

A close-up photograph of a person with dark hair and black-rimmed glasses, looking through the horizontal slats of a weathered wooden fence. The person's hand is visible, with fingers resting on one of the slats. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.

SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

Issue 51 – November 2022

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A Christian View of Risk

Risk is biblical

We live between two great truths: God is sovereign and has determined all things; man, made in his image, has responsibility to discern and act in accordance with his will and purpose. Our lives, bounded by these truths, are characterised by limited knowledge and uncertainty. And uncertainty gives rise to risk.

Risk is the likelihood, or probability, of some specified event or consequence occurring. Risk is associated with hazards, loss and harm, something detrimental (we tend to talk of the likelihood of positive consequences as just that: for example, the likelihood of sunny weather over the next three days is 80%). Your death is nearly 100% certain, but not quite so. Not all the sons of Adam have seen death and the possibility of the Lord's return further reduces the likelihood.

Risks are very high when the specified consequences are great and the probability of them arising are high. Risks are very low when the consequences and their associated probabilities are low. Everything between these positions is a trade-off between consequence and likelihood.

Christians handle uncertainties and risks by walking through them hand in hand with God. If you want a breath-taking example of what a high-risk walk with God looks like, then consider 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 (ESV):

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Paul repeatedly experienced, welcomed and expected the high consequences of high-risk Christian work; risks in the form of physical dangers, deprivations and mental anxiety. Some risks arise for Christians because they are Christians. Risk is real, and risk is right.¹

Social science literature, notably Beck² and Giddens³, labels modern society as the 'Risk Society'. It is characterised by increasing numbers of new risks generated by modern industrial society: risks arising from supplying our comforts and needs (power and heating generated via, for example, nuclear power); risks arising from workplace activities (manufacturing and construction); risks from negotiating our high street roads and from our national and international travel systems. More insidiously, tech gadgets bring benefits and risks which we are only beginning to understand and manage. Society expends considerable effort on understanding and mitigating these risks and much of this is good and worth striving for.

Amy Donovan, in her excellent Cambridge Paper *Finding security in the 'risk society'*, quotes Beck: 'Risk makes its appearance on the world stage when God leaves it' and 'Whoever believes in God is a risk atheist'.⁴ While a biblical view of risk doesn't appear to support this degree of antithesis between belief in God and risk, it nevertheless serves to remind us that we need to avoid being drawn into pursuing a low-risk, safe way of life which impacts on our work for Christ.

¹ See: John Piper, *Risk Is Right: Better to Lose Your Life Than to Waste It* (Crossway, 2013)

² See: Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a new modernity* (London: Sage, 1992)

³ See: Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How globalization is reshaping our lives* (London: Profile Books, 1999)

⁴ See: Amy Donovan, *Finding security in the 'risk society'* (Cambridge Papers, 2015). Accessed online 4 November 2022: <https://www.cambridgepapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/24-4-Finding-security-in-the-risk-society.pdf>

Introducing his book *Why Join a Small Church*, John Benton points out:

To join a big and thriving church is not always wrong, but it is frequently the easy option. To join a little, needy congregation is not a decision to be taken lightly. It will probably require far more guts, love, resilience and spiritual exertion. But how the devil would love to herd Christians into a few big city centre churches, getting them to travel miles from their communities, and leaving vast tracts of our country with no viable witness for the gospel.⁵

Another term for 'easy option' is 'low-risk option'.

Risk has been and always will be a feature of this life. We can't and shouldn't seek to eliminate it because it is part of the God-given environment in which we are to outwork our relationship of trust, faith and dependence on him. It is clear, though, from Scripture that we are to seek to reduce the risks that we face. We see this, particularly in situations where the risks are highest.

War is frequently a high-risk venture where knowledge and understanding, experience, planning, preparation and organisation are key to reducing high-consequence risks. In Numbers 13, God instructs Moses to send men to spy or scout out the land he had promised them. This was an intelligence-gathering exercise, designed to help them prepare to take the land promised to them from the current inhabitants. It may also have been a test. Even though the land was promised to them and their conquest of it certain had they trusted God, they were nevertheless instructed to gather information which could be used to execute a takeover of the land, minimising (or at least reducing) the risks from conflict.

This exercise was a failure, with only Joshua and Caleb remembering and acting on the fact that God keeps his promises even when the odds appear to oppose this. Fast forward 40 years and Joshua, faithful Joshua, sends out spies. This was not an indication of a lack of trust, but the act of a godly man working with his God to minimise the uncertainties and help smooth the path to achieving God's will.

More generally, Proverbs 24:6 tells us that war is to be waged by wise guidance with the aid of many counsellors. That is knowledge from a variety of sources and perspectives, wisely considered and applied.

John Piper, in his book *Risk is Right* concludes, 'Evidently God intends for us to live and act in ignorance and in uncertainty about many of the outcomes of our actions.'⁶ As the subtitle indicates, a key point in Piper's book is that though outcomes may be uncertain, the uncertainties should not prevent action after suitable consideration – Christian lives can be wasted waiting for a clarity of view that never comes. We need balance; not gung-ho but not risk averse. Joshua and Caleb's contemporaries on their first excursion into the promised land were too risk averse and allowed the perceived risks to blind them to God's promise. Joshua was neither gung-ho nor risk averse; he properly valued God's promise, acted wisely and, 40 years later, triumphed.

We need and it is right to take risks, but it is also important that we apply knowledge and wisdom where we can to minimise them.

Risk in everyday life

How does the Risk Society deal with risks? Interestingly, not a great deal differently from a biblical approach. Developed nations, in particular, expend much effort to improve their knowledge of risks and collect data on seemingly random events to better identify patterns of risk and ways to control them.

For instance, both in the world of work and the home, deaths, serious injury and lesser

⁵ John Benton, *Why Join a Small Church* (Christian Focus, 2008)

⁶ John Piper, *Risk Is Right: Better to Lose Your Life Than to Waste It* (Crossway, 2013). 19.

consequences are commonplace and are usually labelled accidents. Accidents, by definition, are random events. However, despite occurring randomly we can, by collecting data over many accidents, identify patterns and grow knowledge. For instance, there are around 6,000 accidents a year in our homes in the UK which result in death.⁷ Although these are random events, the number of accidents and deaths each year is a fairly stable figure. By collecting and analysing data of such events we can begin to understand the extent of a problem (its frequency) and also possible ways of reducing the associated consequences and the likelihood of occurrence.

Statistics can give us a glimpse of the truth lying within random events that are not intuitively obvious. Most of us will consider rock climbing a high-risk activity, but what about table tennis? Statistics from Germany and the UK show that the risk of dying from playing table tennis is 80% of the risk of dying from rock climbing.⁸ Would you have imagined that horse riding is twice as risky as rock climbing and that swimming is six times as likely to result in death as rock climbing?

Statistics give us the what, but we must dig deeper to find the why. In the sports above, the explanation for the (perhaps surprising) statistics lies in the higher threshold of competence and fitness required for mountain climbing compared to the more everyday and accessible activities. They suggest that a cardiovascular check-up might be beneficial before embarking on a vigorous swimming regime! Indeed, seek to join a gym and you'll need evidence of medical fitness.

It's also important to understand the context of these risks. The comments of the organisation compiling these statistics on sporting activities point out that, 'There will be accidents, like folk drowning on holidays, or being involved in road traffic accidents while cycling, but by and large it is safer than most of us would probably have thought.'⁹

If we cannot and should not seek to reduce risks to negligible proportions, how do we balance risks and risk reduction? An approach practised in the UK and other countries, primarily concerning workplace activities but also with a wider application (including biblical scenarios, as we shall see in a moment) is summarised by the acronym SFAIRP – so far as is reasonably practicable, or ALARP – as low as reasonably practicable.¹⁰ The two terms mean essentially the same thing and at their core is the concept of 'reasonably practicable'; this involves weighing a risk against the trouble, time and money (summarised as cost) needed to control it.

This approach recognises the biblical position that it is not desirable – reasonable or practicable – to reduce risks completely, but that efforts should be made to reduce risks to a reasonable and practicable minimum.

Although largely a trade-off between risk and cost, there is in the workplace an absolute backstop. Some risks are considered so great as to be intolerable; at this point, either the risk-generating activity should cease or, if it must continue, the costs to reduce the risk to a tolerable level may rise to normally unreasonable heights.

What intolerable risks reveal

The idea of intolerability can help clarify our thinking. For example, during the periods of Covid restrictions, Christians arrived at quite different views on the legitimacy of governments banning meetings in churches. Were views derived from biblical principles, implicit risk assessments, a desire to resist, or some combination of these? We can start to answer this question by asking how transmittable and potent the Covid virus would have to have been before we considered it untenable to continue meetings in our churches. Would there be an attrition rate amongst those gathering at which we would have welcomed state intervention, rather than resisted it?

⁷ <https://www.rospa.com/home-safety/uk/scotland/research/statistics>

⁸ <http://www.bandolier.org.uk/booth/Risk/sports.html>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ For the UK see: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/managing/theory/alarpglance.htm>

If, say, we met as churches and within minutes people became ill and some died, surely we would consider this intolerable and stop meetings until the risks to health and life were reduced to some level of acceptability. If we agree, then what is taking place is a trade between the benefits of resisting government interference and the benefits of working with the state to save lives. We usually resolve these questions by undertaking an implicit, often unspoken, risk calculation – a lesser of the two evils approach. For Covid, was the real but unquantifiable reduction in the risks to lives, and to lives lost, brought about by our contribution to government measures? Was the benefit of affirming the value and sanctity of life worth the cost of the unspecified benefits and downsides that an illegal protest would bring? More simply, what would you give up to save a life (in this very specific Covid context)? That was the question that lay before our consciences.

Risk and prayer

Having suggested that our biblical decision-making may be more risk-based than we might think, let's consider how risk features in the core Christian activity of prayer.

It seems unlikely that many of us have thought of prayer in terms of risk. Rightly so, it's arising from a personal relationship with God as we seek to know and do his will, not a consideration of statistical risk and the need to apply ALARP. However, if we step back for a moment and consider our prayer life – what we pray most earnestly and most often for and what we pray less earnestly and less often for – we can see from our understanding of risk that it follows a risk-based pattern.

For example, perhaps the worst consequence we can conceive of is that someone – a relative, friend, or contact – will die without knowing the Lord. And if they do die without knowing the Lord, then there is no possibility of a reconciliation with God. Their eternal future is eternal separation from God. Surely our most earnest and heartfelt prayers are for these people. As they get older and the probability of death increases, do we pray more or less for them? I suspect we pray more.

What is the chief purpose of our existence? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. Surely we pray earnestly for this; the spread of his kingdom, that his name would be glorified in all we do and all that is done in his name; that sin would not reign in our bodies.

