



SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

Issue 55 – March 2024

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It's time to call out ageism

By Alex Drew

When I was 14 I was thrilled that I managed to convince the cinema ticket seller to let me into an 18 movie – I didn't use words, I just stood there looking the part. You see when I was young, I wanted to be older and look older so I used make up and clothes, and what I presumably intended to be some level of sophistication, to convince people and myself that I fitted in with the older crowd. Being taken for older or more mature didn't just get me in places, it commanded respect. Some of my ruminations were even taken for wisdom and I was considered grown up. I loved it.

Being youthful became my goal

I don't know when the shift happened, maybe in my 30s, but suddenly I changed my mind; I didn't want to look older and be older anymore. I wanted to look younger and be younger.

As I started to look and feel older, the society around me was trying to convince me that being youthful should be my goal. It did this by having 13-year-olds promote anti-ageing potions; showing me how to apparently 'reduce the fine lines of ageing', of which of course they had none. It portrayed older TV characters as miserable and often ridiculous. Even in my circles, people began to regret another birthday and lie about their age. Suddenly forgetting why we walked into a room became known as a senior moment as if we hadn't been walking into rooms forgetting why since we were children.

Sounds harmless, doesn't it?

Negative attitudes towards ageing

Fast forward a few more years and I can expect to be treated differently at work, to be patronised, and even considered a burden because others in our society have been brought up with the same negative attitudes about ageing as I was. The idea is that ageing is something to be feared and that younger is better than older.

This causes society to discriminate against older people – in subtle ways and ways more distinct. It's called Ageism. A social construct that brings together stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

Ageism affects self-esteem, health, sense of purpose and how people experience daily life. It may even lead to an earlier death. Most of us will experience ageism in society, and even in the church.

It comes from poor examples set by us by others in their attitudes and use of language, it comes from fear of death and ageing, and it comes from denial – not facing up to the fact that ageing will happen to us too.

Ageism seeps into our culture when we don't call it out.

Growing old is a good thing

It's madness really, as if anyone can help ageing. Whether we're three years old, or 17, 42, 68 or 91, we will all get older. That's a good thing, God designed us to age. The Bible tells us that age is a divine blessing – it's God's glory revealed through his creation, you and me.

There's no ageism in the Bible. We're called to love our neighbours as ourselves. God has no favourites – we are all loved equally, and nobody has cause to put themselves above another. We see people like Moses, Joshua and Anna living incredible lives for God well into old age.

In the Bible age distinguishes people in a good way – the wisdom and experience gleaned over a lifetime, shared with younger generations, who are honoured and privileged to learn from those in later life.

In 1 Timothy we're reminded not to rebuke an older man harshly but exhort him as if he were our father, and to treat older women as mothers. Jesus who regularly spoke out on behalf of those on the margins, led us in a beautiful example when he prioritised and entrusted the care of his mother to John even from the cross (John 19:25-27). A reminder that we're to make good provision for the welfare and care of older people in our midst.

It's time to call out ageism

It's time to call out ageism everywhere we see it happening. It's time for us to be honest and ask ourselves whether we are negative about ageing and at times, without meaning to, we too may have deep seated ageist thoughts. It's time to stand up and be counted.

When we take the time to notice, we see that our communities are filled with people in later life living to the fullest; taking risks, looking after themselves, learning new things, supporting their families financially and practically, being creative, keeping fit, praying for their neighbours, and still going on new adventures.

What can the church do?

Although not exempt from ageism, the church already leads in a wonderful example – where else in society do we see such an army of older people engaged in effective preaching, mentoring, children's work, serving on trustee boards, welcoming, mass catering, praying, and more?

But society's culture of ageism is pervasive and has sadly managed to find its way into many churches. We subtly begin to glorify youth and count it as more valuable than later life, and we lament over ageing congregations.

When it comes to ageism, we not only have a biblical mandate to oust it, but we have a vested interest to do so – after all – we're all getting older.

Here are some things churches can do to help fight ageism:

- Understand and celebrate the age profile of your membership
- Identify and invest in the leadership for ministry among older people, and invite them to become a 'Faith in Later Life Church Champion'
- Promote involvement of older people at all levels and in all areas of church life
- Promote a better and more biblical understanding of ageing and old age – to celebrate the positive aspects and dispel negative myths, views and prejudices
- Listen to the views and experiences of older people
- Develop activities and opportunities for intergenerational learning

I would further encourage churches to look beyond the threshold of the church, and if possible have a voice into some key issues which are compounded by ageist attitudes and are heading our way. These will have an increasing impact on us all as we age, not to mention on the mission of the church. They include assisted suicide, 'direct cremation', our unprepared health care system, attitudes to older people in the workplace and pensioner poverty.

Let's stop the world from convincing us that younger is somehow better than older. Instead, let's convince the world of God's view of ageing; that it's a crown of glory bestowed on us by the ancient of days himself.

Faith in Later Life exists to inspire and equip Christians to reach, serve and empower older people in every community, through the local Church. You can find out more about their ministry and how you can get involved on their website: www.faithinlaterlife.org.

Is ChatGPT really your friend?

by Jeremy Peckham BSc, FRSA.

The story so far

In my first article, I outlined what AI technology is, and what it can do and provided a simple overview of how it works.¹ We considered some of the challenges that this technology presents to humanity, especially recent developments in Generative AI like ChatGPT that generates new human like output of text or images based on a text input. We saw how it might challenge our ability to discern truth and reality whilst other automated decision making systems might affect our ability to secure a loan or insurance policy due to bias. In article 2, we set out a Christian anthropology to provide a foundation for our evaluation of AI technology and its potential impact on what it means to be made in God's likeness, to have dominion and to be made for relationship. We briefly reviewed different perspectives on the soul and whether the mind functions like a computer, issues that have a bearing on whether it might be possible to replicate a human mind and consciousness.²

In this final article, we will explore some key questions that will help us to navigate whether or how we should use the AI applications that are available today and in the near future. We'll look especially at those based on Generative AI, whether applications that we might find in the workplace like ChatGPT, used in Microsoft's copilot, or apps developed by Christians to write prayers, sermon outlines, summarise bible books or provide spiritual counsel.

At this point, some might be thinking it's ok to use any applications of AI, provided that our motivation is good and we don't use it sinfully, to create pornography for example!

Guns don't kill people, people kill people

'Guns don't kill people, people kill people', so runs the National Rifle Association slogan in the USA. The implication behind this slogan is that technology is neutral, it's what we do with it that matters. It is a view held by many people, including Christians and those who develop technology, but is this really true?

Over the last 100 years or so, philosophers of technology have sought to define what technology is and approached it from several perspectives. One perspective holds that an artefact or tool is simply something that extends human capabilities and enables us to accomplish our objectives. Studied from this perspective the emphasis tends to be on how technology enables us and influences our actions. How might the advent of email have altered our writing habits or communication modalities for example, do we use the phone less, and so on? Typically in this light technology is most often seen as offering convenience and efficiency, we can do things faster and easier, not bad outcomes, one might think.

Other philosophers have argued that this is too narrow a view of technology and that we need to understand the values that lie behind the design and development of a tool, and indeed how tools shape societies as they are used. Some would go further and add that it's also necessary to understand how we got there, and what conditions predisposed designers to think such a tool was necessary in the first place. They would argue that technology doesn't just appear, there are choices to be made, influenced by economics, culture and politics.

The development of the timepiece provides a simple illustration of how technology shapes humanity. Before the invention of the clock, cultures were mostly event driven – I get up at dawn or

¹ 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

² See: Affinity's Social Issues Bulletin - Issue 54. Online: https://www.affinity.org.uk/app/uploads/2023/11/Issue-54-Winter-2023_final-WEB.pdf

eat when I'm hungry. The timepiece gradually changed Western cultures into 'doing' cultures driven by productivity and efficiency and our lives are now scheduled by the clock. Continents like Africa have retained more of a 'being' culture that values relationships and events more than units of time. Which is best? Having worked in both cultures there are benefits and disadvantages to both, perhaps the answer lies in finding a God honouring balance that best reflects who he is.

Although technology shapes us, it doesn't necessarily do so in a completely negative way. The late philosopher of technology, Don Ihde, suggested that technology has both an amplifying and reducing effect. This idea can be easily understood when we think about how a telescope enables us to see far distant planets yet at the same time it narrows our field of vision. Few would argue however that the amplifying benefits of a telescope or microscope don't outweigh the reduction in vision! This notion is also helpful in thinking through the negative implications of reduction. An AI-based application like ChatGPT for example, might amplify access to knowledge but at the same time reduce our critical thinking and our ability to know what is true or real.

