

# Election briefing





CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN A SECULAR WORLD

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Printed in April 2005

Published by The Christian Institute  
PO Box 1, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE7 7EF

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# Introduction

A General Election has been called for 5 May 2005. As Christian citizens, we should think carefully about how we should vote.

The Christian Institute is a registered charity and cannot endorse any political party or candidate in the Election. We cannot tell you who to vote for. That is a matter for you. What we can do is provide you with factual information about the policies of the political parties and key background information on legislation and public policy. This is set out in this *Election Briefing*.

In addition on our website you will find the voting record of all sitting MPs on a specific range of moral issues – see [www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk). You may wish to use this information to help form an opinion about your sitting MP. However, this information only applies to votes on a specific range of moral issues and there may be other information which you wish to consider.

Since our website votes database only applies to sitting MPs, it will not help inform you about the other candidates for the seat. To help Christians find out the views of the people standing in their constituencies you may like to see our *20 Questions for Candidates* on the back page of this briefing.

Also available on our website is our 130-page briefing *Christian Apologetics on 20 Moral Issues*. This sets out why we believe certain votes in Parliament were morally right or wrong and provides more information about how each vote on the website was recorded.

Copies of the *Election Briefing* and *Christian Apologetics on 20 Moral Issues* are available on our website [www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk) and from our office on request – telephone 0191 281 5664.

## Election 2005

Since its inception The Christian Institute has promoted the Christian faith in the public square in six main areas – marriage and the family, medical ethics, education, religious liberty in the UK, matters of public morality, and the constitution.

Within these broad areas, this *Election Briefing* highlights the policies of the three main political parties at Westminster – the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. We also include the known policies of the SNP, Plaid Cymru and UKIP.

There are also other parties fielding candidates at the General Election – these include the Christian People's Alliance<sup>1</sup>, the Green Party<sup>2</sup>, Operation Christian Vote<sup>3</sup>, the Pro-life Alliance<sup>4</sup> and the Scottish Socialist Party.<sup>5</sup>

This *Election Briefing* covers many issues where important Christian principles are at stake. There are many other issues about which Christians show a particular concern and where much material is available (like the Developing World), but we know that many are concerned with issues such as those covered by this briefing.

We have to have laws to restrain evil and policies to commend what is good (Romans 13: 1-7), but the Government is not responsible for everything. Indeed if there is to be democracy, it must not be. Many Christians are gravely concerned about legislative proposals which intrude into ordinary family life, evangelism and the running of the local church.

It is important to say that society is more than the state. Society is made up of families and many institutions and organisations between the state and the citizen. Government by itself cannot solve all our problems or even come remotely close.

The issues we have highlighted are those where we believe the Bible is clear. They tend to be issues where biblical principles, and in particular the Ten Commandments, directly

apply. We cannot break God's law without there being consequences – to a degree in this life, and fully in the life to come. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows (Galatians 6:7). A nation will never be blessed by breaking God's laws.

### **Christian citizenship**

The state is a means of God's 'common grace'. The Bible is very clear that the governing authorities act on God's behalf to restrain evil (see Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). This is for the good of all people in this world – not just Christians.

The Christian has dual citizenship of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and of an earthly nation (usually that in which he was born). The Christian's duty is to obey the governing authorities, except where they forbid what God requires, or require what God forbids (Acts 5:29). It is the Christian's heavenly citizenship which commands the ultimate loyalty.

As well as duties, being a citizen gives us certain rights. The Apostle Paul was prepared both to use *and not to use* his rights as a Roman Citizen depending on which ever option most benefited the gospel cause. (Acts 16:37-39; 21:39; 22:25-29; 25:10-12).

For us in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain, we live in what is historically a relatively unique situation – we live in a democracy. Unique responsibilities and privileges flow from living in a democracy. One is that we have the right to vote. Surely Christians should use this privilege.

Christians can exercise their vote and help influence the policies of the next Government. Christians also want to go much further. We want to say that discussions about our economy or the provision of public services must not ignore the massive spiritual and moral problems in our nation.

Christians in Britain today live in a collapsing culture in which God's moral law is openly flouted. Things will not get better unless this is addressed. The only lasting and real solution to the problem of man's sin is uniquely provided in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel denies that there can ever be political salvation in this life. Nevertheless, we are to pray that our authorities would provide freedom for the Gospel and freedom for Christians to live "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We are to pray that the governing authorities will fulfil their God-given mandate and govern according to God's moral law (Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14). The General Election provides an opportunity for Christians to speak out and play their part.

### **Biblical priorities**

The Bible gives a clear basis for knowing right from wrong. God's moral law is laid down for everyone – not just for Christians.

Jesus criticised the Pharisees and told them "you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). This included "setting aside the commands of God" by neglecting their parents (when they needed financial support) in order to observe a man made tradition (Mark 7:9-12). For Jesus, and for us, it is God's commands which tell us what constitutes justice, mercy and faithfulness.

Whilst we are obligated to obey God in everything, certain parts of the moral law are absolutely fundamental. That is why God has been pleased to give us the Ten Commandments.

When it comes to votes in Parliament, there are cases where MPs vote for or against what is taught in the Commandments. For example, a vote for abortion is a vote to break the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Exodus 20:13). Similarly it is a breach of the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Exodus 20:14) to promote homosexuality to young people in schools or to equate homosexual unions to marriage. These are not matters of political opinion, but straight forward issues of right or wrong.

Debates about the introduction of local income tax, free entry into museums, or the scrapping of tuition fees can all involve a moral component. But from a biblical perspective these issues can never be as important as a debate on whether euthanasia should be legalised. After the election there is time enough to debate all these matters, but during an election we have to decide how to vote. This necessarily involves weighing up what is most important.

Even when it comes to issues of life and death, there are matters of scale. It is said that 1,000 people die through contracting MRSA in hospitals each year.<sup>6</sup> But in 2003 177,286 abortions (97% of all legal abortions) were carried out for social reasons.<sup>7</sup> These deaths are entirely preventable.

Whilst the Christian Church has always protested against abortion, the Bible is silent on the question as to whether hospitals should have matrons. There are a vast number of similar issues where the precise application of biblical principles is harder to determine. This is because in order to make a judgment many other facts need to be assessed.

For example, the state has a right to levy taxes (Romans 13:7), but Christians who hold to biblical truth can never be absolutely certain about what should be the correct level of

income tax. There are many economic and moral factors involved and Christians can legitimately disagree on the interpretation of the facts.

The Bible does not stipulate the level of the national minimum wage, or actually say that the governing authorities are obligated to introduce such a measure. Christians can contribute to a debate on this issue, but in the brief time left before the election Christians will want to focus on what are clear biblical priorities.

### **Candidates and parties**

There are perhaps two factors which we all must consider when deciding who to vote for. We must consider *the candidates* and we must consider *the parties* they represent.

You may feel it is better to vote for an exceptional candidate who shares your Christian views across a range of moral issues even if they are standing for a party which you would not naturally support. You may feel that the most important consideration is to vote for the candidate who is standing for a party which in your view represents the least worst option. You may feel that it is better to vote for one of the Christian political parties which may happen to stand in your area. These are decisions which ultimately only you can decide. In some constituencies Christian believers may be in an impossible position. Christians should exercise their Christian conscience in these matters. Just because your parents or your work colleagues vote in a certain way does not mean that you need to do the same. It is your choice.