Ingrowing toenails can be painful and needy of treatment, but we wouldn't expect our prayers for these and similar ailments to dominate the church prayer meeting. In terms of our needs, we naturally pray most earnestly where the risks – detrimental consequences and likelihoods – are highest and where the threats to God's glory as we experience them are highest and imminent. We direct our prayers where the power of individuals and the wider church at its best is utterly weak. We pray for kings and all who are in high positions; our boss, our company heads, our local authorities, our government, our monarchy, the Whitehouse, the Kremlin, and all peoples and nations.

God tells us to pray for situations where the consequences are incalculably large and where the probabilities of them occurring, by any effort of ours, are immeasurably small. While we can show our prayer life from one perspective is risk-based, 1 Timothy 2:1-2 shows that it is not to be risk bound.

Risk and investment

In his paper, *Investing as a Christian*, Paul Mills discusses the biblical position on a wide range of common investment routes.¹¹ A key point made by Mills is that, for example, 'harvesting where you have not sown' (Matthew 25:24) is a prohibition on making money through taking an interest. Rather than Christians placing their investments in bank deposits, he contends the money should be used in a business venture or the like, which combines the elements of risk-taking

11 See Paul Mills' chapter titled *Investing as a Christian*: Michael Schluter, *Christianity in a Changing World: Biblical Insight on Contemporary Issues* (Cambridge Papers Group, 2000) 204-215.

and unpresumed profit. For context, he rates nine investment routes against five biblical criteria; personal stewardship, knowledge of use, equity/rent v. interest, non-hoarding and non-speculation. Employee share ownership schemes and owner-occupied housing come out best (most biblical) in the ratings and bank deposits and cash come off worst (less biblical).

The relevance to us in the context of this article is that, should you accept Mills' arguments, the Bible is advocating actively investing our money where, in general, the risks are highest (where we may or may not receive a profit share) and avoiding the safer, lower risk options such as bank deposits, pension funds and unit trusts. This moves us from a position where we acknowledge the uncertainties and risks in the world and seek to minimise them to one where we actively pursue higher-risk options.

Perhaps a more general point we can extract from this brief foray into financial investment is to consider that money is one of the things God has gifted us to use for his service. God has given us other gifts and therefore these also should be used for his service in such a way that maximises the benefits for his kingdom. Where we risk more, the potential benefits are higher. That takes us back to *Why Join a Small Church* and other enterprises which demand more of us and our talents. They are riskier, but in turn they offer higher and more fruitful returns.

A New Testament lesson on dealing with risk

The use of knowledge and yes, the application of the modern-day concept of ALARP in a risky situation, is neatly demonstrated in Acts 27. There is a discussion between Paul and the centurion taking him to Rome on the relative risks of staying put at the current location of the ship or pushing on through likely bad weather to a more suitable winter harbour. There were two distinct sets of risks under consideration: one set is identified with and articulated by Paul; the other set is articulated by the centurion (as decision-maker) informed by the pilot of the ship and the owner. The other travellers and crew on the boat have some sway on the decision, but their concerns and reasoning are less clear.

Paul believed both the likelihood and consequences of a shipwreck – total loss of ship, cargo and potentially hundreds of lives – were sufficiently high to justify spending the winter in their current location and that the losses associated with a more suitable haven was a cost well worth paying. We can assume that Paul's greatest concern would be for the potential loss of life, but nevertheless, he displays concern for the loss of the ship and cargo because this was likely a key consideration of the pilot and owner of the ship. The other group seemed to think that the probability of pushing on without incurring these losses was sufficiently high to justify the journey ('...the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix...' Acts 27:12 ESV). In other words, the loss of ship, cargo and many lives was a risk worth taking. The risks everyone else seemed to be focusing on were those of the potential deterioration of the cargo (an unsuitable harbour) with the accompanying lack of income; the possible benefit of having a better and more agreeable town to winter in and, perhaps, the relatively short travelling time and exposure to the risks of only a day or so, if all went well.

This tension between very high consequence, high probability risk (as Paul saw it) and lower consequence but higher probability risk (which the majority of the ship seemed to embrace) has been replicated innumerable times throughout history and is commonplace today in industry, commerce and home. In the home, for example, you leave something on the stairs intending to take it up later. In the meantime someone comes down the stairs, steps on the object, slips and ends up dead - one of the 700 or so people who die every year in England from stair-related accidents – or hospitalised, one of 43,000.¹² The ALARP solution is, in this case, extremely low cost: take the object to its destination, or at least off the stairs.

¹² <https://www.simpsonmillar.co.uk/media/personal-injury/how-common-are-stair-related-accidents/#:~:text=But%20sadly%2C%20over%20700%20people,down%20stairs%20is%20even%20greater>

In the majority of these types of risk situations, it isn't practical or possible to calculate relative probabilities of the two sets of risks with reasonable accuracy, any more than trying to do so in the context of an object on the stairs, although it is necessary to have some sense of their magnitude. The best and more robust approach to dealing with the uncertainties of probabilities is to identify what can be done to reduce the risks and implement them whenever possible; to do otherwise is often indistinguishable from gambling.

We cannot be sure that Paul's perception of the probability of a catastrophic shipwreck was more accurate than the view of the centurion and the others; it may or may not have been. More importantly, it seems, he recognised that given the imminence of the risk (they were close to the period when sailing in those waters was considered impossible), avoiding the consequences was worth the cost of a poorer winter harbour.

Paul's solution was to stay put because the value of anywhere between 200 and 300 lives to him far exceeded the small cost of an unsuitable winter haven. His ALARP solution would be a modern-day no-brainer for someone who valued the lives of others.

Seeing and perception

Paul exemplified another feature of these types of scenarios. People who have never experienced or been brought close to a relatively low probability, very high consequence event – an event that can lead to death or worse, multiple deaths – often perceive the probability of occurrence as so low as not to be worth even a small sacrifice or cost. Paul had experienced three shipwrecks and had spent a night and a day adrift at sea. He knew first-hand the imminence of these dangers and the threat to life they posed. Most of us drive more carefully after a car accident or near miss simply because we are more aware of how quickly we can bring others and ourselves close to the point of death or serious injury and because we are brought to realise that even simple precautions can greatly reduce the risks.

This is a feature of perception: it is built on personal experience. It is also influenced by scale. You can't see a chair or a human being by focusing down on the dynamic quantum fields from which both are built (there are no particles). You have to step back and see the big picture. You can't see, for instance, Covid risks by a peripheral scan of your local social group, particularly when serious consequences within that group are below the threshold of what you might consider as intolerable. Presence yourself in a hospital intensive care unit during peak Covid though and you would probably have seen the risks differently. A hospital can scale up your experience of Covid consequences by many thousands of times.

But which perception do you act on? Let's say the one which compels you most to identify and follow the best approaches to reducing the likelihood of the worst-case consequences.

The centurion and others rejected Paul's advice, but God was good to them and although they lost both ship and cargo, the lives of all those onboard were spared. We shouldn't see God's graciousness in this situation as justification for the position the centurion and the others took on the risks to their lives, any more than when God brings good from our own bad decision-making.

Paul's summary position seems to be that he recognised the huge consequences of sea travel at that time of year in that part of the world (primarily, the loss of life of others, not his own). Importantly, he put great weight on those consequences and assessed their imminence as sufficiently high to justify staying put, seemingly informed by his own direct experiences of sea travel and associated disasters.

In most situations, if faced with great consequences, our best approach to dealing with the risks is to assume something around a worst-case probability of their occurrence and then focus on what we can do to reduce them. This puts the emphasis on doing something obviously useful rather than debating contentious probabilities and consequences. It's always possible to revisit the worst-case

assumptions if the cost of any remedial effort is disproportionately costly and/or impracticable, but it rarely is.

Some applications to the COVID-19 pandemic

Face masks

The wearing of face masks during Covid wasn't particularly contentious, even when mandated by the government. Several extensive studies showed the wearing of masks was beneficial in preventing the spread of the virus to others and protecting the wearer.¹³ No significant downsides were identified and mandatory wearing took account of those who might have medical reasons for not wearing masks. Reviews of the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic also indicated that regions and communities suffered less where masks and protective procedures were actively adopted, even though they were probably less effective than our Covid arrangements.¹⁴ There was also an indication that the relatively enthusiastic attitude to take up these preventive measures in some regions led to (or were driven by) overall beneficial behaviours which, in unspecified ways, contributed to reduced suffering and death.

Looking at the risks, the preventive efficacies and cost benefits were uncertain and so it was appropriate to apply the basic heuristic rule to risk reduction by asking; on balance, were masks beneficial in reducing the spread of Covid and associated death and serious health problems? The answer is yes. Were masks reasonably practicable, clearly yes - relatively cheap with some inconvenience, but tolerable for most people. Should we adopt masks? Yes, they were an easy, low-cost way of helping to save lives and reduce health risks.

However, it wasn't uncommon for Christians to challenge the efficacy of mask-wearing and in some cases dismiss them as just rags. Disconcertingly, these views didn't seem to consider any substantive evidence for or against them. For other Christians, masks were a sign of the Devil and therefore, with conscience firmly persuaded, there appeared to be no study, data or knowledge (biblical or otherwise), that could challenge this position. One key feature of conspiracy theorists is their unwillingness to consider alternative views and counter-evidence. For Christians adopting this approach, it leaves deep questions about how we are to reach a common mind on these and other matters. If we deliberately block access to the information and knowledge that would reasonably inform our minds and consciences (information and knowledge that is not offensive to God), how are these not-open-to-discussion, ring-fenced topics determined (that is, how do we decide what a no-go area for discussion is, and why) and how do we learn, change and grow?

Iain McGilchrist, in his books *The Master and His Emissary*¹⁵ (around 600 pages) and *The Matter with Things*¹⁶ (around 1,500 pages) establishes that our right brain hemisphere is perfectly capable of holding two contradictory views, or apparently contradictory views, but the left brain hemisphere is not. It wants certainty and if it doesn't find it, it will create it. This and other left and right brain hemisphere characteristics have been established by a great deal of medical research. Once the left hemisphere has created its view, it will doggedly hang on to it, whatever the evidence. A primary theme in his books is that our current culture, illustrated (for example) by the woke agenda, is behaving as though driven by left-hemisphere thinking; creating certainty where it doesn't exist and denying, or not even 'seeing', long-established truth and facts if they contradict its take on the world. An inevitably simplified warning for us that can be extracted from the 2,000 pages or

13 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>;
<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2014564118>;
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02801-8>.

