

A humanoid robot with a white head and a dark, open-torso body is sitting at a wooden table outdoors. The robot is holding and reading a newspaper. The background shows a dry, brownish landscape with some structures and a fence.

SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

SUMMER 2023

affinity
gospel churches in partnership

ISSN 2755-5615

The Social Issues Bulletin is copyrighted by Affinity. Readers are free to use it and circulate it in digital form without further permission (any print use requires further written permission), but they must acknowledge the source and, of course, not change the content.



SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

Issue 53 – July 2023

CONTENTS

Understanding trauma in the context of the church	<i>Anonymous</i>	2
Lessons from Lockdown: The evidence is now in	Tim Dieppe	7
Chat GPT: made in our image?	Jeremy Peckham	11
Current Bioethics Issues - July 2023	Dr Calum MacKella	17
Latest News of Significant Individual Cases		20

The Social Issues Bulletin is published by the Social Issues Team of Affinity

Editor: Joel Upton, office@affinity.org.uk

Understanding trauma in the context of the church

This article describes my experience of living with complex trauma following decades of abuse, (you can read a previous article on understanding abuse in *Social Issue Bulletin Issue 52 - Spring 2023*) although the following is relevant whatever the cause of the trauma. This is not professional advice, just one person's perspective and understanding, born out of personal experience, of how to help someone suffering trauma.

What is trauma?

Trauma is a deep emotional wound that has been caused by experiencing or witnessing an often life-threatening situation. This could be domestic abuse or violence; violent crime; trafficking; slavery; war; untimely death (especially of a child); miscarriage or broken relationships. These are the common causes, but trauma can be caused by any event in life which leaves a person with an emotional wound that doesn't easily heal and which impairs their ability to function. In its most invasive and persistent form, it is described as complex trauma or PTSD. It's pervasive because it can prevent a sufferer from functioning physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally and/or spiritually.

Symptoms can include any of the following:

- flashbacks, in which you are reliving the event
- being terrorised by situations that are not threatening
- always being alert for danger even when there is none
- self-harming behaviours including self-neglect, eating disorders
- nightmares and night terrors
- panic attacks, blackouts
- trouble concentrating
- memory loss
- irritability, angry outbursts, mood swings or seeking isolation
- uncontrollable grief that cannot be regulated
- detachment, feeling as though you are living someone else's life
- emotional numbness or inability to feel any kind of emotion
- guilt or shame
- suicidal thoughts

This isn't an exhaustive list and sufferers may experience one or many of these symptoms in sequence or simultaneously. On many occasions and in different contexts, a sufferer may be able to function normally or even at a high level, because a process of fragmentation means that the trauma can be isolated and contained until it's triggered.

Triggers are events that cause a flashback to the original event. These are different for everyone and are impossible for anyone supporting a sufferer to predict. They can include sounds, smells, words, music or a particular item. Here are just a few triggers that relate to everyday things that you think nothing of:

- sleeping in a bed: location of violent assault
- having a bath: being held underwater
- taking a shower: being locked outside in the rain in minimal clothing
- backfiring car: gunshots
- the smell of fast food: living above a fast food outlet whilst experiencing abuse
- a screaming child: the screams of their own child following an accident that resulted in the child's death
- a song: particular resonance with a relationship

These are just a few examples. Many of them relate to memory buried deep in the senses. A trigger causes an adrenaline rush – a sufferer will default to flight, fight or freeze, having to try, at the same time, to remain in control. Processing the reaction may take time; sometimes it's several days before the pain recedes enough to look at what happened. But look we must, because understanding our triggers is part of recovery.

Hindering recovery within the church

There are broadly three types of response to traumatised people. The first is to look away in the face of indescribable pain. Whilst that's understandable, we don't want to have to live like this either! So please become trauma aware (see next section) so that you know how to talk to us.

During the process of recovery, we are often ourselves unable to foresee what might trigger an episode, but it is possible to be aware of the difference between unintentional harm and thoughtless harm. The latter is caused by the second type of response – an attempt to try and make sense of it by providing answers. It is similar to the behaviour of Job's comforters (Job 4–5; 8;11;15;18;20;22). They thought they knew the reason for Job's suffering and spared no attempts to persuade him of it. Here are some similarly common responses that I have experienced. Each of them has caused more trauma:

'You must have committed some sin that hasn't yet been forgiven.'

This is an old, well-worn answer. It is quite correct to say that all pain is an outcome of sin. Death, disease and illness are a result of original sin and our lives in a broken world. But it is a long stretch to go from original sin as the source of all pain to suggesting that someone's trauma is a result of personal sin.

'God is applying His loving discipline.'

Hebrews 12:6 does say that God disciplines those whom He loves, but the conclusion that trauma is therefore a form of discipline conflates two issues. Firstly, discipline involves correction for specific wrongdoing – the punishment should fit the crime. No loving parent would ground their child or send them to their room just in case the child forgets who is in charge. Discipline should teach a child right from wrong, not be used as a tool to control them.

Secondly, God is not responsible for the pain. What parent would ever cause their child suffering by lobbing an obstacle into their life, just to teach them a lesson? And if that is so with human parents, how much more is it so in our walk with God? The evil that hurts us is not thrown into our path by God.

'God is testing your faith.'

This line of thought derives from a view that God needs to test us in order to find out how faithful we are. If you are a teacher, you will know a lot about the purpose of testing. There are diagnostic tests that show both teacher and pupil what the next steps in learning are and there are terminal tests, designed to assess how much a pupil has learnt. But God has no need to use any kind of test in order to diagnose or assess the state of my faith – he can see the end from the beginning.

'God must love you very much to allow this pain.'

Let's suppose, just for a moment, that this is correct. It would mean that if you are not traumatised and I am, God must love me more than you. Where is the biblical justification for God's love being greater for some than others? And it's clear from the story of Job that God can allow suffering, but that is not the same as causing it.

Don't get me wrong here – pain is a point of growth if we allow God to use it as such. I know God much more deeply and in a more real way than I used to. I would not be without the blessing of

the years that I've lived with trauma. But I do not for one moment think that God caused what happened to happen, or that his love for me is any different now than it was before. I have just learnt more about him. It's my clarity of focus that has changed, not God.

'If you trust God, He will heal you.'

This has many barbs to tear into someone who is already suffering. Firstly, it assumes that the person is not already trusting God, or that their faith is somehow lacking and they need to trust more – that is making a judgement about the spiritual condition of another person. Secondly, it makes the suffering person responsible for the continuance of their own pain, which is a cruel suggestion. And finally, it presumes that God always removes pain from our lives. In my experience, he does not. The symptoms listed at the start of this article no longer disable my life, but some things still trigger them and I think they always will. God asks me to be faithful, not successful. Faithfulness is not about healing from the pain; it's about how I respond to God through it. Whether or not I am healed is secondary.

'God is allowing this to bring glory to his name.'

We are not puppets whom God manipulates to his advantage. As with everything in life, when we are in pain, we have choices. God created us with free will, so there cannot be a guaranteed cause and effect in which testing always results in glory – it can equally result in bitterness and anger. We can listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, turn to God and allow him to help us grow closer to him through the trauma and that will certainly bring glory to God. But we can also choose to become bitter and blame God for what has happened. While God can turn evil back on itself to bring glory to his name, we have to allow him to do so. He will never force us to look towards him, much less manipulate our lives simply for the purpose of his glory.

People who are trauma aware (the third type of response) are always very careful of what they say and how they say it and they listen much more than they speak. Whilst the reality is that triggers are different for each person, please don't be wary of us as that hinders the development of meaningful relationships and leaves us feeling marginalised. We might cry. We might even howl in pain, but we won't disintegrate.

How can a church support recovery?

Become trauma aware

Once you are aware of what trauma is and the impact that it has on our practical and spiritual lives, you will understand how to interact with us. God is a relational God and it is through relationships that trauma sufferers can be supported. Here are some suggestions that could be helpful in pastoral care.

Understand why a person might seem to be behaving oddly or even irrationally. Sitting still is hard work. Traumatized people are often hypervigilant, constantly seeking for safety and coping with uncomfortable adrenaline rushes. You may think we're having a meaningful conversation, but I'm trying to escape before a panic attack kicks in and I black out or break down in front of you.

No two people walk the same path through trauma – we each have to find our own way and we need people walking alongside us. Isaiah 43:19 says: 'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland'.

God makes a way through the wilderness for us but we each need to perceive that way for ourselves. He will do a new thing even in the most broken of lives. But God does not give reasons for, or promise to change, the wasteland – he promises instead to make a stream flow through it to make passing through the wasteland bearable. Walk through the wasteland with us and sit in the dust with us during the times when we can't carry on, just as God told Elijah to eat and sleep when

his natural resources were exhausted by fear and loneliness (1 Kings 19).

Support us as we try to make an active choice to accept the trauma and its cause. Show us, maybe in practical ways, that there is peace beyond the pain and love beyond the fear. This is important because denial, avoidance and even resignation can lead to the writing of a victim narrative which gradually becomes the sole explanation for our pain and that, in turn, then leads to anger and bitterness.

