

SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

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**Why should Christians care
about free speech?**

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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Freedom of speech

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

Why should Christians care about free speech?

By Daniel Friery

Free speech can be a thorny issue. We are rightly concerned about the threats to Gospel freedom posed by laws threatening free speech: the Online Safety Act, proposed legislation on conversion therapy, and amendments to hate crime legislation, to name just a few. But on the other hand, we can rightly feel uncomfortable with the vile content awash on social media.

How are we to respond as Christians? Should Christians defend all free speech? I offer these five reflective angles as a starting point to begin thinking through this important issue.

1. A Creational Case: Freedom to speak is granted by God

Speech is a precious gift from God. It is part of what distinguishes us as humans, made in the image of God. As God is a communicative Being, so we too are communicative beings. Of course, this is by way of analogy. God's speech is not a matter of syllables sounding and then dying away – his Word is eternal. Nevertheless, we understand the accomplishment of God's Word:

- It nurtures relationships, principally within the Trinity but secondarily with his creatures (John 1:1);
- It communicates truth, expressing his own being (Proverbs 2:6; John 1:14; 2 Timothy 3:16);
- It exercises dominion through its creative power (Genesis 1:3-4; Psalm 33:9).

If human speech is a sharing in this aspect of the divine nature, then our speech has a similar end. Fulfilling relationships (Ephesians 4:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:11), increased knowledge (Proverbs 1:5-7; Romans 10:14-17), true self-expression (Psalm 142:1), and righteous dominion – which incorporates our work, creative endeavours and advocacy for justice (Genesis 2:18-20; Proverbs 31:8) – are the goods that speech can accomplish.

In passing, it may be helpful to note how these ends correspond closely to the cultural mandate given by God in Genesis 1:28, to 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it' and to have 'dominion'. Thus, it is our moral duty to exercise speech to these ends. God intends us to speak.

2. A Natural Law Case: The government should ordinarily preserve that natural liberty

There is a natural order of things which precedes any human construct or government. God determines the blueprint for human flourishing. Nations lacking in liberty are those that invert this order and where a state presumes to determine *for itself* what is good for human flourishing, based upon its own ideological convictions. This is precisely what we see in the advance of 21st century cancel culture: 'good' is redefined and then censorship applied accordingly.

On the other hand, Christians have argued that liberty is built upon the foundation of natural law. The purpose of civil Government is to uphold the conditions whereby a person can pursue the happy ends for which they were created. As C.S. Lewis wrote:

The State exists to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden – that is what the State is there for.¹

The close connections between speech, the cultural mandate and human flourishing makes freedom of speech an integral part of liberty. If a government is too restrictive regarding speech, it risks trampling on God's purposes and leaving society a distorted shadow of all that it was intended to be.

This is obvious to us. A society where people can be reported to the police for saying the 'wrong thing' is one that breeds mistrust between people – thus destroying relationships, rather than establishing them. A law restricting free speech limits the human capacity to discern what should be said and thought – a key part of human maturity.

And righteous dominion too is threatened. Proverbs 31:8-9 shows the connection between dominion, speech and justice: 'Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.' Restriction on speech very quickly impacts on justice. Think of how, in our own nation, state enforcement of gender ideology has discouraged large swathes of the nation from speaking out against puberty blockers in what is now recognised as one of the greatest medical scandals of our time.

A right to 'freedom of speech' is therefore based upon the right to carry out God's commands and purpose in the world. Thus, freedom of speech can be defined as an *instrumental* good – it is good insofar as it enables man to live out his God-given duties. To put it another way, the State becomes illiberal when it curtails the right to live in that God-honouring way – with flourishing relationships, God-honouring worship and righteous enjoyment of the world – or compels ungodly speech or action.

Whilst it may seem counter-intuitive, any other foundation for freedom of speech either fails to support its weight or even undermines it.

A Utilitarian approach to freedom of speech which states that a person may say anything on condition that it causes no harm to others, raises significant questions around the definition of 'harm' – a conundrum that can only be resolved through appeal to a moral standard. This is illustrated in the Government's plans to pass a conversion therapy law. Their understanding of what is 'harmful' is determined by their own 'moral standard' that no person should be told that their sexual conduct or transgender identity is wrong.

Conversely, an absolutist approach to freedom of speech, which includes a right to engage in incitement to violence or gross obscenity, clearly opposes the purpose of speech itself in ultimately destroying society through physical or moral violence.

If we are going to counter the two extremes of our day – liberal cancel culture on the one hand, and the anarchic promotion of all that is evil on the other – then we need to grow in confidence in our Christian understanding of freedom of speech, resting upon natural law.

¹ Lewis, C S, *Mere Christianity*, William Collins, 2016, 199

3. An Anthropological Case: Free speech recognises man's suppression of the truth

In Romans 1, Paul teaches us how sinful man seeks to 'suppress the truth in unrighteousness' and instead seeks to cling with vehemence to his own creations and ideas. Consequently, the truth is always in a battle to be heard.

This universal human tendency should dispel any idea that Government is omniscient and can justly discern all that society should hear. The only difference between the individual deadening their conscience and the Government is that the latter has more tools and greater power to suppress.

We recognise that no government is morally neutral – they are constantly seeking to impose their values on society, often through control of speech. Christians must be vigilant about this reality and be proactive in defending the right of the truth to be heard. This includes being aware of any legislation that is passing through Parliament which may seek to take away our right to speech, protected under natural law. Our best counter then, as outlined in Romans 1, is an appeal to conscience.

4. An Epistemological Case: Free speech concords with humility and learning

All truth is grounded upon and presupposes God – his revelation is our epistemological foundation. This means that reason itself is founded upon God. Whether the Athenians in Acts 17 realised it or not, when they engaged in true reasoning they were thinking God's thoughts after him. Indeed, this is partly what Paul means when he says that God is 'not far from each one of us' (Acts 17:27). Their reasoning itself demonstrated the truth and existence of God – even though their hearts lay darkened to God.

This helps us to hold the place of debate in perspective. Through reasoning – which involves weighing up contrary arguments – the Athenians were sometimes able to come to a knowledge of true things. Reason was an essential instrument. But at the same time, we understand autonomous reason not to be the ultimate ground of that knowledge, which is the revelation of God alone through Scripture and nature.

This means that with the 19th century Utilitarian philosopher and poster boy for classical liberal proponents of free speech, John Stuart Mill, we can affirm the utility of engaging in dialectic discussion. But as Christians, we can have a certainty of what is true beyond (though not entirely detached from) this – based upon a Pneumological foundation, as the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. Thus, the Christian is not hoping merely to 'stumble upon' the truth.

Nevertheless, this does not at all remove the importance of a Christian discussing, debating and hearing contrary views. Indeed, they are essential to helping buttress and increase our confidence in the faith. The church has always professed, in the famous words of Anselm of Canterbury, 'I believe in order to understand'.² Our starting point is belief in what is said, but then through that prism we grow in understanding as we see contrary arguments in the light of it. Our scholastic Christian forebears therefore had great confidence in engaging with a full panoply of arguments – e.g. from classical

² *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works, Proslogion*, Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 87

pagans and Islamic sources – some of which were true, others not, to show the reasonableness of faith and so build greater confidence in the truth.

Thus, Christians should not be afraid to hear arguments that are not true because in God's purpose they serve to strengthen and sharpen their faith.

To this extent, John Stuart Mill was absolutely right when he argued in his 1859 essay *On Liberty* that understanding, born out of polemic, helps develop our ideas from dead dogma to living truths and convictions. And this is exactly the place that God wants us to be, as Paul writes in Romans 14:5: 'Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind' in matters of conscience. This, in turn, assists us in our apologetics as we seek to engage with an ever-confused world – just as it did Paul in debating the Athenian philosophers in the Areopagus in Acts 17.

This reasonable approach also helps give us credence in the eyes of the world. It is often said that we live in a social media age, where people exist in their own echo chambers and engage with 'the other side' through strong, unsympathetic rhetoric. But by being willing to test our ideas against alternative points of view, we are demonstrating counter-cultural humility.

Whilst we are assured of the truth insofar as our beliefs correspond to the Word of God, the whole of Christian tradition calls us to recognise our own fallibility. As 16th century Italian Reformer Jacobus Acontius (an important historical figure in arguments around toleration) expressed it: 'Forasmuch as it is a property of Mankind to err, no one person that is but a mere man ought to be so confident, as to persuade himself he cannot err...'.³

A wise Christian will embrace Proverbs 12:15: 'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.' Christian learning is rooted in humility, and this relies upon hearing ideas with which we disagree.

5. A Prudential Case: Christian prudence suggests a pragmatic case for free speech

History is full of examples of those who have sought to suppress ideas through force but found that their measures served only to advance them. For example, the pre-Constantinian Roman Emperors wished to suppress Christianity. But they quickly learnt that coercive suppression was ineffective. Eusebius records how, eventually, Emperor Marcus Aurelius had to do an about-turn because he realised that coercive suppression of Christians was achieving precisely the opposite of this intention:

*You get them into serious trouble by your accusations of atheism [against the Christians], and thereby strengthen their existing determination: and if accused they would choose apparent death rather than life, for the sake of their own god. And so they are the real winners, when they part with their lives rather than agree to carry out your commands.*⁴

As Christians there are ideas that we well might wish would disappear. However, if we are prudent, we will learn from this and other examples that the defeat of ideas is not always best served through censorship.

