

THE BULLETIN

News and Reports from the Social issues Team

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Rod Badams

Rod Badams has recently retired from his role on Affinity's Social Issues Team and as editor of the this Bulletin. He will be sorely missed.

Rod has been at the heart of all the Team's work for over seventeen years, starting from the days when he was also the administrator for the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC). A journalist by trade, Rod has used his skills to great effect. He has written countless letters to government departments to hold them to account, as well as penning very many perceptive articles for the Bulletin that tenaciously grappled with complex matters, dissecting many of the moral and legal issues of the day, explaining the detail in ways that the ordinary man and woman could understand. We thank God for his faithful contribution to the work of Affinity and pray for the Lord's blessing on him and his wife Margery in the future.

Gospel Truth in Contemporary Culture

A report on a debate between John Stevens and Joe Boot

How should Christians respond to the challenges that face them in today's world?

How should we view ourselves – as resident aliens or as alien residents?

What place should God's law have in the government of the nation?

What is the mission of the church in the world?

What impact can we expect to have and how much can we realistically hope to achieve?

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

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

John Stevens: A modified 'two kingdoms' perspective

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

¹ The debate may be viewed in its entirety online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlLt4Cgf0Mg>

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

increasingly marginalised and powerless, and most campaigns against the erosion of our cultural heritage have been lost.

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

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

1. The nature of the world

The history of the world is dominated by a fundamental cosmic clash between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The 'world' in the New Testament is represented as a culture in rebellion against God, under the dominion and rule of Satan. Even though God is sovereign over everything and Jesus is Lord, Satan is the one who is ruling over this world, and God is engaged in a cosmic rescue mission. Those who belong to his Kingdom are 'in the world, but not of the world'; they labour in hostile territory. The Kingdom may break into this world, but Scripture gives us no grounds for any expectation that this world will be the Kingdom. The world needs to be conquered for the Lord Jesus.

2. The mission of God

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

3. The role of the law

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

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

4. The function of civil government

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

5. The time in which we live

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

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

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

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

(b) The church must be a holy community

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

(c) The church must speak prophetically

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

(d) The church must fight for religious freedom

The maintenance of religious freedom is one of the main functions of the state. The apostle Paul appealed for protection under Roman law, and Daniel took a stand for religious freedom. It is right

to fight for religious liberty, but in doing so we need to stand for the freedom and liberty of all. The battle for religious freedom should not be a fight for privilege. The Old Testament law does not make provision for a plural society. Only a minority of aliens lived in Israel and they had to conform. Our situation is different and so religious freedom in our society must encompass the reality of different religious groups.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(h) Christians should expect to be excluded

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

Joe Boot: A 'transformationist' perspective

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

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

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

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

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

1. What is culture?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. *What is the Gospel?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Areas of agreement and disagreement

In the ensuing discussion, several points of agreement emerged:

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

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

Areas of disagreement included:

- The appropriateness of Christians supporting the civic rights of others. For example, should Muslims have religious freedom and be permitted to erect mosques? Should Sharia law be respected and should Jews be permitted to operate their own family courts?

- The extent to which common grace wisdom arguments should be used to build a consensus. Can Christians work as co-belligerents on some issues with Muslims and others with whom they fundamentally disagree on many points?
- The role of the law of God in the state. Does the church have a role in calling for the restoration of Old Testament judicial penalties? Or are we, rather, to see the outworking of God's law in church discipline (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5)?
- A difference in eschatology. Is the postmillennial expectation a type of 'utopianism' or is it encouraged by Scripture?
- How the decline happened. Was it because Christians abandoned the public square or because the church has tried to hold on to laws that reflect Christian morality in a nation that has abandoned the Christian faith?

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

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

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

Norman Wells

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

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

The reign of Christ

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

Immediately prior to his ascension into heaven, the risen Lord Jesus Christ declared: 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth' (Matthew 28:18). And the apostle Paul writes of Christ

that God the Father 'put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all' (Ephesians 1:22-23). Note that the apostle does not say that Christ is the head over the church (though he certainly is that), but that he is 'head over *all things*' and governs all things for the good of his people.

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

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

Here the kingship of Christ is equivalent to the process of subjecting one enemy after another... Christ's kingdom as a process of conquest precedes the final kingdom of God as a settled permanent state.¹

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

The defeat of Satan

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

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

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

¹ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, American Tract Society, 1903, 90-91.

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

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

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

The role of civil government

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

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

As for the function of the civil ruler, the apostle teaches that he is 'God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil'. Whose wrath? His own or God's? Lenski notes that the word 'wrath' appears eleven times in Romans and in each instance it is the wrath of God that is referred to. He comments: 'here it is the divine wrath as executed by God on the evildoer through the government as his "minister"'.² John Murray agrees that the wrath of God is in view and comments: 'Thus the magistrate is the avenger in executing the judgment that accrues to the evildoer from the wrath of God... [H]e is the agent in executing God's wrath'.³

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

The New Testament... lays down no laws for the secular state on any matter. This is left to the natural sense of right and justice found among men, who also bear the responsibility for the laws they put into

² R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Hendrikson Publishers, 1998, 793.

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, 1965, Vol 2, 153.

force and must bear the consequences, whether these are beneficial or detrimental. Shall a state inflict or not inflict the death penalty for extreme crime? The answer is one that the state must give.⁴

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

What do we mean by 'the church'?

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

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

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

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

The New Testament commends congregational demonstrations of practical concern and financial provision for needy believers elsewhere (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:26-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8-9) and, subject to strict criteria, requires churches to provide for the needs of widows who lack means of support from within their own families (1 Timothy 5:3-16). But charitable works are by no means to be confined to corporate activities under the oversight of the local church. Individual believers are also to perform good works on their own initiative. This is explicitly taught by the Lord Jesus himself in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and there is nothing to suggest that the good works and charitable deeds performed by Dorcas in making tunics and garments for the poor was a ministry of Joppa Evangelical Church (Acts 9:36-42). Rather, she provides an outstanding example of a humble believer selflessly employing her gifts and opportunities on behalf of those in need.

⁴ Lenski, *op. cit.*, 792.

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

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

To the church is committed the task of proclaiming the whole counsel of God and, therefore, the counsel of God as it bears upon the responsibility of all persons and institutions. While the church is not to discharge the functions of other institutions such as the state and the family, nevertheless it is charged to define what the functions of these institutions are... To put the matter bluntly, the church is not to engage in *politics*. Its members must do so, but only in their capacity as citizens of the state, not as members of the church.⁵

The relationship between the great commission and the cultural mandate

Has the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 superseded the cultural, or creation, mandate of Genesis 1:26-28? Does God's mandate to Adam in Eden find its fulfilment in Christ's commission to his church? At one level that would appear to be a reasonable conclusion to draw. It was as divine image-bearers that the first man and the first woman were commanded to fill and subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over every created thing. Adam and Eve, together with their progeny, were to serve as God's representatives on earth and to fit the entire planet to serve as a habitation for God to the praise of his glory. As Beale and Kim put it: 'Worship is...the goal of mission in Eden, filling the earth by multiplying image-bearers in the temple of God's presence who would worship and reflect God's glory to the ends of the earth.'⁶

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

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

The great commission tells us not only to tell people the gospel and get them baptised, but also to teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us. Everything. The gospel creates new people, people radically committed to Christ in every area of their lives. People like these will change the world. They will

⁵ John Murray, 'The Relation of Church and State', in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol 1, Banner of Truth, 1976, 255.

⁶ G K Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God dwells among us: Expanding Eden to the ends of the earth*, IVP, 2014, 29.

fill and rule the earth to the glory of Jesus. They will plant churches, establish godly families, and will also plant godly hospitals, schools, arts, and sciences. That's what has happened by God's grace. And that is what will continue to happen until Jesus comes.⁷

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

To affirm and bask in the goodness of the world, to praise God for the wonders of creation, to practice responsible stewardship of this small planet, and to honour its Maker by using its resources widely for the welfare of the race and the enriching of human life are all integral aspects of work that Christians are called to do. Any idea that consistent Christianity must undermine or diminish concern for the tasks of civilisation should be dismissed once and for all.⁸

Or as Abraham Kuyper famously expressed it more succinctly: 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human life of which Christ, who is Sovereign of all, does not cry: "Mine!"'⁹

Norman Wells

Christians and the Arts

Over the centuries evangelicals have had an uneasy relationship with the arts. In the post-Reformation period there were outbursts of severe iconoclasm, it being estimated that in the periods under Henry VIII and Cromwell, 95% of all English art was destroyed.

Later generations came to distrust the arts for a variety of reasons. Some saw them as sensual and worldly; some as belonging only to the aristocracy. And many, understanding the Christian's sole purpose in life as spreading the gospel, regarded the arts as irrelevant, except where they could be dragooned into directly gospel purposes, for instance in connection with church decoration, hymn-writing and Bible illustration.

Over the past 40 years, however, the involvement of Christians in the arts has radically altered. There are now many hundreds of evangelicals working in the mainstream arts, as painters, musicians, actors, TV and theatre directors, stand-up comics and performance artists. They are doing this not as 'Christian artists', i.e. those who use their art as a direct form of evangelism, but as artists who are Christians, aiming to produce good art which embodies their values as Christians.

The motive force behind this shift in thinking largely came from the writing and lecturing of Francis Schaeffer and Hans Rookmaaker in the 1960s and 1970s. They recognised that Christians wishing to engage with twentieth-century culture needed to take its art seriously, both its visual artists and its writers. And they also came to see that Christians could make a significant impact on the culture by responding with their own art, directed not at other Christians but at the wider world.