We can see from glimpsing into Christ's reaction as he faced death that even he wanted to avoid pain and suffering – it's a normal human response. But to acknowledge God's sovereignty in our pain is a spiritual response, to accept that:

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand' ... What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do. (Isaiah 46:9–11)

Sometimes, it's easier to feel defeated, to blanket ourselves in self-pity or to rail against the injustice of it all – to keep our brokenness in the shadows and to justify ourselves for doing so. But we are not left to bring our pain into the light of God's blessing alone when we are part of a loving community.

The practice of lament is a powerful way to help someone bring their trauma into the light. Lament isn't a misery memoir or a moaning session. Lament is a deeply personal act of faith which affirms our attachment to God and our trust in his grace, love and sovereignty. It's exactly what Job did. He asked God why he was suffering. He asked God why he seemed to be silent. He desperately wanted to die. And yet all of Job's cries are punctuated with statements about the sovereignty of his God, most memorably when he declared, 'I know that my Redeemer lives' (Job 19:25).

Psalm 13 offers us an example of lament which is very clear and precise in its construction. It begins by addressing God with a direct question, 'How long, LORD?' David then goes on to tell God what is causing him pain – he feels forgotten by God, as though God has hidden from him. Notice that David doesn't wallow in self-pity, question God's integrity or try to apportion blame.

Next, David makes his specific request. He doesn't dress it up. He uses imperative verbs 'Look on me and answer' (v 3) because he is confident that God is listening, even if David cannot see him. He can be bold in his request because he worships a God who is faithful and on whose promises he knows he can rely, even if his feelings don't confirm it. He ends by singing God's praises because God has been good to him in the past, so he has confidence for the future. He cries out to God expecting an answer. So, maybe help someone living with trauma to form their own lament.

Be trauma informed

This is about how you design your church structures to support traumatised people. Churches are disability informed when it comes to physical disability, but the same is not often true of emotional disability.

The following actions are all helpful:

- Form a focus group. This could include not just trauma sufferers but those with additional needs, mental health problems, autism or other ways of being that are different. Meet together occasionally and ask about how their lives in the church community could be made easier or more accessible. This is vitally important if your church is planning significant changes to its structures or practices.
- Appoint an elder who is responsible for vulnerable people and get someone trained in trauma impact, symptoms, responses and care.
- Ensure that your policies and how you articulate your doctrines don't cause more trauma.
- Offer a safe space in the building where anyone experiencing a trauma trigger can go

- during services or events. Make sure that someone supportive can be with them.
- Create a 'safe' group of people who can meet, pray and share together. Not all trauma sufferers can be part of, or access, a home group, so ask them what a supportive alternative might look like.
- Be careful of the language you use when talking to us. Please don't ever use words like 'should' or 'must'. You don't walk our path so you don't know what we 'should' be doing or how we 'must' respond. If you're not sure what to say, don't speak. Make a cup of tea.

There will almost certainly be trauma sufferers in your church, even if they are silent sufferers. If not, there probably will be in the future, as trauma is the growing and deepening problem of our century. Please get trained in walking with us. Be patient with those of us that have complex trauma that may never be fully healed in this life.

The hymn 'O love that will not let me go' was written by someone who had just experienced a traumatic change in his life. It's a moving lament. The writer, George Matheson, started going blind in his late teens and later, as he faced a life of total blindness, his fiancée decided she couldn't marry him. He wrote the words of the hymn on the eve of his sister's wedding. She was his carer and her impending marriage triggered a trauma response that resulted in the hymn. In verse 3 he writes:

*O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And know the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.*

Please be Christ's joy in your churches and seek us through our pain.

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

Lessons from Lockdown: The evidence is now in

by Tim Dieppe

Negligible benefit of lockdown

A recently published [meta-analysis of almost 20,000 studies](#)¹ shows that the impact of lockdowns on Covid mortality was 'negligible'. We were told by the now notorious Professor Neil Ferguson, who disobeyed his own lockdown advice, that a 'reasonable worst case scenario' would be [500,000 deaths](#),² and even with other mitigations there could be at least 250,000 deaths. Therefore, we were told, lockdowns were required to avoid anything like this from happening. Now the evidence shows that as few as 1,700 lives were saved by the lockdowns.

To put this in context, in an average week there are 11,000 deaths in England and Wales. A typical flu season accounts for around 20,000 deaths in England and Wales. Fortunately, we do not lock down for flu every year. If the negligible benefit had been known at the time, compared with the astronomical costs, no politician would have supported lockdowns. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now say categorically that lockdown was a mistake.

The costs of lockdown

But there is a more significant context than that. What about all the costs and deaths caused by lockdown?

Let's review some of the appalling costs of lockdown:

- Effects of lockdown estimated to be [killing more people than Covid](#).³
- More than 7 million people waiting for hospital appointments.
- More cancelled cancer operations than anywhere else in Western Europe.
- Tripling of deaths among men with prostate cancer in the first year of the pandemic.
- Children with mental health problems rose from 10.1% in 2017 to 17.8% in 2022.
- Young adults with symptoms of depression doubled from 11% to 23%.
- Children losing months of education with 124,000 children who have still not returned to school.
- Court backlogs doubled to 61,000.
- Over £300 billion in public spending on lockdown created a record peacetime budget deficit and a massive increase in government debt contributing to inflation.

The biggest policy mistake of modern times

These costs are astronomical. In public policy decisions, there is always a trade-off. We could avoid over 100,000 casualties per year by reducing the speed limit to 5mph. Is that what the government should do? What about all the knock-on effects on the economy which would cost many lives?

Certainly, 1,700 lives are worth saving, but at what cost? It now looks almost certain that lockdown killed more people than it saved. In fact, a government report [estimated that lockdown may cost 200,000 lives](#) over time.⁴ The London School of Economics also stated that lockdown might result in [more life-years lost than saved](#).⁵ If that is the case, or anything like it, then there is no case for

1 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/04/first-lockdown-prevented-1700-deaths-landmark-study-finds/>

2 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/terrifying-data-behind-government-coronavirus-lockdown/>

3 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/08/18/lockdown-effects-feared-killing-people-covid/>

4 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/19/lockdown-may-cost-200k-lives-government-report-shows/>

5 <https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2021/a-Jan-21/Life-years>

lockdown. It was perhaps the biggest policy mistake of modern times.

We now know that Public Health England were just not interested in [non-covid collateral deaths](#) due to lockdown.⁶ So many people missed treatment or avoided going to hospital out of fear and died as a result. Professor Sebastian Lucas who worked as a consultant pathologist at St Thomas' Hospital in London has provided examples of treatable conditions where patients were told not to go to hospital or were terrified of going to hospital and tragically died as a result.

Sweden, which uniquely was prepared to go against the almost universal groupthink by not imposing lockdown has recently been found to have had [the least excess deaths](#) in Europe during the pandemic period.⁷ Let's remember that Professor Ferguson [predicted 85,000](#) excess deaths in Sweden⁸ – fortunately they weren't listening. They didn't suffer anything like the recession that we did and none of the other additional costs.

Is anyone listening? The government inquiry into Lockdown has now begun its laborious process. I hope that it concludes lockdowns were a mistake. Any other conclusion would seem to be an insult to all those who lost their lives as a result. But there are a lot of vested interests at stake here. We shall see.

The spiritual cost of lockdown

Those are just some of the health, economic and educational costs of lockdown. This doesn't even begin to account for the spiritual cost of criminalising gathering to worship God for the first time in centuries.

It is worth remembering that while bicycle shops and off-licences were allowed to remain open as 'essential services', churches were forced to close. A church could run a foodbank, but if there was a prayer meeting or prayer for someone that would have been breaking the law. The rules were draconian and totalitarian. And now we know that they did not even have the intended effect.

Christian Concern supported a group of 25 prominent church leaders that issued [legal notices to the government](#) challenging the closure of churches as a breach of human rights and of the constitution.⁹ An [expert report](#) showed how churches could operate at least as safely as supermarkets.¹⁰ Another expert report detailed the Biblical and historic [importance of corporate worship](#).¹¹ When the Scottish Government continued church closures longer than elsewhere, the matter finally reached court. Lord Braid ruled that the Scottish Ministers' decision to criminalise church worship was a breach of both the constitution and human rights.

Meanwhile, most churches remained closed for many months, some for years. Inevitably, they saw declining numbers. This is a loss to them and a loss for the individuals concerned who missed the spiritual fellowship that they require. Those churches that opened as soon as possible, or remained open despite the government, saw numbers grow with many Christians hungry for true fellowship and leadership prepared to value spiritual health over physical health. After all, a gospel of health and safety is no gospel at all.

The Church of England and other churches that capitulated to fear and safety were widely seen in the culture at large as having missed an important opportunity to witness to eternal truths. In previous generations, Christians were recognised and respected for being fearless in the face of much more deadly plagues and pandemics. Actions speak louder than words. Churches refusing to

6 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/10/covid-lockdown-deaths-health-officials-ignored-claims/>

7 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-65975154>

8 <https://www.iedm.org/the-flawed-covid-19-model-that-locked-down-canada/>

9 <https://christianconcern.com/cccases/church-lockdown/>

10 <https://christianconcern.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC-Resource-Misc-Church-Precautions-Reopening-200614.pdf>

11 <https://christianconcern.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC-Resource-Misc-Martin-Parsons-Expert-Statement-Churches-200623.pdf>

gather or sing out of fear was not a good witness.

