

SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

Issue 54 – November 2023

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Christian parenting in a confusing world of gender identity

by Dr Julie Maxwell

Once upon a time (not so long ago) after asking for your name and date of birth, medical and other forms asked for sex/gender with the option to choose either male or female. The terms sex and gender were mostly synonymous and the reply expected was that of biological sex.

Understanding the terminology

Biological sex is determined at conception and (except for some very rare chromosomal conditions) every human being has either XX (female) or XY (male) sex chromosomes. These determine the physical development of the fetus so that – again apart from some very rare medical conditions – the sex of a baby is easily observed at birth by looking at the genitalia.

There have always been a few children who, for a variety of reasons, have struggled with their sex (or the expectations and gender stereotypes) and have believed themselves to be, or wanted to be, the opposite sex. Studies in the past have shown that the vast majority of these children would grow up to be comfortable with their biological sex¹.

Gender dysphoria is a term that is used to describe a sense of unease that a person may have because of a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity.²

It is now the case that the term **gender** is no longer synonymous with biological sex and generally means something different. The WHO defines gender like this:

*...the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.*³

Gender identity is used to mean something different again and is defined by the NHS as 'our sense of who we are and how we see and describe ourselves.' A person may therefore express a gender identity which is different to their biological sex and they may identify as male, female, non-binary or any one of an increasing number of identities.

Sometimes I think it's difficult for us to comprehend just how much has changed in just the last 10 years as 'transgender' seems to have taken such a prominent place in our society. We find ourselves in a world where feelings trump physical reality and where expressing anything other than complete acceptance and celebration of someone's identity can result in us being labelled bigots or transphobic. Our children (and grandchildren) are growing up in a very different world to the one we did so we must understand what they are being surrounded with and think carefully about how we as Christians can hold firm to the truth of the Bible and its goodness and pass that on to the next generation.

Increase in gender dysphoria (GD) and mental health problems

You may be wondering why we need to be concerned about this. Yes, it seems to be in the news

1 <https://statsforgender.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Gender-related-distress-will-alleviate-for-around-80-of-pre-teen-children-once-they-become-teenagers.pdf>

2 See: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/>

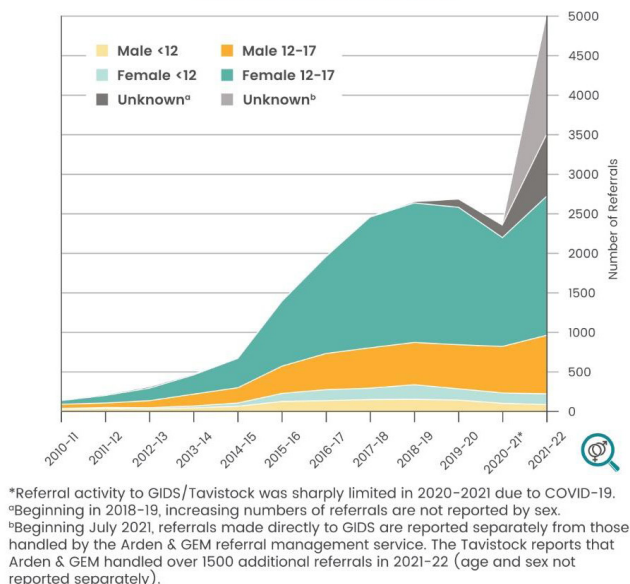
3 <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

almost every day with articles about Drag Queen story times in libraries; arguments over whether transwomen (biological males identifying as women) should be allowed into female only spaces or to compete in female sports, and the impending closure of the controversial Tavistock gender identity development clinic, but does this really affect our children?

Children and young people are increasingly experiencing significant mental health difficulties – in it's 2022 report, The Children's Society reported that there had been a 50% increase in young people experiencing mental health problems in the last 3 years.⁴ While a greater awareness of mental health problems is helpful for those experiencing clinical depression or significant anxiety, we are seeing more and more young people self-diagnosing themselves with anxiety, depression and even autism or ADHD. The rise in mental health problems was a concern even before Covid and this has only intensified as young people were isolated and spent endless enforced hours alone in their rooms 'learning' online.

We also see from the following chart that the number of children being referred to the Tavistock clinic with gender dysphoria has increased at an alarming rate:

Child and Adolescent Referrals for Gender Dysphoria United Kingdom (GIDS)

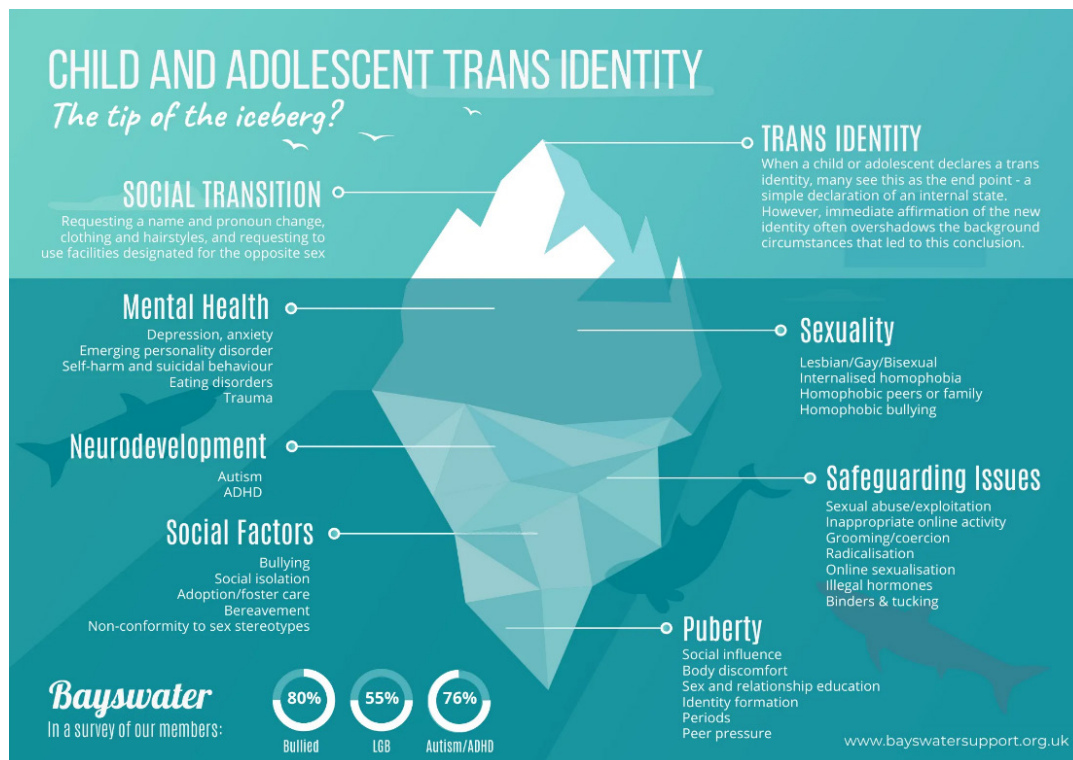


Source: https://segm.org/images/280UK_22.svg

The reality is that the referrals to the specialist clinic do not necessarily reflect the true numbers of those who are experiencing distress around their gender or questioning their gender. Many will not seek a medical referral and there may be a variety of reasons for this. Some young people do not experience distress and as a result, do not feel the need for medical or psychological input: they may present in an androgynous way and identify as non-binary or agender. Many parents who are concerned about their child or young person heading down a medical/surgical pathway may be afraid that professionals will simply agree with their child's gender identity and undermine them as parents.

All too often young people are trying to make sense of a variety of mental health problems and other distress through the lens of gender. Set up in 2019 by parents of children identifying as trans or non-binary, the Bayswater Support Group has produced the extremely helpful infographic below which encourages us to see gender distress and trans-identification as the visible tip of the iceberg and emphasises the need to look at the many possible contributing factors that may be lurking beneath the surface.

⁴ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood>



Source: <https://www.bayswatersupport.org.uk/iceberg/>

Teaching in schools

Two recent reports have exposed the extent to which children are being exposed to inappropriate and ideological content both in RSE/PSHE and throughout the curriculum.⁵ In addition, a survey conducted by the Association of Christian Teachers reveals the concerns and difficulties faced by Christian teachers being expected to teach material on sex, relationships and gender identity that is inaccurate or inappropriate.⁶

Educate and Celebrate (an educational organisation) describes how nursery and primary schools can refashion themselves to be 'gender-neutral' and suitable for 'children of all genders' because young children are 'fluid':

Children are so open-minded and ready to listen, they have no set views and they are fluid in their ideas and understanding and readily accept, given the opportunity to do so. To support them, teachers need to be ready with songs, books and examples in their repertoire and jump at any opportunity to challenge preconceived views in young children.

(Dana: Educate & Celebrate Best Practice nursery teacher)

Examples of the kind of books recommended for young children include: *Who Are You? The kid's guide to gender identity* which tells children 'Babies can't talk, so grown-ups make a guess by looking at their bodies', and that there are more than two choices of gender: 'trans, genderqueer, non-binary, gender fluid, transgender, gender neutral, agender, neutrois, bigender, third gender, two-spirit...' and 'you are who you say you are because YOU know you best'.

Children are often not being taught the biological reality that sex (male or female) is determined at conception and that every cell in their bodies (with a few incredibly rare exceptions) carries either XX or XY chromosomes. It is not possible to change sex – medical and surgical interventions may change a person's appearance so that they look more like the opposite sex but they will never actually change sex.

⁵ See: <https://www.newsocialcovenant.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/nsucu-education-2023-v1.pdf> and <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Asleep-at-the-Wheel.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.christian-teachers.org.uk/speaking-up/rse-report>

However, the situation in schools and health provision is such that so often as soon as a child or young person expresses any kind of wish to be the opposite sex or to be unhappy with the way they are, this is immediately jumped on and the preferred gender identity is affirmed. There have been many reports of this taking place even without parental knowledge – some parents have only discovered their child is using different names and surnames when the school has accidentally sent a letter using them.

When a child identifies as trans this doesn't just affect them and their family; it affects all those around them as well, in particular the other children in their class and school who may be expected to use new names or pronouns that don't match biological sex and who may get into trouble if they are unable to or even if they forget.

Social transition

Changing of name/pronoun or dressing/presenting as the opposite sex is known as social transition. Many people think that it is just a kind thing to do and doesn't really matter as long as it makes the child comfortable, however evidence is growing that allowing social transition increases the likelihood of the gender identity/dysphoria persisting and sets a child on a pathway to transition.⁷

An independent review of NHS services for children with gender dysphoria states:

*Social transition – this may not be thought of as an intervention or treatment, because it is not something that happens within health services. However, it is important to view it as an active intervention because it may have significant effects on the child or young person in terms of their psychological functioning. There are different views on the benefits versus the harms of early social transition. Whatever position one takes, it is important to acknowledge that it is not a neutral act, and better information is needed about outcomes.*⁸

Social media

iGen is defined as the first generation who have gone through their whole adolescence in the age of the smartphone. When I first started going into primary schools teaching Lovewise material (around 10 years ago) only a few children in a year 6 class would own mobile phones and these would generally not be smartphones. Today it would be highly unusual for any child in year 6 (or even year 5) to not have a smartphone. 10 year olds happily tell me the age limits for various social media platforms and justify still being on those platforms saying their parents have let them have accounts.

Young people spend large amounts of their time on social media and algorithms mean that they will see more and more of the same type of material. There is a plethora of content that encourages children and young people to think they are trans and gives overwhelmingly positive stories of young people undergoing medical and surgical transition. Young people are often coached into how to 'come out' to their parents; what to say to get medical intervention, and that anyone who doesn't immediately agree with them and celebrate their new identity doesn't understand them or hates them.

Detransitioners

There are a growing number of people coming forward who, having undergone some degree of transition, decide to return to identifying as their biological sex (several stories can be found on the

⁷ <https://statsforgender.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Social-transition-.pdf>

⁸ <https://cass.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Cass-Review-Interim-Report-Final-Web-Accessible.pdf>

Bayswater Support website⁹). Some people who transition come to a point when they realise they have made a terrible mistake and that gender wasn't the real issue – often they have embarked on medical and surgical treatment only to discover that the problems they had are still there and that in addition to the mental health difficulties they started with, they now have physical problems as a result of hormone treatment and/or surgery. The number of detransitioners is likely to rise as increasingly younger people have commenced medical and/or surgical transition.

Christian perspective

As Christians we believe that we have been created by God and that our bodies are important. We are created in God's image and being male or female is part of what that means:

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*
(Genesis 1:27)

Our identity is given to us by God our creator and is not something we either have to decide or discover. Andrew Bunt has written an excellent book *Finding Your Best Identity* which explores this in more detail and Sam Alberry's book *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies* is also very helpful.

So how can we as Christians try to ensure that our children are not deceived by the culture of ideology and expressive individualism (for more on this read *Strange New World* by Carl Truman or *Pride: Identity and the Worship of Self* by Matthew Roberts) and what do we do when our children are taken in and declare a trans identity?

What can we do?

- 1. Be well informed** – reading this article is a good start but only touches on the topic and on many of the aspects that need to be understood. There are many books on the subject of transgender and it is helpful to read a variety of secular and Christian books (I've put together a list of useful books at the end of this article) which together help us to have a better understanding of what we are facing. A new Christian book by Patricia Weerakoon, *The Gender Revolution*, is an excellent book which includes some very helpful insights and advice around children and young people who identify as trans which has been missing from available Christian books on the topic.
- 2. Teach our children biblical and biological facts at ages appropriate to them** – we need to make sure that our children are well taught and that they have a good understanding of the importance of bodies. Children should be taught about body parts and their proper names by their parents – including differences between boys and girls without endorsing unnecessary gender stereotypes – and this is done in a natural way from a young age. As they get older and approach puberty it is vital that they are prepared for the changes that will happen to their bodies in the context of being created by God and that the changes of puberty have a good purpose – changing us from children to adults. Lovewise has resources that can support parents to talk about this with their children¹⁰. These conversations lay the foundations for children and ground them in reality and the goodness of God's creation and also allow for ongoing conversations as they are exposed to other perspectives.
- 3. Find out what children are being taught at school and challenge if needed** – there is widespread concern (not just among Christians) about some of the content that children are being taught and about the approaches often taken to children who question their gender. As parents, you have the primary responsibility for your child and you have the right to information about what they will be learning in PSHE/RSE and across the curriculum (including asking about books in the school library) and about what approaches the school

⁹ <https://www.bayswatersupport.org.uk/detransitioners-videos/>

¹⁰ Visit: <https://lovewise.org.uk/christian-sex-education-resources/>

takes/might take to a child declaring a gender identity. Schools often take an approach because they genuinely believe they are doing the right thing and so often a gentle, questioning approach can be productive. There are several organisations that can be very helpful in supporting parents as they challenge schools¹¹.

