

Inside

**Public bodies
censor mention
of Christianity**



**Government concessions
on the Equality Bill**



**MSPs tone down
plans for quicker
divorce**

**Northern Ireland quango
thinks again over list of
recommended sex lessons**

**Massive surge
in gambling
follows new laws**



Government backs down over religious harassment

Following its comprehensive defeat in the House of Lords, the Government has agreed to drop the religious harassment clause from the Equality Bill. We give thanks to God for this wonderful answer to our prayers.

On 9 November Peers voted by 216 to 126 for Lord Lester and Lady O'Cathain's cross-party amendment deleting religious harassment from the Bill. In response the Government has now said it will not seek to reinstate the harassment clause. Instead it will be referred to the Discrimination Law Review for further scrutiny.¹

The Government had planned to make it illegal for a public body or a landlord to 'harass' an individual on the grounds of their religion or belief. But in fact we already have a perfectly good law which protects everyone: The Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

Religious harassment raises many of the same concerns about free speech as the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill. Many Peers expressed fears that the law would encourage politically correct officials to stop public expressions of Christianity, such as evangelism, carol services, or Bibles by hospital bedsides – as we have seen in recent months (see article on page 2).

Lord Lyell of Markyate said: "Under this Bill, John Wesley would have been prevented from preaching in most open-air areas", pointing out that it applies to council-owned land. Lady O'Cathain warned: "We cannot ignore the plight of the Christian hospice that could be sued for saying grace, or the prison chaplain who is told he cannot initiate conversations about God with inmates..."²

The victory on religious harassment is a fantastic result. Thank you for all your prayers about this issue. Thank you also to the many people who wrote letters to Peers. Those letters helped to persuade Peers that this was an important issue of concern to real people.

The Discrimination Law Review is to produce a Green Paper in late Spring 2006 to consult on its wide-ranging deliberations. The consultation may include the issue of religious harassment. We must continue to be vigilant and also give thanks to God for the victory he has given.

¹ House of Commons, Hansard, 21 November 2005, col. 1248

² House of Lords, Hansard, 9 November 2005, cols 654 and 661

Lords' victory on the Religious Hatred Bill

The Government has suffered a massive blow in its attempts to introduce an 'incitement to religious hatred offence'. The House of Lords has voted in favour of introducing safeguards for freedom of speech, evangelism and religious debate.

On 25 October, Peers voted by 260 to 111 to support a cross-party amendment tabled by Lord Hunt (Conservative) and Lord Lester (Liberal Democrats). Under the amendment, nobody can be found guilty of the new religious hatred law unless it is proved they *intended* to stir up hatred; only threatening words would be banned by the Bill, not those which are abusive or insulting; there would be a specific part of the Bill saying the law should not restrict evangelism, discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of

particular religions or beliefs.¹

The Government opposes the amendment but has since hinted at a compromise. We do not yet know what the Government has in mind but it is unlikely to be anything as good as the Lords' amendment. We would rather not have a religious incitement offence at all but, given the Government's threats to force the Bill through using the Parliament Acts, the Lords' amendment is the best thing on offer.

Peers' overwhelming support for the amendment is excellent news. This result is due, in part, to Christians who have contacted their MPs about this matter. This has clearly helped the political parties to understand Christian concerns and this has, in turn, supported the resolve of the opposition parties in the Lords against the offence.

The changes could still be removed when the Bill returns to the Commons, although that is not a foregone conclusion. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties are both opposed to the offence and many back-bench Labour MPs have serious concerns. There is a possibility that the Government could lose in the Commons.

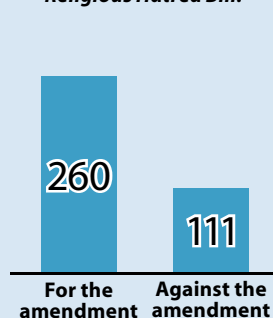
Even if the Government wins a vote in the Commons, every vote against the plans will be useful. If the Commons majority is small, then clearly MPs are very divided on the benefits of the offence. This weakens the constitutional argument for using the Parliament Acts to force the will of the Commons on the Lords. So every MP's vote counts.

