

SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

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CHANGING BRITAIN

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

ISSUE 60 – JANUARY 2026
Changing Britain

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Editorial: Changing Britain

In this issue of the *Social Issues Bulletin*, we present three articles that explore some of the issues which are currently challenging and changing Britain.

Tim Dieppe's article on immigration and integration (p. 3) considers the UK's political parties' approaches to immigration, as well as the lack of progress on this issue since the publication of the Casey Report in 2016. Tim encourages Christians to differentiate between the approaches which should be taken by national governments (i.e. maintaining borders in such a way that the country can care properly for its citizens) and individuals (i.e. sharing the gospel with and showing hospitality to strangers).

Lizzie Harewood's article (p. 8) explores how the subject of Religious Education is impacted by changes in Britain. She considers the impact of immigration in bringing about a rapid demographic change in the UK – and how this change impacts the teaching of RE. Lizzie also explores the subject's history and educators' efforts to use it to equip students for living in a country as diverse as the UK. She concludes her article with four suggestions for how churches can engage with multicultural schools work.

Joanna Timm's article (p. 16) reflects on events in New South Wales, Australia, where a 2024 law about sexual orientation/gender identity has severe consequences for gospel freedom. Joanna urges UK Christians to heed the warning from our Australian brothers and sisters, and to commit to speaking out against similar laws being implemented here in the UK.

Alongside these three articles, we also include Dr Calum MacKellar's latest review of current bioethics issues, including the UK's three-parent-baby experiment; a baby born from a record-breaking 30-year-old embryo in the USA; success, also in the USA, in creating new eggs from skin cell chromosomes; and the announcement from an Amsterdam-based company, uniQure, about new treatment for Huntington's disease.

This issue concludes with Tim Dieppe's reviews of two books addressing Christianity and the slave trade: Ian Shaw's *Christians and Slavery* and Nigel Biggar's *Reparations: Slavery and the Tyranny of Imaginary Guilt*.

Christian Engagement on Immigration and Integration

By Tim Dieppe

Out of control

The current Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, spoke in October of the loss of control of our borders.¹ She said: “Far too many have been able to enter this country and disappear into the black economy.”² She argued: “that work begins at our borders where we must restore order and control.”

She continued: “Unless we have control of our borders, and until we can decide who comes in and who must leave, we will never be the open, tolerant, and generous country I know we all believe in.”

Prime Minister Keir Starmer wrote in September:

There is no doubt that for years, Left-wing parties, including my own, did shy away from people’s concerns around illegal immigration. It has been too easy for people to enter the country, work in the shadow economy and remain illegally.

We must be absolutely clear that tackling every aspect of the problem of illegal immigration is essential.³

He continued:

Equally, the belief that uncontrolled legal migration was nothing but good news for an economy should never have been accepted on the Left. It is not compassionate Left-wing politics to rely on labour that exploits foreign workers and undercuts fair wages.

The huge increase in immigration that happened under the Conservatives was based on a hyper-liberal free-market viewpoint. Labour is clear that there must be no return to that.⁴

Almost every day there are stories of migrants abusing the system or committing crimes. Sometimes this has caused social unrest, as it did outside the migrant hotel in Epping after one migrant sexually abused a teenager nearby.

At last year’s general election, both Labour and Conservatives promised to cut immigration in their manifestos, not just Reform. Polling this year show that immigration is now the top issue that voters are concerned about. How should Christians respond to this growing challenge in our nation?

¹ Shabana Mahmood, 'Mahmood: UK has lost control of its borders', *The Telegraph*, 14 October 2025:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/10/14/shabana-mahmood-uk-has-lost-control-of-its-borders/>.

² Shabana Mahmood, “Order at Our Borders” – Shabana Mahmood’s First Speech as UK Home Secretary | Labour Conf. | AC1G’, *DRM News*, 29 September 2025: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOTXn_w_rf0.

³ Keir Starmer, 'The Left ignored immigration fears for too long. It's time to give control back to communities', *The Telegraph*, 25 September 2025: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/09/25/the-left-ignored-immigration-fears-for-too-long/>.

⁴ Ibid.

Integration isn't working

Ten years ago the government commissioned Dame Louise Casey to conduct an independent review into opportunity and integration. I was very struck by her comment that: "none of the 800 or more people that we met, not any of the two hundred plus written submissions to the review, said there wasn't a problem to solve."⁵ She writes:

Too many public institutions, national and local, state and non-state, have gone so far to accommodate diversity and freedom of expression that they have ignored or even condoned regressive, divisive and harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded racist or Islamophobic.⁶

She argues:

As a nation we have lost sight of our expectations on integration and lacked confidence in promoting it or challenging behaviours that undermine it.⁷

At the time I found this report encouraging. As Casey herself puts it: "I am convinced that it is only by fully acknowledging what is happening that we can set about resolving these problems and eventually relieve this pressure."⁸

Her report appeared to be the first step towards that.

Earlier that year, Trevor Phillips, former head of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, wrote in *The Sunday Times*: "For centuries we have managed to absorb people of many different backgrounds; Britain has changed them and they have changed us, both almost always for the better. But the integration of Muslims will probably be the hardest task we've ever faced. It will mean abandoning the milk-and-water multiculturalism still so beloved of many, and adopting a far more muscular approach to integration."⁹

Both Casey and Phillips singled out Muslims as a special case. They are right to do so. We do not have immigrants from Ukraine, Hong Kong, Nigeria, South Korea or a host of other countries setting up a parallel legal system (sharia courts), or seeking to restrict free speech about their beliefs (by defining Islamophobia), or advocating polygamy, or supporting terrorist organisations (Isis, Hamas), let alone committing acts of terrorism. I am not saying that all or even most Muslims do these things, but it is only Muslim immigrants who are influencing our society in these ways.

That was nine years ago. Today no one will say that the problem has gotten any easier or that any sensible steps have been taken to improve integration. Instead, levels of immigration have increased to levels that almost everyone agrees are unsustainable.

⁵ Dame Louise Casey, 'The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration', 5 December 2016: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80c4fded915d74e6230579/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf, p. 5.

⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹ Trevor Phillips, 'What do British Muslims really think?', *The Sunday Times*, 10 April 2016: <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/my-sons-living-hell-j72t7fppc>.

Evangelistic opportunity

Christians can see the immigration of Muslims to Britain as a fantastic evangelistic opportunity. It can be very difficult or even dangerous to be a missionary in an Islamic country so it's great that they are coming here where we can freely preach the gospel to them! I co-wrote *Questions to Ask Your Muslim Friends* with Beth Peltola precisely because of this opportunity and in order to empower and equip Christians to have these gospel conversations. We do still (just about) have free speech in this country which means that we can freely preach that Muhammad is a false prophet and that Islam is a false religion. Muslim immigrants are often disillusioned by what they have experienced of Islam in their countries of origin. This is a great opening for the gospel, and many churches are now seeing growing numbers of converts from Islam amongst migrant communities.