However, you can't make an informed decision without knowing what the parties and the candidates stand for. Christians should make it their business to find out the policies of each candidate and party. They should seek to find out their position on key moral issues.

### **Speaking to candidates**

Candidates or their representatives may come to your door or call by telephone or stop you in the street to ask how you intend to vote. This presents an ideal opportunity to raise Christian concerns and to find out where the candidates stand on key issues. The candidate's opinions on certain moral issues can be quite different from the position of the party.

More than at any other time the candidates and the sitting MP will be open to listen to your views. Should they be elected they will be representing you in Parliament.

Think through two or three issues and have questions ready in case canvassers call or stop you whilst out shopping. Limit yourself to two or three issues with which you are most

concerned. Be prepared to give a reason for your view. This *Election Briefing* will help you get to grips with the issues you are interested in.

If you speak to the candidate himself, ask if he is willing to raise your concerns in Parliament if elected. If he says that he will, you can hold him to this promise should he be elected.

If you speak to a representative canvassing on behalf of the candidate, ask for your concerns to be forwarded. The very act of asking questions is a Christian witness.

### **Writing to your candidates**

If you don't want to wait for candidates to knock at your door, then you could write to the candidates either by letter or by email in order to raise your concerns. This way you can be sure that all the candidates are aware of your concerns.

Election literature which is put through your letterbox will give the local addresses for your candidates. For the sitting MP you may want to see how he or she has voted in the past since this is a matter of public record (see The Christian Institute's website – [www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk)). If you write to a candidate, keep your letter short but do raise specific points. Make sure you tell them that you are a constituent. You could swap notes with other Christian friends who have had contact with a candidate.

It is highly unlikely that you will find a party or a candidate whom you feel has all the right views. In some constituencies there will be the option to vote for a candidate who takes a firm stand on moral issues. This is not going to be the norm. Instead it is likely to be a decision about what is the least-worst option amongst the political parties and candidates.

There are many ways of being a Christian citizen, but a General Election provides a good opportunity for Christians to be salt and light in our society. We must pray for wisdom and speak out for the truth.

### **Party policies**

The parties set out their policies in their manifestos. They also publish official policy documents and have policy resolutions determined by their party conference.

Obviously the Government's actions are there for all to see. Since the opposition parties are not in a position to implement their ideas, we can only note what they have said about the Government's legislation and the way they have voted.

Christians must weigh the evidence and exercise their Christian conscience.



## Labour's record in Government

Labour has continued to push through various 'gay rights' measures. The Labour Manifesto boasts that it passed the **Civil Partnership Act** (which is 'gay marriage' in all but name), reduced the **homosexual age of consent** to 16, and reformed the law on sexual offences removing all distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual acts.<sup>8</sup> Attempts to quietly scrap the law against **homosexual activity in public lavatories** had to be abandoned after major opposition in the House of Lords.

In 2002 it passed a law allowing **homosexual adoption** in England and Wales.

It also introduced **special employment rights for homosexuals**. These represent a serious threat to religious liberty. They make it more difficult for church schools, churches and Christian organisations to refuse to employ staff whose conduct does not match their Christian profession.

At the same time the Government introduced similar regulations covering 'religion or belief', removing the absolute discretion of churches to employ believers in whatever post they saw fit. In theory the regulations give employment protection for religious believers in secular workplaces, but the greatest concern has been the restriction of Christians' freedom to employ religious believers. These new employment laws threaten the ability of churches and Christian organisations to maintain their distinctive doctrines and ethos.

In 2000 Labour **lifted the ban on homosexuals serving in the Armed Forces**.

On the positive side, in education the Government has continued to promote the establishment of **academies** with a Christian ethos. But, negatively, it has also repealed **Section 28** (the law which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools) and in February 2005 funded the 'National Gay and Lesbian History Month'. Under this extraordinary initiative pupils were to be taught that Florence

Nightingale had lesbian tendencies.<sup>9</sup>

The Government refused to lower **the age of heterosexual consent** from 16.

The law on **cannabis** was downgraded by the Government in 2003 – cannabis became a Class C drug on a par with sleeping pills.

The **Gender Recognition Act**, passed in 2004, provides a raft of legal rights for transsexuals – including the right for people to change their legal birth sex. So a man can become a woman in law and then marry another man. The Government did permit sporting bodies to have exemptions from the legislation, but it resisted amendments in Parliament to protect churches and religious organisations from the effects of the Act.<sup>10</sup>

The Children Act 2004 contains a Government-backed law restricting (but not banning) **the parental right to smack** their children.

Christians across the country strongly opposed the Government's proposal to create an '**incitement to religious hatred offence**'. The law threatened to curb the freedom to preach the Gospel. Following opposition from the House of Lords, the measure was dropped before the General Election.

Many people are concerned that the Government's **Mental Capacity Act 2005** allows euthanasia by omission. The Act creates 'advance decisions' – known as 'living wills'. The Government refused to amend the Bill to stop it opening the door to euthanasia.

The new **Gambling Act** was passed just before the election. This provides for a massive deregulation of the gambling industry, introducing Las Vegas-style casinos to Britain and allowing for a great multiplication of betting shops, slot machines and internet gambling. Significantly, the Government formally legalised casino machines – 'fixed-odds betting terminals' – in casinos and betting shops. These machines have been called the 'crack cocaine' of gambling.<sup>11</sup>

In February 2005 the Labour Government

opposed attempts to abolish the **blasphemy laws**. This may be only a temporary reprieve, however, as the former Labour Home Secretary, David Blunkett, suggested repeal whilst in office.<sup>12</sup>

## Labour Party Policies

**Abortion** – Tony Blair has said it is a conscience issue for MPs, but will not commit parliamentary time to lowering the age limit up to which healthy babies may be aborted.<sup>13</sup>

**Euthanasia** – The Government has said that it ‘has no plans’ to allow euthanasia.<sup>14</sup> There is concern about the effect of the Mental Capacity Act (see above).

**Human Cloning** – In the past the party has permitted MPs to vote according to their conscience on the issue of so-called therapeutic cloning. In March 2005 the UN passed a declaration calling for a ban on all forms of cloning, both reproductive and therapeutic. The UK Government representative voted against and refused to accept the declaration.<sup>15</sup> The Department of Health stated in reference to the declaration:

“This is totally unacceptable to the UK government which strongly supports stem cell research, including embryonic stem cell research which involves the use of cloning technology.”<sup>16</sup>

**Parental smacking** – The party opposes a total ban on parental smacking: “...it would be wrong to create a new offence by imposing a ban on smacking... There is a world of difference between a light smack and violence or abuse.”<sup>17</sup> However the Children Act 2004 did restrict the parental right to smack.

**‘Gay marriage’** – Labour has stated that it has no plans to introduce same-sex marriage.<sup>18</sup> However, its Civil Partnership Act created ‘gay marriage’ in all but name, and greatly increases the likelihood of full legal ‘gay marriage’.

