

intouch

News of ministries
within the
Affinity Family



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A blue-tinted photograph of a church service, showing people in the foreground and background. Overlaid on the image is a network diagram consisting of numerous colored circles (white, orange, red, green) connected by thin lines, representing a growing network of churches and organizations. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image.

Affinity is a growing network of 1,200 Bible-centred churches and Christian organisations throughout Britain and Ireland. We declare and demonstrate the unity of Christ's Church for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

Director's Desk

I hope you are knowing God's blessing and the good fellowship with his people as we share with you the Summer edition of our In Touch magazine.

Last autumn I wrote that 'the war in Ukraine continues with no prospect of peace at the moment, and in the UK we are experiencing political instability and the challenge of rapidly rising prices...' I could have said the same now, over half a year later as not much has changed since then in those categories. But even when peace is struck or politics become calmer and kinder, the only lasting hope for an end to all the troubles of our world is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ who never changes (Hebrews 13:8).

Affinity has continued to speak up in the public square with many interviews on radio and TV. We continue to work in partnership on the *Greater Love Declaration*, a positive explanation of the Christian views on sex and gender – for more on this topic and how you can get involved see page 18.

The Affinity Theological Study Conference took place in March and was reported by some attendees to be the "best ever". Especially encouraging were the many first-time delegates who attended from diverse church backgrounds. You can read a brief report on page 19.

Also in March, we launched a book called *Challenging Leaders* about how to prevent and investigate claims of pastoral abuse, inside on page 16 we share more about this resource for churches.

I found our cover article an excellent and practical piece written by Regan King on 'Biblical Masculinity', so make sure you flick to page 10.

We also feature two articles by Affinity members, one introducing one of our newest Agency members, the Association of Christian Teachers and another by one of our founder members, FIEC, who celebrated their 100th anniversary this year.

We trust you will find this edition of In Touch encouraging and informative. I would love to hear from you with any comments or questions. You can write to me directly at director@affinity.org.uk.

Wishing you God's richest blessing over the summer season.

Graham Nicholls





100 Years of FIEC

By John Stevens, FIEC National Director

On Saturday 22 April 2023, some two hundred people gathered at Westminster Chapel to give thanks to God for the centenary of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC). This was the climax to a series of events marking this milestone and was a wonderful opportunity to praise God for his faithfulness to the Fellowship and to recommit to serve the gospel in the coming years.



FIEC was formed in November 1922 by some eighteen churches and mission halls, many with a Brethren background, as a result of the vision of E J Poole-Connor. His work as deputation secretary for a missionary society made him aware of the needs and isolation of evangelical churches that did not belong to the established denominations, and so FIEC was established to be a 'society of mutual helpfulness' to enable these churches to support and strengthen each other.

Why was FIEC founded?

It is important to remember the context of British evangelicalism when FIEC was founded. Most independent evangelical churches belonged to denominational unions, for example, the Congregational Union and the Baptist Union. Churches in these denominations had little to do with each other, and evangelical unity was largely manifested in para-church organisations such as mission societies and conferences like the Keswick Convention. Liberal theology was rampant and filtering into the churches through the influence of seminaries and universities.





E J Poole-Connor's vision was to establish an association that would enable independent evangelical churches to enjoy the undoubted benefits of denominations, whilst avoiding the danger of a central controlling structure and sectarian division over secondary issues, such as baptism. FIEC was established as a free association of self-governing churches with no formal power over the individual churches that choose to affiliate.

The original purposes of FIEC were to stand together for the truth of the apostolic gospel, accredit ministers, encourage adequate ministerial training, support church planting, promote evangelical unity, and provide practical support and advice for churches. This remains the core mission of FIEC, now encapsulated as 'Independent churches working together to reach Britain for Christ'.

The vision that led to the founding of FIEC has stood the test of time because, we believe, it embodies biblical principles of ecclesiology. We believe that the New Testament pattern for the church is for autonomous local assemblies under the rule of Christ – through his word, by his Spirit – in relationship with one another. FIEC exists as a vehicle for expressing this in practice.

A growing Fellowship

FIEC today is an association of 640 churches, united by common gospel convictions. Several reasons account for the growth of the Fellowship.

Over the past century, the UK population has grown significantly, and many new towns and communities have been built. Evangelical Christians have been active in church planting, and it has proved much easier to establish independent churches where there is no institutional drag from slow-moving denominations. Many of these churches have joined FIEC.