The duty to love the stranger

Alongside evangelism is the Christian duty to love your neighbour which, which as Jesus illustrated with the parable of the Good Samaritan, clearly includes immigrants or foreigners. All Christians should show love and compassion to immigrants no matter how they got here or where they are from. Churches too, should seek to be welcoming to immigrants and perhaps offer practical help with navigating the laws of the land or helping with genuine asylum claims. Christian Concern has provided legal help of this nature to Christian converts from Islamic countries where they would be at serious risk of persecution.¹⁰

Immigration policy

The thornier question is what a Christian approach to immigration policy should be. It is important first to differentiate between the duties of Christian individuals, the duties of churches, and the duties of governments. While Christian individuals are called to love their enemies and forgive those who sin against them, governments are called to administer justice and to defend their citizens from external aggressors. While the state can, and should, punish wrongdoers (Rom 13:4), individual Christians and churches should never take justice into their own hands. In a similar fashion, while individual Christians and churches should love and welcome all immigrants we come across, the state can and should seek to limit the numbers and types of people entering the country.

Maintaining borders

It is interesting to note that the Israelites requested permission to pass through Edom in their travels after the Exodus (Num 20:16-21). They respected the border by both asking permission and by turning away when permission was refused. There is evidence that ancient nations at the time constructed forts to control their borders. Border integrity concerns are hardly new.

Having a border is, in fact, a defining characteristic of a nation. Acts 17:26 implies that it is God himself who sets the “allotted periods and boundaries” of the various nations. And what are borders for, if not to set limits on who may and who may not enter the country?

Israel's borders are described in remarkable detail in Joshua 13-19. In fact, the word ‘border’ or ‘borders’ occurs 62 times in the ESV translation of the Bible. Even the New Jerusalem has walls

¹⁰ 'Christian woman who fled Islamic persecution overturns asylum decision', Christian Concern, 28 May 2025: <https://christianconcern.com/news/christian-woman-who-fled-islamic-persecution-overturns-asylum-decision/>.

and gates (Rev 21:12-14)! These boundaries are important. A government's primary responsibility is to protect its citizens. This necessarily means limiting who can and cannot cross the border. The government has failed to do this for many years. Christians should join with others in calling for the government to properly control our borders for the good of the country, while at the same time loving, welcoming, evangelising and having compassion for all immigrants in our local communities.

Resident aliens and foreigners

Eminent Egyptologist and Hebrew scholar, James Hoffmeir, argues in *The Immigration Crisis* that Biblical law distinguishes between resident aliens (those with rights to live in the land) and foreigners who are temporary visitors.¹¹ The word for resident alien is *ger*, and the most common word for foreigners is *nekhar*. Where the Israelites are commanded to love the stranger, it is *ger* that is usually used (Lev 19:34). All citizens had to obey the same law, whatever their origin (Ex 12:49; Lev 18:26; Lev 24:22). This implies that resident aliens have the same legal rights as native-born citizens of Israel. Such rights did not apply, however, to foreigners. Gleaning rights, which might be equivalent to social benefits today, were given to the poor and the resident aliens (Lev 19:9-10) – both of whom had to work quite hard to get them (Ruth 2:7; 17) – but not to foreigners. A resident alien could formally adopt the religion of the Israelites, get circumcised, and participate in the Passover (Ex 12:48). Foreigners, though, were not permitted to participate (Ex 12:43). Hoffmeier suggests that we can see here the seeds of a policy which distinguishes between legal and illegal immigrants and treats them differently.¹² There is a lot for Christians on both sides of the political spectrum to learn from these Biblical principles.

Capacity

If the government asked you to accommodate an immigrant in your home, you might agree to do so. While being welcoming and hospitable, you would naturally insist that the guest follows some basic rules about how to behave in your home. If you were asked to accommodate ten immigrants, I suspect most readers would argue that they do not have capacity for this. In a similar way, any nation has a finite capacity to absorb immigrants. The House of Commons Library notes that fewer immigrants arrived in the UK in 2024 compared to the record highs of 2022 and 2023 – but even then, 2024 saw 948,000 people migrating into the UK in contrast to the 513,000 emigrating from it.¹³ The use of hotels to accommodate immigrants at considerable expense to the taxpayer betrays the current lack of capacity to handle the vast numbers of immigrants we are currently attempting to absorb. Then there are all the associated costs of education, health care, social care, and policing, with knock on effects for the existing resident population. The combined effect is why the commentators above are in agreement that we need to cut today's excessive levels of immigration.

Conclusion

Everyone, it seems, agrees that we have a problem with immigration and integration. Politicians and commentators of all stripes are now in agreement that current levels of immigration are unsustainable. Christians can look to the Bible to inform both our individual responses and questions

¹¹ James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis* (Crossway, 2009), p. 48-52.

¹² Ibid., p. 52, 57, 84, 89, 91.

¹³ Esme Kirk-Wade and Annalise Murray, 'Migration statistics', House of Commons Library, 1 December 2025: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06077/>.

of government policy. The Bible has radical ideas that conform to neither left-wing nor right-wing simplistic ideologies. This is an opportunity for Christians to speak into a debate with compassion and conviction demonstrating the enduring relevance of Biblical principles.

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

Britain is changing. What does that mean for RE in schools?

By Lizzie Harewood

Growing up in a small rural village in Cheshire in the 80s and 90s, life was close-knit, predictable, and somewhat insular. With few amenities, I often felt bored – particularly as a teenager. Village life revolved around familiar rhythms: May Day with maypole dancing, cricket matches, the annual Scout barbecue, the village pantomime, the pub quiz, and the regular cycle of parish church services. My tiny Church of England primary school of around 45 students was completely monocultural; there was little opportunity to encounter ethnic diversity or other religions. RE largely consisted of the Vicar coming to tell Bible stories and even at my larger (though still rather homogenous) secondary school, we largely focused on Christianity – and occasionally Judaism – in RE lessons.

At the time, I resented the parochial nature of my upbringing and my school experience. I couldn't wait to travel and visit exotic destinations with unfamiliar cultures, different languages and interesting customs.

Yet there was something about the unspoken glue that held our small community together that made life feel simpler than it does today. There were no barriers of language, culture, or differing customs around food or politeness – everyone largely operated from the same set of assumptions. There were shared memories and allegiances (particularly in football!), moral sensibilities that shaped an unwritten code of conduct and a sense of belonging that didn't even register at the time.