3 See <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A75849.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext> as at 11 March 2025

4 Eusebius: *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, Penguin, 1989, 115

Such prudential arguments are important. Pragmatism can often be seen as a dirty word amongst Christians today. However, we must give it its right place, under the domain of Christian prudence. Prudence uses practical reason to discern our true good in each circumstance and helps us choose the right means of achieving it.

The goal of civil Government is, as we argued above, for a society to flourish in accordance with virtue. Any means we use must be suited to achieve this end, whilst being in accord with the Word of God.

In his *City of God*, Augustine defines virtue as 'rightly ordered love'.⁵ Government, he argues, can promote this end by the coercive force of justice helping people reorder their loves to the benefit of human flourishing. But its effectiveness will certainly depend on the matter at hand.

Take, for a modern example, the law around wearing a seatbelt. In punishing this offence, the State are partially trying to force the individual to think about which they value more highly: their freedom not to wear a seatbelt or the money they would lose in a fine. The law is largely effective because most people decide that their money is more valuable to them than defying the State.

But the force of the punishment can break down the higher the love – a fine to outlaw a particular religious belief is likely to be ineffective. This is because a person's love for their god is, by definition, nearly always going to be higher than their love of keeping their money. In fact, such a law may be counter-productive, and increase the fervency of their love for their religious belief. Thus, it would be imprudent.

Nevertheless, making prudent decisions in such matters can be difficult. Above all, Christians should want righteousness to flourish. It should cause us to pray for wisdom in all these matters. But this prudential argument also leaves us with a challenge: if suppression is not the right answer, how can we work to make our speech most effective and persuasive to help people love the right things under God?

Daniel Friery studied History at the University of Oxford and works in Public Affairs at The Christian Institute.

⁵ Augustine: *The City of God*, Penguin, 1972, Book XV, chapter 22, 637

Freedom to Criticise Other Religions

By Tim Dieppe

Paul in Athens

When Paul was in Athens, he was greatly distressed by the sight of all the idols there (Acts 17:16-34). So, he went to the marketplace and reasoned with the people there on a daily basis. He was accused of 'advocating foreign gods' and brought before the council of the Areopagus. There, he criticised the very concept of temples, proclaiming that God 'does not live in temples built by human hands.' He also criticised the concept of idols: 'we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill.' Indeed, the Athenians were wrong to worship multiple gods. There is only one God 'who made the world and everything in it.' Paul told the Athenians they needed to repent of their sinful ways and worship the one true God. He warned that a day is coming when 'he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed,' and that he has 'given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.'

The accusation against Paul of 'advocating foreign gods' was a dangerous one. It was well known that Socrates had been on trial in Athens, at least in part for introducing 'new gods' to the Athenians. The trial of Socrates resulted in the death penalty. Rowe argues that the connections are strong enough to assume that Luke was deliberately likening Paul to Socrates and reminding his readers of the 'Athenian reputation for enforcing the death penalty upon those who brought in new gods.'¹ Paul was therefore fortunate not to receive the same treatment.

The mandate to criticise other religions

Paul was fearlessly challenging and confronting the false religion that he saw in Athens. He presented them with the true religion of one God who died and rose from the dead. Paul was merely doing his job as a church planter, a missionary, and an evangelist. Indeed, it is impossible for an evangelist to do his or her job without criticising other religions. We are, after all, meant to 'demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.' (2 Cor 10:5). How can this be done without criticising false religions?

The early church did this all the time. In Damascus, Paul 'confounded the Jews ... by proving that Jesus was the Christ.' (Acts 9:22). In Ephesus, Apollos 'powerfully refuted the Jews' (Acts 18:22). In Ephesus, Paul 'spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading'. Since we are all instructed to 'do the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim 4:5), we should all be confronting and criticising false religions at least on occasion.

How we are losing the freedom to criticise Islam

Up until recently, the law has protected the ability of evangelists or others to criticise other religions. The Waddington amendment to the Public Order Act reads:

¹ C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Greco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 32

Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.²

Notice that criticism, and even ridicule or insult of other religions, is specifically included here, as is proselytising.

Nevertheless, when Christian evangelist Hatun Tash boldly confronted the Muslims at Speakers' Corner by provocatively mocking Islamic teaching, she was wrongfully arrested on more than one occasion by the police, who prefer to arrest her rather than respond to the violent threats of the Muslims. After receiving £10,000 compensation from the police for a wrongful arrest for the second time, Tash said:

We don't live in Pakistan; we don't live in Saudi Arabia. I am Christian and by default I believe that Muhammad is a false prophet. I should be allowed to say that in the UK without being stabbed or repeatedly arrested.³

Indeed. And one would have thought that would be obvious to everyone, not least the police, but instead the police seem intent on enforcing sharia law by arresting Tash and anyone else they believe is insulting Islam.

Street preacher Ian Sleeper was arrested for holding a sign which read: 'Love Muslims, Hate Islam, Jesus is love and hope.'⁴ It is not an offence to say, 'hate Islam', and it is clear in context that Sleeper did not intend any hatred towards Muslims. Nevertheless, Sleeper was arrested and later released without charge. He sued the police for wrongful arrest but lost his case in the High Court in January. Christian Concern intends to help him appeal. It cannot be right that you can be arrested for criticising Islam.

When a man burned pages from the Qur'an in Manchester in February, police were quick to arrest him and charge him. Burning pages from a book is not an offence in this country. But when it comes to the Qur'an, the police will inevitably get involved. The police then disgracefully released the perpetrator's name, street address and local area, putting his life in danger.⁵

When a pupil had his copy of a book knocked onto the floor at a school in Wakefield in 2023, four pupils were suspended!⁶ The police even got involved. How come? Well, this wasn't just any book – it was the Qur'an. The headteacher said: 'Their actions did not treat the Quran with the respect it should have, so those involved have been suspended and we will be working with them to ensure they understand why their actions were unacceptable.' The Qur'an, you see, must be treated with respect in this country.

2 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64/section/29J>

3 <https://christianconcern.com/news/preacher-wins-payout-after-arrest-for-damaging-her-own-quran/>

4 <https://christianconcern.com/news/preacher-to-appeal-after-arrest-for-criticising-islam/>

5 <https://freespeechunion.org/manchester-police-name-quran-burning-suspect-despite-threat-to-life/>

6 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64757799>

The APPG definition of Islamophobia

The City of Wakefield council has formally adopted the APPG definition of Islamophobia.⁷ Perhaps this is why the police were so keen to get involved, and there was such concern about the Qur'an being treated with respect.

The APPG definition of Islamophobia reads as follows:

Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

At once, you can see many problems with this definition. For a start, Islam is not a race. Therefore, Islamophobia can't be a form of racism. Secondly, 'Muslimness' is incredibly vague, and in case it wasn't vague enough, 'perceived Muslimness' means that if someone perceives you to be Islamophobic, then by definition you are. Nevertheless, this definition has been formally adopted by the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid Cymru, and dozens of local councils.

Much more can be said about just how problematic this definition is for free speech when it comes to Islam. I wrote a report for the Free Speech Union, entitled: *Banning Islamophobia: Blasphemy by the Backdoor*.⁸ Professor Richard Dawkins was kind enough to write the foreword. There I outline multiple criticisms of the APPG definition and ways in which it has been used to silence or punish those who criticise Islam.

The government was forced to admit last year that the APPG definition of 'Islamophobia' conflicts with the Equality Act since, as we all know, Islam is not a race.⁹ No organisation that I know of has since dropped the definition on the back of this rather devastating admission.

Instead, the government is planning to set up a council tasked with proposing an official definition of Islamophobia.¹⁰ Dominic Grieve, who wrote the foreword to the original APPG report proposing the definition, is said to be recommended to chair the new council, which does not bode well for it recommending a definition friendly to free speech. Furthermore, Qari Asim is said to be shortlisted for the council even though he was explicitly dropped as an advisor to the previous government in 2022 for protesting against the film 'Lady of Heaven'. The letter sent to him withdrawing his appointment states: 'This clear involvement in a campaign to limit free expression is incompatible with the role of a government adviser.'¹¹ By shortlisting him for the new council, the government appears to have no regard for preserving freedom of expression when it comes to Islam.

Conclusion

The freedom to criticise other religions is essential for the work of evangelism. While there is strong protection in law, the freedom to criticise Islam in particular is being eroded. Police have a track record of arresting people they view as insulting Islam, notwithstanding the Waddington amendment.

7 <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Islamophobia-Revisited.pdf>

8 <https://freespeechunion.org/banning-islamophobia-blasphemy-law-by-the-backdoor/>

9 <https://christianconcern.com/comment/islamophobia-definition-in-conflict-with-equality-act/>

10 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/02/03/angela-rayner-set-rules-islam-free-speech-dominic-grieve/>

11 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1081996/DLUHC_to_lmam_Qari_Asim_-_11062022.pdf

The widespread adoption of the notorious APPG definition of Islamophobia is an additional threat to freedom of speech. Government plans to formulate an official definition of Islamophobia will doubtless further serve to curb the freedom to criticise Islam. As Christians, we should be mindful of these trends, whilst also seeking to push back and counter them wherever possible. Fear should not be a motivating factor when engaging Muslims evangelistically, no matter what the law says.

