

## THE BULLETIN

*News and Reports from the Social issues Team*

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## Mindfulness: Panacea, fad or Buddhist meditation in modern dress?

The health and social benefits that are claimed for mindfulness are wide-ranging and growing. It is credited with reducing the recurrence of depression, and with increasing levels of concentration and productivity. Where mindfulness is practised in schools, it is reported that the behaviour of children improves as does their ability to focus, and pupils experience reduced levels of anxiety and distress.

According to a study published by the University of Oxford, after just one month participants in the Be Mindful Online course reported on average a 58 per cent reduction in anxiety levels, a 57 per cent reduction in depression and a 40 per cent reduction in stress.<sup>1</sup>

In the words of the Mental Health Foundation:

Practising mindfulness can give more insight into emotions, boost attention and concentration, and improve relationships. Anyone can learn and practise mindfulness; children, young people and adults can all benefit. It's simple, you can practise it anywhere and the results can be life-changing.<sup>2</sup>

As mindfulness has become more widely practised over recent years and promoted by a growing number of health organisations including the NHS<sup>3</sup> and NICE,<sup>4</sup> it has begun to attract the attention of the press and media and its profile is being raised in the public consciousness.

The multi-million dollar business, Headspace, has been promoting mindfulness since 2010 through online courses and an app. According to its website, Headspace now has over a million users in more than 150 countries. 'Our simple idea', they say, 'is to teach the world to meditate, so that everyone can live a *happier, healthier, more enjoyable life*.'<sup>5</sup>

But what is mindfulness and what are Christians to make of it? Should we embrace it, cautiously welcome it, or give it a wide berth? How should we respond if it is introduced into the schools and colleges that our children attend? Or if it is encouraged, demanded even, by our employers? Does it have a place in our churches – as a service to Christians, or as a ministry to the world around? Or is it just a fad, or more seriously, is it a false religion with a scientific veneer?

### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is variously defined, but it is essentially 'a meditation technique aimed at focusing the mind on the present moment'. It 'aims to achieve a relaxed, non-judgmental awareness of your thoughts, feelings and sensations'.<sup>6</sup>

Non-judgmentalism, or freedom from judgment, features prominently in the thinking and writing of mindfulness advocates. Meditation teacher, Sharon Salzberg, for example, writes:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/training/be-mindful-online-mindfulness-course/>

The study referred to is Adele Krusche, Eva Cyhlarova, J Mark G Williams, 'Mindfulness online: an evaluation of the feasibility of a web-based mindfulness course for stress, anxiety and depression', *BMJ Open* 2013;**3**:e003498 doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2013-003498

<sup>2</sup> <http://bemindful.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/mindfulness.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> NICE guidelines (CG90), Depression in adults: The treatment and management of depression in adults, October 2009 <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg90>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.headspace.com/about-us>

<sup>6</sup> Jon Henley, 'Mindfulness: A beginner's guide', *Guardian*, 7 January 2014.

Mindfulness isn't just about knowing that you're hearing something, seeing something, or even observing that you're having a particular feeling. It's about doing so in a certain way — with balance and equanimity, and without judgment. Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention in a way that creates space for insight...

Long story short: by practicing mindfulness, we aren't simply just 'more aware'. We open ourselves up to greater discernment, compassion, and an intelligent, empowered sense of choice. *This* is mindfulness.<sup>7</sup>

Along similar lines, Andy Puddicombe, the founder of Headspace, defines mindfulness as:

the intention to be present in the here and now, fully engaged in whatever is happening, free from distraction or judgment, with a soft and open mind. Meditation is an exercise in familiarising yourself with the qualities of mindfulness. It helps optimise conditions for training the mind to be calmer, clearer and kinder.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Mindfulness in Schools Project:

Mindfulness involves learning to direct our attention to our experience as it unfolds, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity and acceptance. Rather than worrying about what has happened, or might happen, it trains us to respond skilfully to whatever is happening right now, be that good or bad...

Mindfulness is always learned in a highly practical way, through experience rather than talk. We gradually learn to direct our attention in a more focused way to whatever is actually happening – whether it be our breathing, the sensations in our body, thoughts and feelings, or everyday activities such as walking and eating.<sup>9</sup>

### **The roots of mindfulness**

Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist thought and practice. The seventh component of the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism is termed 'right mindfulness'. The *Maha Satippahana Sutta*, the Buddha's original discourse on mindfulness, is considered his most important *sutta*.<sup>10</sup> It stresses that mindfulness begins with an exclusive focus on breathing patterns and proceeds from there to note other physical and mental phenomena.

Bhikku Bodhi, a Buddhist monk and former president of the Buddhist Publication Society, defines mindfulness as:

presence of mind, attentiveness or awareness. Yet the kind of awareness involved in mindfulness differs profoundly from the kind of awareness at work in our usual mode of consciousness. All consciousness involves awareness in the sense of a knowing or experiencing of an object. But with the practice of mindfulness awareness is applied at a special pitch. The mind is deliberately kept at the level of *bare attention*, a detached

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<sup>7</sup> Sharon Salzberg, 'What does mindfulness really mean anyway?', *On Being*, 5 April 2015.

<http://www.onbeing.org/blog/what-does-mindfulness-really-mean-anyway/7431>

<sup>8</sup> Claire Coleman, 'What is mindfulness? Stay cool, calm and collected', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 August 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Mindfulness in Schools Project, 'What is Mindfulness?' <http://mindfulnessinschools.org/mindfulness/>

<sup>10</sup> *Maha Satippahana Sutta: The Greater Discourse in Steadfast Mindfulness*, translated by U Jotika and U Dhamminda, Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc, 1986.

observation of what is happening within us and around us in the present moment. In the practice of right mindfulness the mind is trained to remain in the present, open, quiet, and alert, contemplating the present event. All judgments and interpretations have to be suspended, or if they occur, just registered and dropped...

To practice mindfulness is thus a matter not so much of doing but of undoing: not thinking, not judging, not associating, not planning, not imagining, not wishing. All these 'doings' of ours are modes of interference, ways the mind manipulates experience and tries to establish its dominance. Mindfulness undoes the knots and tangles of these 'doings' by simply noting. It does nothing but note, watching each occasion of experience as it arises, stands, and passes away.<sup>11</sup>

In his meditation manual, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, Henepola Gunaratana notes that:

Buddhism as a whole is quite different from the theological religions with which Westerners are most familiar. It is a direct entrance to a spiritual or divine realm without addressing deities or other 'agents'. Its flavour is intensely clinical, much more akin to what we would call psychology than to what we would usually call religion. It is an ever-ongoing investigation of reality, a microscopic examination of the very process of perception. Its intention is to pick apart the screen of lies and delusions through which we normally view the world, and thus to reveal the face of ultimate reality. Vipassana meditation [mindfulness] is an ancient and elegant technique for doing just that.<sup>12</sup>

Gunaratana, formerly principal of the Buddhist Institute of Kuala Lumpur and General Secretary of the Buddhist Vihara Society of Washington DC, explains:

This meditation is a process of retraining the mind. The state you are aiming for is one in which you are totally aware of everything that is happening in your own perceptual universe, exactly the way it happens, exactly when it is happening; total, unbroken awareness in the present time. This is an incredibly high goal, and not to be reached all at once. It takes practice, so we start small. We start by becoming totally aware of one small unit of time, just one single inhalation. And, when you succeed, you are on your way to a whole new experience of life.<sup>13</sup>

As we have already seen, mindfulness entails the suspension of the critical faculties. So Gunaratana writes:

Mindfulness is non-judgmental observation. It is that ability of the mind to observe without criticism. With this ability, one sees things without condemnation or judgment. One is surprised by nothing. One simply takes a balanced interest in things exactly as they are in their natural states. One does not decide and does not judge. One just observes...

Mindfulness sees all experiences as equal, all thoughts as equal, all feelings as equal. Nothing is suppressed. Nothing is repressed. Mindfulness does not play favourites...

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<sup>11</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path; The Way to the End of Suffering*, 1999.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/waytoend.html#ch6>

<sup>12</sup> Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, Dhavana Society 1990 [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/personal-development-workshops/mindfworkshop\\_resources/Mindfulness\\_in\\_plain\\_english](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/personal-development-workshops/mindfworkshop_resources/Mindfulness_in_plain_english)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

It is not thinking. It does not get involved with thought or concepts. It does not get hung up on ideas or opinions or memories. It just looks. Mindfulness registers experiences, but it does not compare them. It does not label them or categorize them. It just observes everything as if it was occurring for the first time. It is not analysis which is based on reflection and memory. It is, rather, the direct and immediate experiencing of whatever is happening, without the medium of thought. It comes before thought in the perceptual process.<sup>14</sup>

### **The secularisation of a Buddhist idea**

Over the past 30-40 years, mindfulness has begun to gain currency outside Buddhist circles. In the Western world it has been popularised by the mindfulness practitioner and advocate Jon Kabat-Zinn. Born into a Jewish family, Kabat-Zinn was introduced to Buddhist meditation and mindfulness as a young man by Philip Kapleau, a teacher of Zen Buddhism. He subsequently became a student of the Korean Zen Master, Seung Sahn and was a founding member of the Cambridge Zen Center in Massachusetts.

Kabat-Zinn developed a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme at the University of Massachusetts Hospital based on Buddhist principles. In 1979, he founded the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, which he continues to serve as Founding Executive Director. He has authored several books on mindfulness which have been published in over 35 languages and his work is credited with preparing the way for the entrance of mindfulness into mainstream institutions, such as medicine, psychology, health care, neuroscience, schools, corporations, prisons and professional sport. He and his wife, Myla Kabat-Zinn, are currently supporting initiatives to promote mindfulness throughout the school system beginning at pre-school, and to encourage 'mindful parenting'.

Kabat-Zinn has also served as a board member of the Mind and Life Institute which, under the chairmanship of the Dalai Lama, is dedicated to building a scientific understanding of the mind in order to reduce suffering and promote well-being. The institute seeks to bridge the divide between science on the one hand and contemplative practices and introspective methods on the other.

Although Kabat-Zinn acknowledges that his mindfulness programme is 'without question' founded on Buddhist principles, he has sought to present it in a more secular and scientific way in order to gain acceptance within the medical mainstream:

If you go in talking about the Buddha and inviting masters with shaved heads for lectures, it's going to be perceived right away as some foreign cultural ideology – a belief system. Understandably so, it would likely be rejected.<sup>15</sup>

Kabat-Zinn therefore tends to play down the connection between mindfulness and Buddhism and does not generally identify himself as a Buddhist. In an interview with the Buddhist magazine, the *Shambhala Sun*, he commented:

People don't need any more identifications than they already have... If you present the *dharma* [the teachings of the Buddha] as Buddhism, one half may love it and tell great Zen stories or romantic Chinese Chan stories or exotic Tibetan Vajrayana stories and be sucked into this whole orbit of how wonderful Buddhism is. The other fifty percent may be

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> An interview with Jon Kabat-Zinn, Wherever You Are website, <http://lioncel.tripod.com/jonkabat-zinn.html>

completely turned off, feeling that some Buddhist evangelist is trying to sucker them into a belief system and on top of that, they probably want money.

The challenge we are faced with in mindfulness-based stress reduction is how to make use of a vocabulary, structure and format that will invite people into the deep practice of meditation in a way that lets the practice be American. That has happened in every country Buddhism has ever gone to... At this stage, for Buddhism to become Buddhism it may have to stop being Buddhism. Meditation is not a collection of techniques that belongs to any group. It is a way of being. After all, the Buddha was not a Buddhist.<sup>16</sup>

In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, he was at even greater pains to distance mindfulness from its Buddhist roots: 'Mindfulness, the heart of Buddhist meditation, is at the core of being able to live life as if it really matters. It has nothing to do with Buddhism. It has to do with freedom.' The article records that Kabat-Zinn is reluctant to use the word 'spiritual' to describe the approach to healthy living that he promotes, preferring to characterise it as being 'grounded in common sense':

You don't have to have a belief system or faith of one kind or another. It's not in conflict with faith. It's about a profound connection with the universe... within a faith tradition or outside of any faith tradition.<sup>17</sup>

While people who attend Buddhist meditation centres are frequently seeking the experience of 'enlightenment', people who take the MBSR programme generally know nothing of Buddhist spiritual experience. According to Kabat-Zinn, it is 'a situation made to order for Buddhist work' and sometimes patients encounter something akin to Buddhist 'enlightenment'. He explains:

People do have small experiences of going beyond themselves, of transcendence. We've had several people who have had knock-your-socks-off enlightenment experiences, of the self falling away and so forth. You know it immediately, because the vocabulary that they use is so unusual in describing it. But we don't set this as a goal in people's minds. It's more a question of developing one's own inner wisdom for right living and right awareness.<sup>18</sup>

In his Masters thesis, co-founder of the Mindfulness in Schools Project, Richard Burnett, compares and contrasts secular and Buddhist mindfulness and concludes that mindfulness 'is not something easily pigeon-holed'. From interviews with experts who teach both 'secular' and 'Buddhist' mindfulness, he found 'a huge degree of overlap in the early stages of mindfulness practice, be it in a secular or a Buddhist context', with hardly a line between the two. He found that there was not so much a degree of competition between rival disciplines as 'a profoundly healthy and very much on-going dialogue between them'.<sup>19</sup>

In the recent book, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*, Jeff Wilson from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, demonstrates how Buddhism shed its countercultural image and was assimilated into mainstream American culture. He cites the rise of mindfulness in America as a perfect example of how Buddhism enters new cultures and is domesticated: the new cultures take from Buddhism what they believe will

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Boyce, 'Jon Kabat-Zinn: The Man Who Prescribes the Medicine of the Moment', *Shambhala Sun*, May 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Nomi Morris, 'Fully experiencing the present: a practice for everyone, religious or not', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2010.