14 <https://www.history.com/news/1918-spanish-flu-mask-wearing-resistance>

15 See: Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (Yale University Press, 2012)

16 See: Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things; Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* (Perspectiva, 2021)

so McGilchrist spends discussing this topic, is that we need to be careful not to jump to opinions because it eases the mental frustration of reconciling biblical tensions and viewpoints or because it takes too much time and effort to build a view. Nor should we just become fixated on a particular position. The left hemisphere is also adept at cherry picking information to support its precast view and will angrily resist challenges to that view.

Vaccinations

In early 2021 John Piper was advising Christians to be wary of Covid vaccinations because of concerns over their genesis from aborted embryos,¹⁷ but by October 2021 was promoting their take up.¹⁸ This was because his earlier concerns had been shown, to his satisfaction, to be largely unfounded. His October 2021 position was also supported by risk data on the effectiveness and potential detrimental side effects of vaccinations. He also suggested the following risk-based approach as a means of directing the conscience.¹⁹

You have:

- *considered the risk of COVID as you watch hundreds of thousands of people die*
- *considered the short- and long-term risks of the vaccines as you watch millions get the shots*
- *compared the frequency of hospitalisations and deaths of those with and without vaccines*
- *thought hard about the implications of foetal cell lines in the production and testing of the vaccines*
- *rejoiced at the increasing evidence that natural immunity, developed after recovering from COVID, is as effective as vaccination immunity*
- *pondered the likelihood and unlikelihood of conspiratorial conjectures.*

A similarly commendable rethink took place when Dave Brennan used 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 to argue against not taking the Covid vaccine,²⁰ again because of concerns over the history of its genesis and, for him, the associations with the prevailing abortion culture. Following his very clear call to challenge that view, he received challenges and graciously modified some of his views in light of them.

Both of these examples illustrate how we can help avoid trapping our thinking and our consciences in a pool of self-referencing and self-supporting thoughts (an approach sectors of social media promote by presenting us with views we are most likely to agree with). Piper and Brennan do this by showing the value of critical review – from ourselves and by inviting others to challenge our thinking. Piper, in particular, illustrates the benefits of doing the hard work on reviewing the relative risks, selecting those which generate the most consequential benefits(in this case lives), and reviewing the likelihoods of alternative viewpoints as we seek to do what is right. All of this contrasts with the spirit of age where opinion (particularly incisive opinion), and slogans are rated more highly than careful reasoning and group thinking is valued more than free thinking.

Final considerations: risk and anxiety

Risk arises from uncertainty, but uncertainty also generates anxiety. Clinically, anxiety can be a debilitating, complex problem which significantly impairs our ability to function from day to day. Here, however, we are looking at this at a level that all of us have experienced to some degree and which, although it may impact our daily lives, isn't unduly restrictive. Anxiety at this level is often related to either (or a combination of) concerns and worries about uncertain future events, or future

17 <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-i-take-a-vaccine-made-from-aborted-babies>

18 <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-reason-to-be-vaccinated-freedom>

19 Ibid

20 <https://www.brephos.org/post/my-response-to-the-ea-s-webinar-on-the-ethics-of-covid-19-vaccines-part-4>

events which are likely or very likely to happen, but which we'd rather not face.

At the outset, it is worth pointing out that some feelings of anxiety can be addressed by rising every morning at a similar time and having a breakfast rich in fat and protein.²¹ With this done, we can move on to another practical help. Since anxiety can be specifically linked with running backwards from future problems, it does help if we make a sensible plan for dealing with those problems.²² That is, we acknowledge problems and walk towards them in a planned way. In making a plan we begin to take control; we can often avoid some uncertainties and, most importantly, we begin looking for ways to deal with the uncertain outcomes. It should be clear from earlier in this article that this is what the Bible encourages us to do. Recognise the problem, gather information and make a plan using, where possible, the wisdom and knowledge of others. Sometimes (for fairly high-probability events), it is also really helpful to consider the worst-case outcome and plan for it.

There are around 18 or so verses in the Bible which advise us on how to deal with anxiety. They range from an appropriate 'good word' in Proverbs 12:25 to one of the most comprehensive yet concentrated commands in the whole of Scripture:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

The centrepiece of verse 6 is giving thanks to God because we recognise his sovereignty over all things, including the uncertainties of the life in this world which he has ordained for us. We cannot see and precisely plan for the future, but he has determined the future. We, therefore, stop being anxious when we trust the one who has determined our future. And we grow and deepen this trust through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving.

We live between two great truths: God is sovereign and has determined all things; man, made in his image, has responsibility to discern and act in accordance with his will and purpose. Our lives, bounded by these truths, are characterised by limited knowledge and uncertainty, and uncertainty gives rise to risk. We seek to minimise risk where we can, but not to be bound by it. We actively pursue risk in order to best use the gifts God has given us for his service. Risk is right. We are called to deal with the risks we face but ultimately peace, the true peace of God, is found by trusting him alone.

I end with a challenge from Donovan:

Furthermore, the contentment that Christians find in their relationships is much deeper than any relief from anxiety and uncertainty that risk management can provide. The prevalence of fear in the modern world – hidden though it sometimes is behind the complex risk mitigation technologies that surround us – is an immense opportunity for Christians both to engage with the issues that drive the fear and to demonstrate that we live with a fundamentally different and eternal perspective.²³

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

21 See: Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Allen Lane, 2018 [Kindle Edition]) 17.

22 See: Ibid, 350.

23 Amy Donovan, *Finding security in the 'risk society'* (Cambridge Papers, 2015) 6. Accessed online 4 November 2022: <https://www.cambridgepapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/24-4-Finding-security-in-the-risk-society.pdf>

We Must Deal with the Antisemitism in Our Churches

by Regan King

It was a fairly cool evening. I had just enjoyed visiting another church with my wife where I had preached in their two services. We had enjoyed much of the day and while I always miss The Angel Church when away and look forward to returning, I was thankful to visit dear friends elsewhere. As my wife and I waited on our train, I commented on the day and asked how she had found it, to be met with something along the lines of the less than reassuring, 'It was ok'. I enquired further and asked if she was sure or if something was bothering her. She didn't really want to say, but I could tell something had made her sad, so I persisted; I know her well enough to know when something needs discussing. Then it came, 'Well, you know that man [one of the deacons - an older fellow who hung around us quite a bit after the services]. When you were talking with someone else, he came up to me and said, "The Jews deserved the Holocaust because they killed Jesus."' 'What?' I responded. She repeated and clarified further. The comment was offered without any context, completely irrelevant to the messages given, without any discussion of my obviously Middle-Eastern Jewish wife who the man knew was born and raised in Jerusalem; she lived through both the First and Second Intifadas, served as all Israeli youths in the IDF, and has simultaneously believed in and followed Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, serving in evangelism alongside her late father, Antony Simon.

Another occasion saw us listen as a preacher spoke about nearby Stamford Hill and passionately said, 'Those people killed Jesus'. A further time saw a man attend a Passover replication we were hosting in church, not to participate, but to make a point by his lack of participation. 'It's not my Passover. Jesus is,' he said, ignoring the fact that this was the whole purpose of this time. He refused to so much as pray or read Scripture with us and treated the occasion as if it was an act of false religion. One man complained that a Psalm sung in Hebrew was posted in a WhatsApp group. When it was pointed out that the Psalm was being sung by Hebrew-speaking Christians in Israel, he chose to double down and implied that because the Psalms were from the Old Testament and before the incarnation, they lacked the utmost helpfulness and relevance to Christians.

I give these stories as an introductory example of the problem of antisemitism in British evangelical churches today. What's worse, there is next to no recognition or repentance of the problem. It is a massive blind spot that I believe is in no small part due to a failure of discipleship and a faulty treatment of Old Testament prophecy. The importance of the Jews – what Paul speaks of as their advantage (Romans 3:1) – is deliberately deemphasised or replaced in what seems to be the kind of arrogant treatment Paul warns against in Romans 11:18. I have participated in discussional Bible studies where it has even been claimed that it doesn't matter if Jesus really returns to geographical Jerusalem, with an overt spiritualisation of every promise made concerning ethnic or natural Israel and the statement, 'They're not special' being made concerning the Jews. I have grown accustomed to large British Christian Facebook groups harbouring antisemitic comments demonising Jews for Kosher slaughter and circumcision (ignoring the fact that a good percentage even of non-Jews see circumcision as medically prudent). As my children grow up, I am wary that as Jews (who I pray will follow their Messiah Jesus), they will experience antisemitism not only from non-Christians but from those who say they are following the distinctly Jewish Messiah who grafts Gentile believers into the body of his people.

Just as other forms of racism have been recognised, rightly condemned, and to varying degrees repented of among British evangelicals, I submit that antisemitism remains largely unrecognised and undealt with in any meaningful way in large factions of British evangelicalism. In what will soon be 10 years of serving on the Affinity Social Issues Team, I do not believe we have commented on antisemitism at all. And yet the discussion of antisemitism in broader social and political arenas, the ongoing well-publicised Stephen Sizer debacle, and evident tolerance of antisemitism in churches,

specifically shows that such a comment is very relevant.¹ UK evangelical leaders have urged us 'to hear the challenge of black church leaders as they speak of their experience of the white UK church'.² Yet racism is, of course, not merely a black/white problem, hence why I similarly suggest that in dealing with antisemitism it is right that we start listening to Jewish and Jewish Christian voices and acting meaningfully to address the concerns raised. I pray that this comment on the matter will go a long way to facilitating such meaningful repentance.

Getting our terms right

Unfortunately, antisemitism is not always seen for what it is by evangelicals because we aren't even defining the term correctly. The assumption is often made that antisemitism is Jew-hatred in thought, word and action. While overt hatred certainly is antisemitic, there are many other ways in which antisemitism is exhibited and felt.

On 26 May 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted a working definition of antisemitism:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

The guiding notes for the IHRA definition present a very clear list of what constitutes antisemitism.

Manifestations of antisemitism include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Such antisemitism was on full display in the streets of London in 2021 with Z-list Islamic YouTube celebrities and Speakers Corner radicals Ali Dawah and Mohammed Hijab whipping up a Pro-PLO and Hamas (Palestinian terror organisations) sympathetic crowd in calling for the shedding of Jewish blood.³ The crowd burned Israeli flags and shouted antisemitic slurs, making threats that were of real concern to Jewish communities across London. Featuring in this and other events have been theories painting the Jews as conspiring to harm a small or large part of humanity or being the reason certain things go wrong in the world. These theories and the use of stereotypes and caricatures to depict Jewish control over various areas of life are antisemitic.⁴

The IHRA guidance proceeds to include but not limit antisemitism to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanising, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.

1 Nick Howard, *The Racism Within: Why the time has come for British evangelicals to acknowledge their failure to confront antisemitism*, Online: <https://nickhoward76.medium.com/the-racism-within-42c9ba10369>; Archbishop Cranmer blog, *Why does the South East Gospel Partnership tolerate anti-Semitism?*, cross posted by Harry's Place. Online: <http://hurryupharry.net/2012/07/22/why-does-the-south-east-gospel-partnership-tolerate-anti-semitism>.