Tim Dieppe is Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern, where he responds to Government consultations, interprets policy trends and helps to inform and equip the Church to engage with cultural and political issues. Tim holds an MA in Kingdom Theology.

Free Speech in Education: A Christian Perspective

By Lizzie Harewood

My heart sank when I heard that in her first act as Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Philipson was to revoke the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act. The act was a vital piece of legislation protecting open debate and the free exchange of ideas for students and academics.

In the UK – a modern, liberal society, there has, until perhaps recently, been an assumption that free speech is good for many reasons – but particularly for the advancement of knowledge and the avoidance of tyranny. As the old adage goes, the best disinfectant for bad ideas is to bring them into the light. A truly tolerant society surely seeks to facilitate understanding between those who disagree – especially vital in our educational institutions. And as a Christian, I believe that freedom of speech is a good and noble concept which has enabled the proclamation of the gospel in our nation – and even our schools – for many years.

However, surveying the state of academic freedom in our educational institutions has deepened my unease over our Secretary of State's decision.

There is a problem

The UK's Global Academic Freedom ranking in 2023 marked its worst position in history, continuing a worrying decline over several years. The UK is one of the few countries in the West where academic freedom has diminished since 1973 – an alarming trend that signals a troubling failure in the education system and the erosion of critical thinking. Ranking lower than Peru, Burkina Faso, and Georgia, the UK's great universities appear to be failing to uphold academic and cultural freedom – something so crucial where ideas are being formed, developed and taught.

Christian beliefs and socially conservative values are increasingly under scrutiny, making it difficult for Christians to speak out in universities. Yet the targeting of academics like Kathleen Stock, a gender-critical feminist who resigned from the University of Sussex after student protests against her book challenging gender identity's primacy over biological sex, highlighted that censorship and restrictions on free expression are not limited to Christians.

And what's happening at the Higher levels of Education is simply a more sophisticated development of what is happening at the lower levels of education. Or, it is probably more accurate to say that what's happening in higher education is trickling down into primary and secondary education; the prevailing academic narratives and cultural standpoints are shaping the way education is delivered at all levels. Secularism and progressivism have crept into curriculum, pedagogy and staffroom politics, and despite there being a privileged legal place for Christianity in schools, it is the censorious mood of our age that chills the expression of Christian perspectives.

But what *should* free speech mean in Education?

Most people with a degree of common sense would agree that free speech should not be an absolute right – nor is it under the law. The way free speech functions must also be adapted to different settings. What is appropriate in a classroom differs from what teachers or students may express

in their personal time. Similarly, the boundaries of free speech in higher education should not be identical to those in primary and secondary schools.

While free speech has an important role in academia and the online world, the classroom is not a place for needlessly offensive or crude language. Complex or controversial theories should also be introduced with care, ensuring that children are mature enough to engage in reasoned debate. Likewise, ideological materials should not be promoted without presenting a balanced range of perspectives – at least, that is what one would expect.

The uncomfortable reality in schools is that while Christians may hold Biblical views on gender, marriage, and abortion, they operate in an awkward system that permits Christian input but denies its absolute truth. In state-funded schools, insisting on a particular perspective on such issues as 'correct' – with implied consequences for rejecting it – may be unlawful, breaching the 1996 Education Act's requirement for impartiality. Most Christians are acutely aware of this.

The reality is that the dominant voices in the classroom when it comes to sensitive topics are almost always ideologically progressive. And the voices that get silenced are almost exclusively socially conservative or represent a Christian worldview.

Christians at the coal face

As many regular readers of this Bulletin will know, Kristie Higgs, a pastoral assistant, was dismissed from her role at Farmor's School in 2019 after posting private Facebook comments criticising the teaching of LGBT relationships in primary schools. After six years of legal battles, she was finally vindicated at the Court of Appeal, which ruled that the school had discriminated against her because of her Christian beliefs.

Dr Bernard Randall, a Christian chaplain, lost his job at a private school and was reported to the government's anti-terror watchdog after delivering a chapel sermon that encouraged respect and open debate on identity ideologies. His sermon was a response to teaching from the charity 'Educate and Celebrate' during student sessions on 'smashing heteronormativity'.

In 2023, the Association of Christian Teachers (ACT) surveyed Christian teachers about Relationships and Sex Education, revealing responses that aligned with trends illuminated in high profile cases such as Kristie's and Bernard's. 30% of respondents stated that their curriculum taught gender identity as fact, while only 31% reported a 'balance of opinions' in the curriculum when discussing contentious topics like abortion and feminism. Many respondents' schools engaged extensively with ideological groups and their materials, such as Stonewall and Mermaids.

But what was perhaps most illuminating was some of the qualitative information given by Christian teachers:

'I was expected to deliver material on sex education that did not include any reference to marriage, even as one option amongst several.'

'I was asked to teach PSHE/RSE avoiding heteronormative language and to celebrate and affirm underage sex and to encourage children to explore their sexuality. I made an official complaint, and the school hired a barrister to investigate me. The barrister reported I was unfit to teach PSHE/RSE and would need further training.'

'I was allowed not to teach elements of RSE due to my beliefs.'

'There is the playing of all sorts of YouTube videos to illustrate points or introduce non-traditional views on sexuality, such as testimonies of young people with multiple sexual partners from a young age portrayed as an accepted norm and something to be considered as unproblematic.'

'Staff have been told in training that children are whatever gender they want to be, and this is portrayed as the only legitimate view that can be held within school.'

'A big concern of mine is the view of many colleagues of Christianity as a white male oppressor religion (despite the picture of faith in Africa or Catholic Church congregations saying the opposite).'

So whilst it appears that progressive views on various issues appear to be welcomed, more conservative perspectives, including Christian views, are often prohibited – even if they express those views in a moderate, restrained manner and within a balanced framework. And the revelation that Christians are sometimes stopped from teaching certain topics *because of their beliefs* is surely cause for alarm. Are traditional Biblical views permitted a 'place at the table' alongside other ideologies? The answer according to statutory provision is 'yes', but in practice, this is not necessarily the case.

So how should we navigate concerns about free speech in schools?

Here are three key takeaways for application:

1. Remember that free speech is a privilege we value but cannot demand

God has been very good to Christians over many years – particularly in the realm of education. We should honour the significant impact of churches and individuals within state schools over centuries. Opportunities to speak about Christianity in assemblies, clubs, and RE are still protected by law – an expression of God's kindness. However, the Bible does not guarantee Christians the right to free speech; in fact, it suggests the opposite. Jesus calls his followers to expect persecution: 'Remember what I told you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.' (John 15:20)

2. We must value and make use of this privilege

Although we should not take this privilege for granted, we must be willing to defend it. If Christianity's strong statutory status were lost to secularism in schools, we would not gain neutrality but simply replace one belief system with another. This is already happening where schools fail to meet their obligations. The legal requirements for RE and collective worship allow young people to explore Christianity's truth claims – an important educational practice given our Christian heritage and its status as a major world religion. It may be a case of 'use it or lose it', and with many schools functionally secular and struggling with religious illiteracy, local churches could provide a lifeline by supporting schools in delivering assemblies and RE lessons.

3. We must use this privilege wisely

When discussing free speech, it is easy to slip into 'culture wars' mode. But as Christians, we are called to a higher standard. We should not be deterred from speaking out simply because it makes us unpopular – Jesus never made popularity his goal. But nor should we offend for offence's sake.

As Ephesians 4:29 says, 'Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths.' Many are watching our witness, and speaking the truth in love is the Christian virtue of the moment if we are to win hearts to Christ and help influence society for good.

Ultimate consequences

Thankfully, after much pressure, the government made a partial U-turn on the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act I had been so concerned about. In January, the Department for Education confirmed it would proceed, albeit with unspecified amendments. I'm pleased – but not entirely convinced – that what William Hague described as 'comfort blankets of cancellation' will be decisively shown the door.

By shaping the political climate of the classroom, teachers subtly define what students see as reasonable speech. With impartiality sidelined, we risk raising a generation unable to engage with differing views – or one that rebels in extreme ways. Avoiding perspectives that aren't *à la mode* only fosters a centralised approach to accepted speech, eroding diversity of thought, freedom of expression, and ultimately, free speech itself.

In the worst-case scenario, we may close the door to many faithful and gifted Christian teachers – and potentially, to the gospel itself.

And what a grievous disservice to our nation's children that would be.

Lizzie Harewood is the Executive Officer of the Association of Christian Teachers. She previously spent 12 years as a secondary school English teacher. Her passion is to equip Christians to be salt and light in the nation's schools. Outside of work, Lizzie supports her husband as he pastors an evangelical church in Yorkshire.

Silencing Conscience: What Scotland's Safe Access Zones Mean for Free Speech

By Stephen Allison

In February this year, Rose Docherty, a 74-year-old grandmother, was arrested outside an abortion clinic in Glasgow for silently holding up a sign which read 'coercion is a crime, here to talk, only if you want'. This was the first arrest under the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Act 2024 which introduced buffer zones around abortion clinics in Scotland, making it a criminal offence to engage in certain activities within these areas.