It is therefore vital that MPs understand the concerns of Christian constituents. We would encourage supporters

to contact their MPs and urge them to accept the Lords amendment. Briefing material on the Religious Hatred Bill is available from our website (www.christian.org.uk).

¹ Racial and Religious Hatred Bill as printed 25 October 2005

The Lords' vote on the Hunt & Lester amendment to the Religious Hatred Bill.



Bid to scrap blasphemy law fails

On 8 November an amendment to the Religious Hatred Bill that would have abolished the offence of blasphemy was defeated in the House of Lords by 153 votes to 113. The amendment was moved by Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Avebury. During the debate many Peers argued the offence of blasphemy was archaic and discriminatory as it only protects the Christian faith. However, Lady O’Cathain spoke powerfully in support of the blasphemy law arguing that, along with the Coronation Oath, it is part of Britain’s Christian heritage and cannot be considered apart from our constitutional settlement as a whole.

Public bodies censor mention of Christianity

Although ‘religious harassment’ has been deleted from the Equality Bill, other measures in the Bill still give us serious cause for concern. For example, the Bill requires public bodies not to discriminate on the grounds of religion. These new laws could be used by public officials, or hostile litigants, to expunge Christianity from many parts of public life.

Even before these ‘non-discrimination’ measures are introduced, there is already a problem with political correctness seeking to ban Christianity from the public square. In this year alone:

- The Home Office has threatened to stop funding a carol service for the victims of crime because it is “too Christian”.¹ After stinging public criticism they agreed to continue funding the event.
- Waveney Council has plans to scrap grants for Christmas lights because they conflict with its “core values of equality and diversity”.²
- The Inland Revenue banned a collection for a children’s charity, which sends Christmas gifts in shoeboxes with accompanying Bible stories, “because it offends the Government’s ‘diversity’ policy”.³
- An official at Lambeth Council ordered that Christmas lights should be renamed “Winter

Lights” and “Celebrity Lights”⁴ but the council later backed down after a public outcry.⁵

- The University of Leicester NHS Trust considered banning Bibles from its bedside lockers in order to avoid offending other faiths. This move was opposed by Leicestershire’s Federation of Muslim Organisations and the Sikh chairman of the Council of Faiths.⁶ The Trust backed down after being attacked in the press.
- Norfolk County Council warned a Christian-run shelter for the homeless that it will lose £150,000 of funding unless it stopped saying grace at mealtimes and putting Bibles out for use by guests.⁷

November also saw the publication of a new Remembrance Sunday service by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland which removed a number of Christian references to appeal to “people of all faiths”.⁸

The religious discrimination measures which remain in the Equality Bill would act as a catalyst to make the situation even worse.

¹ *Daily Mail*, 8 November 2005

² *The Sunday Times*, 6 November 2005

³ *Daily Express*, 3 November 2005

⁴ *The Times*, 2 November 2005

⁵ *Daily Express*, 3 November 2005

⁶ *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 2005

⁷ *Daily Mail*, 3 May 2005

⁸ *Daily Mail*, 14 November 2005

The Equality Bill - other Government concessions

The deleting of religious harassment from the Equality Bill is very good news. But it is not the only change for the better. The Bill has been significantly amended in other ways during its passage through the Lords.

