occur to most people, and therefore it lacks practical value as a deterrent. Reasonable though that observation is, it misses the point. In defining accountability, the reckoning is not being limited to what happens at the day of judgment. We are simply using the principles of Matthew 12 to establish the criteria for the legitimate accountability which man is entitled to impose in the interests of good social order.

In the light of, and in the defence of, the principles of Matthew 12, which do not allow for prescriptive restrictions, we find ourselves siding with the stance of the press industry in opposing state intervention to whatever degree and in whatever way. State intervention is by definition prescriptive; its actions inevitably determine boundaries.

The press is therefore right. It is not just defending its corner. Anything identifiable as state intervention would represent a crossing of the Rubicon – the surrender of a principle. With that surrender, there would no longer be any ability to guarantee press freedom.

If there is no prescription, there will be no chilling effect. A chilling effect occurs when laws or rules are phrased in imprecise terminology, and as a result, people and organisations voluntarily desist from activity which is perfectly innocent and legal. It creates a climate of blandness and fear, instead of liberating a population to make constructive use of its legitimate freedom.

A retrospective approach is admittedly more risky, and requires a high degree of responsibility on the part of the press and others in exercising freedom of expression. But these requirements, even when they fail, must not obscure the intrinsic value to a society of the principle of free expression.



Imagine the situation if it became unlawful in Britain to exercise the freedom of speech which Houellebecq and Doniger expressed. Thousands of remarks a day would be actionable and everyone would be in constant fear of accidentally saying something which might be construed as criticism. Although freedom of expression is no longer as highly valued within British society as it once was, the law still strongly protects the right of freedom of expression, even though on far too many occasions the rights the law guarantees have not been supported sufficiently rigorously by the police. The legal guarantees are explored further in Section 8.

## **6 Similar treatment of the press and individuals**

There are many practical differences between the exercise of freedom of expression by a major press title or media channel, and, for instance, a street preacher in a Cornish village. The power, influence, resources and scale of impact of the established press and media are in an altogether different league from what would be typically characteristic of a private individual.

In principle, however, there is no difference. The press and media are simply more organised ways of communicating news, information, comment, opinion, criticism and analysis. If there is any justification, in principle, for drawing a distinction between the exercise of freedom of expression by a press title, and by a private individual, it is hard to see what it is. In any case, in the world of 2014, the boundaries between the two are blurred. Are personal web sites and pages on social networks to be defined as publications, or as electronic conversations?

Everything that the Bible records was written well before the invention of the printing press, let alone the electronic media of today's world. However, this does not mean that New Testament principles cannot be applied to the world's largest media empire, in the same way as we would apply them to an individual. On the other hand we must avoid extending the application of the principle too far. The press, both as a concept and in its everyday activity, belongs wholly to a post-Bible culture.

We have already observed that the organised press and media are, in principle, simply an extension of the individual. It is helpful, and right, to keep things this simple. If we can accept that there is no difference, we will find Matthew 12:36 useful in establishing the principle of press and media freedom and accountability, as well as the freedom and accountability of the individual.

On the basis of these clearly justifiable assumptions, the press and media should therefore lawfully be free to do everything which a private individual is lawfully free to do. A daily newspaper consists of many thousands of words, published as a single entity at a particular moment in time. However, exactly the same publication, given enough time, could have been produced and published by a private individual. It is unjust and inconsistent to impose restrictions on a group of individuals, simply because they are categorised as "the press" or "the media", which are not imposed on individuals acting purely in a personal capacity.

## **7 Extent of definition of "careless"**

The Greek word *argos*, translated *idle* in the AV and NKJV and *careless* in the ESV and NIV is central to the principle of accountability. Accountability can be justified in respect of every utterance and related event which is covered by the meaning of the word. In English, the words *idle* and *careless* seem sufficiently different to imply that this is a word with a broad scope. One of many definitions available from the world of scholarship is *lazy, shunning the labour which one ought to perform*.

On the principle that every word should be given its obvious meaning, the most obvious meaning of the word *idle* does pick up that idea of *laziness*. The word *careless*, however, extends considerably the circumstances to which the word might apply. Something described as *careless* could include the

*casual*, the *indifferent*, the *reckless* – anything embarked upon with inadequate care and thought. The adjectives *idle* and *careless* are therefore, in this context, more descriptive of the attitude of the person using the words, than they are of the nature of the words being used.

In view of this, the use of the words *idle* or *careless* in Matthew 12:36 can justifiably be applied beyond the use of the words themselves to the peripheral circumstances relevant to their selection and use. In the context of material published in the press, indifference to how information was obtained, to the dignity of those whom the information is about, and to the truth of what is being said, would all amount to *carelessness*, and would justify the regulation of conduct which included such shortcomings.

## **8 Scope of existing guarantees and sanctions**

Much of the current freedom of expression enjoyed in most countries of the world is based on statements contained in a variety of global conventions, some of which have been specifically incorporated into the legal framework of particular nations.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), for instance, states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions *without interference* and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas *through any media* and regardless of frontiers.” [Article 19] The words I have italicised seem wholly to support the press’s own view of the regulation issue. The phrase *through any media* clearly covers all press activity, and the Royal Charter scheme with its role for Parliament would amount to *interference* by the State.

An older Convention, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (DRMC, 1789), establishes a clear link between freedom and accountability: “The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.” [Article 11] This statement is entirely consistent with the biblical principle which we have identified.

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 1950) borrows the wording of the UDHR, but it is more specific than the UDHR in identifying public authorities as the source of the *interference* to which it refers. “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.” The Royal Charter scheme, since it involves Parliament, would amount to *interference by public authority*.

The ECHR then goes on to address the vexed question of competing rights: “The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society... for the protection of... the rights of others.” [Article 10, Freedom of Expression]

Article 9 ECHR [Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion] – are similarly qualified. If, for instance, Christians want to adopt personal stances and practices consistent with the biblical doctrine they believe, this right to “manifest (their) religion or belief, in... practice and observance”, then Article 9 provides for that. However, if taking that stance, which may be one of conscience, restricts the rights of others, then it is potentially in conflict with the qualifying ECHR statement, and in practice that conflict is likely to be resolved by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which will make a judgment in the light of the circumstances of each case. In recent years, the ECtHR has tended to rule that the rights of others (an equality-seeking interest group, for instance, or an employer or local authority imposing a blanket policy motivated by an “equality” agenda) trump the

rights of religious believers. Cases where the rights of believers are “trumped” are usually connected with freedom of action, rather than with freedom of expression. On the latter, the current legal framework in the UK is much more favourable.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, for instance, includes a specific provision (Section 29J) establishing an unequivocal freedom to promote or criticise all religions: “Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.”

In Britain therefore, nothing more needs to be done to guarantee the right to preach the gospel and to condemn or warn against false faiths. There may be side-issues relating to the manner or the place in which the preaching of that gospel is taking place, and these will need to be judged on their legitimate merits, but the principle of freedom of expression is firmly established, both in law and in current public and social policy.

In connection with individual accountability, the current long trial of Andy Coulson, Rebekah Brooks and five others has demonstrated that the present criminal law has the capacity to achieve what this principle requires. The seven defendants face between them 14 charges of conspiracy – conspiracy to commit misconduct in public office; conspiracy to intercept communications; and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. These charges are general in nature, but the details cover a wide variety of alleged activity. Not all the defendants face all the charges.

The decision to bring charges of conspiracy is appropriate to the way in which the press operates. We have already seen that everything the press does is the result of the conscious and willful action of individuals. By definition, conspiracy involves two or more people acting together in the planning or commission of something illegal. Under present law, charges alleging criminal action by the press can only be brought against individuals. There is no equivalent of the law relating to corporate manslaughter, under which a company or organisation can be prosecuted following, for example, a fatal railway accident.

Under the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007, a corporate manslaughter charge may be brought against a railway company in cases where there is clearly negligence, but insufficient evidence to show that any one person is individually responsible for that negligence, and thus for causing the accident.

In the case of the press, a charge of corporate criminality would be misconceived, since in the press environment, negligence is an impossibility. Everything that happens in a newspaper office is, for good or ill, highly proactive, and is carried out deliberately by individuals. A newspaper has only one output – the printed word – and every word ever printed is actively composed by an individual. Inertia and neglect can cause a railway accident, but have never produced a single printed word.

The nearest the law can therefore get to corporate responsibility in the press environment is to bring charges of conspiracy, alleging that a number of individuals willingly co-operated together to achieve an agreed outcome by criminal means.

Other trials will follow the current conspiracy trial, involving an even wider range of charges. For example, a number of journalists and public officials are due to face charges of corruption – the paying or receiving of bribes – in connection with the release of confidential information.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 2014.

## 9 Implications and conclusions

In the light of all the above, the following seems to be the way forward for press regulation which most accords with the biblical principles involved:

- (a) There should be no state or political involvement at all in the regulation of the press.
- (b) The press should be allowed to operate its own self-regulation system. Any aggrieved party, including the government, victims, the public, lawyers, campaign groups, whistleblowers, independent journalists and dissident press titles or media channels should be as free to challenge publicly the actions and decisions of the press's self-regulatory body, as the perpetrators of the original questionable activity were free to publish or to do what they did.
- (c) As the press's regulatory system is voluntary, independent and outside legal jurisdiction, it is free to establish its own code of conduct, which, since the code will only apply to those who have agreed to be bound by it, may involve some prescriptive elements and sanctions against newspaper companies, rather than individuals. State criminal law, however, and any amendments to the law, should be directed against individuals on the basis of the principle of retrospective accountability.
- (d) Given that regulation should recognise individual responsibility, and that individual and press freedom should not be treated differently, the idea of establishing a recognised professional body known as the "register of practitioners of journalism" or something similar, should be rejected. The creation of any such body would inevitably lead to the freedoms and actions of those registered being treated differently from the way in which the general public is treated. It would also be bound to affect the motivation and opportunity for those not registered to be involved in formal journalism, since it would be likely to reduce the regard in which the unregistered were held. It would lead to a new kind of chilling effect. How can there be a freedom of the press if one has to be registered with an accreditation body in order to exercise it?
- (e) After the current and pending criminal trials are over, Parliament should review the extent to which the law, as it currently stands, adequately deals with any malpractices which evidence at the trials, and to the Leveson inquiry, may have clearly uncovered. This review may or may not result in new laws, amended laws, or revised penalties for existing offences.
- (f) In parallel with (e), the Home Office and the Police Service must ensure that an effective system, sufficient resources and a strong enough determination exist to bring the law to bear against individuals who abuse press freedom by committing offences. Any law is only as good, in practice, as the quality of its enforcement.
- (g) On the basis of wider biblical principles, churches will have a responsibility to promote and discover truth and to seek justice. This will involve the defence and support of victims of press intrusion, innuendo and vilification. How this can most appropriately be done will vary from case to case. Although churches should not look for cases to take up, they should anticipate the probability of having to fulfil this role from time to time, and, when a case arises, give careful thought to the action and strategy needed.

*Rod Badams*

## **Developments in care and the response of the local church**

Care of older people and people with disabilities is often in the news, usually because of failures in the delivery of care or malpractice in an institution.

The fact is that a great deal of good quality care is delivered and many staff employed to give care are people of high quality with a strong desire to serve their “clients” as well as they can. The downside is that the systems in place to plan and provide this care often involve extensive bureaucratic structures which many professionals feel create problems, and which are frequently blamed for inadequacies and failures in delivery.

In general, we accept that the state and other public and voluntary services must take the leading role in the care of people with disabilities, older people, those who are frail and those who are dying. Nothing else is practicable. The numbers involved, and the cost, complexity and range of care needed is far beyond the capacity of any single agency, or any informal structures, to provide. Sophisticated and highly-organised management systems are essential in order to assess, develop, provide, monitor and review the vast quantity and range of care services requiring to be delivered.

Amid the complex mix of issues which arise in connection with care needs, service provision and finance, the local church also has a significant role. This role is usually related to the care of specific individuals rather than to the planning and development of services, or the monitoring and evaluation of their delivery. Church leaders and members of congregations seek to visit and support those who, because of disability, age or illness need to receive care support from the providing agencies.

During this whole process of arranging for and providing care, it is possible for spiritual ministry to be severely curtailed or even squeezed out altogether. Despite the intentions of the strategists and the ideals set out in official guidelines, spiritual needs tend to come very low on the list of priorities when specific provision is being planned. Against this background, means have to be found therefore to ensure that spiritual care can be brought to people in an uninterrupted way. How this can be done is the theme of this short analysis.

### **Being cared for at home**

It is the received wisdom and perception that people are better off being at home wherever that is possible. Many older people and people with disabilities, and their families, have also indicated that this is their preferred option, provided that the necessary care support is available. It is also often claimed that care at home costs less than care in hospital or special institutions such as care homes.

For all these reasons, successive governments have increasingly put the care of people in their own homes at the centre of their funding priorities and plans.

This is where the first big problem arises. The availability of the needed services varies depending on where a person lives, leading to what is often called “a post-code lottery”. An example of this is currently evident in the way the problem of dementia is addressed.

Someone suffering with Alzheimer’s Disease has a range of needs at the various stages of its remorseless development. Before any services are provided, a care assessment is made. Sometimes this will involve a number of separate assessments. When it comes to someone receiving care in their own homes there will usually be an assessment by the social services department of the local authority. There may also be an assessment by health care professionals to determine the nature of any nursing input that will be needed. Where there is a terminal illness or some specific physical

need, assessments may be made by other health professionals, such as occupational therapists or physiotherapists. As a result of the assessment process, care plans will be developed which may lead to other services being arranged. Some of the personal care may be provided by a private agency which may wish to make its own assessment before starting to provide a service. Some social arrangements may be provided by a voluntary agency, which may make an assessment as well.

Where several care providers are involved, meetings will be arranged, as part of the management of the person's care, at which the different agencies will pool information, in order to ensure some degree of coordination.

Of course, individual cases vary widely in their degree of complexity, but the involvement to some extent of a number of different care providers is by no means unusual.

Given its complexity, the process of assessment can be intimidating and emotionally stressful, and the professionals making the assessments can be fairly pressured so that the needs of sufferer and carer becomes marginalised. It should not happen, but it does. Throughout the assessment period, and then as the care plan is implemented, the wishes of both the person receiving care, and the spouse or family member who provides the main support, should be taken into account. The carer, and, if capable, the person receiving care, should at all times be fully involved.

