

Newsletter Spring 2008

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We are working on many fronts

Unless you are on email or the internet, the last time you heard from us would be when you received our Annual Review in February. Since then we have been incredibly busy. We wanted you to know about all the work we have been doing.

Inside this newsletter you will see what we

have been doing on the embryology Bill, religious liberty cases, the 'homophobic hatred' offence, charity law, age of consent and more. The first quarter of 2008 has been one of our busiest-ever periods and it shows no signs of slowing down. We value your prayers and support at this time.

Brown under pressure over embryos Bill

The Government's highly controversial Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is making its way through Parliament. It has already passed through the Lords and is now in the Commons.

The Christian Institute has been working with like-minded organisations and pro-life politicians to oppose certain aspects of the Bill in accordance with our Christian beliefs.

The Bill has been well publicised in the media, particularly when back-bench Labour MPs succeeded in forcing the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to allow them to vote according to their conscience on three crucial aspects.

The three areas are: whether to allow scientists to create embryos that are part-animal, part-human; whether to allow embryo screening for so-called 'saviour siblings'; and whether to remove the requirement for doctors to consider a child's need for a father when referring a woman for IVF. In addition to these three elements, we expect to see amendments to the Bill to change the law on abortion. MPs on both sides of the abortion debate will seek changes to the law.



A public opinion poll, commissioned by The Christian Institute, found that 79% think it is important to consider a child's need for a father in IVF, 60% think it is wrong to create animal-human embryos (only 33% do not think it is wrong), and a majority (51%) agree that the creation of 'saviour siblings' denies the child a choice in how its body is used.

These three issues, together with abortion, have become the most contested aspects of the Bill. You can read more on our website (christian.org.uk).

Court action against Google

The Christian Institute is suing the internet giant, Google, because it will not allow adverts for websites which combine "abortion and religious-related content".

The well-known search engine blocked a pro-life ad for The Christian Institute's website, christian.org.uk, because it is a "religious" website expressing views on abortion. Yet Google is happy to accept abortion ads from non-religious groups.

Lawyers for The Christian Institute say Google is treating the Institute less favourably than other customers simply because of its religious beliefs. The Equality Act 2006 makes it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of religion in the provision of goods and services.

Recent figures show that Google earned about £407 million from UK advertising in the first three months of 2008, with much of the revenue coming from adverts for



pornographic sites. This means it is set to overtake ITV, Britain's biggest commercial TV channel, as the biggest player in the UK advertising market.

The Christian Institute's Mike Judge said: "Google promotes itself as a company committed to the ideals of free speech and the free exchange of ideas. It is against this standard that Google's anti-religious policy is so unjust.

"If there is to be a free exchange of ideas then Google cannot give special free speech rights to secular groups whilst censoring religious views."

Scores of religious liberty cases

The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund is financing the Google action plus a host of other religious liberty cases.

Since the fund's launch, the Institute has helped dozens of Christians defend their liberty.

We are currently working on some crucial employment cases where attempts are being made to force Christian employees to act against their religious beliefs.

We are also using the fund to protect Christians who have

been unjustly stopped from sharing the gospel in public places.

A Christian who has faced persecution in her vocational training because of her faith is also being supported by our Legal Defence Fund.

At this time, we cannot publicise the details of these ongoing cases. But there is no doubt that the fund is a necessary and timely resource for Christians in Britain.

Legal Defence Fund

The Christian Institute has set up a Legal Defence Fund. The aim is to fund the costs of legal action and the associated campaign work in cases of national importance for religious liberty.

There are a growing number of cases where Christian freedom is being restricted by official bodies, often acting completely outside the law.

Parliament and the courts have laid down many precious rights and freedoms in the UK. These freedoms need to be used. We want to use the Legal Defence Fund to protect Christian religious freedom and restrain those who are unlawfully harassing and discriminating against Christian believers.

We also want to use the fund to intervene in strategic court cases where precedents could be set which may affect Christian religious liberty.

Religious liberty in the workplace

The Christian Institute has teamed up with employment lawyer and Christian, Mark Jones, to produce a handy guide to religious liberty in the workplace.

Mark is head of employment law at Ormerods solicitors in Croydon, where his advice is much sought-after by many 'household name' corporations.

He has assisted many Christian individuals who have suffered workplace discrimination because of their faith and advises a number of Christian organisations.

Already one of the Institute's most popular publications, this extremely practical booklet addresses

many key issues faced by Christian employees in Great Britain:
■ Can I send Christmas

cards to my colleagues?