And when I look at the many different groups in playgrounds and as I observe the shift in the cultural makeup of the school population, it does beg the question: how are schools preparing this generation to navigate the rapid and complex integration of religious, non-religious, and cultural diversity?

Fragmentation is not unique to the school yard. Recent research from the Policy Institute at King's College London and Ipsos shows that perceptions of division in the UK are now at their highest since records began in 2020.¹ Eighty-four per cent of the public say the country feels divided – up sharply from 74% five years ago. And tension between immigrants and those born in the UK has climbed sharply in the past two years with the majority of participants now say they perceive great tension around the topic of immigration, rising from 74% in 2023 to 86% today.

It's right to approach this debate with clear-headed analysis of our changing demographics, so that citizens and policymakers can respond wisely and support the cultural and social integration of children and young people.

Yet even the most careful analysis is not enough on its own. As Christians, we must also view these shifts through a biblical lens.

¹ Bobby Duffy and Gideon Skinner, "The UK's changing 'culture wars': Division, tension and common ground", November 2025: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/uk-s-changing-culture-wars-division-tension-and-common-ground.pdf>.

And this leads us to deeper questions: what does all of this mean for the message of Christianity in our schools and for our nation's children? Will it be drowned out by a rising tide of competing worldviews? And how should Christians respond?

Rapid Demographic Change

Immigration to the UK has arguably been the most significant social and demographic change of the 21st century. Since the late 90s, immigration and emigration have both reached historic highs – yet immigration has exceeded emigration by over 100,000 every single year between 1998 and 2020. In the year to June 2023, net migration was 906,000.²

And of course, we are seeing this reflected in education. The latest DfE data shows a striking demographic change unfolding in England's schools. In the 2024/25 school census of roughly 21,500 state-funded schools, White British pupils make up 60.3% of students, a drop from 62.6% in just two years.³

Today, my children attend an urban school where roughly 40% of pupils speak English as an additional language – about double the national average. Their classmates include children who have undertaken perilous journeys from Iran, West Africa, and Ukraine; others come from Greece, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, China, Hong Kong, and across Eastern Europe. The languages spoken are many and varied, and families practise a wide range of religious traditions, including Islam, Sikhism, Alevism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism.

Long-term projections point to notable shifts in the UK's religious landscape. The Muslim population is expected to grow from 7% to nearly 19% over the period to 2100 – close to one in five people in the UK. Alongside this, the proportion of those who say they have no religion has risen sharply and now sits at almost 40% of the population.⁴

Of course, we need to be careful when discussing ethnic identity, religious identity, culture and country of birth; the topic is complex and these terms are not interchangeable. And in many ways, the increase in cultural diversity is a real gift. As Christians working in or engaging in schools work it is an opportunity to show hospitality, compassion, and love for neighbour. Rather than going to all nations, the nations have come to us! We now have the chance to reach out with the gospel to multiple cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities right here in our own communities. In fact, perhaps the British church can learn a great deal from non-Western Christians engaged in 'reverse mission', returning with the gospel to nations that once evangelised their own. Often their witness is marked by a greater and more urgent sense of courage and conviction than British Christians tend to feel.

Yet this data also raises important questions for schools and particularly for RE. How is the subject intended to enrich such a diverse array of learners, and to what end? How do we cultivate a coherent sense of shared culture and common life amidst such plurality? How do we remain generous and open-hearted to 'non-native' cultures while acknowledging that a community cannot flourish without shared foundations, shared narratives, and a shared sense of purpose?

2 UK Government – Migration Advisory Committee, 'Net migration report', 2023 (Updated January 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migration-advisory-committee-report-on-net-migration/net-migration-report-accessible>.

3 UK Government, 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics', 5 June 2025: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>.

4 Matt Goodwin, 'Demographic Change and the Future of the United Kingdom: 2022-2122', 29 May 2025: <https://www.heterodoxcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/3-CHSS-Goodwin.pdf>.

Perhaps most importantly, what does this mean for the privileged place of Christianity in the RE curriculum? Can we still reasonably expect that the Bible's story and Christian doctrines take precedence today?

RE in the curriculum

Religious Education and the content of curriculum in England and Wales is riddled with complexities. There have been many changes over time in the provision of the subject. When universal education began in the UK, it offered a broadly Christian, non-denominational approach. Today, Religious Education is classed as a "basic curriculum subject". This means it is compulsory, but it sits outside the national curriculum with its nationwide stipulations for study. Since 1988, it has been a pluralistic curriculum covering the major world religions, while still recognising Christianity as the most widely represented faith in England. Around one third of England's state-funded schools are Church schools (Church of England or Catholic), with smaller numbers belonging to other major faith traditions. In these settings, RE can be taught in line with the school's religious designation, though the extent of this varies by school type, and these schools can still choose to teach about other religions.

SACREs – Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education – were created to bring together local faith representatives, teachers, and the local authority to advise on religious education and collective worship in schools. Although since 1988 the local RE syllabus itself has been determined by a separate body – the Agreed Syllabus Conference – SACREs still play an important role in enabling local faith communities to contribute to discussions about RE and its impact on pupils. SACREs in England include four groups (Christian and other faith representatives, the Church of England, teacher associations, and the local authority). In Wales, the structure is similar but without the Church of England group.

In short, RE has shifted from teaching a shared cultural Christianity as a normative, moral framework in the Victorian era to explicitly exploring religious difference in a diverse society- studying belief systems from a supposedly neutral standpoint.

And though this speaks to the sad decline in Christianity's influence in our nation, the current "multi-faith" model – set out in the 1988 Education Act – does offer some real strengths. When taught well, it gives pupils space to grapple with life's biggest questions and to explore the varied beliefs and practices of the many communities that now make up Britain. Perhaps most helpful, it permits the influence of local faith groups on the programmes of study for a local area, offering church leaders and other faith representatives, including many evangelicals, a meaningful opportunity to shape how Christianity is taught in local schools, and ultimately the communication of Biblical truth in a way that doesn't proselytise but enables students to consider the validity of such teaching for themselves.

A subject in slow decline?

There are problems afoot, however. The discrete subject of RE has been floundering in our schools for some time now. The status of RE as part of the 'basic' curriculum, but not 'national' has caused long-standing challenges: without a central programme of study, the quality of RE varies widely, and many schools do not meet their legal obligations in how they provide it.