2 John Stevens, *Racism: The Gospel Demands We Confront The Evil of Racism So Tragically Highlighted By The Death Of George Floyd*. Online: <https://www.affinity.org.uk/uncategorized/834-racism-the-gospel-demands-we-confront-the-evil-of-racism-so-tragically-highlighted-by-the-death-of-george-floyd/>

3 Dipesh Gader, *Embassy protester demanded 'Jewish blood'*, The Sunday Times, on May 30 2021; Israel Advocacy Movement, *Jews attacked at Israel Rally*, Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJCYPXFrDSk>

4 See: American Jewish Community (AJC), *Translate Hate: Stopping Antisemitism Starts With Understanding It*, October 2021. Online: <https://www.ajc.org/translatehate>

- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterise Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel.

The above definition and guidance, as well as further points on more obvious criminal antisemitism, have been adopted by a wide range of institutions, universities, and organisations including the UK government.⁵

While many Christians would certainly very much agree with the points raised by the IHRA, I believe James Mendelsohn and Rev. Nick Howard, two Jewish followers of Jesus, are correct in their essay for the *Journal Of Contemporary Anti-Semitism* in writing:

*...antisemitism is still seen by British conservative evangelicals as a lesser bigotry, which is why, for many years, their organizations and senior leaders have consistently failed to speak out or take timely and decisive action against the antisemitic activity of Stephen Sizer.*⁶

Stephen Sizer, former vicar at Christ Church Virginia Water and influential in various evangelical circles has a long track record of unquestionable antisemitism. The range of claims against Sizer, particularly highlighted by legal expert James Mendelsohn and Rev. Nick Howard, are specific, detailed, and longstanding. Yet tragically – and abusively – for some time these claims have been ignored, swept under the rug, or denied as significant. While this may be about to change in some way – Sizer is currently awaiting a verdict from the Bishop’s Disciplinary Tribunal for the Diocese of Winchester – there has been next to no condemnation by any senior UK evangelical leader up to now.

On 28th July 2022, following yet another example of Sizer’s antisemitism via his positive linking to an antisemitic website, Dr Liam Goligher, present senior minister at 10th Presbyterian Church Philadelphia, USA and formerly of Duke Street Church, Richmond became the first British conservative evangelical church leader of any real seniority to publicly condemn Stephen Sizer’s antisemitism. He commented on Twitter:

*This is an example of racism of the worst possible kind. Given the apostle’s love of his fellow countrymen and of his desire that they might be saved Sizer’s behavior isn’t Christian in any recognizable sense.*⁷

⁵ Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, and The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, *Government leads the way in tackling anti-Semitism*, Press Release, 12/12/2016. Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-leads-the-way-in-tackling-anti-semitism>

⁶ James Mendelsohn and Bernard Nicholas Howard, *A Lesser Bigotry? The UK Conservative Evangelical Response to Stephen Sizer’s Antisemitism*, *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2021, 59. Online: <https://doi.org/10.26613/jca.4.1.72>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/LGoligher/status/1552604273690697730>

Graham Miller, London City Mission CEO, similarly responded:

*I am SO sorry that Jewish people continue to endure racism. I am SO sorry that we as British Evangelicals haven't taken action to ensure our leaders don't cross boundaries from political discourse into blatant racism. Words seem empty when action is long overdue. I am SO sorry.*⁸

Affinity have made its own statement on the matter which can be found at the bottom of this article.

Getting our history and theology right

As with any area of life, behaviour is rooted in belief. The poor response to antisemitic words and behaviour among evangelicals has flagged that there are significant issues in our beliefs concerning Israel and the Jewish people. Among British evangelicals, it is quite common to find antisemitism under the banner of so-called 'anti-zionism'. Indeed, Stephen Sizer and others claim that they are not antisemitic, but they are anti-zionist. And yet anti-zionists deny that Jewish people have a right to self-determination and existence in the land of Israel, often allying themselves with groups who support violent Islamist organisations like Hamas, who are devoted to the ethnic cleansing of Jews. This is fully antisemitic.

Present-day anti-zionism among British evangelicals could not be further from the mindset of leading 19th-century British evangelicals, J. C. Ryle and Charles Spurgeon. Ryle saw many of the Protestant Reformers as particularly mistaken in their spiritualisation of 'Israel' and urged a more literal and fair reading of Old Testament prophecy. He says:

*But suppose the Jew asks you if you take all the prophecies of the Old Testament in their simple literal meaning. Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of Messiah to reign over the earth in glory, a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine, a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem. Suppose the unconverted Jew puts these questions to you, what answer are you prepared to make? Will you dare to tell him that Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain literal sense? Will you dare to tell him that the words Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Judah, Ephraim, Israel, do not mean what they seem to mean, but mean the Church of Christ? Will you dare to tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy, mean nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries and gospel preaching? Will you dare to tell him that you think it 'carnal' to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem, 'carnal' to expect a literal coming of Messiah to reign? Oh, reader, if you are a man of this mind, take care what you are doing!*⁹

*It is high time for Christians to interpret unfulfilled prophecy by the light of prophecies already fulfilled. The curses of the Jews were brought to pass literally; so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal; so also will be the gathering. The pulling down of Zion was literal; so also will be the building up. The rejection of Israel was literal; so also will be the restoration.*¹⁰

*Cultivate the habit of reading prophecy with a single eye to the literal meaning of its proper names. Cast aside the old traditional idea that Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Jerusalem, and Zion must always mean the Gentile Church, and that predictions about the second Advent are to be taken spiritually, and first Advent predictions literally. Be just, and honest, and fair. If you expect the Jews to take the 53rd of Isaiah literally, be sure you take the 54th and 60th and 62nd literally also. The Protestant Reformers were not perfect. On no point, I venture to say, were they so much in the wrong as in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.*¹¹

8 https://twitter.com/Windy_London/status/1552801153976500230

9 J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 47

10 Ibid, 4

11 Ibid, 157-159

Over 80 years before the State of Israel was established and recognised, Spurgeon similarly addressed what he saw as ignoring Old Testament prophecies' clear meaning pertaining to Israel. In an exposition on Ezekiel 38:1-10:

Israel is now blotted out from the map of nations; her sons are scattered far and wide; her daughters mourn beside all the rivers of the earth. Her sacred song is hushed; no king reigns in Jerusalem; she bringeth forth no governors among her tribes. But she is to be restored; she is to be restored "as from the dead." When her own sons have given up all hope of her, then is God to appear for her. She is to be re-organised; her scattered bones are to be brought together. There will be a native government again; there will again be the form of a body politic; a state shall be incorporated, and a king shall reign. Israel has now become alienated from her own land. Her sons, though they can never forget the sacred dust of Palestine yet die at a hopeless distance from her consecrated shores. But it shall not be so for ever, for her sons shall again rejoice in her... If there be meaning in words this must be the meaning of this chapter. I wish never to learn the art of tearing God's meaning out of his own words. If there be anything clear and plain, the literal sense and meaning of this passage—a meaning not to be spirited or spiritualized away—must be evident that both the two and the ten tribes of Israel are to be restored to their own land, and that a king is to rule over them.¹²

Ryle and Spurgeon were not unique in what would today be referred to as their Zionistic beliefs. Indeed, while rank antisemitism was very present in many of the reformers, there is a significant and rich heritage of leading Christ-disciples who believed in, looked out for, and advocated the return of the Jews and the re-establishment of Israel centuries before it would finally occur.

Sir Henry Finch, an English lawyer and politician (died 1625) came under much pressure from James I for his 1621 work *The World's Great Restoration or Calling of the Jews, and with them of all Nations and Kingdoms of the Earth to the Faith of Christ* in which he predicts the fulfilment of prophecy in the restoration of the Jews to their land. John Owen's note in Vavasor Powell's *A New and Useful Concordance to the Holy Bible* on the prophecies concerning the calling of the Jews in the Old Testament states: '[The Jews] would be gathered from all parts of the earth...and brought home into their own land.' The author of *The Jews Jubilee or, the Conjunction and Resurrection of the Dry Bones of the Whole House of Israel* (London, 1688) prophetically urges the Jewish people to prepare for a return to their homeland where they will eventually encounter God's glory in the Messiah.

Protestant, albeit debatably unorthodox, individuals such as the Puritan Thomas Brightman and intellectual Isaac Newton both spoke rightly of the clarity of the Old Testament prophets on the return of the Jews to their land.

In *Shall they Return to Jerusalem Again?* (1615) Brightman writes: 'There is nothing more sure: the Prophets plainly confirm it, and beat often upon it.'

Newton in his *The Mystery of this Restitution of All Things* writes:

For they understand not that the final return of the Jews captivity & their conquering the nations of the four Monarchies & setting up a peaceable righteous & flourishing Kingdom at the day of judgment is this mystery. Did they understand this they would find it in all the old Prophets who write of the last times as in the last chapters of Isaiah where the Prophet conjoins the new heaven & new earth with the ruin of the wicked nations, the end of all troubles weeping & of all troubles, the return of the Jews captivity & their setting up a flourishing & everlasting Kingdom.

12 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews*, Sermon #582, 16/06/1864

Benjamin Keach, Increase Mather, Jonathan Edwards, Lord Shaftesbury, and William Wilberforce all spoke affirmatively of the Jewish return and the God-ordained nature of that return to their homeland, Israel.¹³

Our theology doesn't rest or fall on the beliefs of the aforementioned men, of course. Indeed, while these men were fallible themselves and sometimes strayed into error in the application of their interpretation,¹⁴ when it comes to their understanding of God's specific unconditional promises, specifically ethnic Israel, we would be hard-pressed – and I dare say agenda-driven – to deny their analysis. Leaving aside the oft-debated identity of 'all Israel' in Romans 11:26 (I believe contextually this does specifically relate to ethnic Israel), the covenant God makes in Deuteronomy 29:1–29 and Deuteronomy 30:1–10 and the promise of the restoration of ethnic Jews from among all nations throughout the prophets, coupled with the sovereign orchestration of God in allowing Israel to be reformed and founded and protected in its current state, should be enough to make the case for God's favour upon the Jews in an ongoing way.