**Divorce** – The Labour Manifesto states that the party will promote mediation in divorce<sup>19</sup> – schemes for divorcing couples to divide their assets and take decisions about the children. But this is not the same as promoting reconciliation (to avoid divorce) through counselling the couple. Christians want to see politicians promote reconciliation (which saves marriages) not mediation which facilitates divorce. In Scotland, the Scottish Executive’s

Family Law Bill would make divorce quicker and easier. (The Scottish Executive is a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition.)

**Legal rights for cohabittees** – in March 2005 the Lord Chancellor asked the law commission, the official law reform body, to draw up proposals for giving cohabittees the same legal rights as married couples when they split up.<sup>20</sup>

**Morning-after pill in schools** – in 2002 the Government gave the go-ahead for school clinics to supply contraceptives and the morning-after pill.<sup>21</sup>

**Christian schools in the state sector Academies** – The Labour Manifesto promises to continue the academies programme which allows the creation of academies with a Christian ethos.<sup>22</sup>

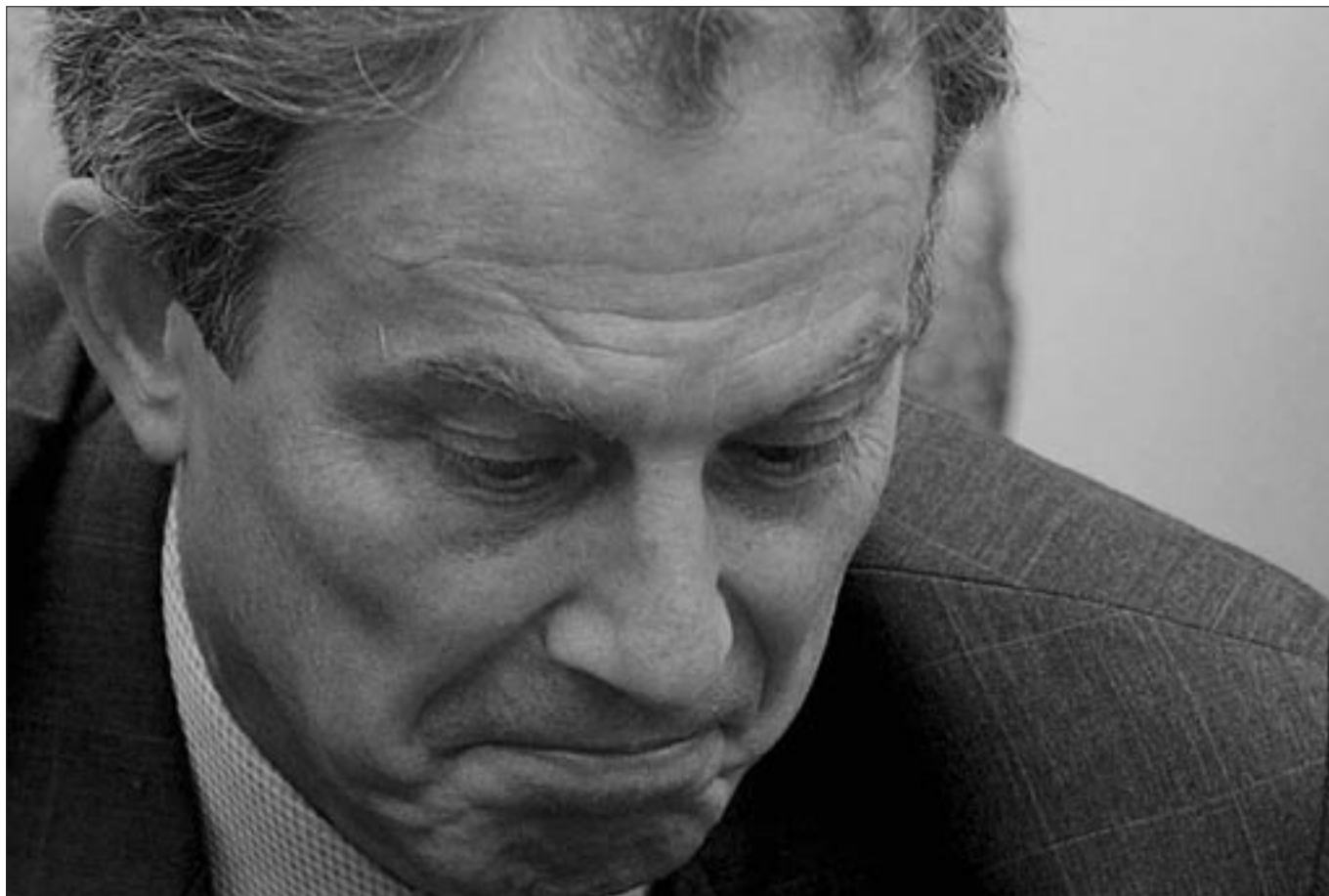
*Church schools* – The Labour Manifesto states: “Britain has a positive tradition of independent providers within the state system, including church and other faith schools. Where new educational providers can help boost standards and opportunities in a locality we will welcome them into the state system, subject to parental demand, fair funding and fair admissions.”<sup>23</sup>

**Mainly Christian RE and school assemblies** – In 2004 the Government accepted a report from QCA outlining a non-statutory framework for RE. The framework stated that all six main religions should be taught and opportunities given for teaching other religious traditions such as the Baha’i faith and even humanism.<sup>24</sup> RE will remain predominately Christian, with Christianity taught at all key stages.<sup>25</sup>

In May 2004 the Government stated in Parliament that it is considering a range of proposals to help schools deliver their statutory responsibility for collective worship in schools, and will announce the way forward in due course.<sup>26</sup>

**Sex education in primary schools** – The Government recommends that sex education should be taught in primary schools in England and Wales, though it is not compulsory.<sup>27</sup>

**Incitement to religious hatred law** – The Labour Manifesto promises to pass the incitement to religious hatred law.<sup>28</sup> The Home Secretary wrote a letter to mosques throughout Britain apologising for not being able to get the religious hatred law passed before the election, blaming the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords.<sup>29</sup> A Home Office Minister has said that should Labour be



returned to power, it will use the Parliament Act to force the measure into law (overriding the objections of the House of Lords).<sup>30</sup>

**Incitement to 'homophobic hatred' law** – In March 2005 the Government said it was “open to considering” whether this offence should be introduced.<sup>31</sup> There is the clear potential that Christian preaching which declares homosexual practice to be sinful could fall foul of this law.

**Religious broadcasting freedom** – The Government continues to ban Christians from holding some TV and radio broadcasting licences.<sup>32</sup>

**Commission on Equality and Human Rights** – The Labour Manifesto promises to establish a Commission on Equality and Human Rights.<sup>33</sup>

**'Homophobic' discrimination in goods and services** – The Government has previously announced its intention to legislate to outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods and services on the grounds of sexual orientation.<sup>34</sup> There are concerns that this could affect Christian ministries.