The support of caring Christian friends and the church is also vital in helping to enable those going through the assessment process, leading to a new, different, and more dependent way of life, to cope. Sadly, many families and many local churches do not understand the process and so do not make the input they could. Pastors and church leaders should seek to be better informed about these processes.

Many people who receive care tend to accept what is being planned for them by the various agencies. However, if they are believers, or there is a connection with the local church, it is at this earliest stage that the importance of spiritual and pastoral issues should be raised. This is particularly true where someone has a terminal condition and they are wishing to die at home. It is often possible for a minister to be involved in a case review (the meeting of the various agencies) as a "professional" who has a legitimate input. It is always worth seeking to be involved in order to stress the spiritual care aspects.

A significant issue, especially for social services departments, is cost. Services can be limited or even refused on this basis. Even where it is agreed that there is a need, there may often be delays while various committees and officers within the local authority evaluate the need and consider what resources are available to meet those needs. "Social workers themselves can be frustrated by the way their assessments are amended or even refused by these levels of bureaucracy. Some people with disability become angry as a result of the delays and changes which often occur during the process. They see it as a form of control over how they lead their lives." (See *How bureaucracy is derailing personalisation* by Jeremy Dunning, published in *Community Care*, 21 July 2011)

## **Bureaucracy**

The issue of bureaucracy is seen by many within the field of care provision as a growing problem. It needs to be realised, however, that reducing budgets and increasing demands inevitably leave managers and statutory agencies with difficult decisions to make.

One of the growing areas of complaint is the amount of detailed information that is often collected. Assessment forms can be very involved. Proposals to simplify the various processes are constantly being considered.

In the delivery of services, bureaucracy can be a problem as well. Where a number of agencies are providing services, the danger of staff overlapping can be disturbing and frustrating. Rigid definitions of what can and cannot be done can lead to significant issues being overlooked. An example would be that of a caring lady going into an elderly person's house to help a confused lady to dress being forbidden from putting dirty clothing in the washing machine and being unable to help the carer husband who was not coping with his wife's problem. Piles of dirty clothes quickly accumulated, causing both husband and wife further distress.

The issue of the time allocated to some paid care staff to do their work has featured in the media in recent months. A number of issues come together here; funding is a major factor, with many local authorities paying private agencies an hourly rate below that which is recommended. As a result, the agency then cuts corners. Bad management by the agency is also a factor; workers drive longish distances between case visits, for which they are often not paid, and the daily care schedule is inefficiently structured, requiring staff to incur extra mileage and lose time because the visits for the day are not planned in a sensible order, and involve criss-crossing journeys.

Here again, if they take time to identify the ways in which they can offer effective help and support, there are opportunities for local churches to be involved with members of the congregation who are receiving services and experiencing inadequacies.

## **Loneliness**

One of the problems with care at home which affects many older people and people with disabilities is that of loneliness. Where mobility is limited, the house can become an isolating place for those who live alone. They may well be assessed to be capable of living by themselves with support services. But those who provide that support are often only in the house for a total of an hour a day. When that day is 14 hours long (i.e. from 8.00am to 10.00 pm), there is a lot of time to fill.

Loneliness is a killer, even worse than obesity, according to recent research findings which showed that feeling extreme loneliness can increase an older person's chances of premature death by 14 per cent. Psychologist John Cacioppo, the Tiffany & Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor in Psychology at Chicago University, who is considered to be a leading expert in North America on loneliness, says older people need three levels of relationships (he calls it connectedness) to avoid or alleviate loneliness:

- Intimate connectedness – having someone who identifies with you closely and shows you real affection;
- Relational connectedness – face to face contact with people who visit you for your own sake, rather than merely in fulfilment of their work;
- Collective connectedness – being an accepted and acknowledged member of a group.

This analysis equally applies to people with disabilities.

Although a secular study, this research accurately reflects the experience of many vulnerable people and demonstrates the vital and effective role of the local church. Those of us who have worked with older people know well how damaging to someone's mental health loneliness can be. Spending long

periods of time on your own, feeling that no-one cares for you and that you do not belong to anybody are among the worst experiences a person can go through. That many older people in our society are familiar with this dreadful experience is sadly beyond doubt.

Older people, in particular, can also partly be the cause of the problem. Many will not talk about their needs or their feelings of loneliness because they are concerned about “being a burden”. Of course, others will talk about it non-stop and so discourage visitors. This is a cultural phenomenon that affects many Christians. In a society that devalues age and disability, as ours does, there is a tendency for people to devalue themselves. Further, in a society where family structures have broken down, and where family members live a long way away from each other it can feel like an imposition to ask for even a little help.

The local church has a vital role to play in visiting, supporting and addressing this problem of loneliness. First of all, we need to teach people that legitimate need of help from others does not amount to being a burden. If Galatians 6:2 means that each believer is to show concern for other believers, as 1 Corinthians 12:24-25 clearly does, then we should be there to help (cf. Hebrews 6:10). If I am to help you, however, it requires that you must be willing to share your need and to let me help you. In his book *The Radical Disciple*, John Stott helpfully calls this “mutual burdensomeness”.

Then we need to be imaginative about how we address the loneliness. It is not practical to have someone with each lonely person all the day. But there are lots of other ways of responding to the problem. Thirdly we need to encourage people who are alone to cultivate their spiritual lives, to use CDs and other means of spiritual stimulation, and to keep in touch with others themselves. Loneliness so often inculcates a spirit of self-pity and inactivity.

### **Care in dying**

Perhaps the area where bureaucracy and spiritual care clash most is in the care of the dying. Inevitably a number of different agencies will be involved when the final weeks and days are lived in the home. At such a time, for families and carers to have their loved one near to them is very important. For the dying person to be in their own home with family close at hand is a great support.

In order for that to happen, however, it will mean that staff will continually be arriving at the house throughout the day to provide needed care and practical support. In theory those most personally involved (i.e. the person and his or her carer) have the primary rights in the way services are delivered. In practice, however, because of the scarceness of resources and the high level of demand for services, the service providers control the way things are done. This can, and often does, lead to those seeking to provide spiritual and emotional care – e.g. pastors, elders and close friends from the church – being side-lined or squeezed into small slots through the day.

The need is to try to make sure that there are spaces available in the programme of care that not only allow the dying person time to rest, but ensure opportunity for spiritual input when it can be assimilated and received. This is not easy, since when half a dozen care agencies are involved, care staff are coming and going all day long, and privacy can be in short supply. This is the exact opposite of the loneliness problem mentioned earlier.

There are three areas of practical input that need to be considered. Firstly, spiritual input must be put on the agenda and the agencies involved asked to accept this. Usually they will do so readily. Church leaders and others who are bringing the spiritual care need to discuss with the carer and family of the dying person when the best time for that would be. It should be noted that the first part of the day is usually a period of maximum input by nursing staff and care workers.



Late morning (i.e. just before lunchtime) or early evening can be a good time. This will vary, of course, according to the exact condition of the dying person. It is important, however, to find a time when there is less likelihood of interruption by others and when the dying person is able to sustain a short conversation. The frequency of such visits should be discussed. As death draws nearer, this will increase and become daily, if not eventually more frequently.

There are times and circumstances when the presence of a spiritual leader will need to be constant. The various agencies coming and going will need to be advised about that. They should accept it, with the proviso that full respect will be paid to the privacy and intimacy involved in some medical and care procedures. Those bringing spiritual care should be sensitive to the situation, and ready to withdraw if this becomes necessary, even if it has not been possible to minister to the dying person at all during a particular visit.

Secondly, the purpose of such spiritual ministry may seem to be obvious, but it is important to emphasise what the content should be. In a sense all pastoral care can be brought down to three simple aims – to ensure the person you are speaking to is a true believer (and if there is doubt to state the gospel as clearly as possible); to strengthen the true believer's confidence in God by opening up the truths of Scripture that are most applicable; and to focus attention on the eternal verities of redemption and glory.

These aims become more critical in the case of someone dying, but they must be approached with great tenderness and also sensitive brevity. So the reading of a short passage of Scripture, a short elucidation and prayer are the central features of such visits. Readings which point to the reality and glory of heaven, the finished work of Christ and the greatness of God's love and mercy are obviously the primary passages to use.

However, alongside that, there is a need to give space for the dying person to speak of concerns – natural and spiritual. Often a visiting Christian, and especially a pastor, may be told things that the dying person would not share with others – the subject areas of these matters can be very wide. The alleviation of anxieties in the mind of the dying person is a most important ministry and opportunity for that to take place is crucial.

The third aspect of support that must be given involves personal attention to the carer and family members. The needs of the dying person are important, but so are those of the family. Comfort and counselling for these needy ones should not be left until after the person has died. It is an on-going process. The overwhelming sense of loss will take place at the moment of death and in the days that follow. But as someone dies, those around feel a deep sense of growing loss and a range of other emotions and fears that need addressing as time and opportunity allows.

The fact that these ministries are having to take place within the complexities of our current society, and amid the pressures on those who provide care, means that the church has to rethink its approach. Pastors and church friends need to be flexible, but there is a place for a gracious insistence on being able to provide what is the most important ministry at the close of life. In an increasingly secular environment, when spiritual issues receive scant regard, we have to assert their importance and demonstrate their value.

*Roger Hitchings*

## **New official definition of marriage**

A new official definition of marriage in England and Wales has been published, but the new meaning will not have the prominence that the former meaning enjoyed, in register offices and civil ceremonies, for nearly 150 years.

The Registrar-General's new definition, released by the UK Passport Office (UKPO) following an inquiry under the Freedom of Information Act, states: "Marriage in this country means the union of two people, voluntarily entered into for life, to the exclusion of all others."

This new wording replaces the well-known definition of marriage which was adapted from a legal precedent established in a court case of 1866: "Marriage, according to the law of this country, is the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others."

However, the use of the new definition will be much more optional than the previous one was. Although not a legal requirement, the old definition was a standard formal statement displayed in local register offices and quoted by registrars when conducting civil marriage ceremonies. The new definition will be no more than a form of words which superintendent registrars in local register offices will be "advised to consider".

Explaining the role of the new definition, the UKPO states: "The General Registry Office do not propose that it is mandatory to display the new preamble since it is merely suggested introductory wording rather than a legal definition or a requirement for the ceremony. This may be varied to suit the wishes of the couple, provided that any amendments are secular in nature, and that the preamble does not state that marriage is the union of one man with one woman." The government has confirmed that the first marriages under the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act can take place with effect from 29 March 2014.

The UKPO has also clarified that separate figures will be published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the number of marriages of same sex male couples, same sex female couples and opposite sex couples. This allays fears aroused in December by one of the questions in a public consultation on marriage statistics, which appeared to suggest that the number of marriages might only be published as a global figure, thus concealing the number of same sex and opposite sex marriages in the total.

Although the current marriage certificate does not require the gender of a party to a marriage to be stated, the UKPO has confirmed that gender information will be included in the details of each marriage returned quarterly to the Registrar-General by local register offices. The Registrar-General will then provide the statistical information relating to marriages required by the ONS for the annual release of the figures on behalf of the government.

There are no official estimates of how many same-sex marriages are expected to take place in England and Wales, but in Spain, where same-sex marriage was introduced in 2005, there were 26,082 same-sex marriages in the seven complete years between 2006 and 2012 – an average of 3,726 (2.02% of all marriages) per year. This compares with 1,264,733 mixed-sex marriages – an average of 180,676 (97.98%) per year.

In England and Wales, in those same seven years, 58,501 same-sex couples – an average of 8,357 per year – have entered into civil partnerships, which became legal in 2005.

The population of England and Wales (56.1m) is slightly higher than that of Spain (47.1m).

### Abortion

#### Undermining the Abortion Act 1967

Just before Christmas, the Department of Health furtively launched a consultation – it was neither announced on its website, nor via a press release. It is entitled *Procedures for the Approval of Independent Sector Places for the Termination of Pregnancy*. Its intention is to weaken still further the provisions of the 1967 Act.

Is this a genuine consultation? Will the Department take notice of responses? Maybe not, because apparently new guidelines have already been drafted. They suggest, for instance, that nurses alone can administer abortions – at least, those of the medical variety; and that women using such abortion pills should be allowed to go home for the expulsion of the foetus.

Moreover, the guidelines propose that abortions can be authorised without patients having to see a doctor. However, the 1967 Act insists that two doctors must decide “in good faith” whether a woman requesting an abortion satisfies the terms of the Act. This was originally included in the Act as a safeguard, so that a doctor could be sure his authorisation was justified by obtaining the endorsement of a colleague. It was also a protective arrangement for the woman as a safeguard against a hasty decision.

Now the proposal is that doctors can be bypassed entirely – they have merely to rubber-stamp the official consent forms. Since the vast majority of abortions are performed for mental health reasons – ground C, the “social clause” – how can a proper assessment of a patient’s mental health be arrived at without a doctor actually seeing the patient? Disturbingly, this is already happening. Jane Ellison, a health minister, has recently admitted that only 46% (83,930) of women who had abortions under ground C during 2012, were seen by a doctor – this means that approximately 96,250 women side-stepped the Act. The question needs asking again: Is a coach and horses being driven through the provisions of the 1967 Act? Are most of these abortions illegal?

The Department of Health needs to ensure that the stipulations of the 1967 Act are followed, not to give licence for a free-for-all. When questioned about this debacle, a Department of Health spokesman feebly stated: “The law requires that two doctors certify in good faith that there are lawful grounds for any abortion. Doctors must comply with that approach.” So, what is the Department doing to ensure legal compliance?

#### Gender-selection abortions

Back in February 2012, *The Daily Telegraph* published some convincing evidence that sex-selection abortions were occurring in the UK. In particular, three doctors were accused, but the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with prosecutions because the General Medical Council would conduct its own investigation and, if necessary, discipline these doctors. In the meantime, the government mounted its own inquiry, which concluded that there was “no evidence at all of gender-related abortions in the UK”. Anyone who took an interest in the issue could see the whitewash – it was blinding.

Now, in January 2014, comes even more compelling evidence for the illegal practice from a detailed analysis of data based on the March 2011 National Census. The study involved scrutiny of children born to ethnic groupings, especially to mothers originally from Pakistan and Bangladesh, and depended on the premise that such families are more accepting of a daughter as a first-born child. Therefore the research examined the ratio of second-born children. It was here that the natural ratio of approximately 50:50 was abnormally skewed towards boys.