⁷ John M Frame, 'Christianity and Culture', Lectures given at the Pensacola Theological Institute, July 23-27, 2001 http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/Frame.Apologetics2004.ChristandCulture.pdf

⁸ Thomas Howard and J I Packer, *Christianity: The True Humanism*, Regent College Publishing, 1999, p.180.

⁹ Abraham Kuyper, 'Sphere Sovereignty', a public address delivered at the inauguration of the Free University, 20 October 1880, translated by George Kamps.

A Christian understanding of the arts

In his highly-influential book *Modern art and the death of a culture*,¹ Rookmaaker set out his basic understanding of where the arts fit into a Christian worldview. The fine arts, a unique feature of Western civilisation, trace their roots back to the icons of the Byzantine era, from which words such as 'iconology' and 'iconography' are still in use in the study of the arts. Icons, he argued, were images that embodied the highest values of their culture – not just images of Mary, Jesus, and the saints, but the emphasis on the reality and *otherness* of the spiritual realm.

Although the Renaissance brought secular and pagan values into the arts, this did not change the nature of the fine arts: that a painting or sculpture embodies something of the fundamental values or worldview of the artist and/or their culture. A work of art will say something about what the artist views as being of ultimate importance; his or her ultimate commitments; something about the nature of reality, or the nature of human beings. It is this that distinguishes the fine arts from the applied arts which are found across all cultures.

This understanding is what enables us to chart a link between such diverse images or objects as Rembrandt's *Descent from the cross*, Monet's *Waterlilies*, and Tracey Emin's unmade bed. Rembrandt speaks of the humanity of Jesus, the reality and therefore the significance of his death, and the profound interconnection of God with his world, and of sinful human beings with the spiritual realm.

Monet, an arch-materialist of the nineteenth century, focuses solely on what he can see – light reflecting off water and onto his retina: a beautiful, but frighteningly limited understanding of reality. And Tracey Emin also reflects on her own view of reality – a very public, candid self-revelation, recognising the sordidness of her surroundings and, by implication her lifestyle, and yet, for lack of an overarching set of values, unashamed. They all, in their own ways, express some ultimate values of their culture and/or themselves.

Christians in the arts

Into this arena Christians are setting foot with increasing boldness, putting forward their own values. They have to do so with subtlety, for that is the nature of the fine arts. The arts are not the same as propaganda. Propaganda has its place, by simply stating its message as clearly and forcefully as it can, whether in a tract or a poster. But propaganda does not make good art.

The arts work by allusion and reference. They never have a single definable 'message', but they can promote values and aspects of a worldview which challenge popular assumptions. C S Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* are a well-known example, perfectly readable as stories in their own right, and understandable as Christian allegories by those who know what to look for. But they are also stories which promote clear Christian values such as the reality of sin, the need for redemption, the power of substitutionary atonement and the possibility of personal change.

A few years ago the American Christian rock band P.O.D. had a hit with *Alive*, the accompanying video showing a hideous car accident, at the end of which the driver cautiously and thankfully pokes his head out of the vehicle, clearly unharmed. The message of the song, limited in scope as is appropriate to rock music, was simply that it is good to be alive; but that in itself is a radical challenge to the message of much contemporary music.

¹ Hans Rookmaaker *Modern art and the death of a culture* (IVP, 1970; Leicester, England: Apollos, 1994)

In the 1980s a Christian artist, Gerry Griffiths, had a work exhibited in a major exhibition of contemporary art. It was a simple still-life, showing a knife, fork and spoon set out on a clean table cloth. Not a lot to go on, you might think. But reviewing the exhibition in *Art Monthly*, a leftwing art journal, the critic Andrew Brighton singled this work out, illustrating it alongside the text, and asked 'What makes this artist so certain?' Brighton, an intelligent, sensitive critic, had engaged with Griffiths' work and understood what he was saying: that there is an order and a purpose to reality which needs to be acknowledged and explained.

Many artists, too, offer a very humble service of helping us to see what is in the world, and help us to overcome that sense of alienation which sin often creates. This is especially the case with those working in the Dutch tradition, observing light or shape or detail in the everyday that the rest of us miss.

The English artist Peter Smith made a series of woodcuts of scenes in the London Underground, showing people walking through tunnels, or waiting on platforms. They are quiet, humble images, which highlight aspects of reality that we normally miss in the bustle of life. And their effect is quietly redemptive: now, when I walk through the underground system, I notice things that he has noticed, and the world becomes a little bit more familiar, and less alienating than before. By carefully and lovingly capturing these aspects of reality in their work, artists can help the viewer subsequently to see them for themselves.

The church and the arts

One of the great insights of Schaeffer and Rookmaaker, drawing on previous generations of Dutch Calvinist thinkers, was that the lordship of Christ over all of life must be made a reality in our daily lives. We are here as witnesses to the grace of God, but not just as one-dimensional gospel preachers, but as those who are working to bring all of life under the lordship of Christ (Ephesians 1:10).

Our creativity is part of the way God has made us, and the arts, like every part of life, should be redeemed for Christ – not just made a vehicle for evangelistic propaganda, but dedicated to Christ as really good art embodying the values of Christ.

The arts are important for church life: uplifting music, attractive surroundings, thought-provoking drama, challenging DVDs, all have their part to play in our gatherings and our outreach. But the arts are for more than direct evangelism. They are an enrichment of everyday life, a way of helping us to understand the world around us, and the thinking of our culture.

The arts are not elitist, but are open to everyone. Like anything that is worth doing, however, they require an investment of time and energy for us to be able to understand them and enter into them. If you have artists in your congregation, encourage them by talking to them about their work, praying for them, and buying their work. And if you would like to know more, start reading and looking.

Nigel Halliday

* This article first appeared in The Bulletin in March 2006. Many other such previously published articles of abiding value and relevance are available to read and download, free of charge, at our online archive of Salt and Light Papers: <http://www.affinity.org.uk/resources/resources--1>

Weed of Controversy: Cannabis and the Christian

Drugs – a term with mixed connotations. The word can be used to speak of some form of medically prescribed treatment or it could be used to speak of any number of substances designed to give the recipient a pleasurable experience of ecstasy or mellowness, often called a ‘high’.

There is a measure of complexity in this discussion in that medical drugs and those generally used to achieve a high are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Many drugs, prescribed medically, can prove very addictive for some, leading to their abuse long past the end of their intended use. Other substances are on the drug-taking ‘scene’, with horse tranquilisers, petrol, and even household goods like bath salts being taken and sniffed. Additionally, British young people have been reported to take more cocaine than any of their European peers and London’s sewers contain a higher percentage of cocaine than Amsterdam, with traces even found in our drinking water supply.¹

And then there is *weed*. In a third of British police forces, cannabis confiscation rose more than 40% in 2014. It is not all due to the vastness of London either; West Mercia revealed a massive 195% increase in cannabis confiscation while Wiltshire claims the highest proportion of cannabis plant seizures in the country out of the national total of 450,000 – 9,613 plants per million homes.² While some argue that legalising hard drugs may in some way limit or control use, for many Christians and non-Christians there is no question that drugs such as heroin, crystal meth, and cocaine should be illegal.

With cannabis the issue is slightly more complex. Some are all for a blanket ban, while others see its consumption as no more harmful than smoking normal tobacco or consuming alcoholic beverages.

What are Christians to make of all this? In this paper I seek to make some general observations on addiction, employ some statistics that highlight the real problems of alcoholism and tobacco use in UK life, highlight the even more severe effects of specific compounds within cannabis – while leaving room for scientific and medical use. I conclude with an assessment of how Christians should view cannabis and, indeed, any harmful substance.

The reality of addictions

Addiction is defined as a state characterised by compulsive engagement in rewarding stimuli, despite adverse consequences.³ Harmful substances can indeed be the source of addictive stimuli, but it can also be that some substances resulting in addiction are – when present in balance or moderation – not necessarily harmful. Some would look at alcoholic beverages and tobacco as well as substances like cannabis as being in this latter category. This assumes however that alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are relatively harmless and that the controls in place on these products are sufficient. Is this really the case, though? Regardless of whether a Christian believes it is good to drink alcohol in moderation or not, the statistics on alcohol use in the UK paint a troubling picture. Alcohol Concern’s website⁴ informs us:

¹ *European Drug Report 2015: Trends and developments*, EMCDDA, Lisbon (June 2015); Withnall, ‘Cocaine use in Britain so high it has contaminated drinking water, report shows’ in *The Independent* (11 May, 2014).

² Paton C, ‘Cannabis Cultivation: Over 450,000 weed plants seized by UK police in 2014’ in *International Business Times* (5 June, 2015).

³ Angres DH, Bettinardi-Angres K, ‘The disease of addiction: origins, treatment, and recovery’, *Dis Mon* 54 (10): 696–721 (Oct, 2008).

⁴ www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

- More than 9 million people in England drink more than the recommended daily limits
- In England in 2012 there were 6,490 alcohol-related deaths, a 19% increase compared to 2001
- Alcohol accounts for 10% of the UK burden of disease and death, making alcohol one of the three biggest lifestyle risk factors in the UK, after smoking and obesity.
- An estimated 7.5 million people are unaware of the damage their drinking could be causing
- Alcohol misuse costs England around £21bn per year in healthcare, crime and lost productivity

Even more specifically:

- Alcohol is a causal factor in more than 60 medical conditions, including mouth, throat, stomach, liver and breast cancers, high blood pressure, cirrhosis of the liver and depression
- In the UK in 2012-13, there were 1,008,850 hospital admissions where an alcohol-related disease, injury or condition was the primary reason or a secondary diagnosis
- In 2012 there were 8,367 alcohol-related deaths in the UK
- Males accounted for approximately 65% of all alcohol-related deaths in the UK in 2012
- Alcohol-related conditions now cost the NHS £3.5bn per year, equal to £120 for every tax payer

The statistics for smoking tobacco as given by ASH (Action on Smoking and Health)⁵ are equally troubling:

- Every year, over 100,000 smokers in the UK die from smoking-related causes
- Smoking accounts for over one-third of respiratory deaths, over one-quarter of cancer deaths, and about one-seventh of cardiovascular disease deaths
- Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and death. Every year smoking causes around 100,000 deaths in the UK.
- Smokers under the age of 40 have a five times greater risk of a heart attack than non-smokers
- Smoking causes around 80% of deaths from lung cancer, around 80% of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema, and about 17% of deaths from heart disease
- More than one quarter of all cancer deaths can be attributed to smoking. These include cancer of the lung, mouth, lip, throat, bladder, kidney, pancreas, stomach, liver and cervix.