**Drugs** – In 2003 the Government downgraded **cannabis** from a Class B to a Class C drug. It recently announced a review of the decision after further evidence showing a causal link between cannabis and mental illness.<sup>35</sup>

In April 2005 the press reported that the Government plans to give **heroin** addicts free supplies of the drug at clinics. The scheme is to be piloted in three locations from June.<sup>36</sup>

**Prostitution** – In 2004 the Government published a consultation paper on prostitution. The Government stated many of the laws relating to prostitution are “outdated, confusing and ineffective.”<sup>37</sup> It consulted on a number of questions, including whether to establish prostitute ‘tolerance zones.’<sup>38</sup>

**Sunday trading** – Labour has said it has no plans to further deregulate Sunday trading.<sup>39</sup>

**Constitution** – The Government has said that it opposes the separation of church and state. (It therefore supports the establishment of the Church of England and the exclusion of Roman Catholics from the line of succession to the throne).<sup>40</sup>

**House of Lords** – The Labour Manifesto also proposes to reduce the powers of the House of Lords, as well as to remove the remaining hereditary Peers and allow a free vote on the future composition of the House of Lords.<sup>41</sup> Many issues of Christian concern – for example on religious liberty – have been effectively raised in the Lords when it has proved very difficult to do so in the House of Commons.

# Conservatives



## Conservative Party Policies

The Conservative Party under Michael Howard gave a free vote to its MPs on the **Civil Partnership and Gender Recognition Acts**, though the frontbench spokesmen supported both pieces of legislation. In 2002 the Conservatives opposed the legalisation of **adoption by homosexual couples** in England and Wales.

In the past few months the Conservatives have firmly opposed the **incitement to religious hatred offence**. However, the party did not in the end oppose the **Gambling Act**.

**Abortion** – Michael Howard has promised to give parliamentary time for a debate on reducing the time limit to 20 weeks.<sup>42</sup> Whilst he said he personally would support the measure, he said it would be a free vote issue for his MPs.<sup>43</sup>

**Euthanasia** – In the past it has been party policy to oppose euthanasia.<sup>44</sup>

**Human Cloning** – In the past the party has permitted MPs to vote according to their conscience on the issue of so-called therapeutic cloning.

**Parental smacking** – In 2004 Conservative MPs were given a free vote on whether smacking should be banned. Party Spokesman Tim Loughton MP stated his opposition to restricting the right of parents to smack their children.<sup>45</sup>

**'Gay marriage'** – the Conservative Party policy on introducing full legal same-sex marriage is unknown. Michael Howard voted for the Civil Partnership Act, which created 'gay marriage' in all but name.

**Divorce** – The Scottish Conservatives oppose allowing quickie divorces (as proposed in

the Family Law (Scotland) Bill).<sup>46</sup> When in government, the Conservatives passed the 1996 Family Law Act for England and Wales. This was to have introduced no-fault divorce, but it was never implemented after pilot schemes showed the Act to be unworkable.

**Legal rights for cohabiters** – During the passage of the Civil Partnership Bill, Conservative spokesmen opposed giving legal rights to cohabiting heterosexual couples, arguing that they can get married.<sup>47</sup>

**State-funded Christian schools** – In April 2005 Conservative Education Spokesman Tim Collins stated that a commitment to a major expansion of religious schools "is absolutely at the heart of the Conservative vision."<sup>48</sup> Michael Howard has said he believes: "that faith schools should be allowed to flourish... We will encourage new ones to be set up, existing ones to expand..."<sup>49</sup>

**Sex education in primary schools** – The Conservatives have strongly criticised the Liberal Democrat policy of compulsory sex education from the age of 7: "What do they [the Liberal Democrats] stand for?... Forcing every 7 year old, regardless of parental wishes, to have sex education. Be very clear – the Lib Dems are entirely unfit ever to run education."<sup>50</sup>

### 'Anti-homophobia' officers in schools

– In March 2004 the Conservatives proposed that every school would be encouraged to designate a teacher to deal with 'homophobic' bullying.<sup>51</sup> Michael Howard recently expressed regret that he had in the past supported Section 28.<sup>52</sup> The Conservative Party attacked the Government funded "National Gay and Lesbian History Month" as being about political correctness.<sup>53</sup>

**School discipline** – The Conservative Party wishes to give more powers to headteachers over school discipline.<sup>54</sup>

**Incitement to religious hatred law** – Michael Howard stated in February 2005 “...I am opposed to the Religious Hatred legislation presently before Parliament. I believe it has the potential to limit freedom of religious expression and have the opposite effect to the one intended.”<sup>55</sup>

**Incitement to ‘homophobic hatred’ law** – Conservative Home Affairs Spokesman Patrick Mercer, responding to this proposal in April 2005, said: “I suspect this is a politically correct measure to satisfy a vociferous minority.”<sup>56</sup>

**Religious broadcasting freedom** – The Conservatives oppose the ban on Christians holding some TV and radio licences.<sup>57</sup>

**Commission on Equality and Human Rights** – The Conservatives have offered their “broad support” to the establishment of the commission.<sup>58</sup>

**Blasphemy** – The Conservative Party no longer has a position on the repeal of the blasphemy law. Last time it was debated it was matter for a free vote.

**Drugs** – The Conservative Manifesto promises to reverse the downgrade of the law on **cannabis** – returning cannabis to a class B drug.<sup>59</sup>

**Public health** – The Conservative Manifesto contains a commitment to a TV public health campaign against STIs. This appears to promote the ‘harm reduction’ philosophy of ‘safer sex’, rather than promoting marriage.<sup>60</sup>

**Constitution** – Michael Howard has spoken in favour of repealing the law which excludes Roman Catholics from the line of succession to the throne.<sup>61</sup> He has also stated his support for the establishment of the Church of England.<sup>62</sup>

**House of Lords** – The Conservative Manifesto states: “We will seek cross-party consensus for a substantially elected House of Lords.”<sup>63</sup>





## Liberal Democrat Party Policies

It is no exaggeration to say that the Liberal Democrats are proud to be the main party most supportive of **gay rights**, arguing in their LGBT Manifesto that they have wanted to go much further than the Government and that only they are truly consistent on gay rights.<sup>64</sup> In 2002 the Lib Dems backed the legalisation of **adoption by homosexual couples** in England and Wales. They also supported the **Gender Recognition Act 2004**.

The Liberal Democrats supported the downgrading of the law on **cannabis**, but oppose an **incitement to religious hatred offence**. It is party policy to completely ban **parental smacking**.<sup>65</sup>

**Abortion** – In the past the party has permitted MPs to vote according to their conscience.

**Euthanasia** – The party supports the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia. In March 2004 the Liberal Democrats passed a conference motion that ‘medically-assisted dying’ should be legalised, though Lib Dem MPs would be permitted to have a free vote.<sup>66</sup>

**Human Cloning** – In the past the party has permitted MPs to vote according to their conscience on the issue of so-called therapeutic cloning.

**Fertility treatment** – The Lib Dems would repeal the law which currently requires clinics to consider the need for a father before providing treatment. The party believes this discriminates against lesbians.<sup>67</sup>

**Parental smacking** – The party would introduce a ban on all parental smacking.<sup>68</sup>

**‘Gay marriage’** – the Liberal Democrat party policy on introducing full legal same-sex marriage is unknown.<sup>69</sup>

**Divorce** – In Scotland, the Scottish Executive’s Family Law Bill would make divorce quicker and easier. (The Scottish Executive is a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition.)