The Jew who rules the world

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, highlights the tension between Jews and Gentiles in the early church. It is clear that as Gentile believers in Jesus began to outnumber Jewish followers, there was tension. Throughout church history, it is easy to find present in churches the two extremes with which Paul seems to deal. One view says that Jews have no advantage when it comes to the Gospel. Another view says that Jews are better off before God because they are Jews; some even say Jews do not need to follow Jesus as Messiah because they are Jews. Both views are wrong. The first denies any ongoing significance or importance of the Jews and national Israel in God's plan. The second emphasises the importance of the Jews and national Israel to the point of denying Scripture regarding salvation. Christians must acknowledge that God's Gospel is for the Jews first (Romans 1:16) while affirming that God's judgement will affect Jews as well as non-Jews – ethnicity does not save (Romans 2:9–11). God's favour is for what Paul outlines as inward, Holy Spirit-filled Jews (Romans 2:28–29) but God has specifically blessed ethnic Jews regardless of their following of Messiah with historic access to the 'oracles of God' (Romans 3:2). Paul says 'They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.' (Romans 9:4–5 ESV).

These gifts from God to the Jews do not make them better off before Him in a saving sense. Paul writes: 'What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,' (Romans 3:9 ESV). Meanwhile, God's promises for Israel do extend to Gentiles who believe in Jesus (Romans 9:6–7; 24–29), but the promise remains that God has not forgotten or rejected his special covenant people (Romans 11). Isaiah 59:20 promises and Romans 11:26–27 quotes 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.' (Romans 11:26b ESV)

A Jew rules the World

The stories I began with are far from the only times my family has experienced antisemitic comments. On one occasion a non-Christian man made a comment to my wife during church

13 See: Benjamin Keach, *Antichrist Stormed; Or Mystery Babylon, the Great Whore and the Great City, Proved to Be the Present Church of Rome* (London, 1689); Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation* (London: John Allen, 1669); Mather, *Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation* (London: R. Tookey for Nath. Hillier, 1709); Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, Apocalyptic Writings, V. 8, pp. 133–34.; Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, "Memorandum to Protestant Monarchs of Europe for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine", *Colonial Times*, 1841; William Thomas Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, from 1809 to 1908*, 1908, p. 41.

14 Keach for instance felt the Jewish return to their homeland was imminent and looked at his present day context, charting out a chronology of events.

outreach that the world was under Jewish control. She kept her cool and responded, 'Of course it is! Jesus was a Jew! He controls it! It's a good thing!'

Non-Jewish Christians would do well to remember that we are included in God's promises to Abraham by faith in the Messiah. We worship the Jewish Messiah who continues to work through time and space accomplishing all of God's promises to his people, Jew or Gentile. We mustn't grieve him with arrogance, hostility, or indifference toward our Jewish friends and family. We mustn't ignore the antisemitism that is so normal that it isn't even seen as a problem in our churches. We must repent and respond in humility, dealing with this grave sin against God and our fellow man, remembering God's promise to Abraham and his offspring: 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse' (Genesis 12:3).

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A statement on antisemitism from Affinity

Affinity categorically rejects all forms of antisemitism, and indeed racism of any kind, especially within the church. This article reflects the personal views and experiences of the author. We were deeply sorry to hear how Regan and his wife Rachel had been spoken to on those occasions he cites. We also note that very serious and disturbing allegations of antisemitism have been made against Rev. Stephen Sizer which are currently subject to a Clergy Disciplinary Measure. Rev. Sizer has strongly denied that he is antisemitic, and the Tribunal has not yet delivered its determination. It would not be appropriate to comment on that case, nor are we qualified to do so, we have not researched the situation deeply but are very concerned to have seen some social media posts that appear to be offensive and insensitive to the Jewish community.

Affinity takes no collective position on the nature of the fulfilment of biblical prophecies relating to the land of Israel – a diversity of interpretations are held by our constituent churches and members. Affinity is also aware that the IHRA definition of antisemitism is not universally approved by Christians and it has not, as yet, been formally adopted by Affinity.

Teaching Christianity in Schools for the Common Good

by Crossteach

The concept of the common good has engrossed philosophers since ancient times. It was an abstract much pondered by the Greeks: Aristotle, in pursuit of the definition for a good life, concluded that it isn't simply about a life well lived through pursuing good purposes. Rather, it is about orientating that good life to the benefit of wider society. He defined a life lived for the common good as 'more divine' than that lived only for personal good and this spiritual dimension has echoed down through centuries of Christian thought.

Common good in Christian thought and teaching

God gave humanity its first blueprints right from the beginning. He looked at his creation and declared it to be good. The first humans were given dominion over the created world to both enjoy and steward it for the good of all. God also created man and woman to live together in relationship with each other and with him. The relationship of marriage is special. For it to flourish and provide a healthy environment for children to be raised, each person sometimes needs to forgo their individual wishes for the good of the family as a whole. A strong family is the building block of a thriving, stable society. Time after time in the biblical narrative and throughout history, people suffer because that foundational relationship gets broken.

The book of Acts tells us that people in the first church sold their possessions to ensure that everybody had enough (Acts 2:44–47, 4:32–37). Presumably, as they ate in each other's homes, they kept some of their homes and sold everything they didn't need. This wasn't a compulsion, but it was clear that building personal wealth just for your own wellbeing was seen as a spiritual issue.

Writing to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul says, 'Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good' (1 Corinthians 12:7). We are given various gifts for the benefit of the whole church community and yet it is in exercising those gifts that we also grow personally, as the body of Christ becomes stronger than its individual parts.

Early Christian thinkers extended that principle beyond the community of the church and into society. The Epistle of Barnabas, written between AD70 and 132, says, 'Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek together the common good.' Writing in *City of God* nearly 300 years later, Saint Augustine asked himself whether individual human wellbeing was found in the good of a whole society - his answer was a resounding yes.

Look forward another 800 years and we find that for Thomas Aquinas, the common good was expressed through the double commandment recorded in Mark's gospel, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and also to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:30–31).

Extending that principle into society creates an imperative for Christians to engage in public life and political discourse at every level. Through the prophet Jeremiah, we are exhorted to 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper' (Jeremiah 29:7).

This is nowhere more vital than in education. Our country has a long history of church engagement in education – the church was providing schools for the nation's children as a form of public service decades before the state got involved. Why? Because Christians understood the vital role that education plays in human flourishing. More than a quarter of all children in the UK currently attend a church school and the Church of England's continuing vision for its schools was explicated in its 2016 document, *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good*.

Teaching Christianity in schools

Contemporary education is a battleground for the minds of our children and young people. Woke culture dominates. Secular liberal ideologies underpin much of what is taught. In 2013, the word 'selfie' was named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries and self-values as a key to personal development are woven through every discourse: self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-concept, self-image, self-love, self-assurance, self-defence.

Yet according to the 2020 Children's World Project, children in the UK are the unhappiest in the world. Often children give the trauma of their broken family as the reason for their unhappiness, with all the attendant distress of moving home, losing friendships and often losing contact with people they love.

The Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) programme – much vaunted as the solution to social evils – is now statutory in all our schools, regardless of religious ethos or independent status. It teaches children about abuse and how to deal with it; how to say no to drugs; how to react to the deluge of child-on-child sexual abuse that is sweeping through our schools. This is education at its worst – teaching children and young people how to spot and defend themselves against the common bad.

Tolerance and respect are the buzzwords of the current zeitgeist. But tolerance has no answer to the ugliness of racism or the brutality of abuse. Tolerance cannot feed starving people or prevent us from destroying the beautiful world that God created for us to enjoy. Nor can it tame an insatiable desire to feed the beast known as The Economy.

Christianity speaks into all of this in a variety of ways. Many churches build relationships with local school communities and are welcomed in to lead assemblies and after-school clubs. Religious Education (despite sustained attempts to downgrade its status) remains a statutory subject in the school curriculum and Christianity is the core religion taught in most schools. Where churches have built a bridge into a school, Christians are also often welcomed in to teach RE. This is an amazing opportunity to teach (within the curriculum) biblical perspectives on marriage; identity; social engagement; care for others; wealth creation; care for the created environment, and God's love for each of us, uniquely created in His image. And, for the moment, this opportunity remains legally protected.

Christianity as the only sustainable path to the common good

The concept of the common good resonated, too, with secular Enlightenment thinkers. John Locke's 1689 *Two Treatises of Government* argued that we are all born free of God's dominion, with equal opportunity to determine our own outcomes. We can therefore choose to set aside personal ambitions for the greater good. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's treatise *The Social Contract*, written in 1762, suggested that in order for a society to function, not only must the common interests of all those in a society be recognised, but that the end goal of those who govern must be the realisation of the common good.

But despite the best of humanist intentions, we cannot do this in our own strength, because at the core of the Christian gospel is the inescapable fact of sin.

On 8 June 2020, hundreds of people protesting against police brutality after the death of George Floyd set up the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP) – an autonomous police-free zone. They planted community gardens, offered free medical care and held screenings of films. The city's mayor hoped that it would usher in a 'summer of love'. A visitor to the zone enthused that:

It was absolutely astonishing. There was a food co-op, as well as a full medics corner with actual doctors from around the city that had volunteered and had their own ambulance.

There were classes, lectures, speakers, poetry, lots of live music, huge works of art... It was really beautiful.

The BBC reports that it all came to an end on 1 July, after four shootings and allegations of assault within the community. Why such violence in an intentional community set up for the promotion of peace? The Bible tells us that 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure' (Jeremiah 17:9) – older translations used the phrase 'desperately wicked' to describe our human hearts. No matter how altruistic our intentions are, sin will always spoil human endeavour.

So it is this message that lies at the very heart of Christian teaching in schools. We live in a fallen world full of sin and its consequences. It is only through forgiveness in Christ that we can be free from the power of sin in our lives. And that freedom, given to us as a free gift from God, is what motivates and empowers us to work for the ultimate common good – communities where God is honoured as the creator and sustainer of our lives.

The mission of Crossteach is to teach about the Christian faith in schools. Our vision is for pupils to develop spiritually through understanding, engaging with and responding to the Christian faith. Find out more at <https://www.crossteach.com/about-us/>

Scottish Government Advisory Group Calls for Ban on the Ordinary Work of Churches

by Joanna Cook and Revd Stephen Allison

At the beginning of 2022, the Scottish Government established an 'Expert Advisory Group' on banning conversion therapy. The group's role was to help the Scottish Government understand how a ban should function. Now it has published its official report, and it is deeply worrying.¹

The Report calls for an extreme ban on conversion therapy, which would see pastors and parents criminalised for conversations about marriage, sex and gender.

It claims that Christians teaching 'the importance of marriage' is an attempt to 'suppress LGBT people' (the Advisory Group's definition of 'conversion therapy'). It says Christian leaders should have their 'professional licence as a faith leader' removed or have their 'ability to work within Scotland' withdrawn if they are found guilty of the new offence. And it says: 'Where parents or guardians have engaged in conversion practices, the modification or even withdrawal of their parental or guardianship rights is envisaged as an option.'