Whilst we can all agree that certain practices of intimidation and harassment outside abortion clinics are totally unacceptable, that is not really the issue being addressed by this legislation – since harassment, intimidation, and threatening behaviour were already criminal offences. Instead, the legislation targets any attempt to persuade individuals to change their minds or those silently praying while holding signs. Whether or not you believe Christians should be protesting or present outside abortion clinics, this is a significant infringement of the most fundamental human rights and sets a dangerous precedent.

What does the legislation entail?

The Act establishes safe access zones around medical facilities providing abortion services. Within these zones, it is illegal to engage in activities deemed to influence or interfere with individuals accessing or providing abortion services. This includes:

- Protests, demonstrations, or vigils related to abortion, whether silent or active.
- The offering of advice, information, or alternatives to abortion, even if done peacefully and without coercion.
- Prayer or religious observance that could be seen as attempting to dissuade someone from having an abortion.

The legislation also applies to private premises (whether homes or churches) within the zone if anything done from the private space can be seen or heard within the zone.

The legislation carries significant penalties, including fines and potential criminal records for those who breach the zones.

Concerns over freedom of expression

One of the most concerning aspects of the Act is its impact on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of conscience – fundamental rights in any democratic society. This law curtails the ability of individuals to express pro-life views in public spaces. Even silent prayer, a deeply personal act of faith, could now be criminalised within these zones.

Whilst giving evidence to the committee scrutinising the bill in the Scottish Parliament, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health suggested that private prayer amounts to silent judgement which can intimidate women and so should be criminalised. Whilst, it has been disputed whether silent prayer alone is covered by the restrictions, the MSP who proposed the legislation has stated that 'performative prayer' would be covered. The line is a narrow one between when someone is merely praying silently and when someone's actions become performative.

Freedom of expression is enshrined in both Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). While these rights are not absolute and can be restricted in the interests of public order, such restrictions must be proportionate. Criminalising peaceful speech and prayer goes beyond preventing harassment – it effectively creates censorship zones in which certain beliefs cannot be expressed.

Proponents of the law argue that safe access zones are necessary to protect women from distressing encounters when seeking abortion services. However, existing laws (e.g. breach of the peace) already prohibit harassment, intimidation, and obstruction. If harassment occurs, it should be addressed under laws already in place rather than imposing blanket bans that infringe upon civil liberties.

The principle of proportionality is key to any limitation on rights. In this case, the Act appears to extend beyond what is necessary to achieve its stated aim. It does not merely prohibit harassment (which is already illegal) but criminalises entirely peaceful actions. This overreach raises concerns about whether the law is being used to shut down moral and religious viewpoints that some find uncomfortable, rather than addressing actual harm.

The chilling effect

Whilst proponents will argue it is proportionate within a narrow zone around abortion clinics the issue is that it sends a signal – that certain topics should be off limits. This has a chilling effect on freedom of expression around abortion issues in general – compounding a situation where it is already very hard to openly discuss and debate abortion-related issues. Making it illegal to discuss abortion within an exclusion zone makes a statement to society that it is inappropriate to express pro-life views. There is already a lack of balance in the presentation of pro-choice and pro-life views in the media and political life in Scotland and this legislation reinforces the idea that it is wrong to express pro-life views.

This bill targets peaceful citizens, not because of anti-social behaviour but due to their pro-life views. Given Christian belief about the sanctity of all human life, the proposal also targets individuals because of their religion and belief. For many Christians and other faith groups, standing near abortion clinics to pray, offer support, or provide alternatives is an act of compassion and conscience. Criminalising such activities suggests that faith-based perspectives on life issues are unwelcome in the public sphere.

This legislation represents significant overreach on the part of the state and it seems the law is deliberately being used to shut down moral and religious viewpoints that some find uncomfortable, rather than addressing actual harm. Safe access zones are intended to silence those who hold opinions abortion advocates find 'offensive'. But as Lord Justice Sedley said 'Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having' (DPP v Redmond-Bate (1999) 163 JP 789; [2000] HRLR 249).

The impact on private spaces

As previously mentioned, the legislation also limits what can be done on private property if it is within the radius and could be seen or heard within the public land. This is a serious restriction of human rights, preventing someone from displaying posters, etc, on their private property. If someone was holding a prayer meeting in their home that could be seen through their window this could potentially be caught by the legislation.

The radius covered by the zones also includes churches, and they are concerned that the right of churches to preach and communicate their doctrines on their own property is being unjustly interfered with. One example discussed at the committee was whether a church displaying a general religious message such as 'Repent and Receive Forgiveness for Your Sins' could be caught by the legislation as an attempt to influence those entering an abortion clinic given the close association between the pro-life movement and Christianity.

The danger of expansion

The legislation introduces buffer zones of 200 metres around abortion clinics. However, the legislation includes the possibility of the Scottish Ministers extending these zones. They can designate other premises – this could include GP practices and pharmacies where abortion pills are distributed. The distance can also be extended and there is no limit on what size these buffer zones could cover. Most of Scotland could end up covered by safe access zones and this is an inappropriate grant of blanket powers to extend provisions, without parliamentary scrutiny.

Other areas of application

Whilst not all Christians would believe it wise or appropriate to engage in pro-life vigils that does not mean such actions should be banned. And the biggest issue with introducing safe access zones is that it sets a dangerous precedent for the state being able to ban both protests and efforts to persuade individuals to change their minds on contentious issues.

If the state can designate areas where certain moral or religious views cannot be expressed, what is to stop future restrictions on other contentious topics? Today, it is abortion; tomorrow, it could be debates on gender, sexuality, or euthanasia. Within a free society, it is vital that we are able to disagree and engage in discussions around sensitive topics without the state seeking to stamp out fundamental rights of freedom of expression. Freedom of expression must be defended consistently, even when it involves uncomfortable or controversial subjects. A free society does not silence dissent but engages with differing views through open discussion.

Conclusion

The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Act 2024 represents a significant shift in the balance between protecting access to services and preserving fundamental freedoms. While no one should face harassment outside a medical facility, the broad wording of this law risks criminalising peaceful, faith-based actions that pose no threat to public order. This law should concern all who value democracy, religious liberty, and the ability to engage in peaceful, public discourse. The right

response is not to silence voices of compassion and conscience but to foster a society where difficult issues can be discussed with grace, respect, and truth.

As Christians, we are called to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) – to stand for the sanctity of life while also showing compassion to those in difficult circumstances. The challenge before us is to continue advocating for both justice and mercy, ensuring that our voices are heard, our freedoms are protected, and the value of every human life is upheld.

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

Current Bioethics Issues - Spring 2025

By Dr Calum MacKellar (February 2025)

Westminster Parliament Accepts Assisted Dying at Second Reading

On the 29 November 2024, the House of Commons of the Westminster Parliament accepted, by 330 in favour to 275 against, the Second Reading of the *Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill*, which was introduced by Kim Leadbeater MP. If this Bill eventually becomes law, it will legalise assisted suicide in England and Wales for persons who (1) have the mental capacity to make such a decision, (2) have been given a terminal diagnosis and (3) are expected to die within six months. There are also layers of suggested safeguards involving doctors and judges.

This vote means that a majority of MPs in the House of Commons of the Westminster Parliament have, unfortunately, accepted the dangerous concept of a 'life unworthy of life', which is a notion that should never be accepted in a civilised society. Vulnerable people need to know that society is committed first and foremost to their well-being, even if this does involve expenditure of time, effort, and money.

Though the concept of autonomy is extremely important in medicine, there are times when the inherent value and worth of all human life, because it is created in the image of God, must take priority over autonomy for a civilised society to survive.

A similar vote in the Scottish Parliament is expected in the spring of 2025 but the Westminster outcome will have significant consequences for both Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Most recent (2023) numbers of births in England and Wales published

Official government statistics showed that there were 591,072 live births in England and Wales, which is the lowest number of births since 1977 (569,259). The total fertility rate in England and Wales dropped to 1.44 children per woman, its lowest value since records began in 1938. Wales and the North-West of England experienced the largest declines in total fertility rate compared with 2022.

The average age of fathers increased to 33.8, while mothers' average age remains stable at 30.9 compared with 2022. The report also indicated that age-specific fertility rates declined in almost all age groups.

Stillbirth rates remain stable in England at 3.9 stillbirths per 1,000 births, but in Wales rates have decreased from 4.4 in 2022 to 4.0. Stillbirth rates decreased in the Black, Mixed or multiple, and White ethnic groups for England and Wales compared with 2022. However, rates increased in the Asian and other ethnic groups.