The growing liberalism of the denominations, and their failure to discipline false teachers who deny the gospel, has led waves of churches to leave their denominations and join FIEC. This



was true of Westminster Chapel where we met in April: Martyn Lloyd-Jones led the Chapel out of the Congregational Union and into FIEC. Today we are seeing a new raft of churches leaving denominations that have compromised on the issue of human sexuality, and some are choosing to join FIEC.

Other independent churches have chosen to join FIEC because they have come to see the value of joining together with others, and they have overcome their fear that FIEC is some kind of denomination that will compromise their independence.

FIEC today is an expression of gospel unity in our core convictions: we are a complementarian group of churches that believe pastors and elders ought to be male; we reject compromised ecumenism; and we stand for the biblical teaching on marriage. Within these boundaries, our member churches come from diverse

backgrounds. Some are Brethren, some Congregational, some Grace Baptist, some Pentecostal, some Methodist, and some from an Anglican background. We rejoice in this diversity.

The central FIEC structure exists to help and support our churches. Another major change over the last century has been the growth of our staff team, this enables FIEC to provide care to churches and pastors and help with training, evangelism, planting, women's ministry, and church revitalisation. A new network of 'Local Directors' is benefiting to provide help at a more local and regional level. FIEC has also birthed Edward Connor Solicitors, which is providing expert Christ-centred legal advice to evangelical churches and charities.

The next 100 years

As we enter our second century, the gospel need of the UK is as great as it has ever been. Only 2-3% of the population are born-again believers. Many mainstream churches are declining and facing demographic collapse because they have abandoned the gospel. The UK evangelical church is becoming more diverse ethnically and in ministry practice. FIEC is perhaps better equipped and structured to meet the challenges of the times than it has been at any point in its history.

We long and pray that we will remain faithful to God as we continue to serve churches for his glory. We are encouraged that all across the country, in widely diverse social contexts, FIEC churches are reporting significantly more gospel growth in the post-Covid period than they have seen in the previous decade. Our prayer is that the Lord Jesus will build his church in our nation and that we might play our small part in his great plan of redemption.



ACT Association of Christian Teachers

For over 50 years, The Association of Christian Teachers (ACT) has existed to support Christians working in Education. Although the focus of ACT's ministry has developed somewhat over the years, we remain committed to helping Christians engaged in all forms of education to thrive professionally and spiritually. ACT recently became an Agency member of Affinity and we're thrilled to forge this new partnership and are excited to work together for the glory of God in the Education sector in the UK.

Lizzie Harewood, Executive Officer at ACT, provides more information on who ACT are and how they can support you.





What is The Association of Christian Teachers?

As a membership organisation, ACT offers professional and spiritual support to Christians engaged in or interested in pre-school, primary, middle, secondary, special, college and university education in the UK, whether in a voluntary or paid capacity. We do that by connecting Christians in Education, resourcing them and influencing the context in which they operate.

Connect - We unite Christians from every area of education to support one another and share best practices.

Resource - We give Christians in education the tools they need to be effective ambassadors for Christ and to thrive professionally and spiritually.

Influence - We provide comment on education issues from a Christian perspective, and work with partner organisations to deliver training and influence policy.



Connect



Resource



Influence



What does ACT do?

We want to help Christians see that there isn't a divide between their work in schools and their spiritual lives. The work of schools and colleges contributes to God's purposes such as seeing young people flourish and caring for God's creation. Whether it's teaching phonics to early years, Geography to teenagers, or vocational skills in the Further Education (FE) sector, it really does matter!

In all spheres of education, we are committed to supporting and connecting those seeking to bring a faithful Christian witness and Christians in education are an integral part of the church's mission. Sadly, Christian worldviews are increasingly marginalised in our educational institutions and we hear from many teachers that feel isolated and voiceless.

ACT sees our role to help our members find their voices in these different contexts, to share and encourage one another in their own personal situations, and to speak to leaders in education, our employers, our governments and our world, of the deep goodness of God's precepts and the profound depth of his grace.

As Christians in education, we seek to hold true to God's word and to speak positively of his truth rather than simply criticise what we see around us without pointing

to his better way. We seek to demonstrate these values in practical ways and to be ambassadors for Christ in our work as an Association.

If you, as an individual, or as a Church, want to join with us, to stand together in mutual support and encouragement and to find new courage and confidence to speak clearly and respectfully of the reason for the hope that we have in Christ, then we will be delighted to hear from you.

