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A busy summer ahead

Work shows no sign of slowing down at The Christian Institute this summer. This newsletter brings you up to date.

We have taken significant action that helped to slow down the progress of a rushed anti-sectarianism Bill.

While we all wish to see an end to sectarian hatred, measures in the Bill could inadvertently affect free speech and religious liberty. We will be urging Holyrood to resolve these problems.

We also report on an

announcement that there will be a public consultation on radically changing the definition of marriage in Scotland. We tell you about the implications for society and why it is an important issue.

We bring you up to date with our religious liberty case work. We also tell you about developments from the Westminster Parliament regarding an amendment to improve the law on free speech and a Bill to address the issue of Islamic Sharia courts.

Sectarianism Bill slowed to allow time for consultation

The Christian Institute, together with CARE for Scotland, took legal action against the Scottish Government's rushed timetable for its anti-sectarianism Bill.

While we want to see the stain of sectarian hatred removed from our society, the Bill includes measures that may interfere with free speech and civil liberty (see inside for more details about the concerns).

First Minister Alex Salmond wanted the Bill to be pushed through the Scottish Parliament in just one week.

This left no time for proper public consultation. Lawyers advised us that this was unlawful, and so we issued proceedings in the Court of Session.

Aidan O'Neill QC had prepared a legal opinion for us,

showing how the Bill may harm free speech and civil liberty.

The legal opinion was sent to MSPs, and it was referred to during a Holyrood debate about the Bill.

On the day of the debate Alex Salmond announced that he was abandoning his plan to push the legislation through in one week. Instead, he extended the timetable to six months.

We have little doubt that our legal action was a significant factor in delaying the passage of the Bill.

The new timetable allows more time for a proper public consultation, and it will be important for Christians to respond. We shall be contacting our supporters about this in due course.



Alex Salmond has delayed the Bill after the CI and CARE for Scotland lodged a legal action.

More inside...

Sectarianism Bill: the risks to religious liberty

What's next?

Before the end of the year it will be vital that Christians contact their MSPs to raise free speech and civil liberty concerns about the Bill.

However, it will be important that such responses are measured, sensible and relevant to the facts.

We would encourage our supporters to wait until we have published information that will assist them in this regard.

We will be pursuing additional initiatives seeking to ensure the Bill does not damage free speech and civil liberty.

The Bill creates a new religious hatred offence covering communicated material other than unrecorded speech. This is the most worrying proposal. It is not difficult to see how sermons downloaded from websites could fall foul of this offence.

There is no free speech safeguard and the offence is very broad as drafted. The Scottish Government argues that Procurators Fiscal will not prosecute legitimate free speech.

We believe it is dangerous to create a law that depends on subjective assessments being made. If the Scottish Government wants to protect religious liberties it must drop this aspect of the Bill entirely. Failing that, it will be vital that robust protections for basic free speech are put in place, and that the scope of the offence is narrowed.

The Bill also creates a new public order offence to cover football-related incidents. This goes much wider than sectarianism in

football. It covers incidents which might offend transsexuals and homosexuals in the vicinity of a football ground or anywhere a football match is being relayed on television.

The Bill also creates a new offence of communicating a threat of violence. While there may be some legal technicalities to overcome, we have no problem with this proposal in principle. However, with regard to the regulation of internet activity, we doubt whether this is within the jurisdiction of Holyrood under the Scotland Act.



Scottish Labour and Lib Dems want civil partnerships in churches

Scottish Labour and the Scottish Lib Dems want to change the law to allow homosexual civil partnerships to be registered in Scottish churches.

Both parties made the commitment in their manifestos ahead of the Scottish Elections earlier this year.

The SNP Government at Holyrood has yet to make its position clear, but it is believed that

it may consult on the issue within a wider consultation on same-sex marriage to be launched later this year.

The issue of registering homosexual civil partnerships in churches is entirely separate from that of changing the definition of marriage to allow same-sex marriage, though there are obviously similar themes.

The Scottish Parliament would

have to change the law before Scottish churches could be allowed to register civil partnerships.

The Westminster Government is currently consulting on plans to allow civil partnerships to be registered in churches in England.

Hardly any churches want this, and even the Government admits that the issue creates serious religious liberty and administrative problems.

Same-sex marriage in Scotland

Stonewall pack for schools

If same-sex marriage is legalised, schools will be forced to promote it in classrooms. Parents who object are likely to be labelled intolerant.

Homosexual activist group, Stonewall, has already sent teacher training packs to some primary schools throughout Britain.

The pack includes a DVD – funded by a Government agency – which features ‘best practice’ tips from teachers.