Smoking tobacco also has a significant impact on the health of people who, though not smokers, are exposed to smoking. Second-hand smoke has been shown to cause:

- lung cancer and heart disease in adult non-smokers
- increased sensitivity and reduced lung function in people with asthma
- irritation of the eye, nose and throat
- reduced lung function in adults with no chronic chest problems

Second-hand smoke exposure also harms babies and children, with an increased risk of respiratory infections, increased severity of asthma symptoms, more frequency of chronic coughs, phlegm and

⁵ www.ash.org.uk

wheezing, and increased risk of cot death and glue ear. It is estimated that, globally, 600,000 deaths a year are caused by second-hand smoke. Most of these deaths are among women and children.

The Lancet Psychiatry Journal even recently asserted that there seems to be a link between psychotic conditions such as schizophrenia and tobacco smoking.⁶

Arguments I have heard in favour of cannabis legalisation generally mention that it is as harmless as alcohol and tobacco consumption. Given the evidence above this must surely be seen as far too simplistic! Other arguments are clearer in suggesting that as gambling, alcohol, and tobacco are legal – each able to cause significant personal and societal damage – it makes sense that cannabis should be as well. But before accepting the validity of these arguments it would be useful to know more about the substance of cannabis itself.

The weed of controversy

Cannabis is a naturally-occurring, flowering plant. There are well over 30 names for cannabis or cannabis-derived substances on the drug-taking scene. In 1970 the United States government classified cannabis as a Schedule I drug. This placed it in a category of dangerous substances, including heroin, generally recognised as having no valid medical purpose and with high levels of abuse. Though the idea that cannabis is not addictive is being pushed by marijuana legalisation advocates, a study out of Massachusetts General Hospital found that ‘More than 80 percent of participants met criteria for cannabis dependence’ with 40% reporting withdrawal symptoms – an indicator of addiction.⁷

Cannabis’ principle active compound ingredient is known as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) with another key component being cannabidiol (CBD). THC, first discovered by Raphael Mechoulam at the Weizmann Institute of Science near Tel Aviv, has a profoundly powerful psychoactive effect on humans. The National Institute on Drug Abuse lists the short-term effects of marijuana smoking and the consequential introduction of THC into the blood stream as including altered senses (seeing brighter colours, hallucinating, and experiencing paranoia), altered sense of time, changes in mood, impaired body movement, difficulty with thinking and problem-solving and impaired memory. Additionally, marijuana raises the heart rate for up to three hours, putting some at risk of heart attack, while also being a lung irritant comparable to normal tobacco. Use by adolescents can change the way the developing brain grows and can severely affect mental health by triggering the onset of schizophrenia as well as provoking severe and sustained anxiety attacks. Specially-bred strains of cannabis such as skunk and sinsemilla generally have twice the level of THC – all the more popular and all the more potent. The profit in cannabis growing, distribution, and dealing leads to the dangers of gang involvement and inevitable violence. All of these features are what set even moderate cannabis use apart from tobacco and alcohol consumption, indicating it is far more dangerous – and thus recreational use should remain illegal.

The medical argument

Cannabidiol (CBD), the other key component of cannabis, is said to have many potential medical uses and no psychoactive effect on humans when separated from THC. Derivatives of this compound, sometimes referred to as ‘medical marijuana’, have been used to treat glaucoma, Crohn’s disease, inflammation, appetite loss (though in contrast, THC increases appetite leading to possible mood

⁶Gurillo P, MD, Jauhar S, MRCPsych, Murray RM, FRS, MacCabe J H, FRCPsych, ‘Does tobacco use cause psychosis? Systematic review and meta-analysis’, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (published online, 9 July 2015).

⁷Kelly J, PHD, ‘Cannabis withdrawal symptoms common among adolescents treated for substance use disorder’, University of Massachusetts press release, 2 September 2014.

swings and/or weight gain), Tourette's syndrome and asthma. Drugs using marijuana extracts are also in development to relieve pain in Multiple Sclerosis patients, negate side effects of chemotherapy and hinder certain types of epileptic seizure. Case studies in National Geographic's June 2015 cover story, 'Weed: The New Science of Marijuana' indicate use of cannabis-derived substances has provided many with a better quality of life.⁸

Advocates for cannabis legalisation often highlight such cases while neglecting the dangers in recreational use. Indeed, it would be interesting to know how many with no vested medical interest in cannabis use the medical argument as their primary argument for legalising what is recreationally, a very dangerous drug. Additionally, the idea presented by marijuana proponents is that smoking it has a positive medical impact. The evidence on THC suggests that this is not the case. Oils and pills are the common form of 'medical marijuana' and are made up only of specific compounds found in marijuana that have proven beneficial effects. This means that using the term 'medical marijuana' is about as helpful as speaking of morphine as 'medical opium' or aspirin as 'medical heroin'. While some may reap benefits from smoking certain types of marijuana, they are at the same time exposing themselves to the far greater consequences of ingesting THC.

What should Christians think?

Working as an evangelist and church-planting pastor has brought me into regular interaction with people affected by substance abuse and addiction problems. I have sat and listened to a young woman sniffing from an aerosol can as she told me of her problems and of the hope she had that her husband (whom she claimed was around 80 years old, no less than 50 years her senior) would die and leave her his money so she could get help. I have routinely been approached by gang members dealing skunk. I have spoken to and sought to care for many dealing with tobacco and alcohol addictions and regularly preach from God's Word in their presence. Most recently I have had the privilege of ministering to an ex-heroin addict who is seeking to grow in a relatively new faith in Christ and continues to battle many complexities in his life. Real people. Real problems.

Yet, I am preaching a real Saviour who can deliver people from their sin. People are enticed and deceived into thinking that substances offer an escape from their problems and end up enslaved by the sensuality therein. 2 Peter 2:19 asserts '...whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved'. Drug addiction and alcoholism are the masters in so many lives. People are driven to despair and destitution as a result of their substance abuse. Is it in keeping with Christ's command to love God and to love our neighbours to support liberalisation of drug laws that would cause much harm to our fellow man and open many others up to abuse? Should cannabis legalisation be part of a government's fulfilling its God-given responsibility (whether it acknowledges him or not) to praise good and punish evil (1 Peter 2:14; cf. Romans 13:3)? At the same time, does not hindering medical research of the cannabis plant also keep us from helping our fellow man by keeping possible cures out of reach? Is it right that medical practitioners and scientists face reprisals or backlash for their exploration of the compounds within cannabis? Surely not. Thus, an opposition to recreational cannabis use, balanced with a support for legislation allowing medical research and regulated medical use seems to be a wise, pastorally-careful balance to strike. Some, particularly of libertarian political persuasion, may still argue that keeping cannabis illegal causes more harm than good. Statistics for this are lacking and legalisation seems a dangerous risk to take.

While for many it may still seem more consistent to legalise cannabis – given tobacco and alcohol's legal, albeit regulated, status – several factors indicate otherwise. Firstly, while the statistics for alcohol and tobacco use are troubling, cannabis is far more likely to cause instant destructive reactions than either of these. A glass of wine or other alcoholic beverage is purported to have health benefits, and

⁸ Sides H, 'High Science' in 'Weed: The New Science of Marijuana', *National Geographic* (June 2015) 30-54.

while the same cannot be said of tobacco consumption, it is unlikely that smoking a cigarette would have the instant negative side effects of cannabis. Whilst it is hermeneutically indefensible to suggest that the Bible treats any alcohol consumption as a sin, there are multiple warnings against the sin of drunkenness and any intoxication that clouds sober thinking and judgment. Depending on certain personal factors it generally takes 3-5 drinks containing an alcoholic volume of 14% to constitute the legal definition of 'intoxication'. So is smoking 'a joint' of cannabis not the same? Could it not be that cannabis is fine and even healthy if smoked as one joint every now and then?

Smoking a joint can almost instantly produce erratic, intoxicated behaviour. A study published in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* indicates that intoxication can occur after ingesting a mere 7 mg of THC⁹ – approximately four puffs on a joint of marijuana and possibly less in high THC breeds. Russell Moore (the incoming president of the Southern Baptists' Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) has applied Ephesians 5:18 to the morality of recreational marijuana use: 'God intends for us to be discerning, wise, in control of our actions; and drunkenness or similar impairment reduces that capacity in a way that I think is dangerous for the individual and dangerous for society as a whole.'¹⁰

A second point to consider is that the current legality of certain harmful substances does not legitimise the legalising of yet another (potentially more harmful) substance. Thirdly, from a Christian counselling perspective, promotion of, or support for, legalising recreational cannabis would be fundamentally unwise as it muddies the waters of what should be a clear issue. Given the data above, the biblical mandates to love God and neighbour, to be sober and shun drunkenness, as well as the responsibility of government to promote what is good, while punishing evil, it seems that recreational cannabis use must be considered sinful among believers and we should desire that it remain illegal under law. At the same time, adequate legal provisions should be made to ensure that cannabis can be scientifically studied and, in some cases, cannabis-derived medicines used to treat relevant conditions.