Before education reforms in 2010, many schools routinely entered pupils for a full or short-course GCSE in RE. But the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) changed the landscape. Because schools were judged on pupils achieving strong passes in a set group of subjects – English, Maths, a foreign language, two Sciences, and either Geography or History – RE no longer counted towards

this key performance measure. As a result, many schools pushed students towards EBacc subjects to protect their league-table position, leaving RE increasingly sidelined and contributing significantly to the subject's decline.

Ofsted's Deep and Meaningful report, published in 2024, highlighted that much statutory non-examined RE in schools is limited in scope and often of poor quality. Compounding this, specialist RE teachers are scarce: more than half of RE lessons in the UK are delivered by teachers without RE training. While a few have received subject-specific professional development, the vast majority have not. Given the complexity of RE and the misconceptions pupils are left with, this represents a serious concern, with Ofsted noting one widespread misconception among some leaders and teachers that "teaching from a neutral stance" is the same as teaching a non-religious worldview.

Evolution of RE

While the headlines make for grim reading, there are groups working hard to revitalise (some might even say resurrect) the subject – including the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) and the recently formed Religious Education Network (REN). The challenge is that so many stakeholders have strong views about how RE should be taught that reaching any kind of consensus has become almost impossible.

The latest approach in Religious Education is the "Religion and Worldviews" model, promoted by the REC. It is based on the idea that everyone – whether religious or not – lives according to a personal worldview, which can be studied much like any formal religious or philosophical tradition. When the government-commissioned panel reviewing curriculum issued its final report in September 2025, it recommended working towards adding RE to the national curriculum, using the REC's National Content Standard as a basis.

Nobody stands nowhere

On the surface, the study of worldviews seems to offer a promising way to teach RE in a genuinely pluralistic, but Christianity friendly, manner. It starts with the idea that everyone has a worldview, shaped by their experiences, values, and sense of meaning – and that these differ from person to person. It presents each individual as someone with an innate capacity for spirituality and reflection. In many ways, this feels like a helpful and even exciting way to acknowledge the depth of personal faith convictions. For an evangelical Christian, it can sound like a gift.

However, the sociological lens behind this approach cannot be overstated. It comes with assumptions that many believers simply cannot share. It treats all worldviews as human constructions, denying the conviction – held by most religious adherents, including Christians – that there is one ultimate reality, and that the foundations of morality – and indeed salvation – are not invented but revealed.

Christians do not understand their beliefs as cultural constructs, but as God's revelation to humankind. Yet the worldviews approach does not engage with the propositional truth-claims of faith. Instead, it focuses on how individuals interpret and express their beliefs within their own context, identity, and, most prominently, their lived experience. The lens is primarily sociological and anthropological. It follows personal stories rather than doctrine; experiences rather than Scripture; perspectives rather than authoritative teaching.

This becomes particularly clear in the draft handbook's example of studying a "Practising Anglican with a preference for Celtic Christianity, an interest in Zen Buddhism, married to a pagan and

incorporating Pagan festivals and sensibilities into their living and being.” Such a profile crystallises the problem: the framework becomes so elastic that it borders on the absurd, making the paradigm unworkable as a way of teaching religious faith with any coherence or integrity.

Chasing social harmony – and losing the heart of RE

There’s another problem too. The arguably admirable goal of social cohesion and personal development has grown into a dominant driver behind the subject. There’s now a worrying hint of activism shaping some of the material circulating in classrooms – from resources on “Climate justice via RE” to tasks such as “create a 5-point guide for decreasing Islamophobia.” But citizenship and personal development are not the same as RE. Even Ofsted acknowledges that where curricula take substantive knowledge in RE seriously, the secondary benefits – tolerance, respect, mutual understanding – tend to follow naturally and far more effectively. RE should not be the vehicle for delivering whole-school citizenship initiatives. Yet much of what we see resembles a citizenship lesson dressed in religious language and scenarios, rather than a discipline rooted in genuine theological and philosophical learning.

Resources designed to fit an activist agenda are already widely used. Case studies are prolific and often focus on the most unlikely voices within religious or non-religious traditions: the complex story of a white British “revert” to Islam; teenage girls arguing that Muhammad was a feminist; an LGBT Black Caribbean Christian who reveals their transgender identity at their baptism; multiple schemes of work on Veganism; or tasks evaluating the spiritual lessons of *The Lego Movie*.

I recently looked through my daughter’s Year 4 RE exercise book. Sadly, it showed an almost exclusive focus on “how we can celebrate all religions and worldviews and promote religious equality and harmony,” as one resource put it. Leveraging RE solely for the purpose of social cohesion is surely a well-intentioned misuse of the subject. Encouraging children to think about harmonious living may have a surface-level value, but it offers little depth of understanding.

In one activity, the class was given a principle from a particular religion and used string to make connections across Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Bahá’í. Yet despite this impressive list, my daughter could tell me very little about the actual nature of these religions or what their adherents believe. What she could repeat was the mantra that “every religion is equal” and that harmony must be preserved at all costs. In prioritising this above all else, are we witnessing the emergence of a new postmodern, post-Christian form of religiosity?

Damage done to the fabric of society

The tragedy is that this approach does very little to equip students with the substantive knowledge needed to navigate a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. The “all worldviews are equal” platitudes don’t help my daughter understand why her Muslim friends aren’t allowed to join her after-school dance classes or to wear their hair uncovered. They don’t explain why her secular Iranian friend can’t visit her grandparents for fear the family may not be allowed to leave the country again. They don’t shed light on the violent pogroms in Turkey that drove some of my son’s Alevi classmates to seek refuge in the UK. And they certainly don’t explain the distrust many Hong Kong families at school feel toward the quasi-Marxist ideology of the Chinese Communist Party.

But with an hour a week – if that – allocated to RE, can we really expect the subject to handle such vast and diverse territory? The depth of understanding required would be far too weighty to deliver robustly. Inevitably, the multitude of worldviews becomes compressed, risking a shallow engagement

with all of them that is more likely to confuse than to inspire clear understanding – or else pushes teachers toward the activist route instead.

Children grasp abstract ideas and principles through repeated exposure to familiar stories and coherent doctrine. Constantly moving between frameworks risks disorienting students rather than grounding them. This doesn't mean multiple religions shouldn't be studied; rather, without one dominant, familiar orthodoxy from which to evaluate other perspectives, students are left without an anchor – a stable base from which to understand and discern the other fundamental ways people make sense of life.

Cultural Hegemony?

One school that has sought to cultivate a shared sense of 'Britishness' and a consciously patriotic approach to cultural integration is Michaela School in Wembley, London. Its intake is 90% ethnic minority, around half of whom are Muslim, and it sits in an area of considerable socio-economic deprivation. Many will be aware of the recent legal challenge brought against the school over its refusal to permit communal Muslim prayer, despite its clearly articulated secular ethos.