4. **Limit screen time and monitor what they are accessing** – one of the aspects of gender identity is the disconnect between bodily reality and how someone feels – feelings trump reality. It is important therefore to ground our children in physical reality as much as possible. Spend time with them, get out and about and do fun things together as much as you can. Encourage them to meet up with friends to join clubs and youth groups rather than just spending time online. And be interested in what they are doing online rather than just being dismissive of the latest TikTok or meme.
5. **Listen to them** – as your child gets older it becomes increasingly important to really listen to them even (or perhaps especially) when they seem to be saying things that you don't understand or you know not to be true. As you listen you can reflect back to them and ask questions that show you are genuinely interested in how they feel and what they think. As you ask questions they may naturally begin to question themselves and you can also take natural opportunities to give your thoughts (in a non-confrontational way) and to state biological and biblical truth (which you taught them when they were younger – point two above).
6. **Pray** – hopefully you are already praying for your children every day so keep going, they need it!

Useful resources

If your child is already struggling with gender identity then here are a few resources you might find helpful:

- An article I wrote a little while ago: <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/111/parenting-a-child-questioning-their-gender-identity>
- A new secular book called *When Kids Say They're Trans* by Stella O'Malley, Sasha Ayad and Lisa Marchiano.
- Bayswater Support Group (<https://www.bayswatersupport.org.uk/>) is a secular organisation that provides valuable support for parents of trans-identified children
- True Freedom Trust (<https://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>) is a Christian organisation (and Affinity member) that can provide support.

Useful books

- *The Gender Revolution* by Patricia Weerakoon
- *Growing Up God's Way* by Dr Chris Richards and Dr Liz Jones
- *Challenges to Living God's Way* by Dr Chris Richards and Dr Liz Jones
- *Trans* by Helen Joyce
- *Irreversible Damage* by Abigail Shrier
- *Embodied* by Preston Sprinkle
- *The Genesis of Gender* by Abigail Favale

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¹¹ The Christian Institute: <https://www.christian.org.uk/>
Safe Schools Alliance UK: <https://safeschoolsallianceuk.net/>
Parent Power: <https://parentpower.family/>

Will assisted suicide laws ever be compatible with a Christian worldview?

by James Mildred

Around the UK, we're never far away from a fresh attempt to legalise assisted suicide. In **Scotland**, the Scottish Liberal Democrat MSP Liam McArthur is planning on introducing his members' bill to give certain patients a new, legal right to be helped to kill themselves. When he does, it will be considered by a lead committee, which will take evidence and produce a report. MSPs will then vote on the Bill at a Stage 1 debate. It was at this stage in 2015 that the previous assisted suicide bill in Scotland was comprehensively defeated by 82 votes to 36. With two Holyrood elections since then, and plenty of new MSPs, it's far less clear what the outcome will be this time.

Meanwhile in the **Isle of Man**, representatives in the House of Keys have debated an assisted suicide bill introduced by Alex Alisson. His proposed legislation would allow terminally ill patients the right to choose either an assisted suicide – when the patient is prescribed lethal medication to kill themselves – or euthanasia – when a medical practitioner administers the patient with a lethal drug to kill them.

Politicians in **Jersey** are also looking at assisted suicide proposals in a consultation that may yet see the government there introduce legislation.

Lastly at **Westminster**, the Health and Social Care Committee has been conducting an Inquiry into the current law in England and Wales (under the current law, assisting someone to commit suicide is illegal and punishable by up to 14 years in prison). The guidance urges caution in applying a prison sentence. In this sense, the law has a stern face, but a kind heart. The committee is expected to report back in the coming months. With a King's Speech in November, and the private members' bill ballots in the House of Commons and House of Lords as well, there's also the prospect of an assisted suicide bill coming high enough up one of these ballots to be given more time for debate in either House.

Faced with all this, you can't help but wonder what part of the UK will end up legalising assisted suicide first?

The vital role for the church to play

While CARE is responding to consultations on assisted suicide and providing support and briefings to politicians across the UK, including the Isle of Man, there is also a vital role for the church to play. Thankfully, we live in a democracy which means we can engage with our elected representatives on the issues we care about. It seems to me that assisted suicide is set to become one of the defining ethical debates of our time. At its heart, it is about how we view and respond to death and suffering and how we care best for the frailest in our society.

As followers of Jesus, contacting our politicians about assisted suicide is one of the ways we can be salt and light. In our emails, letters, and meetings with our representatives, we can be gracious, clear, compelling and compassionate. There are multiple arguments we could employ. For example, we could encourage them to consider the evidence from Canada, which offers a cautionary tale to any state looking to pass assisted suicide laws. In Canada, the law was changed in 2016 and since then, vital safeguards have already disappeared. And the change in culture has been profound as well.

One former Paralympian and army veteran in Canada wanted a stairlift put in. She contacted her local authority and they responded, not by sending an engineer to install the chairlift, but by sending her a leaflet about assisted suicide. Sadly, this story from Canada is not an isolated

incident. Such arguments about public safety and the failure of safeguards, as well as the risk to the most vulnerable, are the ones most likely to influence the politicians who represent us.

Questions to think about as we engage with this topic

While you might read this and be fully convinced assisted suicide is wrong, I'm also aware you might not be so sure. Perhaps you've experienced the tragedy of watching a loved one suffer terribly at the end of their life. As a result, there's an inner conflict over what to think. Perhaps the arguments employed by pressure groups like Dignity in Dying (formerly called the Voluntary Euthanasia Society) are persuasive to you, especially the idea that legalising assisted suicide is not really such a major change in the law.

If you find yourself unsure what to think, let me raise just two questions I think you should ask yourself. These are good questions for us all to think about as we engage with this emotive topic of assisted suicide.

Do you think individual freedom should always trump collective responsibility?

When it comes to assisted suicide, the argument used for it is often based on the rights of an individual. It goes like this: it's not up to me or anyone else to decide how you die. You should have that choice yourself. Anyone who opposes assisted suicide doesn't need to choose one. But why should we deny the rights of individuals who want an assisted suicide?

The flaw in this argument is it fails to acknowledge that human beings are not islands and there is no such thing as absolute freedom. All of us make choices that impact other people and choosing an assisted suicide would be no different. Choosing it could prompt an elderly neighbour who is depressed and lonely to contemplate the same choice, even though, deep down, what they really need is love, support, company and friendship.

Moreover, all of us accept limitations to our freedom in society. For example, there are limitations on how fast we can drive on the roads, and where we're allowed to cycle, to mention just two. These exist to protect people from harm and to serve the common good. Evidence from around the world suggests assisted suicide laws place pressure on the most vulnerable, with the right to die becoming a duty to die. Is there any way we could absolutely ensure an assisted suicide law wasn't abused and exploited?

Do you think life is always sacred or only if it is free from suffering?

In the Christian worldview, there can be only one answer. Life is always seen as sacred. It is a gift from God. And he values each and every human because all are made in his image. He values life so highly that post-Flood when Noah emerged from the Ark, we have the first legal bit of text in the history of the world. God placed a death penalty on the intentional killing of another human being, which highlighted how deeply precious human life is. And the greatest evidence for the preciousness of human life? The incarnation of Jesus! God himself humbled himself and became an embryo in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The trouble with assisted suicide is it believes the lie that life is profane. That it reaches the point where it loses its value and meaning.

Assisted suicide laws will never be compatible with the Christian worldview

Personally, I do not think assisted suicide laws will ever be compatible with the Christian worldview. Our whole theology of suffering leans into the redemptive and sanctifying effect it can have on us and on others. We will not always know why we suffer. We will not be in control of how and what our loved ones go through. But our confidence rests in the promises of God, which are all yes and amen in Christ. He has promised to be with us in the storms, in the valley of the shadow of death. And he has also promised that his grace (power) is sufficient for us in all our trials.

Far from being a minor, easy change in the law, legalising assisted suicide would mean profound, irreversible culture change. It would open a *Pandora's Box*, with the whole ethos of medicine and care for the most vulnerable fundamentally changed. Doctors would have the legal power to kill patients in certain circumstances. That's a momentous shift and one we should urgently resist.

As politicians engage and debate various assisted suicide proposals in Scotland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and potentially at Westminster too, let's pray they will be receptive to hearing our arguments and opinions and that every parliament and assembly will always – as they have done so far – say no to assisted suicide.

James Mildred is CARE's Director of Communications and Engagement. He started working in politics in 2014. He moved to London to work for CARE that same year and also completed a two year church based training programme.

A biblical perspective on adult social care

by Stephen Hammersley CBE

One of the more surprising pictures of heaven that we read in the Bible is of a city where all the people are at ease with themselves, and with their God. Old men and old women are described as sitting along the streets each with a staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city are filled with boys and girls playing (Zechariah 8:4).

If this picture of intergenerational harmony is a surprising choice of imagery, you might also like to note that in Daniel's rather more dynamic pictures of heaven, we see myriads of people and angels ministering and attending, while God himself is described using language ordinarily ascribed to an older man: the Ancient of Days sitting on his throne with white hair and clothes, in splendid and praise inspiring surroundings (Daniel 7:9).

In both pictures, we see age as something to be celebrated and held in awe and older people ascribed value and worth. Indeed, whenever the Bible chooses to tell us that someone is of great age we normally see them doing significant things for God and others: Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh on behalf of the Israelites (Exodus 7:7); Joshua was leading an army in his eighties and exhorting the people of Israel to follow God while aged over 100 (Joshua 24:29); Abraham aged 100 trusting God for a descendent to fulfil the promise that from him would come a mighty nation that would bless all peoples (Genesis 21:5); or think of ancient Anna and Simeon in the Temple, able to discern that the baby Jesus before them was the promised Messiah and saviour and to pray and prophesy accordingly (Luke 2:22-38).

This positive perspective on age is a direct challenge to our modern-day tendency to see older age and older people negatively and as a problem that needs a solution.

The Bible is also brutally honest, however, about the challenges of ageing: the loss of capacities and capabilities that the writer of Ecclesiastes says can make it 'hard to take pleasure in life and in God' (Ecclesiastes 12:1). But the Bible sets even the dependency and frailty that comes with ageing in a constructive context. When writing to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul commands his readers to 'Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2). This requires someone to have a burden that they are prepared to share just as much as it requires someone to take the load. And both the burden sharer and the burden carrier – the helped and the helper, perhaps the older and the younger – fulfil the law of Christ. Paul used the metaphor of a body to describe church life as involving community, mutuality, and interdependence, where everyone has a part to play (1 Corinthians 12:12). Jesus drove this point home when he commanded his followers to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34). Loving kindness that embraces people who are frail through age is therefore an obligation so that all generations might have life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

But what does all this mean for adult social care?

For individuals

For me, and for every individual Christian, it means resetting our attitudes towards older people as vital members of our church families. It means showing that we value them for who they are and for their ongoing contribution to body life. As I write, I am thinking of an old friend who prays regularly for me and tens of other Christian workers and ministries but who is rarely encouraged in her prayer ministry. Consequently, she all too often sees herself through the lens of what she can no longer do, rather than as someone who still has a vital gifting and role.

For churches

For churches it means teaching that there is no retirement in God's kingdom, rather a continued gifting that is to be used. It means starting to recognise the importance of the ripe harvest field that the growing older demographic represents, particularly in evangelistic terms with growing millions of people facing death alone and with no eternal hope. And maybe the Lord has provided us with the workers to bring in the harvest in the form of our older church members whose individual and collective prayers and outreach can be so powerful.

It also means taking seriously the business of burden sharing across generations and showing vital love and support to those involved in caring. The statistics show that most people will now know someone close who needs help and many will be experiencing how complex and confusing it is to navigate the care system. Too many people describe trying to get good care for a spouse, parent, or friend as an exhausting 'fight' as they try and join up NHS and Local Authority provided services and discover for themselves the reality of a very mean 'means test' for care, and the fact that over half a million people who are assessed as needing care receive no help from the state.

For society

And for society, we need to face up to the fact that our system for adult social care needs fixing and we need to encourage our politicians to honour their promises to do so. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Reimagining Care powerfully described the Biblical principles underpinning how this could be done.¹ They recommend a system that starts with the goal of enabling all humans to flourish. This immediately elevates things beyond the delivery of basic care tasks and survival and opens the door for creative input from charities and civil society. It also rejects the notion of a deficit focus based on what people can no longer do and promotes the value of each person and the assumption that everyone has something to contribute. This would see a system based on interdependence and reciprocity – the idea that we each give and receive in different ways at different times regardless of our age or needs. And the system should prize relationships and belonging, reflecting the reality that we were created to be in a relationship with God and other people.

A system based on these principles would see adult social care as a whole of community responsibility, with family delivered care complemented by the state's properly funded support and community led responses. This would see state budgets going further as they are augmented by the resources and gifts of older people and community groups and churches that would otherwise lie latent.

The paradigm shift that we need is to value older people, as we read in Leviticus 19:32: 'Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.'

Our older brothers and sisters, family members and friends are to be respected for who they are and what they still have to contribute – literally rise up in response to their presence. But don't forget the 'and'. We are told to show respect *and* revere God. Young and old revering God as they respect and value each other and respecting each other because they revere God.

Stephen Hammersley has been the Chief Executive of Pilgrims' Friend Society – a charity which supports older people to live fulfilled later lives in their residential care homes and independent living housing schemes – since January 2015, Stephen began his career as a mathematician and worked in the banking industry for 17 years.

1 <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/reimagining-care-commission>

What happened with the ‘online safety bill’?

by Dave Greateorex

Four years after it was first announced, the Online Safety Act 2023 has now reached the statute book. It's the Government's attempt to force tech firms to take more responsibility for content on their platforms. With many free speech concerns addressed, this more targeted Act certainly has the potential to be a breakthrough moment for child protection.

But effective enforcement will be crucial. Because keeping children safe online isn't going to be easy. The National Audit Office recently estimated that over 100,000 platforms will be in the scope of the regime¹. With so many different possible harms in view, it's no wonder that one of Ofcom's online safety chiefs, Chloe Colliver, has admitted that her team's biggest challenge at the moment is 'prioritisation'.²

That's why, throughout the passage of the legislation, The Christian Institute, CARE and others argued for the Government to be laser focused. A clear, targeted approach would be the most effective way to bring the full weight of the law down on the most serious harms for children while preventing mission creep into censoring merely controversial ideas.