<sup>18</sup> An interview with Jon Kabat-Zinn, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Richard Burnett, *Mindfulness in Schools: Learning lessons from the adults – secular and Buddhist*, October 2009.

relieve their specific distresses and concerns, and in the process create new forms of Buddhism adapted to their needs.<sup>20</sup>

Not all Buddhists are comfortable about uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical and religious context in order to repackage it ready for marketing to a secular world. Some critics have dubbed the stripped-down, secularised technique 'McMindfulness'. In an article published in the *Huffington Post*, David Loy, a Zen teacher and Ron Purser, a university professor and Zen practitioner, express the hope that the mindfulness movement will recover a firmer attachment to its Buddhist roots:

One hopes that the mindfulness movement will not follow the usual trajectory of most corporate fads – unbridled enthusiasm, uncritical acceptance of the status quo, and eventual disillusionment. To become a genuine force for positive personal and social transformation, it must reclaim an ethical framework and aspire to more lofty purposes that take into account the well-being of all living beings.<sup>21</sup>

### **The growth of mindfulness**

Mindfulness is deemed so successful that it is being employed in an ever-expanding number of spheres: in schools, colleges and workplaces, in healthcare, and even in Parliament.

#### *(a) Mindfulness in schools*

The Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) was founded in 2007 by three teachers from independent schools: Richard Burnett from Tonbridge, Chris Cullen from Hampton, and Chris O'Neill from Charterhouse, with the support of Mark Williams, former Professor of Clinical Psychology at Oxford University and Director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre. MiSP has prepared a 10-week course for 11-18 year-olds intended for use in the classroom or in small groups within other youth-related settings. Known as the .b course (pronounced 'dot-be'), standing for 'Stop, breathe and be', it is designed to give all students a taste of mindfulness, with each of the 10 lessons teaching a distinct mindfulness skill.<sup>22</sup> The curriculum has been translated into eight languages and is being taught in 38 countries.<sup>23</sup>

A new course, aimed at primary school pupils aged 7-11 has recently been developed, known as Paws b. This programme can either be delivered formally in a series of six, one-hour lessons, or twelve 30-minute lessons within a school's PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education) programme, or it may be offered 'informally through integrating the learning and practice of mindfulness in all National Curriculum subjects and in the children's everyday lives'.<sup>24</sup>

A series of Good Practice Guidelines for the teaching of mindfulness-based courses has been prepared by the UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations, a new body convened by Heather Regan-Addis, a tutor with the Mindfulness Association. The network lists 18 affiliated organisations, including the universities of Aberdeen, Bangor, Exeter, Oxford and Salford, and plans to create a list of trained mindfulness teachers in the UK to help policymakers and the general public identify teachers who have received adequate training.

In July 2015, the Wellcome Trust announced a seven-year national research programme into the effectiveness of mindfulness education. The £6.4 million study will follow nearly 6,000 pupils aged

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://professorjeffwilson.wordpress.com/research-and-publications/> Jeff Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Ron Purser and David Loy, 'Beyond McMindfulness', *Huffington Post*, 1 July 2013.

<sup>22</sup> <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/what-is-b/b-curriculum/>

<sup>23</sup> Eleanor Doughty, 'Present, sir: benefits of a mindful classroom', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 2015.

<sup>24</sup> <http://mindfulnessinschools.org/what-is-b/paws-b-curriculum/>

11-14 across 76 schools. Half the schools will teach mindfulness, while the other half will teach standard PSHE, and each pupil will be followed up for two years. Researchers from the University of Oxford, the University of Exeter, University College London and the Medical Research Council Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit will examine a range of outcomes, including risk of depression, anxiety, social and behavioural skills, peer relationships, wellbeing and school performance.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Wellcome Trust expresses the hope that the research programme will provide more conclusive evidence about ‘whether’ mindfulness is an effective way of improving mental resilience in teenagers, it appears to somewhat prejudge the outcome of the research when it goes on to suggest that: ‘Although an intervention such as mindfulness may have a modest effect at the individual level, its potential to shift a whole population towards greater resilience and wellbeing holds great promise.’<sup>26</sup>

#### *(b) Mindfulness in higher education*

Chris Cullen, one of the founders of the Mindfulness in Schools Project, has also been instrumental in establishing the Mindfulness for Students Network, a body of mindfulness teachers who are interested in supporting the practice of mindfulness in higher education through sharing resources, information and good practice.<sup>27</sup> The network lists around 30 universities in the UK currently offering mindfulness training to students.<sup>28</sup>

#### *(c) Mindfulness in the workplace*

Recent years have also seen a growing number of businesses embracing mindfulness. Companies which run mindfulness programmes for their staff include Transport for London, eBay, Google, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Prudential, the Home Office, the NHS and the London Business School.<sup>29</sup> It has even entered the City of London at Goldman Sachs, Barclays and J P Morgan.<sup>30</sup> Since 2011, the training organisation Mindfulness at Work Ltd has delivered talks, workshops and courses in mindfulness at a wide range of organisations, including local authorities, hospices, investment banks, retailers and charities.<sup>31</sup>

#### *(d) Mindfulness in healthcare*

Since 2004, NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) has been recommending mindfulness for patients suffering with recurrent depression, and mindfulness is increasingly being offered on the NHS in different parts of the country to reduce stress and to treat health conditions such as chronic pain and anxiety. For several years the Mental Health Foundation has been calling for mindfulness to be made available nationally on the NHS.<sup>32</sup> Pregnant women are also being encouraged to practise mindfulness to help reduce prenatal stress and anxiety, and to improve mood and a general sense of wellbeing.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wellcome Trust press release, ‘Large-scale trial will assess effectiveness of teaching mindfulness in UK schools’, 16 July 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Wellcome Trust blog, ‘Mindful of the evidence base’, 16 July 2015.

<sup>27</sup> <http://mindfulnessforstudents.co.uk/about-us/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://mindfulnessforstudents.co.uk/mindfulness-courses-at-uk-universities/>

<sup>29</sup> ‘Mindfulness: helping employees to deal with stress’, *Personnel Today*, 3 September 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Siobhan Norton, ‘Mindfulness meditation is big business in London’s Square Mile’, *The Independent*, 14 March 2015.

<sup>31</sup> <http://mindfulnessatwork.com/workplaces/>

<sup>32</sup> Mental Health Foundation press release, ‘Meditation must be available on the NHS, says Mental Health Foundation’, 5 January 2010.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Dr Sian Warriner, ‘A Mindfulness Approach to Pregnancy and Childbirth’, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust.



### *(e) Mindfulness in Parliament*

Although government ministers have resisted calls to add mindfulness to the school curriculum, several have expressed varying degrees of sympathy and interest in the subject. For example, at the end of a Westminster Hall debate on mindfulness initiated by the tireless advocate of the practice, Chris Ruane MP, the education minister Elizabeth Truss stated:

Mindfulness has been used in schools and is often taught in combination with other relaxation and self-management techniques. Some early indications suggest that such approaches can help pupils to control stress and anxiety, pay attention and develop social skills, and can improve teacher-pupil interactions and enhance academic performance. I support the sharing of good practice and ideas that help pupils to achieve more. I also believe that the best way for schools to find out about what works is from the successes of other schools in similar circumstances. I would like to hear from the hon. Gentleman and interested colleagues about positive examples of schools that are using mindfulness and finding it a successful approach.<sup>34</sup>

Three months later, when asked by the Education Select Committee whether the Department for Education planned to promote courses in mindfulness to raise child wellbeing, the schools minister David Laws responded: 'We are very interested in promoting this. We certainly think that it is an area that merits consideration, based on the evidence we have seen to date. My colleague Liz Truss has been looking at this recently.'<sup>35</sup>

Since May 2014 there has been a Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group devoted to reviewing 'research evidence, current best practice, extent and success of implementation, and potential developments in the application of mindfulness within a range of policy areas, and to develop policy recommendations for government based on these findings'.<sup>36</sup> In October 2015, the group published its *Mindful Nation UK* report in which it made a series of recommendations for the application of mindfulness interventions to the policy areas of education, health, the workplace and the criminal justice system. The report included a Foreword written by Jon Kabat-Zinn.<sup>37</sup>

Chris Cullen, co-founder of the Mindfulness in Schools project offers weekly mindfulness classes on the Parliamentary estate. At the launch of the *Mindful Nation UK* report, it was announced that 115 MPs and peers, together with 80 members of their staff, have received mindfulness training since the beginning of 2013.<sup>38</sup>

### **'Christian mindfulness'?**

Over recent years, mindfulness has begun to be embraced and used in churches and is finding growing acceptance among some evangelicals. One of the foremost advocates of 'mindfulness from a Christian perspective' is Shaun Lambert, Senior Minister of Stanmore Baptist Church in Middlesex. His book, *A Book of Sparks: A Study in Christian Mindfulness* (Instant Apostle, 2014) is warmly commended by figures from a broad church spectrum, including the consulting editor of the *Methodist Recorder*, the Subprior and Abbey Bursar of Worth Abbey, and the Director of the Mind and Soul Foundation, who also serves as pastoral chaplain at Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hansard, House of Commons, 10 December 2013, cols 70-71WH.

<sup>35</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, Oral evidence: Child well-being in England, HC 1034, 12 March 2014, Q118.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/register/mindfulness.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, *Mindful Nation UK*, October 2015.

<sup>38</sup> '195 MPs, peers and staff attend mindfulness classes', Belfast Telegraph, 20 October 2015.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.instantapostle.com/publications/a-book-of-sparks-second-edition-a-study-in-christian-mindfulness/>

Lambert, a member of the New Wine leaders' network, describes Christian mindfulness as 'the lost gospel', and declares that, 'Mindfulness saved my life!' In his view, the 'gospel' of mindfulness was adhered to by the contemplatives in the early centuries of church history, but lost due to a Western overemphasis on reason, logic and propositional truth.<sup>40</sup> 'The 6 Ps that make us tick' at Lambert's church do not appear to allow much space for propositional truth at all:

**Presence** – To be fully alive is to be present: present to our own self, to others, to the world and to God.

**Practice** – We are changed and transformed through practices, spiritual and otherwise.

**Participate** – Our life is on hold if we just sit on the sidelines and don't get involved.

**Perception** – Learning to see clearly through paying attention and learning awareness is at the heart of the truly lived life.

**Play** – We want to release the creativity gifted to all of us, in a multitude of ways.

**Prayer** – Practise the presence of God in prayer.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, Lambert enjoys many opportunities to promote 'Christian mindfulness' within the evangelical mainstream. He has given a series of lectures on the subject as part of the London School of Theology (LST) theology and counselling course, and during both 2014 and 2015, he led sessions within the training stream at the LST Summer School. He has led seminars on 'Mindfulness – the Big Bang', 'Mindfulness – the lost Gospel', 'Mindful relationships' and 'Mindful parenting' at New Wine events, and addressed training events run by the Association of Christian Counsellors, and HTB focus weeks. He has also been interviewed sympathetically on Premier Christian Radio.<sup>42</sup>

In an article published by the Evangelical Alliance's Friday Night Theology series, Lambert argues:

There are truly 50 shades of mindfulness and Christianity has something unique to offer in this area. This is also true in the area of apologetics – not just in the area of psychological and spiritual health – and in developing an awareness of the presence of God.

Christians need to develop a theology and practice of mindfulness, and to engage respectfully and intelligently with the growing body of scientific research which endorses mindfulness. Andrew Newberg, a neuroscientist in the US, calls this 'neurotheology'.

Our culture is in the middle of a paradigm shift embracing mindfulness and related concepts. It is good news for the church if we can rediscover our ancient roots as contemplative evangelists.<sup>43</sup>

### Academic concerns

While advocates cite research which suggests that mindfulness is 'an effective treatment for a variety of psychological problems, and is especially effective for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress',<sup>44</sup> other researchers argue that 'the idea that science has unequivocally shown how meditation can change us is a myth'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 'The lost gospel of mindfulness', *Premier Christianity*, April 2015.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.stanmorebaptistchurch.org.uk/about-us/what-makes-us-tick/>

<sup>42</sup> Premier Christian Radio, 'Shaun Lambert - Christian Mindfulness', 26 March 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Shaun Lambert, '50 shades of mindfulness', Friday Night Theology, Evangelical Alliance, 21 September 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Bassam Khoury et al, 'Mindfulness-based therapy: A comprehensive meta-analysis', *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol 33, Issue 6, August 2013, pp.763–771.

<sup>45</sup> Miguel Farias and Catherine Wikholm, 'Mindfulness has lost its Buddhist roots, and it may not be doing you good', *The Conversation*, 5 June 2015.

Following their extensive research in the course of writing *The Buddha Pill: Can Meditation Change You?* (Watkins Publishing Limited, 2015), the academic psychologists, Miguel Farias and Catherine Wikholm, report that:

After examining the literature from the last 45 years on the science of meditation, we realised with astonishment that we are no closer to finding out how meditation works or who benefits the most or the least from it.

The few available meta-analyses report moderate evidence that meditation affects us in various ways, such as reducing anxiety and increasing positive emotions. However, it is less clear how powerful and long-lasting these changes are — does it work better than physical relaxation for example? Or than a placebo? The evidence on this is contradictory and inconclusive.<sup>46</sup>

Although sitting in silence, focussing on breathing patterns, may appear an innocuous activity with little potential for harm, Farias and Wikholm observe that:

[C]onsidering that many of us rarely sit alone with our thoughts, it isn't hard to see how this might lead to difficult thoughts and emotions rising to the surface for some people – which we may, or may not, be equipped to deal with. Yet the potential for emotional and psychological disturbance is rarely talked about by mindfulness researchers, the media, or mentioned in training courses.

