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A busy few months in store

The coming months look set to keep The Christian Institute busier than ever.

The Equality Bill, which carries several significant threats to religious liberty, is making its way through Parliament. We are working very hard to defend Christian freedoms from the Bill.

A general election is on the horizon. At the last election we produced an extremely popular briefing detailing the policies of the major parties on key moral issues. We plan to produce a similar briefing again.

March will see two important cases come to court supported by our Legal Defence Fund. You can read more about those inside this newsletter.

And there is lots of good news to reflect on from the end of last year. Lord Waddington's free speech clause was retained, Ben and Sharon Vogelenzang were found innocent of insulting a Muslim, the law on prostitution was toughened, and Parliament rejected weakening the law on assisted suicide.

Lords vote to protect churches from Equality Bill

On 25 January the House of Lords voted against Government plans to alter the law on who churches and other faith-based groups can employ.

This means churches and other Christian groups keep a legal safeguard that allows them to protect their ethos by insisting staff live consistently with the Bible's teaching on sexual behaviour.

At the time of going to press, it is not known whether the Government intends to overturn the result in the Commons.

Peers voted 216 to 178 in favour of Lady O'Cathain's amendment to keep the current law unchanged.



Lady O'Cathain is delighted by the result.

Then in an extraordinary move the Government broke with House of Lords convention in a bid to damage Lady O'Cathain's victory.

But in two further votes Lady O'Cathain won by 195 votes to 174 and by 177 votes to 172.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats whipped their Peers

to vote against Lady O'Cathain but the Tory Peers were whipped to support her.

Letters written to Peers, including Northern Ireland Peers, together with the prayers of thousands of Christians and churches, were crucial to the victory. The support of Bishops was also key.

Reacting to the

successful votes, Lady O'Cathain said: "I know that very many Christians were praying that justice would prevail as the House of Lords voted on this important issue.

"Many also wrote wise, sensitive letters to Peers, seeking to persuade them of our case.

"We give thanks to God for the outcome, and we continue to pray for our Government, as Scripture exhorts us to do, that God would bless their counsels.

"I do also want to thank The Christian Institute for the amazing support they have given to me throughout this campaign."

Institute helps churches and charities understand their legal responsibilities

The Christian Institute is conducting a national roadshow to help the leaders of evangelical churches and charities understand their legal obligations under current charity law.

A panel of experts will speak and lead workshops on topics

such as "Meeting the Charity Commission's requirements", "The church as an employer" and "Public evangelism and the law".

The Charity Roadshow runs from 23 January to 15 May at 10 venues across England and Wales. Attendance is free for

those in leadership of evangelical churches and charities, but others can attend at a cost of £70 for day events.

For more information and online booking go to christian.org.uk/roadshow

Wayne Grudem to tour with Institute



Bestselling Christian author Wayne Grudem will tour England for a week in June as a guest of The Christian Institute. The respected theologian, best-known for his 'Systematic Theology' and for his translation work on the ESV Bible, wants to encourage Christians in Britain to speak out clearly and publicly on moral issues.

Dr Grudem rejects the notion that religious belief should be kept as a private and personal matter and not talked about publicly. He also dismisses the idea that Christians should only be active in evangelism, not the political sphere. Instead he argues for "significant Christian

influence on government" that is based on a right understanding of the Bible. His tour comes at a time when Christians in Britain are increasingly marginalised for their beliefs.

During the tour, Dr Grudem will teach about the responsibility on all Christians, especially Christian leaders, to present clear Biblical truth on moral issues to the society around them. He says: "Loving our neighbours as ourselves means seeking their good in every aspect of society. This includes good government and good laws."

For tour venues and dates go to christian.org.uk/grudemtour

Government to clamp down on home schooling

The Government wants home educating families to register with local authorities and expose themselves to intrusive regulation, or have their children forcibly sent to school. Registered home educators will be required to satisfy their local authority that the education their child receives is "suitable", with parents and child subjected to questioning by education officers.

If the proposals become law, their effect on home schooling families will very much depend on the attitude of education officials.

The proposals fall within the Children, Schools and Families Bill. They are heavily influenced by the recommendations of the Badman Report on home education, even though the Government's own public consultation on the Report revealed fierce opposition from parents.

Many parents fear that increasing Government control of family life could lead to the kind of cases seen in other parts of the world. In the US a judge ordered a 10-year-old Christian girl to attend a state school because her home education led to "rigidity on questions of faith",¹ while in Sweden Christian home-schooling parents who had their son taken away by Government officials recently lost a court battle to have him returned.²

¹ *Washington Times*, 4 September 2009

² Alliance Defense Fund, Press Release, *Swedish Government Seizes Child from Home-schooling Family*, 22 December 2009

Christians cleared of insulting a Muslim as judge finds accusations 'unreliable'

In December a Christian couple were found innocent of insulting a Muslim after a judge said their accuser's evidence was not reliable.