Interestingly, Boxing Day (26 December) remained the least likely birth date for the 11th year in a row.¹

1 Office for National statistics, Births in England and Wales: 2023: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2023>

Development of Synthetic Human Eggs and Sperm

In January 2025, the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority examined the development of In-vitro gametes (IVGs), which are synthetic eggs or sperm cells that are created in the lab from genetically reprogrammed cells taken from the human body.² Such lab-grown eggs and sperm cells are being considered by Silicon Valley scientists who suggest that they could become a reality within a decade. This would enable:

1. The creation of very large numbers of embryos in the lab by a couple, whereby the 'best' ones (with desirable biological traits) could then be selected for implantation. In other words, a form of eugenics would develop enabling parents to have the best children 'of their own' (whatever this expression means)!
2. Enable same-sex couples to have biological children 'of their own' together. For example, one woman could provide the egg and the other woman the IVG sperm cells. After fertilisation in the laboratory through IVF (In Vitro Fertilisation), the resulting embryo could then be implanted into one of these women for gestation.
3. Reverse parenting for married couples who may want, for some reason, the husband to generate the egg and the wife the sperm cell.
4. Solo parenting, whereby a prospective mother could create her own IVG sperm and self-fertilised herself to become both the mother and the 'father' of her child.³
5. Multiplex parenting, whereby two couples produce two embryos through IVF in the laboratory and cells from these embryos are then used to derive IVG eggs and sperm. These would then be brought together through IVF to generate a final embryo, for whom the parents would be the embryos but with four living adult biological grandparents. This may be considered by a 'foursome' who want to create a new life together for some reason.

Very few Christian churches and theologians have yet considered the ethical perspectives of generating children using some of these procedures.

Unprecedented rise in women being prosecuted for ending their own pregnancies

It was reported, in January 2025, that six women have appeared in court over the past two years under the *Offences against the Person Act*. This is significant since only a handful of known convictions have occurred since this law was introduced in 1861.

Since the 1967 *Abortion Act*, a healthcare professional undertaking an abortion is not prosecuted if two doctors agree that continuing the pregnancy would represent a physical or mental health risk for the woman and the procedure is undertaken before 24 weeks of gestation. But the 1861 law was never repealed and it is still a criminal offence in England and Wales to procure an abortion with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

² Hannah Devlin, 'Technology for lab-grown eggs or sperm on brink of viability, UK fertility watchdog finds', *The Guardian*, 26 January 2025: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/jan/26/lab-grown-eggs-sperm-viability-uk-fertility-watchdog>

³ A very good 20 minute film on this topic can be found at: <https://annasmajdor.wordpress.com/film/>

The rise in the number of illegal abortions is very likely due to abortion drugs now being available at home (since the introduction of this possibility during the COVID pandemic) and women taking these drugs after the 24-week limit.

More than 30 groups, which represent about 800,000 healthcare professionals, are now calling for such prosecutions to stop, indicating that abortion should only be a healthcare issue and not a criminal one.⁴ This position, however, is extraordinary since the topic of abortion has always been both a healthcare and a human-rights matter. Indeed, any improper act by the mother or any other person intending to destroy a foetus constitutes a crime under the 1861 Act because this foetus is not considered to be devoid of moral status. This means that reducing abortion to essentially a healthcare matter, as is suggested by these healthcare professionals, would inappropriately distort the legal setting of abortion in England and Wales.

Only one doctor in Scotland is trained to undertake surgical abortions after 15 weeks

Surgical abortions are terminations of a foetus in which surgical instruments are used for a uterine evacuation, with the most common method being vacuum aspiration, which generally take place after 15 weeks of gestation. This is in contrast to medical abortions, in which drugs are used to induce the expulsion of an embryo/foetus from the womb. The majority of pre-9-week terminations are medical abortions.

In November 2024, however, it was indicated that only one doctor in Scotland has been trained to provide surgical abortion care to the UK legal limit of 24 weeks into a pregnancy.⁵ This means that many women have to go to England to obtain a surgical abortion after 15 weeks of gestation.

It remains unclear why Scotland's delivery of abortion services is more restrictive than other areas of the UK, with academic literature published in 2015 suggesting that beliefs relating to the moral status of the prenatal child, limited resources, and 'institutional inertia' being significant factors.⁶ In addition, a survey of practitioners at a conference for abortion care providers in Scotland, which was published in 2013, showed that only a quarter of participants were prepared to administer late abortion procedures, with lack of expertise, lack of medical centres, lack of support from senior hospital management, and nurses' unwillingness to participate in late abortions, all cited as reasons.⁷

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

4 Shanti Das, 'Unprecedented' rise in abortion prosecutions prompts call for law change from medical leaders', *The Guardian*, 12 January 2025: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/unprecedented-rise-in-abortion-prosecutions-prompts-call-for-law-change-from-medical-leaders>

5 Hannah Brown, 'Only one Scottish doctor is trained in surgical care to legal limit', *The Herald*, 3 November 2024, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24695831.one-doctor-can-provide-surgical-abortion-scotland-says-doctor/>

6 Pearson (2015) Abortion in Scotland (Dissertation MSc in Equality and Human Rights, University of Glasgow)

7 Cochrane and Cameron (2013) Attitudes of Scottish abortion care providers towards provision of abortion after 16 weeks' gestation within Scotland.

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.

Darlington Nurses

On 20 January 2025, the Darlington nurses gave evidence in court that they were 'intimidated' by a male colleague identifying as woman called 'Rose', after launching legal action against an NHS Trust that forced them to undress in front of him.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, the eight nurses at Darlington Memorial Hospital launched legal action against County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust after they were told they needed to be 're-educated' and 'more inclusive' after raising concerns to HR about having to change in front of a man.

Alarm from dozens of nurses, at least one of whom had experienced sexual abuse as a child and reported that she was having panic attacks after getting changed and being questioned by 'Rose' in the changing room, were ignored.

Instead, HR and The Trust's bosses dug in on their policy which allowed anyone who merely 'identified' as a woman to use the female changing room.

The nurses' case has had high-profile national and international media attention, with the nurses receiving public backing from J.K Rowling, health secretary Wes Streeting and leader of the Conservative Party, Kemi Badenoch.

On 20 January, Newcastle Employment Tribunal considered the application made by the Trust's legal team for reporting restrictions to prevent Rose's identity being made public.

'Rose' claimed that he needed anonymity because he was afraid of further media attention which would put him 'at risk' of being targeted with hostile online comments.

Two of the Darlington nurses who brought the challenge filed witness statements to rebut Rose's attempts to present himself as a 'victim' when he had escalated his intimidation of them at the hospital.

Bethany Hutchison said that since the nurses raised concerns about the Trust's changing room policy, Rose's 'behaviour changed' and 'we started to feel quite intimidated.'

After the legal claim was launched and the story appeared in the media, a sign with NHS logos was taped on to the female changing room door which said: 'INCLUSIVE CHANGING ROOM'.

The nurses were eventually given inadequate 'temporary' changing rooms, which are offices, while Rose continued to use the female changing room.

Mrs Hutchison said other nurses reported that Rose's behaviour was 'intimidating and completely inappropriate' with one saying that as they passed Rose in the corridor, he 'intentionally eyeballed them and walked towards them aggressively swinging keys.'

Bethany added that Rose unnecessarily asserted himself and creating a presence in the nurse's unit.

Due to this behaviour, Bethany said she was 'sceptical' about his claims of 'distress and anxiety' and questioned that if this was so, then why was he continuing to use the female changing rooms and unnecessarily appear on their unit?

Another Darlington nurse giving evidence said that Rose has failed: 'to consider the risk we and other women face every time he or another male is in our changing room. The Trust's policy puts us at risk. It is very important the public are aware of this.'

Rose also claimed that he is 'a private person', but the nurses in response submitted evidence that revealed him campaigning for Stonewall on Facebook, being a member of a 'Transgender s***tposting' group, and images of him appearing as a male and getting engaged to his girlfriend.

After initially indicating she would give an order on 20 January, Employment Judge Sharon Langridge said she would reserve judgment on whether to grant Rose further anonymity.

The hearing opened with the Trust's lawyers asking the Tribunal to use feminine pronouns to refer to 'Rose'. The nurses' barrister, Bruno Quintavalle, insisted that Rose was legally a male and he was instructed by the nurses to refer to him by masculine pronouns which reflected their case and the law of the land.

Throughout the hearing, Mr Quintavalle referred to Rose as 'he' while Employment Judge Langridge tried to compromise by saying 'they.'

First of its kind Trade Union

The nurses have launched the Darlington Nursing Union (DNU) after the hospital forced them to undress in front of a man who 'identifies' as a woman but openly says he is sexually active with his girlfriend.

The DNU is believed to be the first union of its kind, in that it is expressly founded on 'gender-critical' principle of defending the rights and dignity of women defined by reference to biological sex.

The male operating department practitioner, who openly declares that he does not take female hormones and is trying to get his girlfriend pregnant, says that he 'identifies' as a woman and is called 'Rose.'

NHS policies used by Darlington Memorial Hospital permit anyone who says they are female to use the staff female changing rooms.

One nurse, who experienced sexual abuse as a child, spoke of her shock and horror when she was approached in the dressing room. Having never spoken to 'Rose' before, semi-naked and with genitalia visible, she was asked three times: 'Are you not getting changed yet?'

The nurses are calling for government scrutiny on the NHS changing room policies which they say are putting them and women across the country 'at risk'.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, the nurses are pursuing their legal case against County Durham and Darlington Memorial Trust.

Kristie Higgs

Kristie Higgs, 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.

The dramatic six-year legal battle has been supported by the Christian Legal Centre from the beginning.

Kristie Higgs has now won her landmark free speech case at the Court of Appeal.