And here we come to an important point. Buddhist meditation was designed not to make us happier, but to radically change our sense of self and perception of the world. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that some will experience negative effects such as dissociation, anxiety and depression.<sup>47</sup>

Buddhists Ronald Purser and Andrew Cooper acknowledge that, 'as [al]most any experienced meditator knows well, meditation can also lead one into some very dark places'. They are sceptical about appeals to science in support of the efficacy of mindfulness:

[O]ne of the few things we can say with certainty about the science of mindfulness is that, at least in its public presentation, it appears to be based more on rhetoric than rigor, having less to do with actual science than it does with sounding 'scienc-y'... [I]t is more that it 'feels' like science than that it is science. In many respects, branding mindfulness in the cloak of science is not all that dissimilar to how any new fitness fad, whether it be low-fat diets or some exercise craze, is promoted. Promoters of the latest diet or exercise program are notorious for cherry-picking studies and appealing to the authority of science to bolster their claims, promising that we can shed pounds and dramatically improve our lives in just a few short weeks. Their solutions almost always turn out to be short-lived fads.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Some of the adverse side-effects experienced by mindfulness practitioners are documented in M Kathleen B Lustyk et al, 'Mindfulness Meditation Research: Issues of Participant Screening, Safety Procedures, and Researcher Training', *Advances*, Vol 24, Issue 1, Spring 2009. See too, Miguel Farias, 'Meditation is touted as a cure for mental instability but can it actually be bad for you?' *Independent*, 21 May 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Purser and Andrew Cooper, 'Mindfulness' "truthiness" problem: Sam Harris, science and the truth about Buddhist tradition', *Salon*, 6 December 2014.

## A theological perspective on mindfulness

In view of the fact that the roots of mindfulness lie in ancient religious philosophies and practices which are antithetical to a Christian worldview, we might well anticipate that its therapeutic use will not stand up to biblical scrutiny. As Douglas Groothuis warns:

If any holistic practice has a questionable or non-Christian origin, it must be carefully evaluated to see if it inextricably involves unbiblical assumptions and/or practices. If so, it must be avoided.<sup>49</sup>

There are a number of respects in which mindfulness falls short:

*It allows no place for objective, absolute truth*

Mindfulness allows no space for making judgments of any kind; it is strictly non-judgmental. As Henepola Gunaratana puts it:

Mindfulness is not trying to achieve anything. It is just looking. Therefore, desire and aversion are not involved. Competition and struggle for achievement have no place in the process. Mindfulness does not aim at anything. It just sees whatever is already there...

Mindfulness does not react to what it sees. It just sees and understands. Mindfulness is the essence of patience. Therefore, whatever you see must be simply accepted, acknowledged and dispassionately observed. This is not easy, but it is utterly necessary. We are ignorant. We are selfish and greedy and boastful. We lust and we lie. These are facts. Mindfulness means seeing these facts and being patient with ourselves, accepting ourselves as we are. That goes against the grain. We don't want to accept. We want to deny it. Or change it, or justify it. But acceptance is the essence of mindfulness.<sup>50</sup>

While such passivity and non-judgmentalism may chime with the spirit of an age which values things for how they make us feel regardless of whether they are true, it runs contrary to the character of a Creator and Judge who is righteous and true, and who has defined what is good and evil in his holy law. God has placed a conscience within every man and woman created in his image in order to give us the capacity to distinguish between moral right and moral wrong. In mindfulness, however, the voice of conscience, designed and given to bear witness to God's moral standards and to serve as a restraint against sin, is silenced.

*It facilitates a postmodern 'spiritual journey'*

According to one academic who describes himself as 'a psychologist in the Reformed theological tradition':

For postmoderns truth is not anchored in a tradition believed to be the one and only way. Rather than seeking a dogmatic orthodoxy, postmoderns describe themselves as pursuing a 'spiritual journey', searching for shelter under a 'sacred canopy'... Mindfulness works because it facilitates the spiritual journey...

Learning a catechism of propositions, 'truths' or 'worldview' is insufficient in a world marked by fragmentation, plurality and multiple voices from diverse perspectives.

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<sup>49</sup> Douglas R Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age*, IVP, 1986, p.68.

<sup>50</sup> Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, *op. cit.*

Postmodern persons have needs that do not benefit from more information, intellectual activity or more material 'stuff', but yearn for formative structures that help bring order out of chaos and provide a way through the fragmentation of contemporary life.<sup>51</sup>

The writer is positive about mindfulness, and concludes by encouraging his readers to 'embrace and celebrate these gifts of healing and life-enhancement'. However, in these few words he demonstrates that the philosophy behind mindfulness is far removed from biblical Christianity which is centred on a Saviour who is 'the way, the truth and the life'.

The fundamental need of postmodern people is not some ill-defined 'spiritual journey' leading to an uncertain destination, nor is it some type of 'formative structure' to help order their chaotic lives. It is rather the truth which will set them free (John 8:32). Those who are tempted to employ mindfulness as some kind of evangelistic tool will inevitably find themselves straying from the faith once delivered to the saints and vulnerable to every wind of doctrine.

*It seeks a sense of peace and wholeness without reference to the God of peace*

From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that man, by nature, is at enmity with God and that all his ills flow from his alienation from his Creator. Our restlessness, our uneasy conscience and our sense of guilt all flow from our sinfulness before a holy God. They cannot be resolved by therapy; the only way of peace is through the blood of Christ's cross (Colossians 1:20). His peace is unique and cannot be replicated by any other source (John 14:27). As those who have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son, it is only as we let our requests be known to God that we shall know the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guarding our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). True peace is to be found not by looking within, or by focussing on our breathing patterns, but by looking to the Lord:

*You will keep him in perfect peace,  
Whose mind is stayed on You,  
Because he trusts in You.  
Trust in the LORD forever,  
For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength. (Isaiah 26:3-4)*

In short, mindfulness is an exercise in godlessness. In mindfulness there is no acknowledgement of the Creator, no recognition of a fallen, sinful nature, no embrace of the Redeemer, no presence of the Holy Spirit, and no hope of a glorious new creation. It is without God and therefore without hope. There is within it no place for self-examination, for conviction of sin, for repentance, or for forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

### **Biblical meditation**

Unlike mindfulness and other Eastern meditative techniques, Christian meditation is not focussed on finding inner peace, harmony or attaining to some form of mystical experience. It differs in terms of its character, its content, its objectives and its fruit. Edmund Clowney writes: 'Christian meditation centres on the revelation of the triune God. Its power and blessing are not in the *technique*... but in the *content*.'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Michael J DeVries, 'Mindfulness in reformed perspective', *Psychology Renewed* blog, 1 October 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Edmund P Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, IVP, 1980, p.35.

True meditation is not about *emptying* the mind; it is rather a discipline that *engages* the mind – and not the mind only, but also the heart and will. It is practised in the presence of God, based on the revelation of God, accompanied by the fear of God, motivated by love for God, and issues in a life lived for the glory of God.

The Scriptures teach us to meditate on God's *character* (Psalm 63:6; 145:5), on his *words* (Psalm 1:2; 119:15,23,48,78,97,99,148) and on his *works* (Psalm 77:12; 119:27; 143:5) with a view to a *life of obedience* (Joshua 1:8). As Peter Toon has written:

[M]editation is a God-ordained channel by which truth from God, written in the Scriptures, enters our minds, passes into our hearts and causes us to adore and love God and desire to serve him the more... Meditation upon God's revelation makes use of the mind, heart and will and ought to lead to wholeminded, wholehearted and wholewilled Christianity.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike Eastern meditative techniques, the Christian who practises biblical meditation does not seek to become detached from the created order. He rejoices in the reality that, 'The earth is the Lord's and all its fulness' (Psalm 24:1) and recognises that 'every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving' (1 Timothy 4:4). There is, nevertheless, a detachment that the Christian does seek, and that is a detachment from sin, and an ever-increasing attachment to God. This was a recurring theme in the preaching and writings of the Puritans. Edmund Calamy declared:

A true meditation is when a man doth so meditate of Christ as to get his heart inflamed with the love of Christ; so meditate of the truths of God as to be transformed into them; and so meditate of sin as to get his heart to hate sin.<sup>54</sup>

Thomas Gouge wrote in similar vein

A set and deliberate meditation is a serious applying of the mind to some spiritual or heavenly subject, discoursing thereof with thyself, to the end thine heart may be warmed, thine affections quickened and thy resolutions heightened to a greater love of God [and] hatred of sin.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

If present trends continue, growing numbers of Christians are likely to encounter mindfulness in their schools, colleges, workplaces and in the context of healthcare. Those entrusted with the care of souls will need to have a clear grasp of the issues in order to give wise counsel.

In addition to warning of the dangers associated with ancient religious practices in modern dress, there is a need to recover the largely lost practice of biblical meditation. Perhaps if Christians were more familiar with the true, they would be better equipped to recognise the false and spurious nature of mindfulness and other Eastern forms of meditation that are gaining a new therapeutic lease of life in a Western world that is reaping the consequences of forsaking God. Not only that, but they will reap a rich spiritual harvest.

*Norman Wells*

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Toon, *Meditating upon God's Word*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988, pp.34-35.

<sup>54</sup> Joel R Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, Reformation Heritage Books, 2012, p.890.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.893.

## Putin would be proud of the Government's anti-extremism plan

Later this year, the Government will introduce legislation it claims will tackle extremism 'in all its forms' by introducing 'Extremism Disruption Orders' (EDOs) – a foolish boast as the Home Office has yet to define what extremism is.

When you look at what ministers have so far said, their idea of extremism seems to include many minority, traditional or unpopular views. These will likely include many campaign groups, mainstream religious leaders, and outspoken atheists.

The Government has decided that to tackle the scourge of extremism it will introduce a catch-all offence, and one which assumes guilt not innocence. Those targeted by the State will not even have had to break a law. David Cameron announced that 'saying to our citizens: "as long as you obey the law, we will leave you alone"' is a 'failed approach' that has to end'.

A loyalist Tory MP told a constituent that teachers who teach that gay marriage is wrong must be subjected to the full force of the new law, in exactly the same way as violent extremists. The future for mild-mannered RE teachers in church schools looks grim. Even environmental protestors, such as those in the North West and Sussex who are concerned about fracking, could be labelled extremists. Teachers are already being encouraged to spy on parents and pupils for this type of behaviour.

This approach smacks of panic. It's neither intelligent nor measured. Worryingly, it embraces all the worst traits of so-called 'governmental logic': we have a problem, we need to do something; EDOs are something, so let's do EDOs.

It was this daft logic that led to Section 5 of the 1986 Public Order Act, originally framed to target street yobs, being used to arrest street preachers, campaigning atheists, a student who called a police horse 'gay' and Peter Tatchell for protesting against an Islamist march.

But countless governments have fallen into this trap.

More chilling is where we find similar legislation. Not in France, Germany, the US, Canada, Australia or India, but in those two bastions of free speech and democracy, Egypt and Russia. So inspirational are Mrs May's proposals that in a recent BBC interview an Egyptian foreign minister defended a law used to imprison journalists by saying 'Egypt is facing terrorism and those who formulated this law have taken into consideration anti-terrorism laws in other countries, including your country'.

President Putin has enacted several anti-free speech measures aimed at clamping down on 'extremists'. It's just a coincidence that the extremists always seem to be from groups associated with the Russian opposition.

No one is denying that there is a problem with a small number of young men becoming radicalised and wanting to perpetrate acts of violence and terrorism against British citizens and our interests. But we have dozens of laws already that enable us to tackle this, including:

1. The Offences Against the Person Act 1861
2. The Public Order Act 1986
3. The Malicious Communications Act 1988
4. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
5. The Terrorism Act 2000
6. The Criminal Justice Act 2003

7. The Communications Act 2003
8. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004
9. The Terrorism Act 2006
10. The Serious Crime Act 2007
11. The Counter-Terrorism Act 2008
12. The Terrorist Asset Freezing etc. Act 2010
13. The Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011
14. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
15. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

This arsenal of legislation – some of which is already regarded as over-broad by civil liberty groups – can be used to target those engaged in terrorism and seize their assets, jail those inciting violence or using threatening behaviour, ban groups connected in any way to terrorism and even allow ministers to suspend existing laws during a time of crisis.

As former Attorney General Dominic Grieve said, the current laws constitute ‘a substantial armoury’. Squashing the rights of dissenters, those who want peacefully to hold and express views, even those we might consider odd, old fashioned or challenging, is not the way to preserve our traditions and way of life.

And while there is clear political imperative to appear tough – to be seen to be doing something, anything – EDOs are not the solution to the radicalisation of a vile, hateful, but small number of people. That takes focus, engagement, hard work and money, not a piece of legislation that criminalises thought, attacks free speech and savages our ancient rights.

*Simon Calvert*

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## **'Extremism', British values and William Wilberforce**

'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.' (Genesis 9:6, NIV, 1984)

*'If to profess humanity to our fellow creatures, and to endeavour with zeal to carry into execution whatever measures lay in my power for promoting their welfare, were the hon. Gentleman's definition of fanaticism, I am afraid that I am a most incorrigible fanatic.'*

William Wilberforce (1816)<sup>1</sup>

If you are a Christian I hope you are an extremist. Before you ring the Government's 24-hour hotline 'channel', let me explain. Jesus said that the most important commandment was to love the Lord with *all* your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbour as yourself.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he even said 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'.<sup>3</sup> This is the extremism required of followers of Jesus – the sort of extremism which characterised Jesus' life<sup>4</sup> and motivated the lives of believers such as William Wilberforce. I hope therefore that you are this type of extremist – a 'good' extremist and not a 'bad' one.