'Horrendous abuse'

Of course, a key question is what a pastor or parent must be found guilty of to suffer these heavy sanctions. Are these punishments for carrying out horrendous abuse, or is this an attempt to limit the ordinary work of churches?

What do you think of when you hear 'conversion therapy'? Most would reflect on medical experiments and horror film-like scenes from decades ago. It should go without saying that Christians, believing all are made in the image of God, can never condone such abuse. We would hope that were such practices happening today, churches would stand firmly against them.

But these practices are already illegal and ceased long ago, as admitted by institutions which carried them out.² Yet activists tell us 'conversion therapy' takes place today in different forms which ought to be outlawed. The Advisory Group's Report makes it clear that Christians are right to be wary of what that means – these 'forms' all too often sounding more like 'conversion' than any sort of attempted 'therapy'.

Church practices

The Advisory Group recommends the Scottish Government follow the model of the State of Victoria in Australia. Its conversion therapy ban is known as the world's most repressive, with the body enforcing it even claiming it is now illegal to 'not affirm someone's gender identity'. Churches which teach celibacy for those who are unmarried, and those who say homosexual practice is a sin, are also conducting 'conversion therapy' according to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

And then there is the impact of the Victoria legislation on parents. Those who refuse to support their children receiving puberty blockers are apparently breaking the law. Parents there have been forced to form 'a clandestine network to exchange ideas on how to approach the legal minefield', as

1 View the report online: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2022/10/expert-advisory-group-ending-conversion-practices-report-recommendations/documents/expert-advisory-group-ending-conversion-practices-report-recommendations/expert-advisory-group-ending-conversion-practices-report-recommendations/govscot%3Adocument/expert-advisory-group-ending-conversion-practices-report-recommendations.pdf>

2 See: <https://parliamentnews.co.uk/horrific-experiments-at-university-of-birmingham-give-no-ex-cuse-for-banning-prayer/>

even discussion seems to be under the purview of the legislation.³

So while activists in Scotland hail Victoria's 'conversion therapy' ban as the 'gold standard', those in Australia are left frightened by a law which seemingly stops them from voicing concerns either with their children or in the public arena.

Far from tackling abuse, then, the Advisory Group wants to replicate bad laws from other countries. And it is ordinary parents and the ordinary work of churches which are at risk.

Avoiding bad legislation

In such a contested arena, an 'expert panel' would seem like a sensible idea. It is surely wise to take advice from those who understand the issues deeply and grasp the wider significance and concerns of all involved. But the Scottish Government's choice of 'experts' is telling.

When the decision to form a panel was first announced, The Christian Institute asked for a seat at the table. The Scottish Government said it would ensure representation across the board. But when the membership was announced it was clear that only those who had already pledged outright support for a broad ban were approached.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government's plans for a new law on 'conversion therapy' have made this a law on fundamental human rights. You would be right to think a panel for this purpose would be made up of lawyers and human rights scholars – but it is not. Instead, we have activists from LGBT campaign groups and some from the most liberal wings of the Scottish churches recommending the Government rolls back decades of hard-won protections for freedom of speech and freedom of belief.

That is why The Christian Institute's 'Let Us Pray' campaign is so important. It speaks out against the extreme views of LGBT activists who are driving conversion therapy proposals. Let Us Pray is clear about what activists really mean when they speak about 'conversion therapy' and decodes the jargon those pressing for new legislation try to hide behind.

Dangerous ideology

Talking of the 'suppression of LGBT people' while describing 'teaching the importance of marriage' shows how the activists think. 'Suppression' sounds bad – but what those proposing this Bill mean by it is Christians saying certain actions should be avoided as sinful. Restraining our desires is universally accepted as a moral good – but here it is rebranded as 'suppression' to justify its criminalisation.

Removing the 'professional licence' of faith leaders also sounds like a reasonable enough punishment for those who are found guilty of a crime. But when the offence is upholding orthodox biblical teaching, the Report is actually calling for church ministers to be beholden to Government-approved liberal theology.

In recent years we have seen numerous cases of Christian groups being refused the use of venues because of their beliefs. But the courts have been clear that the Christian sexual ethic is 'worthy of respect in a democratic society' and it is unlawful discrimination to refuse access on this basis. But the 'expert' group has decided that despite these views being 'worthy of respect', public buildings should not host Christians who fall foul of the extraordinary new law.

Another clear failing of the Report is its inability to understand the importance of parental freedom. Christian parents must be free to discourage their children from unhelpful or dangerous sexual activity. They must be able to counsel their children to be comfortable in their own skin. Yet here we

³ See: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11101415/Parents-counsellors-face-prosecution-gender-transition-children-suppression-law.html>

find that parents who do not readily affirm their children's chosen identity face even 'withdrawal of their parental or guardianship rights'. This prospect of LGBT ideology being foisted upon everyday family life is truly terrifying.

We must therefore pray that the Scottish Government would not bring forward a Bill that would trample on free speech and religious freedom. We must also pray that pastors and church leaders would remain free to pray and care for people and that Christian parents would be free to bring up their children in the faith.

Joanna Cook works in Public Affairs at The Christian Institute and is part of the Let Us Pray campaign. She is from Aberdeenshire and has a BA in Theology from the Highland Theological College.

Rev. Stephen Allison has been minister of Kiltarlity Free Church since 2018. He is also involved in the wider work of the Free Church of Scotland as an Assistant Clerk to the General Assembly and Public Engagement Coordinator.

Latest News of Significant Individual Cases

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

Richard Scott

Christian Doctor threatened with expulsion for praying

Richard Scott, 62, is a GP from Margate and has worked as a doctor for the last 35 years.

In 2011 he faced an official complaint after discussing faith with a patient. Despite Richard following the General Medical Council's guidelines, he was given an official warning in 2012.

In 2019, he faced a six-month fitness to practice investigation, following a complaint lodged by the National Secular Society after Richard prayed for a patient during a consultation. The GMC (General Medical Council) concluded their investigation in November 2019, stating that there was no evidence, no specific complaints and that he had not broken GMC guidance by offering to pray for his patients.

In December 2019 the NSS raised another complaint, claiming that they had 'new evidence'. Again, the GMC found that there was 'no grounds for a fresh decision' and upheld their decision from November 2019.

However, NHS England decided to take up a case against Dr Scott despite the General Medical Council ruling twice in both, 2019 and 2020, that he had not breached any of its guidelines and that 'discussion of faith in consultations is not prohibited'.

NHS England began a series of investigations throughout 2020 and 2021.

During this period, Dr Scott was given a series of disciplinary measures; he would be barred from the NHS Practitioners List and mandatory conditions such as taking an £1800 'professional boundaries' course, at his own expense. He contested going on the course and was told that for refusing to comply he would need to undertake a psychological assessment to 'reset' his approach when offering patients prayer. Dr Scott, refused to undertake the course or assessment.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Scott had been set to contest the disciplinary measures, and mandatory conditions imposed against him by NHS England at a six-day hearing at Ashford Hearing Centre, Kent starting from 26 September 2022.

However, on the 26 September, just before proceedings commenced, NHS England agreed to settle the case. This included NHS England lawyers agreeing that Dr Scott is free to offer to pray with patients if he does so within agreed GMC guidance. In return Dr Scott has agreed, with no admittance of wrong-doing, to attend a one-day course related to professional boundaries.

Responding to the outcome, Dr Scott said: 'I am relieved that NHS England has agreed to settle the case, but it never should have come to this.'

'Sadly, I have seen a deep intolerance from some parts of the NHS towards Christian beliefs and a complete lack of understanding of what prayer is and how it positively impacts people's lives.'

'I hope this outcome acts as an encouragement to other Christian professionals that it is more than OK to share your faith and that freedom is worth fighting for.'

Fitzwilliam College

Fitzwilliam College initially accepted the booking of the Wilberforce Academy in January 2022 for its September 2022 conference. The College recanted its acceptance after receiving the Academy's booking form stating the purpose of the event and that: 'As a Christian organisation, Christian Concern holds to the traditional historic Christian understanding of marriage and sanctity of life, in line with mainstream orthodox Christianity and the Church of England.'

The College's Head of Catering and Events, stated in an email 'After careful consideration the College has decided not to accept the booking on the grounds that the event is not compatible with the Values of the College.' In a phone call the day after that, the College went even further in defending the cancellation by stating that the Academy was perceived to not be 'inclusive', that it did not believe in gay marriage, and that Christian Concern's general beliefs were 'not compatible with the values of the College.'

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre the Academy is pursuing a judicial review of the decision of the College, arguing that they have acted unlawfully and breached its duty under the Education Act 1996 for their direct discrimination against the Academy on the grounds of its religious and philosophical beliefs. The permission hearing for judicial review was heard on 15 September 2022.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern said: 'We are now living in a society where orthodox Christian beliefs appear to be "fair game" for secular activists who have a grip on what is acceptable and what isn't at the heart of our universities.'

Bernard Randall

Trent College

School Chaplain, Rev. Dr Bernard Randall, 49, lost his job and was reported to the government's terrorist watchdog after delivering a sermon in school chapel that that encouraged respect and debate on identity politics.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr. Randall filed claim against Trent College for discrimination, harassment, victimisation and unfair dismissal in the employment tribunal.

Background

In June 2018, the College which has a 'protestant and evangelical' Church of England ethos, invited the leader of Educate and Celebrate, into the school to train staff. 'Educate and Celebrate' claims to 'equip you and your communities with the knowledge, skills and confidence to embed gender, gender identity and sexual orientation into the fabric of your organisation.'

Dr Randall raised concerns about this Educate and Celebrate's programme because of potential clashes with Christian beliefs and values.

In January 2019, at the next staff training day it was announced that the school had decided to adopt their year-long 'gold standard' programme. This would see an identity politics 'LGBT inclusive curriculum' implemented, even for the nursery provision at the school.

The Sermon

Dr Randall asked students what subjects they would like to hear in his sermons during the summer term Christian chapel services, Dr Randall was approached by a student who asked him whether he would address the following: 'how come we are told we have to accept all this LGBT stuff in a Christian school?'

He had also been approached by pupils who had said that they were confused and upset by the

issues involved in the new LGBT teaching.

He gave the sermon twice as part of a service which also included hymns, prayers and a Bible reading. A week later Dr Randall was asked to attend a meeting with the school's Safeguarding Lead where concerns were raised about his sermon. Dr Randall was suspended throughout the duration of the disciplinary process.

Dr Randall was dismissed for gross misconduct by letter on 30 Aug 2019. He appealed this decision and was reinstated at the school on a final written warning. He was then furloughed during COVID and in October 2021, not having been reinstated from furlough, Dr Randall was advised by the school that they wanted to consult on reconstructing the Chaplaincy provision.

On 7 - 21 September 2022 Dr Randall's case was heard at the East Midlands Employment Tribunal.