Hotel owners Ben and Sharon Vogelenzang suffered months of anxiety after police charged them with a crime because of a religious debate with a Muslim guest.

In court Ericka Tazi accused the couple of launching an hour-long verbal attack against her. She claimed they had called her a terrorist and mocked her Islamic headscarf.

But Mrs Tazi's claims were contradicted by other witnesses and, after hearing all the evidence, District Judge Richard Clancy said Mrs Tazi's version of events could not be trusted.



Ben and Sharon are delighted to have been cleared but are still suffering financially.

He hinted that the police should have handled the matter better.

The couple's hotel business has been devastated because of the prosecution. There has been an 80 per cent drop in bookings and, despite

being found innocent, the couple continue to suffer financial hardship.

Ben and Sharon were supported by The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund.

After the case was dismissed in court the Institute's Director Colin

Hart reminded Christians of Jesus' words: that people may "falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11).

"Ben and Sharon stand in a long line of believers who have faced false accusations," said Mr Hart.

Foster carer case: court date set

The case of a foster carer struck off because she allowed a 16-year-old Muslim girl in her care to convert to Christianity will be heard by the High Court in March.

The foster carer cannot be named for legal reasons. Officials removed her from the fostering register, claiming she failed in her duty of care by allowing the girl to become a Christian.

But lawyers acting for the woman believe her religious liberty rights have been breached.

Prayer email case to be heard in March



Jennie Cain.

Jennie Cain, a part-time school receptionist who was disciplined by her bosses for sending a prayer email, will have her case for religious discrimination heard by an employment tribunal in March.

Mrs Cain sent the prayer email from her own home, outside work time, using her own computer and her personal email account.

The email asked church friends to pray because Mrs Cain's five-year-old daughter had been reprimanded by her class teacher for talking about her faith.

The school's head defended the decision to reprimand the young girl, saying that children should not be allowed to state faith as fact.

Registrar case may go to the Supreme Court

Lillian Ladele, the Christian registrar who was ordered to perform same-sex civil partnership registrations or face dismissal, lost her case for religious discrimination at the Court of Appeal in December.

Judges expressed sympathy for Miss Ladele's situation but ruled in favour of her bosses at Islington Council.

Miss Ladele says she intends to appeal to the Supreme Court, the UK's highest court.

The Court of Appeal said that "Islington did not treat her fairly". However, the Court ruled this did not amount to religious discrimination.

The Council had leaked confidential disciplinary information about Miss Ladele to the Council's LGBT forum. The Court said this was a breach of her rights and a breach of the Council's own code of conduct.

The Council had also treated her letter of request for a reasonable accommodation of her religious beliefs as a freestanding act of "gross misconduct". The Court said this was an "unjustifiable characterisation".



Gay civil partnerships planned for Ireland

Registrars in the Republic of Ireland who refuse to facilitate same-sex civil partnerships would face jail under a new Bill before the Irish Parliament.

The Irish Government's Civil Partnership Bill grants welfare and tax benefits on a par with marriage to homosexual and heterosexual cohabiting couples who enter a civil partnership.

Registrars who refuse to facilitate a same-sex civil partnership would face a €2,000 fine and up to six months imprisonment.

There is no clause to allow freedom of conscience, which has sparked concerns about the Bill's impact on registrars who hold Biblical views about marriage and homosexual relationships.



Northern Ireland churches concerned by charity code

Churches and religious charities in Northern Ireland have been voicing their concerns about draft guidance on 'demonstrating public benefit' published by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI).

Under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, religious organisations wishing to acquire or retain charitable status must demonstrate public benefit. CCNI published draft guidance outlining the considerations it would make when assessing whether or not an

organisation meets the public benefit requirement. A public consultation on the draft guidance closed in November.

According to the guidance, CCNI will weigh up 'benefits' against 'detriments' when assessing an organisation's activities.

Features of the draft guidance which have concerned churches and Christian charities include:

- ▶ No assurance that CCNI will not seek to critique religious groups' beliefs and doctrines when assessing 'detriment'.
- ▶ An expectation

that the membership benefiting from religious groups' activities is "sufficiently open".

▶ No positive reference to evangelism or missionary work as beneficial "advancement of religion".

▶ Over-sensitivity about the 'detriment' caused if a charity's activities are controversial among other groups with opposing views.

CCNI will assess the responses to the consultation before publishing a final version of the guidance.

Law against prostitution toughened

The Government's new law to tackle sex trafficking has passed through Parliament intact. The Christian Institute strongly welcomes this development.