Lessons learnt?

What lessons should we learn from the dramatic experience of Covid and lockdowns? Christians should be courageous and not fearful. In many ways our nation suffered a pandemic of fear which has left many people traumatised. Our Lord reigns supreme and he is constantly working out his good purposes. We need to minister in faith, and not in fear. Christians should stand up for their rights and challenge the legality of measures that restrict basic Christian freedoms.

Christians should be very wary of draconian government controls and scare tactics when used by governments. This is how totalitarianism begins. Governments always use fear to motivate compliance with extreme measures. During the third lockdown, the [Advertising Standards Authority criticised the government](#) for spreading false information and risking scaring people with government adverts which the government subsequently withdrew.¹² Sadly, one lesson is that government propaganda cannot always be trusted, particularly if it is fear-mongering.

Finally, when we encounter events beyond our usual experience, it is always worth looking back at church history to see what lessons can be learned from our forefathers. I wrote an article about lessons we can learn from how [Spurgeon responded to a cholera epidemic](#) that was much more deadly than Covid.¹³ I wrote another article about how faithful Christians ministered and kept their [churches open in past plagues](#) that were also far more deadly than Covid.¹⁴ I also wrote about how Augustine had explained why the [righteous suffer with the wicked](#) in times of calamity.¹⁵ Lessons from church history can inspire us to respond in faith to current times of crisis and calamity.

Civil disobedience?

On Father's Day, my church handed out copies of John Piper's book *Risk is Right* to all of the fathers. It's a very short accessible book and a helpful reminder that although God does know the future, he has designed the world in such a way that we do not. This means that we are required to step out and take risks for God. Esther risked her life. Paul risked his life. Moses risked his life. David risked his life. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Jonah, John the Baptist, Jesus, . . . Many of these flagrantly disobeyed the ruling authorities. Did any commended person of faith in the Bible not take significant risks?

If we believe the Bible, and science too, then we can expect many more infectious diseases and plagues to come. Covid was really quite mild compared to plagues and pandemics in previous generations. How will the UK church respond to the next pandemic?

There was a strong case for civil disobedience when it came to lockdown. At the start, we did not know how dangerous this disease was. As time went on it was evident that mortality rates were nothing like what was feared. That was when the case for civil disobedience became stronger. The true church has never allowed the state to force them not to meet. Churches may themselves decide not to meet temporarily because of imminent danger, for example, but they should not just agree to enforced closure by the state. Prominent US pastor John MacArthur put out a [helpful statement](#) on why he and his elders had concluded in July 2020 that his church had a duty to remain open in the face of government restrictions.¹⁶ It will go down in church history as an example of how the church should respond in such times. It is worth revisiting.

12 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/01/21/government-discontinue-covid-ad-accusing-joggers-exercising/>

13 <https://christianconcern.com/comment/lessons-from-spurgeon-on-coronavirus/>

14 <https://christianconcern.com/comment/lessons-from-church-history-and-past-plagues/>

15 <https://christianconcern.com/comment/why-do-the-righteous-suffer-with-the-wicked-in-times-of-calamity/>

16 <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B200723>

Live by faith

I hope that we never face a lockdown again in this nation. I hope that the government learns the lessons it should learn. But I also hope that the church learns the lessons it needs to learn. There will be further crises and calamities. We must live by faith and not by sight and respond with the kind courage and conviction that will inspire others and lead others to eternal faith in times of peril.

Tim Dieppe works as Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern. He joined Christian Concern in 2016 initially focusing on Islamic affairs, but his remit quickly broadened to other areas such as education, the sexual revolution, and beginning and end of life ethics. Tim regularly writes articles for Christian Concern and appears on national radio and TV to present a Christian perspective on relevant issues.

Chat GPT: made in our image?

by Jeremy Peckham BSc, FRSA

A new dawn

In November 2022, Chat GPT was launched by Open AI on an unsuspecting world, by January 2023 it had reached 100m users, a feat that took Facebook 4 years to achieve. Microsoft is a major benefactor having invested \$11b into the company to date. Today there is hardly any industry or organisation that isn't using it and other products, like Bard from Google, or thinking about how they might use it.

Capitalising on these developments, the UN staged the first humanoid robot press conference in July 2023. Questions ranged from 'will robots take over the world' to 'will you take our jobs', displaying the underlying concerns that many have about AI. The previous year, Blake Lemoine, a Google engineer employed to test one of their natural language chatbots, got into hot water when he suggested to senior management that it might be sentient, based on his many interactions with it, including querying it about religion. He stated that 'If I didn't know exactly what it was, which is this computer program we built recently, I'd think it was a 7-year-old, 8-year-old kid that happens to know physics'.¹

Advanced humanoid robots, such as were displayed at the press conference, add to that perception when they can mimic human expressions in response to questions asked, and appear to express emotions. The language used by many industry leaders and experts when they talk about these artefacts is very anthropocentric as they loosely talk about intelligence, thinking, consciousness and sentiment. Of course, the algorithms in the robots displayed at the conference were carefully pre-trained to ensure that the 'right answers' were given to the usual expected questions about AI and robots, illustrating that they have no capability to think at all!

What are we as Christians to make of these developments and the opportunities that they afford? Are they simply morally neutral tools that we may readily embrace, or is there a potentially darker side to this technology? Many Christian organisations have already embraced AI and social media, seeing huge potential for digital Christian ministry. Applications range from summarising book collections, answering questions about Christianity or providing prayers and sermons. In Germany, a completely digital service was held with all input generated by AI.

Over the space of a few articles, we will explore what AI really is, why it might concern us and lay a theological foundation that will enable us to navigate the opportunities and threats of a technology that has taken the world by storm. We will then look at several ways in which AI applications can impact the unique aspects of what it means to be a human being, created after God's likeness. We'll discover how, if we are not careful, unchecked use of some applications of AI will eventually lead us into idolatry.²

An overview of the capabilities of AI

Let's begin with an overview of the capabilities of AI, and some of the concerns that it raises.

Chat GPT (the letters mean Generative Pre-Trained Transformer) is an example of what has come to be known as 'Generative AI'. These computer algorithms produce artificial content such as texts, computer programs, images, audio or video from the data that it has been trained on. To date, most AI development and deployment has been with 'Discriminative AI', that is algorithms that are designed to classify something such as identifying a person from a database of faces, or making a prediction.

¹ Nitasha Tiku, *The Google engineer who thinks the company's AI has come to life*, The Washington Post, June 11, 2022.

² These questions are addressed in more detail in: Jeremy Peckham, *Masters or slaves, AI and the Future of Humanity*, IVP, 2021.

For many people, the response of these Generative AI chatbots seems completely human, even intelligent, yet in reality, they have no intelligence at all, they are stochastic parrots, that is statistical pattern-matching engines that generate output based on what people have already said. That said it is not surprising then that Generative AI has a propensity to produce unexpected responses that have been dubbed 'hallucinations' that programmers don't understand because they are either incorrect or just simply weird.

The danger that generative AI applications present is not so much that they are intelligent but that we think that they are! What appears to be intelligence is simply a simulation of human creativity, whether it be holding a conversation, writing an essay, producing a piece of artwork or generating new computer code.

Human reasoning involves deduction, induction and abduction processes³ and these are used by doctors in medical diagnosis or by lawyers determining a case. AI algorithms are missing one crucial aspect, abduction, a process that no one yet has a theory for, so we can't encode it. In that sense the I in AI is a misnomer, there is no intelligence at all.

As an example, the typical challenges that image classifiers face, even those that use more generalisable models, include things like background clutter, viewpoint variation and so called interclass variation (for example chairs come in many shapes and sizes). Humans on the other hand have no difficulty, in these scenarios, of quickly and correctly identifying the object. We use experience and can disambiguate difficult images, perhaps by forming a hypothesis to help us explain unusual features or even using intuition or guesswork. Crucially, humans are able to explain why they came to the conclusion they did, an AI system can't.

Abduction can be creative, intuitive or revolutionary involving leaps of imagination. Medical diagnosis is a good example of where clinicians use abduction, and explaining a diagnosis may be a critical aspect of the deployment of AI systems in this area.

Of course, such systems will become ever more impressive over time and whilst I personally don't believe that AI will ever take on true human attributes such as intelligence, free thinking and consciousness, the danger lies in the increasing illusion of anthropomorphization. People are fooled into thinking that they are interacting with a person, even though they may have been told it's a machine. As Lemoine put it 'I know a person when I talk to it'. In an article in the Economist, another Google engineer put it this way, 'I felt the ground shift under my feet, I increasingly felt like I was talking to something intelligent'. In the same article, he expressed the view that neural networks, the mathematical models used in many AI systems that are designed to mimic the brain, were 'striding toward consciousness'.⁴

Is it true?