Knowing that we live in a fallen world with sin and its consequences helps Christians to appreciate how people's values and goals might influence the design of technology as well as our use of it. A simple and well documented example of this is how social media platforms use algorithms developed by AI, designed to appeal to our vices, rather than our virtues, to keep us engaged on the platform. The motivation for this is to sell more advertising that pays for the 'free' platform we use. As users of social media, we have a choice of how much time we spend, what rabbit holes we go down, how we interact and whether we allow ourselves to become addicted to it. Unfortunately, the platform design is set up to promote bad behaviour rather than virtue. Fake news is viewed six times more than real news, and many people become obsessed with their followers and how to keep the 'likes' up. This can lead to narcissistic behaviour and toxic postings, that are all too familiar on social media, leading to a greater polarisation of opinion. But why would companies and individuals develop and promote the use of such technology?

Significantly, much of the AI technology that has been developed in the West has been carried out by a relatively small number of Big Tech companies, like Amazon, Google and Meta. These and other large companies such as Microsoft and Apple, have the resources to acquire or invest in other specialist AI companies like Open AI and the British company Deep Mind. Since 2016, over 500 billion dollars have been invested in this sector so there is a huge vested interest in seeing it succeed. For the likes of Google and Meta, their business model depends on keeping the 'user a product', sucking in all their data, profiling users and selling this on to advertisers and others.

We are constantly told that this technology will benefit humanity by improving productivity and solving the problems of the world like health and climate change. Some go so far as to believe it might even lead us to the point where many won't need to work and they will subsist on a type of Universal Credit. This techno-optimist worldview has now been adopted by many politicians who tell us that innovation and productivity are necessary for economic growth. There is also a fear of missing out which has led to an AI arms race with with many Western countries seeking to outdo China and come out on top. Vladimir Putin once famously stated that 'whoever wins the AI race will control the world'.

The reality for digital technology is however somewhat different, at least as far as its economic benefit to the general population. Figure 1 shows how the period between 1949 and 1973 in the USA, wages kept pace with increasing productivity.³ The years between 1973 and 2013, the digital age, saw productivity increase by 74.4%, yet the hourly compensation of workers rose by just 9.2%. During this period however, the median wage gap between the lowest and highest paid workers widened very significantly with the lowest decreasing to -5% and the highest increasing to 41%. In their book, *Power and Progress*, MIT economists Acemoglu and Johnson survey 1,000 years of technology progress and argue that it is mostly the elite and powerful that benefit from

³ Source: EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata from the CPS survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics [machine-readable microdata file]. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/>

innovation.⁴ They cite the example of the Industrial Revolution to show that it takes pressure from ordinary people and government regulation to ensure that the economic benefits of improved productivity flow down to the workers. Automation in the 1980s displaced a significant number of blue collar workers. Today, AI applications are impacting white collar workers and professionals in all spheres spanning the creative arts, computer programming, marketing, accounting, the law and medicine along with office workers using Microsoft's copilot, embedded in Office 365.

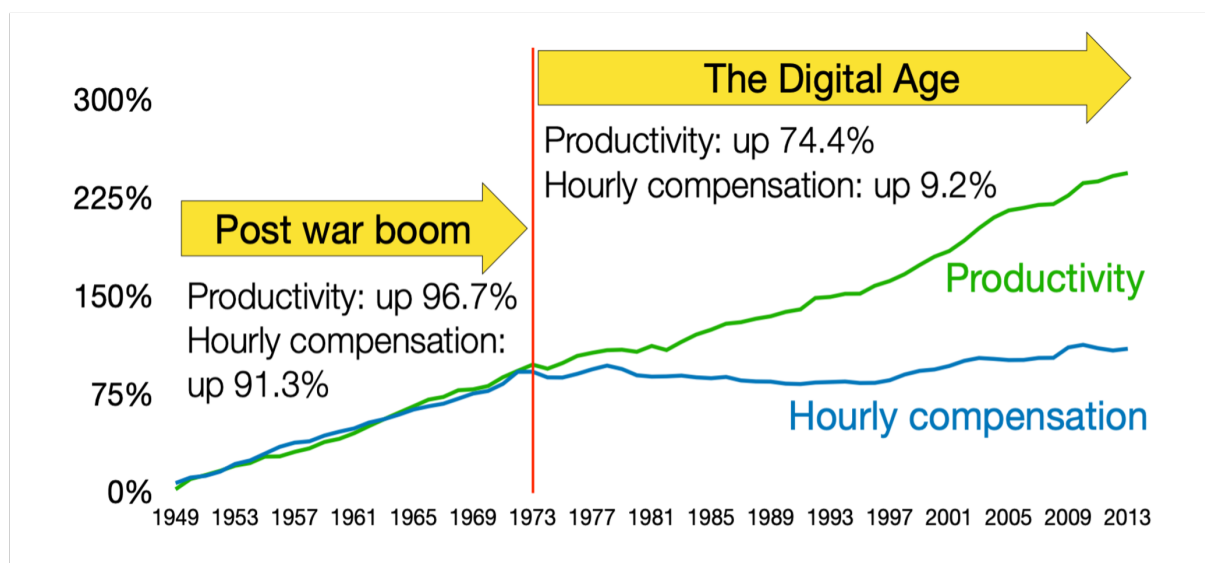


Figure 1: The relationship of productivity growth to wages post war to the digital age. Productivity hasn't benefitted workers in the digital age. Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The gap between the hype about human flourishing and reality is not confined to the economic sphere. Digging beneath the claims surrounding AI capabilities in drug discovery, as an example, we find that, impressive though published results are for predicting known protein structures, there is still quite some way to go before the technology can predict structures that haven't already been determined through traditional means such as NMR Spectroscopy or X-Ray crystallography. This is in part because proteins fold over time and according to context and these structures might not be well represented in the data set of solved protein structures used to train the algorithms.

We need therefore to be mindful of the agenda behind the promotion of AI applications like ChatGPT and many other similar capabilities. These companies care less about the impact on society and individuals than the profits that they seek to accrue and dominating the AI world. This shapes the design and marketing of these tools and how they are being deployed. The examples of social media, search engines, and even online shopping are instructive as the aim is to create an increasingly frictionless interface to the platform to encourage user engagement, to see more adverts or to purchase more goods. The more immersive the experience is, whether on a smartphone or tablet, the more users are sucked in and the more likely they are to become addicted.

Ironically, many of the leaders of AI companies have recently warned of the existential risks that advanced, so called Frontier AI, presents to humanity. So successful has this agenda setting been that the UK hosted the first global summit on AI safety in November 2023. Safety Institutes have now been set up by the UK and US with other countries likely to follow. Unfortunately, these institutes are too focused on addressing future risks rather than the here-and-now risks that AI applications are posing to society at large, through the way that they are shaping us. Neither are they adequately addressing the concerns that minority or marginalised groups have over specific risks, such as data bias, privacy and injustice from prejudicial automated decisions.

Although many, even Christians, think of technology as amoral or neutral, it is undeniable that

⁴ Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson, Power and Progress, Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity, (London: Basic Books UK, 2023).

tools have shaped our societies and societies have shaped the values and ideas of the people who design and sell these tools. We tend to give too little thought to these aspects when we enthusiastically embrace new technologies and inventions. Christians are then unwittingly shaped by the world around us, especially as the way that society uses technology is normalised and unquestioned.

Imitating Christ in a virtual world

Although the image of God in us is affected by our sin and desire for moral autonomy, Christ has freed us from slavery to sin. Paul exhorts the Christians in the church at Ephesus, ‘Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Eph. 5:1–2). Paul also said to the Corinthian church that they should ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’, meaning that we should imitate Paul in so far as he reflects Christ. It’s essentially the same exhortation, imitating God and Christ is a command for us to image the Godhead, to allow the nature of God, in whose image we’re made, to shine forth.

In Paul’s letter to the Colossian church he urges them to ‘Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:’ listing some of the things we must put away ‘seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.’ (Col. 3:1-10). The image of God in us, although tarnished by sin, is being renewed in line with the image of our creator. If we allow ourselves to become immersed in technology that diminishes the true image of God in us, we’re not cooperating with the Holy Spirit, who is the one who helps us to put off the old self and put on the new:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1–2)

In his book on the Sermon on the Mount, John Stott makes this observation: ‘Probably the greatest tragedy of the church throughout its long and checkered history has been its constant tendency to conform to the prevailing culture instead of developing a Christian counter-culture.’⁵

We must pay attention to the impact that the world around us, including technology and AI, has on the renewal of our self, and our sanctification. We’re engaged in a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness and the devil will seek to subvert the process of our sanctification, our becoming more like Christ. Let us be careful that the convenience some AI applications offer us, or indeed any other technology, doesn’t become self seeking, the substitution of self for Christ in our affections, ‘which is idolatry’.