That is the Government's difficulty. If you want to stop bad people, how do you create a definition which catches the baddies and not the goodies? 'Extremism' as a word is morally neutral; it can be bad or good and so the word is not a sensible one to use. But if you choose to use it (as the coalition and this government does), how do you define it?

To deal with the threat of Islamic terrorists the coalition government developed a strategy which it called 'Prevent'. This strategy has defined 'extremism' as: 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.'<sup>5</sup> As far as I am aware, this statement of British values has not been voted on by Parliament.<sup>6</sup>

If it is to work, this definition of 'extremism' should enable us to work out who is a danger to our society and who is not; to sort out the bad from the good. The first thing to say is that there is a lot which is good about the British values identified. Law has been given to us by God in his grace to restrain the effects of the fall and the rule of law is important both for government and to limit government. Liberty equally has an important place in the Bible. The Bible does not prescribe forms of government but democracy was practised in the early church and can be justified as a good way of appointing and limiting governments. Vocal or active opposition to the rule of law, liberty and democracy could be a warning sign that someone might be a danger to our society.

There are however numerous difficulties with defining extremism in this way. First, it is very difficult to identify when someone is actually opposing liberty, democracy or the rule of law. At some point, one person's liberty can become another person's tyranny.<sup>7</sup> When does law-breaking become

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *William Wilberforce*, William Hague (Harper Press, 2007), 396.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:29-31.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:44.

<sup>4</sup> John Stott wrote a book entitled *Christ the Controversialist*.

<sup>5</sup> 'Tackling extremism in the UK', Report from the Prime Minister's Task Force Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism, December 2013 (paragraph 1.3).

<sup>6</sup> This is a paradox given the values are said to include democracy and rule of law.

<sup>7</sup> This dilemma has been classically illustrated by the Ashers' Bakery case or the smoker/non-smoker debate of a decade ago.

opposition to the rule of law? At what point does opposition to an election result become opposition to democracy?<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to use an expression of ideals to identify those who are a threat.

The second problem lies in the words ‘mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’. The drafting is ambiguous. Is ‘mutual respect’ a British value or are ‘respect and tolerance’ meant to be read together?

I suspect, ‘mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’ are meant to be read together as one value. This gives rise to a troubling (third) problem. Every time anyone criticises the beliefs of ISIS fighters they may be failing to be tolerant of a different faith and belief. The same is true whenever someone takes issue with my belief that Jesus is the way, truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through him.<sup>9</sup> Surely liberty and democracy and a strategy to prevent terrorism require us to have those discussions and to challenge one another’s beliefs?

This brings me to one of the biggest omissions of all from the statement of values.<sup>10</sup> At the heart of this fourth problem lies a failure of the stated British values to include any explicit reference to the intrinsic value of human life. As Christians this is of fundamental importance as the Bible tells us all people are made in God’s image;<sup>11</sup> indeed, in Genesis 9 God makes it clear that taking the life of another human being made in God’s image is tantamount to attacking God himself.<sup>12</sup> The value of our lives is bestowed upon us by God and does not lie in what we believe. This is the foundation of our laws on offences against the person.<sup>13</sup> It is the absence of recognition of the intrinsic value of life which characterises the terrorists, torturers, rapists and violent people the government seeks to stop. A ‘Prevent’ strategy based on the intrinsic value of every human being would be more effective in achieving the Government’s aims and less likely to have the harmful and counter-productive side effects of the current strategy. The ‘Prevent’ strategy should seek to stop those whose ideas or beliefs include the use of force or violence to injure or coerce others.

William Wilberforce understood the intrinsic value of every human being – his understanding of it was at the heart of his campaign to abolish the slave trade. However he had trenchant views on other religions. Thus, for example, he attacked Hinduism, the caste system ‘and the practices of polygamy, infanticide and *suttee*, and the worshipping of gods who “are monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness and cruelty”’.<sup>14</sup> The depth of Wilberforce’s understanding of the value human life meant that his views on Hinduism remained topics for debate and would never have led him to cause harm, mistreatment or suchlike to any of its adherents. All he wanted was for them to hear about Jesus Christ – although he was clear that he was not advocating compulsory conversion to Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Scottish nationalists argue for independence as the way to get rid of the Conservative rule over Scotland. Is that opposition to democracy? Problems with differing concepts of democracy are illustrated by noting that the former East Germany called itself the German Democratic Republic.

<sup>9</sup> John 14:6

<sup>10</sup> The other is arguably the omission of any reference to truth, which should underpin everything. The obvious difficulty is that we can no longer agree as a society on what truth is, or whether it even exists, robbing us of a system of thought and moral framework essential to much needed value judgments on what is good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 9:6. The verse is quoted in full at the top of this article. The prohibition on taking human life is not absolute but it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the circumstances in which the taking of human life is permitted.

<sup>13</sup> See ‘Offences against the person Act 1861’ and Blackstone’s Commentaries.

<sup>14</sup> *William Wilberforce*, William Hague (Harper Press, 2007), 410.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Compulsion and Christianity! Why, the very terms are at variance with each other: the ideas are incompatible.’ Wilberforce, July 1813. *Ibid.*, 411.

It comes down to this: if Jesus died and rose again to save those who trust in him on the day of judgment, it is worth telling others – atheists, Muslims, Hindus or any non-believer. Freedom to tell others, to speak the truth about Jesus, is essential – but that must mean others having equal opportunity to challenge our beliefs and to tell us about theirs. Parts of the Christian Faith are in fundamental respects at odds with other belief systems and faiths<sup>16</sup> and therefore under the current ‘Prevent’ strategy and the proposed bill to be published this autumn, if Christians articulate those differences, we risk being accused of not tolerating or respecting other faiths or beliefs and being branded ‘extremists’ – even though we only want to use words to set out the claims of the gospel. Our liberty to tell the truth about Jesus is at stake. We must act now to persuade the government not to legislate in such a way as will make sharing the gospel that much harder and more costly.

*Ian Miller*

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<sup>16</sup> A moment’s thought shows this to be true. Christianity is theistic and not polytheistic or atheistic; it holds that Jesus was/is the Son of God and not just a prophet; it holds that we are sinners only saved from God’s judgment by Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross etc.

## The Inadequacy of Pluralism

Pluralism is the strategy by which a variety of religions is allowed to co-exist in the same society and world, some of them believing and preaching mutually-exclusive messages, without being subject to discrimination or penalty.

On the basis of pluralism, which is the current religious regime in the UK, Christianity and Islam, for example, both have the right to declare, with equal freedom and toleration, that theirs is the only way of salvation for everyone in the world in all generations, and that all religions other than their own are false. Self-evidently, they cannot both be right, and at least one must be a delusion, but this is no problem to pluralism, which has no reason to let truth get in the way of a useful social convention.

In recent years, evangelicals have tended to support the concept of pluralism, seeing it as a safe haven in turbulent times. When social attitudes to religion and faith are rapidly changing, with unpredictable results, pluralism, it can be argued, does provide a guarantee that churches can continue in their familiar pattern, with only a relatively modest amount of harassment. Pluralism allows everyone freedom of speech – a rightly-prized entitlement – and therefore enables the gospel to be preached. It permits a church to exercise a wide range of ministries to build its own life. It sanctions the visible presence of a church building within a physical community environment, and tolerates the engagement of that church, through its activities and personal contact, with the people who live in those communities.

Pluralism extends precisely the same rights and privileges to every other religion as well. How much better this is, it is argued, than in many other nations of the world in which one dominant religion holds sway, and the rights of minority faiths are restricted, if they exist at all, and where persecution of various kinds is an everyday occurrence.

Without undervaluing the identifiable benefits of the safety zone which pluralism offers, this article sets out to query whether pluralism is a cause which Christians should seek to espouse, defend and advance in all social and political circumstances. The article first sets out three reasons why pluralism may be deficient, and concludes with a few suggestions in favour of a more triumphalist Christian strategy.

### **What are the particular deficiencies of pluralism?**

The first deficiency of pluralism is that it does not remotely meet a Christian's aspirations.

Let me take you to one of the most delightful scenic views in England. It is the view from the vantage-point, on the border of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, from which Lord Fairfax spied on the movement of royal troops before the battle of Naseby in 1645. Today the viewer sees a stretch of countryside which is coherent, beautiful, full of interest and unspoiled. The varied greens of the fields, hedges, ridges and undulations form the canvas on which feature the half-hidden houses of Clipston and East Farndon.

It is breathtaking in its beauty, but even more so in its coherence. The scenery screams out that it is part of one society and nation – not merely terrain peopled by a miscellany of unconnected individuals and small groups. Clipston itself is a village from which minor roads shoot out in all directions, along one of which is a 200-year-old chapel building latterly taken over by a more recently-established group of believers.

My aspirations are for the fragrance of Christ emanating from this group of believers to overwhelm the whole population of Clipston, and that this should be the fruit of gospel truth and gospel life in every village, town and city in Great Britain, so that 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2:14). These desires will not be satisfied by the lordship of pluralism.

Secondly, pluralism is inconsistent with the nature of God, and with the pattern of his dealings with men and nations. Pluralism does not square with the jealousy of God, and his insistence that 'I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to idols' (Isaiah 42:8). If God says that about himself, is it right for us to approve of a public policy in our own nation which regards all religions as equal, and therefore all deities as equal? In pluralism there would be no place for the decree of Darius recorded in Daniel 6:26, since the State could not legitimately intervene to give supremacy to one religion over another.

Thirdly, pluralism is only viable in practice where all religions are minorities, which is effectively the position in 21<sup>st</sup> century Great Britain. Once any one religion is a majority faith, whichever religion it is, it will inevitably ensure, wittingly or unwittingly, that its own beliefs and values pervade the nation and are reflected in public policy.

We are not only talking about Islam here, in the light of our awareness of the dominance it has in every aspect of politics, society and culture in those countries where it is already the majority religion. We are talking about Christianity as well.

If 90 per cent of the UK population were evangelical Christians, biblical Christianity would become the majority faith and public policy would be based on Bible principles. For the most part this would result, not from government willingness to listen to the voice of the churches, but from the fact that 90% of political party members would also be evangelicals, and manifestos would naturally contain policies which run with the grain of Bible truth and principle, instead of against it. Imagine a world in which 90 per cent of the British Medical Association, 90% of journalists and 90% of schoolteachers are evangelicals. State schools would effectively be faith schools, with the support of the government. The sanctity of life – in the research centres, in the womb and in the care of the elderly – would be secured by ethical medical policies. Dream on, you say. It is a blissful hypothesis, but by the grace of God neither impossible nor unprecedented.

It is not in the above policy spheres that an evangelical majority would face its greatest challenge. The real tension would be over the way in which the majority faith would treat religious minorities. Christianity, and particularly evangelical Christianity, is a profoundly benign religion – much more benign than is sometimes alleged by those who want to be seen to be even-handed in what they say about religions. Even so, this benign Christianity, if in the majority, would struggle to be willing to allow the minority faiths all the rights and privileges they enjoy at present. Of course, without question it would grant them freedom of worship and freedom of speech. But in some of the more public expressions of the presence and the practices of the minority faiths, I expect there would be a tougher regime. Planning permissions and public money would be harder to obtain, the establishment less ready to accommodate diversity, and individual adherents of minority faiths would have more hoops to go through to secure any privileges linked to religious practice.

In a largely evangelical society, the minority religions and their practices are much more likely to be viewed as 'heathen' – as they were in the early years of the modern missionary movement (1792-1850). There would be much more pressure than exists at present to restrict public expression of 'heathen' religious custom and practice.

**If this will be the situation if evangelicals became a majority, what should the attitude of evangelicals be under a regime of pluralism?**

One option is to have nothing to do with anything except the gospel. This strategy is advanced by some, on the basis that the gospel is our great commission and that to have any other focus could prove to be a damaging distraction.

There is some truth in the underlying fear. When Dr R W Dale (1829-1895) became sole pastor of Carrs Lane Congregational Chapel in Birmingham in 1859, he succeeded John Angell James (1785-1859), an out-and-out evangelical who had helped to establish the Evangelical Alliance in 1848. During his ministry over the next 36 years, Dale became known by a number of epithets, one of which was 'preacher of the civic gospel'. A contemporary in Birmingham of John Bright (1811-1889), Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) and George Cadbury (1839-1922), Dale played a major part in establishing its reputation as 'the best-governed city in the world'. His personal contribution to its health and human well-being was colossal and genuinely reforming. On his watch, the city's education blossomed, life expectancy increased by 15 years through improved housing, and the city gained a 'civic pride' which was widely envied. The fruits of all these benefits were still abundantly evident in the Birmingham of my own childhood in the 1950s. The gains were immense and ought not to be under-stated.

However, the city paid a great price for its social amelioration. With the arrival of Dale, the clear bugle note of the gospel was lost amid the welter of other causes. Not only was it lost in Dale's own church, but in the churches of all the denominations in this teeming city. This set the pattern for more than half a century, so much so that by the 1950s, in the 60-or-so Baptist churches of Greater Birmingham, one would have struggled to find more than two which could have been remotely described as 'evangelical' by today's understanding of the term. Christianity became a religion whose tenets and values inspired a corporate social ethos and agenda, rather than a faith which proclaimed the way of salvation to needy sinners.