Targeted approach

Thankfully, after a lengthy campaign, this is largely the approach the Act now takes. It contains a number of targeted measures that should make a real difference.

Molly Russell, 14, tragically took her own life in 2017 while, an inquest concluded, 'suffering from depression and the negative effects of on-line content'.³ Under the Act, a new offence of encouraging or assisting serious self-harm will go a long way to stop children from seeing the kind of content that led to Molly's death.

With research showing that 76 per cent of teenage girls have been recipients of unsolicited sexual images, it was clear that targeted action was needed. Such 'cyberflashing' will be criminalised by the Act.

Arguably most significant, at least in terms of pervasiveness, are the Act's provisions tackling pornography. The Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza is 'deeply concerned about the normalisation of sexual violence in online pornography, and the role that this plays in shaping children's understanding of sex and relationships'.⁴ With over half of 11 – 13 year olds admitting to having seen porn⁵, even many former advocates of 'sexual liberation' are now recognising its societal harm. The Online Safety Act will require tech firms to implement "highly effective" age verification to protect kids from such content.

This 'highly effective' standard is a major improvement on the original drafting, which left age assurance standards more in the hands of the porn platforms themselves. This was like letting burglars set standards for locks. Plaudits here go to CARE, alongside other groups, who spearheaded this part of the campaign.

1 *Preparedness for online safety regulation*, National Audit Office, July 2023, page 4

2 'Preparing for the tricky task of regulating online safety', *Computing*, 8 August 2023, see <https://www.computing.co.uk/event/4121797/preparing-tricky-task-regulating-online-safety> as at 27 October 2023

3 *REGULATION 28 REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS*, The Coroner's Service, 13 October 2022, see <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Molly-Russell-Prevention-of-future-deaths-report-2022-0315-Published.pdf> as at 27 October 2023

4 'A lot of it is actually just abuse': Young people and pornography, Children's Commissioner, January 2023, page 4

5 'Children see pornography as young as seven, new report finds', *BBFC*, 26 September 2019, see <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/children-see-pornography-as-young-as-seven-new-report-finds> as at 27 October 2023

‘Legal but harmful’ removed

All of this is an epic task. So forcing tech firms to police the nebulous category of ‘legal but harmful’ *for adults* would have been a massive distraction.

Under the original plans, the Secretary of State was to designate a list of ‘harmful’ content that tech companies would have had to address. In theory this didn’t force tech companies to censor, but would certainly have provided cover for those minded to. And what company would want to be seen promoting content explicitly designated ‘harmful’ by the Government?

The requirements could have been broadly interpreted and allowed woke activists to argue for the removal of content that ‘misgenders’, for example. With potential fines of up to ten per cent of global turnover, it’s easy to see how tech companies erring on the side of caution might have put mainstream Christian ethics on the ‘banned’ list.

Last November, the Government replaced these provisions with what it called a ‘triple shield of protection’. Tech firms have to remove illegal content while acting consistently with their terms and conditions and providing user empowerment tools so users can decide for themselves if they want certain other content filtered out of their feed.

Letting users choose what they see is a good way forward. It’s the equivalent of being able to put on headphones and walk quickly past a speaker on the street.

However, users still need to understand what they are filtering out. The Act says that the tools should be provided for content which ‘incites hatred’. A low or vague threshold could mean posts which merely criticise a particular belief being hidden from a user who only wants to filter out genuinely dangerous material. Ofcom must issue clear guidance that discussion, criticism and other fundamentals of robust public debate are not what is in mind.

Enforcement

Even with more focused legislation, there still has to be a will to act. There is a vast difference between legislation passing and its measures being enforced. Requirements for all adult websites to introduce age verification were put on the statute book by the Digital Economy Act 2017. But these provisions were never implemented and the Online Safety Act replaces them.

Even more pertinently, Ofcom has been able to enforce age-checking systems on UK-based video-sharing platforms since November 2020. These measures were considered a trial run for the broader online safety regime. But despite admitting last year that ‘most’ porn sites it looked at didn’t have proper safeguards, it has only opened one relevant investigation.⁶ Ofcom recently suggested that more investigations *may* be on the horizon but only after months of further ‘assessment’.⁷

Without robust action from Ofcom, the Act will be a damp squib. If it takes months between each warning before requiring particular actions or issuing fines, porn sites will take advantage. In reality, change could be implemented within days. Leading age verification software provider Yoti claims it can ‘Add age verification to your website in minutes’.⁸ The French regulator understands this:

⁶ *Ofcom’s first year of video-sharing platform regulation: What we found*, Ofcom, October 2022, page 106, para. 14.6; ‘Investigation into Secure Live Media Ltd’, Ofcom, 16 May 2023, see https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/bulletins/enforcement-bulletin/open-cases/cw_01272 as at 27 October 2023

⁷ ‘Enforcement programme into age assurance measures on UK-established, adult video-sharing platforms’, Ofcom, 29 September 2023, see https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/bulletins/enforcement-bulletin/open-cases/cw_01266 as at 27 October 2023; there has been one fine issued under the regime, but that was for refusing a statutory information request, not directly for failing to implement age verification: *Ofcom’s first year of video-sharing platform regulation: What we found*, Ofcom, October 2022, page 11, para. 3.8; ‘Investigation into Tapnet’s compliance with a statutory information request’, Ofcom, 27 March 2023, see https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/bulletins/enforcement-bulletin/all-closed-cases/cw_01263 as at 27 October 2023

⁸ ‘Age Verification’, Yoti, see <https://www.yoti.com/business/age-verification/> as at 27 October 2023

it gives non-compliant porn sites only 15 days to put age verification in place, before requesting blocking orders from the court.⁹

And where porn sites seriously believe action will be taken, they will be forced to act. Some US states introduced age verification laws during the summer. Pornhub – one of the biggest porn sites in the world – blocked access to its services in Mississippi, Virginia and Utah, a move it would not have taken unless it believed it would face enforcement action.¹⁰

It's imperative that over the coming months, Ofcom is held accountable for taking decisive action with the powers it has been given. Our children have been left unprotected for far too long.

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9 'No blocking for these porn sites in France, but a reprieve of a few months', *Aroged*, 7 July 2023, see <https://www.aroged.com/2023/07/07/no-blocking-for-these-porn-sites-in-france-but-a-reprieve-of-a-few-months/> as at 27 October 2023

10 'Pornhub blocks access in Mississippi, Virginia and Utah amid changing laws', *TechCrunch*, 3 July 2023, see: <https://techcrunch.com/2023/07/03/pornhub-blocks-access-in-mississippi-virginia-and-utah-amid-changing-laws/> as at 27 October 2023

Made in His image: Implications for our use of AI¹

by Jeremy Peckham BSc, FRSA.

A Christian anthropology

In our last article we considered the rapid advances in so called Artificial Intelligence, particularly Generative AI applications like ChatGPT, and how the deployment of various applications might impact us as individuals and society at large.² We observed that most people, including the developers of such technology, have a tendency to use anthropomorphic terms when describing the capabilities of AI. In so doing we ascribe human characteristics, such as intelligence and thinking, to artefacts that are in fact no more than 'black boxes' that use sophisticated statistical pattern matching techniques.

If we are to be able to evaluate such technology and its impact on humanity and the church, our starting point must be a uniquely Christian anthropology. In this article we will explore the dimensions of such an anthropology, located in God's unique revelation to us in the Bible.

Right from the opening chapter of the Bible we learn that we're created in God's image when God said:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. (Genesis 1:26)

In God's creating activity, man and woman are singled out from the animals and the rest of physical creation as special, because nowhere else in Scripture is anything else that God creates defined as in his 'image' or 'likeness'. But what does it really mean to be made in his image or likeness? To get to grips with this, we need to understand something about the essence of God.

The essence of God

God does not manifest himself in physical form: he's metaphysical and this therefore means that in some way we mirror his essence or nature, both through our body and what we call the soul. This is often referred to as the ontological view of Imago Dei.

The church fathers were the first to study more thoroughly what Imago Dei (image of God) means, and Tertullian saw free will as the essential mark or stamp of the divine image. Augustine suggested that God and humans share some ontological³ component, trait or quality that essentially defines us: memory, intelligence and will.

Varying views were held among the Reformers and Reformed theologians, but the dominant view has been that there's both a narrow and a broad definition of what it means to be made in God's image. The narrow definition describes a spiritual dimension, or the virtues of holiness, knowledge of the truth and righteousness that humans possessed before the Fall. In the narrow definition this divine image was lost in the fall of humankind and could be reclaimed only through redemption. However, a broader view of Imago Dei accepts that humans possess other attributes of God, such as intelligence, natural affection and freedom to choose, and that these are retained by all of

¹ Parts of this article are based on extracts from J. Peckham, *Masters or Slaves? AI and the Future of Humanity*, IVP, 2021, pp 43-65, used with kind permission from IVP.

² See: Affinity's *Social Issues Bulletin - Issue 53*. Online: https://www.affinity.org.uk/app/uploads/2023/08/Issue-53-Summer-2023_final-WEB.pdf

³ The essence or nature of being.

humanity.⁴

What is clear is that even after the Fall, God still speaks of humankind as ‘made in his own image’, there is no hint that it has been destroyed by the Fall (Genesis 9:6).

Some theologians like to group the attributes of God into categories such as goodness – embracing attributes such as love, mercy, righteousness, justice and holiness. The category of knowledge covers the attributes of speech, reason, truth and wisdom. God’s power is yet another category that covers his eternal being, existence, omnipresence and immensity.⁵ Clearly, these are not attributes of humankind. All of these attributes are, of course, part and parcel of who God is, and any divisions are merely human attempts to try to define what he’s like. What we can say overall is that these attributes encompass God’s moral excellence.

The attribute of truth is worth a small excursus as it has important implications for our thinking about AI technology, especially Generative AI.

Truth and reality

The Hebrew root ‘*emet*’ is used in various ways in the OT in terms related to truth and conveys the ideas of stability, support, faithfulness and conformity to fact. God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah declares ‘I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right’ (Isa 45:19). The word is also used to convey the idea of conformity to reality as opposed to something erroneous as for example the response of witnesses in Isaiah 45:9: ‘Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right, and let them hear and say, it is true’. There is a harmony between the different usages of these terms, as Roger Nicole puts it:

*It is because truth is conformity to fact that confidence may be placed in it or in the one who asserts it, and it is because a person is faithful that he or she will be careful to make statements that are true.*⁶

The NT usage of the term for truth accords with these OT concepts and also implies the absoluteness of truth, such as when Jesus prays for his disciples, ‘Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth’ (John 17:17).

The idea that truth is conformity to reality is referred to as the correspondence view of truth and is key to our thinking about what is actually output by the Large Language Models (LLMs) of Generative AI applications like ChatGPT. These systems generally don’t output specific quotations from individuals but produce a natural language synthesis from the training text corpora, raising the question, ‘How do we know it’s true?’. We cannot attribute the output to a specific person or text. If we were to use the Bible texts as an example, simply outputting an amalgam of such texts (albeit in plausible natural language responses to questions posed), would be a distortion of God’s revelation to us that has been carefully preserved over centuries.

It is also worth noting that language is the means by which God reveals himself and truth (his word) to us. The emulation of natural language by an artefact, such as ChatGPT, that purports to be the same as that spoken or written by a person should raise serious ethical concerns for Christians who are called to mirror the Biblical correspondence meaning of truth. This understanding should also cause us to reflect carefully on whether such tools can be used in the Great Commission without compromising this calling. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians, ‘having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour,’ (Eph 4:25). In using the likes of ChatGPT we must be careful to avoid what the prophet Isaiah laments, that ‘truth has stumbled in the public squares’ (Isa 59:14).

4 L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 204.

5 J. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002), p. 399.

6 Roger Nicole, ‘*The Biblical Concept of Truth*’, *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson, John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 291.

Moral agency

When God made Adam and Eve he gave them freedom to choose – moral freedom. They chose, against God's command, to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when they were tempted in the Garden of Eden. This choice ended with disastrous consequences for creation and humankind.

Some have, however, challenged this notion of free will, a concept that the author Yuval Harari sees as existing 'only in the imaginary stories we humans have invented'. Harari justifies this perspective on the basis that:

Over the last century, as scientists opened up the Sapiens black box, they discovered there neither soul, nor free will, nor 'self' – but only genes, hormones and neurons that obey the same physical and chemical laws governing the rest of reality.⁷

Free will however is foundational to moral responsibility, regardless of whether one thinks morality has external agency or not. As a concept it's therefore important in the debate about AI potentialities, as well as in framing ethical questions in the use of AI and our relationship to it. It's also important in relation to the moral responsibility at the heart of the ethical debate about self-driving vehicles and autonomous weapons. Effectively, when we step into a self-driving taxi or our own self-driving vehicle, we're handing over moral agency to that vehicle.

Let us reason together

Turning to the category of knowledge as an attribute of God, we see that he's a reasoning, logical and intelligent God who is truth itself. We see that God is a reasoning God in Isaiah's vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem, where he communicates his view of the waywardness of his people. God nonetheless encourages them to repentance and forgiveness with the words 'Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord' (Isa 1:18).

Our ability to reason is a precious part of what it means to be human. It's special to us and we don't see it mirrored in animals. This ability to reason is communicated in language, both spoken and written, at a level unique to humans. We see reason worked out in Adam's relationship and communion with God, in his understanding of what God was telling him and acting upon it – such as in naming the animals that God brought before him.

This is why we must be careful how we think about Generative AI and avoid anthropomorphising it and imagining that it reasons and thinks like a human; that it is a human created intelligence that might even surpass ours.

Another aspect of the nature of God is that the act of creation itself shows us that he's a God who works and creates. Work was also part of God's design for humankind and clearly a part of the natural order when he created Adam and Eve and they tilled and kept the garden.

Clearly the fall of humankind, described in Genesis 3, changes what we're like because of the introduction of the corrupting power of sin. No longer do we love perfectly or think completely rationally, and no longer do we seek justice and righteousness as God does, because of our selfish desires. Nonetheless, we remain creatures made in his image, made of his essence, and some of the nature of God is still seen, even in fallen humankind.

This image begins to be restored when we're redeemed by Christ, as Paul reminds the Colossian Christians when he tells them that they're to be renewed after the image of their creator (Col 3:10).

What we've seen so far is that Imago Dei means being made as a mirror of the nature of God. This has to do with reflecting some of God's attributes, such as being moral, and having freedom to choose and to reason.

⁷ Y. N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Harvill Secker, 2016), p. 329.