Church pastors and leaders would do well to be intensely practical in teaching on matters of intoxication and substance abuse, dealing in grace with those affected either in the past or present and seeking to keep others from being affected in the future. We must guard against any spirit of antinomianism and the consequential abuse of God's grace and the freedom we have in Christ. At the same time, we must be prepared to struggle alongside people who are battling with substance abuse and addictions, seeking to provide not only counsel but very practical and personal care that is focused on Christ and the promise of freedom and righteousness before God (1 Corinthians 6:11). Through much love, care, council, gospel presentation, and prayer God will work in the lives of those we know who are dealing with the devastation, depression and despair of substance abuse.

Regan King

⁹ Zuurman L, Ippel A. E. , Moin E & Joop M. A. van Gerven, 'Biomarkers for the effects of cannabis and THC in healthy volunteers' in *British Journal for Clinical Pharmacology* (67:1, October 2008), 5-21.

¹⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/25/marijuana-not-sinful-christians-divided-legalization-poll_n_3154849.html

Life Issues

Abortion

Abortion Statistics – England and Wales 2014

These were published on 9 June 2015. What can be said about them? They are always depressing. The total number of abortions performed during 2014 in England and Wales for residents was 184,571 plus 5,521 non-residents, making a total of 190,092 – just 708 less than the 2013 figure. Of course, any decrease is welcome, but does this drop represent even a glimmer of long-term hope? Hardly! The 2014 abortion rate remained unchanged at 15.9 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44.

The entire report for England and Wales can be read here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433437/2014_Co_mmentary_5_.pdf The 2014 figures for Scotland are here: <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Sexual-Health/Publications/2014-05-27/2014-05-27-Abortions2013-Report.pdf> Add the Scottish total of 11,475 to the 190,092 for England and Wales and the grand total of abortions performed in Great Britain during 2014 becomes a massive 201,567.

There are some notable 2014 trends. For example, medical (as opposed to surgical) abortions, using principally the abortifacient drug Mifegyne also known as RU-486, accounted for 51% of the total – the first time they have been in the majority. Ground E abortions for suspected handicap increased from 2,732 to 3,099. While this figure may account for only 2% of the total it indicates society's growing unease towards the disabled – 662 for Down's syndrome and even 10 for cleft lip and palate. Repeat abortions continued to rise with 37% of women having already had one or more abortions. There were 2,399 abortions carried out on girls aged under 16. Only 32% of abortions were performed in NHS hospitals, while 67% occurred in approved independent sector places under NHS contracts – whichever, the taxpayer is funding them. The remaining 2% were privately funded. Late abortions continued with a total of 1,193 being performed at 22 week's gestation and over. And as a result typically of over-zealous IVF, 132 abortions, usually at about 12 week's gestation, were performed to reduce the number of developing fetuses – these are the so-called 'selective terminations'.

Lastly, this Department of Health document blithely confirmed that, 'Complications were reported in 330 cases in 2014, a rate of about one in every 550 abortions, slightly lower than the rate in 2013.' I know this refers to acute medical complications. But we all know that long-term medical and psychological complications, both major and minor, affect the majority of these 190,092 women.

Reversing RU-486 – the Abortion Pill

This is a fairly new, controversial procedure, which originated in the USA. Think about this scenario. A woman finds that she is unexpectedly and unwantedly pregnant. She attends an abortion clinic, where she is told that she is only 6 weeks pregnant so she is offered the abortion pill Mifegyne, RU-486. It consists of two stages – first, mifepristone, an abortifacient drug to kill the unborn child, and second, misoprostol, to cause the uterus to contract and expel the dead embryo or foetus. She takes the mifepristone pill.

That night she is in tatters. Yes, she is shocked to be newly pregnant and yes, her boyfriend has just dumped her and yes, she has a low-paid job and yes, her parents will probably not support her. But,

above all, she is now regretting her decision to abort. What does she do? She Googles 'abortion pill reversal' and finds, contrary to common knowledge, that the abortifacient effects of RU-486 can sometimes be reversed.

The concept is simple. Mifepristone works as an antagonist of progesterone, a hormone essential for a successful pregnancy. Its abortifacient action can be counteracted by quickly giving the woman large and repeated doses of progesterone, by mouth, vaginally, or by injection, every day until the end of the first trimester, that is about 14 weeks. And it seems to work! But it is a race against the clock – the reversal procedure must be started no later than 48 hours after the mifepristone pill has been taken.

Back in 2007, Dr Matthew Harrison performed the first documented RU-486 reversal. One of the current prime movers in this 'abortion pill reversal movement' has been Dr George Delgado, a general practitioner from Escondido, California. In December 2012, he co-authored a paper with Mary Davenport in the *Annals of Pharmacotherapy* entitled, 'Progesterone Use to Reverse the Effects of Mifepristone', which stated, 'It may be possible to reverse the effects of the abortion if the pregnant woman changes her mind, but that time is of the essence.' The article reported the use of progesterone in six patients who had second thoughts after taking the mifepristone, but not the misoprostol. Four of the six women carried their babies to term with no detected birth defects.

Since then, Delgado has created a worldwide network of almost 300 doctors who are willing to use the procedure under the collective title of Abortion Pill Reversal (APR). By 31 December 2014, APR doctors had administered progesterone to 223 women, 89 of these patients went on to have normal deliveries and 75 were still pregnant. Assuming those other pregnancies result in live births, then more than 60% of these patients will have avoided their previously intended abortions

But the procedure is contentious. It is not 100% effective. Some say progesterone therapy can cause ectopic pregnancies. APR is little tested. There have been no clinical trials. It is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the US. It is not recommended by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Side effects, though minor, include insomnia and nausea. Critics maintain that there is no clear evidence that the procedure actually works. For example, Dr Daniel Grossman, a fellow of the ACOG, has stated that, 'For about 30% to 50% of women who take mifepristone alone, the pregnancy will continue. It may very well be that doing nothing and just waiting to see what happens may be just as effective as doing this course of progesterone treatment.'

Nevertheless, the APR doctors press on. They justify the continued use of this procedure on the grounds of five foundational principles:

- 1] It is reasonable and appropriate to respect a woman's right to choose to reverse a medical induced abortion.
- 2] A woman should never be coerced into starting or continuing an abortion.
- 3] Human beings are valuable and should be protected at all stages of their development.
- 4] Mifepristone does not significantly increase the chances of birth defects. Reversing a mifepristone medical abortion is within reasonable medical practice.
- 5] Progesterone can reverse the effects of mifepristone and has been safely used in pregnancy for over 40 years.

Whether APR ever comes to the UK depends upon the courage and response of our general practitioners. Up to now, they have been singularly reluctant to get involved. So far the APR procedure is available only in the USA – details can be read at <http://www.abortionpillreversal.com/>

Assisted Reproductive Technologies

CRISPR – The New Bioethical Challenge

What an acronym! It stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats. It is pronounced 'crisper' and it could change the world. So far it has sparked the biggest bioethical debate of the year, and one that is likely to last for at least the coming decade.

CRISPR is a revolutionary tool for editing genomes, that is, it can add or remove genetic material with great precision. It acts like a pair of molecular scissors that can cut at an exact point on the DNA chain of any cell's nucleus – the snip is made by a DNA-cutting enzyme called Cas9, hence the technique is often known as CRISPR-Cas9. The technique was originally devised in 2012 by Emmanuelle Charpentier from the Hannover Medical School and Jennifer Doudna from the University of California, Berkeley and first described as, 'A programmable dual-RNA-guided DNA endonuclease in adaptive bacterial immunity' in *Science* (August 2012, **17**: 816-21).

If gene therapy is the ultimate goal of genetic engineering, then CRISPR takes us a huge step nearer that target. CRISPR has previously been applied to various animal and human cells, but in May 2015, a group of Chinese researchers published the first report of CRISPR editing of the genomes of human embryos. Junjiu Huang and his colleagues at the Sun Yat-sen University presented their results in a paper entitled, 'CRISPR/Cas9-mediated gene editing in human tripronuclear zygotes' in the journal *Protein & Cell* (May 2015, **6**: 363-372). The work centred on modifying the HBB gene, which codes for β -globin protein, but when mutated it is responsible for β -thalassaemia, a potentially fatal blood disorder. They injected human embryos with the enzyme complex CRISPR-Cas9, in order to bind and slice DNA at the specific 'bad' gene location and then repair it by introducing the 'good' gene.

In all, the Chinese workers injected 86 human embryos and then waited 48 hours for the embryos to grow to about the eight-cell stage. Of the surviving 71 embryos, 54 were genetically tested. This revealed that just 28 were successfully sliced, but only a few contained the replacement 'good' gene. Such lack of success is serious. As Huang stated, 'If you want to do it in normal embryos, you need to be close to 100%. That's why we stopped. We still think it's too immature.' Furthermore, they found that the technique produced a surprisingly high number of 'off-target' mutations caused by CRISPR-Cas9 altering other parts of the human genome – such mutations can be deleterious and may have occurred because the embryos were 'abnormal'.

Nevertheless, this is undoubtedly landmark science. As the authors noted, 'Gene editing tools ... hold tremendous promise for both basic research and clinical applications.' Others have described the CRISPR-Cas9 technique as, '... a molecular biology breakthrough that could potentially lead to curing every major disease'.