There are two explanations for this imbalance. Either women are continuing to have children until a son is born, or women are choosing to abort female foetuses. According to the study's statisticians from Imperial College, London, the latter is the more likely. The work was commissioned by the *Independent* newspaper and it concluded that gender-selection abortion "... has led to the 'disappearance' of between 1,400 and 4,700 females from the national census records of England and Wales". Now will the government do something?

### **Tightening abortion laws**

On 20 December 2013, the government of Spain approved a radical Bill that would repeal its current law, which allows abortion up to 14 weeks. Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, the Spanish justice minister, confirmed that abortion in the future will only be allowed in the case of rape, or when there is a serious mental or physical health risk to the mother, or when serious foetal deformity is suspected.

Under 18-year-olds will once again have to obtain permission from their parents before having an abortion. The Bill has yet to be approved by the Spanish parliament, but it does look likely that Spain is about to become the first country in the EU to back-pedal its abortion law. Such a move demonstrates that abortion laws can be tightened when pro-life groups and individuals exert pressure on politicians.

Moreover, across America, more and more states are passing laws that are restricting abortion provision. The effects are easy to see – in 1991, there were 2,176 abortion clinics nationwide, by the end of 2013, there were 582. And there is a New Year frisson across the land concerning the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act. This would ban most abortions after 20 weeks' gestation on the grounds that unborn babies at that stage are capable of feeling pain.

Further evidence that a US pro-life momentum is growing came when a recent *Washington Post/ABC News* poll showed that a majority (56%) of Americans supported restricting abortions after 20 weeks. Such thinking is leading to action. For instance, in Arizona, a lower court confirmed the legality of a new state law banning post-20 week abortions. Of course it was challenged, but, in January 2014, the US Supreme Court refused to review this Arizonian law.

How do you react to this sort of news? There are only three answers. Are you pleased, or are you appalled by State control of women's rights, or are you just confused? If either of the latter two characterises your response, then you have probably been subject to the great abortion conspiracy – abortion is safe, simple and a woman's right. In other words, you have been overly affected by the zeitgeist of Western liberal democracy. You are also out of kilter with history.

Here in the UK, the 1861 Offences against the Person Act made abortion a serious offence with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Prior to the infamous 1967 Abortion Act, public condemnation of abortion was widespread; there was considerable protection for the unborn and their mothers; the law was restrictive; and the punishments for those involved were severe. How times have changed!

## Is abortion a human right?

Good question – there is no doubt that many would like the answer to be *Yes*. On 10 December 2013, however, the European Parliament plenary session voted, albeit narrowly by 334-327, to defeat a resolution that would have made access to abortion a fundamental human right. The Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, put forward by Portuguese Socialist MEP, Edite Estrela, contained an aggressive pro-abortion stance. Rather than leaving abortion as an issue to be dealt with by individual EU member states, it went much further in declaring abortion to be a human right. Controversially, it also called for compulsory sex education at primary school level, and it challenged the right of healthcare professionals, doctors and nurses, to refuse to perform abortions because of conscientious objection.

Most countries within the EU have laws which permit some abortion under specific and limited conditions, but millions of EU citizens uphold basic pro-life principles, including the protection of all human life from conception. In addition, many others consider that while abortion should be available as a last resort, it should not be regarded as a human right, on demand. However, considering the narrowness of the vote and the resolve of the pro-abortion lobby, it is expected that the Estrela Report, or something similar, will resurface before too long.

## The ABC, the abortion-breast cancer link

Pro-abortionists have long denied the existence of any association between abortion and breast cancer – the so-called ABC link. Pro-lifers have long insisted that such a link exists. New evidence from China demonstrates not only the reality of the link, but also that the cancer risk rises with each abortion a woman has. This report has been described as a “real game-changer” for ABC link deniers. The study, entitled *A meta-analysis of the association between induced abortion and breast cancer risk among Chinese females* was published in the November 2013 edition of *Cancer Causes and Control*.

The research was conducted by Yubei Huang and colleagues at the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Tianjin Medical University Cancer Hospital. Chinese women have typically had lower rates of breast cancer than their Western counterparts. However, over the last two decades, coinciding with the implementation of the Chinese one-child policy coupled with rampant abortion, rates have increased at “an alarming rate”.

The findings are the combined result of 36 studies, covering 16 provinces in China, and they record a “dose-response relationship”. In other words, the risk of developing breast cancer is increased by 44% among women having one abortion. This increased to 76% after two abortions and up to 89% after three. The Chinese researchers concluded that: “IA [induced abortion] is significantly associated with an increased risk of breast cancer among Chinese females, and the risk of breast cancer increases as the number of IA increases.”

Two other recent, much smaller and perhaps less rigorous, studies provide some additional evidence for an ABC link among Asian women. They show that in Bangladesh and India breast cancer risk has increased with unprecedented magnitude among women who have had induced abortions.

In Bangladesh, a paper entitled *Breast cancer and some epidemiological factors*, a hospital-based study, was reported by Suraiya Jabeen and co-workers in the *Journal of Dhaka Medical College* (2013, **22**: 61-66). It found a 20-fold increased risk for breast cancer among women with abortion histories.

Also in 2013, there was a study entitled *Reproductive factors and breast cancer: A case-control study in tertiary care hospital of North India* by A S Bhadoria and colleagues, published in the *Indian Journal of Cancer* (2013, **50**: 316-321). It stated: "History of abortion was also found to be positively associated with the risk of breast cancer with 6.26 times higher risk in women having a history of abortion."

Now consider this: The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, in its revised 2011 review, *The Care of Women requesting induced abortion*, declared that: "Women should be informed that induced abortion is not associated with an increase in breast cancer risk." Or the Q&A page from the website of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America: "Q. Does having an abortion really lead to breast cancer? A. No. No. No. No. No. There is no truth to this at all. It is one of those nasty myths invented by anti-choice organisations to frighten women away from having an abortion." How much longer will this sort of advice, from both sides of the Atlantic, be given?

## **Assisted Reproductive Technologies**

### **All change at the top of the HFEA**

In January 2014, Professor Lisa Jardine CBE completed her six-year undertaking as chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). Reflecting on her time at the HFEA she said: "The efforts we have made to reduce multiple births, provide fairer compensation for donors, reduce regulatory overlap and give better access to data for researchers are just a few of the projects I am delighted to have seen implemented during my time here. I am particularly honoured to have overseen the *Medical Frontiers: debating mitochondria replacement* public consultation. It clearly demonstrated the specialised ability the HFEA has to engage, educate and communicate complex science and public opinion."

Some would beg to differ that these were anything like notable achievements. "The efforts we have made to reduce multiple births" have been a disaster. In 2009, the HFEA began a national strategy to cut the number of multiple births. In 2011, it imposed sanctions on fertility clinics if they overstepped the prescribed 10% target. Mohamed Taranissi, the notorious IVF practitioner, thought the rule was barmy and took the HFEA to court. It lost. The HFEA then withdrew its ill-designed policy.

The "compensation for donors" was concerned partly with keeping up with inflation but also, more seriously, was a recognition that donation of human sperm, ova and embryos were items of everyday trading. "Regulatory overlap" was reduced only because the HFEA was threatened by closure or amalgamation with the Human Tissue Authority (HTA). In the end, the government relented and the HFEA lives on. "Better access to data" is a laugh. HFEA statistics are often out of date and, when they are published, are so complex and opaque that they serve little purpose.

On the other hand, I must acknowledge that HFEA staff do willingly respond to my requests for data clarification under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – though they often take a long time to answer. As for the public consultation over "three-parent" IVF, this has generally been regarded as a farce. The HFEA insisted that there was "broad support" for authorising the technique. This was a flawed conclusion; the majority of submissions opposed legalisation, but the HFEA gave unwarranted credence to opinions expressed during a limited number of its own "public engagement" sessions, where the attendees were addressed by pro-"three-parent" IVF experts. If Professor Jardine was "delighted" and "honoured" to have overseen these projects, we can be glad she did not disclose anything she was "forlorn" or "shamed" about during her reign.

Sally Cheshire, a long-standing member of the HFEA, has been appointed as the interim chair. The post has been advertised and, at £37,148 to £47,360 for two or three days per week plus travel and subsistence expenses, it looks attractive. Moral absolutists need not apply. It is a job suited only to bioethical utilitarians and pragmatists.

### **Adverse IVF outcomes**

This may be just another brick in the ART sub-standard wall, but it is still serious. Scientists at the University of Adelaide studied 300,000 births that occurred between 1986 and 2002 in South Australia, of which 4,300 were the result of IVF or ICSI (intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection). The report was entitled *Perinatal outcomes by mode of assisted conception and sub-fertility in an Australian data linkage cohort* and was published in January 2014 online at the Public Library of Science ONE.

The lead scientist, Professor Michael Davies, stated: “Compared with spontaneous conceptions in couples with no record of infertility, singleton babies from assisted conception were almost twice as likely to be stillborn, more than twice as likely to be pre-term, almost three times as likely to have very low birth weight and twice as likely to die within the first 28 days of birth.”

These adverse outcomes were more common with IVF than with ICSI treatments. Using frozen, rather than fresh, embryos eliminated all significant outcomes with ICSI but not with IVF. Moreover, a group of infertile couples, who eventually conceived naturally, experienced even greater adverse effects with their babies. This suggests that the problems were precipitated not only by the ART treatments *per se*, but rather by the underlying medical conditions that caused the infertility in all the parents.

### **The legal status of the human embryo**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has decided to hear the case of Parrillo v. Italy, which will have major implications for the legal status of the human embryo. At issue is this question: Are human embryos merely property, or do they have rights?

The case concerns Adelina Parrillo, who in 2002, at the age of 48, decided together with her husband to have children by means of IVF. Five embryos were created and frozen for future transfer. In 2003, the applicant lost her husband and gave up the idea of IVF. However in 2011, Mrs Parrillo realised that a 2004 Italian law forbade the destruction of her embryos. She applied directly to the ECtHR, alleging that her “property rights” over the five frozen embryos and her “right to private life” were breached by this law which prohibits her from donating the embryos to scientific research, and obliges her “to keep them in a state of cryopreservation until they were no longer viable”.

It is most surprising that the ECtHR has agreed even to consider this case, especially since the Court has previously failed to provide legal protection for human embryos. In the past, the Court has certainly handed down some bizarre decisions. For example, in the 2004 case of *Vo v. France*, the Court stated that there is “common ground between States that the embryo/foetus belongs to the human race”. Yes, OK. It further asserted that “the potentiality of that being and its capacity to become a person... require protection in the name of human dignity, without making it a ‘person’ with the ‘right to life’”.

Apparently the judges were not prepared to give legal protection until the embryo attained “personhood”, which the Court did not, of course, define. However, the Court did manage to duck the big question by maintaining that “the Court is convinced that it is neither desirable, nor even possible as matters stand, to answer in the abstract the question whether the unborn child is a person for the

purposes of Article 2 of the Convention". It is patently obvious that the Court was determined not to assign human rights to the unborn child – that would definitely have upset the European bioethical applectart. So the Court invented, or at least, applied the undefined criterion of "personhood".

This is all contrary to the 2004 Act 40 of Italian law, which recognizes the human embryo *in vitro* as a "subject of law" and which clearly regards the human embryo as more than mere biological material with property rights. No hearing date for Parrillo v. Italy has been announced, and it may even be referred to the Grand Chamber for judgment, but the outcome of this case will be fascinating as well as significant.

### **The case of Brüstle v. Greenpeace**

This has been a most unusual legal case. Way back in September 1997, Professor Oliver Brüstle, of the University of Bonn Medical Centre, applied for a German patent on isolated and purified neural progenitor cells, which he derived from embryonic stem cells as a potential treatment for Parkinson's disease. Brüstle's patent request was granted, but Greenpeace objected and took legal action. The German Federal Patent Court noted that the European Biotechnology Directive affected the patenting of stem cell developments in the EU. Article 6 of the Directive prohibits "uses of human embryos for industrial or commercial purposes" but it does not define what it meant by "human embryos".

This is where the European Court of Justice (ECJ) stepped in. In 2011, the ECJ held that because there was no agreed definition across Member States, "the concept of 'human embryo'... must be understood in a wide sense". The ECJ therefore ruled, inter alia, "that a human embryo is any human ovum after fertilisation". That is to say, it is "capable of commencing the process of development of a human being".

The ECJ further ruled: "In the context of a case concerning the patentability of an invention involving the production of neural precursor cells, which presupposes the use of stem cells obtained from a human embryo at the blastocyst stage, entailing the destruction of that embryo, an invention must be regarded as unpatentable." In other words, a patent should not be granted to an invention if it requires the prior destruction of human embryos, such as the production of human embryonic stem-cell lines. Put more plainly, Greenpeace won, Brüstle lost.

### **The "One of Us" European Citizens Initiative**

As a consequence of the Brüstle v. Greenpeace decision, the "One of Us" European Citizens' Initiative was launched with the intention of broader, Europe-wide action to protect human embryos. The organisers published a petition which stated: "The EU should establish a ban and end the financing of activities which presuppose the destruction of human embryos." The petition, which closed on 2 November 2013, gathered more than 1.89 million signatures from 20 countries.

During 2014, possibly in February, the "One of Us" Initiative will formally present its petition to the European Commission. The legislation it proposes, if adopted, would have the effect of retrospectively amending the Horizon 2020 Regulation, which hastily committed huge sums of funding to research projects, which will involve the destruction of human embryos. Several MEPs have asked the Commission to institute a temporary ban on funding projects, such as embryonic stem-cell research, until the Initiative has been considered by the Commission and any subsequent legislation has been voted on by the Parliament and Council of the EU. It is all very complex, innovative and uncertain. Yet the battle has been joined and has already proved that there is considerable pro-life sentiment across Europe.



## Stem-Cell Technologies

### Yet another stem-cell surprise – STAP cells

The story of stem-cell technologies has been one full of shock and awe. Here is another chapter. It has been heralded – probably with too much hype – as a “major scientific discovery”. This is how the BBC described it: “Scientists in Japan showed stem cells can now be made quickly just by dipping blood cells into acid.” The actual report is called *Stimulus-triggered fate conversion of somatic cells into pluripotency* by Haruko Obokata and her colleagues at the Riken Center for Developmental Biology, Kobe, Japan and it is published in *Nature* (30 January 2014), **505**: 641–647.