Ambassadors of God

In the twentieth century, theologians began to challenge the ontological view (or what we might call 'the attributes of God') of what is meant by being created in his image. They argued that Imago Dei is more about the function of humans and what we're made to do, rather than what we are or what attributes we display. This view sees humankind as agents or representatives of God rather than sharing his attributes. For convenience, I've called this the functional view. This view, however, is really more about what we do as people made in God's likeness, and in my view it would be a mistake to see it as an alternative meaning of Imago Dei. It does not replace the understanding that we've so far explored, of what being made in his image or likeness means.

Rather, as we shall see, it complements the ontological view and provides the impetus for reflecting God's image and lays a responsibility on us to do so.

The functional role rests on an alternative translation of Genesis 1:26, 'let us make humanity as our image',⁸ but it's also supported by the second part of Genesis 1:26, where God says, 'And let them have dominion'. This verse is essentially saying that humans are to have dominion over all that he has created, whether living or non-living. This view of Imago Dei is one of humankind being delegated by God to oversee his creation as his vicegerent.⁹

The idea of being a vicegerent comes from the ancient rule of kings over their kingdom and people, with the vicegerent being appointed to co-govern or rule. In ancient times a king might have had statues (icons) erected to remind his subjects who was king and lord over them. In ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts, kings were seen as sons of gods and therefore being in the gods' image. This is an interesting motif when we consider the biblical texts that also speak of Adam's being a 'son of God' (Luke 3:38). Being in God's image carries with it the idea of sonship and sons representing our Father on earth in his cosmic temple.

This idea of image bearing or of being 'icons' of God in his creation is a powerful one, especially in the context of thinking about ways our image bearing might be tarnished by the use of AI technology.

The functional view of being made in God's image goes beyond the idea of being an icon, something that should look like the one it represents. To exercise dominion over God's creation is not a passive thing. It carries with it the responsibility to work and be creative: we see that even before the fall God put humans in a garden to till and keep it: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it' (Gen 2:15).

The functional view of Imago Dei emphasises the purpose for which we're made: humanity's function. Rather than standing opposed to the ontological view that we share some of the attributes of God, it underscores our need to ensure that we reflect those attributes, that image. The icon bears witness to the one whom it represents. Going further, the vicegerent has a responsibility to function in a way consistent with the nature of our creator, whose image we bear.

We must therefore be careful not to allow our humanity to be 'downgraded'. Ex-Google ethicist Tristan Harris has popularised this term to describe the way in which smartphones affect humanity. Harris cites a number of ways in which humanity is being dumbed down by technology designed to grab more and more of our attention. This results in an interconnected set of issues such as shortening attention spans, social isolation, and polarisation of views along with manipulation and addiction, brought about by the use of techniques such as notifications (for example when a text message arrives).

⁸ T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament, Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), pp. 443–444.

⁹ For an extended treatment of this view see J. R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

Made for relationship

One of the consequences of God being moral in character is his unconditional love, a love that has meaning only because he has the freedom to choose to love. This love is shown supremely in God's love for fallen humans in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die for our sins. We too share the ability to love, because we're made in his image.

Although there was love and communion between God and Adam, God desired that man should have a human companion, so he brought forth woman from Adam's rib. They were able to enjoy love for each other and intimacy as one flesh. True love stems from God's moral nature and requires freedom to choose to love, or it's not love at all.

Proponents of the relational view of Imago Dei see the significance in the use of the plural in Genesis 1:26, 'let *us* make man in *our* image' and suggest that this means image is the relationship within the 'us' and 'our', although there is debate over who is referred to. There is no doubt however that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are involved in creation and are in relationship. Humans were clearly created for relationship, ultimately to love and obey God. If we're a Christian, this becomes the main goal in our lives, along with loving our neighbour as ourselves. This is born out in Jesus' answer to the scribe who asked Him what the most important commands were:

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' (Mark 12:30–31)

The relationship aspect of Imago Dei helps us to think about whether my use of AI technology might affect the way in which I relate to people – does it diminish authentic, embodied soul-to-soul relationships with others and, of course, ultimately my relationship with God? Various studies have shown how the manipulative algorithms in social media platforms have impacted the digital generation's relationships and attitudes.

A holistic view of Imago Dei embraces the ontological, functional and relational dimensions and provides the foundation for the development of Christian ethics in regard to AI and its uses.

Before we conclude, it is worth exploring a little further where the image of God in us resides. In essence, the question that we need to address comes down to this – does the body have a soul? How we answer this question is likely to determine what we think about the prospects for creating artificial general intelligence (AGI) and beyond this super intelligence. Putting it another way, is the essence of what it means to be human something special, something metaphysical, or is it merely physical, an evolution of our brains?

More than matter

Some would see our brains as simply a computer made up of cells rather than silicon chips, that has evolved over time to develop capabilities such as reasoning, moral choice and love. Indeed, the most advanced AI systems are built on mathematical models called neural networks inspired by how the brain works. However, nothing takes away from the reality for the Christian that personhood entails being made in God's image, and that this is part of the inner self, the soul or consciousness.

Whilst some may believe that we can never develop a truly general AI, let alone a superintelligence, because we cannot define it in order to encode it, others may find it perfectly reasonable to believe that it's only a matter of time before we can create a self-learning algorithm capable of simulating the human soul and becoming conscious.

It's important for us to understand that many of those working in the field of AI, AI ethics and policy formation will tend to the latter view. This will shape their ethics, their view of what AI is and indeed whether there is the possibility of creating a general AI or even super intelligence.

Conclusion

Drawing these various threads together, we've learnt that we're made in God's likeness and therefore bear something of his nature, albeit tarnished by sin. This nature can be described by a number of attributes that include moral freedom, from which love, justice and righteousness flow, and an ability to reason. All these attributes are unique to humanity and distinguish us from animal life.

We saw also that God commissioned humanity to be stewards over his creation and made us his representatives, his vicegerents. As God's redeemed people we are to be salt and light, his ambassadors, given responsibility to show the world God's character. We are to *image* him in the world through who we are and how we act. God also made us to work in his creation and even though it's made more difficult by the fall, there's dignity in work.

Finally, being made in the likeness of the triune God who shows us unconditional love, is to be made for a loving relationship with him and with our fellow humans.

Many of the challenges that we face in developing and deploying AI-based systems have to do with how they potentially influence what it means to be human, and how they affect our image-bearing. Whenever our mirroring of the image of God in us is diminished, it's an affront to God, and if we're distracted from putting on Christ, then we negatively influence our image bearing and being vicegerents. If we truly believe that we're created in his image, then great care is required in how we use and develop AI systems.

In our next article, we will explore how this foundation of Christian anthropology which we have developed here can be applied in some specific use cases of AI

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.

Current Bioethics Issues - October 2023

by Dr Calum MacKellar

European Court of Human Rights rejects appeal to export abroad sperm and embryos from the deceased for fertility treatment

In September 2023, the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Baret and Caballero v. France* decided (unanimously) that there had been no violation by France of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights, to stop the export of sperm and embryos from the deceased. The cases concerned a woman wanting to export her deceased husband's sperm, and a second woman seeking to export an embryo created from her deceased husband, to Spain where posthumous medically assisted procreation is permitted.

The Court considered that the absolute nature of the prohibition on posthumous insemination in France was a political choice and that, when it came to a social issue relating to moral or ethical considerations, the role of the domestic policy-maker had to be given special weight.¹

This decision contrasts with the case of a British woman, in 1996, who went to court in order to have the right to be inseminated with her late husband's sperm so that she could have a baby. This caused an ethical storm and was debated in the courts, in the UK Parliament, and in the media. Because her husband had not given his written consent to use the sperm, the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority refused to allow her to be inseminated with his sperm in the UK. But it did eventually allow her to take the sperm abroad, and she conceived a child after treatment at a Belgian hospital.²

New prohibition for UK Residents to buy an organ abroad on the Black Market

Some rare bioethical good news in the UK (that has largely gone unreported) is that, in July 2022, amendments were made to the *Human Tissue Act 2004* (for England, Northern Ireland and Wales) and the *Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006* to expand their remit. These changes made it an extraterritorial offence to have financial or commercial dealings in human material for transplant, such as buying or selling human organs on the black market.

In practice, this means that all persons who are now resident in England, Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland will be committing an offence if they are involved in seeking, offering, or receiving payment or reward for donating organs for transplantation or initiating, negotiating, advertising or being involved in buying or selling human organs for transplantation, anywhere in the world. And all suspected cases of patients travelling overseas for illicit transplantation must be reported to the police.

New artificial embryos created

In September 2023 it was announced that Israeli scientists had created synthetic human embryos which grew outside the womb for up to 14 days from cells cultured in the laboratory and which did not involve egg or sperm cells. These synthetic embryos had structures and compartments, including the placenta, yolk sac, and other external tissues, that ensure the models' growth.³

¹ European Court of Human Rights, ECHR 260 (2023) 14.09.2023, <https://www.echr.coe.int/w/judgment-concerning-france-5>

² Diane Blood has human rights success, BioNews No.197, 3 March 2003.

³ Oldak, B., Wildschutz, E., Bondarenko, V. *et al.* Complete human day 14 post-implantation embryo models from naive ES cells. *Nature* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06604-5>

Indeed, the inner organisation of these synthetic embryo models resembled the natural human embryos at all the corresponding stages of development until the 14-day stage. Every compartment and supporting structure were not only there, but in the right place, size, and shape.

Unfortunately, however, because these synthetic embryos may not be considered to be embryos in law in many countries, including the UK, they may be developed outside of any regulations.⁴

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⁴ https://bioedge.org/beginning-of-life-issues/artificial_reproduction/israeli-team-creates-synthetic-human-embryos-without-eggs-or-sperm/

Latest News of Significant Individual Cases

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

Sudiksha Thirumalesh

19 year-old Sudiksha suffered from a rare genetic mitochondrial disease, a condition which caused chronic muscle weakness, loss of hearing and damage to her kidneys. She was dependent on regular dialysis and other intensive care, although her brain function was not affected.

Despite her illness, she attended a regular school, achieved good GCSE results and was studying for her A-levels when her health deteriorated after catching Covid in August 2022. She remained in an intensive care unit until her death. Unlike most cases, Sudiksha remained conscious throughout that time.

In November 2022, Sudiksha issued lasting powers of attorney to authorise her parents to make decisions on her behalf in the future if she was to lose mental capacity. The following February, the hospital asked the Court of Protection to set aside the document on the grounds that she did not have mental capacity to sign it. The hospital then made a further application to approve a palliative care plan which would mean she was no longer given dialysis and would die from kidney failure, which was said to be in her best interests.

Sudiksha's only hope of a cure was the experimental treatment known as nucleotide therapy, which is only available abroad. Her family wanted to appeal to the public to raise funds to enable her to participate in a clinical trial which is expected to start in Canada later this year.

However, in March 2023, the court issued a transparency order, at the request of the NHS, which imposed draconian restrictions on reporting any information which might lead to identification of Sudiksha, members of her family, or the hospital. This prevented Sudiksha and her parents from giving any media interviews or making an appeal for funds.

Sudiksha's parents did make an urgent application to reconsider the transparency order to enable them to raise funds for treatment in Canada, but despite holding three hearings, the court did not find time to consider the application until after her death.

Two psychiatric experts instructed by the hospital examined Sudiksha and told the court that she was not suffering from any mental health illness and had the mental capacity to make decisions about her own medical treatment. She said she realised that the experimental treatment might still fail to save her, but in that case, she said that she 'wanted to die trying to live'.

However, doctors argued that her refusal to trust their judgment and to accept that her imminent death was inevitable amounted to a 'delusion'. Mrs Justice Roberts ruled that the decisions about Sudiksha's life and death should be taken by the Court of Protection based on an assessment of her best interests, and that she lacked the capacity to have a say in the matter via her own lawyers. Rejecting the opinion of both psychiatric experts, the judge concluded that Sudiksha was mentally incapable of making decisions for herself because she did not believe what hospital doctors said about her condition. Sudiksha died on 12 September 2023.

Ten days later, Sudiksha's family attended a hearing at the Court of Protection. Reporting restrictions that had stopped Sudiksha and her family from being named publicly were lifted. Mr Justice Robert Peel ruled in his judgment that the gagging order preventing the naming of the NHS

Trust responsible for Sudiksha's care could also be lifted. However, he also ruled that the naming of the Hospital and the clinicians involved was not allowed before the expiry of an 8-week 'cooling' period.

Sudiksha's family said:

We are deeply disturbed by how we have been treated by the hospital trust and the courts. We have been gagged, silenced and most importantly, prevented from accessing specialist treatment abroad for Sudiksha. Had she been allowed to seek nucleotide treatment six months ago it may well be that she would still be with us and recovering.

Sudiksha said she wanted 'to die trying to live'. This is what she did. We are so proud of her.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:

'This Christian family has shown courage in their most difficult hour facing the loss of their beloved Sudiksha. They stood firm in defending Sudiksha's life. This profoundly disturbing case has demonstrated the urgent need for an overhaul into how critical care decisions are made in the NHS and the Courts. There is an urgent need for a more open and transparent system. Justice is done in the light and not behind closed doors.'

The Christian Legal Centre is currently supporting the family to appeal the court's decision that declared Sudiksha lacking mental capacity to make decisions about her medical treatment and to conduct proceedings.

Indi Gregory

Indi, an eight-month-old baby, is in paediatric intensive care at the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham, after being diagnosed with a rare mitochondrial disease. Despite her condition and disability, her parents have maintained she is happy and responsive to their touch.

Earlier last month, her parents Claire Staniforth and Dean Gregory (who are engaged), were devastated to be informed with only 48 hours' notice that there would be a legal hearing to determine their baby daughter's fate. In October, Mr Justice Robert Peel ruled that it was in the best interests of Indi Gregory to have her life-support removed. Indi's parents appealed this ruling.

It was argued that the Trust had been allowed to provide expert opinion evidence, without having any formal permission to do so or being instructed as experts, and yet the judge refused to allow Mr Gregory to instruct experts in either mitochondrial disorders, neuroradiology or cardiology to support his case.

At the appeal hearing, Lady Justice Eleanor King refused to allow the family permission to appeal a High Court decision that it is in the baby's 'best interests' to die.

On 26 October, after exhausting domestic remedies, the family, filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), asking for 'Interim Measures under Rule 39 of the Rules of Court' to prohibit withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment until the ECHR has considered the case. However, the ECHR has refused to consider the case after a last-ditch application. A stay had been granted to the family to make the application and for it to be considered. Now that stay has expired, the Trust can legally withdraw treatment.

Responding to the news, Mr Gregory said: "As a father and parent, I was willing to do everything I could to save my daughter's life from inhumane decisions and people trying to play god.