The Bill creates a Commission for Equality and Human Rights. The Bill as originally drafted stated that the Commission’s “fundamental duty” was to be “the creation of a society” in which there is no discrimination.¹ Many Peers protested at such sweeping powers reminiscent of totalitarian regimes and which may in practice have put it beyond the scope of judicial review. As Lord Waddington QC said: “There is no precedent of which I can think in any Act of Parliament for charging a quango with the duty of creating any particular form of society.”² Under sustained pressure, the Government watered down the clause – replacing the wording with a “general duty”

of “encouraging and supporting the development of a society”.³

The Government minister has also given guidance to the Commission on how it uses its legal powers in relation to religious groups, following concern that it could unfairly target such organisations for investigation or legal action.⁴

Part 2 of the Bill creates new religious discrimination laws. Religious organisations are given exceptions so that their fundamental activities are not rendered illegal overnight. At Committee Stage Lady O’Cathain objected to the sweeping ‘Henry VIII clause’ which enabled the Government to delete these protections by ministerial order.⁵ In response it removed the provision from the Bill. The Government has also amended the Bill to protect school carol services which take place off-site, e.g. at the local parish church.⁶ These were left out of the original protections.

The Christian Institute raised each of these issues, aided by legal advice

from top lawyer Neil Addison.

In Britain we are living in a collapsing culture. And overall the Equality Bill threatens to make things even worse. However, the good changes made to the Bill show that reasonable Christian concerns backed by accurate research and firm arguments are still making a great difference. And we must give thanks to God for those politicians who speak out in defence of our religious liberty – particularly Lady O’Cathain who has worked tirelessly throughout the Lords stages of the Bill.

¹ Clause 3 of Bill as printed 18 May 2005

² House of Lords, Hansard, 6 July 2005, col. 699

³ Clause 3 of Bill as printed 11 November 2005

⁴ House of Lords, Hansard, 9 November 2005, cols 641-644

⁵ House of Lords, Hansard, 13 July 2005, cols 1187-1189

⁶ Clause 54 (4)(h)(iii) of Bill as printed 18 May 2005 compared with clause 51 (4)(k)(iii) of Bill as printed 11 November 2005



Listen to
Christian
teaching on
our website



The Institute has expanded its website to include audio recordings of past meetings. These include the recent meetings held about the 'incitement to religious hatred' offence, with special guest speaker Pastor Daniel Scot who was caught by a similar law in the State of Victoria, Australia.

The website audio archive also has recordings of lectures on theological topics, such as a series of lectures on *The Ten Commandments for today*.

In total, over 60 hours of audio are available with more yet to be added. Users can click-and-hear the audio or download the digital file to listen to later. There are easy to follow instructions on how to access the recordings. Listening to the audio is free to anyone with internet access.

There are currently audio recordings of 23 speakers including: author of *The Christian Mind*, Harry Blamires; David Jackman of The Proclamation Trust; Professor John L. Mackay of the Free Church College, Edinburgh; Professor Edward Donnelly, Principal of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological College, Belfast; and Brian Edwards, author and former pastor of Hook Evangelical Church.

Making these digital audio recordings available on our website allows a world-wide audience to hear Christian truth being taught and defended. Already, the recordings have been listened to over 2,500 times. The recordings are available at www.christian.org.uk

8,000 people attended our meetings this year

The number of people attending Christian Institute meetings has doubled in the last year. Over 8,000 people have heard presentations from The Christian Institute, compared to 4,000 last year.

As well as making a public stand for Christian truth, the Institute is also committed to informing and helping Christians to understand the moral and ethical issues of the day.

If you would like The Christian Institute to hold a meeting in your area please contact The Christian Institute by emailing info@christian.org.uk or by telephoning 0191 281 5664. We cannot guarantee to accept every request but we will consider each one carefully.

MSPs tone down plans for quicker divorce

A committee of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament has voted to water down proposals to make divorce easier.

The Scottish Executive planned to reduce the required separation periods for 'no fault' divorces from 5 years to 2 if the divorce is contested or from 2 years to 1 if both parties consent. The plans are contained in the Family Law (Scotland) Bill.

However, on 2 November, the Justice 1 Committee rejected the Executive's plans and accepted amendments to change the periods to 3 years and 18 months respectively. Committee members backed the change by 4 votes to 3.