Since the danger of downgrade is ever-present, so the argument runs, we should lay aside every other aspiration, and have the gospel solely and centrally as our focus. Those who make this case usually put forward another contention which strongly supports it – that the nation will only change if its people change, and they will only be changed by the work of the gospel. The corollary of this is also true. If people are changed by the gospel in large numbers, the private and public life of the nation will be changed as a natural consequence, without the need to address moral and social issues directly or individually.

The main planks of the above argument are all true, but they are not enough. The earth is the Lord's now, even in deepest spiritual darkness. His lordship must be acknowledged by his people in their entire outlook, conduct and message, all the time. Whatever their circumstances, they cannot believe one thing and preach another. Nor can they proclaim one truth about God from the rooftops, while remaining totally silent about another.

Nor should they take one view when times are hard, and believe or act differently, if we can borrow an expression from the Post-millennialists, should the 'glory days' be ushered in.

The posters outside many churches say: 'We preach Christ crucified.' But we do also preach him 'Lord of all.' Triumphalism is in our generation a word which is only ever used pejoratively, but it is the word which most technically correctly describes the desire to express 'Lord of all' – the supremacy and vindication of Christ in the whole world.

## How should we express triumphalism in a pluralist society?

Two triumphalist mind-sets which can be rejected immediately are:

- (a) That Britain is a divinely-favoured nation. There is no biblical nor logical justification for any such idea. God established nationhood as one of his three pre-eminent expressions of community in man's world – the others being the family and the church – but the Israel of the Bible is the only specially-favoured nation.
- (b) That Britain is irrevocably and inevitably a Christian nation and should be regarded and ruled as such, irrespective of its current religious and spiritual state. A nation is what it is now – not what it used to be. It is answerable for what it is now, and any nation which pleases God by the way it conducts itself may be subject to his blessing.

However, three other legitimate and cogent triumphalist arguments can be advanced which will lift evangelical ambitions well beyond the doldrums of pluralism:

- (a) When a country's laws, social assumptions and policies are based on Christian values and biblical principles, this is good for the nation and society.
- (b) The vast majority of Britain's population claims to be 'Christian' whatever it means by that. In the 2001 Census, a question about religious adherence was included for the first time, and 71% professed to be 'Christian.'<sup>17</sup> This is more significant than it may seem, given that the question was entirely voluntary, and Christianity was certainly not the 'default option'. There was a box marked 'None' which fulfilled that role.
- (c) Since 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it' the people of God have a duty to exercise a prophetic voice. They are the conscience of the nation, reminding rulers that they are appointed by God (Romans 13:1) and accountable to God (Romans 13:4) and have a moral duty to exercise a righteous rule. If the people of God are not fulfilling this prophetic duty, it is certain that no-one else will be.

These triumphalist truths need to be publicly declared to government and institutions, and to all the Christian and non-Christian sections of our population, unhesitatingly and continually, in the wide range of appropriate ways still available to us.

*Rod Badams*

***The above was previously published in The Bulletin in July 2008.***

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<sup>17</sup> Since its publication in 2008, in the more recent 2011 Census, the proportion claiming to be Christian had dropped to 59%, but that this is still a significant majority, and the principle still applies. The difference is chiefly explained by the fact that between 2001 and 2011, the proportion claiming to have no religion increased from 15% to 25%. The latter increase is not caused by people abandoning their previous Christian allegiance, but by the fact that far more of the new census respondents (mainly young adults), for whom the 2011 Census was their first, are professing to have no religion than was the case with the elderly generation who died between 2001 and 2011.

## Pastoring a Miscarriage

As is the case with much of human sorrow, we respond to that which we have not personally experienced with some naivety. Yet the experience and grief behind miscarriage suffers particularly from misunderstanding and ignorance. Many grieving parents have been shocked and deeply hurt at the responses of blithe sympathy, impatience, and even contempt to their bereavement, as though it were a sad inconvenience. Unless we have walked through a miscarriage ourselves, or walked closely with those who have, many of us have no idea of the horror and myriad pastoral implications that arise from losing an unborn child.

### Zuckerberg breaks the silence

Part of the problem is the mythical silence that surrounds miscarriage. It is an oddity that we live in a society that boasts in its sexual immorality and yet the experience of the death of an unborn child is shrouded in silence and shame. No doubt we have inherited this from eras when wives concealed such secrets from even their husbands, let alone anyone else. This is pastorally devastating, however. The current lack of open and sincere response to miscarriage or stillbirth does little to comfort and support the grieving mother who is already bogged down by her own self-imposed feelings of guilt, failure and pain. It was telling when in August Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced that he and his wife had suffered three consecutive miscarriages: candid conversation and 'confession' broke out online, challenging the miscarriage taboo and myth.

### Dear pastors and church members...

This silence needs to be broken so that couples can journey through their loss in a healthy and even godly way. The church family should by definition give an informed and compassionate response. This article seeks to enable, in some small way, pastors, church workers and church members to effectively and appropriately pastor and support those going through this unique loss. Why is it unique? As we shall see, the physical implications of miscarrying a baby, married with the emotional loss, means miscarriage is, to say the least, pastorally complicated.

### No more trite one-liners, please!

Those in our church families who have suffered or are suffering a miscarriage, as well as non-Christians of course, want no more pat answers. For decades (probably centuries) miscarrying women have been told 'not to cry'. Maureen Rank, the author of *Free to Grieve* says it has been seen to be an 'experience for which only minimal grieving is considered acceptable'.<sup>1</sup> She continues, 'Women who lose pregnancies sometimes feel frightened, other times guilty, often confused, but nearly always very alone.'<sup>2</sup> It is destructive to Christ's Body that upon this suffering, our sisters in Christ feel isolated when they need the love of the church family most. We Christians are notorious for breathing off one-liners or Scriptural texts while we squirm in discomfort. Is it not time for meaningful pastoral and gospel responses from all members of the Body of Christ to the trials of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

### Yes, it is a bereavement

'Disbelief' sums up my reaction to the lack of understanding that followed our two miscarriages. Most of our friends and family either ignored the issue or said the most unhelpful things that ranged from 'are you feeling better now?', 'you *do* have two children' and 'it just wasn't meant to be', to

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<sup>1</sup> Maureen Rank, *Free to Grieve: Healing and Encouragement for Those Who Have Experienced the Physical, Mental and Emotional Trauma of Miscarriage or Stillbirth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



‘maybe it’s God’s way of telling you not to have any more’ or ‘does it count if you lost it so early’? Only a precious few were pastorally spot on!

The world talks about losing a ‘pregnancy’ more than losing a child. Because it is said that 20% of conceptions end in loss we use this as an excuse to be pastorally idle or insensitive. Yet a high number of this 20% are unknown by the parents. When my husband and I stood in front of our baby’s grave, trying to muster all our faith in a good God to genuinely say ‘the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD’ (Job 1:21), there was little ambiguity: We had buried our sweet baby in the cold hard ground and the pain was deep and merciless.

### **Health care professionals are NOT pastors**

The health care professionals whom the miscarrying couple come into contact with are not in the position to offer any meaningful support, other than (at most) some snippets of sympathy during appointments. Some health care professionals can actually make this very difficult situation worse. Maureen Rank tells of one doctor breaking the terrible news to a woman overcome with contractions and bleeding, with the words, ‘you’re going to miscarry, probably within the week. So... go home and do it!’ This left the woman in even more fear and confusion.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Ethical differences*

The cold, detached, and patronising manner of my own obstetrician after my second miscarriage left me similarly confused and angry. He offered no words of sympathy or comfort and then responded impatiently at my desire for a ‘conservative’ or natural delivery of my loss. I was uncomfortable using the same surgical procedure used to end an unborn life. This meant an already extremely painful appointment turned nasty, as he sneered at me stating ‘It isn’t an abortion!’ I couldn’t believe my ears. In my immense grief I was all too aware that my baby was already dead. I foolishly had looked to my doctor for reassurance and support, and only found judgment and dismissal that added to my wounds. Another couple, whilst expressing their grief to their doctor, were interrupted, ‘Wait now. You can’t think of this as losing a baby – it was a foetus, a mass of cells. What you lost was just tissue, not a person.’<sup>4</sup>

These are extreme examples where Christian medical ethics clash with the mainstream. This only goes to show that even the kindness and compassion of gifted nurses and doctors cannot take the place of the pastor. Bereaved Christian parents need to make gospel sense of their bewildering loss – this eternal comfort can only be found in the church, within a Christian worldview.

### **Physical implications**

Some consideration of the physical process of miscarriage must be given in order for us to fully understand the ordeal and so give some level of informed care. It is perhaps our British aversion to such honesty that has added to undue reserve or disregard in this issue.

The physicality of miscarriage is not for the faint-hearted – the bleeding alone can be horrific and very traumatising. Depending on how long the pregnancy progressed it might be anything from a heavier period to a bath full of blood, clots, and human tissue. In some cases of stillbirth (loss after 20 weeks of pregnancy), some women are forced to work through a bloody and physically painful labour to give birth to the little one they have already lost. Personally I still find it frustrating and distressing that my body was completely unable to progress naturally into labour for the delivery of my two living children, but I shifted easily into labour to deliver my dead baby.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21.

During miscarriage, bleeding can stop and start over a period of weeks, adding to the emotional rollercoaster. In some cases, in very early pregnancy, the miscarriage can take weeks to be confirmed, if the scan is inconclusive or the pregnancy hormone remains. In this time the parents live on an all-consuming knife-edge between hope and despair.

Other physical implications of miscarriage include the possibility of the woman experiencing the bleak and suffocating darkness of postnatal depression... but with no baby. Another is the risk of infection where further treatment after the miscarriage can prolong the experience. In the case of serious infection a hysterectomy might be necessary, resulting in infertility. If an ectopic pregnancy occurs, where the egg implants and the embryo develops in the fallopian tube, the removal of the baby and fallopian tube is necessary. In this case the baby may still be alive and so the couple have to deal with immense guilt of ending the pregnancy, although the mother's life was at stake.

In the event of the death of an unborn baby, many Christian couples are not given the time or freedom to request a natural delivery of their little one. Instead, at the doctor's orders the mother is rushed in for surgery (the dilation and curettage procedure). This can be problematic to say the least. Some couples struggle with their own ethical stance since the D&C is used to perform abortions. Adding to this is the fact that there is no body to hold and grieve over: the foetus is destroyed and taken away. One friend of my mine explained she felt robbed of her baby and the ability to bury and mourn, 'I don't know where they took my baby! Probably they took my baby to the hospital incinerator and I don't even believe in cremation.'

#### *Womb of death*

If one is pastoring a couple through miscarriage then they need to understand the woman's experience of death coming from inside her own body. This renders miscarriage a very personal and unique type of bereavement because the dead body is inside you. Many mothers are hugely sensitive to this reality. Women who have miscarried need to be pastored sensitively and shown that their bodies are not bodies of death. Even in the case of infertility or when a successful pregnancy is never reached, Psalm 139 is one biblical aid that can give counsel and encouragement of the sovereignty and goodness of God in the womb. There is no womb of death.

#### **Pastoral issues**

So I hope it is becoming clear that the pastoral issues that result from miscarriage abound. There are feelings of guilt and blame – particularly as some women will have to fight with the thought that they killed their own child. Whether the miscarriage is the past or the present, such mothers are bombarded with thoughts of trying to account for their loss: 'Did I get too stressed? Or over-exert myself? Did I eat or do something dangerous? Was it my fault?'

Then there is the strong sense of failure. Sociologists at Clemson University, USA, observed that mothers mourning the death of an unborn or stillborn child wrestled much more with guilt, failure, anger and bitterness than those who lost their babies later in life.<sup>5</sup> This sense of failure is holistic, especially in the felt humiliation of multiple miscarriage; it does not necessarily reserve itself for child-bearing but can affect the whole of life and be detrimental to the woman's self-esteem.

If another pregnancy does occur then there is living with the constant dread of another miscarriage – like the spouse who lives under the constant fear of another affair. Many couples in our churches endure the seemingly endless nightmare of repetitive miscarriages with little support.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18.

The emotional recovery after a miscarriage can be lengthy. Sarah Fuller writes in her book *Confessions of a Childless Mother*, 'My initial experience of complete blackness was confined to those first few days. Yet the following months were still impossibly difficult. Whilst coping externally perhaps, internally I was... "barely functional" ... I finally reached my first level "plateau" about eighteen months after the operation.'<sup>6</sup>

We have not even considered the theological questions plaguing the couple: 'Is God punishing us? Is our baby in heaven? Will we ever meet our baby?' In addition, the loss of an unborn baby can put immense strain on the marriage. Particularly as each partner might grieve in different ways. Pastoral care needs to focus on the husband as well as the wife – as individuals, as well as a couple.

### **Encourage grief**

One of the best things we can do in pastoring a miscarriage is to encourage grief. My husband and I found people communicated frankly to us their opinion that there was no need to be sad. However, the healthiest response for the couple is to grieve in a situation where it is not easily facilitated. 'When a child dies in miscarriage, society provides no outlets for the grief. People don't usually sympathize unless the mother has to be hospitalized. There is no body to mourn; no headstone is laid. Grief is dammed up in a reservoir with no floodgates to open.'<sup>7</sup> Sometimes it is simply our duty as brothers and sisters in Christ to sit in silence and 'mourn with those who mourn' (Romans 12:15).