I'm heartbroken by the decision but I am no longer surprised. I believe it comes down to costs and resources and in the eyes of the NHS and the courts in this country and Europe, Indi is not worth it. To us she is everything and we will do everything we can to help until the end as it is our duty as parents to protect her.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: 'Indi's family have given their all to contend for her life as has the Christian Legal Centre. It is disturbing and sad that they have had to go through such trauma. We stand with them.'

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. Dr Randall filed claim against Trent College for discrimination, harassment, victimisation and unfair dismissal.

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 its programme because of potential clashes with Christian beliefs and values, but in January 2019, it was announced at a staff training day that the school had decided to adopt the year-long 'gold standard' programme. This would see an identity politics 'LGBT inclusive curriculum' implemented, even for the nursery provision at the school.

After asking students what subjects they would like to hear in his sermons, Dr Randall was approached by a pupil 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 said that they were confused and upset by the issues involved in the new LGBT teaching.

He gave a sermon twice as part of services 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 the sermon content. He was then suspended throughout the duration of a disciplinary process.

Dr Randall was dismissed for gross misconduct in August 2019 but was reinstated on a final written warning after appeal. He was furloughed during COVID and in October 2021, not having been reinstated from furlough, was advised by the school of a consultation to reconstruct Chaplaincy provision.

Following the hearing of his case at a Tribunal, Judge Victoria Butler ruled against him, using in support of her ruling the C of E's own '[Valuing All God's Children' guidance for schools](#), whilst also making the point that the Church cites Educate and Celebrate as a recognised resource.

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.

He has also since been reported to the Teaching Regulation Authority (TRA) and the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS). The TRA has decided there is no case to answer: the DBS process is still ongoing. Dr Randall, who is ordained by the C of E, was also reported by the Church of England as a safeguarding risk to children, following his dismissal as Chaplain. Internal emails revealed cooperation between Trent College and the Diocese of Derby, to ensure Dr Randall could not officiate again in the region.

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.

Dr Randall also brought a claim against the Diocese of Derby. It was argued that a campaign against him, involving stereotypical assumptions that a clergyman holding his beliefs was a safeguarding risk, was an act of discrimination, harassment, and a breach of the Equality Act 2010. In February of this year, the Tribunal heard how Dr Randall has been unemployable as a C of E priest since the Bishop of Derby refused to permit him to work following his dismissal.

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

Glawyds Leger

Glawyds Leger, a Modern Foreign Languages teacher with 12 years' experience, faces losing her career for refusing to teach LGBTQI lessons in a Church of England school.

In 2017 she began working at Bishop Justus, a Church of England secondary school in Bromley, Kent. As well as languages lessons, Ms Leger also had to teach RE, but discovered that teaching material included extreme content on gender identity with themes that begin to suggest to children that humans can be born in the wrong body. Materials for RE entitled ‘Who Am I’ included introducing children in Year 7 to gender identities such as pansexual, asexual, intersex and transgender.

In May 2022, Ms Leger was sacked after refusing to promote extreme ideology, for expressing her biblical beliefs on human sexuality during a discussion on gender identity issues and for explaining her belief that LGBTQI practice is sinful.

Ms Leger said she was ‘treated like a dangerous criminal’ for refusing to teach the lessons. The school then referred her to the Teaching Regulation Authority because ‘she upset one pupil by sharing her views on LBGTQ+ and she went on to share many more in our investigation and subsequent hearings, such that we were not certain whether she would continue to share those views with young people.’

Ms Leger's fitness to practice hearing at the TRA's headquarters in Coventry was held in October, the outcome of which could see her barred from the profession indefinitely. It is thought to be the first time that the TRA has taken a case to a full hearing on these issues against a teacher at a Church of England school.

King Lawal

King Lawal, 31, has been a councillor at North Northamptonshire Unitary Council for two years. In June 2023, he became aware of some of the inappropriate behaviour that took place at Pride events, including naked men illegally parading through streets in front of children. As a Bible-believing Christian he believed what was happening was wrong and sinful and in a rare Twitter post, said:

When did Pride become a thing to celebrate. Because of Pride Satan fell as an arch Angel. Pride is not a virtue but a Sin. Those who have Pride should Repent of their sins and return to Jesus Christ. He can save you. #PrideMonth #Pride23 #PrideParade.

Within days of the tweet, he was cancelled by seven organisations, including being suspended by the Conservative party pending an investigation. He was also warned of a possible police investigation, and received a potentially illegal ultimatum by a local authority stating that he must resign from his own business or face a substantial contract being scrapped. He has been banned

from holding surgeries at the local library and removed as a trustee for an organisation that helps children get access to green spaces.

Cllr Lawal has instructed lawyers to prepare legal action alleging multiple violations of his rights to freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

On 26 October, it was announced that Cllr Lawal would be reinstated by the Conservative Group on the local council following an investigation by the local authority's standard committee. Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:

What has happened to Cllr Lawal has been brutal and is a clear case of viewpoint discrimination against a standard expression of Christian belief. Where is 'diversity', 'tolerance' and 'inclusion' here? We have only a monoculture which requires approval, allegiance and promotion of LGBT Pride no matter what.

Calvin Robinson

Rev Calvin Robinson, a GB News presenter, won an £8,000 settlement after being cancelled by the Royal Academy of Dance for opposing 'Drag Queen Story Hour'.

In February 2023, he attended a protest against a Drag Queen storytelling event set to be held at a local library in Lewisham, London involving 'That Girl' performing age-inappropriate 'interactive' kids shows to young children. Rev Robinson, a former teacher and safeguarding officer, then covered the story on his weekly *Calvin's Common Sense Crusade* on GB News.

The following month, he received an email from Royal Academy of Dance, where he is a committee member, stating that Board of Trustees and CEO, Tim Arthur, were terminating his membership with immediate effect. As a former teacher, Rev Robinson had been invited by the RAD to become a member of its education sub-committee in 2020. The role was a voluntary position to advise the RAD on how to better their engagement with the education sector.

Rev Robinson pursued a discrimination claim against the RAD, after they, without warning or discussion, removed him from their education sub-committee for opposing the sexualisation of children. He won an out of court settlement of £8,000.

Felix Ngole

In 2015, Felix Ngole, a social work student at Sheffield University, was removed from his university social work course after he made comments on his personal Facebook page in support of Biblical teaching on marriage and sexual ethics. Felix was told that by posting his comments on Facebook, he 'may have caused offence to some individuals' and had 'transgressed boundaries which are not deemed appropriate for someone entering the Social Work profession.'

Felix's case raised doubt over whether Christians in regulated professions enjoy free speech protections. However, in a landmark judgment in 2019, the Court of Appeal overturned a previous High Court ruling, making it clear that Christians do have the legal right to express Biblical views on social media and elsewhere in public without fear for their professional careers.

Despite this, a healthcare provider withdrew a job offer from Felix after it discovered that he held Christian beliefs on marriage and human sexuality. He was told by [Touchstone Support](#) Leeds that unless he could demonstrate how he would 'embrace and promote homosexual rights' at the organisation, the job offer would be withdrawn.

Mr Ngole gave personal assurances that he would not discriminate against anyone whilst making clear his stance on his Christian beliefs by saying:

What I cannot do, and you cannot reasonably expect me to do without yourselves being discriminatory, is make my participation in the 'promotion of homosexual rights' a condition of my employment.

The role would have involved working at Wakefield Hospital to manage the discharge of patients with mental health conditions into the community. But after Touchstone's chief executive, Kathryn Hart, discovered online articles about [Felix's previous legal case](#), the offer was withdrawn.

Felix is now challenging the withdrawal of the job offer, making claims under the Equality Act for direct discrimination, harassment, indirect discrimination, and compensation for injury to feelings. He will also be seeking a recommendation that Touchstone amend its recruitment procedures to align with its stated objective of being an 'inclusive employer' so as not to preclude practising Christians from its workforce.

The case is due to be heard early next year.

Core Issues Trust

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

In July 2020, CIT was given two months' notice that its banking facilities with Barclays Bank would be stopped, after a coordinated social media campaign by LGBT activists. The International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC) project supported by CIT also received a closure notice. CIT has received over 300 nuisance phone calls and hate messages and its email address has been signed up to porn sites without consent. Mike Davidson, Chief Executive of CIT and a Christian therapist, received death threats and numerous intimidating messages. CIT is challenging the decision of Barclays to close its accounts.

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

In October 2022 Barclays bank lawyers sought to strike out Dr Davidson's case by suggesting that the court does not have jurisdiction to determine the legal action. However, the following month, Judge Devlin refused, ruling in an oral judgment that the case could continue in the Northern Irish courts.

He also said that it was of note that no reason had been provided by Barclays Bank for the closure of two business accounts and that the lawyers representing the corporation had been given no instructions in this regard, other than that there was no unlawful discrimination involved.

Barclays bank has lodged an appeal against this decision, with a hearing date yet to be released. Negotiations with Barclays Bank are ongoing, but the bank has agreed to pay over £20,000 in compensation to the group.

Bournemouth Buffer Zone

40 Days for Life is an international grass roots organisation dedicated to ending abortion. Volunteers regularly offer help and information on alternatives to abortion to women outside the clinic. During the opening times of the clinic, volunteers stand peacefully, holding nothing but a couple of small signs offering help. Prayers, which are a central part of 40 Days for Life activities, are either said quietly or silently.

A buffer zone has now been introduced in Bournemouth – with no effort made to consult the pro-lifers who volunteered outside the clinic – prohibiting any discussion of abortion or offers

of help within the area, banning prayer and reading from the Bible, making the sign of the cross, counselling and/or providing information and other support available to women in crisis pregnancies. Sprinkling holy water within the zone could even lead to a volunteer facing six months in jail.

The 150 metre exclusion zone was brought in under section 67 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and surrounds the British Pregnancy Advisory Group's (BPAS) Bournemouth clinic.

Livia Tossici-Bolt, a former clinical scientist, is now challenging the council and the validity of the Public Space Protection Order, arguing that the council has exceeded its powers. It will be argued that the council did not have the power to make the PSPO because officials wrongly sought to prohibit peaceful and lawful behaviour which cannot properly be characterised as "anti-social", and for which there is no evidence.

Lawyers will also highlight that the buffer zone in Bournemouth is unique in that the way it has been drawn up by the local authority means that the exclusion zone covers both public spaces and private homes. They will argue that if someone were to be heard and seen from the street praying against abortion, this could result in a prison sentence.

Furthermore, lawyers will argue that the PSPO is disproportionate and interferes with Miss Tossici-Bolt's human rights under Article 9, 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The High Court will be asked to declare the PSPO unlawful, unjustified and an interference with Miss Tossici-Bolt and other pro-lifers' rights.

Miss Tossici-Bolt commented:

Everyone must have the freedom to pray quietly in a public place. By imposing this PSPO, the council is preventing women coerced into abortion from being reached and helped and denying women and couples in difficult circumstances the possibility of receiving independent information and supportive alternatives to abortion. We believe what the council has done is unlawful, discriminatory, and unethical and we are determined to fight for justice.

Additionally, Christian Concern has launched a judicial review. As the zone covers private land surrounding the abortion clinic, it is argued that the council did not have the power to make a PSPO which restricts and criminalises otherwise lawful activities conducted on private land and that due process was not followed.

On the 17 October, a conjoined hearing (of the statutory challenge and Judicial Review) took place at the High Court in London, asking the judge for an order quashing part or all of the PSPO. The outcome of this hearing is awaited.

Stephen Green

Stephen Green, 72, a Christian preacher and campaigner from South Wales, was prosecuted by Ealing Council under section 67 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 for holding a sign outside of an MSI Reproductive Choices clinic in West London, in February of this year. The sign said: 'Psalm 139:13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.'

He left the area before the police arrived. Nonetheless, staff at the clinic relayed to the police what had happened and seven months after the event, Mr Green received a prosecution notice from Ealing Council.

He is alleged to have broken a Public Spaces Protection Order, which, including prayer,

criminalises 'protesting, namely engaging in an act of approval/disapproval, with respect to issues related to abortion services.'

If found guilty, Mr Green could be sent to prison for six months and/or fined £1,000. At a hearing on 17 October at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court he pleaded not guilty, and a subsequent trial date has been set for December 2023.

What Professor Steven Greer's hounding for Islamophobia teaches us and how Christians might respond

by Dr Carys Moseley

In the last couple of years Professor Steven Greer, a socio-legal academic at Bristol University, has been the subject of an allegation of Islamophobia by the Bristol University Islamic Society (BRISOC). BRISOC wanted his module on Islam and human rights removed from the Law degree course, for him to be sacked and replaced by an Islamic scholar, and for his post to be defunded. The university ultimately found nothing against Greer, though still bizarrely conceding that BRISOC might have had a point. Greer subsequently retired from Bristol and is now research director at the Oxford Institute of British Islam. Earlier this year he published an account of his ordeal: Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia: My Struggle Against Academic Cancellation*. Washington-London: Academica Press, 2023.

No lecturer or tutor should ever have to put up with harassment and false allegations by students. It is particularly shocking that numerous other university Islamic student societies (ISOCs) joined in the attack, as did many other societies in Bristol. This was nothing short of an online mob setting out to wreck someone's reputation and career. The book makes it clear that Bristol University's handling of his case was less than satisfactory despite him being exonerated.

Greer's case is a turning point as the attack on critics of Islam has turned to targeting university academics. Until now, politicians, journalists and artists have been the main elite targets. Bristol University's uneven handling of Greer's case sends an unhelpful message to other universities about handling attacks on critical analysis of Islamic issues. It raises the question of whether academics can trust universities to allow them to do their work to the best of their abilities. Some such academics may be Christians. In addition, if university policy does not favour free speech on Islam, this will have an effect on Theology and Religious Studies courses and possibly on seminary courses accredited by universities.

This article will explore Greer's own approach to the topics of Islam and Islamophobia, and assess whether and to what extent this helps the case for free speech on these matters. This is a very grave matter as Islam-inspired terrorism is the UK's greatest security threat. Moreover, the campaign against the UK's counter-terrorism watchdog Prevent was run by people who wish to Islamise the country.¹

Section 1. First-person perspective is prioritised

The book's chapter sequence prioritises Greer's first-person perspective over a basic account of the facts of his case. His personal history from childhood onwards is the subject of chapter 1; the immediate academic context to the attack against him is in chapter 2; the processes used to handle the complaints and campaign against him is the subject of chapter 3, but only in chapter 4 are the allegations made by BRISOC set out. Chapter 1 is intended to prove that he doesn't have a history of prejudice or Islamophobia. The problem here is that Greer wants readers to see him as a wholly innocent person in terms of his past before he delivered the 'offensive' lecture course. Normally a defence of free speech should focus first and foremost on the actual course material and his recollection of delivering it, but he only does that later in the book. Appendices A, B and C provide the material. For Greer to provide his own character reference in this manner makes his account

¹ I exposed the nature of the anti-Prevent campaign in February 2023, in the wake of Sir William Shawcross' Independent Review of Prevent finally seeing the light of day. <https://christianconcern.com/comment/the-anti-prevent-campaign-and-the-desire-for-islamisation/>

too subjective and defensive, playing right into the so-called 'woke' culture that he subsequently decries in chapters 5 and 6.