Asking the right questions

Although convenience and efficiency are not wrong in and of themselves, we need to balance what is gained and what is lost. We need to ask, what does this technology do for us and what does it do to us? Why are we using it, rather than something else? As we think about these questions it might be helpful to consider six key areas of our God given humanness, illustrated in Figure 2, that could be shaped by our use of AI applications, or indeed any technology.

There is a spectrum of risks associated with our use of AI, some applications will have no impact on our ability to faithfully image Christ in the spheres where God has placed us, whether church, friends, family or work. Other applications will have a significant impact so we will need to evaluate our engagement in each use case and think about how it will shape our behaviour over time as well as how our use will impact others and their view of Christ, who he is and what he is like. Many applications impact more than one of the six human areas shown in Figure 2.

⁵ J. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, revised edition (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2020), p. 45.

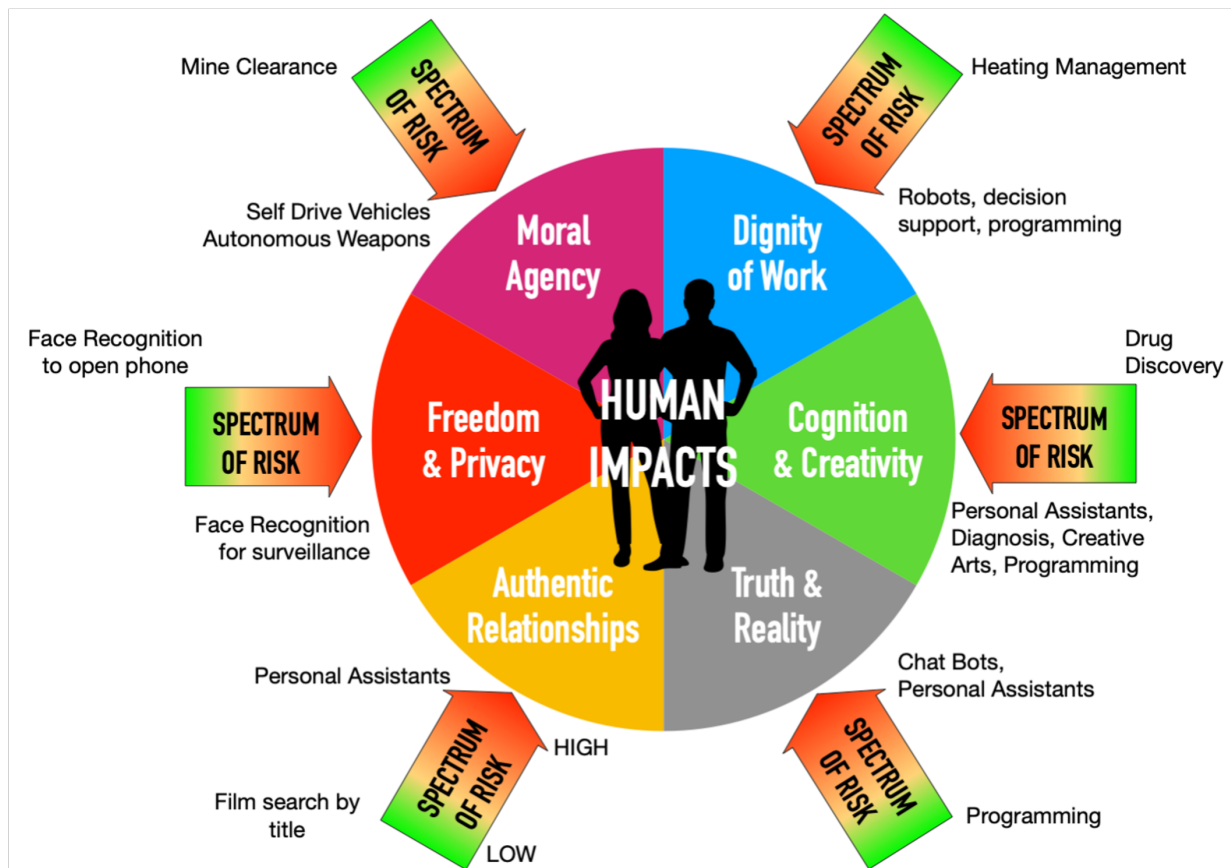


Figure 2: Based on the Imago Dei the diagram shows six key aspects of being human, made in God's image, that can be diminished or sidelined through the use of AI. Application lie on a spectrum of risk, One example of this is ChatGPT which can be used for writing stories, emails, summarising books or conversationally providing information. Some have adapted ChatGPT to provide explicitly Christian content such as sermons, study outlines, prayers and spiritual guidance. We might ask why are we using such tools rather than our brain and creativity or asking our pastor and friends for an answer to a question that we may have.

We are effectively giving up our creative activity and imagination, all for the sake of convenience. What is more important to God, using our brain, asking our pastor or friend for an answer to a question that we may have, or freeing up time? When we get an app to write a prayer for us aren't we replacing seeking the Holy Spirit to give us words and listening to his prompting? Who is the author of that prayer, email or story that we get an app to generate? Or to put it another way, who is doing the 'thinking', isn't the AI artefact, it's simply regurgitating sentences as a statistical amalgam of all the texts it's been trained on with no attribution to any author or authors. Seen in that light, we need to ask ourselves whether we honour God and the creativity he has put in us by getting an artefact to do the work, to become a proxy author and thinker.

Such applications also impact human agency, when we outsource cognitive tasks we are effectively giving the artefact proxy agency, yet humans alone have been endowed by God with moral agency. We cannot delegate this to an artefact that cannot think or act volitionally. We are responsible for the output, its truthfulness or not and the impact of the output on others. The impact of Generative AI on truth and reality is illustrated in the case of a passenger who won a case against Canadian Airlines for refusing to honour the incorrect policy information that its chatbot had created regarding bereavement travel. The judge ruled that the company was liable for the accuracy of information on its website, whether produced by a chatbot or not. This is an inherent problem of AI systems that generate plausible but incorrect output, often called hallucinations or confabulations. An evaluation carried out by Algorithm Watch on the accuracy of answers generated by ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot on the Swiss elections in 2023 found that nearly a third of the answers were incorrect and

another 39% were evasive. For Christians, there are further questions about how we view scripture, truth and the Holy Spirit's work when we use statistical algorithms to summarise a bible book, to answer questions about the Bible or Christianity.

Privacy and freedom are also impacted by Generative AI applications that use Large Language Models (LLMs) that have been trained on texts and images harvested from the internet as they often include copyright material. Several lawsuits have been filed against a number of AI companies like OpenAI and Midjourney for copyright infringement of both text and artistic material. Notwithstanding their counterarguments of 'fair use', they have acknowledged that these capabilities would not have been possible without using copyright material and Sam Altman, Open AI's CEO sought to get the UK to waive copyright law for LLMs. Using ChatGPT or any tools based on current LLMs, along with those that generate images or video, seems to me rather like singing songs at church without a copyright licence or acknowledging the copyright holder!

Using applications like Midjourney or Microsoft Copilot, will over time, shape the way we think about creativity, moral agency, authentic embodied relationships, privacy, truth and reality. Some companies have suggested that this technology will give everyone a personal assistant, except it's not a real person with whom you can have an authentic relationship. The human activities that we replace, using such tools, will over time become detached from their uniquely human locus. Convenience will be the yardstick by which we judge this technology's usefulness, rather than the moral question about how it's shaping us and whether it's helping or hindering us from becoming more like Christ, reflecting his image and leading us closer to God. Using a statistical tool to generate what is normally the creative process of humans is to abdicate our image bearing responsibility, dumbing down over time what it means to be human and robbing God of what he designed us to be and do.

What are the messages we are communicating to our church community when we use Midjourney to produce pictures to illustrate our sermon or an AI app to write a prayer or sermon outline and get a copilot to reply to emails? When we abdicate our responsibility to be like Christ in our homes and workplaces for the sake of convenience, we unwittingly communicate what we value to our children and work colleagues.

Characteristics of true image bearing in authentic relationships	Influence of digital technology and personified AI	How am I being formed by AI and digital technology?	What are my choices?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love • Commitment • Kindness • Preferring others over ourselves • Encouraging one another • Listening • Empathizing • True intimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abrupt communication • Inability to pay attention • Lack of focus • Diminished ability to reflect and think • Preferred because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – don't answer back – empathetic – easier to deal with – do what one commands • Gender stereotyping • Personification • Accept answers unquestioningly • Reliance on device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much time am I spending in a digital world vs the real one? • Which do I prefer? • Do I prefer to text? • Do I pay attention to others and listen? • Do I find it easy to empathize? • What are my expectations of others? • What am I prepared to give in relationships? • How do I view others, such as women? • Can I live without it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give preference to face-to-face over virtual • Use text search and a neutral search engine instead of a digital assistant • Limit use • Ask whether it can be done another, more human, way • Avoid

Table 1: Example of the difference between authentic relationships and the negative impact AI, used in digital assistants such as Alexa, could have on these through the way it forms us, alongside self-analysis and our choices (from Jeremy Peckham, *Masters or Slaves, AI and the Future of Humanity*, IVP, 2021, used with kind permission from IVP).