### **The gospel treatment**

As we said earlier, a Christian couple who are having, or have suffered, a miscarriage will be desperate to make gospel sense of their loss. As a young couple it might be their first experience of death or deep sorrow. However, finding a biblical explanation can be difficult. As Jessalyn Hutto wrote in her recent article *The Baby Given to Women Who Miscarry* for the Gospel Coalition, we need to point these women 'to the comforting, joy-inducing reality of Jesus Christ. Because his gospel truth is everything to a women who has miscarried.'<sup>8</sup> Hutto unapologetically points her readers to the spiritual fall of humankind in Eden and the inheritance of the curse of death, "'In pain you shall bring forth children'" (Genesis 3:16). How personally this aspect of the curse is felt by those, like myself, who've lost babies in the womb... Sin's dark consequences claim our babies and leave our wombs – as well as hearts – scarred.'

In pastoring a miscarriage we give those suffering the hope of Jesus Christ in a world groaning in sin (Romans 8). Babies die because of our union with Adam, but our union with Christ gives us a real, tangible hope.

It was the coherence of the gospel that made sense to the seemingly senseless and arbitrary nature of our losses. In all the physical and pastoral mess of miscarriage, the Easter victory of Jesus becomes our anthem and kicks against Satan's defeated warmongering. Effectively pastoring a miscarriage can only be done in the gospel context, where a baby 'conceived within a frail, sin-infected womb'<sup>9</sup>, yet conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, saves us from such a physical outworking of sin and death.

*Natalie Brand*

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Fuller, *Confessions of a Childless Mother: Learning to Trust God through Infertility* (Leominster: DayOne, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Rank, 24-25.

<sup>8</sup> Jessalyn Hutto, *The Baby Given To Women Who Miscarry*, The Gospel Coalition: 15 October 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## Life Issues

### Abortion

#### The Planned Parenthood affair

For the last few months, the abortion issue has been dominated by one story – that of Planned Parenthood of America. The mother organisation, IPPF, International Planned Parenthood Federation, has its roots in Brooklyn, New York, where Margaret Sanger opened the first birth-control clinic in the US. In 1921, she founded the American Birth Control League which, in 1942, changed its name to Planned Parenthood. IPPF now works in 170 countries worldwide, with 30,000 staff and millions of volunteers. Its mission includes, ‘... sexual and reproductive health and rights concerns’, which is code for mass abortion. For example, in the US, Planned Parenthood performs some 300,000 abortions annually. In the UK, the pro-choice Family Planning Association, fpa, is a Member Association of the IPPF.

During 2013, David Daleiden, often described as an anti-abortion activist, founded the Center for Medical Progress (CMP). He then set up a bogus biomedical research company, called Biomax Procurement Services, as a cover to enable CMP members to pose as buyers of foetal tissues and organs. They set up a series of undercover stings in which they secretly filmed Planned Parenthood officials purportedly discussing the illegal sale of aborted baby parts, foetal tissues, to medical researchers for financial gain. In July 2015, the CMP started releasing these videos allegedly showing examples of these illegal transactions.

The story has caused not inconsiderable uproar across America. The pro-choice movement has denounced the accusations as untrue and the videos as deceitfully edited. An editorial in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, described the CMP videos as part of a ‘campaign of misinformation’ by an organisation intent to ‘twist the facts’. Others have accused pro-lifers of stupidly anthropomorphising foetuses and embryos, as well as CMP’s activities as ‘corporate espionage’. Planned Parenthood has maintained that the financial discussions were about shipping and handling costs to biotech companies, not profit - ‘There is no financial benefit for tissue donation for either the patient or for Planned Parenthood’. Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood, has sought to placate those women who have consented to post-abortion tissue donations by declaring, ‘Your commitment to lifesaving research, developing treatments for diseases like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s, is important and compassionate.’

The pro-life movement has used the affair to expose the physical, ethical and financial horrors associated with abortion. David Daleiden accused Planned Parenthood of altering its surgical abortion procedures in order to acquire the higher priced intact foetuses and entire tissues, such as brains and livers. He has stated, ‘Planned Parenthood is a criminal organisation from the top down and should be immediately stripped of taxpayer funding and prosecuted for their atrocities against humanity.’

The action has more recently moved from the media and into the courts and government. The National Abortion Federation is suing CMP and Planned Parenthood is also considering legal action. In September 2015, a US court ruled that Daleiden and the CMP must submit private documents and details of the video stings along with their full raw footage. StemExpress, the tissue procurement company that works with Planned Parenthood and is featured in some of the CMP videos, has also obtained a similar court ruling. Congressional investigations have started. There has been a concerted push to cut state funding of Planned Parenthood, which currently amounts to \$0.5 billion

of taxpayers' money each year. A defunding Bill was proposed in the US Senate, but it failed to pass on 3 August. Planned Parenthood is now under investigation by the House of Representative's Oversight and Government Reform Committee. A September interim Memorandum from that Committee's chairman, Jason Chaffetz, stated, 'Planned Parenthood and its affiliates have spent millions in recent years on "blowout" parties, first-class travel and "lucrative" salaries'.

By mid-October, Planned Parenthood had announced that its health centres would no longer accept financial reimbursement for procuring post-abortion body parts. Big deal! The horror is that they still find cutting up unborn children and salvaging their bits and pieces to be an acceptable practice. Pro-life organisations called this belated 'policy change' a PR stunt and little more than a last-ditch effort to avoid prosecution while retaining its massive funding from US taxpayers. This affair is far from over – as they say, 'the case continues'.

### **Sex-selection abortions**

In November 2014, Fiona Bruce MP introduced her Abortion (Sex-Selection) Bill in the House of Commons. Considerable evidence had been previously produced by *The Daily Telegraph* undercover reporters along with anecdotes from the general public that abortions on the grounds of gender – typically female – were illegally taking place in the UK. The Bruce Bill got lost in a mire of procedural ambiguities. It was eventually shuffled into the Serious Crime Bill. The only positive outcome was that the Department of Health was mandated to examine the various claims.

In August 2015, the Department published its required report, *Assessment of termination of pregnancy on grounds of the sex of the foetus – Response to Serious Crime Act 2015*. And its conclusion? 'However, we have found no substantiated concerns of gender abortions occurring in England, Wales and Scotland.' So, gender-specific abortions occur elsewhere in the world, but not in the UK. Do you believe that? Statistics rarely tell the whole truth.

## **Assisted Reproductive Technologies**

### **Adverse IVF incidents**

Is all going well in the IVF clinics across the UK? Not entirely. In September, the HFEA published its second annual report entitled, *Adverse incidents in fertility clinics: lessons to learn*. It covers the year 2014 and can be read here: [http://www.hfea.gov.uk/docs/Incidents\\_report\\_2015\\_designed\\_-\\_WEB\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.hfea.gov.uk/docs/Incidents_report_2015_designed_-_WEB_FINAL.pdf)

A total of 465 incidents were reported. Of these, two were classified as grade A, the most serious, with 166 grade B incidents and 232 at grade C. Grade B incidents include events such as severe or critical ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS), the loss of a patient's embryos and breaches of confidentiality. Grade C incidents occur, for example, where one of a patient's ova may be rendered unusable but others remain, so treatment is not completely futile. And there were 65 other reports that were unclassified.

One of the grade A incidents involved a patient who became pregnant with twins after an embryo affected by chromosomal translocation was inadvertently transferred, despite undergoing screening for the genetic condition using pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), or as the HFEA Report stated, '... the pregnancy was affected by an unbalanced chromosome translocation.' The incident occurred at CARE Fertility Nottingham, which had used a third party laboratory, Genesis Genetics Europe (GGEu), to test the embryos. A failure of the technology rather than human error was blamed. Of all the seven adverse incidents relating to misdiagnosis by PGD since 2009, six have occurred with CARE Fertility Nottingham.

The second grade A incident took place at the South East Fertility Clinic in February 2014. Seven patients treated on the same day underwent ova collection followed by successful fertilisation. However, it was later noticed that none of the embryos developed properly. The HFEA concluded that they were probably placed in petri dishes with 'sub-optimal media'. No pregnancies resulted from the treatments and the Clinic offered the affected patients another cycle of treatment free of charge.

Perhaps the above needs a little context. The total incidents reported represent approximately 1% of the 60,000 IVF treatments carried out by UK fertility clinics each year. And the numbers were slightly down on the previous year. Even so ...

### **HFEA in trouble again**

The most senior family judge in England and Wales, Justice James Munby, has castigated the HFEA and several IVF clinics for their 'widespread incompetence across the sector' and 'alarming and shocking' failures that have left dozens of couples who had a child through artificial insemination by donor (AID) in doubt about whether the child legally belonged to both of them.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 and clinic licensing conditions require that both partners be given information, offered counselling, and sign consent forms before beginning treatment to ensure that both become the child's legal parents. But 51 of the 109 clinics licensed by the HFEA had 'anomalies' in their records, said Sir James Munby, president of the High Court's family division. These included essential documents – known as WP and PP forms – not signed, not fully completed, filled in by the wrong person, or with missing pages. It is understood that 85 other couples could have their parentage called into doubt because of similarly inaccurate paperwork.

Sir James stated, 'The picture revealed is one of what I do not shrink from describing as widespread incompetence across the sector on a scale which must raise questions as to the adequacy if not of the HFEA's regulation then of the extent of its regulatory powers. That the incompetence to which I refer is, as I have already indicated, administrative rather than medical is only slight consolation, given the profound implications of the parenthood which in far too many cases has been thrown into doubt.' These scathing remarks came as a result of cases brought by five heterosexual couples and two same-sex couples who were the victims of bureaucratic ineptitude. After the babies were born the couples learned that they might not be the legal parents. The judge granted legal parentage to all the parents, saying that they had already suffered greatly.

### **And the HFEA's response**

On 11 September, the HFEA issued the following response to the above cases:

*'These hearings have no doubt been very stressful for the families involved and today's judgment is clearly welcome news for them. They rightly assumed that legal parenthood was beyond doubt; finding out that it was not must have been very upsetting.*

*The law was changed in 2009 to allow unmarried partners of women having treatment with donor sperm to become the legal parent at birth. Whilst this only affects a small group of patients, that is no excuse for getting it wrong. As the regulator, we have worked hard to make sure that clinics understand this complex aspect of the law, but we should have done more to make sure clinics were getting it right.*

*After the first case of this kind came to light, we asked clinics to review all relevant patient records. We are working with the clinics involved to make sure affected patients are contacted and offered*

*the support and advice that they need. We have also changed our approach on inspection to make sure that consent processes in clinics are tightened up and that staff are properly trained*

*We will review the action we have already taken, alongside the Judge's recommendations, to minimise the risk of this happening again. All fertility patients have a right to expect that matters as important as consent to parenthood are handled professionally by their clinic.'*

I can detect no sense of contrition or apology, real or inferred, in this HFEA statement. Perhaps saying 'sorry' to these people would be too much of an admission of the regulator's incompetence. Big-time administrators often have a terrible record of human empathy. Just how inept is the HFEA? Why cannot it regulate properly? Does it not understand the law? How far does this 'widespread incompetence' spread? Does it go beyond this numerically tiny sector of AID into the enormous sphere of IVF and embryo research?

### **Womb transplants**

Around one in 5,000 women are born without a womb, while others lose theirs due to cancer or other medical conditions. The once imaginary treatment of a womb transplant has now become a reality. In October 2014, a 36-year-old woman in Sweden became the world's first person to give birth after a womb transplant.

Now doctors in London have been granted permission to carry out the UK's first trial in which ten women will receive womb transplants. If successful, the first baby could be born in late 2017. Dr Richard Smith, a consultant gynaecologist at the Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital in London, who has been working on the project for 19 years, will lead the transplant team.

The procedure is not without ethical and practical problems. IVF, with all its attendant bioethical predicaments, was used in the Swedish trial. In addition, immunosuppression drugs are required to prevent the womb being rejected, but to avoid their harmful long-term usage, the womb is surgically removed once the birth has occurred. The alternative remedies to such childlessness are surrogacy or adoption – the latter is the only recommended route for the morally sensitive.

### **Britain's national sperm bank waiting for donors**

A change in UK law in 2005 removed anonymity for sperm donors and this is thought to be the cause of a recent dearth of volunteers. Demand for donated sperm has soared because more and more same-sex couples as well as single and older women want children. The UK's answer has been the establishment of its first sperm bank, which was opened in October 2014, at a cost of £77,000 at the Women's Hospital, Birmingham, amid much media razzmatazz.

One year on, only nine men have registered as donors. The bank is now planning a recruitment drive. Its outspoken chief executive, Laura Witjens, thinks that appealing to male pride with a 'superman' message may be an effective way to boost donations. She believes, 'If I advertised saying "Men, prove your worth, show me how good you are", then I would get hundreds of donors.' Who is she kidding? We shall see by October 2016.

### **'Three-parent' IVF superseded?**

This contentious procedure, also known as mitochondrial donation, approved by Parliament in February and thus making the UK the first country in the world to allow the creation of babies with DNA from three people as well as permitting unethical germline genetic modification, may yet

become history. A novel method has been reported, in *Nature* as ‘Metabolic rescue in pluripotent cells from patients with mtDNA disease’.

Mitochondrial diseases, like muscular dystrophy, may possibly have a new cure.

The study, from the Oregon Health & Science University, has shown that people suffering from mitochondrial diseases can still produce healthy mitochondrial DNA, which may be used to remedy the defects. In other words, genetic material from a third person may not be necessary. Mothers at risk of passing on mitochondrial diseases may be able to use their own healthy mitochondria to repair their ova.