Bruce McFee (SNP, West of Scotland) argued: "If we agree to reduce the period to a year, we will send out the message that marriage is an easily disposed of—indeed, a throwaway—commodity. ... we will do children a disservice if we devalue marriage and our society will pay for that."¹

Statistics show that every time divorce law has been liberalised, the number of divorces has increased.² Mary Mulligan (Labour, Linlithgow) observed: "We should go back to basics and ask why we are seeking to change the current arrangements. I do not think that the Executive has so far been able to give us a sound reason for that, or even sound evidence to support its proposed change."³

The amendments are better than what the Executive proposed. Married couples will have



Pauline McNeill MSP is the convener of the Justice 1 Committee.

more time to rethink their decision to divorce.

The Committee's amendments must now be considered by the whole Parliament in the Bill's Stage 3 debate on 15 December.

¹ Scottish Parliament, Justice 1 Committee Official Report, 2 November 2005, col. 2202

² See, *Marriage: Worth Fighting For – How the Family Law (Scotland) Bill Undermines Marriage*, The Christian Institute, 2005, page 11

³ Scottish Parliament, Justice 1 Committee Official Report, 2 November 2005, col. 2200

Northern Ireland quango thinks again over list of recommended sex lessons

Explicit sex education resources have been removed from a Northern Ireland quango's approved list for schools following a Christian Institute campaign.

Over recent months The Christian Institute has been raising concerns in Northern Ireland about a list of sex education resources published by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA).¹

Some materials on the CCEA's list are very vulgar. One book, *Taking Sex Seriously*, outlines lesson plans where children are arranged into small groups to discuss group sex, masochism, and vibrators.² It suggests, as a homework exercise, that children buy condoms from a chemist shop.³ Another lesson plan has role play exercises with pupils acting the part of a homosexual 'coming out'.⁴

The Primary School Sex Education Pack also appears on the CCEA's list. This contains worksheets depicting various children with their parents. Beside drawings of a normal family is a picture of two children with a lesbian couple. The caption reads "Anne and Jack live with their mum and her partner, Pauline".⁵

The Institute has been raising awareness of this issue at meetings across Northern Ireland. In October two local politicians, George Dawson MLA and David Simpson MP, contacted us for



The CCEA are responsible for recommending the 'educational' materials

more information. Following our briefings Mr Dawson and Mr Simpson met with the CCEA to voice these concerns.

We are delighted that the CCEA is now reviewing its list and has taken the list with the most offensive resources off its website.⁶

¹ CCEA, *Relationships and Sexuality Education: Guidance for Post-primary Schools*, 2001, pages 32-36

² Cohen, J and Wilson, P, *Taking Sex Seriously: Practical Sex Education Activities for Young People*, Healthwise, 1994, page 31

³ *Ibid*, page 58

⁴ *Ibid*, page 91

⁵ Cohen, J, *The Primary School Sex and Relationships Education Pack*, Healthwise, 1997, page 51

⁶ CCEA, *Relationships & Sexuality Education: Guidance for Post-primary Schools, Version 2*, page 32, see http://www.rewardinglearning.com/development/ks3/curriculum_support/docs/rsepps_v2.pdf as at 18 November 2005

Smacking ban rejected

A bid for an outright ban on smacking in Scotland has been firmly rejected by a committee of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament. Marlyn Glen MSP wanted to amend the Family Law (Scotland) Bill to ban all smacking but she withdrew the amendment after failing to receive any support. MSPs on the Justice 1 Committee said such a ban was unnecessary and unpopular, commenting on the number of letters they had received from parents against a ban. The amendment was also opposed by Deputy Justice Minister, Hugh Henry, who said the Scottish Parliament had only recently considered this issue in 2003.



Marlyn Glen MSP withdrew her amendment to ban smacking

Are people born gay?