Table 1 gives some practical questions that we can ask ourselves about using applications that impinge on relationships, what they do to us and how they might be forming us, along with what we can do about it. Such questions can be developed for other application areas including those that don't use Generative AI and that even are working in the background without our knowing, for example in credit checking or analysing our job application.

The more humanlike and convenient AI technology becomes, the more it erases the distinction between online and offline, while at the same time creating an illusion of more control of our lives and our digital world. Yet the evidence is that this technology is already beginning to control us. Children, for example, find it hard to take off the 'lens' through which they see and interact with the world. Digital technology, and increasingly AI mediated technology, is their world. Many have become reliant on this technology and are uncomfortable when it's taken away, finding themselves insecure and struggling emotionally to deal with people face to face. It has become a mediator through which we interact with other people and through which we understand our world, it has become nothing less than a digital priesthood. Idolatry can be defined as anything that we value more than God, the things that drive us. When we replace our responsibility to image him by, for example, using an AI app to write a prayer or a story, are we not valuing convenience more than being a faithful witness?

Conclusion

We need to think about how to develop and deploy AI based technology that will serve humanity rather than simply race to replicate it. Applications of technology and AI in particular are best targeted at enhancing or extending human capabilities, rather than replacing them, amplifying something we can do but not reducing our humanity at the same time. An example is the use of robots in surgery where higher precision can be achieved than a well trained surgeon might

be capable of due to the limitations of hand dexterity. We can use AI based robots in hazardous environments like finding and neutralising mines. The techniques used in AI, like Machine Learning (ML), might be able to perform tasks that humans can't easily do, like finding patterns in data for fraud detection or cybersecurity. Generative AI and ML techniques are increasingly being used in 'Digital Twins' that are virtual models of real or intended physical systems and environments like wind turbines or manufacturing processes. These models have a role in improving the design and performance of many physical systems. AI might also be used to carry out tasks that would be impractical for humans, as they would take far too long, potentially speeding up scientific research in areas like drug discovery. Rather than replacing creativity and cognitive activity, AI applications might be better assisting in tasks, such as checking human generated software code to highlight potential problems, rather than doing the programming itself. These are just a few illustrations of how AI could be used to benefit, rather than sideline humanity.

As communities of God's people, we can show the world a different way by modelling authentic community that is situated and embodied, where relationships are built on love not likes. We can show how God's gift of creativity is valued and celebrated by involving others in the process, rather than sidelining them by using ChatGPT or Midjourney, and other similar technologies, to create devotionals or graphics for our church. Being intentional about encouraging one another demonstrates how true knowledge and wisdom are shared within our communities rather than obtained from a statistically based artefact trained on masses of data that has no thoughtfulness or ground truth. Truth is found through reading, studying and discussing God's word in community and our knowledge and understanding of our world are mediated through reliable news sources, critical thinking and discussion with trusted friends.

These next few years will be challenging as more and more applications are released onto an unsuspecting world, infiltrating the public service arena, our workplace, our homes and even our churches. With God's help and by his grace the church can make a difference, being the salt and light that we are called to be. May God grant us discernment as we navigate the rapidly changing world of AI and may he keep us from losing our saltiness, so that we are only fit for scattering on the ground and being trampled underfoot.

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 has also developed an online bible based course for individual or small group study (mastersorslaves.com). 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 leadership.

Abortion: Current Legal Challenges and Opportunities

A Call to Pray and Not Give Up

by Dr Susan Marriott

The most recent government data reports that 214,869 babies were aborted in England and Wales in 2021. This is the highest total number (and the highest rate) of abortions in any year since records began.¹ One in four pregnancies now end by abortion.²

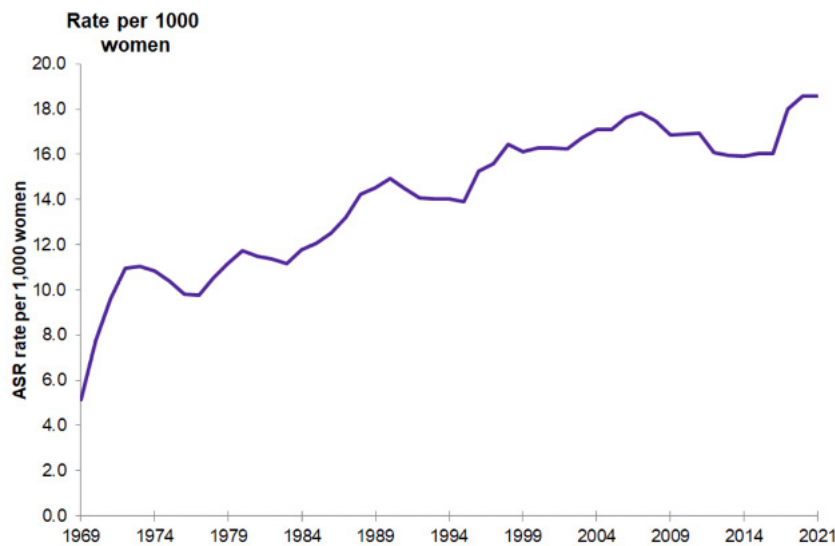


Figure 1 - age-standardised abortion rate per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, England and Wales, 1969 to 2021 (taken from www.gov.uk/government/statistics/abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales-2021/)

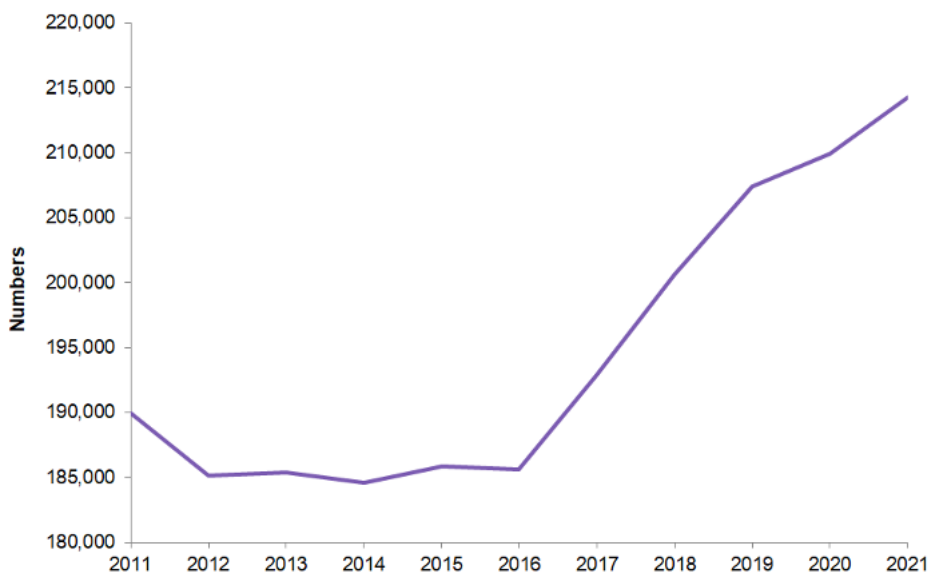


Figure 2 - number of abortions, England and Wales, 2011 to 2021 (taken from www.gov.uk/government/statistics/abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales-2021/)

¹ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales-2021/

² www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/conceptionstatistics/2021#conceptions-leading-to-legal-abortions

This is a heartbreaking reality, especially when we remember that behind the cold statistics are lives lost and lives negatively impacted. The legal landscape is also continually shifting, and there continue to be legal challenges seeking both to loosen further and also to tighten the restriction of abortion.

Pills by Post

During the Covid pandemic, rules were temporarily changed so that women could be sent abortion pills in the post after a telephone or online assessment, without the usual step of a face-to-face appointment and an ultrasound scan. The law was changed in March 2022 to allow abortion providers to offer such 'pills by post' schemes permanently. Many people warned how dangerous this policy was, including that it might lead to a rise in dangerous late abortions and possibly also coercive abortions. And sadly, as time passes under this law, there are early indications that these concerns are becoming a reality.

Without a face-to-face assessment allowing for her to be examined and scanned, a woman may more easily mistake how far along she is in her pregnancy; or indeed, she might lie about this or be coerced to do so to obtain abortion pills. Worryingly, she could then use these pills beyond the time in her pregnancy when they are legal and also beyond the time for which the pills are recommended concerning dangers to the woman herself.

Offering 'pills by post' is financially desirable for abortion providers (who unsurprisingly support it), but the adverse effects on women (as well as of course their unborn children) are potentially devastating. It was encouraging to see Miriam Cates MP add her voice to those highlighting this recently,³ and as evidence mounts, so must pressure on policymakers to return to the pre-pandemic norm of mandatory face-to-face consultations.