**Marriage** – In 2004, a Liberal Democrat Spokesman stated during a debate on the role of marriage in securing well being for children and parents: “The position that these Benches adopt is that it is not for the state to lay down moral rules... Therefore, our emphasis is not on marriage *per se* but on the means of providing the safe, secure, loving long-term relationships that children need. It is the quality of the relationship that is the key issue rather than the precise legal institutional framework of that relationship.”<sup>70</sup>

**Legal rights for cohabiters** – When the Civil Partnership Bill was announced, the Lib Dem spokesman supported giving unmarried couples the same rights as marriage.<sup>71</sup> However, during the passage of the Civil Partnership Bill, Lib Dem spokesmen opposed giving legal rights to cohabiting heterosexual couples.<sup>72</sup>

**Morning-after pill in schools** – The Liberal Democrats support the availability of the morning-after pill in schools. They welcomed the decision by Labour in 2002 to establish school clinics to supply contraceptives and the morning-after pill.<sup>73</sup>

**State-funded Christian schools** – The Lib Dem Manifesto does not mention academies or church schools. In the past the party has argued that faith schools should be “more inclusive”<sup>74</sup> and that they should not be able to select pupils on the basis of their religion.<sup>75</sup> The Conservatives have said the Lib Dems would ban faith schools, but the Lib Dems deny this. In 2005 their Education Spokesman said: “It is not about the worth to society of high value added church schools – I am happy to see them expand – but about access by those children



who do not have either the Church or their parents as advocates."<sup>76</sup>

**Sex education in primary schools** – The party believes there should be compulsory sex lessons for seven year olds. In September 2003 the Liberal Democrat conference overwhelmingly carried a motion calling for compulsory sex and relationships education from the age of 7.<sup>77</sup>

**Incitement to religious hatred law** – The Lib Dems oppose the offence and put forward an alternative outlawing racism disguised as religious hatred.<sup>78</sup> The Lib Dem Manifesto says: "Liberal Democrats led the call for an amendment to the laws on incitement to racial hatred, to criminalise those who use religious words as a pretext for race hate."<sup>79</sup>

**Incitement to 'homophobic hatred' law** – The Liberal Democrats support this law: "We will make incitement of homophobic hatred an offence on the same basis as inciting racial hatred."<sup>80</sup> The Lib Dem Manifesto promises: "We will establish hate-crimes investigation units in each police force to co-ordinate information and action against racism, homophobia and other hate crimes."<sup>81</sup>

**Homosexual teachers in Church schools** – The Lib Dems have a manifesto commitment to changing the law so that Church schools

can no longer refuse to employ practising homosexuals on the teaching staff.<sup>82</sup>

**Homosexual employment rights against Churches** – The Lib Dems want to reduce the scope of the employment law exemptions which currently allow Churches and Christian organisations to refuse to employ practising homosexuals. The Lib Dems would only protect "proselytising roles such as priests."<sup>83</sup>

**Religious broadcasting freedom** – During the passage of the Communications Bill 2003, the Lib Dems initially supported removing restrictions on religious bodies holding TV and radio licences. However, in a last minute U-turn, they supported the Government in maintaining the ban.<sup>84</sup>

**Equality Act** – The Lib Dem manifesto states: "We will introduce a Single Equality Act to outlaw all unfair discrimination, (including on the grounds of race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability, age or gender identity), thus giving equal protection for all."<sup>85</sup>

The Party has also said: "[The] Liberal Democrats will pass an Equality Act to end all forms of discrimination including on the grounds of sexual orientation. Public bodies will have a positive duty to tackle inequality and discrimination against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people... The Act

would not just apply to the public sector. It will end discrimination in the provision of goods and services. For example, currently, hotels can refuse to take a booking from a same sex couple. Under our equality Act, everyone will be treated equally."<sup>86</sup>

**Blasphemy laws** – It is Lib Dem policy to abolish the blasphemy laws.<sup>87</sup>

**Drugs** – The Lib Dem policy is to legalise cannabis, downgrade the law on ecstasy and end prison sentences for using any illegal drug.<sup>88</sup>

*Cannabis:* In the long-term they plan to legalise cannabis in a regulated system. In the short term they plan to maintain the classification of cannabis as a Class C drug but issue policy guidance that it is not in the public interest to prosecute individuals for possession of cannabis for their own use, cultivation of small numbers of cannabis plants for their own use, or 'social supply' of cannabis. They would also allow the use of cannabis for 'medical purposes'.<sup>89</sup>

The Manifesto states: "We will concentrate more police efforts on tackling drug traffickers and those drug users who resort to crime to feed their habits, rather than criminalising people possessing cannabis only for their own personal use."<sup>90</sup>

*Ecstasy:* The Lib Dems want to downgrade the law by reclassifying ecstasy from Class A to Class B.<sup>91</sup>

*General drugs policy:* ending the use of imprisonment as a punishment for possession for a person's own use of illegal drugs of any class. Liberal Democrats believe emphasis on criminal sanctions makes the problem worse; they advocate moving away from the general prohibition of drugs.<sup>92</sup>

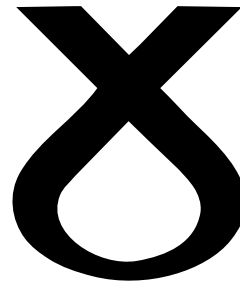
**Prostitution** – The Liberal Democrats have proposed the state licensing of brothels and the scrapping of the existing legislation on kerb crawling and soliciting, replacing it with a new offence of harassment.<sup>93</sup> In January 2005 Lib Dem controlled Liverpool Council voted to introduce a prostitution 'tolerance zone'. This is not permitted under the present law.<sup>94</sup>

**Wider availability of pornography**

– The party's spring conference voted that pornography currently only legally available to those aged over 18 should be made available to those over the age of 16.<sup>95</sup> Under the plans, 16 year olds would be able to go into sex shops.

**Constitution** – Liberal Democrat policy is to disestablish the Church of England<sup>96</sup> and repeal the law which excludes Roman Catholics from the line of succession to the throne.<sup>97</sup>

**House of Lords** – The Manifesto promises to: "replace it with a predominantly elected second chamber."<sup>98</sup>



## SNP Policies

The SNP is the official opposition in the Scottish Parliament. It had 5 MPs before Parliament was dissolved for the election – including the leader, Alex Salmond. It currently has 25 MSPs.

**Abortion** – Alex Salmond has said he would personally support reducing the limit for abortion from 24 weeks to 20.<sup>99</sup> He said this would be a free vote issue for his party.

**Human cloning** – In February 2005 the SNP Shadow Secretary for Culture and Sport laid a motion in the Scottish Parliament congratulating the UN for its declaration against all forms of human cloning, and endorsing its call for member states to prohibit all forms of human cloning.<sup>100</sup>

**Parental smacking** – The SNP is against a total ban on parental smacking. It supports the current law in Scotland.<sup>101</sup>

**Gay rights** – The SNP spokesman welcomed the introduction of the Civil Partnership Bill, which introduces 'gay marriage' in all but name.<sup>102</sup> All 5 SNP MPs voted for the Bill at Westminster; they also voted against an amendment to extend the benefits of the Bill to siblings who share a house.