Basically, the study showed that simply “shocking” blood cells by lowering the pH of their environment, to between pH 5.4 and 5.8 for less than 30 minutes, can trigger their transformation into stem cells. These have been awkwardly named “stimulus-triggered acquisition of pluripotency cells” or STAP cells. According to the authors: “In STAP, strong external stimuli, such as a transient low-pH stressor, reprogrammed mammalian somatic cells, resulting in the generation of pluripotent cells” and “thus, our findings indicate that epigenetic fate determination of mammalian cells can be markedly converted in a context-dependent manner by strong environmental cues”.

The authors concluded that: “This study has revealed that somatic cells latently possess a surprising plasticity. This dynamic plasticity – the ability to become pluripotent cells – emerges when cells are transiently exposed to strong stimuli that they would not normally experience in their living environments.” The research team was “really surprised” by its discovery. Dr Obokata stated: “It’s exciting to think about the new possibilities these findings offer... in regenerative medicine.” Others said: “It is a game changer” and “...it looks faster, cheaper and possibly safer than other cell reprogramming technologies”.

Here, however, is the great caveat. The Japanese work used mouse blood. If – and so far, this is an entirely unknown “if” – it could work with human blood, then the age of personalised reprogrammed-cell therapies may be upon us faster than we had previously thought. Could it be the end of potential therapies based on embryonic stem-cells, or even iPS cells? Let’s wait and see – there may yet be more shock and awe around the corner.

### Stem-cells and organ transplants

There has always been an aspirational connection between the two entities of stem-cells and organ transplants. Now the Japanese have moved one step nearer realising the dream. Professor Hiroshi Nagashima of Meiji University plans to create special embryos and, by transferring them into the uterus of a surrogate mother, he hopes to produce fully-grown offspring. Here is the twist – so far, the surrogate is a pig and the special embryos are chimeric, that is, they contain genetic material from two different animals.

For example, Nagashima and his colleagues have already created a white pig that contains the pancreas of a black pig. Using a white pig embryo, the gene for developing the pancreas is turned off. Then stem cells from a black pig are introduced and these create a “black pig” pancreas. Professor Hiro Nakauchi of the Institute of Medical Science at the University of Tokyo (IMSUT) has gone one step further. He has taken skin cells from an adult brown rat and converted these into induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells. Using these he has grown a brown rat pancreas inside a white mouse.

Where is all this leading? The goal is xenotransplantation – growing human organs inside other animals, especially pigs, to overcome the shortage of hearts, kidneys, and so on, for donation. Xenotransplantation has been in the air for the last 50 years, but with hardly any success. Nakauchi's ultimate goal is to be able to take human skin cells, change them into iPS cells, inject them into pig embryos and so produce organs genetically matched to the skin cell donor. The end of transplant rejection and the end of transplant waiting list? Maybe. Numerous hurdles, biological and bioethical, are awaiting – pigs and humans are dissimilar in so many ways, and the creation of human-animal hybrids is generally illegal worldwide. This does not look like bioethically-attractive stem-cell technology.

### **“Three-parent” IVF**

Global opposition to the proposal of mitochondrial replacement (MR) is growing. The technique is basically as follows: The nucleus of a donor ovum is removed and replaced by the nucleus of a woman with mitochondrial disease. This genetically-engineered egg is then fertilised with sperm creating an embryo that has genetic material from three persons – mitochondrial DNA from the donor and nuclear DNA contributed by the parents. Thus the constructed embryo is expected to be free from diseased mitochondria which are inherited only via mothers.

Here are three of the major arguments against MR. First, this is germ-line (as opposed to somatic) genetic modification, which means that it will be passed on to further generations. It would therefore cross a previously-robust, anti-eugenic Rubicon, upheld by most jurisdictions worldwide. Second, there has been a serious lack of animal experiments to test the efficacy of MR. Third, this process of MR is technically very similar to somatic cell nuclear replacement (SCNT), the cloning technique. That should in itself cause concern. Moreover, SCNT in animals has consistently caused serious malformations in both unborn and born offspring.

Marcy Darnovsky of the Center for Genetics and Society considers that allowing such genetic modification trials with humans “...would be clinically, ethically and socially dangerous, and would be a breach of international norms”. Indeed, if “three-parent” IVF is permitted, it will change human biotechnology forever. It will usher in the age of genetically-engineered children. It will lead to a eugenic “designer baby” market. It will also challenge the concept of what it means to be human.

The proper bioethically-responsible way forward is to focus on cures and treatments for mitochondrial diseases for the people, not of future generations, but for those who are living with them right now. The Department of Health is currently devising guidelines to enable Britain to become the world's first user of the technique. A final decision on allowing the new “treatments” to be offered will be subject to a vote in Parliament. If approved, it is expected that the first patients could be treated within the next two years.

### **Embryonic stem-cell progress**

We are still waiting for positive news. Embryonic stem-cell research has failed to demonstrate the promised “miracle” cures and instead it has created dangerous side effects. The excitement generated a decade ago by scientists, the media and Hollywood about the potential of embryonic stem-cells has quietly dissipated, as has its funding. If you believe that “money chases opportunity” then consider this. Two of the USA's most liberal states, namely California and Maryland, are switching their financial investments to support not embryonic, but rather adult stem-cell research.

In 2007, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) funded 100 embryonic stem-cell research projects. In 2012, it was only six, but 15 to scientists who were conducting non-embryonic

stem-cell research. Similarly, in Maryland, 11 embryonic projects and four adult stem-cell projects were funded in 2007. By 2012, 28 non-embryonic grants were made, but only one for embryonic stem-cell research. What does that tell us?

### **Claudia Castillo still going strong**

It was in 2008 that the *Lancet* reported the first full transplant of a human organ grown from adult stem cells. It was carried out at the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona on Claudia Castillo, a 30-year-old mother of two. Her windpipe had been severely damaged as a result of tuberculosis. Researchers harvested a portion of trachea from a donor and stripped off the cells that could cause an adverse immune reaction, leaving a three-dimensional trunk of cartilage. This bio-scaffold was then “seeded” with stem-cells taken from the bone marrow of Ms Castillo’s hip and this new section of trachea was grown in the laboratory over four days. It was then transplanted into the left main bronchus of the patient.

As the stem-cells were harvested from the patient’s own bone marrow, it was not necessary to give her anti-rejection, immunosuppressive drugs. Before the surgery, Ms Castillo struggled to climb a flight of stairs. After the operation, she began to lead a normal life – apparently she has even been known to go out dancing! This adult stem-cell and surgical procedure was a medical milestone.

In October 2013, the *Lancet* published an important paper entitled *The first tissue-engineered airway transplantation: 5-year follow-up results*. Claudia Castillo’s medical team reported that: “Lung function and cough reflex were normal. No stem-cell-related teratoma formed and no anti-donor antibodies developed. Aside from intermittent bronchoscopic interventions, the patient had a normal social and working life.” They concluded that this tissue-engineering strategy “is safe and promising”. Another triumph for adult stem-cell technologies!

## **Euthanasia and assisted suicide**

### **The battle is joined**

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are destined to become the dominant bioethical issues of 2014. Lord Falconer’s private member’s Assisted Dying Bill will come before the House of Lords for its second reading some time this Summer, after the new parliamentary year begins in May. Could there be a separate Bill in the Commons, or even a parallel debate in both Houses? A YouGov poll, conducted in April 2013, showed that 76% of adults in England and Wales support the Bill’s proposals. In Scotland, Margo MacDonald’s Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill will come before the Scottish Parliament this year. Dignity in Dying, the foremost pro-euthanasia organisation in the UK, is gearing up for its biggest campaign ever. Expect sympathetic coverage in the mass media, personal horror stories, endorsements from celebrities, biased programmes on TV and radio, emotive letters to the press, and so on.

Indeed, the deluge has started. On 14 January, the *Sun*, Britain’s most popular newspaper, came out in favour of the Falconer Bill. The editorial stated: “The risks of legalisation seem tiny to us compared with the suffering it would ease.” Under the headline *Let sick Brits die like Hayley*, it announced that 73% of its readers believe that existing laws that ban assisted suicide should be changed so that terminally-ill patients should get the right to end their suffering like Corrie’s Hayley Cropper.

The reference is to pancreatic cancer-stricken Hayley Cropper, a character played by Julie Hesmondhalgh, in the ITV soap opera *Coronation Street*. Not incidentally, the actress is a supporter of the legalisation of assisted suicide. On Monday 20 January, she is shown with no real help from her husband, Roy, taking a lethal cocktail of drugs and thus committing suicide, not the assisted

variety. Many are concerned that this will normalise assisted suicide. The Samaritans are fearful that copycat suicides may follow.

Now is the time to be aware of and clear about the issues involved. One of the best resources is [www.carenokilling.org.uk](http://www.carenokilling.org.uk) In addition, a report, published in November 2013 by three distinguished peers, argues that the Falconer Bill is proposing “no mere amendment of the law but a fundamental change to it” and “is asking Parliament to sign a blank cheque”. Lord Brennan QC, the Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE and Lord Carlile QC CBE write that there is “widespread misunderstanding and misinformation, on what the law, namely, the Suicide Act 1961, says and how it works”. Their excellent report can be accessed at [www.livinganddyingwell.org.uk](http://www.livinganddyingwell.org.uk) I might also add that my book, *The Edge of Life – Dying, Death and Euthanasia* (Day One) deals with these very issues from a Christian perspective.

### **The Nicklinson-Martin-Lamb case at the Supreme Court**

The names of Tony Nicklinson, “Martin” and Paul Lamb have become synonymous with the legal battle to establish a right to end their lives at a time and in a manner of their choosing. The case rumbles on. On 16 December 2013, this trio of “right-to-life” test cases finally arrived at the UK’s Supreme Court before a panel of nine judges – an unprecedented number, which indicates the hearing’s legal significance. The case lasted four days and judgment is expected in early 2014.

We must have the utmost empathy and sympathy for all those who live and suffer on a daily basis. However, the gravity and consequences of changing the law on assisted suicide or murder, whether these men and women are terminally-ill or not, whether their diseases are debilitating or not, are too great. The outcome would be too far-reaching, too devastating for the disadvantaged, the disabled and the dying. The floodgates to euthanasia would be opened – medical practice, legal protection and our regard for human life would never be the same again, and never safe.

### **Euthanasia in Belgium**

Nowhere in the world has taken to euthanasia like Belgium. Voluntary euthanasia was legalised in 2002 and ever since the Belgian situation has become worse and worse. There have been increasing numbers and also an alarmingly-widening scope. Officially reported cases of euthanasia have increased sixfold in ten years, from 235 in 2003 to 1,432 in 2012. Moreover, in some parts of the country, it is reckoned that half of the cases are not reported and a third are involuntary, yet nobody has ever been prosecuted.

A decade ago, Belgians believed that their new law would uphold proper safeguards and ensure strict compliance. Now there is euthanasia linked directly to organ harvesting (so-called organ-donation euthanasia, ODE), joint euthanasia for elderly couples, euthanasia after a botched sex-change operation, a double euthanasia for deaf twins because of their fear of failing eyesight, and euthanasia for a sexually-abused anorexic woman. Euthanasia for psychological suffering among the non-terminally ill has become de rigueur.

That is not all. At the end of 2013, the Belgian Senate voted, by a massive margin of 50 to 17, to approve euthanasia for children – a measure expected to be legalised in 2014. Also in the near future, those Belgians with dementia are likely to become eligible candidates. And who’s next? What about the unhappy?

On St Valentine’s Day 2014, as expected, the Belgian Lower House passed the bill allowing child euthanasia by a vote of 86 to 44, with 12 abstentions. All that now remains is for King Philippe to

give it the royal assent. Then Belgium will become the only country in the world which allows euthanasia without an age limit. Even the Netherlands permits euthanasia for children only from the age of 12. Proponents of the new law say that it will apply to only a few children who must be terminally ill, in great pain and with parental consent.

The short history of Belgian adult euthanasia would suggest that such safeguards will soon be overridden – children can usually be easily persuaded to please adults, especially their parents. This new law is but the logical extension of eligibility categories – legalising euthanasia creates an insatiable appetite for more and more. We already bar children from making many economic and emotional decisions – and with good protective reasoning, primarily because they are childish and vulnerable. Now, at least in Belgium, they can decide to be killed.

Something is seriously wrong here. Tellingly, the majority of pro-euthanasia organisations around the world have fallen silent on the matter – is this Belgian move a step too far even for them?

## **News from the USA and Elsewhere**

### **Hobby Lobby and Obamacare**

The case rolls on, slowly. Hobby Lobby is the arts and crafts outlet owned by David Green and his family, which aims at “honouring the Lord” in all it does “by operating the company in a manner consistent with biblical principles”. It is arguing that Obamacare’s requirement that compulsory health insurance coverage for its employees, including access to the morning-after pill, other emergency “contraceptive” methods and intrauterine devices, restricts its freedom of religion.

Hobby Lobby is not alone. There is a string of organisations, ranging from the Little Sisters of the Poor to Wheaton College, objecting to the provisions of Obamacare. And there is increasing opposition among the American public. A poll, conducted during November 2013, showed that 59% of those questioned “oppose the mandate requiring the coverage of preventive care services for women which includes all FDA-approved contraceptives, including drugs that can destroy a human embryo, and sterilisation services without a direct cost to the patient”.

On 26 November 2013, the Supreme Court announced that it will agree to hear the Hobby Lobby case. Kyle Duncan, lead lawyer for Hobby Lobby said: “We are hopeful that the Supreme Court will clarify once and for all that religious freedom in our country should be protected for family business owners like the Greens.”

Another of Hobby Lobby’s legal team, Joshua Hawley stated: “Some might say that corporate conscience is all well and good, but Hobby Lobby is attempting to impose its convictions on its employees. But this is quite wrong. Hobby Lobby has no objection to its employees using whatever forms of contraception they may choose. Hobby Lobby is not asking that any contraceptive drugs be made unavailable. It is simply asking not to be forced to pay for a handful of contraceptives that can cause abortions.”

David Green, Hobby Lobby’s founder and CEO, has said: “My family and I are encouraged that the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to decide our case. This legal challenge has always remained about one thing and one thing only: the right of our family businesses to live out our sincere and deeply held religious convictions as guaranteed by the law and the Constitution. Business owners should not have to choose between violating their faith and violating the law.”

It has been announced that the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments for the case of *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores Inc.* on Tuesday 25 March 2014, starting at 10.00 am.