It is not in the interests of abortion providers to allow evidence of the adverse effects caused by 'pills by post' schemes to come to light. Will you join us in praying for those collecting and highlighting this evidence to see obstacles removed? Returning to face-to-face consultations would be a helpful step in the right direction, and would reduce the additional harms arising from their previous removal.

Two amendments relating to abortion

In Parliament, the Criminal Justice Bill is currently waiting for a date to be announced for its report stage and third reading in the House of Commons. Two amendments relating to abortion have been tabled on this bill.

A Decriminalisation of Abortion Amendment

Diana Johnson MP has an amendment (New Clause 1[1]) tabled on the Criminal Justice Bill, which, if passed, would remove the offences that make it illegal for a woman to perform a self-abortion at any point right through to birth.

There is a sad irony here. Many of those campaigning for this amendment are doing so based on some shocking recent cases, such as that of Carla Foster, who tragically had a very late abortion after taking 'pills by post'.⁴ This abortion would not have been possible, and Ms Foster would, therefore, have been protected from prosecution if mandatory face-to-face assessments were still in place. Women are already being failed by 'pills by post', and they need better (and face-to-face) care, not the removal of legal responsibility to enable their poor care to continue unchallenged and their highly developed babies to be killed. Abortion providers who want to remove this legal framework are actually campaigning to remove accountability for their own poor care, over which they have been repeatedly warned.

³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/28/decriminalising-abortion-will-fuel-diy-warns-miriam-cates/>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/18/carla-foster-woman-jailed-obtaining-tablets-pregnancy-freed-appeal>

A Reduction in Abortion Limits Amendment

Caroline Ansell, representing a cross-party group of MPs, has also tabled an amendment (New Clause 151) to the Criminal Justice Bill. If passed, it would lower the abortion time limit for the vast majority of abortions from 24 to 22 weeks.

From its original position of 28 weeks, the usual abortion limit was lowered to the current 24 weeks in 1990. At that time, the improved survival rates of babies born between 24 and 28 weeks was a crucial consideration in lowering the time limit, and preterm survival rates have continued to improve for babies born at 22-24 weeks since 1990. Polling data shows that most of the public agrees with a reduction in the upper limit of abortion,⁵ and it would also bring us closer to the much lower limits of most of our European neighbours.⁶

Don't lose hope

Will you join us in praying that Diana Johnson's decriminalisation amendment will be defeated and that the abortion limit reduction amendment might be passed into law?

The landscape of abortion in this country can seem so overwhelming that it is tempting to look away or give up praying. It is tempting to lose hope and to give up striving against the worsening of the law and for changes in the law that will protect women and unborn children. I am personally encouraged that Jesus knew there would be times that we would feel like giving up, and so he told his disciples the parable of the persistent widow and ensured it was recorded for us in Luke's Gospel 'to show [us] that [we] should always pray and not give up.' (Luke 18:1 NIV).

Further Resources

Considering Writing to your MP about Decriminalisation - <https://righttolife.org.uk/johnsonabortionamendment>

Little Fighters Campaign to lower abortion limits - <https://righttolife.org.uk/littlefighters>

Dr Susan Marriott is Associate Head of Public Policy at the Christian Medical Fellowship. Here she provides an update on what is happening in the United Kingdom regarding abortion laws and regulations.

⁵ <https://righttolife.org.uk/news/parliament-to-vote-on-lowering-abortion-time-limit-after-cross-party-group-of-25-mps-table-amendment-to-criminal-justice-bill>

⁶ <https://righttolife.org.uk/what-are-the-abortion-time-limits-in-eu-countries>

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.

Rev. Dr Patrick Pullicino

Neurologist cleared after investigation for ‘pro-life opinion.’

Rev. Dr Pullicino, 74, an experienced consultant neurologist, with a medical career spanning 50 years and ordained Catholic priest faced an investigation from the General Medical Council (GMC) for giving a ‘pro-life’ medical opinion in an end-of-life court case. This could have seen him barred from the profession.

The end-of-life case involved the Court of Protection authorising the removal of nutrition and fluids from a middle-aged Polish man, anonymised as ‘RS’, who had suffered brain damage after a heart attack.

The clinical team at a Plymouth Hospital had predicted that ‘RS’ had no prospects of recovering beyond spending the rest of his life in a ‘minimally conscious state’ (MCS).

The Court of Protection ignored the official requests by the Polish government to the UK to permit the man’s repatriation to Poland and ruled that prolonging his life was not in his ‘best interests.’

RS’s mother and two sisters sought to instruct Dr Pullicino as their medical expert, but the High Court Judge, Mr Justice Cohen, strongly criticised Dr Pullicino’s opinion that further observations and tests were necessary for a confident prognosis. The Court likewise rejected an opinion of a Polish neurosurgeon (who cannot be named for legal reasons), who agreed with Dr Pullicino.

RS died from dehydration after all nutrition and fluids were withdrawn in January 2021.

Ms Kitzinger, a ‘Right to Die’ campaigner, who had been following the case and court proceedings, made a written complaint to the GMC accusing Dr Pullicino of bias for ‘trying to save a patient’s life’ and speculated that he ‘may have deliberately misdiagnosed the patient in the hope of saving his life’ after he had given urgent assistance on Christmas Day, during lockdown, to a family facing tragedy. She also accused Dr Pullicino of bias because he was a Catholic and had expressed “pro-life values” in the courtroom, referencing Dr Pullicino’s 2019 public lecture, where he suggested that ‘discontinuation of food and water is a form of euthanasia’.

In May 2021 the GMC notified Dr Pullicino that it had commenced an investigation into his fitness to practise based solely on Ms Kitzinger’s complaint.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, his lawyers argued the following his defence:

- Dr Pullicino took the reasonable and legally correct view that he did not need to obtain consent from anybody and instead had to act in the patient’s best interests. He made a reasonable assessment of the patient’s best interests and acted on it.
- The aim of his assessment was to verify the relatives’ impression that the patient’s level of awareness was improving so as to bring that to the attention of the Court and the treating clinicians and thus ensure the patient was not deprived of life-saving treatment as a result of a mistake.
- There is no suggestion that anything he said in his evidence was untrue or dishonest. He was complying with an express order of the Court and with the guidance given by an

experienced solicitor who had instructed him to comply. It is impossible to see how such actions may amount to misconduct.

Dr Pullicino's actions were backed by an expert consultant neurologist.

The GMC subsequently rejected all of Ms Kitzinger's allegations and refused to take action against Dr Pullicino.

His case highlights the growing pressure on medical professionals not to break ranks with their colleagues who had taken a controversial decision which would end a patient's life. In sensitive end-of-life cases, dissenting medical experts risk severe criticism by courts and activists, leading to protracted and stressful investigations by professional regulators.

Indi Gregory

Indi, a seven-month-old baby was 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 maintained that she was happy and responsive to their touch.

In October 2023, Mr Justice Robert Peel ruled that it was in the best interests of Indi Gregory to have her life-support removed. With the support of the Christian Legal Centre Indi's parents, Claire Staniforth and Dean Gregory from Derbyshire, 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 Justice Robert Peel 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 of Indi Gregory permission to appeal a High Court decision that it was in the seven-month-old baby's 'best interests' to die.

After exhausting domestic remedies, the family of Indi Gregory on 26 October, with the support of the CLC 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 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) refused to consider the case of eight-month-old Indi Gregory after a last-ditch application. A stay was granted until 27 October, however, once this expired the NHS trust was not legally obliged to continue providing life support. However, following an urgent meeting, the Trust gave Indi's family until Monday 30 October to decide to move Indi to a hospice.

On 30 October 2023, a leading paediatric hospital in Italy, Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome, agreed to accept Indi for treatment and to carry out the right ventricular outflow tract stent procedure that has been put forward by medical experts. Consequently, lawyers went back to the Trust to request that Indi's parents be allowed to transfer her to Rome. Two medical experts, a cardiologist and a medical geneticist, a paediatrician and an expert in mitochondrial disorders, provided opinions on the treatment Indi can receive, at the Italian hospital.

However, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust resisted the request for the parents of Indi Gregory to take their daughter for specialist treatment in Italy.

At a further hearing on 31 October, a High Court judge, Mr Justice Peel denied the parents of 8-month-old Indi Gregory the right to transfer their child for specialist treatment in Italy, ruling that it is in Indi's 'best interests' to die in the UK rather than receive specialist treatment at the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome, which would be funded by the Italian government.

On 6 November the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, granted Indi Italian citizenship and released a statement saying: 'They say there isn't much hope for little Indi, but until the end I will do what I can to defend her life. And to defend her mum and dad's right to do everything they can for her.'