Do you work in education? Consider joining ACT

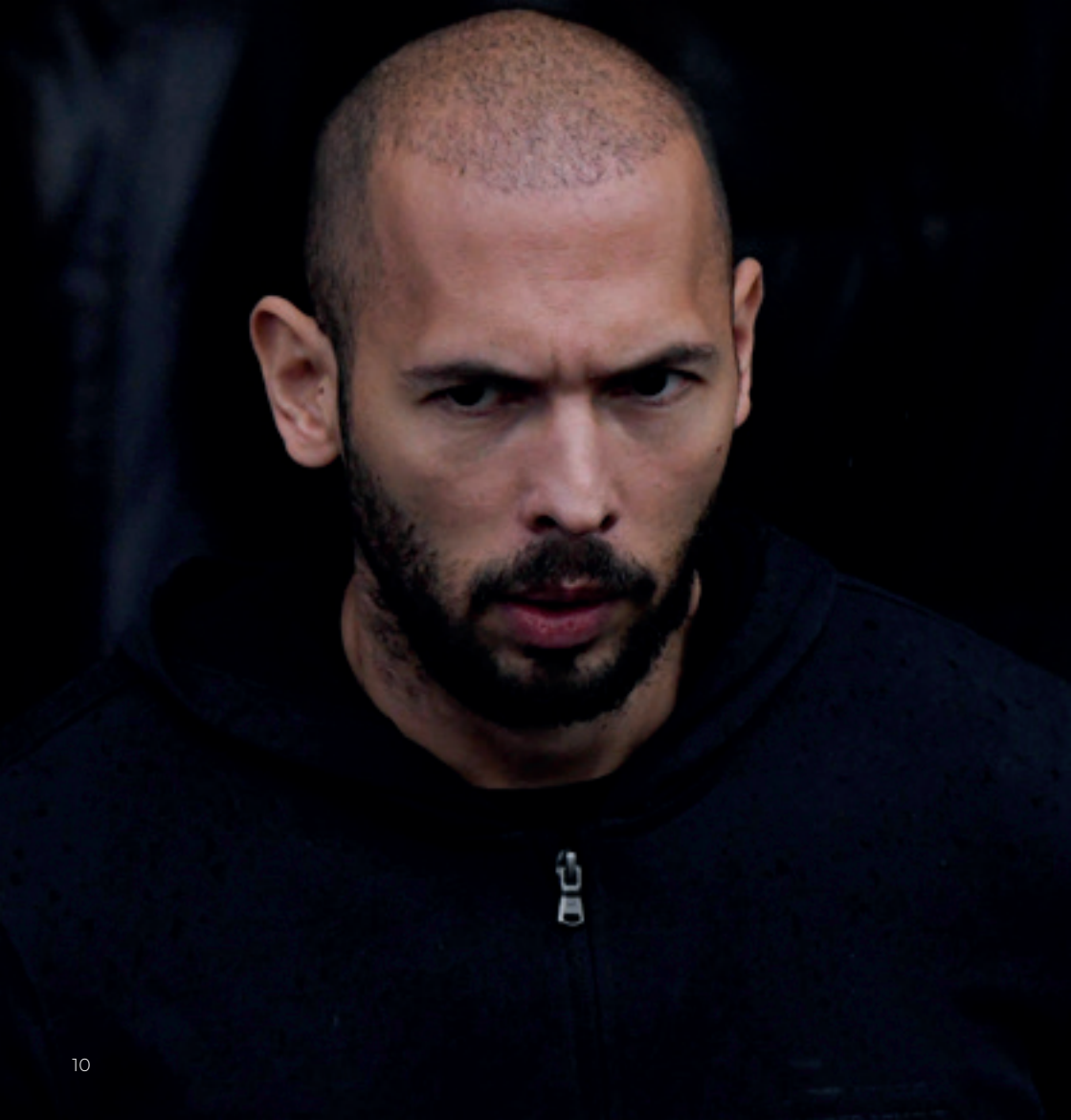
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- Connect with others, share ideas and build your network through our online community platform
- Join 'sectional' networks for career stage, professional responsibility or Educational interest
- Access events and resources
- Receive *The Journal*, our termly publication
- Access prayer support and specialist expertise

To find out more visit
christian-teachers.org.uk

FEATURE

Andrew Tate and Biblical masculinity





This is an abridged version of an article written by Regan King that was first published in Affinity's Social Issues Bulletin – Issue 52: Spring 2023. Regan is the lead pastor at The Angel Church in Islington (London). He is married to Rachel and has two children. He also serves on the board of the Pregnancy Crisis Helpline, is an author and is a presenter for Revelation TV.