I visited on a cold November morning last year to see how such a cohesive culture had been constructed. In many respects, Michaela is a striking example of successful, outwardly harmonious integration. Pupils sing *God Save the King* with gusto and recite Kipling's *If* – often described as the nation's favourite poem – as part of their daily routine. I listened to a polished recitation of Henley's *Invictus* by confident, articulate students. I was genuinely impressed.

Over lunch, I sat with a lively group of Year 8s whose "topic of the day" was: If you could have a portal to anywhere, where would you go and why? And what would be the advantages and disadvantages of such an ability? Their eagerness to engage and their thoughtful (albeit occasionally hilarious answers) spoke of the school's emphasis on character, courtesy and the value of conversation. They asked me about my work and home life too and were clearly practised in articulating ideas and taking an interest in others – especially adults. When I asked how they felt about the school's strict rules, they framed them in terms of responsibility to other learners and the good of the whole community. I was astounded at the attitudes of 13 year olds, seemingly mature beyond their years.

Despite the virtue of intention behind Michaela, there's a real tension here. A cohesive culture built on a strictly secular framework (as Michaela is permitted to maintain as a free school) can certainly produce admirable discipline, courtesy and shared purpose – and it clearly does. But despite Katharine Birbalsingh, Michaela's headteacher recently openly admitting on X that the school's values are 'traditional, derived from our historical Christian roots', it also functionally narrows the horizon of what pupils are able to explore, including the claims of Christianity itself. It creates a community with a story. But this is not necessarily the true story Christians believe children most need to encounter.

At Michaela there are no designated spaces for Muslim prayer, but equally there are no assemblies where children hear about Jesus, no chances outside the academic intensity of the RE classroom to dig deeper into the central claims of the Christian faith. Church leaders cannot come in to take a guest lesson, offer pastoral support, or contribute to meeting pupils' moral, cultural or spiritual needs. In that sense, the cohesive culture on offer is impressive – but also carefully contained.

Fruit without the root

You only need to read the ever-popular Tom Holland's *Dominion* to see that Christianity has been the primary force shaping the modern moral imagination in the UK. Ideas such as the dignity of the weak, the paradox of the powerless overcoming the powerful, and history understood as a drama of sin and redemption have powerfully shaped our political, judicial and education systems. But the problem with sincere attempts to reclaim these values on their own terms is that we forget a simple truth: the fruit cannot flourish without the root. Detached from their Christian foundations, these virtues become like cut flowers – attractive for a moment, but inevitably fading, because they are no longer drawing life from the soil that once sustained them.

And even in schools without such a profoundly secular ethos, godless ideologies often dominate the curriculum and shape school life. Many may not recognise these secular frameworks as ideologies in their own right, yet as Christians we know that removing Christianity from the public sphere does not make society less 'religious'; devotion is simply redirected elsewhere. Emile Cammaerts puts it aptly: "The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything."⁵

Four lessons for the church engaging in multicultural schools work

1. Challenge assumptions with grace

Many people – particularly those from white, middle-class backgrounds – tend to view all religions through the lens of Christianity, assuming they operate with the same moral framework. As Christian teachers, parents, governors, and church leaders, we must not be afraid to challenge, gently and graciously, the well-intentioned but often naïve assumptions in schools that all organised (or even non-organised) worldviews uphold the concept of *Imago Dei* – that every human being, regardless of background, carries dignity deserving of respect. This calls us to carefully examine curricula that present only the positive interpretations of religions.

2. Engage respectfully with other cultures and belief systems

We should not assume that other belief systems are, however, entirely alien to Christian sensibilities. It is possible to make the most of the opportunities that pluralism affords without falling into relativism. Many religions and worldviews contain universal truths that we can affirm without necessarily affirming the religion itself. Ideas of accountability, virtue, sin, compassion, justice, and reciprocity can provide real starting points for fruitful conversation.

3. Make the most of every opportunity

Despite recent attempts in the Lords to reduce Christian influence – such as by placing non-religious worldviews on equal footing with religions in RE (Amendment 471) or by replacing daily worship with "moral and cultural assemblies" (Amendment 465) – we still enjoy meaningful opportunities to share Christian truths via lessons and collective worship. These opportunities allow Christianity to be taught thoughtfully and objectively, giving the gospel room to shine and stand on its own merit. We must make the most of these opportunities whilst we still have them.

5 Emile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues & G.K. Chesterton* (ACS Books, 1937). Available: https://www.chesterton.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/The-Laughing-Prophet_ACS-Books.pdf.

4. Offer depth, rigor, and relevance

We are called, in every generation, to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3) with grace, humility, and conviction. This includes offering students serious Bible teaching and sound doctrine that engages with life’s biggest questions. Many young people have never encountered the richness of historic, Biblical Christianity, yet I hear from teachers across the country that students of all backgrounds are ready and eager to engage with teaching that speaks directly to contemporary issues. The so-called ‘quiet revival’ is showing its face not only in churches but in Christian Unions and searcher groups in schools. Christians involved in education are uniquely positioned to meet this hunger with truth, and gospel hope.

Take heart

I sometimes feel an unexpected pang of longing for the past – a nostalgia for elements of British culture that seem to have faded. I’m never quite sure whether that feeling should unsettle me, and it’s one I have to approach with care. As a Christian, I know I must guard my heart: the more ‘Christianised’ UK of my childhood was hardly perfect, and idealising it ignores both its flaws and the rich diversity that will characterise our true and eternal home in Heaven.

I must remind myself that the cultural and demographic shifts in our schools are not a reason for fear, but an invitation for faithful engagement. Christians can be confident that the gospel is good news in any plural setting. True gospel multiculturalism does not suppress the legitimate diversity of cultures, languages, or peoples; it unites humanity in a shared story without erasing difference.

Take heart. We have good news to share. May we take it into our schools with great confidence.

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.

We must keep on fighting the Government's conversion therapy plans

By Joanna Timm

Christians in the Australian state of New South Wales have united against a new law that threatens the freedom to proclaim the Gospel of repentance to all people. The NSW Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024, which came into effect in April, criminalises any practice aimed at 'changing or suppressing' an individual's 'sexual orientation' or 'gender identity'. The penalty? Up to five years in prison or a maximum fine of A\$100,000. Official state guidance on how to comply with the law confirms just how repressive it is, since encouraging an individual to embrace celibacy outside of marriage, or praying with a person at their request, could be deemed an attempt to change or suppress that person's sexual orientation and therefore constitute a criminal offence.