On 8 November, the Italian consul in Manchester, Dr Matteo Corradini, in his capacity as guardianship judge for the 8-month-old, issued an emergency measure recognising the authority of the Italian courts in this case. It is believed to be the first time that such a measure has been issued in an end-of-life case in the UK.

Mr Justice Peel said that life-support will be removed from 14:00 on 9 November. The judgment was made despite the Italian government dramatically granting Indi citizenship the day before, and issuing emergency measures authorising her to be transferred to the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome for specialist treatment.

Indi's parents make one final application to take Indi home for extubating. On 10 November Court of Appeal judges, Lord Justice Peter Jackson, Lady Justice Eleanor King and Lord Justice Andrew Moylan denied this request.

Indi was transferred from the hospital to a hospice in an ambulance, with a security escort. At the hospice, she had her life-support removed and was provided with invasive ventilation.

Indi Gregory died in the early hours of Monday 13 November, after having her life-support removed.

Bernard Randall

Trent College

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

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

Background

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

Dr Randall raised concerns about this Educate and Celebrate programme because of potential clashes with Christian beliefs and values. In January 2019, at the next staff training day, it was announced that the school had decided to adopt their year-long 'gold standard' programme. This would see an identity politics 'LGBT inclusive curriculum' implemented, even for the nursery provision at the school.

The Sermon

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

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

issues involved in the new LGBT teaching.

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

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

On 7 - 21 September 2022 Dr Randall's case was heard at the East Midlands Employment Tribunal. Following the hearing, Employment Judge Victoria Butler ruled against Dr Randall. Judge Butler used the CofE's own 'Valuing All God's Children' guidance for schools against Dr Randall. Judge Butler made the point that the CofE cite Educate and Celebrate as a recognised 'resource' in the guidance.

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

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

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

Dr Randall has since been reported to the Teaching Regulation Authority (TRA) and the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS). The TRA have subsequently decided to close the case, with nothing to answer for, and in January 2024 Dr Randall was cleared by the DBS.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has said 'it would not be appropriate' to take action against an ordained Church of England (CofE) chaplain who was sacked and reported to a terrorist watchdog for a moderate sermon on identity politics.

Dr Randall had highlighted to the DBS that hearing challenging ideas is not harmful, and that free speech is actually good for everyone's personal development. Responding to the news that he has been cleared by the DBS, Dr Randall said: 'I am obviously relieved that another malicious referral has been thrown out. It saddens me that it is now the CofE that continues to blacklist me and label its own teaching as a "risk factor".'

Educate and Celebrate

Additionally, the Charity Commission announced that the scandal-hit charity, Educate and Celebrate (E&C), whose extreme gender identity teaching at Trent College led to Dr Randall's sacking, is closing down.

Commenting on the closure of E&C, he said:

I would not be where I am now if E&C had not been invited into Trent College, it is as simple as that. As an ordained CofE minister working as a chaplain in a school with a CofE ethos, it was my duty to encourage debate and help children who were confused by the LGBT+ teaching to know that there are alternative views and beliefs on these contentious issues.

I take no joy in E&C being closed down, but I am pleased the wider world is catching up to the kind of thing I was trying to warn against.

Glawyds Leger

Teacher found guilty of unacceptable conduct for Biblical beliefs

Glawdys Leger, 43, was a specialist Modern Foreign Languages teacher for 12 years. In 2017 she began working at Bishop Justus a Church of England secondary school in Bromley, Kent.

As well as language 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 LGBTQI ideology, and for expressing her biblical beliefs on human sexuality in response to student questions. She had also expressed, for example, her beliefs to students during a discussion on LGBTQI issues that God believes humans are born male and female and that LGBTQI practice is sinful.

Ms Leger, who is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre, has said she was 'treated like a dangerous criminal' for refusing to teach extreme and politically partisan LGBTQI lessons, which had been incorporated into Religious Education (RE) lessons, to year 7 pupils at the school.

The school then referred her to the Teaching Regulation Agency 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.' This could lead to her being barred from the profession indefinitely.

On the basis of upset, not harm, to one child, the TRA decided to take forward a case against her that could have seen Ms Leger lose her practising certificate and her ability to teach in the UK.

On Monday 9 October, Ms Leger had her fitness to practise hearing at the TRA's headquarters in Coventry. A disciplinary panel heard evidence from Ms Leger and the mother and child at the school who made the complaint.

The panel included Canon Maurice Smith, the former Diocesan Director for Education in the Diocese of Manchester. Mr Smith answered to the Bishop of Manchester, David Walker, who is one of the most pro-LGBT voices within the senior ranks of the CofE.

The TRA ruled that it could 'not be proved' that Ms Leger had brought the profession into disrepute or that her conduct was 'contrary to Fundamental British values in that it lacked tolerance to those with different beliefs.'

However, in its decision, the panel said it:

Considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Ms Leger were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession. They found that Ms Leger's beliefs, and the expression of them in a Church of England school, were not aligned with 'school policy'.

The panel therefore ruled that it was: 'Satisfied that you are guilty of unacceptable professional conduct' but stopped short of banning her from teaching indefinitely by saying: 'The Secretary of State for Education has considered the panel's recommendation and has decided that it is not appropriate to impose a prohibition order.' They said: 'The details of this decision will be added to your teacher record, which employers can use to check information.'

King Lawal

‘Objecting to Pride is not homophobic’: King Lawal cleared.

Cllr King Lawal, 31, has been a councillor at North Northamptonshire Unitary Council for two years.

In June 2023, Councillor King Lawal 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, being informed that the Membership governance team at Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) was advising the council to suspend him and wanted the investigation to be centralised rather than local. He was told that a standards inquiry would also follow.

Cllr Lawal was warned of possible police investigation and has received a potentially illegal ultimatum by a local authority which said that he must resign from his own business or face a substantial contract being scrapped.

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

CCHQ publicly sought to distance themselves from Cllr Lawal’s suspension when behind the scenes they were officially investigating him ‘confidentially.’

Supported by Christian Legal Centre, Cllr Lawal has instructed lawyers to prepare legal action alleging multiple violations of his rights to freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and on 26 October 2023, it was announced that Cllr Lawal had been reinstated following an investigation by the local authority’s standard committee.

Despite this, CCHQ refused to drop the complaint against him. However, following a six-month investigation, the Conservative Party disciplinary subcommittee has rejected a complaint against one of its Christian counsellors and concluded that criticising the LGBTQI+ Pride movement is not ‘homophobic.’

It had been alleged that Cllr Lawal’s post was ‘homophobic’ and that ‘by posting this content [Cllr Lawal] has failed to sustain and [is] in conflict with the purpose, objects and values of the Conservative Party.’

In February 2024, concluding its decision, the panel said:

The Panel considers that it would be wrong to conflate an objection to the Pride movement as homophobic. The Panel recognises that [Cllr Lawal’s] posts are a representation of his religious beliefs, which he is free and entitled to hold. Accordingly, the posts, whilst they may be offensive to some, would on balance not be considered by a reasonable and fair-minded observer to be discriminatory or homophobic per se.

Kristie Higgs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 16 June 2023, the appeal judgment was handed down. Justice Eady allowed Mrs Higgs's appeal against the decision of the Bristol Employment Tribunal and held: 'The freedom to manifest belief (religious or otherwise) and to express views relating to that belief are essential rights in any democracy, whether or not the belief in question is popular or mainstream and even if its expression may offend.'

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

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

Concluding her judgment and sending the case back for a re-hearing, which further delays full justice for Mrs Higgs. In light of this, Mrs Higgs, with the support of the Christian Legal Centre made an application to the Court of Appeal to challenge this decision.

In January 2024, the court granted permission on all grounds for the case to be heard at the Court of Appeal, Rt. Hon. Lady Justice Elisabeth Laing said:

All the grounds of appeal are arguable with reasonable prospects of success. Even if they were not, this appeal raises at least three important questions about the dismissal of an employee for the expression of her beliefs.

The important questions included the 'erroneous view that [Mrs Higgs'] views constituted unlawful discrimination', and: 'the extent to which an employer may lawfully dismiss an employee for expressing views which are based on her religious beliefs in a forum which is not in the workplace, is not controlled by the employer, and which has a limited number of members.'

The hearing at the Court of Appeal is likely to take place this year. Its outcome will have significant ramifications for Christian freedom in the workplace and the freedom of any employee to express opposition to LGBT+ ideology without the fear of losing their livelihoods.

Aaron Edwards

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

On 19 February 2023, Dr Edwards posted:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Dr Edwards is now pursuing a claim in the Employment Tribunal against the Methodist bible college on the grounds of harassment, discrimination and unfair dismissal.

Lawyers representing Dr Edwards will argue that the college unlawfully interfered with his rights under Article 9 and/or Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

Dr Edwards will be seeking damages for unfair dismissal, and compensation under the Equality Act 2010. A full employment tribunal hearing is scheduled for May 2024.