Bernard commented: 'My story sends a message to other Christians that you are not free to talk about your faith. It seems it is no longer enough to just "tolerate" LGBT ideology. You must accept it without question and no debate is allowed without serious consequences. Someone else will decide what is and what isn't acceptable, and suddenly you can become an outcast, possibly for the rest of your life.'

Derby Diocese

Dr Randall, who is ordained by the CofE, was also reported as a safeguarding risk to children by the Church of England, following being disciplinary and dismissed as School Chaplain at Trent College.

Internal emails revealed cooperation between Trent College and the Diocese of Derby to ensure Dr Randall could not officiate again in the region. The Bishop of Derby, the Rt. Rev'd Libby Lane, has refused to allow him to officiate in Church services.

In July 2021, Dr Randall was told that he had to undergo an independent safeguarding assessment by a psychologist. The psychologist chosen specialised in assessing sex-offenders. He declined, because the process would require him to accept wrongdoing.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Randall has brought a claim against the Diocese of Derby. It will be argued that the events revealed a campaign of harassment against him, involving stereotypical assumptions that a Clergyman holding his beliefs was a safeguarding risk are an act of discrimination, harassment and a breach of the Equality Act 2010.

Commenting on his treatment by the Church of England, Dr Randall said: "Safeguarding" has been weaponised against what they believe to be a difficult voice...Sadly, the C of E seems to care more about its reputation in the secular world than showing spiritual leadership – it has become managerialised.'

Archie Battersbee

Archie Battersbee, 12, was left in a critical condition after a tragic accident.

Archie was initially given 24 hours to live. Doctors believe that it was highly likely that Archie was brain dead. The Family Division of the High Court ruled that 'on the balance of probabilities' this was likely to be true.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, this decision was overturned by the Court of Appeal, which ruled that the case should be heard again after the High Court judgement wrongly determined that Archie was dead instead of considering Archie's best interests on the basis that he was alive.

In June 2022, in the following rounds of the courts, the judges ruled that it was 'in Archie's best interests' to die.

At the end of July 2022, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities intervened, urging the UK government to keep Archie alive while it considered the case. The UK defied the international injunction and refused to keep Archie on life support for a week longer.

His family's preference to have Archie moved to a hospice was ruled out, as doctors and courts claimed that it would not be dignified; he could only die a 'dignified' death in hospital.

Archie's life support was removed on 6 August 2022. Archie died at 12:15pm

Maureen Martin

Maureen Martin was a housing manager for housing association L & Q for 13 years, with an exemplary record. Maureen is also the president of the Christian People's Alliance and in April 2022 she stood to be Mayor of Lewisham. As part of her election manifesto, she outlined her political position on various topics, including marriage:

'I pledge to cut through political correctness and simply state the truth that natural marriage is between a man and a woman is the fundamental building block for a successful society, and the safest environment for raising children'.

Consequently, several complaints were raised over her manifesto to both Lewisham Council and then her employer L & Q, with accusation of 'hate speech' made. The company quickly investigated her and explained that her 'views could bring L & Q into disrepute' and that her campaign was 'discriminatory' and would offend gay and trans people'. Maureen, was suspended from the company and, following a fully disciplinary hearing, was sacked for gross misconduct.

Maureen is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre as she challenges L & Q on grounds of discrimination harassment and unfair dismissal. Her case is believed to be the first of its kind to see a political candidate sacked by their employer for their Christian beliefs.

Miss Martin commented on her case: 'I was devastated, but also sadly not surprised that L & Q would treat me in this way. I have a right to express my own Christian beliefs in my own private time and should not be required to self-censor valid beliefs on marriage, abortion and US politics. I would not treat people in any way other than professionally. It was a general statement I made, and I am quite within my right to make it. We either have freedom of speech in the UK, or we do not. We must have the freedom to disagree with each other without it resulting in people having their lives torn apart.

'I am determined to fight for justice and to ensure that no other Christian political candidates and employees go through what I have.'

Nigel and Sally Rowe

Nigel and Sally Rowe are bringing a legal challenge against the Secretary of State for Education following their sons' former Church of England primary school telling them that 'misgendering' a child could be considered a form of bullying.

When a six-year-old boy in their son's class started to come to school sometimes dressed as a girl, Nigel and Sally Rowe, who live on the Isle of Wight, raised concerns with the Church of England school. They say that their son, also six years old, came home from school upset and saying that he was 'confused' by the situation.

Nigel and Sally met with the headteacher and class teacher and followed up with a letter setting out some of the questions that they had. But the school's formal response was 'cold', they say,

and didn't address their concerns. In the letter, the school suggested that an 'inability to believe a transgender person is actually a "real" female or male' and the refusal to 'acknowledge a transgendered person's true gender e.g., by failing to use their adopted name or using gender inappropriate pronouns,' was 'transphobic behaviour'.

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

Nigel and Sally, who are currently home-schooling their two children, are now pursuing a judicial review over the Department for Education's refusal to intervene in their case and its promotion of the transgender guidelines in primary schools.

In support of their challenge, Nigel and Sally have sought opinions from three eminent experts, Dr Paul McHugh MD, Dr Quentin Van Meter MD FCP and Graham Rogers. Copies of their expert opinions can be found at <https://christianconcern.com/cccases/nigel-and-sally-rowe/>

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Nigel and Sally applied to the High Court for permission to judicially review the Secretary of State for Education's decision not to exercise powers under the Education Act to challenge the school's approach to children identifying as transgender.

On 9 February 2022, Mr Justice Lane granted permission for the review to proceed, on the grounds that transgender issues in schools are arguably a matter of education and therefore the responsibility of the state.

Secondly, the case will proceed on the ground that ministers failed to take account of the expert evidence presented to them by the Rowses, which shows that 'trans affirming' policies cause harm to young children.

In September 2022, the government (Department of Education) decided to settle the case after the Rowses won permission at the High Court for a judicial review of the government's transgender affirming policies. The government have also committed to reform: 'guidance for schools on transgender issues is being developed by the Department in conjunction with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, with a view to undertaking a public consultation on draft guidance in Autumn 2022, to which the Claimants will have the opportunity to respond.'

Nigel and Sally were awarded £22,000 in legal costs and a commitment from the government to reform transgender policies in primary schools, following the five-year legal battle.

In light of this, Nigel and Sally Rowe are now calling on the Church of England to urgently abandon transgender guidance which says that children as young as five should be affirmed if they want to identify as the opposite gender. On 7 October 2022 they wrote an open letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby to urgently abandon its controversial 'Valuing All God's Children' guidance which covers 4,700 CofE primary schools.

Core Issues Trust

Core Issues Trust (CIT) is a non-profit Christian ministry that offers talking therapy and supports men and women who voluntarily seek change in sexual preference and expression.

On 20 July 2020, CIT was notified that its banking facilities with Barclays Bank would be stopped in two months, after a coordinated campaign by LGBT activists. On 3 July, there were tweets pressuring Barclays bank to stop providing CIT with services. The International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC) project supported by CIT also received closure notice at the same time. CIT has received over 300 nuisance phone calls and hate messages and its email address has been signed up to porn sites without consent. Mike Davidson, Chief Executive of CIT and Christian therapist received death threats and numerous other intimidating messages.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, CIT is challenging the decision of Barclays to close its accounts.

Mike Davidson comments on the case: '[we] believe that, in principle, Barclays Bank was wrong; that they overstepped the mark, that they have been unfair, and they have favoured one viewpoint over another. So really, this is viewpoint discrimination, and I think that that's the higher principle that we need to be looking at in all of this.'

Since the incident, Barclays have refused to apologise, reinstate the account or even give a reason for its action. Barclays argues that it can terminate any account by giving two months' notice without explanation and has claimed there is no evidence that Dr Davidson or CIT have been discriminated against by the bank.

On 14 October 2022 during the hearing, Barclays bank lawyers are now seeking to strike out Dr Davidson's case by suggested that the court does not have jurisdiction to determine the legal action.

Book review: Tax Law, Religion, and Justice

by Naomi Wells

An Exploration of Theological Reflections on Taxation

Allen Calhoun

Published Routledge, 2021, 294 pages, £36.99.

Tax Law, Religion, and Justice is by no means an easy read but is an extremely thought-provoking 294-page volume from Dr Allan Calhoun, a McDonald Distinguished Fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, who has previously been a tax lawyer and a tax law editor and who holds several academic qualifications from the UK and the US.

While the title could be interpreted broadly, Calhoun narrows it down at the outset by identifying two competing principles which drive tax policy – equity and efficiency.

He defines ‘equity’ as the principle that the tax system has the potential to redistribute resources within society, while ‘efficiency’ is defined as the principle that tax is a necessary evil, under pressure to limit itself for the sake of economic productivity and efficiency.

Calhoun’s fundamental opening question is:

Why is tax policy driven by the competing principles of equity and efficiency? Underlying this is a further question, being why does taxation serve an adjunct role in legal systems, functioning as the means of achieving redistributive justice while other areas of law protect private property and foster the production of wealth?

The approach taken is historical and theological, going back to the underlying theological concepts which Calhoun believes still affect tax theory today. He explains that: ‘This project accepts the invitation to excavate the theology or theologies that direct taxation towards a redistributive goal not readily explicable by most prevailing theories of tax equity.’

This does seem to contain hints of a predetermined conclusion, although Calhoun recognises some limitations to his study. It is not intended to make detailed policy recommendations to improve the US tax system (the book appears to be primarily aimed at a US readership, although it does contain occasional references to the UK). It does not suggest that current tax policy should be guided by a particular theological doctrine. Finally, Calhoun acknowledges that Medieval and Reformation teaching on taxation does not supply the technical precision needed for developing contemporary tax policies.

Calhoun’s purposes in writing are aimed at three main audiences:

1. To the historian, he wishes to explain the ‘ambivalent position’ that tax theory is currently in.
2. To the church, he asks believers to consider redistributive taxation as a means of taking on the burdens and needs of neighbours.
3. To policymakers, he warns that multiple goals must be taken into account when setting tax policy, not just one goal such as economic growth.