The Sydney Anglican Synod passed a motion in September encouraging Christians to be unafraid to proclaim the truth of God's Word in matters relating to marriage, sexuality and identity – even if it risks a complaint under the state's 'conversion practices' law.¹ Sydney Archbishop Kanishka Raffe said: "I want to say this clearly and publicly to you all, that I will stand by any clergy person or church worker who finds themselves brought before a tribunal or court because of this poorly conceived law... We must not be silenced or intimidated from teaching God's good plan for human sexuality and relationships. We will insist on the freedom to do so respectfully, but without fear, we will obey God. We can do nothing less."² The Presbyterian Church of NSW joined its Anglican brethren in affirming that it will continue to promote biblical sexual ethics and support people to live in line with their faith.³

The pushback from our Australian brothers and sisters should serve as a challenge to us here in the UK. With the Westminster Government set to publish its own draft 'conversion practices' Bill for England and Wales soon, it's important that we too use every opportunity to push back against activist demands for a law that would trample gospel freedom. We must continue to draw attention to the many legal opinions from leading KCs which affirm that existing law in this area is already sufficient to protect everyone from actual abuse.⁴ And we must continue to make the case that broadening the criminal law in this way will only see innocent actions – like prayer and pastoral conversations – brought within its scope.

A good example of this is the recent open letter to the Westminster Government, drafted by 24 church leaders from across Great Britain, including Affinity Director Graham Nicholls. In response to Westminster's pledge to publish a draft bill for pre-legislative scrutiny, the church leaders warn that a conversion therapy law "could criminalise mainstream, historic Christian teaching on marriage and

1 Sydney Anglicans: Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 'Synod Summary – September 2025', 2 October 2025: <https://synod.sydneyanglicans.net/s/sfsites/c/sfc/servlet.shepherd/document/download/0690100000UxyY0IAZ>.

2 David Robertson, 'Christians stand against conversion law', *Evangelicals Now*, 23 November 2025: <https://www.e-n.org.uk/world-news/2025-12-christians-stand-against-conversion-law/>

3 John McClean, 'NSW Presbyterians and the Conversion Practices Ban Act', *AP*: <https://ap.org.au/2025/09/30/nsw-presbyterians-and-the-conversion-practices-ban-act/>.

4 Let Us Pray, 'The legal case against a "conversion therapy" law', 30 July 2024: <https://letuspray.uk/latest/the-legal-case-against-a-conversion-therapy-law>.

sexual ethics, and make sharing the Gospel with some people illegal".⁵ They also warn that this law could criminalise parents – Christian or not – from engaging in conversations with their children about sex and sexuality. More than 6,000 Christians have added their name to the letter supported by The Christian Institute campaign Let Us Pray, including over 1,300 church leaders. (You can sign the letter here: letuspray.uk/letter.)

When the Scottish Government published its proposals for a conversion practices law last year, we encouraged Christians in Scotland to pray and to act. The results of the consultation were published in October. This revealed that the majority of respondents opposed the plans.⁶ Of the 5,811 responses – which is a remarkably high response rate in Scottish terms – 52% opposed a new law covering “acts or courses of behaviour intended to ‘suppress’ another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity”. 46% were in support, with two per cent unsure.

Many highlighted the threat to religious freedom. Some expressed concern that the proposals risk “criminalising religious leaders whose role is to guide others in line with their beliefs”, arguing that proposed exemptions for ‘non-directive’ guidance fail to recognise that pastoral support often involves providing direction. Similar concern was expressed regarding parents. Respondents warned “that legislation could encroach on the rights of parents and carers and that people could be criminalised for acting in what they believe to be the best interest of their child(ren).”⁷

Interestingly, the Scottish Government did not push ahead with those plans. Bizarrely, for the SNP, it has asked Westminster to legislate for Scotland, while pledging to bring in its own law if Westminster’s is inadequate. This feels like an effort to long-grass the issue. All of this is testament to the importance of sustained pushback. Now is not the time to retreat or slacken. It’s vital we keep speaking out and help others in our churches understand the threat a conversion therapy law poses to gospel freedom, so that when the Westminster Government does publish its draft Bill, we are ready to respond.

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5 Let Us Pray, 'Great Britain Letter', <https://letuspray.uk/take-action/great-britain>.

6 Scottish Government, 'Ending conversion practices in Scotland: consultation analysis', 7 October 2025: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-conversion-practices-scotland-analysis-responses-scottish-governments-public-consultation/>.

7 Ibid., 17.

Affinity News: June-October 2025

By Dr. Calum MacKellar

UK three-parent-baby experiment published

In July 2025, it was announced that eight children were born in the UK from a procedure seeking to ensure that they are unaffected by a serious genetic disorder. News of the births and the children's health had been expected for a long time. The fertility regulator granted the first licence in 2017 to a clinic at Newcastle University where scientists pioneered the technique. The four boys and four girls, including one set of identical twins, were born to seven women.¹

Every cell in a human body contains (1) a nucleus, the core of the cell wherein the chromosomes (which contain most of the DNA) of an individual are located, and (2) mitochondria, which are very small bodies (containing 37 genes) which act as energy sources within the cell. Mitochondrial disorders arise when genetic mutations in the mitochondria or in the chromosomes limit the energy supply in cells of affected persons giving rise to dysfunctions in some organs and tissue with high energy requirements such as in the brain or muscles.

In this experiment, the chromosomes were transferred from the fertilised egg of one woman (who wants a child but has defective mitochondria) into another fertilised egg which has been emptied of its own chromosomes and originates from a donor woman with healthy mitochondria. The new fertilised egg was then implanted into the woman wanting a child.² The procedure could eventually enable women, affected by mitochondrial disorders, to have healthy genetically related children.³ This process, however, is not a medical treatment. It only makes sure certain kinds of persons are created in the first place. In other words, it is a form of genetic selection of possible future children.

30 year-old frozen human embryo eventually becomes a baby

A baby boy born in July 2025 set a new record for having been stored the longest (30 and a half years) as a frozen embryo. Linda Archerd, 62, who created the embryo in 1994 had originally planned to use the embryos herself but then experienced a divorce with her husband. She won custody of the embryos and kept them in storage, believing that she may use them one day. However, this did not happen.

She was then informed about the possibility of giving the embryos up for 'adoption'. This is enabled by (often Christian) agencies which believe that embryos have full moral status.⁴ In this case, Lindsey and Tim Pierce, who live in the USA, adopted the embryos. In the UK, about 200 leftover embryos from IVF are also adopted every year out of the about 20,000/year who are discarded and left to perish.

1 Ian Sample, 'Eight healthy babies born after IVF using DNA from three people', *The Guardian*, 16 July 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/jul/16/eight-healthy-babies-born-after-ivf-using-dna-from-three-people>.