In a seminal judgment for Christian freedom and free speech, the Court of Appeal has reversed a ruling which defended the dismissal of Kristie Higgs from Farmor's School in Gloucestershire for raising concern on Facebook about extreme sex education and transgender ideology being taught in her son's Church of England primary school.

The groundbreaking decision, handed down on Wednesday 12 February by Lord Justice Underhill, Lord Justice Bean and Lady Justice Falk, re-examines and re-shapes England's law on religious discrimination.

Mrs Higgs, 48, was represented in court by barrister, Mr Richard O'Dair.

Ruling re-shapes the law on freedom of religion in the workplace

The ruling confirms that the Equality Act protects traditional Christian beliefs on social issues, such as opposition to the ideas of transgenderism and 'gender-fluidity' and opposition to same-sex marriage.

The authoritative judgment re-shapes the law on freedom of religion in the workplace. For the first time in employment law, the judgment has effectively established a legal presumption that any dismissal for an expression or manifestation of Christian faith is illegal.

It explained that the burden is on the employer to prove in the Employment Tribunal that any such dismissal can be objectively justified (not just that they believed it was justified) and was prescribed by law, proportionate and otherwise necessary in a democratic society to address a pressing social need.

The Court of Appeal has also ruled that such a dismissal would only be lawful if it was objectively justified as prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society.

'Disproportionate response'

Mrs Higgs' employer had argued during the case that its justification for sacking Mrs Higgs was not to do with her Christian beliefs but because of the language she used in the posts.

This argument, however, was rejected by the judges, who said in their ruling that Kristie's: 'dismissal was unquestionably a disproportionate response', and that 'even if the language of the re-posts passes the threshold of objectionability, it is not grossly offensive.'

They added that: 'There was no evidence that the reputation of the School had thus far been damaged: its concern was about potential damage in the future (see, again, the final paragraph of the passage in the dismissal letter quoted at para. 22 above). As it also accepted, there was no possibility that, even if readers of the posts associated the Claimant with the School, they would believe that they represented its own views.'

Any reputational damage would only take the form of the fear expressed by the complainant, namely that the Claimant might express at work the homophobic and transphobic attitudes arguably implicit in the language used. I accept that if that belief became widespread it could harm the School's reputation in the community, as the panel clearly thought. But the risk of widespread circulation was speculative at best. The posts were made on her personal Facebook account, in her maiden name and with no reference to the School. By the time of the hearing, several weeks after the posts were made, only one person was known to have recognised who she was.

Furthermore they have ruled that:

Even if readers of the posts might fear that the Claimant would let her views influence her work, neither the panel nor the ET believed that she would do so. There was no reason to doubt her assertion that her concern was specifically about the content of sex education in primary schools; that she 'wouldn't bring this into school'; and that she would never treat gay or trans pupils differently (see para. 16 above). There had indeed been no complaints about any aspect of her work for over six years.

The Court therefore overruled the earlier decision of Employment Appeal Tribunal to remit the case for a re-trial, and concluded: 'we should ourselves hold that the Claimant's dismissal constituted unlawful discrimination on the ground of religion and belief'.

'Ideological censorship illegal'

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

Free speech and religious liberty are not yet extinguished from the English law. The outcome of Kristie's case sets an important legal precedent for many years to come.

The Court of Appeal has confirmed, loud and clear, that ideological censorship at workplace is illegal, and any employer who tramples upon their employees' right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion breaks the law of the land.

VAT on schools

Christian schools, parents and pupils have launched an application for Judicial Review over the government's VAT tax raid on private and independent schools.

The 13 claimants seek a declaration that the government's amendment of the VAT Act 1994 is unlawful and is incompatible with their human rights.

The legal claim comes after [Chancellor Rachel Reeves](#) announced a draft bill on 29 July 2024, which included plans to pass legislation through the Finance Bill for the 2024/2025 Budget which will amend the VAT Act 1994.

Private schools across the country are already [beginning to close](#) after the policy began to take effect on 1 January 2025, despite significant opposition and several legal challenges.

Lawyers in the case say the government's move is unprecedented as education in the UK has never been taxed. They add that the government's proposed measure fails several key legal requirements and that there is an international consensus that compulsory school education is not to be taxed.

Lawyers representing the latest group to seek a judicial review of the VAT extension say that the measure disproportionately impacts parents, and in particular a set of Christian parents, who have chosen for their children to be educated in Christian schools which have predominantly Christian teachers and cover all subjects from a Christian worldview perspective.

The parents are claiming that the government is breaching their rights under Article 14 of the ECHR, the right to protection from discrimination.

One parent bringing the claim, bookseller Stephen White, 40, chose to live in one of the most deprived areas of Bradford so that he could afford to send his four children to Bradford Christian School based in the Yorkshire city.

Mr White, whose 14-year-old son, Josiah, is also a claimant in the case, said: 'As Christians, we believe that it is our duty as parents to raise our children in line with our beliefs. This policy denies us this right and choice and must be challenged.'

He accuses Labour of creating a 'caricature of wealthy schools full of wealthy parents', which is 'not the reality'.

'Looked after children' impacted by hike

One family bringing the legal claim, who do not wish to be identified, includes a guardian of two children, who currently attend a fee-paying Christian school.

Both children are previously looked after children and have been with their guardian for several years. The guardian is a former youth worker and full-time carer who gave up working to ensure the needs of the children are met.

Another family includes a single parent of five children who also faces severe consequences if the Labour government continues with the policy. The mother lost her husband to covid several years ago and three of her children now attend an Independent Christian school.

The parent believes that they would be unable to afford the expected significant increase in fees, and fears that the school may be forced to close as many already have done.

'Pupils not from affluent backgrounds'

Headteachers at four independent Christian schools have also become claimants in the case. They include the Wyclif Independent Christian school in South Wales, which is the only school of its type in the region.

Launched in 1982 by two fathers who wanted to provide Christian education to the area, it now has 200 pupils, but is preparing to be significantly impacted by the policy.

Another claimant, The Branch Christian School in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire is an independent school providing Christian education for children aged 3 – 18 years.

Caroline Santer is Headteacher at The King's School, Fair Oak, in Hampshire, which provides high-quality Christ-centred education to (currently) 231 girls and boys aged 4 – 16 years. She said:

Parents send their children to the school because they want their children to have a Christian education.

The vast majority of our pupils are not from affluent backgrounds. We have a number of single parent families receiving Universal Credit and most families make huge financial sacrifices in order to send their children here.

Consequences devastating

Ben Snowdon, Headteacher at Emmanuel School in Derby, an award-winning Independent Christian School which has been providing small group Christian education for over 30 years, said:

The consequences of this policy will be devastating for independent Christian schools and many other low-cost independent schools across the country. It is especially concerning to parents who are not from affluent backgrounds and who have children with special education needs.

At Emmanuel School we share the government's desire to ensure that all children have access to high quality education, but we're deeply concerned that the government's VAT proposals will hinder this aim.

Ian Sleeper

In a concerning setback to the right to free speech, the High Court has rejected the appeal of a Christian preacher who was arrested outside Southwark Cathedral for displaying placards which protested Islam in the wake of the London Bridge, Westminster, and Manchester Arena terrorist attacks.

Ian Sleeper, 58, was arrested outside Southwark Cathedral on 23 June 2017 under controversial section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 for causing 'harassment, alarm and distress', for displaying a sign which read: 'Love Muslims, Hate Islam, Jesus is love and hope.'

Section 5 Public Order Act

Section 5 of the Public Order Act is a controversial law which has long been criticised by free speech campaigners because it has been used to stifle speech and debate on the grounds that a listener may be offended or feel insulted.

Ten years ago, the Reform Section 5 campaign, which was led by Rowan Atkinson and backed by a broad cross-section of people and groups including Christian organisations and the National Secular Society, led to a change in the law in 2015 which was meant to protect people engaging in speech that could offend people's feelings.

Unfortunately, Sleeper's judgment shows how ineffective the change has been and how free speech is seriously undermined in the United Kingdom.

The arrest was captured on police body cam footage. Sleeper was held in a police cell for 13 hours.

Weeks earlier, on 7 June 2017, on London Bridge and at Borough Market, which is adjacent to Southwark Cathedral where Sleeper was protesting, Islamic terrorist attacks had taken place, killing eight people and injuring 48.

Mr Sleeper was later released without charge. He then sued the police for wrongful arrest and false imprisonment. He failed in his original action against the police but was given permission to appeal.

Pro-Hamas protests in London

The appeal came after months of antisemitic and pro-Hamas protests in London following the October 7 2023 attacks.

Monuments have been desecrated, people wearing poppies have been intimidated, and multiple calls for Jihad and violence have been made, without interference from the police.

Protestors have held signs calling for the genocide of Jews in Israel, but the police have repeatedly taken no action.

On Remembrance Day, 11 November 2023 and 2024, there were reportedly hundreds of thousands of protestors marching against Israel and in support of Hamas on the streets of London.

Sleeper's case has shown that some religions and philosophical beliefs are favoured over others, or treated more leniently than others, by the Metropolitan Police. His treatment provides a clear example of 'two tier' policing.

The Judgment

In a concerning judgment for free speech, the High Court has now confirmed that the arrest was lawful: in his ruling Justice Sweeting rejected the idea, often expressed by Christians, that you can 'hate the sin but love the sinner.'