**Divorce** – The SNP welcomed the Family Law (Scotland) Bill. This Bill (being considered by MSPs in the Scottish Parliament) would make divorce quicker and easier.<sup>103</sup>

**Legal rights for cohabitants** – The 2003 SNP conference overwhelmingly agreed that unmarried heterosexual partners should be included in the Civil Partnership Act and be given the same property, taxation and inheritance rights as married couples.<sup>104</sup>

**Roman Catholic schools** – The party supports denominational Roman Catholic schools in Scotland: "The SNP will continue to support Catholic schools for so long as parents wish to send their children to them. We will ensure that our education system meets the distinctive needs and interests of all of our communities, including our ethnic minorities."<sup>105</sup>

**'Homophobic harassment' law** – The SNP supports extending 'hate crime' legislation to cover harassment aggravated by hatred of a person's 'sexual orientation'. SNP Justice Spokesman Kenny MacAskill said in November 2004 that the existing hate crimes legislation should be extended: "Homophobia is clearly a problem that has to be addressed, and I'm not averse to the LGBT community receiving additional protections. But what we need most of all is better policing, prosecution and punishment..."<sup>106</sup>

**Cannabis** – The party supported the UK Government's reclassification of cannabis in 2003 from Class B to Class C.<sup>107</sup>

**Constitution** – The SNP leader, Alex Salmond, has campaigned for the repeal of the Act of Settlement, which excludes Roman Catholics from the line of succession to the throne.<sup>108</sup>





## Plaid Cymru Policies

Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales, had 4 MPs before Parliament was dissolved for the election. It has 11 Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales. The party's President is Dafydd Iwan.

**Euthanasia** – The party policy is unknown, but in 2005 Dafydd Iwan said: "...if the quality of someone's life has deteriorated to the point when they wish to be released from their suffering, then I believe that to prolong life by technical means becomes an unjustified intervention in the course of nature."<sup>109</sup>

**Parental smacking** – The party policy is unknown, but in 2004 Plaid Cymru MP Simon Thomas argued strongly for a complete ban on parental smacking<sup>110</sup> and three of the party's 4 MPs voted for a complete ban (the other abstained or was absent).

**Gay rights** – The party supported the civil partnership scheme, which introduces 'gay marriage' in all but name.<sup>111</sup> All 4 of its MPs voted to repeal Section 28.

**Legal rights for cohabitants** – The Plaid Cymru Manifesto promises to introduce a law "to provide a right for unmarried partners to register their partnership and have property, pension and inheritance rights."<sup>112</sup>

**Incitement to religious hatred law** – All 4 Plaid Cymru MPs voted against the proposed offence.

**Cannabis** – In September 2001 the Party Conference backed moves to decriminalise cannabis for personal and 'medicinal' use.<sup>113</sup> Two of the four Plaid Cymru MPs supported the reclassification of cannabis in 2003 (Simon Thomas and Hywel Williams); the other two abstained or were absent (Elfyn Llwyd and Adam Price).

**Gambling** – All 4 Plaid Cymru MPs voted against the Gambling Bill. The spokesman said: "It is not patronising, elitist or snobbish to stand up and say that gambling harms society and the poor and the working class disproportionately... Gambling is founded on misery and broken dreams for many, and it is a broken dream for a Government to promote it."<sup>114</sup>

# UK Independence Party



## UK Independence Party Policies

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) won 12 seats in the European Parliament in the 2004 elections, coming third after the Conservatives and Labour. It has no MPs. Its leader is Roger Knapman.

**Marriage** – UKIP has promised to restore tax advantages for married couples with children under 18, saying: “A further unfortunate result of expanding state provision and other government policies has been to undermine the family as the basic stable unit of society. The family, preferably with two committed parents, is the best environment for raising secure and confident children. In this connection, the UKIP will restore tax advantages to married couples with children under the age of eighteen.”<sup>115</sup>

**Divorce** – UKIP has said: “We shall also review current legal practices that seem to favour divorce and allow parents to escape financial and moral responsibility for their children.”<sup>116</sup>

**Schools (Scotland)** – The party recently said it would scrap separate denominational education in Scotland.<sup>117</sup>

**Constitution** – UKIP’s constitutional policies differ markedly from the other main political parties. It is well known for its policy of ending Britain’s membership of the European Union. The UKIP Manifesto also promises to repeal the Human Rights Act.<sup>118</sup> The Party would “resist any further dilution” of the powers of the House of Lords, saying “it is not convinced by proposals to include a proportion of elected members. The virtue of the Lords is their independence from the government and this would be reduced if they had to seek re-election.”<sup>119</sup>



# More information about current legislation and public policy

## Medical ethics

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### Abortion

Abortion has been in the media limelight over the past few months. The present law allows abortion up to the age of 24 weeks, but the law permits abortion up to birth where the child may have 'a serious handicap'. What constitutes a serious handicap has not been defined. In practice the diagnosis of a comparatively trivial deformity can be used as a ground for an abortion. Curate Joanna Jepson was granted a judicial review of the police decision not to prosecute doctors who aborted a 28 week-old unborn child with a cleft palate. In response, the Crown Prosecution Service re-examined the case but it has since announced no charges will be brought against the doctors involved.<sup>120</sup> Joanna Jepson is now seeking a judicial review of the Secretary of State for Health for failing to define what is a serious handicap.<sup>121</sup> In 2003 177,286 abortions (97% of all legal abortions) were carried out for social reasons.<sup>122</sup> Architect of the Abortion Act 1967, Lord Steel, has called for the abortion limit to be lowered to 12 weeks.<sup>123</sup> According to Department of Health statistics, in 2003 there were 1,229 abortions of unborn children aged between 22 and 24 weeks. This is an average of more than three a day.<sup>124</sup>

### Euthanasia

Pro-life campaigners believe that the Mental Capacity Act legalises euthanasia by omission (e.g. by withdrawing food and water). Euthanasia by acts of commission (e.g. by administering a lethal injection) is illegal in the UK. In April 2005 the House of Lords Select Committee on the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill published its report. Whilst not calling for the legalisation of euthanasia, it did urge Parliament to debate the issues raised at an early opportunity.<sup>125</sup>

### Human cloning

The present law allows human embryos to be cloned for 'research' (so-called 'therapeutic cloning'), but they are not allowed to develop ('reproductive cloning') – embryos created must be destroyed when they reach 14 days old.<sup>126</sup> In the past political parties have permitted MPs to vote according to their conscience on the issue of therapeutic cloning.

### Fertility treatment

Under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, all clinics have to consider the welfare of the unborn baby, including his or her "need for a father", before allowing fertility treatment such as IVF.<sup>127</sup> This provision rightly makes clear that a child should not be denied a mother *and* a father. However, the Chief Executive of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Suzi Leather, has called for the requirement to be scrapped.<sup>128</sup> Gay rights enthusiasts want lesbian couples to be provided with IVF and the current rules get in their way. In August 2004, the Government signalled that it intends to remove the provision.<sup>129</sup>

## Marriage and the family

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### Parental smacking

The Children Act 2004 restricted the defence of 'reasonable chastisement' for parental smacking of children. The Act applies to England and Wales. Under the new law, any smack that causes reddening of the skin that is 'more than transitory' could potentially result in a prison sentence. During the passage of the Bill, some back bench MPs tried to ban all smacking. The Government rejected an outright ban, but supported the change in law that weakens the parental right to smack.