- Should I be allowed time off because of church services/ Christmas/Easter?
- Can I wear a cross?
- I am being asked to wear an immodest uniform – can I refuse?
- Can I share my faith in the workplace?
- Can I give a Christian opinion on controversial topics?
- I am worried I might be accused of being homophobic.
- Can I object if my employer has asked me to undertake duties that are contrary to my Christian conscience?
- My employer has asked me to

provide a good or service for a client that is contrary to my Christian conscience. How should I convey my concerns?



New common grace book

In this helpful booklet, Dr Nick Needham explains why the doctrine of 'common grace' (God's favour to all men in this life whether they are Christians or not) is so useful in understanding the work of The Christian Institute. A Baptist minister, lecturer at the Highland Theological College and author of several books on church history, Dr Needham traces the implications of common grace through three key themes:

- Christians as citizens of both the church and civil society, with responsibilities to both communities.
- The role of the state and how Christians can help the state to be a guarantor of a just moral order.
- The conscience of unbelievers – an example of God's common grace in every human being – and how it acts as the Christian's secret ally, recognising and responding to the claims of the moral law.



Web and email are the best ways to stay informed

If you have an email address or access to the internet, then we would encourage you to use these tools to keep up to date with news from The Christian Institute.

All the news covered in this newsletter has already been publicised on our website (christian.org.uk) and by email.

It is a tremendously powerful way for us to communicate with you. We can publish online articles instantly, whereas publishing a newsletter like this takes days. Sending emails costs pennies but mailing a newsletter like this costs thousands of pounds.

We want to reassure you that we strive to maintain the same standard of professionalism and reliability in all the material we publish – whether it is digital or whether it is in print. We also want you to know that we fully intend to continue sending you printed information through the post.

However, we would encourage you to visit our website regularly and sign up for email alerts. These are the best ways of keeping up to date with all our news.

Embryos Bill: what happened in the Lords

During the passage of the HFE Bill through the House of Lords, Peers on our side presented strong arguments in the debates and were able to rebut the exaggerated claims of the Bill's supporters. Sadly the votes on the pro-life and pro-family amendments were lost, but the campaign is by no means over. The amendments identified and highlighted the most crucial issues in the Bill. Now that all MPs will have a free vote in these areas, they are waiting to hear the views of their constituents. It is vital that Christians pray and contact their MP when the time comes.



Lady O'Cathain was among those who tabled amendments against the Bill

	For	Against
Animal-human embryos (L. Alton) The amendment prohibited the creation of any form of animal-human embryos. The Government whipped against it.	96	268
15 January 2008		
Saviour siblings (B. O'Cathain) The amendment prohibited the creation of a child for the purpose of treating another child. The Government whipped against it.	62	118
15 January 2008		
Fathers (B. Deech) The amendment maintained the requirement that doctors consider a child's need for a father before permitting IVF. The Government and the Lib Dems whipped against it.	93	165
21 January 2008		
Abortion (B. Masham) The amendment removed foetal disability as a ground for abortion. A vote was not expected and so many supportive Peers were not present.	22	89
28 January 2008		

Sad day as Lords legalise blasphemy

On 5 March the House of Lords voted by 148 to 87 to abolish the law of blasphemy in England and Wales. Under pressure from atheist campaigners, the Government brought forward an amendment abolishing the centuries-old protection for the Christian faith. Labour Peers were compelled to vote for abolition; the leaderships of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties strongly backed repeal but their Peers were allowed a free vote.

Government ministers downplayed fears the move

would lead to increased secularisation. However, Evan Harris MP, an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, wrote to Peers arguing that abolition of the blasphemy law "should be seen as a secularising move, and with pride".

The Church of England did not oppose repeal. The leading opponent was Baroness O'Cathain who argued it would "legalise the most extreme and profane blasphemy". She reminded Peers that the Coronation Oath and the established Churches in England

and Scotland, together with the blasphemy law, are "an explicit denial that Britain is a secular state." She went on: "abolishing the blasphemy law does not demonstrate neutrality; rather, it contributes to a wider campaign for the adoption of a secular constitution, which... would actually be hostile to religion. There is no neutral ground here. Every society has some cherished beliefs that it protects in law."

The House of Commons is expected to approve the abolition of the blasphemy law at the beginning of May.

Consultation on legalising teen sex in Scotland

The Scottish Government has run a consultation on whether to legalise sexual activity between teenagers provided there is less than a two-year age gap between them.