But this latest form of genetic engineering is riddled with controversy. So controversial is it that both the leading journals *Nature* and *Science* declined to publish this research. First, it is germline (as opposed to somatic) gene therapy, that is, it is heritable, and therefore it again raises the spectre of consent from future affected generations, 'designer babies', 'playing God', and so on. However, we are already halfway down that pathway because of the UK government's foolhardy decision in February 2015 to allow germline gene therapy by its approval of so-called 'three-parent' IVF in order to combat mitochondrial diseases. It was always going to be a simple legal and bureaucratic 'hop and skip' from modifying mitochondrial DNA to modifying nuclear DNA.

Second, any research involving human embryos is always divisive. They should never be treated as mere biological material. The Chinese group tried to avert such criticism by using 'abnormal', 'non-

viable' embryos that had been fertilised by two sperm, which they obtained from a local IVF clinic. Nevertheless, while such zygotes could not result in a live birth, they did undergo the first stages of human development.

Third, there is widespread fear that genome editing will go badly wrong. And who knows what the grotesque outcomes might be? Even the Chinese researchers stated that their results revealed serious obstacles to using the method in medical applications. This technology is definitely not yet ready for testing to eradicate human disease genes. But who can doubt that someone, somewhere will not attempt to use CRISPR-Cas9 prematurely, with no regard to its safety? These are serious issues and already many bioethicists and governments are calling for a moratorium on this and other similar gene-editing techniques. For example, John P Holden, the White House science advisor, has said, 'The Administration believes that altering the human germline for clinical purposes is a line that should not be crossed at this time.' And Francis Collins, the director of the US National Institutes of Health, has stated that the NIH would not fund such research. Furthermore, on 17 June, the US House of Representatives introduced its 2016 spending budget which included a bill that would prohibit the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from using public funds to evaluate applications for clinical trials involving genetically-modified human embryos – even so, such research could still be privately funded. Nevertheless, it does seem likely that this previous, worldwide, unwritten consensus that germline genetic modification is a step too far is likely to be ripped up, and soon.

Robert Pollack, professor of biology at Columbia University, in a recent letter published in *Science* encapsulated the unease of many both within and without the scientific community. 'This opening to germline modification is, simply put, the opening of a return to the agenda of eugenics: the positive selection of "good" versions of the human genome and the weeding out of "bad" versions, not just for the health of an individual, but for the future of the species ... Rational eugenics is still eugenics. The best in the world will not remove the pain from those born into a world of germline modification but who had not been given a costly investment in their gametes. They will emerge with the complexity of a genome different from what this technology will be able to define as "normal". I do not think anything short of a complete and total ban on human germline modification will do, to prevent this powerful force for rational medicine – one patient at a time – from becoming the beginning of the end of the simplest notion of each of us being "endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights".' On the other hand, the Oxford bioethicist, Julian Savulescu, has asserted that, 'Gene editing is a revolutionary technology, which potentially offers the next generation an enormous range of benefits. It is important that bad arguments, empty rhetoric and personal interests do not cloud rational thinking and deny the next generation the enormous benefits potentially on offer from this research...'

We may be about to rush towards a gene-editing cliff. The gene-editing genie is about to come out of the laboratory and into our world. The world should first discuss the issues. Even if the techniques are proved to be safe, should we modify DNA in human embryos, ova or sperm? If so, under what circumstances? Are there limits to improving public health? What is the difference between a genetic cure and an enhancement? How can we prevent gene-editing technologies from being abused? How can scientists and the public communicate effectually? Talk of a moratorium is all very well, but has one ever worked? Will China even listen? Is it already too late?

First Baby Born From Frozen Ovarian Tissue

At the age of 5, an anonymous Belgian girl was diagnosed to be suffering from sickle cell anaemia. She needed a bone marrow transplant and her brother was a willing match. But before the transplant could proceed she needed a course of chemotherapy, which would probably destroy her ovarian function, so the doctors removed her right ovary and froze some of its tissue. Her remaining left ovary failed when she was 15 years old.

When she was 23, she wanted a baby. Doctors then thawed and transplanted some of her frozen ovarian fragments. Five months later, she started menstruating spontaneously. When she was 27, she became pregnant naturally and in November 2014, she gave birth to a healthy boy – a world first. While it is estimated that about 40 babies have already been born across the world using frozen ovarian tissue taken from older women, none has proved successful from such a young pubescent girl, as in this Belgian case.

Tangled IVF – Beat This Example!

I couldn't make this up, even if I tried. Here is another first for IVF practice in the UK. Kyle Casson is 24 years old, he works in a supermarket and he is gay, but he wanted a child. A relative offered to be a surrogate but eventually she pulled out. Up steps Kyle's mother, Anne-Marie Casson.

Meanwhile, Kyle shops around for an ova donor and arranges for IVF and embryo transfer to his mum. So, in July 2014, 46-year-old Anne-Marie Casson gives birth to Miles Casson by caesarean section. It is, apparently, the first time in the UK that a single man has had a baby by surrogacy.

Now consider the relationship tangles, twists and knots. Anne-Marie is the mother of Kyle. She is also the mother and the grandmother of Miles. Miles is both the half-brother and the son of Kyle. Kyle is both the son and the 'husband' of Anne-Marie.

Now consider the legal tangles, twists and knots. Under English law, Anne-Marie and her actual husband are the legal parents of Miles. Kyle has had to apply for an adoption order. Normally, a surrogate mother must hand over the newborn child to two parents. Mrs Justice Theis stated that the Casson arrangement was 'unusual', but 'entirely legal'. So the adoption proceeded. The judge was impressed that Kyle had given his decision careful consideration.

Kyle Casson could not comprehend the ethical fuss. He explained, 'I understand that not everyone will agree with it, but they can have their opinions. I have a son and I am very happy. As long as people can provide a home, and they have the support, I don't see why anyone should be denied the right to be a parent. Regardless of sexuality, gender, as long as you can provide for the child, I don't see what the problem is. I paid for it myself, it's not taxpayers' money, I own my own home, I am going back to work.'

So there we have it, you bioethical fusspots. Happiness, plus some cash, are the new arbiters of right and wrong.

Stem-Cell Technologies

A New Type of Stem Cell

A new type of human stem cell, capable of transforming into a greater number of cell types than even embryonic, adult or induced pluripotent stem cells, has been reported. It has been created by the addition of a factor called bone morphogenetic protein (BMP4) to human pluripotent stem cells. Apparently it is totally totipotent.

The lead researcher in this work was R Michael Roberts, professor of animal science at the University of Missouri. He has explained that, 'BMP-primed cells represent a transitional stage of development between embryonic stem cells and their ultimate developmental fate, whether that is placenta cells, or skin cells, or brain cells. We can use these new stem cells for future research to better understand

how embryos are organized and what causes diseases like pre-eclampsia and other prenatal problems.’ The work was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (May 2015, **112**: E2337-2346) as, ‘Heightened potency of human pluripotent stem cell lines created by transient BMP4 exposure.’

The findings show that rather than stem cells moving straight to their end products, such as liver or brain cells, they exist in a half-way house, a transitional state, or a number of transitional states. Roberts commented, ‘We now have new stem cells that are easier to manipulate since they are already at the key transitional precipice before changing into placenta cells, skin cells or any other kind of cell that makes up the human body.’ Roberts’ hope is that such novel cells will advance progress in stem-cell research and healthcare. This work used hESCs and iPSCs – human embryonic, as well as induced pluripotent stem cells – the former makes therefore it bioethically illicit.

And Yet Another Type

Juan Belmonte and his team at the Salk Institute of Biological Sciences, La Jolla, California have discovered what they have called, region-selective pluripotent stem cells (rsPSCs). The news was reported in *Nature* on 21 May 2015 (**521**: 316-321) as, ‘An alternative pluripotent state confers interspecies chimaeric competency.’

These rsPSCs are stable, grow easily and more quickly than other stem cell types. Moreover, they are more straightforwardly subject to gene-editing than other pluripotent cells, a property that may enhance their therapeutic value in regenerative medicine. Their pluripotent properties are apparently tied to their physical location or ‘region’ rather than the usual time-related stage of development of other stem cells. Remarkably when grafted into mouse embryos, these human rsPSCs began to develop into early-stage tissues that resembled the three major cell layers of the early human embryo – the ectoderm, mesoderm and endoderm – from which all tissues and organs in the body grow. It is speculated that rsPSCs may pave the way to growing human organs in animals, such as pigs and cows.

It now seems as if unethical stem-cell researchers have at least two new weapons, derived from human embryos, in their armoury. As any consequentialist will tell you, ‘The ends never justify the means.’

And Yet Another Stem-Cell Triumph

Scientists in the UK will soon start human trials on artificial blood that has been grown in laboratories from stem cells. The ‘new’ blood will not be for general use, but rather for specific patients, such as those suffering from sickle cell anaemia or thalassemia, who require frequent transfusions.

The blood will be made from stem cells obtained from umbilical cords and from adult donors. The harvested stem cells will be cultured for three weeks and then coaxed to become red blood cells. Each stem cell is expected to produce about 10,000 red blood cells. Dr Nick Watkins, assistant director of research and development at NHS Blood and Transplant, ‘We are confident that by 2017 our team will be ready to carry out the first early-phase clinical trials in human volunteers.’ Yet another triumph for non-embryonic stem cells.

More Stem-Cell Wrongdoing?

I am enamoured by stem-cell research – it can, with stem cells not derived from human embryos, be the most bioethically benign and wondrous source of healthcare therapies.