### **'Gay marriage'**

Later in 2005 the Civil Partnership Act will come into force. In reality this creates 'gay marriage' in all but name, by creating a parallel scheme to marriage called 'civil partnerships'. It is not called same-sex marriage in law, though the rights and privileges of marriage and civil partnership are identical. In the UK full gay marriage is still not permitted in law, though the Civil Partnership Act is seen by many as paving the way for this.

### **Adoption**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples in England and Wales. This replaced the 1976 Adoption Act which allowed joint adoption only by a married couple. Before the 2002 Act was passed, some 95% of all adoptions were by married couples; the remaining 5% were by single persons.<sup>130</sup>

### **Divorce**

At present there are five 'grounds' for divorce throughout the UK.<sup>131</sup> These are adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, two years separation where both parties agree to the divorce and five years separation where one party does not consent. In February 2005, the Scottish Executive introduced the Family Law (Scotland) Bill, which will abolish the ground of desertion and dramatically reduce the amount of time required for a divorce on the grounds of separation – from two years to one and from five years to two respectively.

The divorce laws in England, Scotland and Wales are already far too lax. In England and Wales courts have permitted divorce on the ground of 'unreasonable behaviour' because of an inability to do DIY.<sup>132</sup>

When the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended, a Family Law Bill was under consideration which would liberalise the divorce laws in the Province (in a similar way to the current Family Law (Scotland) Bill.)

### **Legal rights for cohabiters**

Currently the law affords married couples benefits and protections which are not available to cohabiting heterosexual couples. During debates on the Civil Partnership Bill, (which gave same-sex couples who register the same rights as married couples), the Government resisted including cohabiting heterosexual couples. It argued, rightly, that they have the option of marriage available. However, in March 2005, the Government asked the Law Commission to draw up proposals giving unmarried couples in England and Wales

similar legal rights on breaking up as married couples.<sup>133</sup>

The Family Law (Scotland) Bill, currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament, would grant to cohabiting couples financial rights that mimic marriage. The Executive wants to allow co-habiting couples, when they split up, to have equal rights to money and property acquired during the relationship. The Bill also proposes to give these rights to homosexual couples who live together. (This would be entirely separate from the Civil Partnership Act.)

### **Morning-after pill in schools**

In 2002 the Government announced its support for the provision of "full contraception and sexual health services" for schools in England and Wales, as part of its strategy to reduce teenage pregnancies.<sup>134</sup> This allowed secondary school clinics to supply the morning-after pill to schoolgirls. Head teachers can still refuse to allow this.

## **Education**

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### **Christian schools in the state sector**

#### *Church Schools*

These are very popular with parents and the two main political parties are committed to promoting them. The Conservatives say they wish to see more Church schools being set up and existing ones expanded.

#### *Academies*

Academies are state-funded schools which are independently run. The Government wishes to see many more academies set up. The Academy concept is based on the City Technology Colleges programme established by the last Conservative Government. Academies can be established with a clear Christian ethos – such as The King's Academy, Middlesbrough and Trinity Academy, Doncaster. The Government continues to support Emmanuel City Technology College, Gateshead, which pioneered this model of Christian education and which is consistently rated as one of the best schools in the country.

### **Mainly Christian RE and school assemblies**

The law in England and Wales requires that the main content of religious education in non-denominational schools must be devoted to the study of Christianity.<sup>135</sup> There must also be a daily act of collective worship in schools (this usually takes place as an assembly) and it

must be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.”<sup>136</sup> In 2004, David Bell, the head of OFSTED, called for the legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship in schools to be repealed.<sup>137</sup> (The law provides an opt-out from participating in the act of worship for teachers or pupils with a conscientious objection.)

### **Sex education in primary schools**

Current Sex and Relationship Education Guidance drawn up by the Government in 2000 recommends (but does not require) that all primary schools should have a sex and relationship education programme tailored to the age and the physical emotional maturity of the children, as broadly set out in Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum.<sup>138</sup> Therefore sex education is not compulsory in primary schools.

### **Promoting homosexuality in schools**

In 2003 the Government repealed Section 28, which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools in England and Wales. In February 2005 the Department for Education and Skills promoted and helped fund the first ever ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender history month’ for schools.<sup>139</sup> The event organised by gay rights group ‘Schools Out’ encouraged schools to ‘celebrate’ homosexuality and the gay community. Under this extraordinary initiative pupils were to be taught that Florence Nightingale had lesbian tendencies.<sup>140</sup>

## **Religious liberty in the UK**

### **Incitement to religious hatred law**

Christians are concerned that this law could harm free speech and curb religious liberty. The Government unsuccessfully tried to introduce the offence (for England and Wales) in 2001 and then again in the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill in 2004.<sup>141</sup> Because of opposition in the House of Lords it was forced to drop the proposed offence in April 2005 in order to save the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill from falling before the election.<sup>142</sup>

### **Incitement to ‘homophobic hatred’ law**

At present there is no legal offence of inciting hatred on the basis of a person’s ‘sexual orientation’. An attempt was made by Lord Alli to introduce such an offence into the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. Whilst the Government did not support this particular attempt, it stated it is “open to considering” whether such an offence is needed.<sup>143</sup> There is the clear potential that Christian preaching which declares homosexual practice to be sinful could fall foul of this law.

### **Employment laws**

In 2003 the Government introduced special employment rights for homosexuals. These represent a serious threat to religious liberty. However, after a long campaign church schools, churches and Christian organisations were given an exemption in the regulations so that they are not forced to employ practising homosexuals. Nevertheless, the legislation makes it more difficult for church schools, churches and Christian organisations to refuse to employ staff whose conduct does not match their Christian profession.

At the same time the Government introduced similar regulations covering ‘religion or belief’, removing the absolute discretion of churches to employ believers in whatever post they saw fit. In theory the regulations give employment protection for religious believers in secular workplaces, but the greatest concern has been the net effect of restricting the freedom of Christians to employ religious believers. These new employment laws threaten the ability of churches and Christian organisations to maintain their distinctive doctrines and ethos.

### **Religious broadcasting freedom**

There are severe restrictions on religious broadcasting in the UK. Christian and other religious organisations are effectively banned from holding many types of broadcasting licences. The 1990 Broadcasting Act made all religious bodies “disqualified persons” for the purposes of holding a licence to broadcast. It was only at the discretion of the Radio Authority and the Independent Television Commission (ITC) that certain types of licence could be granted to these disqualified religious bodies.<sup>144</sup> The Communications Act 2003 maintained the general disqualification of religious broadcasters.

### **Commission on Equality and Human Rights**

The Government’s Equality Bill fell before the General Election. Introduced in March 2005, the Bill would establish a Commission on Equality and Human Rights – a powerful body designed to clamp down on discrimination in a range of areas, including opposition to gay rights. Christians fear it could target organizations which hold to orthodox, traditional Christian belief on homosexuality. The Government has vowed to re-introduce the Bill in the next Parliament.<sup>145</sup>

### **‘Homophobic’ discrimination in goods and services**

The Equality Bill (see above) would, with certain exemptions for religious groups, have outlawed discrimination of goods and services on the basis of religion or belief. It had also

been expected to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, but this was absent from the Bill. According to press reports, the Government feared upsetting Muslim voters before the General Election and so the measure was left out.<sup>146</sup> The next Equality Bill may well prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. At present there are no laws prohibiting discrimination in the provision of goods and services in relation to 'sexual orientation'. Churches can refuse to rent out the church hall to a gay rights group. A Christian bed and breakfast can also refuse to allow a homosexual couple to stay in a double room.