Have you heard of Andrew Tate? If not yet, best to acquaint yourself, because you are about to. Recent research found that eight in ten boys between 16 and 17 years of age had read, listened to, or watched content online from the four-time champion kickboxer and self-described 'most googled man on the planet'.

Born in Chicago, Tate was brought up in Luton, Bedfordshire. He began to achieve broader notoriety and attention in 2016 when he appeared on Big Brother and was subsequently evicted from the reality show after video footage emerged of him beating a woman with a belt (this was said to be consensual) and

in another video telling a woman to count the bruises he had given her. Tate's online presence was boosted when he went viral on social media with his opinions on masculinity, women, and money garnering the most attention.

As a pastor actively engaged in my local community and deeply involved in the lives of a range of men young and old, I know the need to deal with the Andrew Tate phenomena biblically and specifically. As much as I wish it was not so, it may be that the spirit of Andrew Tate seemingly has more influence on some young men in your church than the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus.



What Andrew Tate gets right

Andrew Tate addresses men as men

Without looking into the reasons why at present, it is not too difficult to find anti-man sentiment not just in broader society, but in churches as well. In such a climate, it is important that men have another man speaking to them, addressing them directly as men, understanding their issues and concerns, and addressing these in a clear and certain way. Without commenting at present on the substance of his content, Andrew Tate does this.

His coaching of men presents the goal of 'empowering them to be better in all realms.'

Here's the reality: sometimes the portrayal of men in popular media is accurate. Whether by nature or by giving up in light of perceived societal denigration, men can and do behave poorly. Whatever the reason, many do not strive for excellence or display any motivation to improve and be better at living life, choosing to embrace oafish, laziness and stupidity. Lack of discernment, discipline, desire and drive in men across age categories cripples them from meaningful, productive, prosperous living resulting in feelings of emasculation. Is it wrong for a man to address these issues in men? No. Indeed it is needed. Men need to be trained in how to earn and budget (both saving and spending) well. Men

need to be equipped with the tools and resources and knowledge to be better providers and protectors of their families. Men need to learn and grow in being better communicators, lovers, workers, sons, brothers, fathers and friends. Andrew Tate presents his method as being all about empowering men to be better in all realms, giving a sense of ownership of their lives and the personal responsibility to improve one day at a time.

There. Somehow I managed to present two positive points about Andrew Tate. And it is precisely these positives of Andrew Tate that make him so dangerous.

The perverting influence of Andrew Tate

After my own research, one thing is evident. Andrew Tate says he takes inspiration in how to be a man from his now deceased father; the same father whose mistreatment of his family, particularly his wife led to Tate's growing up in a single-parent home. His words are charged with anger and arrogance – indicating his own sinful narcissism – and he openly portrays, promotes and praises behaviour that can only be described as abusive. I dare not sully this magazine with examples of Tate's crass, crude, sometimes incoherent rhetoric – you can go to the source yourself if you wish – but this content has garnered over 14 billion views, earning him an estimated net worth of \$20 million. Hyper-

sexualised, shamelessly objectifying and misogynistic, Tate's words with the aforementioned positive hooks appeal to disaffected, depressed young men who are often of underprivileged upbringing, broken family lives, and struggling with direction in their lives. Tate stokes the fires of their anger and outrage, tapping into legitimate felt needs and presenting warped solutions that promise to see masculinity regained.

Christianised Andrew Tates

Tragically, there will be young men who try to marry a Christian lifestyle with Tate's principles in their relationships or pursuit of the same. Perhaps finding Tate unpalatable and too problematic they may well seek out professing Christian teachers who can scratch their itching

ears with hyper-patriarchal language.

This can and does carry over into church life. Women will be disrespected, talked down to, ignored, denigrated and generally viewed as less trustworthy even when carrying out their God-given and ordained responsibilities in family and church life to the best of their ability. In a vicious cycle, female victims of such treatment will often begin to view men and male leadership in particular with suspicion and through the lens of their hurt and offences against them. The presentation of biblical complementarity in relationships is consequently viewed as equivalent to patriarchy and this almost always leads to a response that veers toward extreme feminism – an equally unbiblical anthropological perspective.