Section 2. Greer asks students to correct him about Islam

In the same frame of mind, Greer reveals that he used to invite students to correct him as a non-Muslim on details about Islam. This he tells readers to deny that he could possibly be Islamophobic.

"In the past, I began my lecture on Islam, China and the Far East by announcing that if, as a non-Muslim, I had misunderstood any of the finer points of the faith, I welcomed being corrected. No one ever did. Nevertheless, as someone who believes we're all on a life-long learning journey, there may be scope for improvement in emphasis and clarification."²

It is reasonable to suppose that BRISOC found out about this, and decided to take advantage by orchestrating its complaint. Surely such a lecturer should stand confidently on expert literature on Islam, not pander to students and flatter them into thinking they are his intellectual equals. Given that no other religion or belief was handled in this way, he may also have come across to non-Muslims as unfairly biased towards Muslim students.

Section 3. Defining Islamophobia

Buried deep inside the book is Greer's understanding of what Islamophobia is, namely that it 'generally refers to irrational antagonism towards Islam and/or Muslims, also typically based on myth, caricature and misleading stereotype'.³ Most people following the debates around this term know that the definition of Islamophobia as being 'rooted in racism' has been widely promoted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims since 2018.⁴ However, this was not the earliest definition of Islamophobia used in the UK. That was developed by the Runnymede Trust in its pamphlet published in 1997.⁵ This is highly relevant for the complaint against Greer, but he never discusses it.

BRISOC's accusation of his 'Islamophobia' uses the Runnymede Trust's characterisation of negative or 'closed' views of Islam as 'Islamophobic'.⁶ The concept of Islamophobia as laid down by the Runnymede Trust puts critics of certain aspects of Islam, especially those wishing for moderation and modernisation, in a double bind. If they hold a closed view of Islam and say it cannot change, they are deemed Islamophobic. If, like Greer, they hold a closed view of Islam as it is currently but say they think it can change, they are still deemed Islamophobic. By contrast, holding to an 'open' view of Islam means one is not Islamophobic. The real purpose of the concept of Islamophobia appears to be to silence even the most educated critics of Islam as well as would-be reformers who are honest about the challenges. If Greer is truly aware of this, he certainly does not want to let on. This is one of the key shortcomings of the book that show the crying need for an independent critical account of his ordeal.

At the same time Greer reveals (without explaining why) that BRISOC rejected the APPG's definition of Islamophobia in its announcement of 16 February 2021, the text of which he bizarrely inserts in the middle of chapter 3 on 'Processes' rather than chapter 4 on 'Allegations'.⁷ The reason given by BRISOC is that the APPG definition 'has had no effect in practice' (an untruth,

² Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia: My Struggle Against Academic Cancellation*. Washington-London: Academica Press, 2023: 100.

³ Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 122.

⁴ <https://appgbritishmuslims.org/publications>

⁵ Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: A Problem for Us All*. London, 1997.

⁶ The table can be viewed here https://assets.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/617bfd6cf1456219c2c4b-c5c_islamophobia.pdf

⁷ Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 54-55, 120.

as Bristol University had already adopted it), and that 'it is now our representative responsibility to highlight how the APPG definition of Islamophobia seeks to protect no one and is wholly not fit for purpose in addressing our experiences of Islamophobia'. This is another untruth - the APPG definition is very much part of an Islamist campaign to quash free speech about Islam in the West and worldwide. All BRISOC is doing here is pushing the envelope further for that campaign. The likely explanation for BRISOC's rejection of the APPG definition is that BRISOC is a member of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), which publicly rejected the inclusion of racism in the definition in 2020.⁸ This makes it very clear that what FOSIS condemns is Islamophobia in the sense of a negative attitude towards Islam as such. For Greer to have discussed this would have been to let himself open to more probing into how he understands the nature of Islam.

In light of these problems, it is not wise of Greer to regret the lack of consensus on the meaning of the term Islamophobia.⁹ The very use of the term should be strongly opposed as a fundamental attack on free speech and freedom of religion for all.

Section 4. Understanding Islam

Greer sets out his understanding of Islam in chapter 2.¹⁰ His account is uneven; at times he is uncompromising in pursuing the truth, whilst also not mentioning crucial issues.

In lecture 3, Appendix B, 1.1. he says that Islam regards Judaism and Christianity as 'authentic, though less complete, sources of religious truth than Islam'.¹¹ In reality, the Qu'ran forbids people from believing in the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Trinity. It also accuses Jews of corrupting the Torah.¹²

He doesn't explain the characterisation of Sharia as 'uncompromisingly individualistic', and that there is no sense of 'corporate entities' being subject to Sharia law.¹³ As regards the Arab Charter on Human Rights of 2004, he does not ask why there is no obligation on states to provide effective national remedies.¹⁴ Is it not that the corporate application of Sharia is an obstacle?

Greer says that the debate about succeeding Mohammed caused the rift between Sunnis and Shias.¹⁵ In fact, it created the two camps. He also uses several misleading sociological clichés about Islam, e.g. Sunnism as 'charismatic' as opposed to democratic, an anachronism, and Sufism as 'peace-loving'.¹⁶ In fact, the Mughals who invaded India and took over in the 16th century made political use of Sufism, and Hassan Al-Bannah the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood was a lifelong Sufi.¹⁷ This contradicts the *naïve* modern Western view that Sufism is more compatible with the West and that it exists completely apart from Sunni Islam.

In his lecture on 'Islam, China and the Far East' he admits that Islam did indeed originally spread through warfare.¹⁸ However, he omits all mention of Wahhabism arising in 18th century Saudi Arabia – something that cannot be blamed on reaction to the British Empire - or Pan-Islamism, which started within British India in the 19th century. I suspect this self-censorship is due to

8 <https://www.fosis.org.uk/news/fosis-position-on-the-appg-definition-of-islamophobia/>

9 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 120.

10 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 27-33. See also Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain: Threats, Responses and Challenges Twenty Years After 9/11*. London: Routledge, 2022.

11 Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 25.

12 Qu'ran 4: 171-173, 5: 73-76.

13 Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 31.

14 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 239.

15 Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 28.

16 Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 28-29; Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 233.

17 Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001: 242. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/76395/7/HassanalBanna_Berger_with_coversheet.pdf

18 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 234.

his claim that Prevent is based on a Saudi Arabian model.¹⁹ It may also be due to avoiding the possibility that postcolonial campaigners in universities would attack him. Whatever the reasons, a course that ignores the history of the British Empire's dealings with Islam cannot begin to explain British and other human rights engagement with Islam. Ignoring Wahhabism also means there is no opportunity to show that Islamic revivalism has not primarily been motivated or provoked by Western imperialism, as Saudi Arabia was not a colony.

Section 5. The Islamist nature and motivation of the complaint against Steven Greer

The evidence clearly points to the 'complaint-and-campaign' against Greer being Islamist in nature and motivation, though he only blames 'academic illiberal leftism' and some university staff attempting to discredit his support for Prevent.²⁰ These only describe the soil in which the complaint was planted, not the motivation. Greer identifies precursors to the complaint including colleagues who accused him of racism and Islamophobia for denying that Prevent is racist and Islamophobic; a false allegation of having mocked the Qu'ran; a complaint by a student that the Charlie Hebdo massacre illustrated the traditional Islamic death penalty for blasphemy, and insults to the faith. The latter two complaints resurfaced in the 2021 complaint.²¹

The other clue to the Islamist nature of the complaint is that it came from BRISOC and was supported by FOSIS as well as nine other ISOCs across the UK at the universities of Plymouth, Kent, Exeter, West of England, London School of Economics, East London, Cardiff and Loughborough.²² FOSIS was founded in the UK by Muslim Brotherhood member Saïd Ramadan in 1963 and has long had links with the Brotherhood.²³

Section 6. The Islamisation of Knowledge as a factor in the attack on Steven Greer

Greer believes he was targeted because he publicly supports the Prevent Duty in his academic work. This is clearly the case, though I believe there is more to it. He says that BRISOC wanted him to be replaced by an Islamic scholar, and his post defunded. In other words, they wanted his post and courses to be Islamised. Greer is a socio-legal academic with qualifications in both law and sociology handling Islam. The social sciences have been targeted by the Muslim Brotherhood's front group, the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT), for its project on 'Islamisation of Knowledge' (IOK) since the early 1980s.²⁴ There are hints of this in the Brotherhood's Project document date to 1982 but only discovered by Western security services after 9/11.²⁵ This is a 'Project' for a worldwide underground movement to Islamise non-Muslim countries 'from below'. It calls on members to conduct social studies and set up social observatories of non-Muslim countries. The campaign against Prevent, which is linked to Hizb-Ut Tahrir, an Islamist group active in the UK and widely considered an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, makes more sense when seen in this light.²⁶

19 Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 112.

20 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 59-60. Greer even repeated this obvious half-truth in the press in February 2023. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-to-solve-the-campus-free-speech-crisis-7d9jr35zg>

21 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 41-46.

22 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 52-53, fn. 31.

23 <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/uk-islamists-and-the-arab-uprisings>; Jørgen Nielsen, 'Islamic Communities in Britain' in Paul Badham (ed.), *Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellin Press, 1987: 388.

24 <https://www.discoverthenetworks.org/organizations/international-institute-of-islamic-thought-iiit/>

25 The existence of the 'Project' was first made public by French-Swiss journalist Sylvain Besson in 2005 in his book *La Conquête de l'Occident. Le projet secret des islamistes*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2005. An English translation is available <http://www.onthewing.org/user/Islam%20-%20Muslim%20Brotherhood%20Project.pdf>.

26 I wrote about this in February 2023 <https://christianconcern.com/comment/the-anti-prevent-campaign-and-the-desire-for-islamisation/>

The first instance of the word Islamophobia ('Islamophobie') was among French colonial officials discussing how best to govern Algeria, a Muslim-majority country, at the turn of the 20th century. This was simply a debate as to whether the government would be better favouring Islam ('Islamophilie') or being more negative towards it ('Islamophobie') as an aid to good government and keeping Algerians loyal to France.²⁷ The IIIT now promoted the term 'Islamophobia' for Islamist ends, demanding the prohibition of negative criticism of Islam and Muslims. This served its IOK agenda.

The Iranian fatwa against Salman Rushdie for mocking the Qu'ran led to Saudi Arabia, steered by the Muslim Brotherhood which was based there at the time, to increase its influence on British Muslims in competition with Iran. In producing its pamphlet on Islamophobia, the Runnymede Trust had been in contact with the UK Action Committee for Islamic Affairs (UKACIA), which was first convened in 1991 by Saudi diplomat Mughram Al-Ghandi, director of Regent's Park Mosque.²⁸ The Runnymede pamphlet on Islamophobia was preceded by its 1994 pamphlet on anti-semitism; one of the commission members was anthropologist Ahmad Akbar, professor of Islamic studies at Cambridge University, very close to the IIIT.²⁹ In a letter to the commission quoted in the final report, Akbar quite openly says he chose to join the panel due to concerns about stereotyping Muslims and only then professed an interest in anti-semitism. He concluded by suggesting that Runnymede should consider setting up a commission on prejudice against Muslims and Islam:

I joined the Runnymede Commission on Antisemitism for three reasons. First, I felt that a Muslim voice representing broad Muslim opinion was crucial in understanding the problem of antisemitism in the UK and to convey the feelings of Muslims to the Commission. If Jews are easily stereotyped and misunderstood, so too are Muslims. There is a real danger of seeing Muslims — or Jews — as a monolith. Being part of the Commission has enabled me to put forward a Muslim position. Second, I felt that I too would learn something of the anguish of the Jews who suffered such terrible atrocities in the antisemitism of Europe over the centuries, reaching a barbaric climax in Hitler's Germany. This is an area which Muslims generally know so little about. Third, I hoped that something positive would come out of the Commission in which both communities would be able to move closer towards each other. It is imperative that people of good will from all sides play their part in dialogue and discussion. I hope very much that the Runnymede Trust will consider setting up a commission similar to this one, to study prejudice against Muslims and Islam.³⁰

This cynical tactic of using anti-semitism to advance the concept of Islamophobia is exactly that of the Muslim Brotherhood.³¹ Ahmed has also partaken of the Islamic targeting of Christian mission, another key action point of the Muslim Brotherhood Project.³² He preached at Selwyn College, Cambridge in 1996 – the first time a Muslim preached in an Anglican church. Evangelicals protested to no avail.³³ He was one of the signatories of 'A Common Word' in 2007, a document

27 Pascal Bruckner, *Un racisme imaginaire: Islamophobie et culpabilité*. Paris: Éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, 2017: 12-13.

28 Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims*. London: I. B. Tauris, 1994: 161.

29 <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/akbar-ahmed/>

30 Note from Akbar Ahmed to the Runnymede Trust commission, quoted in Runnymede Trust, *A Very Light Sleeper: The persistence and dangers of anti-semitism*. London, 1994, reprinted 1997: 14-15.

31 "Let us note that it was the latter [the Muslim Brotherhood] that publicised the term Islamophobia in the 1990s in an attempt to criminalise any criticism of the religious dogma they championed while at the same time constructing a specious symmetry with anti-Semitism so as to benefit from the moral dividends of victimization and turn them against Israel and Zionism." Gilles Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 17. Cited in Tom Wilson, *MEND: Islamists masquerading as civil libertarians*. London: Henry Jackson Society. 2017, p. 6.

32 The French translation of Point of Departure 7 of the Arabic 'Project' document published by Sylvain Besson: "Accepter le principe d'une coopération provisoire entre les mouvements islamiques et les mouvements nationaux, sur des problèmes de nature générale et certains points ne présentant pas de motifs de désaccord, tels que la lutte contre le colonialisme, l'activité missionnaire chrétienne, l'État juif, sans pour autant former des alliances." Sylvain Besson, *La Conquête de l'Occident*, 26.

33 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/anglican-service-hears-muslim-preacher-s-plea-1348286.html>

pushed by the Muslim Brotherhood to undermine and Islamise Christian Biblical exegesis.³⁴ Clearly the Bible and Christian influence in education are also targets for the Islamisation of Knowledge.