If allowed, it would mean a 15-year-old boy could lawfully have sex with a 13-year-old girl. Homosexual activity would also be lawful between these ages.

The consultation, which closed in March, was based on a Scottish Law Commission report on sexual offences published in December 2007.

The Christian Institute responded to the consultation, pointing out that the age of consent law is an important child protection measure and relaxing the law would send out the wrong signal to

Scotland's teens.

The Institute also alerted the Scottish media. The *Edinburgh Evening News* published an opinion piece written by the Institute.

The Christian Institute has taken legal advice from a Scottish criminal law QC on how the proposals would affect the law on the age of consent.

Plan to lower the age of consent in Northern Ireland

The Westminster Government wants to lower the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual activity in Northern Ireland from 17 to 16.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has approved a report which recommends keeping the law unchanged, but the Assembly has no control over criminal law in the Province.

The proposal is included in draft legislation called the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order.

The Order was devised by the Northern Ireland Office and is due to come before the Westminster Parliament by summer 2008.

Although the Northern Ireland Assembly has no power to amend the draft Order, it has a consultative role. As part of this consultative process an Assembly Ad Hoc Committee scrutinised the Order and compiled a report for the attention of the Assembly.

Staff from The Christian Institute were called by the Committee to present evidence. The Institute demonstrated that changing the law would not command popular support and would send out the wrong signal to young people. The Committee report recommended keeping the age of consent at 17.

A public opinion poll commissioned by The Christian Institute found that 73% of people in the Province oppose any move to lower the age of consent. This includes 80% of Protestants and 72% of Roman Catholics. A majority of the public (58%) believe that lowering the age of consent



The Institute's Callum Webster (left) hands a letter to Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA. The letter objects to plans to lower the age of consent in the Province.

to 16 is likely to increase the number of under-16s with sexually transmitted infections. Compared to Northern Ireland, the rate of STIs among under-16s is 2.5 times higher in England and Wales, where the age of consent is 16.

The Institute has encouraged MLAs of different parties to sign a "no day named" motion expressing their opposition to the proposal. Over 50 MLAs have signed it, making it one of the most supported cross-party NDN motions ever.

Free speech victory in the Lords

Lord Waddington, supported and advised by The Christian Institute, has succeeded in amending the proposed 'homophobic hatred' offence to include a free speech protection.

Shortly before midnight on Monday 21 April, Peers voted 81 to 57 in favour of his amendment which says, "In this Part, for the avoidance of doubt, the discussion or criticism of sexual conduct or practices or the urging of persons to refrain from or modify such conduct or practices shall not be taken of itself to be threatening or intended to stir up hatred."

The amendment must be approved by MPs in the House of Commons. The Government may try to overturn the amendment there. However, the Government is keen to get the Bill passed quickly because a no-strike agreement with prison officers ends in early May. The Government wants the Bill, which makes such strikes unlawful, to become law as soon as possible.

In recent years there have been a number of cases where overzealous police officers have unjustly interfered with the rights of people to express their religious beliefs on sexual ethics.

Speaking during the Lords debate, Lord Waddington said: "Some might say that the amendment is now so moderate in its terms



Many Peers stayed late into the night for the vote

that it merely states the obvious and is therefore unnecessary, but those who say that are, I fear, closing their eyes to what has really happened in recent years."

"When it comes to language touching on matters of sexual orientation, there has already been a load of trouble with the police misapplying the existing Public Order Act. It is our plain duty to try to prevent this continuing to happen," he added.

Colin Hart, Director of The Christian Institute, said: "Peers clearly felt strongly enough about the issue to make sure they attended the debate and stayed very late into the evening to support Lord Waddington. I would strongly urge Christians to pray that the amendment is not overturned by the Government."

Scots charity law

The Christian Institute has responded to a consultation on draft guidance for Scottish charities. Scottish charity law is different to the rest of the UK. In its response the Institute reminded the regulator that it should protect the liberty of Christian charities to evangelise and to express their religious beliefs on ethical issues.

Important consultation for Christian charities

For England and Wales, the Charities Act 2006 removes the presumption that religious groups are for the 'public benefit' and are therefore charitable. In the future, a religious group will have to demonstrate 'public benefit' in order to be a charity.

The question is, how will 'public benefit' be interpreted for religious groups? The Charity Commission has

launched a 'sector specific' consultation which specifically focuses on this question.

A general consultation on 'public benefit' ended last June. This second, more specific, consultation will close on 30 June 2008.

The Christian Institute has been examining the consultation documents in detail. In due course we will publish our view.