### **China's one-child policy**

On 15 November 2013, China's highest legislature, the third plenary session of the 18th Communist Party of China Central Committee, acted to ease its infamous one-child policy. The changes come as no surprise. It is not only pressure from Western countries, but also China's own looming demographic crisis with a shrinking labour force, a rapidly ageing population and a serious gender imbalance, that have brought about reform.

The facts are indisputable. By 2050, it is estimated that a quarter of the Chinese population will be over 65. The elderly are commonly cared for by relatives, so the only child typically faces what is known as the 4-2-1 phenomenon, caring for two parents and four grandparents. And by 2020, because of gender-selection abortions and girl infanticide, there will be some 24 million "leftover men", unable to find a wife.

The policy, introduced in 1979, has always been somewhat piecemeal and applied most strictly to those living in urban areas, while for some years, rural communities and ethnic minorities have been exempt, especially if a couple's first child was a girl, or where both parents of a couple were only children. Now comes this further relaxation – all families will, in future, be allowed to have two children if either parent is an only child.

It is estimated that the original policy has prevented an estimated 400 million births. Those found guilty of breaking it have been subjected to forced abortions and female infanticides or massive fines. An extreme example of the latter came to light in January 2014, when news that the well-known film director and the man in charge of the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, Zhang Yimou, had been fined 7.5m yuan (£729,000) for violating the policy. Zhang, who admitted that he has three children, apologised for violating the policy. He was given 30 days to pay.

### **Abortion in Russia**

It may be hard to believe, but even post-Soviet Russia has moved to curtail its massive abortion industry, with its estimated 1.2 million terminations each year and with, until recently, the average Russian woman having seven abortions during her lifetime. In 2011, Russia banned most abortions after 12 weeks and introduced a minimum 48-hour cooling-off period. And in December 2013, President Putin signed a law which bans abortion advertising. The reasons given for this volte-face are the country's plunging population and a wish to recover traditional moral values.

## **Miscellaneous, but still important**

Finally, here are two obituaries of people who were extraordinary for quite different reasons, yet they both have their place in bioethical history.

### **Frederick Sanger (1918 – 2013)**

Frederick Sanger was the biochemist who was the only Briton ever to be awarded two Nobel Prizes and the only person in the world ever to win the Prize in Chemistry twice. He has been described variously as "the father of genomics", "one of the greatest scientists of any generation" and a "real hero of twentieth-century British science". He was born in 1918 in Gloucester and died in Cambridge on 19 November 2013, aged 95.

He won a place at Cambridge to study medicine, following in the footsteps of his father, a general practitioner, who had worked as an Anglican medical missionary in China. But before Frederick arrived at university he had decided that science would suit his single-minded personality more than medicine, so he switched and studied biochemistry. He graduated from St John's College in 1939, and went on to work for a PhD under the distinguished researcher, Albert Neuberger. In 1943, Sanger joined the group led by A C Chibnall, the man who "gave" him the job of sequencing the insulin molecule.

Sanger devised a novel method for identifying the sequence of the individual amino acids in the protein. It took him several years, but he succeeded, and in 1958 it earned him his first Nobel Prize in Chemistry. My research group regularly used the so-called Sanger method in my "other life" as a biochemistry lecturer – and yes, it worked!

In 1962, Sanger moved to the Medical Research Council's new Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge. There he became fascinated by the molecular structure of DNA. The problem of sequencing DNA was even tougher than that for proteins, but by modifying his own Sanger method, he again succeeded. And again it brought him a Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Yet he still remained at the bench in his laboratory. He said: "Most people, when they get the Prize, they get big jobs. They become professors or directors of large groups. I didn't because I wasn't any good at that. But I was quite good at research."

Some measure of his achievement is that it underpinned the methodology used in the Human Genome Project. And when the Wellcome Trust decided to build a new laboratory in Cambridge for the study of genomics they named it the Sanger Institute.

Despite all his successes and accolades, Sanger was a disarmingly self-effacing, modest man, who once said of himself: "I was just a chap who messed about in his lab." He believed that science was a search for truth and he attributed his own pursuit of it to his Quaker upbringing. As a schoolboy, he learned self-reliance and practical manual skills. Much later, he refused a knighthood because he said: "I didn't think it would suit me."

Although Sanger excelled at his work, he was content to set it all aside when it was finished. On his retirement in 1983, he quit his laboratory more or less overnight, and spent much of the next 30 years tending his garden and building boats. Sanger married Margaret Howe in 1940, an economics graduate he met at Cambridge. They had three children and remained married until her death in 2012. He gladly declared that his wife had contributed more to his work than anyone else by providing a peaceful and happy home.

Sanger said that he found no evidence for a God, so he became an agnostic. He said in an interview with *The Times* in 2000: "My father was a committed Quaker and I was brought up as a Quaker, and for them truth is very important. I drifted away from those beliefs – one is obviously looking for truth, but one needs some evidence for it. Even if I wanted to believe in God I would find it very difficult. I would need to see proof." Consequently he missed out on the greatest accolade and adventure of his life – to be a Christian. I have great respect for someone of his unassuming character and his most remarkable legacy. What a man he was, yet, what a lost man.

### **Alison Davis (1955 – 2013)**

Alison Davis was a remarkable woman. Born in 1955 with spina bifida and hydrocephalus, for much of her life she was wheelchair-bound and battled with other illnesses, including emphysema,

arthritis, lordosis, kyphoscoliosis and osteoporosis. From 1982, she became the national coordinator of the disability rights group, *No Less Human*. She died on 3 December 2013, at the age of 58.

At university, Alison had strongly supported a woman's right to choose abortion. Her attitude changed after reading about the case of a baby girl, Louise, born in 1979 and diagnosed with the same disabilities as hers. Louise had been deliberately starved and dehydrated to death by Dr Donald Garrow of the High Wycombe Hospital. The case, which received wide publicity at the time, shocked Alison to the core. She wrote to the doctor and "explained that I was disabled to just the extent that Louise had been, and that I felt he had made a horribly wrong decision... and that it was in any case wrong to deliberately kill any child on grounds of his/her disability". After that incident, Alison became an ardent pro-life campaigner.

She knew all about pain and suffering. She wrote in 2009: "When the pain is at its worst I can't move or think or speak. About 20 years ago pain of various sorts compounded to make me feel I wanted to die. At that time, doctors believed that I did not have much longer to live. Over time, my desire to die became a settled wish and it lasted about 10 years.

"During the first five of those years I attempted suicide several times. I became ingenious at finding ways of hurting myself to add to my already severe spinal pain. If euthanasia had been legal then, I would have requested it with no hesitation at all, and if living wills had been legally binding, I would certainly have written one, refusing all life-saving treatment. I would have satisfied all the supposedly 'strict criteria' which pro-euthanasia groups want."

The efforts of her friends and a trip to India in 1995, during which she met with disabled children, whom she later began to support financially, helped turn her life around. After that trip she said: "Do you know, I think I want to live." It was the first time that she had thought that for over 10 years. She added: "Had euthanasia or assisted suicide been legal I would have missed the best years of my life, and no one would ever have known that the future held such good times, and that the doctors were wrong in thinking I didn't have long to live."

Alison was to become one of the world's greatest advocates for the right to life of people with disabilities. Who could gainsay her? She understood pain, suffering and depression, yet she was a tremendously caring person who effectively communicated her support for life and her opposition to killing by euthanasia. She led *No Less Human*, a grouping within the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), which campaigns to promote a positive view of disability.

John Smeaton, SPUC's director, spoke warmly of Alison, saying: "Frail in body, she was full of strength in defence of the most defenceless human beings – disabled unborn children. Her uncompromising solidarity and keen insight have proved a powerful defence for the sick and disabled targeted with euthanasia." After her marriage failed in 1985, she began to seek spiritual truth. She turned to the Bible: "I began to think it could just be true." In 1991, she was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

I was often aware of Alison – she wrote letters to the newspapers and articles for magazines, she appeared on TV discussions, and spoke at various conferences. I met her several times – usually at LIFE Conferences or lobbying at Westminster. Invariably bright and cheerful, with lots to say, she was a good correspondent and now and again, we phoned or e-mailed each other. Ecclesiastically, we were miles apart – in the pro-life cause we were side by side; co-belligerents. Her loss is our loss.

**John R Ling**



## How the West Really Lost God

**A review article of *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization*, Mary Eberstadt, Templeton Press, April 2013. Hardcover: 268 pages, ISBN: 978-1-59947-379-6**

Any serious examination of the reasons for the widespread decline of Christianity in the Western world has to be of more than passing interest to evangelicals. Although some have attempted to argue otherwise, there can be little doubt that large sections of the West have become significantly more secular and markedly less influenced by Christian truth over the past five decades or so. So much so that parts of Europe are now being labelled “post-Christian” and the term “Christophobic” has been coined to express the strong antipathy towards Christ and his Kingdom that is being shown in many places.

In her new title, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization*, American cultural commentator and critic Mary Eberstadt weighs the evidence and poses the question: How did it happen? The author has previously served as a member of the policy planning staff at the US State Department and worked as a speechwriter for Secretary of State George P Shultz during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. She is currently a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a Washington think-tank dedicated to applying Judeo-Christian moral tradition to critical public policy issues. Her approach to the subject is primarily historical and sociological and her findings should provoke a good deal of soul-searching on the part of evangelical Christians and churches.

Having charted the decline of Christianity, Eberstadt goes on to consider the major factors that are commonly advanced by way of accounting for it: science, the enlightenment and rationalism, the two World Wars, higher levels of education, technology and material progress, urbanisation and feminism. Each is examined in turn and ultimately found unsatisfying in terms of explaining the widespread rejection of the transcendent which is “unprecedented in the history of the world”, to use the words of Ronald A Lindsay, president of the Council for Secular Humanism.

### **The family factor**

So how are we to account for the marked downturn in Christian influence that has characterised so many parts of the modern Western world? Eberstadt introduces what she calls “the Family Factor” and highlights “the second great decline of our times” – the decline of the natural family, which she defines as “the two-parent, biologically-connected, intact natural family”.

While people may disagree as to whether they have been for the better or the worse, it is agreed on all sides that radical family changes have occurred over the past fifty years, witnessed by high rates of divorce, growing levels of cohabitation, lone parenthood and out-of-wedlock births, widespread contraceptive use, legal abortion and a sharp drop in birth rates.

Eberstadt notes that the whole notion of “family” has been redefined in the minds of many in such a way that it has become “a series of optional associations that can be and sometimes are discarded voluntarily depending on preference”. Although the family has not hitherto received much attention from academics researching the causes of increased secularisation, Eberstadt proposes that the family should take centre-stage in the debate. She does not suggest that the decline of the family is the *only* factor to account for the rise of secularisation, but she does argue that it represents the single piece that holds together all the other pieces in the puzzle. She writes:

This book is an attempt to supply [the] missing piece. It moves the human family from the periphery to the centre of this debate over how and why Christianity exercises less influence over Western minds and hearts today than it did in the past.

She refers to faith and the family as “the invisible double helix of society – two spirals that when linked to one another can effectively reproduce, but whose strength and momentum depend on one another”. In view of this interdependency, she argues that family decline is not merely the consequence of religious decline, but that it also helps to power religious decline: “[T]he ongoing deterioration of the natural family itself has both accompanied and accelerated the deterioration in the West of Christian belief.” Hence, while it is often assumed that faith drives family, Eberstadt advances a case for saying that it is equally possible, at least sometimes, that family drives faith.

### **The difference the family makes**

In support of her theory, she cites demographic trends in history, across different countries. She argues that it is not so much the Industrial Revolution *per se* that accounts for the decline of Christian influence but the destructive effect that it had upon the family. Life in the city is more anonymous than in the country, making it easier to live a double life; hence strong natural families became less common and it was this, Eberstadt suggests, that set many people along the road towards losing their religion, at least some of the time.

She notes that the rise in marriage rates and the post-war baby boom following both World Wars was accompanied by increased rates of church attendance and also suggests that the family factor sheds light on the difference between levels of commitment in the United States compared with Western Europe – a conundrum which has reduced even Richard Dawkins to silence.

In his book *The God Delusion*, Professor Dawkins confesses that he has no answer to the question as to why “the United States, founded in secularism, is now the most religious country in Christendom, while England, with an established church headed by its constitutional monarch, is among the least”. Mary Eberstadt suggests that a plausible explanation may lie in the fact that, even today, there are more families following the traditional model in the United States than in Europe, reflected in higher marriage rates and more children per woman.

She further hypothesises that the family factor may account for why women tend to be more religious than men. (Their participation in creation through pregnancy and childbirth is more immediate than that of men and they have more hands-on experience of family life.) It may also go some way to explaining why in the developing world both natural families and faith communities tend to be stronger. (Human needs are more likely to be met within the family than in the West, which has substituted the welfare state for family ties and obligations.)

### **The significance of 1960**

If she is correct in her theory that family decline has been a major factor in driving religious decline, Eberstadt reasons that it would explain why 1960 or thereabouts marked a turning point. She cites Callum G Brown, Professor of Religious and Cultural History at the University of Dundee, who, in his book *The Death of Christian Britain*, writes: “From 1956 all indices of religiosity in Britain start to decline, and from 1963 most enter free fall.”

While there were undoubtedly a number of social developments that played a role in the diminishing appeal of Christianity during this period, Mary Eberstadt considers that “the underlying and unappreciated quantum leap toward irreligiosity in the 1960s [may have] owed most of its force

to the approval in 1960 of the birth control pill". It was a development that changed relations between the sexes – and within the natural family – as never before.

Although the sexual revolution was already well under way, it was the advent of the Pill that "turned that revolution into capital letters". Sexual temptation now became more powerful for many people, with the result that extramarital sex became more common, there was a marked increase in out-of-wedlock births and divorce rates soared.

As early as 1973, the American philosopher George Gilder argued that in a world where men no longer had to marry to assure their access to sex, many were beginning to lose interest in marriage. The fact that the Pill was initially available only to married women delayed its impact on marriage rates. However, the increasing provision of the Pill to women regardless of marital status during the late 1960s and early 1970s contributed to a marked decline in marriage rates which has continued over the past four decades.<sup>4</sup>

Eberstadt writes:

The Pill and its associated movement, the sexual revolution, contributed to the weakening of family bonds as no other single technological force in history – which explains as no other single factor why the 1960s are the linchpin of the change in Western religiosity...