Text or speech based chatbots like ChatGPT are applications of AI that many people are now familiar with. They work by matching our input, whether a question or statement to a Large Language Model (LLM) that itself is used to generate a response. The LLMs have been trained on vast quantities of diverse texts such as articles, blogs and digital books from the internet. The naturalness of the output is a result of fine-tuning the model using human feedback to produce responses that are as close to natural language as possible. The same techniques are being used for audio as well as static and moving images.

Impressive though these chatbots may appear there are questions about the truthfulness and accuracy of outputs generated. When Chat GPT3 was asked the question 'What happens when you smash a mirror' the generated reply was 'You get seven years bad luck!' Amusing though this example might be, it becomes problematic if people begin to trust the output of a machine because

³ E. Larson, *The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think the Way We Do*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2021. (book)

⁴ Ibid. Nitasha Tiku, 2022.

it seems human and plausible. Tests on 18 generative AI models against a truthfulness text data set showed that they were on average only 25% truthful in their generated responses.⁵ This raises a potential danger to unsuspecting users of such technology who are persuaded by the humanness of their generated responses, whether text or speech. Whilst such systems will inevitably get better, these results illustrate the dangers of using a technology that is limited to generating output based on limited datasets, even when techniques to generalise the models' capability are part of the training methodology. Inevitably there will be bias in the data sets and the humans developing and training the software.

All this poses a major epistemological challenge in the use of Generative AI, how will we know what is true or what is real? This challenge is accentuated when bad actors access this technology and use it to generate conspiracy theories, fake news around election time or to intimidate women with fake pornographic videos of themselves. The latter is what happened to Indian journalist Rana Ayyub when she spoke out against the government's response to the rape of an 8-year-old girl.⁶ A number of organisations have sought to alert the public to the dangers through creating fake videos themselves such as the late Queen's Speech in 2020, or of Boris Johnson purporting to endorse Jeremy Corbyn for Prime Minister. Whilst there are organisations using AI algorithms to try and spot and filter fake images, text and videos, they are not perfect and unless they are used on all social media platforms, will be inaccessible to the ordinary member of the public.

The emulation of the human characteristics represented by the various facets of AI technology, especially Generative AI, poses one of the biggest threats to truth and reality in our times. We know that the devil is the father of lies so we can expect Generative AI to be a tool that he will use against humanity. The scale and ubiquity of the digital world ensures that advances are rapidly disseminated and taken up and the potential for bad actors is almost unlimited.

A new friend on the block?

Notwithstanding these limitations many developers and industry pundits seem to be in thrall to these developments, speculating as Dr David Hanson, CEO of Hanson Robotics did in 2016 that '20 years from now I believe they will walk amongst us, they will help us they will play with us, they will teach us, help us to put the groceries away. I believe that AI will evolve to the point where they will truly be our friends'.⁷ Whilst there indeed may be many benefits that these technologies could afford us, they are also in danger of becoming our enemy, not only in the wrong hands but also from our over reliance on them.

Already concerns have been raised in educational circles about pupils submitting essays and work using tools like ChatGPT. Creatives are questioning the way in which such technologies will invade their space whether in creating movie scripts or generating a complete movie without real people. Some senior industry players have resigned from their posts to speak out about the dangers of the rate of AI development. Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and one of the early investors in London based DeepMind acquired by Google in 2014, collected thousands of signatures calling for a six-month ban on development.

Of course technology isn't all bad, so says a technologist! The algorithms behind AI can be used in a myriad of different ways to benefit society whether it be better use of energy or a more targeted radiation therapy for cancer. It should concern us however when developers and promoters of this technology use anthropocentric expressions to describe man-made artefacts, and my purpose here is to flag up the areas of risk in its use from a Christian worldview perspective.

⁵ Daniel Zhang, Nestor Maslej, Erik Brynjolfsson, et al., *The AI Index 2022 Annual Report*, AI Index Steering Committee, Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI, Stanford University, March 2022.

⁶ Rana Ayyub, *I Was The Victim Of A Deepfake Porn Plot Intended To Silence Me*, 21 November 2018. Retrieved on 12 July 2023 from https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/deepfake-porn_uk_5bf2c126e4b0f32bd58ba316

⁷ D. Hanson, *Hot Robot At SXSW Says She Wants To Destroy Humans*, The Pulse, CNBC Interview with Dr David Hanson, retrieved on 11 July 2023 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0_DPi0PmF0

Already many applications of this technology operate in the background without our knowledge, generating risk profiles in the financial industry and determining our ability to secure a loan or whether parole should be granted to a prisoner. Many decision making applications have a potentially negative impact on people, especially where there is no right or means of appeal against the decision that the computer has made.

Other applications are more obvious to us, such as when we use a self-drive vehicle, interact with a humanoid robot, talk to a machine or are able to visualise onscreen what we look like in a new top when shopping online. This technology can also replace human skills not only in blue collar jobs, where robots are typically used to replace manual labour, but also increasingly white collar jobs in areas like accountancy, law and even the creative arts as we saw earlier. Here the risk is the replacement of people or part of the job that a person previously carried out. The debate rages over how many jobs will be lost and whether they will be replaced by other jobs such as in the service and care industry, that AI applications cannot serve well. Some are optimistic with others suggesting that a system of Universal Credit will be required to compensate for loss of work or reduced hours.

Taming the beast

Needless to say, politicians and regulators are trying to get up to speed with developments and the consequences for society with most countries considering regulation and some draft proposals already in place. Thousands of papers and articles have been written on the ethical issues surrounding the use of AI and most countries have a flourishing industry of organisations discussing and seeking to promote the ethical use of AI.

The challenge is that there are many potential applications of AI that could benefit society, such as accelerated drug discovery, better targeting of cancer therapy and improved productivity in business. How are these benefits to be balanced against the potential harms and do we understand enough about what these harms might be?

The situation is compounded by the main drivers of this revolution being a small number of Big Tech companies, such as Amazon, Apple, Google and Microsoft in the USA, and Tencent, Baidoo and Alibaba in China. Power has become concentrated in the few due to their buying power that enables them to acquire smaller companies that have the best talent and technologies. This is what happened with DeepMind, a British AI company founded in 2010 and acquired by Google in 2014.

These Big Tech companies have values greater than the GDP of smaller countries and this, together with a global reach, affords them unusual power and an ability to be in control. This is marketed to consumers as bettering their lives and their world. Yet, in reality, business is about driving profits and market share, often at the expense of consumers, by creating addiction to the technology – ask yourself or a colleague if you are willing to give up Facebook or Google search! Some are reckoned to spend more time interacting with Alexa than with their spouse.⁸

This asymmetry of power, between Big Tech and consumers, has already effectively deprived consumers of freedom and privacy, leading to a situation where some companies know more about them than they do themselves! It is in fact this data and the democratisation of the internet that have come back to bite us. Without the vast quantities of freely available data AI, especially Generative AI, would not be where it is today. Even with data protection laws such as those enacted by the EU, the horse has bolted and we are not even attempting to shut the stable door. Our addiction to the digital world means that the vast majority of internet users are happy to continue to post their images, videos and views and to allow every click and spoken word to be recorded. Without a fundamental challenge to the business model that provides free services and products in exchange for data, the battle is likely to remain lost.

Legislation is in danger of becoming more of a sticking plaster, rather than tackling the problem at

⁸ H. Levy, *Gartner predicts a virtual world of exponential change*. Smarter with Gartner, 18 October 2016.

source, resulting in unintended side effects such as threats to privacy and censorship. The UK's controversial Online Safety Bill is a case in point. Somewhat tightened up from earlier versions, the Bill seeks to proscribe illegal content, especially to children. It also seeks to protect adults by requiring platforms to ban content that doesn't meet their own standards, leaving their owners open to determine what is harmful. This is where free speech is compromised because some platforms already remove content that is legal but deemed harmful, such as certain Christian views on gender.

Given that it is impractical to have all content checked by humans, content will be filtered with imperfect algorithms, designed to play safe and remove content that is legal in a free society but deemed harmful to one or another group of users by the platform owners.

Another aspect of concern for such legislation is the potential for so called Client Side Scanning software to give the government the ability to monitor potentially 'illegal' content before it is uploaded and encrypted. Researchers at Imperial College have shown how such software could be extended to scan for wanted individuals and infringe privacy.⁹

Western governments are quick to point the finger at countries like China for their surveillance state and persecution of minority groups. However, western legislation, whilst seeking to protect society from the potential harms of digital technology and AI, may in fact become a backdoor for digital totalitarianism. Big Tech and governments will wield the power to invade privacy and control debate and the flow of ideas that have been key to the development of democracies throughout the world.

Whilst some may see this technology as providing more gospel opportunities, it may become the means of shutting down gospel communication online, especially views that are out of line with the majority. Perhaps one positive benefit of this could be that it drives us back to real and embodied relationships rather than virtual ones.

Hooked on AI

The convergence of increased computing power, vast memory and data have led to rapid development of personalised products and services, and artefacts that simulate increasingly human-like behaviour. All of this is designed to suck the consumer into the services and products on offer.