The researchers, led by the controversial and sometime maverick Dr Shoukhrat Mitalipov, of the University’s Centre for Embryonic Cell and Gene Therapy, showed that when skin cells from patients with a mitochondrial disease were converted back to induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, some of them were free from mutations. These corrected stem cells can then be multiplied and transplanted back into the body. Exciting stuff? Yes, but so far the work has been in vitro – it has yet to be tested in animals, let alone human patients. And while the technique using iPS cells is bioethically sound, the team also used cells obtained by somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), the bioethically unsound cloning technique.

### **So you thought you knew about human embryo development**

OK, you know that when one human sperm penetrates one human ovum, a one-cell zygote results and a new human being is under way – that’s good GCSE Biology. But the wonder of this fertilisation marvel is amplified by some research conducted in Sweden and published here:

<http://www.nature.com/ncomms/2015/150903/ncomms9207/full/ncomms9207.html>

The earliest hours of human development are utterly fascinating. How does one cell begin its journey to a full grown adult? How do the zygote’s 23,000 genes control this development? About 24 hours after the zygote is formed, it divides into two cells. At the end of day two, there are four cells, and by day three there will be eight. This is the biological processes of cell division. And it continues to produce the estimated 100 trillion cells of the human adult. Alongside cell division is the process of cell differentiation whereby some of these cells become bone or hair, blood, kneecaps, and so on, under the direction of these 23,000 human genes. But this recent Swedish research has demonstrated that there is not a genetic free-for-all. Rather there is a tightly-ordered sequence of genetic activity.

The Swedish team, headed by Juha Kere of the Karolinska Institute, found that only 32 of the 23,000 genes were switched on two days after fertilization. By day three, 129 genes have been activated. Kere called these genes ‘the ignition key’ of human embryonic development. Yet so much is not known – seven of these 129 genes were previously unknown. Some of these unfamiliar genes were found to interact with ‘junk’ DNA, which has long been thought to have no biological function.

So early human development does seem to display an unexpected parsimony. Ultimately, to produce the fully-developed unborn child, thousands of genes are involved, switching off and on in a complex choreography, a biological ballet. But it seems that on day one, only 32 genes start the motor and by day three just 129 are needed to keep it running. Early human life is indeed a fascinating mystery.

Understanding the biology of these first few days of life could explain the possible roles of so-called ‘junk’ DNA, it could explain the process of induced pluripotent stem cell creation, it could explain



some forms of infertility, it could explain the genesis of some genetic diseases, and so on. It's important to know – such a search for understanding is at the heart of good science. Such searching is a wonderful, God-given, human attribute.

Sadly, there is a downside to this work. These insights came at a bioethical price because the researchers used 348 single cells (oocytes and zygotes) and blastomeres (3-day-old embryos), all of which had been apparently been donated for this research.

## **Stem-Cell Technologies**

### **Yet another adult stem-cell treatment?**

Thousands of people suffer from chronic pain caused by type 2 diabetes, surgical amputation, chemotherapy and many other conditions that current painkillers bring relief for only a short time. A simple stem-cell injection may bring relief for more than a month.

A paper by Ru-Rong Ji and his team at the Duke School of Medicine in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* showed that injections of adult stem cells, specifically bone marrow stromal cells (BMSCs), relieved neuropathic pain caused by nerve damage in mice. Moreover, this study elucidated the therapeutic mechanism – the injected BMSCs translocate adjacent to the damaged nerve cells in the spinal cord and secrete TGF- $\beta$ 1, a protein molecule known to potently inhibit neuropathic pain.

Professor Ji commented, 'This analgesic effect was amazing. Normally, if you give an analgesic, you see pain relief for a few hours, at most a few days. But with bone marrow stem cells, after a single injection we saw pain relief over four to five weeks.' Now the work needs to shift from mice to men.

### **Mitochondrial donation regulations**

In mid-September, the HFEA published new draft guidelines for mitochondrial donation, or 'three-parent' IVF. The labyrinthine regulations will come into force on 29 October 2015 when the HFEA will issue, '... a Clinic Focus article and Chair's letter setting out the final processes, systems and guidance for regulating mitochondrial donation'.

There is still far from any unanimous agreement that such potential therapies will be safe, even advisable. Some biologists think that 'foreign' mitochondrial genes from the donor might interfere with the expression of the nuclear genes of the host, in unpredictable, and perhaps dangerous, ways. Then there is the ethical objection that this sort of mitochondrial tinkering will lead to full-scale germline manipulation – the old slippery slope argument. 'No', says the HFEA. It maintains that licence applications will be narrow and their practical oversight will be strict. Oh yes? And how will such crass comments prevent scientists trespassing into immoral scientific endeavour? It's a mystery.

### **Embryonic stem-cell trial**

The London Project to Cure Blindness was established a decade ago with the aim of reversing vision loss in patients with 'wet' age-related macular degeneration (AMD). In August, the Moorfields Eye Hospital announced that the first surgery of a novel treatment had been successfully performed on a 60-year-old woman patient. So far no complications have been reported. This news was greeted by

an over-excited media suggesting that a miracle had been performed, the blind will now receive their sight. The truth is that any outcome in terms of visual recovery, in just this one patient, will not be assessed until at least December.

Nevertheless, this surgical progress has been sufficient to prompt a larger trial – ten patients will now undergo the procedure over the next 18 months. This involves surgically transplanting retinal pigment epithelial cells, derived from human embryonic stem cells, into the back of the diseased eyes.

This is not the first use of embryonic stem cells in the UK. In 2012, patients with Stargardt's disease were injected with embryonic stem cells in a phase 1 safety trial carried out in the US and at Moorfields.

But why use embryonic stem cells for AMD? Some 40 AMD patients have already been treated at Moorfields with adult stem cells taken from their own eyes. Even the lead scientist of that trial, Professor Lyndon Da Cruz admitted, 'We saw extraordinary recovery, with some people being able to read again and drive, and that recovery being sustained for years.' But he complained that using the patient's own stem cells was complex and carried risks, and so the London Project has also opted for this embryonic stem-cell trial. It is a disappointing development.

### **Yamanaka seeking cures for the incurable**

The following is an interesting excerpt from a recent keynote speech given by Shinya Yamanaka, the discoverer of induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, the winner of the 2012 Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine, and currently the director of the Kyoto University Center for iPS Cell Research and Application (CiRA). It was originally published on 24 September in *Yomiuri Shimbun* (The Japan News).

*'In middle school and high school, I participated in judo, and at university I played rugby, so I suffered many injuries. I had broken bones more than 10 times, and every time I received treatment from orthopaedic surgeons. It was natural that I wanted to become an orthopaedic surgeon after graduating from medical school.*

*Through clinical experiences as a doctor, I realized that many patients suffer from intractable diseases or injuries such as spinal cord injuries – which can't be cured even by skilful orthopaedic specialists. I wanted to find a cure for such patients in the future, and thought I had to study basic medical science to do so.*

*After working as a medical intern for two years, I entered graduate school, starting my career as a researcher. After four years at the school, I went to the United States to receive more training as a researcher. There I could learn a lot of important things. One of them is the motto 'Vision and Hard Work,' which I was taught as a key to success.*

*My future 'vision' is to provide cures for people suffering from currently incurable diseases and injuries, such as spinal cord injuries, by utilizing iPS (induced pluripotent stem) cell technologies.*

*In the United States, I knew about embryonic stem (ES) cells – a type of pluripotent cell created from a mouse embryo. ES cells can be increased indefinitely and transformed into various cells. I was fascinated by their mysterious functions. Back in Japan, I had a tough time as my research gained no one's understanding. It almost made me give up on my research.*

*Around that time, however, researchers in the United States succeeded in creating ES cells using human cells. This achievement brought a global rise in expectations for the technology's application to regenerative medicine, and I was encouraged that my research might become of use. I later would have my own laboratory at the Nara Institute of Science and Technology, where I was given opportunities to advance my research. There is much opposition to human ES cell research because the cells – created from a human embryo – have the potential to grow to be a baby if they are placed in a womb. So my laboratory team set a goal of developing pluripotent cells without using embryos.*

*We discovered genes that work as a switch for somatic cells to transform into cells in a fertilized egg-like phase. At Kyoto University, we succeeded in creating iPS cells from mouse cells in 2006, and from human skin cells in 2007.*

*We are working to apply the iPS technology for two types of medical use. In the first instance – regenerative medicine – we cultivate cells in a healthy condition outside the human body and transplant them into people suffering from illness. For the second – drug research and development – we re-create disease conditions by using iPS cells to figure out the cause of diseases and develop drugs to slow disease development.*

*We publish papers on basic research, but our final goal, and mission, is to realize clinical applications of the technology.'*

## **Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide**

### **Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill 2015-16**

Friday 11 September was a red-letter day. It was the day of the debate and vote in the House of Commons on this alarming Bill. Anxiety was widespread and palpable. It was a Friday, traditionally the day when MPs go home to their constituencies. It was a Private Member's Bill, typically of minor importance and of unlikely progress. It was a free vote, and the ethical stance of the new batch of MPs on any such conscience issue was entirely unknown.

The Bill was sponsored by Rob Marris, Labour MP for Wolverhampton South West. He had inherited it from Lord Falconer's recently miscarried Bill in the House of Lords. Moreover, Dignity in Dying, the pro-suicide group, has thrown its considerable organisational and financial weight behind this House of Commons attempt. But the group became curiously quiet in the days leading up to the Great Debate – had its lobbyists forecast bad news? And the media were also unexpectedly muted. *The Sun* came out in favour of the Bill. Of the medical journals only *The Lancet* declared itself, in a weaselly, anti-Christian piece entitled 'Fibbing for God' by its editor-in-chief, Richard Horton, to be mildly supportive. And all this despite the emotive headlines generated during August by the deaths of the healthy, 75-year-old, ex-nurse Gill Pharaoh at the Lifecircle 'clinic' in Basel and the terminally-ill, 68-year-old, mountain-climbing carpenter Bob Cole at the Dignitas 'clinic' in Zurich.

On the day, as many as 85 MPs had asked to speak. The debate started at 09.49 and within a few minutes of Mr Marris' dogged opening remarks it became clear which way the House was swaying – numerous points of order were raised challenging his arguments and assumptions. And so the opponents of the Bill continued to lay out their case. It was all authoritative, polite and instructive.

At 14.07, after more than four hours of debate, the vote was called. At 14.21 the result was announced – Ayes, 118 and Noes 330, a majority against the Bill of 212. There was tangible relief. The Bill had failed, danger had been averted, good medicine had been reinstated, the vulnerable had

been protected. The astonishing margin of defeat was slightly greater than that of 1997, when MPs last voted on the issue.

There were many notable orations. I thought the finest was by Dr Philippa Whitford, the new SNP MP for Central Ayrshire and a cancer surgeon. Here is the whole of her speech, delivered without notes, as recorded in *Hansard*.

*'I do not think anyone doubts the views that have made all of us give up a Friday to be here; everyone is here because they are concerned about the suffering of others and we want to alleviate it. We just do not agree about how we should go about it.*

*I believe that this is not just a tidying up of a small legal anomaly. It is, rather, a crossing of a Rubicon, as was mentioned earlier. It is changing and legalising the killing of one person by another, regardless of the reasons why we would want to carry that out.*

*The Bill's weaknesses have been mentioned, such as the problem of finding general practitioners who would write a report. In actual fact, quite a lot would be willing to do that, but not so many would be willing to be involved in the act of assisted suicide. Where would the independent expert be found? Some 96% of palliative care specialists are utterly against this Bill. They object to the name of it; they consider what they do is assisted dying, and what this is is assisted suicide.*

*I do not want to talk about the small print, however. That will be explored over the day. My objection is basically in principle. Many Members will be aware of my interest; as a breast cancer surgeon for 30 years, I have been involved in the journey to death of many patients, but as a doctor I have never considered that death was a good treatment for anything, no matter what was wrong with anyone. People would choose such an option for lots of reasons: the fear of being a burden, the fear of dying, and most of all the fear of suffering. The responsibility to deal with that lies with us. Who is making them feel that they are a burden — is it their family or their friends, or is it society? Who is letting them down in their palliative care? It is us.*

*As the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) mentioned, the services are patchy in some areas. Not everyone has access to palliative care, but I started out in 1982 when women did not know when they went into theatre that they had breast cancer because we did not have the ability to diagnose it. I worked for an eminent professor in Glasgow, and we lived in the ward in those days, and I watched patients come back from theatre having had the lump removed. If it was cancer their breast was removed, and that was it — no choice. They found out they had cancer by groping themselves on the trolley, because if they had a lot of bandages and a drip, that meant they had lost their breast and they had cancer. Watching people die of cancer was awful at that time. They were cachectic, they were in pain, and we had very limited hospice and very little palliative care support in the hospital.*

*But 30 years later that has changed. Whereas 40% of patients would live 10 years then, now 80% do so. Our patients know exactly what operation they are going in for. They have hours of discussion with us, and until a few years ago I would have been involved in their journey if that cancer came back, in their palliation and in their terminal care. That journey can lead to a beautiful death. The event that had the biggest impact on me as a junior doctor was the death of a lady whom I had looked after for many months. When I came on to the ward that night, the nurses said, 'I think Lizzie's going.' She was curled up in her bed, obviously quite upset, and when I asked her what was wrong, she said she was frightened and she did not know what she had to do. I said, 'You don't have to do anything. You just have to relax. You just have to let go.' We had the family in. West of Scotland male is not good on emotion or openness, so I took her son in and I spoke to her again about what was happening to the point where he could tell her that he loved her and how much he*