Having thus set the scene, the remainder of the book surveys attitudes to taxation throughout church history and attempts to draw insights and develop principles from the thinking of great theologians from the past, including Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Calhoun helpfully summarises his understanding of these attitudes and principles in his final chapter as follows:

The theological history of taxation provides an antidote to the telescoping of ethical

commitments in several ways. First, as we saw in the case of Thomas Aquinas, it nuances property rights by subjecting them to the higher demands of necessitas in natural law itself, thus ensuring that the needs of the poor are included in any bargain. Secondly, as in the recessive voice represented by Ockham, theology has the capacity to show that taxation can resolve the conflict between wealth and poverty; taxation can be the means of purifying oneself of the taint of the wealth that originates with Caesar. Thirdly, taxation can form part of the dynamic overflow of good things that characterizes Luther's theology of the Lord's Supper. Fourthly, Calvin – taking his cue from Augustine – teaches us that the end-point of all human striving lies with God in the age to come; all we can do in the present age is to respond tentatively and temporarily to injustices and inequalities as they present themselves. One political-theological theme runs through all of these lessons to be learned: at the level of civil government, taxation is a paradigmatic instance of the suture that heals fundamental fractures – i.e., between equality and inequality, between rich and poor, between spiritual and physical needs, between abundance and scarcity, between will and precept, and between individualism and altruism. But that healing is only provisional.

There is a strong emphasis throughout on the use of the tax system to redistribute wealth between the rich and the poor. Calhoun's conclusion is essentially a call to return tax policy to what he views as its original theological context and to see it as a tool to bring about human solidarity and as a vehicle for:

Accommodating the needs that all of society's members have to a subsistence minimum, the need of society's members to retain enough of their material resources to work productively, and the needs of the government to create and maintain the conditions necessary for both of the other sets of needs.

Overall, Calhoun is to be highly commended for addressing the issue of taxation in a theological and historical context and his work provides valuable grist to the mill for any Christians who are seeking to think through the issue of taxation from a theological perspective. There is an inclination in some Christian circles to view taxation as falling within a secular sphere to which theology has little relevance and Calhoun's work does much to redress the balance and to show that it is an issue on which theologians from the past have not been silent. As will be seen from later comments, whether Calhoun correctly identifies the original theological context and purposes of taxation within both the biblical and historic theological tradition is another matter.

Comments made by Calhoun on the place of providence and eschatology in Calvin's social and economic understanding are also helpful to Christians who are seeking to address issues relating to wealth and poverty in a world that groans for renewal. Ultimately, Calhoun views Calvin as maintaining the existence of a 'symbiotic relationship' between rich and poor, with the rich having a responsibility to distribute what has been given to them on trust from God and the poor having a responsibility to gather it in. Ongoing unity and mutual cooperation between rich and poor, rather than the total elimination of inequality, is to be seen as the goal. Calvin's eschatology is significant here in that he makes a clear distinction between the present fallen age (where the poor will always be with us) and the restored age to come (in which all wrongs will be righted and injustices settled). In direct contrast to the modern God-rejecting understanding which requires all inequalities to be resolved in the present age, Calvin was able to trust God to provide a final resolution on the day of judgement, while at the same time seeking the good of others as part of an ongoing process of meeting their needs.

Despite these strong positives, Calhoun has particular personal leanings and it may be helpful to highlight some areas where these show through:

Redistribution of wealth

There appears to be an assumption throughout the book that the principle of achieving equity and the redistribution of wealth via the tax system is a good thing. Indeed, Calhoun comments in his

introductory chapter:

The theologians discussed herein never questioned a ruler's prerogative to raise revenue for the common good, as long as the revenue raised was indeed used for the common good. What the theologians required was that the ruler's objectives be infused with concern for the needs of society's disadvantaged members.

As can be seen from the reflections in the point below, the accuracy of this statement is perhaps questionable, but even if it were entirely correct, it would have been helpful to see Calhoun acknowledging and providing support for his fundamental assumption and perhaps taking into account the views of theologians of differing persuasions. One might add that the biblical witness principally sees taxation as raising revenue for a particular need and that most taxation in the Bible is either a flat rate or an indirect tax on items, neither of which is especially redistributive in themselves.

Interaction of different spheres within society

Limited attention is given to the respective roles and responsibilities of different elements within society, including the state, church, local community and family. Although not part of the primary scope of the book, establishing the role of each party and how these are defined and limited is essential to an understanding of where the state should be focussing its attention and what taxing rights it should have.

There remains significant scope for further study in this area, including the extent to which there is the potential for the state to cause greater harm than good if it oversteps its boundaries and becomes involved in areas of welfare which are (or should be) primarily the responsibility of the family, local community or church.

Privately funded versus state-funded welfare

In some areas, Calhoun fails to distinguish adequately between privately funded welfare and state-funded welfare. This particularly manifests itself in the chapter on Calvin, where he does not make clear how the Genevan welfare system was funded. While he does acknowledge that the French refugee centre was privately funded, he does not consider the reasons for this or make a clear distinction between privately and publicly funded institutions when drawing lessons from Calvin's Geneva. The church also appears to have had some involvement, but again Calhoun does not fully address the specifics of how the roles of church and state interacted and the reasons behind this.

A deeper understanding of these points would be required to draw valid lessons from the provision of welfare in Calvin's Geneva.

Applying a constructive interpretation to theologians of the past

At points, Calhoun openly interprets theologians of the past in light of his preference for a redistributive model of taxation. For example, in the chapter on Aquinas, he writes:

Why is all of this not merely an argument for taxation? Why does taxation, a kind of licit robbery by public authority, even enter Thomas' moral vision of the community of goods that circumscribes individual appropriation?

In response to his own questions, Calhoun accepts that 'no explicit grounds for the redistribution of resources can be located in Thomas' writings'. However, he takes a constructive approach by 'developing principles that are implicit in Thomas' thought' in order to reach a conclusion that favours the redistribution of wealth via the tax system.

In the chapter on Calvin, Calhoun comments:

One might be tempted to conclude that Calvinism bequeathed an emphasis on voluntary charity as the primary form of poor relief to the societies that embraced a certain reading of Calvin's insistence on the church's autonomy, while social welfare in Lutheran states centred on government-administered systems of redistributive taxation. However, the separation of functions in Calvin's theology must not be overstated....

He subsequently says that:

Far from relegating poor relief to the realm of optional personal choice, Calvin raised it to the level of a special task of the church and one that the civil government was obliged to support. It was a point of overlap between the kingdoms.

Unfortunately, Calhoun does not provide examples of how the civil government was obliged to support poor relief in Calvin's Geneva and whether such support took the form of funding which was raised via the tax system or whether it was primarily shown in other ways.

As he concludes his section on Calvin, Calhoun comments: 'Thus, in a very general sense, Calvin lands in the tradition of thinkers who view taxation as an instrument of balancing social goods.'

The reference to 'a very general sense' could be interpreted as an acknowledgement that there appears to be weak support for Calvin being in favour of the use of the tax system for the redistribution of wealth (presumably if there were stronger support then Calhoun would have referred to it), which suggests that a constructive approach may also have been applied here. For Calvin, like others, the church's responsibility for social welfare (administered by the deacons) was significant. Whilst not excluding some central provision (which the city council achieved via the hospital), the essential role of civil government was law and order (the restraint of wickedness). Work itself was endowed by Calvin with moral purpose and dignity. None of this implies particularly strong support for the principles of redistribution.

While there is a place for drawing principles from and building on the work of theologians of the past, the danger of a constructive approach is that it can lead to an interpretation that favours our pre-existing ideology. Further investigation is needed into the reasons why both Aquinas and Calvin stopped short of full support for a redistributive model of taxation and into the place of private charity versus state-funded welfare in Calvin's thinking.

As a result of these limitations, Calhoun's conclusions cannot be endorsed and there remains much work to be done to develop a fully worked-through theological approach to tax policy. However, his book is certainly recommended as a stimulating resource for the informed reader who is seeking to engage with tax policy issues from a theological and historical perspective. As has been highlighted throughout, there is substantial scope for further research and Calhoun's volume paves the way for others to follow in due course.

Naomi Wells works as a private client tax partner at Azets, a top-10 accountancy firm, and is a member of the International Presbyterian Church in Ealing.

Book review: The Case against the Sexual Revolution

by Sharon James

A New Guide to Sex in the 21st Century

Louise Perry

Polity, 2021, 200 pages, £11.75.

This review was first published in the November 22 issue of the Christian newspaper, Evangelicals Now. www.e-n.org.uk

Louise Perry has dedicated this book to 'women who learned it the hard way'. Having worked with victims of rape and abuse, she has seen the dark side of radical feminism and sexual 'liberation'. Many young women are told that casual sex is empowering. But they are the losers in a hook-up culture which delivers loveless sex, humiliating abuse, and miserable abandonment. Men can get sex without commitment. Women tend to value commitment more than men. Sex leads to babies. Women have babies, men do not.

In today's culture, it takes courage to articulate the blindingly obvious!

This book is significant, not because it says anything particularly new, but because of who is saying it. We have heard the case against the sexual revolution from Christians, as well as from socially conservative commentators. But Louise Perry is a young(ish) non-Christian feminist, who writes for the left-leaning New Statesman. She confronts the assumptions of her 'tribe' by arguing the case for monogamous marriage. It is good for men, women, children and society.

Evidence is cited, demonstrating that, while there are exceptions, at a population scale women and children are safer within the married family than anywhere else. As family breakdown increased, partly due to easier divorce, so did the abuse of women and children. Perry's advice to young women? 'Get married and stay married!'

Perry is to be commended for her courage. She has attracted abuse and opposition for attacking current progressive orthodoxies.

She is to be commended for her concern. She has been moved by the testimonies of women whose lives have been wrecked by pornography, abuse, and the multiple perversions that go under the designation 'rough sex'.

She is to be commended for her clarity. She sees through many of the current lies and writes persuasively and well.

Her book is disturbing, and offensive in parts, but we need to understand the human cost of a culture that elevates personal and sexual freedom over all else. When the guard rails of God's moral law (as expressed in the conscience and natural law as well as the Bible) are smashed down, the consequences are catastrophic.

This book provides numerous points of discussion with non-Christians. In such conversations, we don't always need to appeal to the Bible. God has created this world in such a way that truth is revealed in 'the way things are'. All truth is God's truth!

However, Perry doesn't fully address the brutal way that radical feminism pitted women against their unborn children. Young women should be warned of the long-term emotional and physical harms associated with abortion (see testimonies on <https://theunchoice.com/>). And although she presents the benefits of man-woman monogamous marriage, not least for children, she fails to challenge the progressive shibboleth of same-sex 'marriage'. Her presentation of the differences

between men and women implicitly strikes a mortal blow to gender ideology, but she does not address that issue directly (although so many adolescent girls are caught up in the 'social contagion' of transgender identity).

Perry describes the hideous damage done by sexual 'liberation', but in response, she can only offer good advice. Men should behave better and abstain from porn. Women should avoid the trap of loveless sex and look for a marriage partner. But what help is that for people whose lives have already been messed up? What's missing is the Gospel. Our Triune God offers forgiveness and healing for those whose lives have been broken, seemingly beyond repair; the power to live a new life and freedom to forgive others, even as we have been forgiven.

Sharon James works for The Christian Institute and is the author of several books. Her website is www.sharonjames.org

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