In the judgment, the Judge suggested there was a potential risk to public order as a result of the sentiments expressed by the signs (despite there being no evidence of this, rather a mere assertion by the police): 'The circumstances were very different from those that confronted the police in this case where they were concerned with a risk to public order in the febrile atmosphere that followed major terrorist incidents and where they had to make a decision on the spot.'

Inconsistent policing

Mr Sleeper said:

In light of recent events in London, what happened to me following the terrorist attacks in 2017 is still hugely relevant and was a clear indication of what was to come.

How I was treated was completely wrong. The police have never apologised and continue to believe that what they did was right. Recent events in London following the conflict in the Middle East has exposed that anyone protesting Israel and calling for violence would not be treated as I was by the police.

There is no consistency in policing over these matters and what has happened to me and on our streets in the past month should be of grave concern to many.

Mr Sleeper, supported by the Christian Legal Centre, will now appeal Mr Justice Sweeting's ruling.

Gozen Soydag

Gozen Soydag – a school pastoral manager in North London – was sacked for supporting a biblical view of marriage on her influential social media account.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Gozen Soydag, 37, from Enfield, launched legal action against St Anne's Catholic High School for Girls for wrongful dismissal, harassment, discrimination and breaches of her human rights on the grounds of her Christian beliefs.

God-centred ministry

Gozen's Instagram accounts have over 30,000 followers and include @wifeinthewaiting which is described as: 'a God centred ministry that encourages, empowers and equips women, who desire to be married, to position in purpose, dedicated specifically to celebrating the institution of marriage and the traditional nuclear family.'

Despite taking down posts which she was told had caused 'offence' to anonymous complainant, Gozen was told that her marriage beliefs were 'incompatible with the school's ethos'. However, the school's mission statement and ethos web page states:

Our school motto is taken from the book of Micah 6:8, 'Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God' and was chosen by the staff as it reflects the character of our school. This scripture verse reminds us that in our lives we should aspire to treat others fairly, be ready to show forgiveness and compassion and acknowledge our need for God's help and grace in everything we do.

'Our students need you, I need you!'

Beginning work as a Pastoral Manager for Year 10 students at St. Anne's in September 2022, Miss Soydag believed she was working for a school that was committed to the Christian faith as, for example, it had Bible verses and crosses in every room.

When she was offered the job, headteacher Emma Loveland said in an email to her: 'I cannot tell you how much I feel you should be at St. Anne's next year. Our students need you, I need you!'

Despite being told she was doing an 'outstanding' job, however, without warning on 9 February 2023, Miss Soydag was summoned to a meeting with the school's assistant deputy head, Jo Saunders.

During the meeting she was told that elements of her online social media activity had been brought to the school's attention. At no point was she asked or given the opportunity to explain the purpose of her '@wifeinthewaiting' account.

One video Miss Soydag had shared on Instagram, which she was told was of particular concern, involved a woman wearing Muslim attire talking about her happiness of living in submission to her husband. On occasion Miss Soydag would post videos on the theme of marriage and relationships, not because she agreed with the entirety of what she posted, but to generate debate.

The assistant deputy head told Miss Soydag that this video was concerning because if the same statements were made by a man, they would be deemed 'misogynistic.'

The meeting concluded with Miss Soydag being told for the first time that all employees' social media accounts had to be kept private and must not be accessible to the public. She was also told to take down the video, which had generated the initial concern, which she did immediately.

Censored

A fortnight later, however, Miss Soydag was summoned to another meeting where she was told that complaints had been made about other content on her social media pages. One parent reportedly strongly disagreed with the Christian beliefs expressed.

Given an ultimatum that she had 24-hours to ensure that her '@wifeinthewaiting' account was not visible on a Google search, Miss Soydag tried to explain that due to Google's functionality this would take two weeks.

The following day, Miss Soydag told the Headteacher what she had done to make her accounts less visible, but was told that her accounts were 'global', that it was 'too little too late', and the beliefs she expressed were openly criticised.

Miss Soydag was then dismissed and told in an email that:

*Due to much of your extensive online profile being incompatible with the **schools mission statement and ethos**, and the fact that despite being asked to remove such incompatible information your profile appears to a large extent to remain unchanged.*

Told to pack up her belongings and leave the premises, Miss Soydag, left in tears without being able to say goodbye to colleagues and students. All of this happened on her birthday.

Employment Tribunal

A full Employment Tribunal took place before Christmas 2024, at Watford Employment Tribunal.

During proceedings, the assistant headteacher at the school, Jo Saunders, was asked if Gozen's free speech had been curtailed. In response, Saunders said: 'We did not curtail her free speech, we just said that she had to take down her posts.'

Gozen's traditional beliefs on Christian marriage were also compared by Saunders to social media personality Andrew Tate – and deemed 'incompatible in modern society.'

Handing down judgment, Employment Judge Sarah Matthews dismissed each of Gozen's claims and said her posts had: 'Only celebrated the nuclear family, which could make other students from different backgrounds feel devalued.'

'I stand for God's blueprint for marriage'

Responding to the ruling, Gozen, said:

I wanted to work in the education sector and make an impact for young people. This was a Catholic school, and they knew I was a passionate woman of faith. The school's building is in the shape of the Cross. Every classroom had a Cross and Bible verses on the walls. This was a place where I believed they accepted Jesus.

My social media channels were about sharing hope through the Word of God, especially for women.

I believe if this had been anyone else with a belief as part of the 'inclusive' culture, I would not be sitting here, I would have been celebrated and promoted. For discussing and debating traditional Christian marriage and family, I was sacked, and that cannot be right.

Her lawyers will now appeal the outcome of her case to the Employment Appeal Tribunal.

Matthew Grech

Matthew Grech, a Christian charity worker, is facing prosecution in Malta for sharing his testimony of finding faith and leaving behind homosexuality.

Matthew Grech is a trustee of Core Issues Trust, a group which supports people seeking help for unwanted sexual attractions. Having found faith in Jesus himself, Matthew also left behind a life of homosexuality – although for him, this happened without any formal counselling or therapy. As a result, Matthew often shares his testimony online and in the media, and helped to found X-Out-Loud, a branch of Core Issues Trust.

However, in a case believed to be the first of its kind, Matthew is now facing criminal charges for sharing his testimony of change on Maltese media outlet, PMnews Malta.

'You will be arrested'

On 6 April 2022, Matthew was invited by PMnews Malta, a small free-speech media platform, to share the story of how he had become a born-again Christian, which led to him leaving behind a homosexual lifestyle and unwanted same-sex attraction.

The presenters of the TV interview, who are also on trial, asked Matthew about his personal story of moving away from same-sex attraction after meeting Jesus.

They also asked about his views on so-called 'conversion therapy', which is banned in Malta. Instead, Matthew spoke about his own personal conversion to Christ and movement away from identifying as gay. When pushed further by the interviewers, he pointed to the science and explained that sometimes when pain and trauma is addressed through normal talking therapy, same-sex attractions and gender confusion can be diminished.

The interview was advertised on PMnews Malta's Facebook page and the topic for the interview was chosen by the presenters of the programme. At no point during the programme did Matthew invite any listener to attend therapy or encourage anyone to get help for unwanted same-sex attraction.

After his interview with them, which was broadcast online, Matthew received a prosecution order accusing him of advertising 'conversion practices'.

The order accused him of advertising 'conversion practices and this breaking article 3 (a) (iii) of Chapter 567 of Maltese laws.' He was told that he would need to attend a hearing on 3 February 2023 and that if he failed to attend, he would be arrested.

If convicted, he could face a five month prison sentence and/or a 5,000 euro fine.

'Conversion therapy' is a political term

Matthew Grech had his tenth criminal court hearing on Tuesday 4 February 2025, as his case entered its third year.

Lawyers argue that bringing these charges against Matthew breaches his fundamental Human Right to Freedom of Expression safeguarded under Article 41 of the Constitution of Malta and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

They also argue that under Human Rights legislation derived from Malta's obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights, as well as the free speech rights guaranteed by its own Constitution, Matthew had every right to freely share and express his story and views on unwanted same-sex attraction. They say he should therefore not be criminally charged, tried and publicly shamed for having done so.

They say that Matthew's sharing of his own testimony was not only an expression of his own thoughts and views on the subject matter, but also a manifestation of his Christian beliefs, which he respectfully shared with the viewers.

At this week's hearing, Dr Mike Davidson (from Core Issues Trust and IFTCC), who specialises in supporting those who are wanting to leave behind LGBT behaviours, gave evidence.

He testified that Grech had not received any therapy relating to his sexuality and, as such, was not an insider to this kind of therapy. Grech's role with the IFTCC was to support the ex-LGBT community against the discrimination it faces.

Dr Davidson also explained that 'conversion therapy' is a political term, used to jam the conversation about sexuality and stop proper discussion about the topic. It was the equivalent to calling someone a racist in order to shut down a conversation.

Matthew Grech wrote afterwards that Davidson 'brought much needed evidence before the court. [He] represented the Christian faith so well, but more than that, he stood for our God-given freedoms. I also thank Christian Concern for their practical support along this journey.'

Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, said:

It's deeply unjust that Matthew should face criminalisation for his interview. He simply told a small online audience in Malta about his wonderful conversion to Christ, his voluntary moving

away from a homosexual lifestyle and answered journalists' questions about the efficacy and safety of therapy.

The threat is not just to Matthew, but to the existence of free speech itself as even the broadcasters, who were clearly pro-LGBT and wanted to debate the topic, have also been prosecuted. There is no sense in this case. I hope for Matthew, Malta, and the world's sake that he is acquitted now that this evidence has been presented.

Matthew's case is still ongoing.

Hyacinth McIntosh

Hyacinth McIntosh, known as 'XY' under a Court of Protection 'transparency order', can now be named after she died on 25 December 2024 (Christmas Day) following her life support, food and fluids being withdrawn against her family's wishes.

Hyacinth, described as a 'vibrant character' and a 'pillar of her local church', had suffered a heart attack in May 2024 that had left her brain damaged from being deprived of oxygen before she received medical help. She initially went into kidney failure but that resolved with ICU treatment.

However, she remained unconscious for the following 6 months and the doctors at King's College Hospital concluded that, while she was not terminally ill and with appropriate care and treatment could survive for some years, her 'quality of life' was unlikely ever to improve.

They refused to perform a tracheostomy and a gastrostomy to enable her to be discharged home to be looked after by her family, and instead applied to the Court of Protection, arguing that prolonging her life was not in her best interests.

Family's pleas ignored

The application was strongly opposed by Mrs McIntosh's large family, including her ex-partner, both children, granddaughter, grandson and two cousins.

The family told Justice Arbuthnot they were convinced that, because of her personality and Christian beliefs, 'XY', as Hyacinth was known then, would have wanted to be kept alive and leave it to God to choose the time of her death.

The family argued that Hyacinth's neurological condition had improved, and the family members said they had witnessed her reacting to their voices by eye movements and squeezing their hands when asked to do so.

However, the judge ruled that the evidence of the family and Hyacinth's own wishes were 'outweighed' by the medical opinion about her poor prognosis.

The family complained that the reporting restrictions imposed by the Court of Protection prevented them from looking for an alternative hospital, to ask the public for donations to fund private treatment, or to expose the unfairness and cruelty of the system which is enforcing death of their mother against her wishes.

The order ruled that prolonging her life was not in her 'best interests' and that she should only receive 'palliative care'.

Hyacinth, defied expectations that she would die following removal of artificial ventilation on 14 December under the order of the Court of Protection.

However, following the Court order, the NHS also refused to provide her with any clinically assisted feeding or hydration over the next 11 days, condemning her to die of dehydration.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, and represented by barrister James Bogle, Hyacinth's daughter, Shanika Davis, also secured the support of the retired palliative medicine expert, Professor Sam Ahmedzai, who had chaired the committee preparing the 2015 NICE guidelines for end-of-life care.

In an urgent application submitted to the Court of Protection, Professor Ahmedzai argued that withdrawal of fluids from Hyacinth would be 'cruel, inhuman and degrading.'

He added that current guidelines make it clear that 'the provision of palliative hydration could be an integral part of good palliative care', which was what the Court had ordered.

However, the Urgent Applications Judge at the Court of Protection, John McKendrick KC, rejected Professor Ahmedzai's evidence as attempting a 'head on challenge' to the earlier ruling of the Court that all treatment was to be withdrawn.

His decision was upheld by Lord Justice Peter Jackson and Lord Justice Baker in the Court of Appeal on Saturday 14 December.

Life support, food and fluids were immediately withdrawn by King's College Hospital the same afternoon.

After keeping Hyacinth without fluids for a further six days, King's College Hospital finally allowed Hyacinth's daughter to take her home, but the discharge letter to her GP stated that the patient was 'not for fluids'.

Hyacinth's family was devastated when she died the morning of Christmas Day.

Following Hyacinth's death, Professor Ahmedzai said that the case highlights an ongoing crisis in the provision of end-of-life care by the NHS.

He says: 'Although the majority of patients who come under specialist palliative care services do achieve a good death in terms of pain and other symptoms, the provision of assisted hydration at the end of life is much more hit and miss.'

This, he adds, 'reflects a reluctance by some services providing end of life care to let go of the Liverpool Care Pathway, which was abolished by Parliament in 2013 precisely because it offered a one-size-fits all approach including the withholding of hydration, even to those begging for it'.

'Beyond cruelty' says daughter

Speaking on behalf of the family, the daughter of Hyacinth, Shanika Davis, said:

How my mother died was beyond cruelty. There was no dignity or respect, and we refuse to believe that it was in her 'best interests' to die.

My mother was at the centre of our large family and a big part of her community and a pillar of her local church with lots of friends. She was a popular person who cared deeply about other people. Everyone who knew her said that she would have wanted to take every chance to continue to live and would not have wanted to be put to death.

Contrary to the doctors' predictions, my mother survived the removal of ventilation support and breathed very well on her own, with oxygen saturation between 95 and 100 per cent at all times. However, the NHS and the Court refused to revisit their earlier decision and condemned her to a cruel death from dehydration rather than admit that they might have made a mistake.

Like many families before us, the whole system has come against us and it leaves you almost helpless and powerless. Death was forced on us rather than helping us pursue options for life. That is wrong and we are appalled by how many other families have had to go through this.

Book Review

Seismos: Christian Citizenship in a Post-Christian West

By David Landrum

Staten House, 2025 (407pp, £15 on Amazon)

Review by Tim Dieppe

Western culture has been in upheaval for the last several decades as the previously accepted moral foundations of our society have been steadily abandoned and Christianity has gone from being respected to being ridiculed. Life is not what it used to be. Christians now urgently need to think through what it means to live in a post-Christian culture where being a Christian is not only counter-cultural, but also costly. Fortunately, Dave Landrum has done that thinking for us.

Landrum brings decades of experience in Christian political advocacy in the UK to bear, as well as evident personal research and reflection, and wide reading around the subject. There's a helpful summary of what the book seeks to achieve on page 360, where Landrum writes:

In this book I have attempted to provide: a sober analysis of the spiritual and ideological challenges that confront Western Christians; an honest appraisal of the trajectory for our citizenship; and a hopeful and practical strategy to weather the storm and to reach the shoreline.

This is an ambitious undertaking, but one that Landrum is well-equipped to attempt. The first chapter is called *Cultural Climate Change*. Here Landrum outlines the seismic shifts in culture over the last few decades. He writes: 'After centuries of relative stability, a whole new weather pattern is unfolding in the West, a pattern that represents nothing less than a decisive break from Judeo-Christian morality.' (p8). He then moves on in the next chapter to discuss citizenship, where he outlines six key principles for Christian engagement with citizenship, emerging largely from Romans 13.

Chapter three is on the secularising agenda. Here he addresses the myth of secular neutrality, and the myth of progress, as well as the whole woke agenda. There's a helpful discussion of cultural Marxism and the LGBT+ movement with its attempts to redefine family and relationships. Also, a good discussion about just how damaging Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programmes are.

Chapter four is about citizenship tests. Landrum believes that the church is being sifted through this cultural climate change. He outlines six ways that Christian individuals and organisations are responding to these challenges. These are: 1) Fold – acquiesce to the demands of culture which he describes as 'a strategy for failure and treachery.' 2) Fix – set up efforts to repair and reform society. 3) Fight – fight back with righteous indignation. 4) Flee – a natural response, but where to? 5) Fall Silent – keeping your head below the parapet. 6) Fear Not – here, while not dismissing the validity of fixing and fighting, Landrum tries to make the case for a more integrated approach to our cultural challenges.

Landrum's cultural analysis is up-to-date and well-informed. There are multiple quotes from a wide range of Christian and non-Christian cultural commentators. Landrum makes use of contemporary examples of Christians in the West who have suffered in some way for their Christian faith. While Islam is mentioned at points, it does not get nearly as much attention as secularism. In my view, however, Islam is now the greater challenge to Western culture.

The final chapters are on the future of Christian citizenship, public leadership and a final chapter entitled 'A Long Obedience.' Landrum concludes with this:

To restate the triple message of this book: things are much worse than most people understand; things will get even worse before they get better; and things are never as bad as they seem with Jesus in the boat. (p361).

That about sums it up. The book is around 400 pages long, including nearly 30 pages of references, but with no index.

This book contains a combination of cultural analysis, theological analysis, Christian political theory, and practical ideas. All Christian leaders will find his insights and perspective helpful in navigating a rapidly changing culture and thinking through their own responses to these changes.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE OF *THE BULLETIN*

Daniel Friery studied History at the University of Oxford and works in Public Affairs at The Christian Institute.

Tim Dieppe is Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern, where he responds to Government consultations, interprets policy trends and helps to inform and equip the Church to engage with cultural and political issues. Tim holds an MA in Kingdom Theology.

Lizzie Harewood is the Executive Officer of the Association of Christian Teachers. She previously spent 12 years as a secondary school English teacher. Her passion is to equip Christians to be salt and light in the nation's schools. Outside of work, Lizzie supports her husband as he pastors an evangelical church in Yorkshire.

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

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

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

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

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affinity.org.uk

  **@affinitytalks**

office@affinity.org.uk

**PO Box 905
Haywards Heath
RH16 9TJ**

07936 048259