Yet the field seems to attract hordes of charlatans and crooks. For instance, there are thousands of unidentified quacks around the world, operating in at least 100 clinics in China, and as many in the USA alone, who are largely unregulated and offering untested stem-cell treatments and fleecing the gullible. Then there have been the named individuals like Robert Trossel, who ran clinics in Rotterdam and Wimpole Street and charged huge sums for pointless and dangerous treatments to vulnerable patients with multiple sclerosis. The most famous stem-cell crook has been Woo Suk Hwang, the South Korean scientist, who claimed to have extracted stem-cell lines from cloned embryos. He almost got away with it, but in 2005, the truth leaked out and his scientific reputation and his means of employment nosedived.

It is therefore somewhat alarming to learn that Hwang is still operating and has recently entered into a partnership with another medical maverick, the self-publicist, Shoukhrat Mitalipov, from the Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. Together they are pursuing research into curing maternal line genetic diseases in China, where the regulatory laws are lax.

And there is now an even more disappointing case of alleged stem-cell wrongdoing. It involves the surgeon, Paolo Macchiarini. He came to fame in 2008 when he carried out the first transplant of an artificial trachea into Claudia Castillo which had been created using stem cells taken from her hip. He is now accused of misrepresenting data in six published papers involving other recipients of such tracheas. Apparently, these papers made these pioneering transplant operations sound more successful than they really were. The 39-page accusatory report was published at the end of June.

My disappointment is particularly pointed because I have used the Castillo case in lectures and in my *Bioethical Issues* book as a wonderful example of ethical adult stem-cell usage in regenerative medicine – however, there is no suggestion in these recent accusations that the Castillo therapy was other than 100% genuine. Truth is the lifeblood of science – the merest whiff of falsehood can be calamitous and should be vigorously rooted out. I do not want the magnificent benefits of legitimate stem-cell technologies to be even slightly tainted, let alone permanently stained.

Update on World's First Embryonic Stem-Cell Trial

The Lancet (7 February 2015, **385**: 509–516) contained the following paper, 'Human embryonic stem cell-derived retinal pigment epithelium in patients with age-related macular degeneration and Stargardt's macular dystrophy: follow-up of two open-label phase 1/2 studies.' It was from the team headed by Robert Lanza of Advanced Cell Technology, Marlborough, Massachusetts. It reported results from the world's first embryonic stem-cell trial. The false starts, doubts and controversies over this controversial and experimental type of therapy are well known.

The ongoing trial consists of two patient groups. In the first, nine patients with Stargardt's macular dystrophy have been given subretinal transplants of human embryonic stem cell-derived (hESC) retinal pigment epithelia. In the second, another nine patients with atrophic age-related macular degeneration have had the same treatment. Three dose cohorts (50 000, 100 000 and 150 000 cells) were used for each eye disorder.

Basically, this is the two-year follow-up report of a trial that started in July 2011. The overall findings were that, 'There was no evidence of adverse proliferation, rejection, or serious ocular or systemic

safety issues related to the transplanted tissue. Adverse events were associated with vitreoretinal surgery and immunosuppression. 13 (72%) of 18 patients had patches of increasing subretinal pigmentation consistent with transplanted retinal pigment epithelium. Best-corrected visual acuity, monitored as part of the safety protocol, improved in ten eyes, improved or remained the same in seven eyes, and decreased by more than ten letters in one eye, whereas the untreated fellow eyes did not show similar improvements in visual acuity. Vision-related quality-of-life measures increased for general and peripheral vision, and near and distance activities, improving by 16–25 points 3–12 months after transplantation in patients with atrophic age-related macular degeneration and 8–20 points in patients with Stargardt's macular dystrophy.'

The authors continue, 'The results of this study provide the first evidence of the medium-term to long-term safety, graft survival, and possible biological activity of pluripotent stem cell progeny in individuals with any disease. Our results suggest that hESC-derived cells could provide a potentially safe new source of cells for the treatment of various unmet medical disorders requiring tissue repair or replacement.'

First, the methodology seems largely harmless, which was the primary aim of these so-called phase 1 and 2 studies. That must come as a great relief to Lanza and his colleagues because some previous embryonic stem-cell studies have gone biologically haywire.

Second, the enhancement results are certainly not as large as hoped for. Only 56% (10 out of 18) of the patients' eyes showed some improvement in visual acuity, 39% remained roughly the same and 6% got worse. Some eye specialists believe it is too soon to say whether the visual improvements are real. They maintain, for example, that the patients were not examined by independent specialists, eyesight in patients with low vision is notoriously difficult to measure, and placebo effects or unconscious bias on the part of doctors could be confounding factors.

All in all, I suppose this report is some sort of minor feather in the cap of the embryonic stem-cell researchers. Certainly, the drug giant Pfizer has been impressed because it is planning to launch its own study to transplant larger patches of embryonically-derived retinal cells. However, the big questions remain. Why bother? Why not simply use already-proven, bioethically-uncontentious, adult or induced pluripotent stem cells? Why keep destroying human embryos?

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill 2015-16

The pro-euthanasia crowd have recently found a new champion, this time within the House of Commons. After Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill ran out of time because Parliament was prorogued on 26 March, the focus has now switched to the Lower House. Rob Marris, Labour MP for Wolverhampton South, came top of the June ballot for Private Members' Bills and announced that he would present a Bill virtually identical to Lord Falconer's. Officially it is described as, 'A Bill to enable competent adults who are terminally ill to choose to be provided with medically supervised assistance to end their own life; and for connected purposes.'

The Bill's First Reading, merely a procedural formality, was on Wednesday 24 June. The all-important Second Reading is on Friday 11 September. MPs will on that occasion be able to debate for one hour and then vote. This will be the first time an assisted suicide Bill has been considered in the Commons for 20 or so years.

How will the vote go? Who knows? But there is already mounting opposition. When recently asked in Parliament for his view, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated, 'I do not support the assisted dying proposals that have come out of the other place [the House of Lords]. I do not support euthanasia. I know that there are imperfections and problems with the current law, but I think that these can be dealt with sensitively and sensibly without having a new law that actually brings in euthanasia.'

Mark Atkinson, the interim chief of the disability rights charity, Scope, has warned that, 'Many disabled people are really worried about the legalisation of assisted suicide. They are concerned that it will lead to them feeling under pressure to end their lives.' Agnes Fletcher, director of Living and Dying Well, maintains, 'The Bill contains very few explicit safeguards.' The Care Not Killing Alliance, Not Dead Yet UK coalition and many other groups oppose the Bill because it would give doctors the right in law to cause the death of their most vulnerable patients – this, they say, cannot be either right or civilised.

The Second Reading on Friday 11 September poses a potential problem. Many MPs travel home to their constituents on Fridays and so absenteeism in the House is likely. You should therefore urge your MPs (unless they are rabid euthanasiasts) to rearrange their diaries to attend the debate and vote down this Bill. I have written to mine asking if he still opposes the legalisation of assisted suicide, and if not, when can we meet?

Assisted Dying Bill [HL] 2015-16

Meanwhile, the dogged Lord Falconer has re-introduced his old Bill into the House of Lords. It was given its First Reading on 4 June 2015. The Second Reading has yet to be scheduled.

Access to Palliative Care Bill 2015-16

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, the distinguished professor of palliative care, has responded by introducing the First Reading of her Bill on 1 June. It is officially described as, 'A Bill to make provision for equitable access to palliative care services; for advancing education, training and research in palliative care; and for connected purposes.' The Second Reading has yet to be scheduled. Although, if passed, it would apply only to England, it would be a positive counter to all the pro-death talk at Westminster and among the media.

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

On 27 May, this Bill fell at the Stage 1 debate in the Scottish Parliament on a free vote by 82 to 36. It had proposed an 'Oregon type system' with trained 'licensed facilitators' to do the dirty work for mentally-competent adults, aged 16 and over, with a 'terminal or life-shortening illness' or a 'progressive and terminal or life-shortening condition', who had concluded that the 'quality of their life is unacceptable'.

The Health and Sport Committee had previously given the Bill a good mauling and exposed many of its numerous shortcomings. More than 15,000 Scottish people had signed a petition opposing its proposals. Scottish First Minister and SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon, along with 81 of her colleagues, eventually voted against it. Such an emphatic defeat sends a strong message to both Houses at Westminster.

Euthanasia in Belgium

For those who naively think that assisted suicide legislation can be made prescriptive with water-tight safeguards and strict compliance, they should look to Belgium. Belgium permitted voluntary euthanasia in 2002. The unfolding story has been one of increasing numbers and widening scope. First, the numbers. In 2003, there were 235 officially reported cases, by 2012 that figure had risen six-fold to 1,432 and by 2013 it was 1,807. In some regions of the country half of the cases have not been reported and a third are considered to be involuntary. Between 2007 and 2013, the rate of euthanasia increased from 1.9 to 4.6% of all Belgian deaths.

Second, the eligibility net has widened to include euthanasia linked directly to organ harvesting (so-called organ-donation euthanasia, ODE), joint euthanasia for elderly couples, euthanasia after a botched sex-change operation, 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. Then on 13 February 2014, the Lower House of the Belgian Parliament approved the world's most radical extension of euthanasia law – by a vote of 86 to 44 with 12 abstentions – by granting the right of terminally-ill children, regardless of age, to request euthanasia. Similar legislation exists in the Netherlands, though only for children over the age of 12. In both countries, children require the additional consent of parents, doctors and psychiatrists. This Belgian measure had been previously passed by the country's Senate. Then on Sunday 2 March 2014, King Philippe signed the Bill into law. Can children understand the meaning and implications of euthanasia? Even the legal age of consent to sexual intercourse in Belgium is 16.

Now comes news of the most recent and alarming downgrade. Laura is a 24-year-old woman in Belgium who will be euthanased sometime this summer for purely psychological reasons. She is not physically or terminally ill, but she has experienced suicidal thoughts since her childhood. She claims, 'Life, that's not for me.' And in Belgium, that is a sufficient reason for the deadly needle.