So what can you do?

“Pastors, teachers, evangelists, Sunday school teachers, members – whoever you are in the life of the local church – you have a responsibility before God to be disciplined and to disciple in a way that is practical and relevant for Christian living in the present day.”

01 Teach positively on Biblical masculinity and femininity

Men and women both want and need to know who they are. Identity, meaning, purpose and destiny are areas where we have specific questions and need specific answers for clearly directed and disciplined lives. We should sound out the clear and certain teaching of Scripture in these areas, celebrating the unique, complementary and mutually beneficial roles and responsibilities of men and women while acknowledging areas of similarity all in the context of our union in Christ.

02 Don't shy away from pinpointed discipleship on tough topics

Reasons to avoid dealing with difficult, intimate and personal areas of human relationships are fading. It is possible and, I believe, wise and helpful to address these matters in our various church groups. Sex, sexuality, domestic abuse, pornography, objectification, prostitution, divorce and money matters all need to be dealt with. The prophets, Jesus himself, and the apostles all did so. Is there a reason we so often do not? If we do not deal with these areas clearly, people will find themselves disciplined by others who are neither trustworthy in orthodoxy nor orthopraxy.

03 Encourage spaces for men and women to share openly

Transparency is key for the bearing of burdens as we confess our sins to another. Men and women will have various frustrations – sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly – often perhaps with each other. It is important for churches to have opportunities at which men can mentor and build up men and women can do the same with women. Occasionally such meetings can be joint – when dealing with marriage for example – but as a whole, at the very least I recommend operating ‘pastoral surgery’ times when matters can be discussed freely and openly, sins being confessed for the bearing of these burdens.

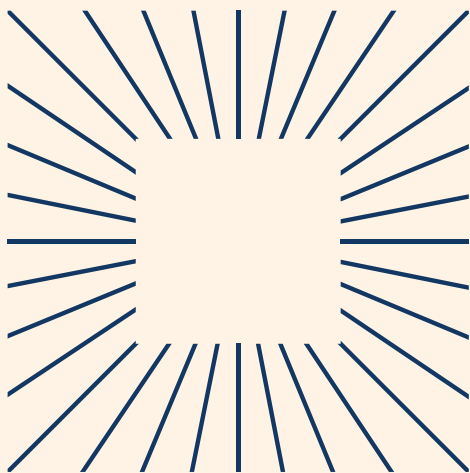


A final word: live worthy of emulation

Andrew Tate is popular because he sets a model – a paradigm even – of how to live. We serve Jesus Christ who calls us to live in imitation of him. Can we, in humility, say to our young men and women like Paul says to the Philippians, 'Imitate me as I imitate Christ' (1 Cor 11:1)? If we strive to live in such a way ourselves, I truly believe the impact we have can provide a healing balm to the wounds caused by the harmful ideologies espoused by Andrew Tate and others. Our words alone accomplish nothing. Let's live in such a way that shows the beauty of what it means to a man or woman in Christ!

Preventing and Investigating Allegations of Pastoral Malpractice

In recent years, there have been a number of high-profile church cases (and many others being dealt with privately), where charges against leaders have included some form of abuse of their position. Often the charges are made that leaders are acting in a heavy-handed way, or being bullies.



There is a danger that church members are confused and that leaders respond either with complacency or with fear: they may dismiss all allegations of abusive leadership as stemming from the current cultural ideology that sees everyone as a victim and all power and privilege as bad. However, the Bible is not silent on the dangers of lording it over people as opposed to being good shepherds—it is a serious neglect of duty by church leaders. Abuse of power is not a new phenomenon, it is an ancient biblical category and has to be addressed.

On the other hand, leaders may respond with fear to the current climate of suspicion and become unwilling to lead in a biblical manner; they may end up tiptoeing around every pastoral controversy in case they are accused of heavy-handedness or worse. As confidence in biblical practice wanes, leaders may instead end up adopting policies based entirely on secular safeguarding models for good practice developed for businesses and charities which may have some merit, and provide a defence against unwarranted accusations but do not include the teachings of the Bible about sin, forgiveness and how the church should operate.

How do we cultivate healthy Christian communities in which concerns about pastoral malpractice can be raised and dealt with fairly, and in ways which are honouring to Christ, theologically faithful and legally compliant?