Debates in both Houses featured attempts to water down the new law, which criminalises anyone paying for sex with a prostitute who is being exploited for gain by someone else.

It is a strict liability offence, meaning the purchaser could be found guilty regardless of whether they knew, or tried to find out, if the prostitute was being exploited.

The Government hopes that the new offence, contained within the Policing and Crime Act 2009, will help cut the demand for prostitution and so stem the tide of women and girls trafficked into the UK to be forced into the sex trade.

An international study found that 68 per cent of prostitutes meet the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with symptoms matching those of torture victims.

The same study shows that nine in ten prostitutes want to escape prostitution but feel unable to do so.¹

¹ Farley M, Cotton A, Lynne J et al, 'Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries', *Journal of Trauma Practice*, 2(3&4), 2004, pages 34 and 56

Success in free speech battle

Victories in the House of Lords for supporters of liberty have forced the Government to abandon its attempt to repeal the free speech protection from its 'homophobic incitement' law.

The House of Commons backed the Government's bid to delete the protection. However, the architect of the 'free speech clause', Lord Waddington, led a campaign in the House of Lords to keep it.

Peers voted to keep the free speech clause on two occasions. In July 2009 Peers voted by 186 to 133. In November, after MPs had voted once more to remove it, the Lords again voted 179 to 135 in support of Lord Waddington.



Lord Waddington led the campaign in the Lords.

During the debate many Peers referred to cases of people investigated by police for 'homophobia' simply for expressing traditional views about sexual ethics.

The Government could not keep delaying its legislation, and a Ministry of Justice spokeswoman announced: "It is with considerable disappointment, therefore, that the

Government has agreed not to remove the 'freedom of expression' section."

The offence of inciting 'homophobic hatred' was added to the statute book in 2008. The Government has continuously opposed having Lord Waddington's free speech protection attached to the offence.

New report catalogues how Christians are being sidelined



The Christian Institute has published a report examining the growing marginalisation of Christians. It catalogues cases of anti-Christian discrimination across a range of areas.

The Christian Institute's Mike Judge said: "Many Christians feel marginalised in modern Britain.

"Whether it's a Christian nurse being suspended for offering to pray for a patient's recovery, or whether it's a Christian couple being prosecuted for a crime because they criticised Islam, believers feel targeted by the 'equality police'.

"When it comes to applying equality and diversity laws, Christians seem to be the first to be punished and the last to be protected."

Critics line up against assisted suicide guidance

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has attracted fierce criticism over his interim guidance on prosecuting cases of assisted suicide.

Critics of the interim guidance have warned that it creates an impression that cases of assisting suicide will not be prosecuted "if certain prescribed boxes are ticked".

The Royal College of Physicians, England's oldest doctors' group, has warned that the guidelines could create "an open door

to physician-assisted suicide", which it firmly opposes. The British Medical Association has raised similar concerns.

Disability rights campaigners have also expressed unease. A group of leading lawyers, Peers and former judges labelled the guidance not "fit for purpose".

The DPP, Keir Starmer QC, was required to publish the guidance by a ruling of the Law Lords in a case brought by an assisted suicide campaigner.

In September he launched interim



Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer QC

guidance together with a public consultation. He is expected to publish a final policy in the spring.

Meanwhile in Scotland, Margo MacDonald MSP has introduced a Bill which proposes to allow assisted suicide in

certain circumstances.

Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond has said that he is "not convinced" by Mrs MacDonald's arguments.

But he pledged to give all Government ministers a free vote of conscience on the Bill.

Guide to general election planned

At the last general election The Christian Institute published a hugely popular guide to the policies of the major parties on a range of moral issues. The handy guide also included simple tips on how to learn more about parliamentary candidates' views. Preparations are already under way for this year's guide.



Sex education plans announced

Compulsory sex education for primary schools, restrictions to parents' opt-out rights, and curriculum changes are all part of a major shake-up of sex education proposed in the Government's new Children, Schools and Families Bill.

The Bill, which would affect all state schools in England, creates a compulsory Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) component within the National Curriculum for both primary and secondary schools.

Despite its own consultation last year showing widespread opposition to the plans, the Government has pressed ahead with the

changes, which include teaching primary school children about body parts and puberty, "sex within the context of caring and stable relationships", civil partnerships, marriage and separation.¹

The Bill also imposes sex education on older children against the wishes of their parents, by ending parents' longstanding right of withdrawal when their child turns 15. The Government has said the continuation of the opt-out at younger ages will be kept under review.²

¹ *Understanding Physical Development, Health and Wellbeing – Draft for Consultation*, QCA, April 2009, pages 3 and 6

² House of Commons, Hansard, 27 April 2009, col 32WS