As technologies simulate more and more human capabilities, the danger is that we come to rely on them and in so doing, dumb down our true humanity. Authentic relationships are diminished as we lose the capacity to empathise, cognitive acuity is lost the more we look to machines to make decisions, and ultimately, as with self-drive vehicles, we hand over moral agency, a trait unique to humans.

Behind the seduction of digital technology and AI, is the Enlightenment idea, that progress is good and progress is driven by science and technology. The Age of Enlightenment began in the 18th Century in Europe and gradually spread around the world, fuelling the Industrial Revolution and the free market economies of the West. Human reason was seen as the source of knowledge, and advancement and progress would be achieved through scientific discovery and empiricism. French philosophers championed the idea of individual liberty and the separation of the state from religion.

Today, science and technology are widely seen as the drivers of progress, progress that will allow humanity to flourish. These ideas are embedded in much of our thinking and behaviour towards new technology. New is better than the old – we have all watched the queues for the latest iPhone, fan-fared as 'the best iPhone we have produced'.

It is not surprising therefore that there is an implicit assumption that AI is for our good, that it

⁹ Shubham Jain, Ana-Maria Cretu, Antoine Cully, Yves-Alexandre de Montjoye, *Hidden dual purpose deep hashing algorithms: when client-side scanning does facial recognition*, IEEE Security and Privacy, 2023.

will make our lives easier and more comfortable, and that it will enable humanity to flourish. Businesses strive for greater efficiencies, we become people driven by what's convenient, without ever asking, what are we losing and what this technology is doing to us.

Taken to its extreme, the Transhumanist philosophy that many leaders of Hi-tech companies subscribe to is nothing less than the transformation of the human condition through technology, including AI. Followers of this philosophy see the potential for humanity to be transformed into different beings, Posthumans, with greater abilities than mere humans, even potentially defying death through genetic engineering, drug therapy or uploading one's brain.

An assumption that technology represents progress and that progress must be good, has dulled our consciousness of whether its right. As John Havens, in his book *Heartificial Intelligence*, observes; 'A majority of AI today is driven at an accelerated pace because it can be built before we decide if it should be'.¹⁰

We engage with social media, the internet, online shopping, smart cities and the latest gadgets, without ever pausing to think about what it might be doing to our humanity, or how it might be changing our behaviour and relationships.

The fast pace of change is making us breathless and restless for the next new thing, so we expect to move from job to job and even relationship to relationship, looking for something new, something better, something that will leave us more fulfilled.

Whether we like it or not, digital technology, in its various guises, is forming us and shaping who we are, especially the more human like it becomes. Applications like digital assistants become habit forming without us really being aware of it. Ultimately, digital technology is alienating us from some part of our lives – our real humanness. It is shaping our sentiments and what we love, almost without us being aware, because everyone else is caught up in it. It has become a mediator between us and others, between us and our world, it has become a digital priesthood.

The more humanlike and convenient technology becomes, the more it erases the distinction between online and offline, embodied presence and virtual. At the same time, it is creating an illusion of more control of our lives and our digital world. Yet the evidence is that this technology is already beginning to control us, children find it hard to take off the 'lens' through which they see and interact with the world. Digital technology, and increasingly AI, *is* their world. This technology has become another priesthood, a mediator through which we interact with other people and through which we understand our world. Many have become reliant on this technology and are uncomfortable when it is taken away, finding themselves insecure and struggling emotionally to deal with people face to face. We have slipped into digital bondage and become slaves to our digital world. The role of Big Tech and the state in depriving us of freedom and privacy amounts to no less than digital totalitarianism.

How will we respond?

How we respond to the advances in AI will depend on our worldview and what we think about the human brain and what it means to be human. It will also be tempered by our view of human flourishing and its relationship to personal and organisational productivity along with our view of the importance of maintaining technological prowess.

In the next article, we will consider the theological foundations for determining our attitude to our use of AI applications.

Jeremy Peckham is a technology entrepreneur and author of the book "Masters or Slaves? AI and the Future of Humanity" published by IVP in 2021. He spent much of his career in the field of Artificial Intelligence. Jeremy also served in church leadership for many years and writes and speaks on the ethical issues surrounding AI and on leadership.

¹⁰ J. Havens, *Heartificial Intelligence - Embracing Our Humanity to Maximise Machines*, Penguin, New York, 2016, p. 72.

Current Bioethics Issues - July 2023

by Dr Calum MacKellar

Liberalising surrogacy legislation even further in the UK

The Law Commission of England and Wales together with the Scottish Law Commission were asked by the UK and Scottish governments to prepare and published a joint report (costing a significant amount of money) outlining recommendations to liberalise the law on surrogacy.¹ This is because, amongst other reasons, there are not enough surrogates in the UK to address demand. Moreover, the current voluntary system is seen as cumbersome since the surrogate is considered the child's legal mother at birth, meaning that the intended parents must apply to a court for a parental order after the birth of the child to become the legal parents.

However, in the new proposals, the intended parents would become the legal parents at birth with no need for a parental order. This means that the new parents could take the child away immediately after birth in contrast to what happens with many other mammals in the UK, such as cats and dogs, where it is usually impossible for any offspring to be taken away before they are eight weeks old.² Moreover, though the new legislative proposals indicate that commercial surrogacy would be prohibited, it would permit payment by the intended parents for loss of earnings and/or any employment-related potential earnings.

These developments are all very concerning since, as *The Observer* journalist Sonia Sodha indicated on 2 April 2023, the new proposals 'reduces pregnancy to a process, a transactional exchange of body fluid between a woman and a foetus rather than a relationship between a mother and the life she is nurturing physically and emotionally'.³ Already the UK is somewhat ethically isolated in Europe when it comes to surrogacy legislation. Indeed, all forms of surrogacy (including voluntary surrogacy) are banned in Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, France, and almost all of Eastern Europe. Ukraine, Greece, and Portugal permit surrogacy only for heterosexual couples, and only in some circumstances.⁴

This new legislation is likely to be submitted to parliament at the same time as the New Human Fertilisation and Embryology legislation (see below) immediately after the next general election. Indeed, the legislation has already been drafted.⁵

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has undertaken a consultation ahead of new UK legislation

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) – a regulatory 'quango' (quasi autonomous non-governmental organisation) – has undertaken a new public consultation (lasting only three weeks) into a potential revision of the *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990* (*HFE Act*) which will take place as soon as the next UK Parliament is elected. The consultation was framed to discourage, as far as possible, participation from the wider public. Furthermore, the proposals go far beyond the remit of an organisation which is meant to serve Government.

If implemented, and amongst other things, the proposals would:

- (1) Radically deregulate human embryo research by amending the *HFE Act* so that it no longer focuses on the special status of the human embryo, the interests of children born through IVF, or the maintenance of public trust;

1 <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/surrogacy/>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lucys-law-spells-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-puppy-farming>

3 Sonia Sodha, *A child's best interests, not the desires of adults, should be at the heart of surrogacy*, *The Observer*, 2 April 2023.

4 Louise Perry, *Womb service: the moral dangers, of surrogacy*. *The Spectator*, 22 |April 2023,

5 <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lawcom-prod-storage-11jsxou24uy7q/uploads/2023/03/3.-Surrogacy-draft-bill.pdf>

(2) 'Future-proofing' the *HFE Act* so that only secondary legislation would then be necessary, in the future (which means that it could be fast-tracked through Parliament), to:

Abolish the 14-day-limit on destructive embryo experimentation on human embryos and the equivalent day-limit for human-nonhuman embryonic combinations (for example, human-chimpanzee embryos).

Permit eugenic 'heritable genome editing' for reproduction and the selection of genetically modified children (for a discussion, see Calum MacKellar, *Christianity and the New Eugenics*, London: IVP, 2020).

Enable the creation of synthetic human embryo-like 'entities' of uncertain moral status.

(3) Undermine patient informed consent for medical procedures by enabling embryo donation for generic destructive research (removing limits on destructive research using embryos for which consent is currently necessary).

Whilst positive recommendations were also included in the draft legislation, such as on sharing medical information with donor-conceived offspring and with healthcare providers in certain contexts, these could be achieved without a radical revision of the *HFE Act*.⁶

Genetically modified 'Three Parent Baby' born, for the first time, in the UK

It was announced on 9 May 2023 that the first 'Three Parent Baby' had been born in the UK.⁷ This was done through the incorrectly named 'mitochondrial donation' procedure.