Herein, lies the wicked sting of legalising euthanasia. Once it is permitted it becomes part of the medical and societal culture. Throughout Belgium, euthanasia is now considered to be a legitimate option within end-of-life care. And that massive unacceptable-to-acceptable transformation took only about 10 years.

USA and Elsewhere

US Abortions Continue to Decline

According to a new Associated Press survey, the rate of abortion has declined across almost all of the USA since 2010. It has decreased by an average of 12% in both liberal and conservative-run states.

What are the causes? They are difficult to tease out. Laws in some states have made it either harder or easier to obtain an abortion or contraception. Certainly there has been a fall in the teenage pregnancy rate, which reached its lowest mark for decades in 2010. Pro-lifers maintain that more women are carrying unplanned pregnancies to full term because, they say, women have an increased awareness of the humanity of their babies before they are born. So that in Indiana, Missouri, Ohio and Oklahoma – states notorious for being aggressively anti-abortion – abortion has dropped by 15% since 2010. But in liberal states like New York, Washington and Oregon – states where it is easier to get abortions – the same declining trend is also evident. Supporters of abortion rights say the fall is due to increased access to contraceptives and better sex education.

Take, for example, Oklahoma. Here the rate fell by 19% between 2010 and 2013 after a new law required women to wait at least 72 hours before undergoing an abortion. The state also banned a second-trimester abortion procedure. Pro-lifers say it is these laws that have helped to increase public understanding of what abortion really means. What else? Some say that factors, such as national pro-life educational efforts and pregnancy support services, are making a difference by providing women with abortion alternatives. Others say that pro-life prayer and educational campaigns outside abortion clinics have contributed to the downward trend. Whatever the reasons, it is good news.

US State Abortion Restrictions Continue

The pro-life consensus in some states continues to promote pro-life laws. Take, for example, New Mexico, a state that rarely makes the news. On a Friday night in March, after some six hours of debate, New Mexico's House of Representatives approved two Bills that, if enacted, will place limitations on abortion services and also affect the provision of medications, such as emergency contraception, aka the morning-after pill.

Thus, New Mexico's Representatives voted 42 to 26 to pass the Late-Term Abortion Ban Bill onto the Senate. The Bill would bar abortions after 20 weeks except in certain cases, such as if the pregnancy was due to rape or incest. The other Bill, passed by 39 to 28, would require abortion providers to notify the parent or legal guardian of any underage girl seeking a termination. Both Bills would also allow doctors and healthcare professionals to refuse, based on religious or moral grounds, to perform procedures or dispense medication that could result in the termination of a pregnancy.

Obergefell vs. Hodges

Though these Updates on Life Issues are usually limited to topics of a bioethical nature, it would be churlish not to mention the ground-breaking case of Obergefell vs. Hodges and something of its likely fallout.

On 26 June 2015, the US Supreme Court ruled, by 5 to 4 votes, that all fifty States are now required to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples. This radical decision may be regarded as just part of a worldwide wave of the redefinition of marriage. After all, the UK (with the notable exception of Northern Ireland, which has rejected the idea four times in the last three years) has already done it, and so have dozens of other countries. But there are serious and adverse consequences to this novel type of 'marriage'. Consider four of a bioethical nature.

First, married couples usually want children. How will gay and lesbian couples fulfil this desire? They will need either ova or sperm from some other adult. I have previously traced several of the disastrous tangles of procreation and childhood with multiple parents – these will only increase. Second, some of the above arrangements will require surrogate mothers. Surrogacy is medically dangerous, bioethically unsound and socially exploitative. I have previously traced several of the disastrous tangles of procreation Third, the God-ordained, neat and wholesome structure of the traditional family – that threesome of father-mother-child – is now merely one of several other acceptable, but fragmented relationship configurations. I have previously traced several of the disastrous tangles Fourth, the legalisation of same-sex 'marriage' has dealt another hammer blow to the conscience of those who object. We hear that the scruples of objectors will be protected, but for how long, and by whom? Free speech and freedom of conscience will now be under even greater threat. I have previously traced several of the disastrous...

RU-486, Drones and Poland

Who could imagine these three words in the same sentence? Sadly, it has come about. The Dutch abortionist organisation, Women on Waves, the group that ran a ship offering terminations in international waters on the borders of countries where abortion is illegal, has devised a new headline-grabbing tactic.

On Saturday 27 June, Women on Waves flew a drone across a river from Frankfurt an der Oder in Germany to land at Stubice in Poland. It carried an unspecified number of the pills that make up the RU-486 abortion regimen, namely, mifepristone and misoprostol. These drugs are legal in Germany but illegal in 90% Roman Catholic Poland, where the country's strict pro-life laws allow abortion only in cases of rape or incest within 12 weeks of pregnancy, or within 24 weeks if foetal malformation is suspected, or later if the mother's life is at risk. It was, of course, a barmy publicity stunt – the German women could have walked across the bridge with the pills in their pockets.

Poland and IVF

In mid-June, the Polish parliamentary Lower House, the Sejm, approved a Bill that, for the first time, would provide statutory regulation of IVF. IVF has been available in Poland for some 25 years, with state funding since 2013, but it has been largely unregulated. Though the Bill was passed by 261 to 176 votes with 6 abstentions, it still needs approval by the Polish Senate and the President. The debate has so far highlighted the ethical fault lines between the ruling Civic Platform Party and the conservative, Roman Catholic-dominated, Law and Justice Party.

The Bill would allow both married and unwed couples to be granted access to IVF if other treatments have not given results in 12 months, and they will be permitted to have up to six ova fertilised. However, any unused embryos may be used by other women, but only after 20 years, and they cannot be destroyed. Destroying embryos will be punishable by up to five years in prison. The same Bill would also ban the cloning of human embryos, the manipulation of human DNA and techniques that would influence the gender of embryos. Sometimes Poland seems such a sensible country, but it is now showing serious signs of plagiarising Western bioethical decadence.

When Dr Philip Nitschke Wins, We All Lose

In July 2014, 'Dr Death', this intrepid euthanasia advocate, had his medical licence suspended by the Medical Board of Australia. He was alleged to have counselled 45-year-old Nigel Brayley from Perth, who was depressed but otherwise healthy, to take his own life. Last December, Nitschke appealed against the suspension before a health profession review tribunal – it upheld the original decision. Then earlier this year Nitschke appealed against that decision in the Northern Territory Supreme Court – on 6 July, his appeal was upheld.

This is not the end of it. First, it is currently unclear whether the Supreme Court's decision will automatically reinstate Nitschke's licence – it only quashed the allegation that Nitschke posed 'a serious and immediate risk to people' because Nitschke and Brayley were not in a formal doctor-patient relationship and therefore a doctor's duty to 'protect and promote the health of individuals' did not apply. Second, the Medical Board of Australia has 12 more complaints against Nitschke to investigate.

The man's reach is worldwide and wriggly. In April 2015, Nitschke was warned that he faced being arrested at Charing Cross police station over allegations that he had encouraged or assisted suicide in the UK – an offence that carries a prison sentence of up to 14 years. However in June, the Metropolitan Police dropped that investigation.

Miscellaneous But Still Important

Out with Bolam – In with Montgomery

Few things within practical medicine are more important than the issue of informed consent. Not so long ago, paternalism reigned in both the hospital and the surgery – the doctor knew, unquestionably, what was best for the patient. Then came the Bolam test – would a doctor's conduct be supported by a responsible body of medical opinion?

Now comes the Montgomery doctrine. It is derived from the case of *Montgomery vs. Lanarkshire Health Board* and the decision made by the UK Supreme Court on 11 March 2015. Nadine Montgomery, who is just over 5 feet tall, suffers from type 1 diabetes – such women are likely to have bigger than normal babies as well as subsequent trouble during birth. On 1 October 1999, she gave birth by vaginal delivery to her son, Sam, at Bellshill Maternity Hospital, Lanarkshire. He underwent shoulder dystocia during delivery. This is an emergency that occurs during labour when the baby's head has been born, but one of his shoulders becomes stuck. It can injure the neonate's shoulder nerves, perhaps leading to damage and even permanent paralysis of the arm. In the case of Sam, it created oxygen deprivation during a 12-minute delay, which caused serious brain damage so that he now suffers from cerebral palsy.

The consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist in charge, Dr Dina McLellan, did not tell Montgomery of the 9 to 10% risk of shoulder dystocia and the hazards associated with her condition. McLellan said that she did not routinely discuss the risk of shoulder dystocia with women with diabetes for fear that, if told, such women would opt for a caesarean section. The Supreme Court declared that McLellan should have informed Montgomery of the risk and discussed with her the option of a caesarean section. The seven judges declared that if a caesarean section had been performed, 'It is not in dispute that the baby would then have been born unharmed.' As a result, the Court awarded Mrs Montgomery damages of £5.25 million.

Montgomery vs. Lanarkshire Health Board was a landmark ruling that is set to change the doctor-patient relationship throughout the UK. The Supreme Court further stated that, 'An adult person of sound mind is entitled to decide which, if any, of the available forms of treatment to undergo, and her consent must be obtained before treatment interfering with her bodily integrity is undertaken. The doctor is therefore under a duty to take reasonable care to ensure that the patient is aware of any material risks involved in any recommended treatment, and of any reasonable alternative or variant treatments. The test of materiality is whether, in the circumstances of the particular case, a reasonable person in the patient's position would be likely to attach significance to the risk, or whether the doctor is – or should reasonably be – aware that the particular patient would be likely to attach significance to it.'