The more people had sex outside of marriage, the less incentive there was to form marriages in the first place – and the more reluctance to sign on to official Christian (or similar religious) teaching in these matters. With more people living without marriage, more men and women had profound new reasons to tell themselves that the Judeo-Christian moral code was out of date – and to be kindly inclined toward experts and even clergy purveying the same message, as more and more men and women of the cloth would come to do.

### **"Assisted religious suicide"**

In a chapter aptly titled *Assisted Religious Suicide*, Mary Eberstadt assesses how some churches have contributed to their own downfall by ignoring the family factor and conforming to the standards and expectations of the world around them. She notes that social changes rather than theological considerations have been the engines driving changes in doctrine and practice on issues such as divorce, contraception and, more recently, homosexuality. She uses the term "Christianity Lite" to describe a pattern she discerns in the approach of churches to family-related issues:

First, limited exceptions are made to a rule; next, those exceptions are no longer limited and become the unremarkable norm; finally, that new norm is itself sanctified as theologically acceptable.

Thus she writes: "Divorce in the mainline Protestant churches is not only destigmatised; it has been almost entirely emptied of moral content; period." It was in line with this same pattern that most Protestant churches came to embrace the use of artificial contraception. Allan Carlson has documented that until less than 100 years ago there was a consensus among Christians of all shades

---

<sup>4</sup> Marriage rates in England and Wales reached a post-War peak in 1972 of 78.4 per 1,000 unmarried males aged 16 and over, but have been in sharp decline since then. By 2011, the marriage rate for unmarried males had fallen to 22 per 1,000.

that artificial methods of contraception were wrong.<sup>5</sup> Then, at the 1930 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Church adopted a resolution stating that in exceptional circumstances, it was permissible for married couples to use contraception. However, it should be noted that this permission was carefully circumscribed with a “strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience”.

What began as an exception to the general rule soon became the norm. The use of contraceptives for reasons of “selfishness, luxury and mere convenience” became par for the course. A generation later, some prominent churchmen were arguing in favour of contraceptive use, not as a legitimate option in exceptional circumstances, but as a moral obligation. In more recent years, the change of attitude in relation to contraception has been cited by Anglican leaders such as Robert Runcie and Rowan Williams in support of proposed changes in attitude towards homosexual practice.

Eberstadt remarks: “The pastors who taught that the church was now indifferent to procreation all but guaranteed themselves thinning and graying ranks in the years to come.” In a 2005 article published in the magazine *Christian Century*, three sociologists argued that “simple demographics” explained around three-quarters of the decline in Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist churches between 1900 and 1975. During the same period, Baptist and Pentecostal churches saw a growth in their membership, largely due to the slower acceptance of contraceptive use in these more conservative denominations.

### **The case for pessimism**

The main body of the book concludes with two chapters setting out the case for pessimism and the case for optimism respectively. Mary Eberstadt submits that if her argument is correct and that the prosperity of the Christian cause in the West is dependent in large part on the health and vitality of the family and vice versa, there is every indication that both institutions are set to experience further decline. The bare statistics are bleak:

- Fewer people are getting married
- Fewer people are having children, and
- Fewer people who are having children are maintaining intact two-parent homes for them to grow up in.

Eberstadt writes:

The more non-traditional and anti-traditional families become the norm, the more difficult it becomes to defend the traditional family, let alone to grant it any privileged position in policy or anywhere else.

On the face of it, the large-scale abandonment of our Judeo-Christian heritage with regard to family formation may appear to present considerable obstacles to the mission of the church. To quote Eberstadt again:

In an age when many people live lives that contradict the traditional Christian moral code, the mere existence of that code becomes a lightning rod for criticism and vituperation – which further drives some people away from church... The mere existence of Christian

---

<sup>5</sup> Allan Carlson, *Godly Seed: American Evangelicals Confront Birth Control, 1873-1973*, Transaction Publishers, 2011.

beliefs attracts [increasing hostility] in an age when many people live in tacit or open defiance of church tenets...

People do not like to be told they are wrong, or that those whom they love have done wrong. But Christianity cannot help sending that message, however tacitly or overtly, without abandoning some of [its] first and core precepts.

In addition to the offence that growing numbers of people take to the Bible's teaching on marriage and family life, large numbers of children growing up without a father are likely to find it more difficult to relate to God as Father, leading Eberstadt to assert that "family illiteracy breeds religious illiteracy".

### **The case for optimism**

Although the pace with which we are proceeding along the present trajectory does not give much cause for confidence of an immediate turnaround, *How the West Really Lost God* concludes on a hopeful note. Eberstadt quotes the psychiatrist and political commentator Theodore Dalrymple on the present economic crisis:

The incontinent spending of many European governments, which awarded whole populations unearned benefits at the expense of generations to come, has... produced a crisis not merely economic but social, political, and even civilisational.

It is in this very crisis that Mary Eberstadt sees a glimmer of light that could, in time, signal brighter days for the institution of the family and for churches. In simple economic terms – quite apart from all the personal costs – family breakdown is extremely expensive. The Relationships Foundation estimates that the cost to the Exchequer of family breakdown in the UK amounts to £46 billion per year (the equivalent of £1,541 per taxpayer) and it is continuing to rise.<sup>6</sup> Under pressure to operate as a family substitute, and especially a father substitute, the state is being stretched beyond its fiscal limits.

Ultimately it will prove unsustainable for the state to continue to perform duties that were historically fulfilled within the family. As the welfare state shrinks, it is the family – and only the family – that can be envisaged stepping into the vacuum. As Eberstadt puts it: "A family phoenix may yet arise from the ashes of the welfare state." She cites David Popenoe who, writing 20 years before the financial crash of 2008, foresaw that one consequence of diminished affluence might be the possibility of reviving the family. "After all," he observed, "families perform a function little appreciated yet crucial to all societies: they do for free what would otherwise cost money to accomplish."

**The incontinent spending of many European governments, which awarded whole populations unearned benefits at the expense of generations to come has... produced a crisis not merely economic but social, political, and even civilizational.**

Eberstadt cites evidence suggesting that financial constraints have already led to a decline in the divorce rate and to a strengthening of the family unit as young people are forced to return home to their parents because they cannot afford to live alone.

---

<sup>6</sup> Relationships Foundation Newsletter, April 2013.

She also takes heart from the work of the Harvard sociologist Carle Zimmerman, who demonstrated in his book *Family and Civilization* that history reveals a pattern of the family being strengthened after patterns of decay which have brought on mounting social costs.

### **The limitations of sociology**

It is not necessary to agree with Mary Eberstadt's analysis at every point to derive benefit from her book. She is herself tentative about some of her conclusions and would certainly not profess to have presented the final word on the subject. The character of her study is such that the term "faith" is broadly defined and extends beyond what an evangelical would recognise as the true, believing response to the revealed word of God that characterises biblical Christianity. Also, in speculating about what the future may hold, no account is taken of the activity of a sovereign God and the possibility of divine intervention.

Eberstadt does, however, recognise the limits of sociological research. She comments that it is a risky business to claim inevitability for any social trend and notes that demographers have been taken by surprise before. As Albert Mohler has written:

A sociological analysis can distinguish between stronger and weaker forms of faith and belief and can measure qualities such as rigor, ardor, and definiteness. Sociology can trace developments and offer research-based predictions about the future. What sociology cannot do is deal with the most important question of all – the truth question.<sup>7</sup>

We therefore need to be very cautious about turning to the disciplines of sociology, demography or psychology in search of identifying what "works" and locating the keys that will guarantee "success" and "growth". Mohler continues:

[I]n the end, sociology can get us only so far and no further. The rigor, ardor, and energies of evangelical churches must not be held merely in a desire to hold to a form of religion that will grow, but in a biblical commitment to hold fast to the truth of the Gospel and to share that saving truth with the whole world.<sup>8</sup>

Social science cannot account for the sovereign and mysterious work of the Spirit of God. Of the work of regeneration, the Lord Jesus Christ declared: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). So, too, with the establishment and growth of churches: one may plant and another may water, but it is God who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). We must therefore reject any formulaic approach that presents the idea that there is a master-key which, if employed, will deliver spiritual life and vitality.

However, to recognise the limitations of social science research is not to adopt the view that it has nothing to say to Christian believers and should be disregarded. Commenting on a journal article which was the precursor of the present volume, Albert Mohler wrote:

Mary Eberstadt has offered a model of the quality of careful thinking needed for our times. The Christian church should take a careful look at her argument, and ponder what this

---

<sup>7</sup> Albert Mohler, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: David Brooks and the Limits of Sociology*, 25 April 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

implies about a transformation of priorities within our congregations – and within our families.<sup>9</sup>

This is precisely the need. What Eberstadt does, in effect, is to hold up a mirror to society, to churches and to families that will assist us in examining against the word of God both the direction we have taken and the trajectory we are on.

### **The political challenge**

At the political level, parliamentarians and policy makers need show a greater deal of respect for the institution of the family and reverse the tendency for the state to assume family responsibilities.<sup>10</sup> Mary Eberstadt observes:

[A]s the State has expanded to take on duties once shouldered by those nearest and dearest, the incentives to do the hard work of keeping a family together have increasingly elicited the tacit response, *why bother?*... [T]he expanded welfare state competes with the family as the dominant protector of the individual – in the process undercutting the power of the family itself... [F]amily change has been an engine fuelling statism – and statism in turn has been an engine fuelling family decline.

If we are to see a reversal of family fortunes, that cycle needs to be broken.

As the State has expanded to take on duties once shouldered by those nearest and dearest, the incentives to do the hard work of keeping a family together have increasingly elicited the tacit response, *why bother?*

### **The challenge to churches**

#### **(a) A robust theology of the family**

There has been a tendency on the part of some evangelicals effectively to baptise the state's encroachment on family responsibilities and to invest it with covenantal significance. For example, without any historical justification let alone theological foundation, one pastor asserted that "in New Testament days" responsibility for welfare has been "delegated by God to the State".<sup>11</sup> We can all too readily assume that what we are accustomed to has the sanction of God and need to ensure that we have a theology of the family that is thoroughly grounded in Scripture.

#### **(b) Faithful proclamation of God's law**

Churches have always faced the temptation to conform their thinking and practices on family-related issues to the prevailing standards in the world around them. But as Eberstadt demonstrates, there is no reason for Christian churches to soften their stance in order to accommodate a society that has abandoned the Creator's moral law. She cites the Oxbridge philosopher Elizabeth

---

<sup>9</sup> Albert Mohler, *Is This How the West Really Lost God?* 10 August, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, the Family Education Trust leaflet, *Respect Begins at Home: Why the government needs to show parents more respect.*

<sup>11</sup> Review of "Child protection in the church", *Evangelical Times*, March 2002.

Anscombe, who noted that “Christianity drew people out of the pagan world, always saying no” to infanticide, abortion and sex outside marriage.

We see this illustrated in Scripture. The apostle Paul was uncompromising in his denunciation of the sins that characterised the Roman world:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

And yet he could go on to say to the believers in Corinth:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

The apostles did not tell their hearers that they had no need to be washed, sanctified and justified. The Holy Spirit has been given, Jesus declared, to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8) and, empowered by that same Spirit, the apostle Paul reasoned with Felix about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).

The abiding moral law of the unchanging God had a definite place in the preaching of the apostles and it was this message that was owned of God to bring many to Christ. We should therefore not shrink from faithfully declaring the mind of God as revealed in his law, and from calling men, women and children to repentance.

### **(c) Divorce**

One area in which churches have countenanced the weakening of the family concerns the lax attitude that many have taken towards divorce and remarriage. Obviously there is a long-standing debate over the meaning of the exceptive clause in Matthew 19 and whether it permits remarriage after divorce and, if so, under what circumstances. That discussion lies beyond the scope of this article. Here the observation is merely made that, from the practice of some evangelical churches, one might gain the impression that every case is exceptional and that there are no circumstances under which remarriage after divorce constitutes adultery.

There is a readiness on the part of some to pronounce a marriage “dead” and to allow the parties to draw a line under it and begin again, with no questions asked. To adopt a policy of divorce and remarriage on demand is to make a mockery of the marriage vows, yet it is to be feared that out of a desire to accommodate the wishes of individual couples, some evangelical churches are turning a deaf ear to the word of God.

### **(d) Children’s and youth ministry**

In spite of an unprecedented investment of time, energy and resources in children’s work and youth ministry over recent decades, there has been a high fall-out rate among young people raised in Christian homes. Perhaps significantly, this investment has been accompanied by a corresponding abandonment of family worship in evangelical homes.

This begs the question as to whether, at least in some instances, the investment in youth work has been counter-productive and whether it has made parents less inclined to instruct their children



from the word of God at home and more inclined to leave it to the church. Given the importance of the family in God's economy, this is an area worthy of closer attention.

## **The challenge to Christian families**

### **(a) Childbearing**

It would be easy to dismiss the attention given to contraception in *How the West Really Lost God* as a product of the author's Roman Catholicism. However, there are very real questions to be addressed concerning the change of attitude towards childbearing among evangelicals as recently as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The evidence of history reveals that this change was not motivated by biblical and theological considerations, but by social pressures. As one prominent American church leader has recently commented:

For evangelicals, everything changed with the advent of The Pill. And evangelical acceptance of the oral contraceptives (and, beyond that, other forms of birth control) also happened without any adequate theological reflection. Today's generation of evangelicals is indeed reconsidering birth control, and theological concerns are driving that reconsideration.<sup>12</sup>

While the United States has indeed seen the small beginnings of a theological discussion among evangelicals in relation to contraception and childbearing, a similar debate on this side of the Atlantic remains long overdue.

### **(b) Childcare and education**

The Bible teaches that God has entrusted responsibility for the care, nurture and instruction of children to their parents (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; the book of Proverbs; Ephesians 6:4), and the New Testament assumes that mothers will be home-based and devoted to looking after their children (1 Timothy 5:10; Titus 2:4-5).

Notwithstanding the fact that education law places parents under the duty to ensure that their children receive a suitable and efficient full-time education "either by regular attendance at school or otherwise",<sup>13</sup> many parents, including evangelical parents, tend to view education as the responsibility of the state. Increasingly, too, Christian parents are outsourcing the care of their children of pre-school age to third-party carers.

## **the New Testament assumes that mothers will be home-based and devoted to looking after their children**

In too many instances, it is to be feared that believing parents are motivated by the same worldly considerations as their non-Christian counterparts over decisions about childcare and education. We desperately need to recover a biblical understanding of the responsibilities of parents and examine from first principles what it means to bring up our children in the fear of God and in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

---

<sup>12</sup> Albert Mohler, "Al Mohler responds: The evangelical unease over contraception", *Religion News Service*, 8 January 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Education Act 1996, s7.