During the Third Reading of the Equality Bill in the House of Lords the Government accepted an amendment on 'sexual orientation' by Lord Alli. The amendment allows the Government to introduce regulations to ban 'homophobic' discrimination in providing goods or services, and the Government has indicated its intention to do so.

Several Peers spoke of the need to include protections for churches and religious bodies, to prevent, for example, churches being forced to accept practising homosexuals as members. Many MPs raised the same concerns at the Bill's Second Reading in the Commons on 21 November. Robust and wide-ranging exemptions from the sexual orientation provisions are essential to avoid a serious infringement of religious freedom.

The amendment by Lord Alli is an example of a persistent attempt by gay rights groups to equate sexual orientation with race. This is based on the false belief that people are 'born gay' in the same way that people are born into a particular race.

Yet evidence does not support that belief. A 2003 study at Columbia University found that homosexuals could become 'predominantly' heterosexual through psychotherapy. 84% of the homosexuals and lesbians in the study became heterosexual by the end of the study.¹ No amount of psychotherapy can ever change a person's race. The study was significant because it



was carried out by Professor Robert Spitzer, a psychiatrist with a long track record of supporting gay rights.

Furthermore, a study published in 2000 of nearly 1,000 pairs of identical twins (monozygotes) in Australia found only 20% of male homosexuals and 24% of female homosexuals had a homosexual twin.² Yet if sexual orientation is determined by genes, the figure should be 100% because identical twins have identical genes.

- ¹ Spitzer R L, 'Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants Reporting a Change from Homosexual to Heterosexual Orientation', *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 32 (5) October 2003, page 411
- ² Bailey J M, Dunne M P and Martin N G, 'Genetic and Environment Influences on Sexual Orientation and its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78 (3), 2000, pages 524-536.

Massive surge in gambling following new laws

Concern is growing over an increase in problem gambling following the massive relaxation in gambling laws.

The Gambling Act was introduced in April. It makes it much easier to open new casinos, it repeals the 24-hour cooling-off period between casino membership and play, it lifts the general ban on all gambling advertising, it allows slot machines to have unlimited stakes and prizes, and it licences remote gambling (via the internet and mobile phones) for the first time.

The increase in people gambling is now very evident. Internet casino company 888 Holdings reported a 118% increase in those gambling between July and September compared with the same period

last year.¹ Debt specialists have suggested that the rise in internet gambling is leading to a rise in the levels of unserviceable debt for participants.²

Since the weakening of casino membership rules there has been a surge in casino gambling. In the five weeks following the change 100,000 more visits were made to casinos, translating into an extra 250,000 new casino-goers in a year. Anti-gambling groups say the situation is spiralling out of control.³

The numbers are likely to rise even faster with the introduction of the first megacasino in 2009. It will be at least ten times the size of most existing premises. Although the Government was forced to slash the number of megacasinos from eight to one

in order for the Gambling Bill to be passed, it could increase this at any time by secondary legislation. Culture minister, Richard Caborn, said that the Government would do so if there was public demand.⁴

Concern is already being expressed over the introduction of new so-called 'small' casinos. Under the Act these 'small' casinos are bigger than current casinos. 'Small' casinos must also set aside space for non-gambling purposes. One such 'small' casino has been proposed in Guildford, Surrey. It would have 80,000 square feet of space holding 3,000 people with bars on seven of its eight floors. The application was turned down by the local council only to be overturned

by John Prescott's Planning Inspectorate. Conservative culture spokesman Theresa May said: "The combination of weaker gambling and [alcohol] licensing laws threatens a lethal cocktail that will threaten public welfare."⁵

The Christian Institute argued against weakening the gambling laws in our briefing, *Gambling with our future*.

- ¹ *The Herald*, 2 November 2005
- ² *The Observer*, 9 October 2005
- ³ *The Times*, 12 November 2005
- ⁴ *The Scotsman*, 1 October 2005
- ⁵ *Daily Mail*, 7 November 2005