In other words, it is now for the patient, rather than the medical professionals, to decide upon the level of risk they wish to take in terms of a particular course of action, given all the information available. And, that information cannot be presented simply by handing out printed leaflets – there must always be a two-way conversation between the doctor and patient, a personal dialogue. Moreover, statistics alone are insufficient to determine whether a risk is significant for a particular patient. And, a doctor's duty is not fulfilled by bombarding the patient with technical information, which she cannot reasonably be expected to grasp, let alone by routinely demanding her signature on a consent form.

In reality, Montgomery is a shift towards more patient autonomy. The message for doctors and all healthcare professionals is this – know your patient and provide tailored information. Montgomery

will have ramifications for all aspects of medicine. The law now requires that doctors must communicate clearly and pause and engage in discussion with their patients. It will be interesting to see how it applies, for example, to women requesting abortions – will the doctors now fully inform and discuss with women the pro-life alternatives, the small physical, but much larger mental, health risks, the prospect of an abortion-breast cancer (ABC) link, the risk of prematurity with subsequent pregnancies, and so on? We await a test case.

Obituary of John C Willke, a Resolute Pro-Life Campaigner

John C Willke was born on 5 April 1925 and he died on 20 February 2015. He was the influential obstetrician, who was regarded by many as the ‘father of the pro-life movement’ in the USA and further afield. He is survived by his three daughters and three sons, 22 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Willke, together with his constant companion, former nurse and wife Barbara, were the co-authors of the 1971 best-selling *Handbook on Abortion* and the 1985 book *Abortion: Questions & Answers*, which were translated into 32 languages and were responsible for educating millions around the world on the issue of abortion – I have both on my bookshelves. The former was written on their kitchen table originally to educate their daughters and teenagers in general. Their other major educational resource was a set of transparencies, known as the ‘Willke slides’, which showed pre-natal development, as well as graphic pictures of abortions performed during all three trimesters. The Willkes appeared frequently on the radio and television and lectured around the world. Jack Willke was not only a doctor, he became a gifted educator, a skilful manager and an effective lobbyist. He remained unfailingly gracious and polite, no matter how intense the disagreements – and he was embroiled with many!

John Charles Willke, known as ‘Jack’, was born in Maria Stein, Ohio, the son and grandson of doctors. Unsurprisingly, he followed the family trade and he was awarded his MD from the University of Cincinnati in 1948. He served in the Navy while at university and as an Air Force doctor in the early 1950s. Then for nearly the next 40 years he practised as an obstetrician and family doctor in Cincinnati. He was competent and apparently adored by his patients.

During the late 1960s, he became troubled by the increasing calls for US women to have the right to terminate their pregnancies by abortion. He was strongly opposed to abortion and decided that he could no longer remain silent on the issue. In 1973, after the landmark decision by the Supreme Court in the case of *Roe vs. Wade*, which effectively legalised abortion state-wide, he threw his weight and his remaining years into the anti-abortion movement. He was to become one of its most controversial and polarising leaders. Many loved him for his uncompromising pro-life stance – many hated him for it.

The Willkes started small – he and Barbara first founded Cincinnati Right to Life. Then Ohio Right to Life. Then, along with Dr Carolyn Gerster and Dr Mildred Jefferson and others, the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), now the USA’s oldest and largest anti-abortion organisation, of which Willke became a long-serving president. He was also a founding member and long-standing president of the International Right to Life Federation and in 1991, the founder and president of the Life Issues Institute, a US educational organisation that aimed to reinvigorate the pro-life movement. He realised that the old message, ‘It’s a baby, it’s a sin to kill it’ was falling on the next generation’s deaf ears – his abiding message was child- and mother-centred – ‘Love them both.’ He mixed easily with the lowly and the exalted. He was responsible for the conversion of President George Bush from a pro-choice to pro-life position. He also met with several popes, for he and Barbara were practicing Roman Catholics.

Everyone of Jack Willke's calibre will court controversy – and he did. He was strong-minded, he could be authoritarian and he divided the pro-life community. Some criticised him because he allowed exceptions in abortion laws for cases of rape and incest. Moreover, he disliked and distanced himself from the more aggressive, in-your-face tactics of displaying large, graphic images of aborted fetuses in public areas as well as protests, prayer vigils and pavement counselling as used by groups such as the Pro-Life Action League. Yet, for the most part, he knew how to communicate the issues instinctively and effectively. Even so, not all of his statements were evidence based. For example, Willke controversially believed that female rape victims have natural physiological defences against pregnancy – in other words, they rarely got pregnant after such sexual assaults. For this opinion, he was mocked by the medical establishment. In 2012, this notion resurfaced when Todd Akin, a Republican Representative from Missouri, used it in an interview, and it caused him to lose his 2012 Senate bid. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists responded by stating that a woman who is raped, '... has no control over ovulation, fertilization or implantation of a fertilized egg' and, '... to suggest otherwise contradicts basic biological truths'.

Yet his greatest legacy is that his labours saved the lives of unknown thousands of unborn children. His Foreword to the *Handbook on Abortion* concludes, 'If your mind is closed, don't bother to read this. If however, you are interested in a short, readable condensation of the world's scientific literature as it pertains to the unborn and to many other answers to the abortion protagonists, then have a look. Then – make up your mind!' And John Willke did cause millions to change their thinking and defend human life from conception to natural death. His calling as a medical doctor was in the true Hippocratic-Christian tradition – as a healer and a protector of all human life. He will be missed and never replaced. May there be many new abortion abolitionists who stand on Jack Willke's shoulders.

John Ling

Book Review

Caring For Widows

Brian Croft & Austin Walker, Crossway Books, 2015, 158 pp

'In the Western world, the care of widows is usually seen as the duty of the state. That is not the Biblical perspective at all.'

So writes Austin Walker in this small, succinct volume with Brian Croft. Walker and Croft note the dangers, particularly in the West, of churches either ignoring the plight of widows or of passing the care for widows onto the government or other social institutions. Walker indicates that this is a consequence of viewing care for widows as a purely humanitarian endeavour. Rather, when practised by God's people, it should be a reflection of God's character and conduct.

In part 1 Walker presents 'The Biblical Warrant' for caring for widows. He briefly walks through the Scriptures observing the repeated interest God has in their physical and spiritual welfare. Walker sadly notes occasions he has observed widows in churches having been forgotten and left to fend for themselves only weeks after losing a husband. One stated purpose of this book is that such failures are addressed by prioritisation of widow care by the local church and by the diaconate in particular. This section does an excellent job in setting any doubters straight that what we are given is not just a warrant, but a mandate to care.

Following Walker's intensely biblical systematic overview of the principles of caring for widows, Croft's second part is particularly practical. He asserts the necessity of spiritual and practical care borne out of genuine love, not a sense of professional duty or obligation. Furthermore, this responsibility belongs to the whole church, not just to pastors and deacons.

Croft draws on personal experience for very specific examples of good care, highlighting the importance of listening and learning from these (frequently elderly and wise) saints. While Croft's practical tips (he spends one whole chapter dealing with the amount of time to spend with a widow depending on her context) may at times seem a little too specific and structured, he acknowledges that some examples do not necessarily apply in every case or culture.

I found this volume to be quite helpful and its brevity yet breadth allowing for easy reading and recollection. I would recommend *Caring for Widows* to pastors, deacons and church members and believe it would be particularly good for leadership teams to study and pray through together whilst considering ways to enact its principles and practical wisdom. With so little material written on the subject outside of the Scriptures, *Caring for Widows*, is an essential handbook pastorally and practically.

Regan King

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.

Ashers Baking Company

Ashers Baking Company is a family-run bakery in Northern Ireland which was sued after it declined in May 2014 to produce a campaign cake, bearing the slogan 'support gay marriage' and the logo of a group called QueerSpace.

Explaining why the company decided not to fulfil the order, the General Manager of Ashers, Daniel McArthur said: 'We thought that this order was at odds with our beliefs, and was certainly in contradiction with what the Bible teaches.'

In May, a judge sitting at Belfast County Court issued a judgment in which she found the bakery and its Christian owners, Colin and Karen McArthur, liable for unlawful discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and political opinion. This was despite the fact that personnel at Ashers had no knowledge of the sexual orientation of the customer or the purpose for which the cake was being supplied. The bakery had served the customer previously and had no issue with him, but on this occasion took issue with the message which they were be asked to ice onto the cake.

Ashers and the McArthurs have lodged grounds of appeal. An appeal will be heard in the Court of Appeal in Belfast either later this year or in early 2016. The case against Ashers was brought by the state-funded Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

The Christian Institute is continuing to support Ashers. [*The Christian Institute*]

Challenge to the 'Named Person scheme' in Scotland

The Christian Institute continues to spearhead a challenge in the courts against the Scottish Government's 'named person' scheme. Under legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2014, a state official will be appointed to every child in Scotland to oversee their 'wellbeing' after August next year.

Named persons will be able to 'advise' and 'inform' the child or discuss or raise matters about the child with relevant public authorities. Named persons will also have the power to receive, share and collate data about each child. These functions are conferred on named persons in relation to each child in Scotland, irrespective of the circumstances of the child or the wishes of the parents.

The threshold for involvement by the named person is 'wellbeing', which is defined in the legislation by reference to whether a child is 'safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included'. Under guidance issued by the Scottish Government, it is clear that wellbeing is simply a state defined description of personal happiness.

Earlier this year, a lower court held that the legislation is compatible with human rights law (including the right to a private and family life) and the UK's obligations under the EU Data Protection Directive. An appeal was subsequently lodged and heard by three senior judges in Edinburgh in June. A judgment is currently awaited.

The Christian Institute is joined in the legal action by CARE, the Family Education Trust, and The Young M E Sufferers Trust, as well as a group of concerned parents. [*The Christian Institute*]

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