### **(c) Higher education**

Mary Eberstadt suggests that the reason why large numbers of young people abandon their faith in their late teens and early twenties is not merely because they are “away from home for the first time, sowing their proverbial oats... and otherwise following the standard script of how young adults lose the faith”. Rather, she hypothesises that it may have something to do with the fact that they are no longer living with their families and advances the view that there is perhaps something about living in families that makes people more receptive to the Christian creed.

This raises uncomfortable questions about the wisdom of sending young people away from home to live in university halls or student houses where they will be subject to temptations and pressures to an intensity they have not experienced previously. To be placed in a position where one is neither accountable *to* someone else nor responsible *for* someone else is a perilous situation to be in at any age, not least in one’s youth.

The fact that some Christian young people survive – and even thrive – while away at university should not blind us to the reality that many others do not. Perhaps more thought could be given to the benefits of young people studying from home and thus remaining within the family context, or where that is not practicable, making arrangements for them to live with a like-minded family elsewhere.

### **(d) Care for the elderly**

As with the care of the young, we have increasingly come to view the care of the elderly as the responsibility of the state rather than that of the family. However, the Lord Jesus Christ taught that providing for elderly parents is all part of fulfilling the fifth commandment to show due honour to father and mother (Matthew 15:3-6).

Similarly, the apostle Paul expects the children and grandchildren of widows to “first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God... But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:4, 8). The church is not to be burdened with the care of widows who have family members who are able to provide for them (1 Timothy 5:3-16).<sup>14</sup>

### **Conclusion**

There are undoubtedly many challenges that confront us in a Western world that has lost God, but by taking on board the central message of Mary Eberstadt’s book and recognising the pivotal role that the family has to play, we are also presented with a tremendous opportunity.

In a dark world where intact, stable and well-functioning families providing inter-generational support are rare, Christian families can shine as bright lights and so bear eloquent testimony to the wisdom and power of God.

***Norman Wells***

---

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the role of the family and the church in the care of the elderly, see *Who cares for the elderly?* by Roger Hitchings, Affinity Social Issues Team’s *The Bulletin*, No. 20, July 2012.

## ***Lord of the Flies* revisited, 60 years after publication**

### **Background**

*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding [1911-1993] was finally published on Friday 17 September 1954. He started the work in 1951 and finished it in 1952 under the title *Strangers from Within*. To date, *Lord of the Flies* (LoF) has sold around 20 million copies in the UK and many millions more worldwide.

Millions of schoolchildren around the world have studied it and it has generated a virtual industry of academic analysis. Its themes cover the fall, original sin, and the depravity of man, sacrifice and redemption. Sixty years on it is worth reflecting on its content and the relevance of its messages for our own society and not least the sadness of an author who saw so perceptively and wrote so eloquently on the state and nature of man, saw the need of a redeemer yet never, it seems, quite made it to the streets of the Celestial City.

After such a huge publishing success, it is hard to believe that the book might never have been published at all if a young, brilliant scholar, recently employed by Faber and Faber, had not spotted its potential and fought its corner. Rejected by seven major publishers during 1953, Golding finally sent the manuscript to Faber and Faber on 14 September of that year. Their internal assessment concluded: “*Absurd and uninteresting fantasy about the explosion of an atom bomb on the Colonies... Rubbish & dull. Pointless... Reject.*”<sup>15</sup> Charles Monteith [1921-1995], however, championed the book against substantial internal opposition and was to become Golding’s lifelong friend and editor.

Monteith pulled Golding from obscurity and Golding went on to publish a number of highly-acclaimed books, winning the Man Booker prize in 1980, the Nobel prize for literature in 1983 and gaining a knighthood 1988. However, he never escaped from the fame and fortune generated by his first published novel and in later life, in darker and perhaps less rational moments, he expressed resentment over its success.

### **Synopsis**

For those who have not read the book or seen the film, or who just need a reminder, here is a short synopsis.

In the midst of a nuclear war – a very real threat in the 1950s – the story follows the lives of a group of schoolboys marooned on a deserted tropical island somewhere in the Pacific as they come to terms with their plight and seek to organise themselves and survive without adults. Escaping from the effects of the war, their ‘plane had been shot down, and they had arrived on the island in detachable pods equipped with parachutes.

The boys fall into two distinct age groups – the *biguns* (10 to 12 years old) and the *littluns* (around six years old). Twelve characters are portrayed but the total number of boys on the island is never specified. The boys start out by electing a leader, Ralph – a *bigun*. Ralph, with the aid of Piggy (the rational intellectual of the group), seeks to set up a system of rules and to provide housing and sanitation and, with an eye to rescue, a continual large fire for attracting the attention of passing ships.

---

<sup>15</sup> Carey, John: *William Golding: The Man who Wrote ‘Lord of the Flies’*; Faber and Faber, 2012, Kindle edition, 151.

Jack, also a *bigun*, came to the island already the leader of a group of choirboys and, although loosely supportive, is a rival to Ralph. Slowly, Jack attracts boys away from Ralph's influence by appealing to their base natures, offering them more exciting and gratifying hunting activities which contrast with the civilised but mundane routines prescribed by Ralph. The rivalry and conflict between Ralph and Jack, representing the forces of civilisation and savagery, are intensified by the very real fear of a mythical beast on the island.

The beast is given form when an airman, shot down at night in an aerial battle over the island, lands by parachute on the island's mountain. Although dead, his parachute is periodically caught by the wind causing the body to rock to and fro and, in the darkness in which he is observed, gives the airman the appearance of a live ape-like creature. Perceiving the airman as the fearsome beast, the boys panic. Jack capitalises on this panic and attracts nearly all of the remaining boys in Ralph's group to his pack of hunters. Jack's aggressiveness offers a form of protection from the beast and, combined with camouflaged face-painting, tribal dancing and hunting, the boys turn away from any of the civilising influences to which Ralph, and those remaining with him, cling. Jack's hunters eventually kill a sow and place its head on a stick. It is an offering to the beast.

Simon, who has mystical tendencies, through hallucination and a vision and in the presence of the sow's head, which comes before him as the Lord of the Flies, sees the true nature of the beast; it is not the creature of their imagination which roams the island, but is something emanating from their inner selves. Stirred by this insight, he struggles up the mountain and approaches the dead airman, sees him for what he really is, and makes his way down the mountain to reveal his knowledge to the boys. He finds them in a dancing frenzy and, mistaking him for the beast, they beat him to death.

Ralph's group, now only four in number, approach Jack and his tribe to regain Piggy's glasses, stolen by them and used for making fire. Piggy is crushed and killed at this meeting by a boulder deliberately rolled on him by a member of Jack's tribe. The two remaining boys of Ralph's group are captured, leaving only Ralph. Jack's tribe pursue Ralph to kill him, intending to place his head on a stick, but a British naval officer from a passing vessel, having seen smoke from their fire, intervenes at the point of Ralph's capture, thus saving him.

In passing, 60 years on it is striking how mature the older boys in particular appear to be for their ages. This seems not so much to be a maturity imposed by Golding to provide his characters with depth, but more a reflection of the times where war and post-war deprivation, hardships and get-on-and-do simply drove maturity at a faster rate.

## **Golding**

Their island sojourn begins well enough for the boys, but then cracks develop in the fledgling, singular society. Tribal groupings form and fevered irrationality ends in conflict and murder. This dark picture of hopeless isolation is in stark contrast to those portrayed in such books as R M Ballantyne's *Coral Island* and raises one of the more obvious questions: is this descent into depravity and murder by those so young really credible?

Golding had no doubts. Prior to writing full-time, which the success of *LoF* and later books had enabled in 1962, Golding had been a school-teacher, a job he thoroughly disliked – indeed hated. With no taste for, and a lack of commitment to, the disciplines of teaching, he nevertheless seems to have been stimulating and motivating for some of his time in the classroom. He had a habit of pitting groups of pupils against each other, either in debate or physical games, and observing the degeneration of standards which occurred in the absence of adult influence and controls. Former pupils recall a sense of being the subject of experimentation.

Golding had also served as a naval officer during the Second World War and had first-hand experience of its savagery and slaughter and was keenly aware of the deep corporate depravity that directed and fuelled it. Indeed, so keen was that awareness that he records: "I have always understood the Nazis because I am of that sort by nature." He adds that it was "partly out of that sad self-knowledge" that he wrote *Lord of the Flies*.<sup>16</sup>

All the characters in *LoF* are vividly portrayed and readily identifiable from our own experience – all perhaps except for Simon. Simon is Golding's Christ figure, although a somewhat diminished version from the person originally envisaged. In Golding's manuscript, which still survives, Simon was much more of a Christ figure but Monteith had him tone the likeness down, removing, for example, references to miracles and the supernatural on the basis that readers would find them unacceptable. In a rare moment of protest, Golding later in life publicly expressed his regret that he had allowed Monteith to trim Simon's significance. To understand better what he was seeking to express through Simon, and the greater themes of the book, it is worth exploring something of Golding's spirituality.

The greatest influence on Golding's life was his father, Alec Golding [1877-1958], who was a successful science teacher and writer of scientific texts. Golding recalls of him: "I never met anyone who could do so much, was interested in so much, and who knew so much. He could carve a mantelpiece or a jewel box, explain the calculus and the ablative absolute. He wrote a text book of geography, of physics, of chemistry, of botany and zoology, devised a course in astro-navigation, played the violin, the 'cello, viola, piano, flute. He inhabited a world of sanity and logic and fascination. He found life so busy and interesting that he had no time for a career at all."<sup>17</sup> Golding acquired some of his father's abilities and was, for example, a very able musician and chess player.

Alec, however, was also an atheist. John Carey records: "His atheism seems to have caused him some inner turmoil. At least one pupil suspected that he suffered 'agonising conflicts between reason and emotion.' ... Atheism did not, however, inhibit his fondness for biblical quotations, which he used in almost any situation. *Go to the ant, thou sluggard* (Proverbs 6:6) was a favourite for reprimanding inattention in class."<sup>18</sup>

Golding goes some way to explaining his father's atheism in perhaps one of the most moving moments of John Carey's biography: "It was the greatest grief [his father's death] of Golding's life. Years later he wrote that he had wept for Alec 'the most of tears I have ever had.' It hurt him to think of his father's atheism, because it meant that he had 'died in no hope.' He had been an atheist only because he could not bring himself to believe in the cruel God of the Old Testament, so he had chosen the 'dry, indifferent universe of rationalism' as the only alternative. 'He was thus a profoundly religious man who remained a grieving atheist until the last days of his life.'<sup>19</sup>

Golding denied being a Christian to his best friend, but seems to have held to a God of some sort, although it did not perhaps much resemble the God of the Bible. He was bold enough on at least one occasion to assert his belief in God during an academic lecture. As a teacher he once asked a boy in his class what made the Bible different from other books and, when no answer was forthcoming, roared: "It's the only one that's the word of God!" He would fire questions at his pupils, such as: "How many of you say your prayers at night?" and, at those who said they did not, "Why not?" He set them thinking about ethical matters by recommending that, at the end of each day, they should make a practice of reviewing the good and not so good things they had done. They had the

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 217.

impression that he was a “devout Christian” and that he taught them about the other main religions only because he was obliged to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to his early manuscript of *LoF*, we see more of Golding’s spirituality as expressed through Simon. Golding wanted a theophany. In the manuscript, Simon was both human and supernatural. He “has an intuition that there is a ‘prohibition’ against eating the fruit on the island. A prohibition implies a person who prohibits. To a rational human being the person implied might seem to be Simon himself, but Simon was not entirely rational. In that molten moment Simon knew that there was a person in the forest who had forbidden him to eat of the fruit, and that knowledge was as if someone had squeezed his heart.”<sup>21</sup> It continues: “Then Simon met the person who had forbidden him to eat the fruit. The other person came out of the silence, swamped Simon, filled him, penetrated his limbs like bees the empty air. This person among the similitudinous<sup>22</sup> simplicity of his being – if being was the word – was merciful and veiled Simon’s eyes and dulled the feelings of his body.”<sup>23</sup>

From this point Simon takes on a supernatural status and acquires a sense of mission as he confronts the pig’s head, the Lord of the Flies, Beelzebub: “Supposing one could offer Simon to the beast as a bribe? So that the beast would let them all alone? Curiously Simon examined the idea, liked the promise of peace and innocence. Only some time later did he remember that he himself would not be sharing it. But the idea remained. Without understanding why he did so, Simon turned and began to pick his way towards the mountain... He would face the beast, make an offer. Then perhaps would come a time when the beast would leave the island.”<sup>24</sup>

It is here that we see Simon clearly as martyr – as expiation for the group. However, these and other explanations of Simon never make it to print and we lose something of the rationale for Simon’s behaviour. In interviews after publication, Golding speaks of Simon as a martyr but in the printed novel his death results from a misunderstanding. Although Simon in the published version is only a mystic or visionary who sees the true nature of the beast, Golding, it seems, could never quite give up the Simon of the manuscript and we can understand his regret over Monteith’s pruning.

## Themes and issues

There is no shortage of possible themes arising from this book. Some which may be of particular interest to an evangelical constituency, or which can be used practically in our Christian walk, are as follows:

### ***Original Sin***

On the question of the credibility of the descent into depravity and murder by boys so young, we can compare Golding’s view with that of the Bible.

Biblically, there can be no doubt that a descent into manifest hatred, hostility and murder is possible for a group of young boys, particularly if isolated from outside influences and left to fend for

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>22</sup> This word does not exist in English. It may be a mistake on Golding’s part – his spelling is described as “erratic” by his biographer – or, possibly, it is an invented word to try to capture something of the mystery, immensity and uniqueness of the fictional being he had himself created.

<sup>23</sup> Carey, John: *William Golding: The Man who Wrote ‘Lord of the Flies’*; Faber and Faber, 2012, Kindle edition, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 156.

themselves. We know this because being the children of Adam we are all at conception a person, fundamentally and entirely corrupted, guilty and an enemy of God.

However, even when unregenerate, this does not exclude the presence of some good; some innate knowledge of the will of God; some conscience to discriminate good and evil. If we display anything of goodness, then it is through God's grace who mercifully does not allow us all to plumb the depths of our sinful natures. Consequently, we cannot assume the inevitability of the descent portrayed by Golding in the particular circumstances of the story, or in similar scenarios; but it is credible.