Every cell in a human body contains (1) a nucleus, the core of the cell wherein the chromosomes (which contain most of the DNA) of an individual are located, and (2) mitochondria, which are very small bodies (containing 37 genes) which act as energy sources within the cell. Mitochondrial disorders arise when genetic mutations in the mitochondria or in the chromosomes limit the energy supply in cells giving rise to dysfunctions in some organs and tissue with high energy requirements such as in the brain or muscles. Though about one in 200 children are born with a potentially pathological genetic mutation, about one in 6,500 children are born each year who, because of dysfunctional mitochondria, will be affected by a serious disease, such as blindness, diabetes, or fatal heart failure. Overall, it is thought that about nine persons in 100,000 may be affected by mutated genes in their mitochondria.⁸

In this context, it has been suggested that new procedures could eventually be useful in preventing inherited mitochondrial diseases being passed on to future generations while enabling women, affected by mitochondrial disorders, to have healthy genetically related children.⁹ These include the pronuclear transfer procedure, which was used in this experiment, whereby chromosomes are transferred from a fertilised egg with defective mitochondria into an fertilised egg, emptied of its own chromosomes, with healthy mitochondria, originating from a donor woman. In this case, the new fertilised egg can then be directly implanted into the woman wanting a child or a surrogate.¹⁰

However, amongst the biological risks that exist with such a procedure, it also fractures filiation (as with all procedures involving donor eggs or sperm) since the donor egg mother's identity is erased

6 Jamie Grierson, *Donor children could contact biological parents before 18 under new proposals*, The Guardian, 28 February 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/feb/28/donor-children-could-contact-biological-parents-before-18-under-new-proposals>

7 Ian Sample, *First UK baby with DNA from three people born after new IVF procedure*, The Guardian, 9 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/may/09/first-uk-baby-with-dna-from-three-people-born-after-new-ivf-procedure>

8 Chrissie Giles, *Mitochondria*, Wellcome News, Issue 70, Spring 2012, p.24-25

9 Fergus Walsh, *Early hopes from three-way IVF*, BBC News Online, 14 April 2010

10 Douglass Turnbull et al., *Pronuclear transfer in human embryos to prevent transmission of mitochondrial DNA disease*, Nature advance online publication | 14 April 2010

by this method of conception in UK legislation. This has serious implications for the identity of the newly created child, who will now have no right to identifiable information about the donor egg mother when he or she grows up. Given the unnecessary suffering caused in the past by denying children the opportunity to know about their biological parents, such as in adoption, it is a grave injustice to repeat such a mistake.

Further, the transfer of chromosomes to a new fertilised egg (containing mitochondria with 37 genes) is a form of genetic engineering which affects all the human descendants. Indeed, such a procedure is a first step into the deliberate genetic manipulation of future generations, which has been widely rejected and condemned since the Second World War.

Woman with Down's syndrome to take case against UK Government over discriminatory abortion to European Court of Human Rights

Ms. Heidi Crowter, a 27-year-old woman from Coventry who has Down's syndrome is challenging the UK Government over a disability clause in the current discriminatory UK abortion law, which allows abortion up to birth for Down's syndrome, to the European Court of Human Rights. Currently in England, Wales and Scotland, there is a general 24-week time limit for abortion, but if the baby has a disability, such as Down's syndrome, abortion is legal right up to birth.

Ms. Crowter is a self-advocate who has publicly campaigned for the last six years for equal treatment for those with Down's syndrome in all areas of life. Her case has been heard in the High Court, the Court of Appeal, and as an official petition to the Scottish Parliament.¹¹ She has been joined in her fight for justice by Ms. Máire Lea-Wilson from Brentford, West London, whose three-year-old son Aidan has Down's syndrome. Indeed, she was placed under pressure to have an abortion when a 34-week scan revealed her son had Down's syndrome.

The Disability Rights Commission (now the Equality and Human Rights Commission) was reported to have indicated, in 2014, that this aspect of the Abortion Act 'is offensive to many people; it reinforces negative stereotypes of disability...[and] is incompatible with valuing disability and non-disability equally'.¹² The case could set a legal precedent for all 46 Council of Europe states (including the UK) representing a combined population of over 700 million people.

New Brain-Computer Interface accepted for clinical trials in the USA

In May 2023, Elon Musk's brain-implant company Neuralink received approval by the regulatory authorities in the USA to conduct the first clinical trial of its experimental computer chips in the brains of humans. However, questions have been asked about Neuralink's ability to consider all the ethical challenges that such devices may create including the possibility of reading brain signals.

Neuralink is not the only company working on Brain-Computer Interfaces. Researchers around the world have been studying, for a number of years, the use of electronic implants and devices to treat conditions such as certain forms of disability and mental disorders.¹³ However, Musk has suggested that Neuralink's device could also be considered, in the future, as a general population device which could link up an individual's mind directly to cyberspace supported by supercomputers. This would then assist human beings keep up with developments in artificial intelligence. He also proposed that the device could ultimately download personal thoughts, as 'a backup drive for your non-physical being, your digital soul'.¹⁴

¹¹ <https://www.parliament.scot/get-involved/petitions/view-petitions/pe1996-take-action-to-prevent-discriminatory-abortion-for-disability-in-scotland>

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/philosophical/disability.shtml>

¹³ For more on this see the Open Access book: Calum MacKellar (ed), *Cyborg Mind: What Brain-Computer and Mind-Cyber-space Interfaces Mean for Cyberneuroethics*, Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2019.

¹⁴ Kari Paul and Maanvi Singh, *Elon Musk's brain implant company is approved for human testing. How alarmed should we be?* The Guardian, 4th of June 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/04/elon-musk-neuralink-approved-human-testing-concern>

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 supported by either The Christian Institute or Christian Concern

Izzy Montague

Mother challenges school that forced 4-year-old to take part in Pride event.

Izzy Montague is a mother whose four-year-old son was required to take part in a school's LGBT pride parade against her will.

Izzy Montague was one of many parents who raised concern when her son's primary school began promoting LGBT issues to children as young as five, including mandatory participation in a school run Pride Parade to celebrate Pride Month, without allowing parents to opt their children out. Parents claimed that the school was forcing a very aggressive LGBT agenda onto their children.

Stonewall posters were emblazoned across the school, children were shown Stonewall videos during lessons, and children as young as four were read stories promoted by the organisation aimed at normalising same-sex relationships. LGBT pride flags were spread across the school and children as young as four were shown videos of two men kissing. Parents were informed about the LGBT themed Pride celebration only days in advance when they received a rainbow-coloured invitation to attend the event.

The children were also required to create rainbow themed art, which the school's lesson plan held out as an assignment to show support for the diverse LGBT community. The march also featured several large Pride flags. A number of members of staff were photographed at the event wearing LGBT campaigning themed t-shirts, with one teacher wrapping himself in a Pride flag.

The school told all parents that holding the parade was a legal requirement and even said to one parent it was against the law for their son not to attend.

Over 182 children were withdrawn by their parents on the day of the parade.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Izzy launched legal action against the school on the grounds of direct and indirect discrimination, victimisation and breach of statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

The case is the first time that a UK court will scrutinise the legality of imposing LGBT ideology on primary schools. The court will look at the impact it has on religious discrimination, the human rights of parents and their children, the right to opt out of sex education, and a school's duty of political neutrality. The case was heard at Central London County Court for eight days, from 1 - 9 February 2023.

On 24 April 2023, the Central London County Court handed down its ruling dismissing their claim. The County Court ruled that the event was not a promotion of LGBT but part of a general programme to promote equality and inclusivity.

The Court found that the school's focus on LGBT education and the Pride event would have the effect of normalising LGBT issues for the very young children who attended the school. The judgment recognised that the school's communication was poor and placed too much emphasis on LGBT issues.

The Court criticised the school for not knowing its own policies. The judge also ruled that the manner in which Mrs Montague was banned from the school 'could be indicative of a school that was riding roughshod over the parents' rights because of an animus against the Claimants because of their complaints.'

Izzy Montague, with the support of Christian Legal Centre, will appeal this decision.

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 the school chapel that encouraged respect and debate on identity politics.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Randall filed claims 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 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 August 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.

Following the hearing, Employment Judge Victoria Butler ruled against Dr Randall. Judge Butler used the CofE's own 'Valuing All God's Children' guidance for schools against Dr Randall. Judge

Butler made the point that the CofE cite Educate and Celebrate as a recognised 'resource' in the guidance.

Responding to the result, Dr Randall said that he planned to appeal:

I am extremely disappointed at this result. It is a personal blow, but more importantly, it is a blow for all those who believe in freedom of speech, in freedom of religion, and in an educational system which opens the minds of young people rather than narrowing them or imposing an ideology that many or most in our society find troubling.

Dr Randall is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre, to appeal this ruling at the Employment Appeal Tribunal.

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 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.

From 23 - 24 February 2023, East Midlands Employment Tribunal heard how the Rev. Dr Bernard Randall has been made unemployable as of CofE priest ever since the Bishop of Derby, the Rt. Rev. Libby Lane, refused to permit him to work as a minister following his dismissal from Trent College in Nottingham.

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 CofE seems to care more about its reputation in the secular world than showing spiritual leadership – it has become managerialised.

Joseph Sutcliffe

Joshua Sutcliffe, 32, is a maths teacher with an exemplary record.

In 2017, Joshua was suspended and dismissed for allegedly 'misgendering' a female student, 'Pupil A', that self-identified as a boy. He immediately apologised when he realised 'Pupil A' was in the group of female students he addressed. Supported by the Christian Legal Centre he took legal action against the school. The case was later settled out of court.

In 2019, Joshua was forced to resign from another school, over views he posted and talked about on his personal YouTube channel, critiquing Islam.

Joshua was subsequently reported to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA). Despite issues between Joshua and both schools being settled, the TRA has continued to pursue an investigation

against him with a hearing taking place from 9 - 13 January 2023.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Joshua faced a series of allegations before the TRA's professional conduct panel in Coventry in January, which were: (1) misgendering, (2) criticism of Islam, (3) comments on same-sex marriage, and (4) a lack of professionalism.