## Public morality

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### Blasphemy laws

The legal notion of blasphemy dates back many centuries. The laws of blasphemy and blasphemous libel still stand in common law in England and Wales.<sup>147</sup> Since 1838, the law of blasphemy only protects the tenets and beliefs of the Church of England. Other Christian denominations are protected where their beliefs overlap with those of the Church of England.<sup>148</sup> In the twentieth century there were only four reported judgements. No blasphemy case has been prosecuted in England and Wales since the passage of the Human Rights Act 1998.<sup>149</sup> It is expected that one may be brought in respect of the broadcasting by the BBC of 'Jerry Springer – The Opera'. (A blasphemy law also exists in Scotland.<sup>150</sup>)

### Drugs

The law categorises illegal drugs as either class A, B or C according to their harmfulness. The classification determines the criminal penalties for possession and supply. The most harmful drugs, such as cocaine and heroin are class A. Class B includes speed (amphetamines) and class C includes cannabis and sleeping pills.

In November 2003 Parliament approved the reclassification of cannabis from a class B drug to a class C drug by passing the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2003. This applied to the whole of the UK. The change in law means that most cannabis users caught by the police will not be arrested. They will simply be verbally ticked-off and have the drug confiscated.

There is a concerted campaign underway to dismantle the whole of our drugs legislation. Those in favour of the legalisation of drugs are continually campaigning for drugs to be reclassified downward, as happened with cannabis. The House of Commons Committee

that recommended the reclassification of cannabis also recommended the reclassification of ecstasy from A to B.<sup>151</sup> Rather than reclassifying down, if anything there should be a new class of A\* created for the most harmful drugs, such as crack cocaine.

### Public health

Public health policies increasingly promote a 'harm reduction' approach. This philosophy rejects preventative approaches which give clear distinctions between right and wrong behaviour.

Instead, 'harm reduction' approaches have been advocated with the justification that telling people not to do something will not stop them doing it, therefore it's better to allow them to do it and ensure they do it safely. This harm reduction philosophy has led to young people being told how to have 'safer-sex' and how to take drugs 'safely'.

But by opposing restraint, 'harm reduction' actually increases the number of people involved in a harmful activity rather than reducing it. From a Christian perspective, harm reduction greases the tracks of sin. It creates an atmosphere of acceptability that encourages more people to engage in harmful activity and stigmatises those young people who remain opposed to it. This will result in increased harm, not reduced harm. Harm reduction undermines the rule of law and parental authority. It leads young people into wrong-doing. It sends out the message that taking drugs or engaging in underage sex is acceptable.

In fact where preventative approaches are used they have been seen to succeed, for example, in the very public campaign against smoking.

### Gambling

In 2005 the Government passed the new Gambling Act. The Act sweeps away layers of sensible restrictions which, for years, have controlled the worst excesses of casinos, betting shops and slot machines. It formally legalises virtual casino machines in betting shops and elsewhere. These machines, known as Fixed-Odds Betting Terminals, have been called the 'crack cocaine' of gambling. The Act also greatly reduces restrictions on new casinos opening, repeals the 24 hour membership requirement and lifts the general ban on all gambling advertising. In addition, slot machines with unlimited stakes and prizes will be allowed for the first time. Under pressure from critics, the Government limited the number of 'regional' casinos to one, but this limit looks as though it may be removed by secondary legislation.<sup>152</sup>

### **Prostitution**

In 2004 the Government published a consultation paper on prostitution. The Government stated many of the laws relating to prostitution are “outdated, confusing and ineffective.”<sup>153</sup> The consultation asked whether street-based prostitution should be accepted and whether there is a case for designating managed areas at a local level, i.e. introducing ‘tolerance zones.’<sup>154</sup> In January 2005 Liverpool Council voted to introduce a prostitution tolerance zone. The Home Office is to decide whether to amend the current legislation to allow this.<sup>155</sup>

### **Sunday trading**

Sunday trading was legalised in 1994, when the Sunday Trading Act allowed six hours of unregulated trading every Sunday. Since then there have been continued assaults on the remaining restrictions on Sunday Trading – for example, the present Government lifted the restrictions on night clubs (and the associated sale of alcohol).

It was reported in 2004 that large retail firms are planning a campaign soon after the General Election against the remaining restrictions on Sunday trading. They want to be able to open 24 hours a day seven days a week.<sup>156</sup>

Further deregulation would further undermine Sunday as a day of rest. There are concerns over the disturbance caused by noisy activities (such as pubs) on local residents and local religious services. It would also put further pressure on workers to work on Sundays. Employee protections in the legislation have proved to be weak. The day of rest was instituted by God at creation (Genesis 2:2) and affirmed in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). It is of value to all men.

## **The Constitution**

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The constitutional settlement in Britain provides that Britain is not a secular state. The [Protestant Reformed] Christian nature of the constitution is evident not only in the monarch’s coronation oath, but also in the establishment of the Church of England and the bar on the monarch marrying a Roman Catholic.

**House of Lords** – Clearly there is no uniquely biblical model for how a second chamber should be organised. Yet in recent years it has been the House of Lords, not the Commons, which has been a more effective protection for religious liberties and a firmer defender of family values. Many Christians will be concerned at any curtailment of the role of the House of Lords.

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# Questions for candidates

## I) Medical ethics

- 1) Do you believe that the law on abortion is too lax, too restrictive or about right?
- 2) Do you believe that parents should be able to choose the sex of their baby?
- 3) Do you believe in the legalisation of euthanasia?

## II) Marriage and the family

- 4) Do you believe that parents should be banned from smacking their children?
- 5) Do you believe that the law on divorce is too lax, too restrictive or about right?
- 6) Do you believe that cohabittees should be given the same rights as married couples?
- 7) Do you believe that two men or two women should be able to marry each other?
- 8) Do you believe marriage should be supported in the tax system?
- 9) Do you believe that the morning-after pill should be distributed in schools to girls under the age of 16?

## III) Education

- 10) Do you support the present law which requires mainly Christian RE and Assemblies in schools and also the provision of state-funded Christian schools?
- 11) Are you in favour of compulsory sex education in schools from the age of 7?
- 12) Do you believe that schools should teach that homosexual civil partnerships are equivalent to marriage?

## IV) Religious liberty in the UK

- 13) Are you in favour of a new incitement to religious hatred law?
- 14) Are you in favour of a new law making it a crime to say that homosexual practice is morally wrong?
- 15) Should the law be changed to allow Christians to apply for all broadcasting licences just as atheists can?

## V) Public morality

- 16) Are you in favour of retaining the blasphemy laws?
- 17) Do you believe that the downgrade of the cannabis laws should be reversed?
- 18) Do you support the decriminalisation of prostitution, e.g. 'tolerance zones'?
- 19) Are you in favour of removing the remaining restrictions on Sunday trading and working on Sunday?

## VI) The Constitution

- 20) Do you believe that the next Coronation service should include a multi-faith affirmation, rather than an oath to uphold and defend the Christian faith?