The widespread approving use of the term Islamophobia, together with a widespread lack of understanding of its origins, has pre-empted any possibility of mainstream media and academics using the term 'Islamisation' to refer to Islamists' intentions in the West. The BBC *normalised* the term 'Islamophobia' from 1999 onwards.³⁵ It only started using 'Islamisation' in 2008, to stigmatise Geert Wilders for opposing the Islamisation of Europe.³⁶ This happened very soon after Civitas had warned of the 'Islamisation of Europe', in response to an announcement by Hazel Blears that Islam could become a compulsory part of Citizenship Education in schools.³⁷ The stigmatisation of talk of 'Islamisation' has probably stifled rigorous, in-depth critical analysis of Islam vis-à-vis public policy in the UK.

Section 7. How things got to be so bad

Greer's accounts of Islamophobia and Islam don't address these problems and are therefore seriously misleading. The reason is hidden in plain sight: as an academic defender of Prevent, he has to abide by the semi-official government-approved definition of Islam published in the Counter-Extremism Strategy of 2015 and set out in Justice Haddon-Cave's judgment handed down in favour of the BBC against Shakeel Begg in 2016.³⁸ Begg had sued the BBC for libel for calling him an extremist. A sharp distinction was made between Islam and Islamist extremism (the latter traced correctly to the Muslim Brotherhood), and Islam was defined more narrowly than most Western and Islamic scholars would do.³⁹

Christian scholar of Islam Sean Oliver-Dee has pointed out that British government officials have not been interested in understanding 'the doctrines of Islam in relation to how they impacted their own contexts' (here schools) or, we might add, the truth about Islam in any other field either.⁴⁰ Their interest is in maintaining social cohesion, and with that combatting the perception that it is hostile to Islam. Academics must first pursue the truth, not considerations of social cohesion and expediency. The fact that Greer was employed by a state-funded university and defended Prevent resulted in a contradiction making it impossible for him to critically investigate Islam and Islamophobia more openly and thoroughly, even though the literature on these is plentiful and freely available. Indeed we have to ask whether the Prevent Duty in higher education has cemented the climate of censorship on Islamic issues by enforcing the government's definition of Islam.

Section 8. How might Christians respond?

Higher education about Islam is undoubtedly important given its presence, growth and influence in the UK and internationally. This has an effect on the ethos of the professions, elite institutions and

34 <https://www.acommonword.com/signatories/>. Sam Solomon and Al-Maqdisi, *The Truth About A Common Word*. Pilcrow Press, 2008. https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/solomon/truth_about_common_word.html

35 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/413577.stm>

36 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7322179.stm>

37 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1036328/All-state-pupils-taught-Islamic-traditions-compulsory-citizenship-lessons.html>

38 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-extremism-strategy>; Begg v British Broadcasting Corporation [2016] EWHC 2688 (QB) (28 October 2016)

39 The BBC employed Matthew Wilkinson, a convert to Islam, as its expert witness to argue that Islam does not allow terrorism. Greer also relies heavily on Wilkinson's work. Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 23-24. In 2018 Wilkinson was barred by the Ministry of Justice from proceeding with a study of converts to Islam in prisons, instead conducting its own study on prisoner radicalisation. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministry-of-justice-blocks-study-of-muslim-conversion-in-prisons-v2g9rzhmt> Wilkinson himself has worked closely with Sophie Gilliat-Ray on Muslim prison chaplaincy, both being at Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK in Cardiff University. Gilliat-Ray is a long-standing member of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (UK), affiliated to the original US AMSS, itself a front for the IIIT. <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/2010/03/22/global-muslim-brotherhood-to-hold-conference-in-bosnia/>

40 Sean Oliver-Dee, *Courting Islam: US-British Engagement with Islam since the European Colonial Period*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020: 142.

the workings of government. Clearly, free speech about Islam is in a troubled state in universities, given that Bristol University's handling of Greer's case was uneven, and that FOSIS and numerous ISOCs joined the attack. The fact that Bristol continued to say that BRISOC might have had a point gave a signal to other universities with ISOCs that their students could get away with similar attacks on lecturers making the slightest criticism of Islam too. It doesn't take too much digging to find that some of these universities have staff and students that are strongly pro-Islam and Islamist in their thinking (hence the heavy academic presence in the anti-Prevent campaign), as well as foreign Islamic funding that affects the teaching on Islam. Thus the first thing Christians need to do is to defend free speech about Islam in universities and related organisations. This is not simply a general defence of free speech. It is necessary for Christian apologetics regarding Islam in the broadest sense.

Part of Greer's problem is that he relies on sociological accounts of Islam rather than looking at the theological foundations and how they contradict Christianity.⁴¹ This is because ultimately maintaining social cohesion by defending Prevent is what matters most to him. This is why he admits openly that the social conditions for Islam being reformed are not there, yet he proceeds to head up research in an institution that wants to do this. Clearly, he has adopted the subjective understanding of human rights as a creed to the extent that he is a true believer and wants to see 'prejudiced hostility towards Islam' and Islamophobia 'confronted and stamped out including in universities'.⁴² This begs the question as to whether he would be willing to see other academics and students penalised for 'real Islamophobia'.

As Christians we need to use our free speech to tell the truth about Islamic activity. Islam is a religion that is fundamentally hostile to Christianity. This is because the Qu'ran repeatedly denies the divinity of Christ and the Trinity and does allow the subjugation and killing of Christians as unbelievers.⁴³ This has profound ethical, social and legal implications for countries and civilisations which have been illustrated time and time again. It is exactly why the intention of Islamisation of the branches of knowledge including the professions and the criminal justice system, is such a basic threat to non-Muslim countries.

The pragmatic and compromising BBC-led stigma on criticising Islamisation, and the consequent relegation of the term to the fringes, needs to be challenged, and Christians can contribute here. It is useful that the one instance since 2008 where the Islamisation of Knowledge is acknowledged by those close to the government is by Policy Exchange in its report on the Trojan Horse affair.⁴⁴

Christians need to exemplify and advocate for the virtues, values and living tradition of intellectual expertise and authority about Islam, given that Islam was set up to oppose Christianity and as such cannot be understood in isolation. Secular thought lacks a proper concept of authority, and Greer's secularism touches upon this. It may be why he stigmatises the concern for defending 'Christendom' as 'far-right', as if somehow advocating a Christian social and governmental vision is inherently extremist and subversive. Regrettably, this intellectual sleight-of-hand regarding Christian influence on civilisation has clearly caught on in counter-extremist circles and explains why the Christian Legal Centre has had to defend numerous wholly innocent Christians from malicious referrals to Prevent as 'far-right extremists' for merely expressing Christian beliefs.⁴⁵ In one particularly significant case, Rev Paul Song, a volunteer evangelical Christian chaplain at HMP Brixton, was tarred as an 'extremist' and removed by the new lead prison chaplain Imam Mohammed Yusuf Ahmed, former General Secretary of the Islamic Party of Britain, which wanted

41 He gives his sources at Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, 25-26.

42 Steven Greer, *Falsely Accused of Islamophobia*, 134-135.

43 There is confusion as to whether Islam considers Christians to be fellow believers or unbelieving polytheists. <https://www.answering-islam.org/Shamoun/christians.htm>. For evidence on the inferior status of non-Muslims in Islamic countries, see Bat Ye'Or, *Understanding Dhimmitude: Twenty-One Lectures and Talks on the Position of Non-Muslims in Islamic Societies*. New York: RVP Press, 2013.

44 <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trojan-Horse-Affair.pdf>

45 Particularly egregious is the case of Rev. Dr. Bernard Randall <https://christianconcern.com/ccpressreleases/school-chaplain-reported-to-terrorist-watchdog-and-forced-out-of-job-for-sermon-on-identity-politics/>

the UK to become an Islamic state.⁴⁶ Ahmed led on counter-extremism and deradicalisation in the prison between 2015 and 2022.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The case of Steven Greer, as well as his own handling of Islamophobia and Islam, suggests that social cohesion matters more than truth when Islam is handled at the government level and in universities. As worshippers of Jesus Christ who tells us he is the Truth and that the truth will make us free, Christians cannot be satisfied with this situation. It is likely to have a long-term effect on educational institutions and work which is important for us. The silence of other British academics about Greer's case is indicative of a deeper malaise. Maybe anticipating insufficient interest in Islam, Greer decries the student attack on him as instances of 'wokeism' and 'cancel culture', which is at best a secondary explanation, given the obvious Islamist nature of the attack.

Secular progressive opposition to Islamism faces a huge uphill challenge because of the project for the Islamisation of Knowledge aimed at the social sciences, fields at the heart of progressivism. As Christians, we need to bring the truth about Islam and campaigners on its behalf to those in higher education and other professions to set people free from the relentless attempt to silence criticism of its influence. It is only the truth about Islam that can set people and societies free, and as Islam was set up to oppose Christianity and Christian civilisation, it is the vocation of Christians to bring light into the confusion.

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46 <https://christianconcern.com/ccpressreleases/christian-chaplain-banned-from-prisons-for-10-years-for-exposing-islamic-radicalisation-to-pursue-judicial-review-at-high-court/>

47 <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/mohammed-yusuf-ahmed-590436189>

Book Review: The Matter With Things

Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World

Iain McGilchrist

Perspectiva, 2023, 1,500 pages, £46.72 (Amazon UK)

The Artificial

The Matter With Things by Iain McGilchrist delves into the intricate workings of the human brain and explores how our brains shape our perception of reality. While it does not explicitly focus on Christian theology or spirituality, the book raises themes and concepts that may be of interest to Christians seeking a deeper understanding of the human experience and the nature of the world.

The book highlights the importance of recognising the different functions of the hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere is associated with analytical thinking, logic, and verbal processing, while the right hemisphere is linked to holistic perception, intuition, and creativity. McGilchrist argues that modern society has become overly focused on left hemisphere dominance, leading to an imbalance that distorts our perception of reality.

From a Christian perspective, this emphasis on the need for balance resonates with the biblical teaching of seeking wisdom and discernment. The Bible encourages believers to engage both heart and mind, recognising the importance of analytical thinking while also valuing intuition, empathy, and creative expression.

Additionally, the book explores the limitations of reductionist thinking and the reduction of complex phenomena to materialistic explanations. It suggests that our obsession with materialism and the physical world has led to a neglect of the spiritual and transcendent aspects of life. This aligns with Christian beliefs that there is more to reality than the physical realm and that faith plays a significant role in understanding and experiencing the world.

The Matter With Things also prompts reflection on the impact of our cultural and societal frameworks on our perception of reality. It invites readers to question the assumptions and delusions that may be ingrained in our thinking and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the world.

Overall, while The Matter With Things may not directly address Christian theology, its exploration of the human brain, the need for balance, and the limitations of materialistic perspectives can align with Christian beliefs about the complexity of the human experience and the importance of holistic understanding. It encourages readers, including Christians, to engage in critical thinking and to embrace a more expansive and nuanced view of reality.

So writes ChatGPT, May 24 Version, when asked to produce a summary of the book from the perspective of a Christian. This is not bad for an artificial intelligence (AI) language model! It also produced a summary of each of the 28 chapters see appendix 1.

The Genuine

First, some basic facts. The Matter With Things (TMWT) is long, very long – 1,500 hardback pages long. It is also quite demanding although the author has, with some success, attempted to make the language and reasoning and the presentation of the large amounts of referenced material as accessible as reasonably possible for the non-renaissance man and woman.

This formidable effort is less surprising given McGilchrist's experience as a psychiatrist, neuroscience researcher, philosopher and literary scholar. All his depth and breadth of learning

are employed in the book which spans neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, cognitive science, psychiatry and psychopathology, anthropology, art and literature.

The book is divided into three main parts:

Part 1: The Hemispheres and the Means to Truth; Part 2: The Hemispheres and the Paths to Truth; Part 3: The Unforeseen Nature of Reality.

You can immediately see from these that he engages substantively with a great theme of the Bible, namely truth. Not of course directly with the true truth of Biblical revelation (because he describes himself as an atheist and by implication that he believes there is no personal God to deliver absolute truth) but indirectly and through its derivatives, available to us by virtue of our creation in the likeness of God. It's on this point that we encounter a primary reason for investing in this read.

What we are is defined by God's creative act – body, spirit, soul – but the way we see and experience the world and ourselves within it is governed by the interactive workings of our brain hemispheres. Our brains mediate reality and what this book does first is to demonstrate what happens to that reality when either a lesion or experimental intervention interrupts the normal workings of the hemispheres.

Given some familiarity with the book's core theses, dipping into the various parts and chapters can be rewarding and a release from mental fatigue, although the author would probably disapprove since the potential loss of context could distort understanding. That said, as with many endeavours, you need to balance sustained, mental effort and focus with relaxation, reflection and recharging and moving around the book from time to time can help those processes. And, despite the author's warning, the Epilogue is worth a read early on in the journey through the book.

Amongst many other things the book is a treasury of insights, anecdotes, and compilations. It is perhaps obvious that a searchable electronic version greatly facilitates repeated access to this box of delights.

TMWT follows on from his previous book on the divided brain, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, published in 2009, taking much further the philosophical implications that each half of the divided brain produces a different version of the experiential world. He argues that the prevalent materialistic/reductionist world view is very much a feature of the left hemisphere of the brain and that we shouldn't pay too much attention to it. The 'Master' refers to the right hemisphere and the 'Emissary', the left. His contention is that the Western world now, and at different periods in history, behaves as though the left hemisphere has dominance. The emissary has usurped the role of the master, and this is regressive and dangerous. His much shorter and accessible *Ways of Attending: How our Divided Brain Constructs the World* is well worth reading for a gentle and easy introduction to the split-brain paradigm.

In the introduction to TMWT, McGilchrist handily summarises the 20 key features of the left and right hemispheres of the brain that form the core of his discussions throughout the book. It is well worth reflecting on these characteristics, comparing them with your own experiences and McGilchrist's evidence for them discussed and applied throughout the book.

McGilchrist makes the case that the predominant worldview in the Western world, characterised by determinism/reductionism/materialism, reflects the characteristic working of the left hemisphere of the brain, particularly when the right hemisphere suffers lesions or is temporarily inhibited (for example, in experiments). He is not arguing that large numbers of individuals in the Western world are suffering from right hemisphere damage, just that individually, and collectively, they are behaving as if this is the case.

For example, if we take what we might call the 'Woke Movement' in its broadest definition and view it through the lenses of LH and RH brain characteristics, we might conclude that LH brain

characteristics dominate. If we do, how might this inform our Biblical analysis of our times and our response to this particular movement?