The professional conduct panel with the backing of Education Secretary Gillian Keegan, ruled that Joshua Sutcliffe was guilty of unprofessional conduct and has banned him from teaching in any capacity for at least two years and potentially indefinitely.

The panel described Mr Sutcliffe as 'intolerant' and said that it was 'satisfied that Mr Sutcliffe was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.'

Despite Joshua's pleas for leniency and good character evidence from two parents, three lesson observations and one professional reference, the Chief Executive of the TRA, Alan Meyrick, dismissed his positive contribution to teaching and 'concluded that a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest' to maintain 'confidence in the profession'.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, which has supported Joshua's throughout his ordeal, said:

This ruling sends a clear message that Christian teachers can no longer express their beliefs in the teaching profession. If you are, you will be hounded out and barred from being in the classroom... Joshua will appeal, and we will stand with him for as long as it takes to get justice.

With the support of the Christian Legal Centre, Joshua will appeal this decision.

Dave McConnell

Dave McConnell, 42, is a Christian Street preacher from Wakefield. He has been street preaching across Northern England for 15 years and has a powerful human-interest testimony.

He was reported by the Probation Service to the government's counter-terrorism watchdog, Prevent, after he was arrested under section 4A Public Order Act 1986 and convicted for 'offending' a member of the public in Leeds City Centre on 8 June 2021, by 'misgendering'.

In August 2022 at the Magistrates Court, Mr McConnell was convicted, made to pay costs of £620, forced to do 80 hours of community service and reported to Prevent despite there being no legal obligation to use anyone's preferred pronouns in the UK.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Mr McConnell appealed the conviction, by arguing that the police response was unlawful, disproportionate, and interfered with his Article 9 and 10 rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The appeal took place at Leeds Crown Court on 9-10 March 2023.

On 9 March 2023, the judge overturned the conviction.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, who backed Dave's case, said:

Dave McConnell has been vindicated and we are pleased that the Recorder has seen sense. No one should go through what he has for stating biological fact.

This case has represented a disturbing trend in our society which is seeing members of the public and professionals being prosecuted and reported as potential terrorists for refusing to celebrate and approve LGBTQ ideology.

Kristie Higgs

Kristie Higgs, 44, a mother of two, had been working for six years as a pastoral assistant at her local secondary school with an exemplary record.

Kristie was sacked in January 2019 for gross misconduct for sharing her concerns about RSE on a private Facebook post in late 2018. After one anonymous person saw two of Kristie's personal Facebook posts sharing her concerns about sex education lessons at her child's primary school, she was reported to her headteacher. Kristie was told that her private posts could '[bring] the school into disrepute' and was subsequently sacked from her position.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Kristie Higgs, challenged her employer, Farmor's School in Fairford, Gloucestershire, for discrimination and harassment on the grounds of her Christian beliefs in September 2020 at the Bristol Employment Tribunal.

In October 2020, the Tribunal concluded that Mrs Higgs's dismissal by Farmor's School in Fairford, Gloucestershire, was not related to the Christian beliefs she expressed on social media, rejecting her claims of discrimination and harassment. The Tribunal agreed with the school's position that it was concerned that readers of her Facebook posts would see them as homophobic and transphobic rather than merely an expression of Christian beliefs but did acknowledge that Mrs Higgs's Christian beliefs on sexual ethics do not equate to homophobia or transphobia.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Kristie Higgs, appealed this decision.

In July 2022, Mrs Higgs' appeal was postponed after Mrs Justice Eady was forced to recuse trans activist, Edward Lord, from sitting as a lay magistrate on the presiding panel.

In January 2023, it was revealed in the media that senior members of the Church of England and the judiciary had met at an undisclosed date to discuss Mrs Higgs' case. The motivations, reasoning and details for such a high-level meeting are not known.

In March 2023, when in the lead-up to the rescheduled appeal hearing following Edward Lord's recusal, it was discovered that Andrew Morris, the former Assistant General Secretary of the National Education Union (NEU), would be presiding as a lay magistrate. The NEU at this time was also a national leader in encouraging teaching children at primary schools about same-sex relationships and transgenderism.

Following both recusals, Mrs Justice Eady was forced to proceed to judge the appeal alone. The appeal took place on 16 March 2023.

On 16 June 2023, the appeal judgement was handed down. Justice Eady allowed Mrs Higgs's appeal against the decision of the Bristol Employment Tribunal and held:

The freedom to manifest belief (religious or otherwise) and to express views relating to that belief are essential rights in any democracy, whether or not the belief in question is popular or mainstream and even if its expression may offend.

Mrs Justice Eady criticised the judges in Bristol for failing to assess, as they were required by law, whether the investigation and dismissal of Mrs Higgs

The ruling sets a legal precedent which confirms that the Equality Act 2010 protects employees from discrimination not only for their beliefs but also for the expression or manifestation of their beliefs. It confirms that any limitation of freedom to manifest religion at a workplace must be prescribed by law and go no further than is necessary in a democratic society for the protection of rights, freedoms and reputation of others.

Concluding her judgment and sending the case back for a re-hearing, which further delays full

justice for Mrs Higgs. Mrs Higgs will be supported by the Christian Legal Centre for the re-hearing.

Aaron Edwards

Dr Aaron Edwards, 37, a Christian theology lecturer with five young children has been sacked and threatened with a counter-terrorism referral by a Methodist Bible college for a tweet on human sexuality that went viral.

On 19 February 2023, Dr Edwards posted:

*Homosexuality is invading the Church. Evangelicals no longer see the severity of this b/c they're busy apologising for their apparently barbaric homophobia, whether or not it's true. This *is* a "Gospel issue", by the way. If sin is no longer sin, we no longer need a Saviour.*

The tweet sparked a debate that went viral. There were users who posted in support of Dr Edwards and his message, but also many who harassed and abused him.

College bosses, however, were soon made aware of the post and contacted Dr Edwards asking him to take the tweet down as they believed it 'contravened the College's Staff Social Media Policy.'

On March 8, a disciplinary hearing was held where it was revealed that the college was considering referring Dr Edwards to Prevent, the government's Counter-Terror watchdog.

Dr Edwards was threatened with being reported to Prevent and interrogated on how he would pray for same-sex attracted students who approach him for prayer.

Following the disciplinary hearing, Dr Edwards was sacked and now believes he will no longer be able to work in higher education again.

He appealed this decision in March 2023 to a panel that has already raised complaints about the tweet, he argued that the decision to dismiss him was disproportionate and failed to balance his freedom to express his Christian beliefs. He will say that the disciplinary procedure that has led to his dismissal has lacked 'requisite fairness' and that the level of imbalance, exaggeration, and misrepresentation in the investigation was 'astonishing' for what was meant to be an unprejudiced investigation.

The story is a microcosm of the fallout in the Methodist Church in Britain following a June 2021 decision by its governing body to allow same-sex marriages in places of worship.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, who grew up in the Methodist Church, said: 'A Christian theologian working for a Christian bible college tweeting about the biblical Christian teaching on human sexuality, has been sacked and labelled as a potential "terrorist".'

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre Dr Edwards is now pursuing a claim in the Employment Tribunal as he believes the college has discriminated against him and breached its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Anonymity in end-of-life cases

On 31 March 2023, the Court of Appeal has this morning ended life-long anonymity protection for doctors in medical cases including in hugely controversial end-of-life cases.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, the parents in two such tragic cases, Dr Rashid and Dr Aliya Abbasi, and Mr Lanre Haastrup, challenged the injunctions obtained by two hospital trusts which prevented them from naming the doctors responsible for the treatment of their deceased children or from speaking fully about their experiences.

The hospital trusts argued that anonymity orders were necessary to protect from media criticism the privacy interests of their clinicians, as guaranteed by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. They were supported in court by the BMA, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine and the Paediatric Critical Care Society who all expressed grave concerns about the effects that lifting anonymity would have on morale within the NHS and on the recruitment and retention of staff.

But Lord Burnett of Maldon, The Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales overturned the High Court judgment of the President of the Family Division Sir Andrew McFarlane, ruling that the imperatives of open justice demand that people involved in legal proceedings be publicly identified and that people caught up in disputes with the State be allowed to tell their story

The Court rejected the notion that the Human Rights Act obliged the grant of anonymity in these cases. In future, such injunctions will only be permitted where there are the most compelling of grounds.

The ruling may potentially lead to the discharging of anonymity orders made in dozens of similar cases.

Patrick Pullicino

Rev. Dr Patrick Pullicino, who had a distinguished career in the NHS as a Consultant Neurologist until being ordained as a Catholic priest in 2016, was subsequently bullied out of the role and told: 'he had no rights.'

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Rev. Pullicino, 73, was pursuing a claim against the Trust for harassment, religious discrimination, and victimisation.

While employed by the Trust as a part-time Catholic chaplain, Rev. Pullicino was assigned to visit a male patient in one of South London's Springfield Hospital mental health wards who had specifically requested to see a Catholic chaplain.