Andy Nix

On 6 July 2021, Mr Nix, who has been a Christian for 42 years and qualified as a teacher in 2006, was preaching in the Briggate area of Leeds City Centre. Another evangelist, Dave McConnell, was also preaching and had responded to a series of questions from members of the public about what the Bible says about LGBT relationships, but Mr Nix did not.

During the preaching, members of the public had assaulted, verbally abused and stolen property from the preachers, but the police took no action.

A handful of 'hearsay' complaints from students to the headmaster, Matthew West, claiming they felt 'unsafe' because Mr Nix was a street preacher was enough to see him sacked on the spot.

On 29 March 2022, Mr Nix entered the staff room at Temple Moor High School where he had been working as a teaching assistant through an agency.

He was summoned by the HR manager to the headteacher, Mr Matthew West's office, who asked Mr Nix if he had been part of a 'rally' in Leeds City Centre. Mr West suggested that the teaching assistant had been arrested for 'homophobic remarks', which was not true. During the interrogation, Mr Nix said he was made to feel like a criminal. He was summarily dismissed and told to immediately leave the school premises.

Following his dismissal, supported by the Christian Legal Centre, he lodged a claim against the school in the Employment Tribunal. Mr Nix made claims for harassment, discrimination and said the school had breached his right to freedom, thought and religion under Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

His lawyers said that the school and the agency had directly discriminated against him because of his protected Christian beliefs and that reasons for the sacking were based on 'hearsay' evidence.

Instead of facing trial, the school decided to settle the case and pay Mr Nix £7,000 in compensation.

Despite the case being settled, Mr Nix believes the sacking has prevented him from being able to get a permanent teaching job.

He said: 'I was shocked and amazed that the headteacher could do what he did. He made me feel like a criminal; his aim was to bully and humiliate me into renouncing my Christian activity. I believe if I had renounced it, I could have kept my job.'

Joshua Sutcliffe

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

In 2017, Joshua was suspended and dismissed for allegedly 'misgendering' a female student, 'Pupil A', who self-identified as a boy. He immediately apologised when he realised 'Pupil A' was in the group of female students he addressed. Supported by the Christian Legal Centre he took legal

action against the school. The case was later settled out of court.

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

Joshua was subsequently reported to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA). Despite issues between Joshua and both schools being settled, the TRA has continued to pursue an investigation against him with a hearing taking place from 9 - 13 January 2023.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In January 2024, with the support of Christian Legal Centre, Joshua's lawyers had appealed the TRA ruling and were pursuing a Judicial Review of the decision to ban him.

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 the sign outside of an MSI Reproductive Choices clinic in Mattock Lane, West London, on 6 February 2023.

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.

It was alleged to have broken a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), which, including prayer, criminalises 'protesting, namely engaging in an act of approval/disapproval, with respect to issues related to abortion services'.

If found guilty, Green could be sent to prison for six months and/or fined £1,000.

Mr Green was supported by the Christian Legal Centre at his hearing on Tuesday 17 October 2023. at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court, London. He pleaded not guilty, and a subsequent trial was heard in February 2024.

At the hearing, at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court in West London, District Judge Kathryn Verghis said: 'The extract of the Psalm mentioning "my mother's womb"...was an act of protest of abortion. There were less controversial verses you could have chosen to display. I can come to no other conclusion that [the verse] was an act of disapproval [of abortion services].. an act prohibited [by the PSPO].'

Whilst admitting that the PSPO was 'a significant interference' of Mr Green's rights under articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention, she said those rights had to be weighed against individuals accessing abortion services. She concluded that, Mr Green's: 'Protest was peaceful...but your actions were not proportionate....I find you guilty as summoned.'

Mr Green, who is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre, said he will appeal the conviction to the Crown Court, saying: 'As a Christian, I should be able to preach freely all over the land. Psalm 139 is about how we all belong to God from conception.'

Book Review: Colonialism

Review by Tim Dieppe

Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning

By Nigel Biggar

William Collins, 2023 (£9.74, Amazon.co.uk)

Colonialism undoubtedly has a bad name. Everyone, it seems, is ashamed of colonialism and empire. Universities are falling over themselves in efforts to 'decolonise' their curricula. Oxford University students protest at the existence of a statue of Cecil Rhodes – citing fake quotations without any appreciation of the actual historical facts involved. While everyone criticises European colonialism, and empire, no one is at all interested in non-European empires or colonialism – whether past or present. So, we are ashamed of our history. But, as the author points out in the introduction, our enemies want us to feel guilt – since guilt can be exploited. So how much guilt should we feel for the past? What is the historical truth of the matter?

This is the question, that Regius Professor Emeritus of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford, Nigel Biggar, sets out to answer in this book. It is meticulously detailed. There are 297 pages of main text, followed by another 130 pages of notes in smaller font. Some of the notes are more than one or two pages long. Biggar seeks to interact with and respond to the leading recent critics of colonialism. He seeks the truth – whether politically correct or not. He explains his motivation in the introduction:

What is at stake is not merely the pedantic truth about yesterday, but the self-perception and self-confidence of the British today, and the way they conduct themselves in the world tomorrow. What is also at stake, therefore, is the very integrity of the UK and the security of the West. That is why I have written this book. (p7)

Biggar takes a self-consciously 'Christian ethical viewpoint' (p10). This includes the belief that humans are all equal in dignity and accountable to God for their actions. It also includes the belief that not all cultures are equal. Cultures can be superior or inferior to others in technological, intellectual, or moral respects (p11). Biggar explains further that he is not a pacifist and that he does not believe that social hierarchy is immoral. He believes that there is a requirement for government of some kind.

This book intends to be a moral assessment of British colonialism. Chapters are thematic rather than chronological and they cover issues such as: motivation for colonialism, slavery, cultural superiority and 'racism', 'conquest', 'genocide', 'exploitation', nationalism, and 'pervasive violence'. Each chapter considers the key accusations and then examines the history and the motives, and in most cases finds the allegations to be false or wildly exaggerated.

I particularly liked the chapter on slavery in which Biggar points out that slavery, far from being unique to the British Empire, was universal. The Islamic slave trade exceeded the trans-Atlantic slave trade in sheer numbers. Africans had been enslaving other Africans for centuries. Biggar explains the Christian motivation for abolishing slavery, and notes that 'about 30 percent of the adult male population of Britain signed anti-slavery petitions' in 1791 (p55). Biggar assesses the economics of the slave trade and its abolition and concludes:

By any more reasonable assessment of profits and direct costs, the nineteenth-century costs of suppression were certainly bigger than the eighteenth-century benefits. (p62)

He cites a study concluding that Britain's effort to suppress the Atlantic slave trade (alone) in 1807-67 was 'the most expensive example [of costly international moral action] recorded in modern history.' (p62).

Biggar frequently notes the influence of evangelical Christians, pointing out that Charles, the Marquess Cornwallis, appointed Governor-General and commander-in-chief in India, was known to be an evangelical Christian, and actively worked against exploitation and corruption. His six following successors were all 'inspired by the same creed' and 'saw themselves not as India's conquerors but as its emancipators.' (p30).

Queen Victoria's proclamation to the Princes, Chiefs and People of India in 1858 included these words:

We desire no extension of Our present territorial Possessions; and... We shall sanction no encroachment on those of others... Firmly relying Ourselves on the truth of Christianity... We disdain alike the Right and Desire to impose Our Convictions on any of Our Subjects. We declare it to be our Royal Will and Pleasure that none be in any wise favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of the Religious Faith or Observances; but that all alike shall enjoy equal and impartial protection of the Law. (p225)

Sadly, today it is hard to imagine our government proclaiming that it firmly relies on the truth of Christianity!

His measured conclusions on the subject of racism are this:

In sum, the British Empire did contain some appalling, racial prejudice, but not only that. It also contained respect, admiration and genuine, well-informed, costly benevolence. Indeed, from the opening of the 1800s until its end, the empire's policy towards slaves and native peoples were driven by the conviction of the basic human equality of all the members of all races. It cannot fairly be said, therefore, that the empire was centrally, essentially racist. (p91)

Biggar examines famous incidents such as the Amritsar massacre in detail. The fact that General Dyer was summarily deprived of his command and informed that he would be offered no further employment shows that his actions were not supported by the authorities. Not only that, but the British government and the government of India also forthrightly repudiated his actions. This response is not that of an empire which celebrates wanton violence. In fact, in every notable case of British imperial military violence, Biggar finds that 'the imperial and colonial governments repudiated the abuse and resolved to stop it.' (p272) This is in sharp contrast with, for example, Nazi death camps or the Soviet Gulag, or indeed much of the violence of any other empire in world history.