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

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

4 Jessica Hamzelou, 'A record-breaking baby has been born from an embryo that's over 30 years old', *MIT Technology Review*, 29 July 2025.

New egg created from skin cell chromosomes

American researchers successfully created early-stage human embryos for the first time by using the chromosomes from skin cells and combining them with human eggs. This breakthrough could potentially address infertility caused by aging or illness, as it enables nearly any cell of the body to serve as the source of new life. The approach may also pave the way for same-sex couples to have genetically related children. However, the technique is still very preliminary and may need years of development before it can be considered for use in fertility treatments.

The procedure involves extracting the nucleus – containing all the chromosomes – from a skin cell and inserting it into an unfertilised egg that has had its own chromosome removed. This process is similar to the cloning procedure that resulted in Dolly the Sheep. But the resulting egg still holds a full set of 46 chromosomes, making it unsuitable for fertilization. Therefore, the scientists developed a method to discard half of the new egg's chromosomes resulting in the usual number of 23 chromosomes. This was then fertilised by a sperm cell (also containing 23 chromosomes) which, all going well, resulted in an embryo inheriting 23 chromosomes from each parent.

The study indicated that 82 functional eggs were created. These were then fertilised by sperm with some embryos progressing until the early stages of development. However, none of the embryos were left to develop beyond the six-day-stage before being discarded.

New treatment for Huntington's disease

For the first time, it was indicated that Huntington's disease (originating from a mutated gene), which is a fatal genetic disease which destroys brain cells in adult patients, has been treated with some success.

Typically, symptoms begin in a person's 30s or 40s, and the condition is usually fatal within 20 years. If one parent carries the faulty gene, his or her child has a 50% chance of inheriting the condition and eventually developing the disease.

Data from the new experimental treatment indicated that progress of the disease had decreased by 75% in patients. This means that the decline that would have been expected in one year would now take four years after treatment. The new form of gene therapy, administered through brain surgery lasting 12 to 18 hours, offers new hope for treating the disease. Early intervention could potentially stop symptoms from developing altogether, which would result in less foetuses being terminated when prenatal testing reveals they have the mutated gene. Fewer embryos may also be discarded with the mutated gene in a procedure called preimplantation genetic diagnosis. This is where many IVF embryos are created by the parents before one or two are selected without the mutation and implanted into the mother (with most of the affected embryos being discarded). With the new treatment, even if they have the mutant gene, embryos and foetuses have a much higher potential for healthy lives.

Book Reviews

By Tim Dieppe

Ian Shaw's *Christians and Slavery*

Day One Publications (2025). RRP £15.

<https://trade.dayone.co.uk/products/christians-and-slavery>

Ian Shaw is a social scientist and Professor Emeritus at the University of York. He is the author or editor of more than thirty books. He is also a member of York Evangelical Church. Some of this book draws on articles he wrote for Affinity's *Foundations* in the last couple of years on slavery, the slave trade and Christians.

Shaw's book, *Christians and Slavery*, is structured in two parts. Part 1 forms the bulk of the book and is about how Christians engaged with slavery and the slave trade. Part 2 seeks to apply lessons from this history to contemporary challenges.

In Part 1, Shaw seeks to provide an account of how Christian leaders in both Britain and America responded to slavery in the 17th century and beyond. The first chapter outlines a history of the transatlantic slave trade and the dreadful inhumane treatment of slaves by both traders and owners. He notes that in 1783, Prime Minister, William Pitt estimated that slave trade profits accounted for 80% of British overseas income (p38). Slavery was so accepted that supporters were incredulous at proposals to outlaw it (p39).

The following chapters demonstrate with extensive research and quotations what Christians of various stripes and times have said and argued about slavery and the slave trade. First, Shaw tackles the Puritans, noting Calvin's general abhorrence of slavery. While Samuel Rutherford criticised slavery in the strongest terms, others (such as Baxter and Cotton Mather) accepted it whilst criticising the harsh and degrading treatment of slaves as a hindrance to the gospel.

Moving on to the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards famously owned slaves, seeming to regard slavery as a necessary evil. Edwards allowed for domestic slavery but ruled out slave trading. His reluctance to defend the practice, however, helped pave the way for the next generation, including his son, to campaign against the practice. George Whitfield also held slaves in his Georgia orphanage.

There is a chapter on black evangelicism and American slavery – a topic not often discussed. Somewhat counter-intuitively, he finds that these often-enslaved Christians had a high view of God's sovereignty. Representative is the quote from Equiano: "Through the mysterious ways of Providence, I ought to regard [slavery] as infinitely more than compensated by the introduction I have thence obtained to the knowledge of the Christian religion." (p133).

A chapter on the abolitionist movement and its Christian motivations discusses the involvement of William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, John Newton, John Wesley, and many others. He also discusses how the Particular Baptists responded to slavery, noting that Robert Robinson preached a sermon in 1788 on slavery in which he lamented: "If there be such a thing as a national sin . . . I fear, I fear, the African slave trade is of this kind." (p150).

Shaw moves on to discuss various theological responses to continuing slavery in 19th century America. Here we see the likes of Robert Dabney seeking to justify slavery by reference to the curse on Canaan. Others, such as Charles Hodge, sought to defend the institution of slavery as divinely ordained whilst abhorring the ill-treatment of slaves. While B.B. Warfield was ahead of his time in criticising racism, he did not completely condemn slavery as an institution. Even into the twentieth century, Gresham Machen sought to differentiate between the institution of slavery and the abuses of it.

A final chapter in part 1 discusses the British abolition of slavery and its aftermath. Here, Shaw highlights the work of William Knib who linked speaking out on slavery with preaching the gospel. He also quotes extensively from the sermons of Charles Spurgeon on the subject.

Part 1 is well-researched and informative, and lays bare the horrors of slavery and the acquiescence or even encouragement of the church in its evils. Part 2 moves on to discuss what we can learn from this to apply to contemporary challenges. Shaw asks, and proposes some initial answers to, eight pertinent questions. These questions are well worth pondering, and I list them here for the reader:

1. What does the history of slavery and the slave trade tell us about Christians and political engagement?
2. How do we keep close to God while being publicly involved?
3. What can we learn when Christians fall short?
4. How should we understand and respond to Christian disagreements on slavery?
5. What are we to think about questions of reparations and restorative justice?
6. Are we called to national repentance?
7. What and how should Christians remember?
8. How has the Bible been interpreted?