Challenging Leaders

Challenging Leaders is a new book which recognises that abuse of power by leaders and of leaders does happen. It is wrong and we need to deal with it biblically, justly and compassionately. It seeks to help churches work through these issues to create a healthy Christian community in which concerns about pastoral malpractice can be raised and dealt with fairly. It also points to clear biblical teaching about how to recognise and develop good character in our leaders, and how to respond to serious failures.

Church leaders are called by the Great Shepherd to make every effort to prevent and respond to abuses of power and to deal justly and tenderly with all those who are victims of such abuse.

As leaders we want to own our responsibility to avoid any defence of our peer group, to recognise the greater responsibility of those in leadership to a higher standard of behaviour but also that leaders are Christians too, who need to be dealt with justly and even if abuse has happened they need to be cared for, not thrown into the wilderness.

Creating and sustaining a spiritually-healthy culture


The first chapter explores the terminology and the practice of abuse of power, biblical condemnation of bad leadership and the responsibilities leaders have as under-shepherds.

The next three chapters explore healthy and unhealthy cultures. The accepted and expected ways of thinking and behaving are powerful factors in the life of any group or community, and any local church is no exception. Creating and sustaining a spiritually-healthy culture is vital in the life of a church for many reasons, not least because it will help guard against the abuse of power by leaders or factions within the membership.

In contrast we go on to look at unhealthy church culture and trauma in the context of abuse and give pastoral advice on how to care for those who suffer. The final chapter offers advice to churches on how to understand their responsibilities and exercise wisdom in their public statements.

We sincerely hope and pray that it will be a good resource for you (member or leader) and your church. You can find out more about this book and how to order a copy from the Affinity website at

www.affinity.org.uk/challengingleaders



We will be hosting a series of events across the UK over the coming year (we hosted the first in Cardiff in May 2023) further equipping church members and leaders with vital tools to build healthy church cultures. You can register your interest in attending one of these events on our website to be the first to know where and when they will be.

FREE TO TALK

Paul Huxley is the Communications Manager at Christian Concern. He shares a practical way we can stand up for a Christian's freedom to talk and pray:

The government has committed several times to a ban on what it calls 'conversion therapy' or 'conversion practices' aimed at seeking change in sexual desires or behaviours.

While these phrases often make people think of physical treatments, the real targets of a proposed ban are talking therapies and prayer – since nothing else is really practised in 21st century Britain.

Both prayer and talking therapy are consensual conversations, which makes a proposed ban an attack on free speech. This might be justifiable if these conversations and prayers were shown to be harmful, but the evidence says otherwise. The available research in fact suggests that these talking therapies can be beneficial to mental health as well as effective.

For various cultural and theological reasons, some Christians are nervous about standing up for the freedom to talk or pray for this kind of change. Free to Talk (freetotalk.org) is a website produced by Affinity member, Christian Concern, which explains the evidence in a robust and clear way that should give everyone the confidence to oppose this unnecessary ban.

Visit www.freetotalk.org to find out how you can get involved



Paul Yeulett, Minister of Grove Chapel Camberwell and Chairman of the Study Conference, provides a review of the recent Affinity Theological Study Conference

Affinity Theological Study Conference

In the bleak midwinter snow – it was actually early March but it felt like midwinter – more than 80 men and women gathered at King’s Park in Northampton for the first in-person Affinity Theological Study Conference since 2019. It did not disappoint.

The theme of the Conference was ‘A Firm Foundation: Priorities for the Rising Generation’, and the five papers addressed the themes of identity, genuine conversion, sanctification, the 21st-century church and persecution. As always, the key feature of the Study Conference was the way in which the papers, which were of a uniformly outstanding quality, were circulated several weeks in advance so that delegates could spend as much time as possible discussing the papers.

There was a real sense of progression from one paper to the next, and it was especially gratifying to see a large number of first-time attendees there. Perhaps there’ll be even more at the next Conference, scheduled to take place in March 2025 – make sure you’re there!



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New
Resource

CHALLENGING LEADERS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CHURCHES
LOOKING TO PREVENT, OR NAVIGATE
ACCUSATIONS OF, PASTORAL MALPRACTICE

*"... a wise and biblical resource that not only helps
Christian institutions understand spiritual abuse,
but provides practical steps to address it. May
God use it to protect and purify his church"*

Michael J. Kruger, President and Professor
of New Testament, Reformed Theological
Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

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