Biggar's final chapter includes a discussion of the issue of reparations. It is interesting to note that 'there are no historical grounds for the claim that African chiefs generally opposed the slave trade.' In fact, some West African states have withdrawn their support for the 'reparations movement' when faced with claims of African complicity (p279). The issue is undoubtedly complex, but Biggar is surely right to conclude that 'our focus should lie on addressing present injustices rather than trying to untangle historic injustices.' (p282)

Finally, Biggar concludes:

Anti-colonialism is not a reliable guide to Britain's colonial past, as it encourages us to draw the wrong lessons for the future. (p296)

For a real-life example, he mocks the highly privileged Oxford students who protest the statue of a British imperialist from Cape Town who died over a century ago, whilst turning a blind eye to contemporary injustices and exploitation in South Africa where unemployment has tripled, and there are riots when its leader is convicted of refusing to answer charges of corruption (p296).

As Christians, we should recognise the importance of a good understanding of history. Much of the Bible is inspired by history providing an account of the origins of humanity and the nation of Israel.

This shows the importance that God himself attaches to history.

The questions raised in this book are moral questions about the character of the British Empire. Like it or not, the British Empire was hugely influential and we and many others around the world continue to live with the consequences and legacy of that empire. Anti-colonialists subscribe to a particular moral perspective on the history of the empire, and this leads them to moral conclusions about monuments, reparations, and how history and other subjects should be taught today. As Christians, we cannot avoid making moral judgments about all these things, and this book provides a very helpful analysis and critique of popular moral claims made about the empire.

Biggar makes no claim of moral perfection for the British Empire, and no such claim should be made for it, or indeed for any other nation or empire. What he does is respond to some of the most serious moral charges made against the empire by modern anti-colonialists. As Christians, we need to reach our own conclusions about the morality of the British Empire and how that should affect contemporary culture. We have a responsibility to ensure that we are speaking as truthfully as possible on such issues, and not just parroting modern fashionable preconceptions or simplistic narratives. This requires an analysis of the historical facts to assess the merits of such claims, which is precisely where this book is helpful.

I learnt a lot from reading this book and had some of my misconceptions corrected. Anti-colonialism is all pervasive in our culture today and this is a very helpful antidote. For Christians seeking to engage with our contemporary self-understanding of the history of the nation and its consequences, it comes highly recommended.

Tim Dieppe is Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern.

Book Review: Christianity and the New Eugenics

Review by Tim Dieppe

Christianity and the New Eugenics: Should We Choose To Have Only Healthy Or Enhanced Children?

By Dr Calum MacKellar

IVP, 2020 (£13.42, Amazon.co.uk)

What's in a word?

Eugenics has a bad name. So much so that the Eugenics Education Society changed its name in 1989 to the Galton Institute after Sir Francis Galton who first coined the term 'eugenics'. More recently, in 2022 it changed its name again to the Adelphi Genetics Forum in order to disassociate itself from some of Galton's ideas. No one, it seems, wants to be associated with eugenics.

But what does the word actually mean? A term coined in the 1880s, MacKellar defines 'eugenic developments' as 'selective strategies or decisions aimed at affecting, in manners considered to be positive, the genetic heritage of a child, a community, or humanity in general.' (p2). Or, in simpler terms, eugenics is the selection of desired heritable characteristics in humans in order to improve future generations.

I don't remember ever hearing eugenics mentioned in church. While I have read several articles about eugenics, the only other book on the subject that I have read is G.K. Chesterton's *Eugenics and Other Evils*, first published over 100 years ago. But eugenics has not dropped off the scene. We live in a society that actively practices eugenics whilst never talking about it. There is therefore a desperate need for us to engage with the new eugenics and this book seeks to help Christians do just that.

A real concern

The author, Calum MacKellar, is an academic with expertise in genetic ethics. He was formerly Associate Editor of *The New Bioethics*, and is now Director of Research of the Scottish Council on Bioethics. He is Visiting Professor in bioethics at St Mary's University in London and a member of a UK National Health Service Research Ethics Committee in Edinburgh. He is also an ordained elder of the Church of Scotland, and has served on its Church and Society Council. Dr MacKellar also regularly writes for *Affinity's Social Issues Bulletin*.

MacKellar is clearly concerned that 'many Christians do not comprehend why, if given the choice, they should not be able to decide what kind of children they want... Why not avoid bringing a child into existence with a serious disorder?' (p1). I am sure he's right. This kind of practice is not recognised as eugenics today.

Within the general definition of eugenics, there is broadly 'negative eugenics', aimed at avoiding an undesired genetic heritage in a child, community or humanity in general, such as enforced sterilisation, marriage restrictions, or selecting out undesirable embryos. And then there is 'positive eugenics', aimed at promoting a desired genetic heritage such as selecting desirable sperm from a sperm bank, certain forms of marriage counselling or promoting birth rates in biologically desirable parents (p5). Once defined in this way, we can start to realise just how widespread eugenic practices and thinking are in our contemporary society.

Compulsory sterilisation

It is important to remember that eugenics didn't always have a bad name. A century ago, eugenics

was fashionable with high profile supporters in the UK, including Sir Winston Churchill, Arthur Balfour and Neville Chamberlain. The UK came close to, but in the end did not, enact compulsory sterilisation of those considered unworthy of having children.

In the USA, an estimated 27 states enacted forced sterilisation laws, and by 1940, more than 35,000 men and women had been castrated or sterilised (p22). American sterilisation policies continued almost unopposed until the 1970s. Supporters of eugenics in the USA included President Theodore Roosevelt, and some 200 Protestant clergymen who refused to marry couples without a medical certificate proving that they were both mentally and physically healthy (p20).

Eugenics and the Nazis

It was the eugenic policies of Nazi Germany that gave eugenics the bad name it has today. From 1934 to 1939, some 350,000 German citizens were compulsorily sterilised by the Nazi regime because they were deemed 'unfit' to have children (p13). In addition, there was the euthanasia programme which enabled 'mercy killing' for those with a 'life unworthy of life'.

Some 70,000 Germans were killed for these reasons (p13-14). Sadly, many German Christian clergy supported eugenic ideology, though there was strong opposition from the Catholic Church. The aim, of course, was to develop a 'master race'. 'Non-Aryan' women were encouraged to have abortions, while it was a capital offence to perform an abortion on an 'Aryan' woman unless you could prove the child had a disorder (p14).

Made in the image of God

After guiding us through this disturbing history, MacKellar makes a Christian case against eugenics by taking a close look at what it means to be in the image of God, and examining all the arguments made in favour of and against eugenics. He argues that the property of being in the image of God is intrinsic to being human. 'Thus, the very definition of a human person is a being who reflects the image of God.' (p36). Therefore, there is a radical equality of all people, regardless of ability, age, gender, ethnicity or indeed genetic defects.

However, in our increasingly anti-Christian society, this is not how people are valued. Today in the UK, as MacKellar points out, more than 90% of fetuses diagnosed with Down's syndrome are aborted. Some are even aborted for fully reversible disorders such as cleft lip. While these eugenic abortions may account for only 1% of all abortions in the UK, they are resulting in an effective genocide of people with certain genetic traits (p58). MacKellar also points out how this mentality instrumentalises children, viewing them as products to satisfy our own desires rather than people of inherent inestimable worth.

Eugenic decisions

The last section of the book discusses the various ways in which eugenic selection is practised today. These include fairly obvious things like sex selection, egg or sperm selection, or 'saviour siblings'. But then there are less obvious procedures like genetic selection of partners, genome editing, or deciding to have more or less, or no children. For example, MacKellar argues that prospective parents deciding not to have children because they are informed of the risks that the child may have a disability may well be a eugenic decision (p68). In each case, MacKellar discusses the arguments for and against and exposes the eugenic mentality behind the practice.

The question is, do we really believe that all children are equally valuable regardless of disability?

MacKellar, in conclusion, states: 'Christians are, therefore, called to welcome unconditionally, without choosing, every kind of child into existence, irrespective of their biological characteristics, even if they have very short and challenging lives of suffering.' (p180). This reminds me of Sarah Williams' superb personal account in *The Shaming of the Strong* (Kingsway 2006), of carrying a

severely deformed baby through to term against the advice of all the medics who pushed her to have an abortion. She felt God's calling to mother the baby, which she did at great personal cost through its very short life. Her mentality is very much against the spirit of the age.

Prevalence of eugenics

Mackellar shows us that while eugenics may have a bad name today, eugenic thinking and practice are nevertheless very evident and prevalent across our culture. The new eugenics, however, is rooted in exactly the same ideology as the old eugenics. It is sheer hubris to suggest that we have learnt from the past and will not repeat the same practices.

If you have never really thought about the new eugenics, you really should. This book provides a very helpful introduction and overview of the issues. I hope it gets a wide readership.

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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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