*was going to miss her. I went for my tea, and when I came back she was sitting up holding court with the whole lot of them. I thought, 'Oh no, we've called it wrong', but she was gone in an hour, and it was beautiful. That made me commit to working with cancer patients. If I had not made it as a surgeon — which, as a woman at that time, I was told flatly that I would not — I would have gone into palliative care.*

*I have seen change in the journey for patients. We heard the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Nadine Dorries) describe the last two weeks of the life of her friend, and that is something that we see repeatedly — that the patient is ahead of the family. We are always utterly open with patients. We no longer have a situation in which a family member says, 'Don't tell my mum. Tell me, but don't tell her.' The patient will always know, because the fear is that when they see their death coming, they will know that everyone has lied to them and they will be on their own. My job was not just to look after the patient; it was to look after the whole family. All these illnesses are diseases of the whole family, and we want the family to be left with the knowledge that they did everything they could and were able to express their love at the end of their loved one's life. Things have changed for cancer patients. I have not had a cancer patient ask me for a quick way out, an escape, for decades.*

*We need to ensure that palliative care is offered to people with degenerative illnesses, of which we are all afraid. When the public support this measure, they are not actually thinking about the last six months of a terminal illness; they are thinking about Alzheimer's, about motor neurone disease and about Parkinson's, none of which the Bill would address. It is therefore inevitable that this would migrate. As the hon. Member for Totnes said, we should support palliative care and we must ensure that it is available to people who are dying, regardless of their illness. We need to change our tone towards the people who live in our society, so that old and vulnerable people no longer feel that they should get out of the way. All our horizons will narrow as we get older. Someone who was hill walking when they were 20 might not manage to do so when they are 80. I have seen patients who are grateful to be at home being wheeled out on to the patio in the sun and having a good blether with their son who has come home from London. They consider that a good day. We might consider it horrific, looking at it in advance, but when we get there we will have changed. We should support letting people live every day of their life until the end, and make sure that, as legislators, we provide the means for them to live and die with dignity and comfort. We should not say, 'When you can't thole [Scots for "bear"] it, take the black capsule.' We should vote for life and dignity, not for death.'*

This was the eleventh time in the last twelve years that the legalisation of assisted suicide has been attempted and defeated in the UK. The Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales have both recently rejected the idea. Is this recent overwhelming defeat at Westminster the end of the matter? No way! True, the issue may not come to Parliament again for perhaps the next five or ten years, but its supporters will not admit defeat. The CEO of Dignity in Dying, Sarah Wootton, described the result as an 'outrage' and scolded MPs for being 'ridiculously out of touch'. Supporters of assisted suicide will now almost certainly pursue their cause, case by case, through the Courts, though we all know that 'hard cases make bad law'. At least, for the time being, our legislators have done their bit on what just happened to be the day after we celebrated World Suicide Prevention Day. That's nice!

### **Access to Palliative Care Bill [HL]**

To bolster the opposition to the Marris Bill, Baroness Finlay is spearheading the above Bill in the House of Lords. It will, 'Make provision for equitable access to palliative care services; for advancing education, training and research in palliative care; and for connected purposes.' Its First Reading took place on 1 June and its Second Reading is scheduled for Friday 23 October. Who could object to its admirable intentions? We shall see.

## **The UK is number 1**

In October, *The 2015 Quality of Death Index* was published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). It ranked the quality of palliative care in 80 countries around the world. The UK came first, with Australia and New Zealand taking second and third places. It was no surprise that wealthy countries cluster at the top and many developing countries came near the bottom. There were some shocks – Mongolia was 28th, Panama 31st and Uganda 35th. Among the lowest rankings were countries such as China (71st), which is facing the dual difficulties of the slow adoption of palliative care and a rapidly ageing population.

And, as if to reinforce the EIU's assessment of the UK, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) announced in mid-October that more than 90% of England's hospices were rated as 'good' or 'outstanding'. It is early days – so far only 37 hospice services have been inspected, out of a total of 324. Of those so far assessed, 10 were judged 'outstanding', 24 'good', two were deemed to be requiring improvement, and one was rated 'inadequate'. Even so, the report highlighted several examples of poor symptom control, poor communication with patients and their families, as well as inadequate generalist and specialist out-of-hours services. But the results were described as 'encouraging' by Andrea Sutcliffe, the CQC's chief inspector of adult social care.

More needs to be done about end-of-life care, everywhere – there are huge variations in its provision and quality, even in the UK. May the UK continue to lead the way forward – after all, we were the pioneers of the modern hospice and palliative care movement.

## **Martin's case again rejected**

In July, Lord Justice Elias and Mr Justice Collins, sitting in the High Court, London, rejected the case of the man known only as Martin or M. The 50-year-old, who suffers from locked-in syndrome and is almost totally paralysed, argued that the guidance given to doctors by the General Medical Council (GMC) unreasonably stops him being given medical help to die.

The Court heard that in order for Martin to travel to a suicide 'clinic' abroad he needs to provide details of his medical history. But doctors are unwilling to supply such documentation for fear of assisting in his suicide. The GMC guidance says that when a patient raises the idea of assisted suicide, a doctor must listen and discuss, but cannot assist the person to die. The judges ruled that this guidance is lawful because 'aiding and abetting suicide' is a crime in the UK, and they dismissed Martin's case. An appeal is expected.

## **The Nicklinson-Lamb case also again rejected**

The latest episode of this long-running saga involving the deceased Tony Nicklinson, his wife Jane, as well as Paul Lamb, was enacted in mid-July. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg found that this combined legal challenge, based on Article 8 of the Convention, was 'manifestly ill-founded' and declared it 'inadmissible'. In other words, the UK's prohibition of assisted suicide, as detailed in the Suicide Act 1961, is not a violation of human rights.

The case of Tony Nicklinson has now been heard in the four highest courts available to UK citizens, and all four have pronounced similarly, namely, the decision to amend laws on assisted suicide belongs to national legislators. Bluntly – it is for the UK Parliament to decide. And it did so on Friday 11 September 2015.

## USA and Elsewhere

### California legalises assisted suicide

On Friday 11 September, the California Senate voted 23 to 14 to allow doctors to prescribe life-ending medication for some patients. The bill needed final ratification by the Governor, Jerry Brown, who had previously given little indication of his intentions.

But on 5 October, California, the Golden State, the Land of Fruit and Nuts, became the fourth US state to legalise physician-assisted suicide (PAS) – alongside Oregon, Washington and Vermont. This ended months of emotional and contentious debate over AB X2 15, also known as the End of Life Option Act. The new law is expected to take effect by Spring 2016. It is based on Oregon's 1997 Death with Dignity Act and will permit doctors to provide lethal prescriptions to mentally-competent adults, who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and face the expectation that they will die within six months.

The California Governor and former Jesuit seminary student, Jerry Brown, who signed the new law into effect, issued an accompanying statement. It read in part, 'I have carefully read the thoughtful opposition materials presented by a number of doctors, religious leaders and those who champion disability rights. I have considered the theological and religious perspectives that any deliberate shortening of one's life is sinful. I have also read the letters of those who support the bill, including heartfelt pleas from Brittany Maynard's family and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In addition, I have discussed the matter with a Catholic bishop, two of my own doctors and former classmates and friends who take varied, contradictory and nuanced positions. In the end, I was left to reflect on what I would want in the face of my own death. I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn't deny that right to others.'

The reference to Brittany Maynard is significant. This articulate, photogenic 29-year-old learned on New Year's Day 2014 that she had brain cancer and a 6-month prognosis. A little later, she decided to move from California to Oregon so that she could legally take medication to end her life, before her 30th birthday. On Saturday 1 November 2014, Maynard did just that. Her case undoubtedly brought the issue to the US consciousness. She had become a nationally-recognized advocate for the assisted suicide lobby group Compassion & Choices (C & C), formerly known as the Hemlock Society, which seeks to expand 'aid-in-dying laws' beyond the current handful of states. In October 2014, C & C had launched a slick video about Brittany on YouTube – within a year it had been watched about 12 million times. It resonated with the WWW – the worried, well and white.

But as the spokesman for Californians Against Assisted Suicide, a coalition of disability rights, healthcare, civil rights and patient advocacy organisations, said, 'This is a dark day for California and for the Brown legacy.' He might have added, 'and for the world'. And here is the warning for us all – this 2015 bill was the 8th attempt by Californian assisted suicide activists. Such deluded men and women are ideologically driven and persistently determined. They and their message must be constantly resisted.

### The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act

In May, the House of Representatives passed this bill, which would ban most abortions after 20 weeks nationwide, with a bipartisan 242 vs. 184 vote. Then Senator Lindsey Graham introduced the bill into the Senate in June.

On 22 September, the bill received a majority of votes, 54 vs. 42, in the Republican-controlled Senate. But it fell short of the required 60 votes to overcome a Democratic filibuster.

‘It is a big disappointment that our elected officials did not pass the overwhelmingly popular, common sense, late-term abortion ban today,’ said Jeanne Mancini, President of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund. She pointed out the poignant irony that, ‘In the words of Pope Francis (who was visiting the nation’s capital that very week), “The level of progress in a society is measured by its capacity to safeguard life, above all in its most fragile stages.” As a country we would flunk this progress test today. America is called to defend life. And our senators are elected to represent their people, not extremist views.’ She continued, ‘The fight is not over. Similar to the partial-birth abortion ban, this will take time. But we will succeed.’

### **Abortions in Texas and Wisconsin and Ohio and ...**

Texas, like several other states, has over recent years passed pro-life abortion laws. These have included such provisions as a 24-hour ‘cooling off’ period, mandatory ultrasounds, admitting privileges to nearby hospitals for all abortionists as well as health and safety upgrades for their facilities.

Are these new laws working? In August, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) reported that 63,849 abortions were performed in Texas during 2013. This was 4,449 fewer than in 2012, and down from more than 77,000 in 2010.

And similar decreases are being reported from other states. For example, in Wisconsin, abortion is 10% down, in Ohio it is 8.7%, in Pennsylvania it is 7%, in Vermont it is 12% and in North Dakota it is 11% down on the previous year. The causes of these reductions are disputed, but for many the pro-life laws are getting credit. Whatever the true explanation, unborn lives are being spared.

### **Another winner against ObamaCare**

The world’s largest privately-owned publisher of Christian books and Bibles has won its case for exemption from the US Government’s health insurance mandate, the controversial Affordable Care Act, also known as ObamaCare, with its insistence that employers must pay for abortifacient ‘contraceptives’, such as the morning-after pill, for their employees.

Lawyers for the Illinois-based Tyndale House Publishers argued that companies should be allowed to operate in line with their religious or moral convictions. In July, a federal district court issued a permanent injunction in favour of Tyndale. They can now do business according to the Book they publish! It was back in July 2014 that Hobby Lobby, a Christian-run business won its pioneering case against the overbearing mandate in a landmark ruling by the United States Supreme Court.

### **The Polish government backtracks**

Across the whole of Poland, schoolchildren are taught lessons within a pro-family subject known as WDZ, which translates as ‘Upbringing for Family Life’. Its aim is to prepare young people for marriage and family life. On 9 July, the Education Minister, Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska, announced that the government wanted to introduce explicit sex education into the syllabus of the nation’s schools.

A coalition of 26 pro-family groups came together to oppose the changes. A protest rally in Warsaw attracted thousands of parents. Before the rally took place, Kluzik-Rostkowska sought reconciliation by declaring that, ‘... work on changing the WDZ curriculum hasn’t started yet.’ But Polish parents



have not been pacified and are under no illusion that their children remain at risk. The vigilance and resistance continues.

### **Euthanasia propaganda for Dutch schools**

On 3 September, the Hyperion Lyceum, a secondary school in Amsterdam, became the first ever to use a new educational kit developed by the Dutch 'Voluntary End of Life Association' (NVVE).

Far from being a neutral presentation, the kit unashamedly pleads for euthanasia and aims to make it acceptable among young people. Many would call it a euthanasia propaganda tool. Indeed the kit's title is 'Euthanasie Doodnormaal', which translates as 'Euthanasia: Dead-normal'. To date, there has been no protest, official or unofficial, regarding the NVVE's action. How different are the cultures of Holland and Poland.

### **Canadian euthanasia**

In February 2016, Canada is set to drop its criminal prohibition against doctors who aid the terminally ill to die, following a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada last year. But, except for Québec, no Canadian province yet has a legal framework in place to regulate the practice.

Only Québec is now forging ahead. Its professional body that regulates doctors, the Collège des médecins, has already published a how-to manual for doctors wanting to euthanise their patients, along with contents of a death kit to be issued to them by pharmacists.

*John Ling*

## Latest news of significant individual cases

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

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.

Ashers and the McArthurs have lodged grounds of appeal. On 22 October the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland, Sir Declan Morgan, directed that the appeal be heard in the Court of Appeal in Belfast on 3 and 4 February 2016.

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

### **Challenge to the 'Named Person scheme' in Scotland**

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 2016.

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. The legislation also lowers the threshold at which personal data on children and their families can be shared between public officials, without their consent.

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. In September, three appeal judges in Edinburgh upheld that judgment. Although the judges made some helpful comments which should assist families who are faced with named persons seeking to usurp the role of the parents, concern remains that the legislation itself does not carry sufficient limits and safeguards.

A further appeal will be heard by the United Kingdom Supreme Court on 8 and 9 March 2016. A central ground for appeal is that the Scottish judges failed to distinguish between child welfare and 'wellbeing' (a much lower threshold for state intervention) when assessing the lawfulness of the named person scheme.

Judgment from the Supreme Court should be given before the named person scheme comes into force in August.

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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