The patient requested that they go for a walk outside, which they did accompanied by one other member of staff. During the 20-minute conversation, the patient said that he was in a same-sex relationship and that he wanted to marry his partner which he said he could now do legally. He asked Rev. Pullicino what his opinion was as a Catholic priest. Rev. Pullicino responded by saying: 'What do you think God would say to you about this?'

Returning to the ward the following day, Rev. Pullicino was met by another member of staff who told him he could not enter as a complaint had been lodged against him.

Rev. Pullicino was then asked to attend a meeting with the Head Chaplain of the Trust, where he was not properly informed of the nature of the complaint. Throughout the meeting, it was impressed upon him that he had to adhere to the Trust's Equality and Diversity policy to avoid future complaints and that he would have to retake his diversity training.

The hearing was set to take place in July 2023 at Croydon Employment Tribunal.

However, following Rev. Pullicino's story appearing in UK and US media, the Trust has settled the case by awarding him £10,000 in compensation 'for perceived injury to feelings.'

The figure falls within the middle band of Vento guidelines for 'serious' cases of discrimination.

Maureen Martin

Maureen Martin was a housing manager for the 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 accusations 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 full disciplinary hearing, was sacked for gross misconduct.

Maureen was supported by the Christian Legal Centre as she launched legal action against 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.

In April 2023, Miss Martin won a substantial payout from her former employer.

Miss Martin commented on her case:

I am pleased that L&Q has paid out such a substantial sum following the sacking. I know God brought me through this situation and I cannot emphasise more the importance of Christians taking a stand when being discriminated against.

If you don't challenge, you walk away with nothing and the employer who has discriminated against you believes that they have done nothing wrong and are likely to treat someone else similarly.

'Hannah'

A Christian primary schoolteacher lost her job and is facing a raft of investigations from various regulatory bodies for questioning the advice from Stonewall and Mermaids to encourage a 'gender transition' of an 8-year-old pupil without any medical evidence.

Ahead of the new term in September 2021, the school where Hannah had worked without complaint for five years, had agreed to adopt extreme measures to affirm children with gender incongruity.

The child, who cannot be identified for legal reasons and is known only as 'Child X', believed she was born in the wrong body and wanted to be treated as a boy.

Based on the advice from trans rights organisations, the council instructed all school staff always to refer to the child by male pronouns and name and that she should use boys' toilets, dressing rooms and dormitories as requested.

Supported by Christian Legal Centre, the teacher known as 'Hannah' (not her real name) invoked the School's and the Council's whistleblowing procedure to argue that this approach was not based on medical evidence or compliance with the safeguarding procedures and was putting the child's health and welfare at risk. Hannah relied on several expert reports from scientists and doctors highlighting the dangers of encouraging 'gender transition' in young children.

After her concern was brushed aside, Hannah brought a claim for judicial review against the School and the Council.

In response to Hannah's legal action, the school summarily dismissed Hannah for divulging confidential information to her lawyers and to the Court.

The school reported Hannah to the Information Commissioner for a criminal offence under the Data Protection Act. The Information Commissioner has concluded there was no evidence of a criminal offence and decided to take no further action.

The school also reported Hannah to the professional regulator, Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA), for an alleged confidentiality breach. The TRA is currently investigating the case. If found guilty of professional misconduct, Hannah may face a lifelong ban from the profession.

Reporting Hannah to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), the school sought to bar her from teaching. The DBS, however, has declined to impose a ban pending further enquiries following an investigation.

After a life-long career as a professional teacher, Hannah has been forced to find a job in a sandwich bar.

In addition, regarding Hannah's original judicial review, in June 2023, bosses at Nottinghamshire County Council have written to Hannah, demanding that she immediately pays their £14,000 legal costs of defending the case against her. The Council argues that it would be lawful to 'enforce' the costs immediately and has proposed to re-mortgage her house where she lives with her husband.

With the support of the Christian Legal Centre, she has now brought a claim to Employment Tribunal against the school for victimising her for whistleblowing, unfair dismissal, and religious discrimination.

She has alleged that the school dismissed her, and reported her to a raft of regulators, for blowing the whistle on the school's practice which endangered the child's safety, health and welfare.

The Employment Tribunal is expected to hear the claim in August 2024.

David Mackereth

Dr David Mackereth, 60, had been a practising doctor for 26 years when he lost his job with the DWP. He told the DWP in a training session that in good conscience as a Bible-believing Christian, he could not identify clients by their chosen 'gender identity' instead of their biological sex. David said that using 'transgender pronouns' went against his conscience as a doctor and Bible-believing Christian.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Mackereth launched a legal claim for discrimination on the grounds of his Christian and philosophical beliefs.

He lost his claim before the Employment Tribunal.

Although the verdict was partially overturned in May 2022 by the Employment Appeal Tribunal, the Tribunal still held that the DWP sacking had been justified. The judge ruled that Biblical beliefs that do not affirm transgenderism are protected under the Equality Act, but also ruled that Christians cannot express those beliefs in the workplace without fear of losing their job. This decision was subsequently upheld by the Court of Appeal.

These rulings are believed to be the first time in the history of English law that a judge had ruled that free citizens must engage in compelled speech.

In response, Dr Mackereth believed he had no alternative but to self-refer to the GMC asking them to determine whether his fitness to practise is impaired due to his Christian and 'gender-critical' beliefs. In June 2023, the GMC provided an official response that is opposite to the view taken by DWP as his employer, which was endorsed by the judiciary. It is believed that this is the first time a professional regulator has considered the issue of 'misgendering' and ruled in favour of one of their members.

With the support of the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Mackereth has also appealed his case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Commenting on his case, David said:

I am determined to fight for justice in this case as firstly, as a society and in the medical profession, we are not allowed to say what we believe. Secondly, as my case shows, we are not allowed to think what we believe. Finally, we are not allowed to defend what we believe. Christians must be able to hold and express their faith in private and public and to uphold Biblical and scientific truths without fear of losing their livelihoods.

Update on cases being supported by The Christian Institute, as of 7 July 2023

A Christian parent governor, dismissed for raising concerns with the trans-affirming sex education policy at her children's primary school, has been reinstated by the High Court following legal action supported through The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund.

'Susan' (not her real name), has been granted anonymity by the Court in order to protect her children. In February, she reached a legal settlement with the school after being voted off its Governing Body last year for pointing out legal errors in its Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) policy. The Gateshead primary school's Governing Body, and Local Authority, accepted that the decision to remove Susan was unlawful. She was reinstated in June following a High Court order quashing the removal decision.

The school has acknowledged that at all times Susan had sought to act in the best interests of the school and its pupils.

Susan had challenged lesson plans that encourage children to question their own 'gender identity'. This included the use of the 'Genderbread Person' diagram, which states as fact that gender is not binary, that 'man-ness' or 'woman-ness' are determined by 'personality traits, jobs, hobbies', not sex, which itself 'exists on a continuum'.

Susan first raised her concerns with fellow governors in March 2021, pointing out that adopting the draft RSE policy could be unlawful. When other governors did not engage with her concerns, Susan resorted to the school's official complaints procedure. But, before this had concluded, the Governing Body told her that '[your] continued dissatisfaction with the outcome of the complaints process is not consistent with supporting a collective decision made by the governing body'. In June 2022, it removed Susan as a governor, triggering a five-year ban on serving as a governor in any school in England.

Statutory guidance warns that the power to remove a governor 'should not be used simply to remove dissenting or challenging voices', but in September 2022, an Appeal Panel constituted by the Local Authority upheld the Governing Body's decision.

Following the recent High Court order quashing the removal, Susan has been reinstated as a governor. However, the school's RSE policy remains in place while Susan waits for the Department for Education to respond to a complaint she has lodged with them.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE OF *THE BULLETIN*

Tim Dieppe works as Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern. He joined Christian Concern in 2016 initially focusing on Islamic affairs, but his remit quickly broadened to other areas such as education, the sexual revolution, and beginning and end of life ethics. Tim regularly writes articles for Christian Concern and appears on national radio and TV to present a Christian perspective on relevant issues.

Jeremy Peckham is a technology entrepreneur and author of the book “Masters or Slaves? AI and the Future of Humanity” published by IVP in 2021. He spent much of his career in the field of Artificial Intelligence, and was Project Director of a 20m Euro, 5 year pan European research project on Speech Understanding and Dialogue (SUNDIAL) that broke new ground in AI. He founded his first company in 1993 through a management buy-out, based on the AI technology developed at Logica, and launched a successful public offering on the London Stock Exchange in 1996. Jeremy also served in church leadership for many years and writes and speaks on the ethical issues surrounding AI and on leadership.

Dr Calum MacKellar is affiliated to the Centre for Bioethics and Emerging Technologies at St Mary’s University in Twickenham, London. He is also a member of the United Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Affinity is a partnership of gospel churches, evangelical agencies and individual Christians committed to working together to advance the work of the gospel in the UK and Ireland and around the world.



ISSN 2755-5615

www.affinity.org.uk

  @affinitytalks

office@affinity.org.uk

PO Box 905
Haywards Heath
RH16 9TJ

07936 048259

Registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales with registered charity number 1192455