The outworking of the biblically revealed truths on original sin are evident to man from observation, and many have linked these observations to some deep-seated corruption of the human nature. Golding's view of indwelling, fundamental sin is derived from such observations. Prior to the Second World War, it seemed that Golding believed in the perfectibility of social man – that all social ills could be removed by reorganising society, but war undermined this belief and he came to see that “man produces evil as a bee produces honey”.<sup>25</sup>

Golding's great achievement was to take the reality of the human condition as he observed and understood it and, by applying it to the young and “innocent”, to construct a story that shocks and challenges the notion of intrinsic and progressive human goodness.

This has application for evangelism. *LoF*/Golding are well known. The 60th anniversary is a natural conversation-opener and this particular theme on human nature is one which resonates with a wide range of people. In the intervening years since its publication it seems unlikely that any comprehensive social study would conclude that the human condition has improved.

Statistics showing that crime rates in the Western world have declined over the last few decades invoke a range of possible explanations – e.g. better policing, decline in drug-taking, unleaded petrol, abortion – but the nearest explanation to a fundamental improvement in the goodness of humans is that young people are generally better behaved.<sup>26</sup> Starting a conversation with a mention of this book will almost naturally turn to a discussion of the book, the biblical view, and then who knows what else?

### ***The Character of God***

#### (a) Justice

In the published version, Simon is simply a mystic – not fully present in the physical world, on the fringes, little understood, feared to a degree and often disregarded. He hallucinates, hears the Lord of the Flies speak to him and hears what he already suspected in part – that the real beast lived within them all. In Golding's manuscript Simon was much closer to a Christ figure although a long way short of whom we know Christ to be through biblical description and revelation.

As we have seen, Simon there takes on a supernatural form – “*The other person came out of the silence, swamped Simon, filled him*” – and contemplates offering himself up in order to remove the beast from the island. What Golding gives us is a part-human, part-deity, offering himself in order to remove the contamination of the beast from his group. Golding recognises the depravity of the human condition and seems to want to believe that there is an escape from it – that all is not hopeless. The escape route is not self-improvement but via a substitute – someone who gives himself in the hope that it will drive out the beast in us. Removing the beast requires satisfaction of

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>26</sup> *The Economist*, Vol 408, Number 8845 (July 20-26, 2013), 21-22.

a penalty and Golding hints of divine justice. Again, the book provides opportunity to examine these great truths from our biblical perspective.

(b) Order and chaos

Ralph represents civilisation, Jack savagery. We might better portray these as truth, order, communication, rational thinking and discussion on the one side and untruth, disorder, emotion and spontaneity on the other. Ralph relies on and uses Piggy's rational intellectualism while Jack plays to emotions – the baser instincts.

We know biblically that our God is a God of order – a God of the mind where our instincts, feelings, emotions, intuitions and judgments, though real and recognised, are ultimately to be governed by the mind. We know that the benchmark for the mind is the word of God. Ralph's and Piggy's benchmark was the world of the adults they had left behind and they acted as rationally as they could for the good of the community.

In contrast, Jack's benchmark was himself; he acted for himself and gained power and influence over the other boys by providing ready gratification and excitement, by ignoring the future, living for the joys of the moment and appealing to the darker nature recognised only by Simon. His group shielded themselves from the consequences of their mob mentality by hiding behind their painted faces and dancing frenziedly, doping their minds and consciences.

The Bible clearly warns us against relegating the mind and allowing instinct or feelings, or group-think, often justified as higher guidance, to dominate. Ralph's/Piggy's approach lacks excitement and tires the mind; it is easier to react than to think; and anyway our thinking is not always right and is subject to distrust.

A conch plays a central role in the story. It represents authority, ordered communication and expression, the right to speak and to be heard. When he could, Jack dismissed it and substituted his own authority based on his own rightness and the relative worthlessness of the views of others. Jack values those who agree and silences those who do not.

Piggy was the rational intellectual, his faith being in the order and right to speak imposed by the conch; but he does not understand the dynamics of the crowd or emotionally-driven mob rule. Lacking the physical stature and charisma of a leader, his role is one of sound adviser, but truth and logic do not gain universal attention and only when he loses his temper does Piggy command the boys' attention.

Golding, quite precisely and very powerfully, describes the forces and dynamics present in almost any grouping you can think of. National politics, local politics, the parent/teachers association and yes, the local church. In so doing, he points to the truth, reasoning and order which characterise God and the lies, emotion and disorder which characterise his enemy. For Golding, truth and order operated by man cannot win the day because the opposites are too powerful, resonating too strongly with the beast within. Only something or someone big enough, from the outside, can subdue and overwhelm this power.

Thus, Golding's keen insight and descriptive power provides yet another avenue for conversation – an opportunity to fill the gaps with biblical truth and our personal knowledge of him who is big enough, Maker of all things... the Lord Almighty is his name. It is an opportunity too for self-examination: which of Golding's characters do you most resemble? In which grouping are you most comfortable?



## Concluding remarks

Golding considered *Lord of the Flies* to be a minor book and perhaps that is part of why it is so popular. It is deep, but not obscure; fable – more complex than Aesop's, but not too complex. It is radical, endlessly controversial, upsetting and challenging; its characters live. The writing is full of flavour, and the message and meaning are incomplete, leaving a desire for more.

*Lord of the Flies* came very close to never making it into print. It may well have carried the label, *absurd, rubbish and dull; reject*. But it is not and it was not. It touches in its own way on some of the most profound truths of our existence – truths that we will want to raise and clarify with others. So do.

Finally, Golding “had been a sensitive, frightened child, and he grew into a sensitive, frightened man... He went rigid with fear if he had to have an injection... He was scared of heights... afraid of crustaceans, insects, and other creeping things... The unseen world was still more frightening to him. He was scared of being alone at night – “even if I am in bright electric light”. The mere thought that he was alone, and that “something” might appear, would send him scurrying to bed, where he lay down beside Ann [his wife], hear her breathing and feel safe. Entering empty rooms at night was an ordeal. He would throw the door open loudly to give a “warning” to whatever spectral beings might be lurking inside, in case he might “see what I should not”. He felt “sheepish” about admitting this, but fear of the supernatural had been with him since “before I can remember”.

“Whatever his rational mind told him, his ‘natural and irrational mind’ was convinced that the dead are always present. ...he lived in his imagination to an unusual degree. ...what most people regard as the real world was secondary to him... When travelling, for example, he tended not to bother with road maps or guide books, preferring to trust his intuition, with the result that he frequently got lost. He did not do research for his novels. Even when they were set in historical periods not wholly familiar to him, he relied on his imagination rather than consult authorities. He was not really interested in intellectual debate or engaging with other minds, because he was too intent on his own imaginative life. Dwelling in his imagination so much, he discounted logic, and contended that, though it was an internally self-consistent system, it amounted to no more, as a means of reaching truth, than ‘a loftier game of chess’.”<sup>27</sup>

He seemed to see aspects of the Celestial City and to walk around its walls. He seemed to be looking and searching for the comfort and security that only Jesus Christ can supply, without ever finding it. Like his father, he seems to have died with no hope, never discovering that God is neither cruel nor unreachable.

**Peter Fearnley**

---

<sup>27</sup> Carey, John: *William Golding: The Man who Wrote ‘Lord of the Flies;’* Faber and Faber, 2012, Kindle edition, 517-519.

## Latest news of significant individual cases

*The following are summaries of the story so far in some of the significant recently-resolved or still unresolved cases involving Christians responding to a wide range of legal, police or disciplinary action against them. Seeking a remedy by means of litigation can be a lengthy process – sometimes taking several years for a closure to be reached. The Christian agency handling these cases is indicated in brackets at the end of each item.*

### **Peter and Hazelmary Bull**

Peter and Hazelmary Bull are Christian hotel-owners who have a long-standing policy of only providing double rooms to married couples. Mr and Mrs Bull were sued by a same-sex couple (who are in a civil partnership) for refusing to provide a double room in their hotel in Marazion, near Penzance, Cornwall. In December 2010, a judge at Bristol County Court found in favour of the claimants and Mr and Mrs Bull were ordered to pay £3,600 in damages for discriminating unlawfully on the grounds of sexual orientation. Since then the Bulls' case has been subject to a succession of appeals.

On 27 November 2013 the United Kingdom Supreme Court handed down its judgment in the Bulls' case. The court dismissed the Bulls' appeal, although the court was divided on the key issue of whether this is a case of direct or indirect discrimination. This is an important distinction because indirect discrimination may be lawful if it can be shown to be justified.

Lord Neuberger, the President of the Supreme Court, and Lord Hughes agreed with the Bulls that this is not a case of direct but of *indirect discrimination*. Lord Hughes said that he did not consider that the same-sex couple were treated less favourably because of their sexual orientation in itself but because they were not married.

However, Lady Hale, who decided it was a case of direct discrimination, gave the lead decision. Lords Toulson and Kerr agreed with her.

Having decided that this is a case of direct discrimination, the court avoided engaging in detail with the question of justification in relation to indirect discrimination. In so doing, they failed to engage with the judgment of the Master of the Rolls, Lord Dyson, in the Wilkinson case (July 2013). In that case, also involving Christian bed and breakfast owners, Lord Dyson, previously a Justice of the Supreme Court, had accepted that Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (protecting freedom of religion) might justify indirect discrimination, depending on the circumstances of the case.

However, the judgment helpfully establishes explicitly the principle of reasonable accommodation for religious views within discrimination law, even if that principle was not applied in the particular circumstances of the case. [*The Christian Institute*]

### **Mike Davidson**

In April 2012, Christian charity Core Issues Trust [CIT] was set to run adverts on London buses which read: "Not gay! Ex-gay, post-gay and proud. Get over it!" These adverts were in response to those run by Stonewall, a homosexual campaign group, which read: "Some people are gay. Get over it!"

CIT had its adverts approved for display by the advertising authorities. But when *The Guardian* reported that these adverts would run, Boris Johnson appears to have contacted Transport for London (TfL), and ordered that they should **not** be displayed.

This happened just as Mr Johnson was campaigning for re-election as Mayor of London and was courting the “gay vote”. Tellingly, he was due to appear at a hustings organised by Stonewall the day after he banned the CIT adverts.

Through a Freedom of Information Act request, an email was uncovered which read: “*Boris has just instructed TfL to pull the adverts.*” This email had not been disclosed to the High Court judge.

On 27 January 2014, the Master of the Rolls (the second most senior judge in England and Wales) ruled that the Mayor of London should be investigated for his part in banning the CIT’s bus advert.

This is a good decision with a number of other positive aspects:

- it recognises the need to ensure that politicians do not make controversial decisions for their own political gain;
- it recognises that “ex-gays” are protected from discrimination;
- it means that TfL should give a level playing-field to both sides of the debate (which means, in practice, that both advertisements, or neither, should run);
- Lord Justice Briggs (one of the other judges) specifically spoke of the need to respect sincerely-held religious views on homosexual conduct.

On 5 March, a High Court judge ordered the Mayor of London to provide full, unedited copies of emails and other documents sent to and from his office “in order to get to the bottom” of his decision to ban the bus advertisement. She has made an order for disclosure by Boris Johnson and TfL of all relevant documents relating to his decision to pull CIT’s adverts. The order includes emails, memos, internal notes, reports and any other relevant documents sent to or from the Mayor or any person in the Mayor’s office within the Greater London Authority.

The judge also asked Boris Johnson, Guto Harri and Sir Peter Hardy, Commissioner for TfL, to provide witness statements, adding that she will decide on the basis of the Mayor’s statement whether to call him to court to give **evidence under oath**. [*The Christian Legal Centre*]

### **Tony Miano**

On 8 January 2014 Tony Miano was arrested after a woman complained that he had spoken about sexual sin while preaching on Dundee High Street in Scotland.

He was part of a street preaching team addressing lunch-time shoppers when he spoke about sin in general, and mentioned adultery, promiscuity and homosexual practice.

Tony, a client of the Christian Legal Centre, was held in custody overnight and the next day appeared before the Sheriff’s Court where he pleaded not guilty to a charge alleging breach of the peace with “homophobic” aggravation. He has been bailed to appear for trial at Dundee Sheriff’s Court on 22 April but is free to return to his home in the United States in the meantime. [*Christian Legal Centre*]

### **Josh Williamson**

Rev Josh Williamson, the pastor of Craigie Reformed Baptist Church in Perth, Scotland, regularly takes to the streets to hand out leaflets, talk to passers-by, and to preach in the open air.

However, on 18 September 2013, a police officer told him to stop preaching as he was breaking the law. The officer insisted that he was not allowed to preach and told Mr Williamson that, if he continued, he would be arrested. Mr Williamson replied that he would not comply with this order, as he was not breaking the law. As a consequence of his reply, the officer arrested him for breach of the peace, and Mr Williamson was taken to Perth Police Station, where he was interviewed and released with a caution.

A second man, who spoke up in defence of Mr Williamson, was also arrested at the scene.

Three days later, on Saturday 21 September, Mr Williamson was arrested for a second time in Perth town centre, again because police took the view that he had committed a breach of the peace. He was held for five hours in the cells before being released at 9.30pm.

Mr Williamson recorded this second incident, and the police action, on camera and made an audio recording on his phone of the trip to the police station in the police car.

His MP3 player has been retained as crown evidence and the Procurator Fiscal, the prosecuting authority in Scotland, is reviewing the evidence. The outcome is still awaited. [*Christian Legal Centre*]

### **Contributors to this issue of *The Bulletin***

**Rod Badams** was a journalist for 11 years, specialising in local government, before serving as General Secretary of Christians at Work from 1979 to 1998. He was FIEC Administrator from 1998 until his retirement in November 2011 and has been editor of *The Bulletin* since 2006.

**Peter Fearnley** is married to Wendy, a teacher focusing on special educational needs. They have four children. Peter has worked both in industry and in the civil service and has been a school governor for 16 years.

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

**John R Ling** is a freelance speaker, writer and consultant bioethicist. His new book – *Bioethical Issues* (Day One) was published in March 2014. His two previous books on bioethical issues – *Responding to the Culture of Death* and *The Edge of Life* – were also published by Day One. His personal website is [www.johnling.co.uk](http://www.johnling.co.uk)

**Norman Wells** is a graduate of the London Theological Seminary and has served as director of the Family Education Trust since 2004. He is also a director of the Coalition for Marriage.