Why do we have a divided brain as described? It's about attention. The LH is good at focused, detailed activities. As a simple illustration, he gives the example of birds who use their right eye (LH controlled) to spot small items of food such as seeds and grubs hidden amongst dirt but simultaneously must scan the horizon for predators. The RH, left eye combination is designed to do this latter task well. In humans we might use the LH for detailed calculations and finely focused thought while the RH puts those calculations and thoughts into the context of real world, big picture reality so that we can judge their credibility.

Why is this long book worth the effort? For me it's because it provides a fascinating, hugely stimulating, mentally engaging and often unique journey through science, philosophy and the arts and ends with the intractable (to the non-Christian) consciousness problem. Time and time again it takes the Christian to his creator and saviour, beautifully and engagingly illustrating the depths of God's creative wisdom.

The thesis of the book is non-simple and contentious. Nevertheless, the book in general seems from a casual media search to have attracted substantive positive acclaim. A selection of reviews, both positive and negative, are worth reading alongside the book as they provide a richer landscape within which to explore this tome and digest its contents. I commend it.

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

Appendix 1: AI Summary of The Matter With Things Chapters

(please check the accuracy by reading the book)

Part I - The Hemispheres and the Means to Truth:

Chapter 1 – Some Preliminaries: how we got here. The author provides an overview of the book and explains how the hemispheres of the brain relate to truth. The left hemisphere is associated with analytical thinking, language, and logic, while the right hemisphere is associated with holistic thinking, intuition, and creativity. The author argues that both hemispheres are necessary for a complete understanding of truth and reality.

Chapter 2 – Attention. The author discusses the concept of attention and how it relates to the hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere is associated with focused attention, while the right hemisphere is associated with broad attention and awareness. The author suggests that a balance between these two forms of attention is necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 3 – Perception. The author explores the role of perception in shaping our understanding of truth. The left hemisphere is associated with a narrow, focused perception of the world, while the right hemisphere is associated with a broader, more holistic perception. The author argues that a balance between these two forms of perception is necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 4 – Judgement. The author discusses judgment and how it can be influenced by the hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere is associated with analytical judgment, while the right hemisphere is associated with intuitive judgment. The author argues that both forms of judgment are necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 5 – Apprehension. The author examines apprehension and how it relates to truth. The left hemisphere is associated with a conceptual, analytical approach to understanding, while the right hemisphere is associated with a more holistic, intuitive approach. The author argues that a balance between these two forms of apprehension is necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 6 – Emotional and Social Intelligence. The author explores the role of emotional and social intelligence in our understanding of truth. The right hemisphere is associated with emotional and social intelligence, while the left hemisphere is associated with analytical intelligence. The author argues that a balance between these two forms of intelligence is necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 7 – Cognitive Intelligence. The author discusses cognitive intelligence and its relationship to truth. The left hemisphere is associated with analytical thinking and language, while the right hemisphere is associated with nonverbal, spatial thinking. The author argues that a balance between these two forms of intelligence is necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 8 – Creativity. The author explores creativity and how it relates to truth. The right hemisphere is associated with creativity, while the left hemisphere is associated with critical thinking and analysis. The author argues that both forms of thinking are necessary for a complete understanding of truth.

Chapter 9 - What Schizophrenia and Autism can tell us. The author examines the relationship between the hemispheres of the brain and schizophrenia and autism. The author suggests that schizophrenia may be associated with an overactive left hemisphere, while autism may be associated with an overactive right hemisphere. The author argues that a balance between the two hemispheres is necessary for a healthy understanding of truth.

Part II - The Hemispheres and the Paths to Truth:

Chapter 10 – What is Truth? The author explores the nature of truth and its relationship to science.

The author suggests that science provides a powerful tool for understanding truth, but that it has limitations and can be influenced by the biases of the left hemisphere.

Chapter 11 – Science's Claims on Truth. The author argues that science provides a valuable but incomplete view of reality.

Chapter 12 - The Science of Life: A Study in Left Hemisphere Capture

This chapter examines how the left hemisphere's way of seeing the world has influenced our understanding of science and biology. The left hemisphere tends to focus on details and categorization, which can lead to a reductionist view of the world. McGilchrist argues that this reductionism has led to a narrow view of biology that emphasizes genes and molecules over the whole organism. He also notes that the left hemisphere tends to see the world in a mechanistic way, which has led to a focus on machines as a model for understanding life.

Chapter 13 - Institutional Science and Truth

In this chapter, McGilchrist looks at how the institution of science has become dominated by left hemisphere thinking. He argues that the left hemisphere's focus on control and predictability has led to a scientific method that seeks to isolate variables and control experiments. While this approach has been successful in certain domains, such as physics and chemistry, it is less effective when dealing with complex systems like living organisms or ecosystems. McGilchrist also notes that the left hemisphere tends to see the world in a dualistic way, which has led to a split between the subject and object of scientific inquiry.

Chapter 14 - Reason's Claims on Truth

This chapter examines the role of reason in our understanding of truth. McGilchrist argues that the left hemisphere's way of thinking has led to a focus on logic and rationality at the expense of other ways of knowing. He notes that reason tends to see the world in a linear and hierarchical way, which can lead to a reductionist view of reality. McGilchrist also points out that reason is only one way of knowing and that other ways, such as intuition and imagination, are also important for understanding truth.

Chapter 15 - Reason's Progeny

In this chapter, McGilchrist looks at how the left hemisphere's way of thinking has influenced our modern society. He argues that the left hemisphere's focus on rationality and control has led to a society that values efficiency, productivity, and quantification over other values, such as creativity, intuition, and empathy. McGilchrist notes that this has led to a society that is increasingly disconnected from nature and from our own inner selves.

Chapter 16 - Logical Paradox: A Further Study in Left Hemisphere Capture

This chapter explores the phenomenon of logical paradoxes, which arise when applying the left hemisphere's focus on logic and rationality to complex systems. McGilchrist argues that logical paradoxes can arise when we try to apply a linear and hierarchical view of reality to complex systems, which are better understood through a more holistic and relational approach. He also notes that the left hemisphere tends to see the world in a fixed and static way, which can lead to a failure to appreciate the dynamic and fluid nature of reality.

Chapter 17 - Intuition's Claims on Truth

This chapter looks at the role of intuition in our understanding of truth. McGilchrist argues that intuition is a way of knowing that is rooted in the right hemisphere's ability to see the whole picture and to make connections between seemingly disparate elements. He notes that intuition is often dismissed as irrational or unscientific, but that it can be a powerful tool for understanding complex

systems. McGilchrist also points out that intuition is not opposed to reason, but rather complements it by providing a different way of knowing.

Chapter 18 - The Untimely Demise of Intuition

This chapter explores the historical decline of intuition in Western culture. McGilchrist argues that the Enlightenment and the rise of rationalism led to a devaluation of intuition, which was seen as unscientific and unreliable. He suggests that this has had negative consequences for society, as intuition is an important aspect of human experience and can provide valuable insights that reason and logic alone cannot.

Chapter 19 - Intuition, Imagination and the Unveiling of the World

In the final chapter of Part II, McGilchrist argues that intuition and imagination are crucial for the unveiling of the world. He suggests that these faculties allow us to see the world in a deeper and more meaningful way, and that they are necessary for the development of a more holistic and integrated view of reality. He concludes that a balance between reason and intuition is essential for a fuller understanding of truth.

Part III - The Unforeseen Nature of Reality

Chapter 20 - The Coincidentia Oppositorum

In this chapter, McGilchrist explores the idea of the "coincidentia oppositorum," the idea that opposing forces or ideas are not mutually exclusive, but can coexist and even be reconciled. He argues that this concept is relevant to many aspects of our lives, including science, philosophy, and spirituality.

Chapter 21 - The One and the Many

McGilchrist discusses the tension between unity and diversity, arguing that both are necessary for a healthy society. He suggests that the left hemisphere tends to focus on unity and the right hemisphere on diversity, and that a balance between the two is needed.

Chapter 22 - Time

In this chapter, McGilchrist discusses the nature of time, arguing that it is not a simple, linear progression, but is instead shaped by our perception and experience. He explores how different cultures and individuals perceive time in different ways, and how this affects our understanding of reality.

Chapter 23 - Flow and Movement

McGilchrist explores the concepts of flow and movement, arguing that they are essential to understanding the nature of reality. He suggests that the left hemisphere tends to see the world as static and unchanging, while the right hemisphere perceives the world as constantly in motion.

Chapter 24 - Space and Matter

In this chapter, McGilchrist discusses the relationship between space and matter. He argues that the left hemisphere tends to see space as an empty void, while the right hemisphere sees space as filled with meaning and significance. He also explores the concept of "res extensa," or extended matter, and how it relates to our perception of reality.

Chapter 25 - Matter and Consciousness

McGilchrist explores the relationship between matter and consciousness, arguing that they are

intimately connected. He suggests that the left hemisphere tends to see consciousness as a byproduct of matter, while the right hemisphere sees matter as a manifestation of consciousness.

Chapter 26 - Value

In this chapter, McGilchrist discusses the concept of value, arguing that it is essential to understanding the nature of reality. He suggests that the left hemisphere tends to reduce everything to its objective, measurable value, while the right hemisphere recognizes the importance of subjective, experiential value.

Chapter 27 - Purpose, Life, and the Nature of the Cosmos

McGilchrist explores the ideas of purpose, life, and the nature of the cosmos, arguing that they are all intimately connected. He suggests that the left hemisphere tends to see the world as devoid of purpose or meaning, while the right hemisphere recognizes the importance of purpose and meaning in our lives.

Chapter 28 - The Sense of the Sacred

In this final chapter, McGilchrist discusses the concept of the sacred and its importance in human life. He suggests that the left hemisphere tends to see the world as mechanistic and devoid of transcendence, while the right hemisphere recognizes the importance of the sacred and the transcendent in our lives. He argues that a balanced approach that integrates both hemispheres is necessary for a healthy and meaningful existence.

Book Review: The Wolf in Their Pockets

by Rev Stephen Allison

13 Ways the Social Internet Threatens the People You Lead

Chris Martin

Moody Publishers, 2023, 224 pages, £12.99 (Evangelical Book Shop)

Where is your phone right now? For most of us it is easily within reach waiting to grab our attention. Maybe you are even reading this article on it – but how often will you be interrupted by notifications pinging on it as you read? Our phones have come to dominate our existence and most of us are all too aware of the negative impact they can have on us. We are easily distracted by the endless scrolling on social media – we don't want to admit it but in many ways, our phones are the drug we just cannot stop using.

Given how much our lives are dominated by social media and the entertainment world that we hold in the palm of our hand it is vital that all of us involved in teaching others are well informed about the impact social media is having on ourselves and especially those we minister to. And we have to recognise this is no longer a problem that only impacts teenagers and students (if it ever was) – the vast majority of people in our congregations and in society as a whole are being shaped and modelled by the social internet.

Chris Martin points out that the average internet user spends about two and a half hours on social media every day – over two-thirds of Americans use Facebook and half of them say they use it 'several times a day'. Social media is shaping those we are called to disciple far more than we are. It is rapidly changing what people think, feel and believe.

Jesus told us to watch out for false prophets who come among God's people as ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15). We are called to guard the sheep but what we often do not realise is the wolf is already in the sheep pen – the wolf is in our pockets as we are constantly connected and constantly being shaped by the social internet.

Chris Martin's book serves as an important wake up call to the issues in ministering today to people being shaped by the social internet, and also a reminder that we ourselves are being shaped by it. Although thankfully the book is not just doom and gloom; instead he offers insightful commentary on aspects of our discipleship today and challenges us to think through how we contextualise today as we engage the hearts and minds of those under our care.

Martin strikes the right balance between two extremes of how we can react to the social internet. One extreme is the uncritical consumption of all the information placed in front of you. The other extreme is the thought that if you do not have or use social media yourself then it will not affect you. The reality is, even if you do not use these platforms, or can manage to stay away from the negative effects, there will be many around you who are actively engaged and living with the effects of social media. And so, we must intentionally engage if we are to be able to support those we minister to.

Martin brings his own experience to bear on this as he works as a content marketing editor for a Christian publisher. He understands this world and has spoken to many pastors in the preparation of the book. Each chapter serves as a helpful discussion starter in which he raises an issue of discipleship or one of the ways the social internet negatively affects us and then gives an overview of the issues and some suggestions of what we can do as leaders to engage in the area. Of course, these suggestions are in no way exhaustive but allow the reader to reflect on where the issues lie and hopefully begin to address the issues within our own discipleship relationships.

A wide variety of issues are covered including our purpose in life, the nature of friendships, cultivating humility and discernment, grappling with anxiety, the nature of sex, and recovering truth in an age of conspiratorial thinking.

Some chapters address issues you might expect, like the chapter on the importance of dethroning entertainment in our lives. However, other chapters encourage us to think about how to address issues that we may not have realised the social internet is creating, such as the way it undermines authority within the church. The ability to connect with others on a global scale has allowed for the widespread sharing of stories of leadership malpractice and the abuse of authority. Of course, it is good that abuse is exposed, but this leads to people expecting to find abuse at every level and erodes truth in local church leadership. Accordingly, leaders need to rebuild trust and root out hypocrisy where it does exist.

The chapter on understanding sex is also very practical about the need for the church to speak into this area. The social internet has contributed to a large-scale change in the way sex and sexuality are viewed – no longer is it simply an aspect of our lives but it has become central to our identities. The church must speak and speak clearly into this area. We must be honest and forthright about issues surrounding sexual sin but also speak with kindness and love. People are crying out for an authentic voice and yet the church is often silent on these issues, particularly from the pulpit.

One of the most frightening chapters relates to the rise of conspiracy theories. Almost every pastor Martin spoke with in the writing of the book identified this as a major issue they face in their congregations. We probably all know people who seem to have been taken in by various conspiracy theories in recent years – and social media allows the easy sharing of these ideas. Often then members of our congregation come to the church leaders and are disappointed we will not promote or speak about the conspiracy theories they raise. The challenge is how leaders can promote transparent truth to counteract conspiracy theories and love those who seem to be constantly out to trip us up over these issues.

The Wolf in Their Pockets is full of practical and stimulating wisdom to help us begin to have conversations in our congregations and among those we minister to about the role that our phones and social media play in our lives. It helps address within discipleship the many ways we are being shaped by the social internet and challenges us to turn instead to God's word to shape us. Social media is not going anywhere and each one of us needs to be equipped to engage in these kinds of conversations.

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

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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.



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