Shaw's discussion of these questions in the light of his research in Part 1 is enlightening. I won't attempt to summarise his thoughts on each of them, but the question on reparations is very topical (and discussed further in Biggar's book; reviewed below). Shaw argues that, while culpability for sin is personal, the corruption of sin is corporate, so that in the Bible nations and churches are called to repent of sins for which not every member was culpable. He quotes extensively from Thabiti Anyabwile's article 'Reparations Are Biblical'.¹ Anyabwile argues that the decrees of Cyrus in Ezra 1 and of Darius in Ezra 6, allowing the Israelites to return to the land with the temple vessels, and then insisting that the rebuilding of the temple is paid for by royal revenues, are reparations for the sacking of Israel by the Babylonians two generations earlier.

This is an interesting argument; however, I am not sure that I am entirely persuaded. Reparations are not mentioned at all in the context of these decrees in Ezra. It is far from clear that these Persian rulers felt any duty of reparation for the sins of the Babylonians. It is worth noting, however, that Jeremiah did say that "after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity" (Jer 25:12). Therefore, punishment was inflicted on people two generations later who did not participate in the destruction of Jerusalem. Surely this punishment was primarily the fall of Babylon in 539 BC?

The unique contribution of this book is its focus on how Christians of all kinds engaged with slavery and the slave trade, both in Britain and America, and both before and after abolition. There is no

¹ Thabiti Anyabwile, 'Reparations Are Biblical', The Gospel Coalition, 10 October 2019:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/reparations-are-biblical/>.

attempt to discuss how the Bible should be properly interpreted in relation to slavery – and this felt like an omission, given the focus on theological responses. However, Shaw's book is a reminder that many prominent Christian leaders failed to properly respond to the evils of slavery. It is an aid to reflecting on what we can learn today from the history of Christian engagement with slavery.

Nigel Biggar's *Reparations: Slavery and the Tyranny of Imaginary Guilt*

Forum (2025). 224 pages. RRP £16.37.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Reparations-Slavery-Tyranny-Imaginary-Guilt/dp/1800755597>

Published after Shaw's book, and in contrast to it, Biggar's *Reparations* makes no attempt to apply the Bible to this important moral question. He merely asserts that he is approaching the question from a Christian perspective, with a “Christian ethical viewpoint” which includes “belief that there is an objective moral reality” and belief in “universal moral principles” (p18).

Biggar argues that, in discussing the question of reparations, we need to take into account four important contexts to British participation in slavery and the slave trade. The first is that slavery was universal and normal throughout the world, not just in Britain. By some estimates, the Muslim slave trade of white slaves from Eastern Europe and the British Isles, which lasted until 1920, exceeded the total number of slaves shipped across the Atlantic by Europeans (p36). It is unfair, given this context, to single out British enslavement as particularly extraordinary and especially deserving of reparations.

The second context is African participation in the slave trade. Africans were selling slaves to the Romans and the Arabs centuries before British ships appeared on the coast of West Africa (p37). It is striking to note that many African leaders at the time actually opposed the abolition of the slave trade (p57). Biggar also notes that some West African states have withdrawn their support for reparations perhaps in recognition of this context (p106).

The third context is the fact that the British were among the first people in the history of the world to abolish slave-trading and slavery. Biggar vigorously rebuts claims that the slave trade financed the industrial revolution and made, according to Marxist historian Eric Williams, “an enormous contribution to Britain's industrial development.” (p45). He cites research showing that the slave trade only engaged 1.5% of British vessels, and 3% of tonnage (p46). He notes then that if this trade contributed significantly to industrialisation, then one ought to expect Portugal to have industrialised earlier and faster since Portugal, with less than one third the population of Britain, carried out nearly two-thirds again as many slaves across the Atlantic (p46). He cites a leading scholar stating that Eric Williams's thesis “has now been wholly discredited by other scholars.” (p46).

The fourth context is the British suppression of the slave trade throughout the Empire for years afterwards. The Royal Navy deployed ships specifically to stop the slave trade from the early 1800s through to 1865. At its height, this effort accounted for 13% of the Royal Navy's total manpower and included forcing Brazil to abandon the slave trade. “In absolute terms,” writes Biggar, “the British spent almost as much on suppressing the trade in the 47 years of the peak period, 1816-82, as they received in profits over the same length of period leading up to 1807.” By any reasonable assessment, “the nineteenth century costs of suppression were certainly bigger than the eighteenth century benefits.” (p85). Indeed, Biggar cites scholars who conclude that: “Britain's effort to suppress the Atlantic slave trade – alone – in 1807-67 was ‘the most expensive example [of costly international moral action] recorded in modern history’” (p86). One could argue that this amounts to reparations by Britain for its part in the slave trade.

Biggar goes on to consider some prominent proponents of reparations, subjecting their arguments to some basic scrutiny and concluding that they are ‘naked emperors’. First is Hilary Beckles and his book *Britain’s Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. Biggar demonstrates Beckles’ misrepresentation of history which avoids or is ignorant of the contexts above. Second is the Brattle Report of 2023.² Once again this is castigated in the harshest terms for historical ignorance, omissions and shoddy reasoning.

Biggar then takes aim at the Church of England’s rush into reparations. The Church Commissioners have made the astonishing claim that: “The immense wealth accrued by the church has always been interwoven with the history of African chattel enslavement.” (p127). Further, they claim that “African chattel enslavement was central to the growth of the British economy of the 18th and 19th centuries and the nation’s wealth thereafter.” These claims just do not stack up. Much is made of the Queen Anne’s Bounty, which was a forerunner of the Church Commissioners’ endowment fund and which, for a time, held shares in the South Sea Company. This, in turn, invested in a business which did include some slaves. However, the fund made a loss on its South Sea Company holdings because its investments incurred serious losses. As a result, the South Sea Company actually never made any profits from the slave trade. Thus, there is no profit from slavery incurring to the Church of England’s wealth. Other claims and assertions of the Church Commissioners are simply not supported by reasoned argument or evidence. The motivation of the Church Commissioners – and, as Biggar concludes, the case for reparations as a whole – appears to be virtue signalling rather than seeking justice or truth.

This book is well researched with multiple references. It builds on some points he made in his earlier book: *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* (William Collins, 2024). It also responds to more recent proposals and discussions of reparations. The reparations movement is growing and gaining political influence. Biggar’s book provides a much-needed critique. His book deserves to be widely read.

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² Dr. Coleman Bazelon, Dr. Alberto Vargas, Rohan Janakiraman and Mary Olson, 'Report on Reparations for Transatlantic Chattel Slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean', 8 June 2023: <https://www.brattle.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Report-on-Reparations-for-Transatlantic-Chattel-Slavery-in-the-Americas-and-the-Caribbean.pdf>.

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