One headteacher says children need to be taught to be resilient to the values of their parents and grandparents.

Another teacher suggests it is a good idea to encourage boys to wear dresses, and another encourages boys to join the cheerleading club.

The pack advises teachers to use pro-homosexual picture books for classroom reading.

The suggested books include *King & King* – a story about two princes that marry – and another book *And Tango Makes Three* – about two male penguins that raise a chick.

Stonewall suggests that the stories could be used as the basis for school plays, with the children performing the character roles.

Consultation coming in 2011



A public consultation on whether to redefine marriage will be launched before the end of 2011, the Scottish Government has said.

A spokeswoman told The Scotsman newspaper: “The Scottish Government is committed to holding a consultation on the issues of same-sex marriage and civil partnership, with the process beginning later this year.”¹

Campaigners for same-sex

marriage are pushing for the traditional definition to be overturned and a new definition imposed.

The SNP made an election promise to hold a consultation on the subject. Scottish Labour promised to look at “options”. The Scottish Lib Dems went a step further, saying they would back a change to the law. The Scottish Conservatives were silent on the issue ahead of the election.

¹ *The Scotsman*, 2 August 2011

Elsewhere in the world

Activists for same-sex marriage are pushing the issue in various US states. Whenever the issue has been put to a vote of the people, traditional marriage has been supported every time.

Since 1998, 31 US states have held referendums on preserving the definition of marriage as being between only one man and one woman.

In each of these states, the people have voted to uphold the traditional concept of marriage.

In 29 of these states, the referendum has been on a measure approving a state constitutional amendment that

defines marriage as consisting of the union of one man and one woman.

Some US states have legalised same-sex marriage either by judicial activism or by changing the law in the state legislature.

Elsewhere in the world only ten nations have legalised same-sex marriage, that’s around five per cent of the nations recognised by the UN.

Seven of the ten are from Europe: Belgium, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. The other three are: Argentina, Canada and South Africa.



Why it’s an important issue

Redefining marriage will have far-reaching effects on our society, particularly on children.

In Canada, where same-sex marriage is legal, a Mormon is using the change in the law to support his legal action to legalise polygamy.

He argues that if marriage can be redefined to allow same-sex marriage, why not marriage between multiple people?

An assistant editor of The Guardian has raised concerns about same-sex marriage, because he says children need a mother and a father.

Michael White said: “Aside from all the theological, moral and cultural freight, there’s an important *practical* distinction here which goes to the root of any society – namely that heterosexual marriage is there to produce and raise children in a more or less stable environment.”¹

If same-sex marriage is legalised, there will be pressure to teach school children that the traditional definition of marriage is wrong.

And whatever religious liberty safeguards are promised, recent history shows that Christians who oppose same-sex marriage will be marginalised.

¹ *Guardian Online*, 14 February 2011

Bill launched to tackle Sharia courts in England and Wales

A Bill to tackle the problem of Sharia courts operating in England and Wales has been launched in the House of Lords.

The Bill does not apply to Scotland because some of the measures in the Bill are matters that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

But the Bill, introduced by Baroness Cox, will raise a national debate about the problem and suggests practical solutions that can be followed.

The Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill aims to stop Sharia law taking root as a parallel legal system, making it a crime to falsely claim jurisdiction over criminal or family law.

It also aims to stop discriminatory treatment against women within Sharia courts. It specifically outlaws the Sharia



The Arbitration Bill was launched by Baroness Cox to tackle Sharia courts that discriminate against women and act illegally.

practices of treating a woman’s testimony as worth less than a man’s; and giving women fewer inheritance rights.

The Christian Institute is backing the Bill. So too are the National Secular Society and the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation.

MPs back amendment to protect free speech

An amendment to improve the law on free speech in England and Wales by removing the word “insulting” from Section 5 of the Public Order Act has been tabled by Conservative MP Edward Leigh.

Section 5 criminalises “insulting” words or behaviour. This has had a damaging effect on free speech.

It has been used to issue a court summons

to a 16-year-old for holding a placard saying: ‘Scientology is a dangerous cult.’¹

It was used to arrest street preacher Dale McAlpine after he said to a Police Community Support Officer that homosexual practice is a sin.

The amendment will be debated at Report Stage of the Protection of Freedoms Bill, expected in the autumn.

¹ *Guardian Online*, 23 May 2008



Bulls' appeal date announced

An appeal in the case of Peter and Hazelmary Bull, the Christian owners of a B&B penalised for their double bed policy, will be heard in the Court of Appeal on 8 and 9 November.

In January a court ordered the Bulls to pay £3,600 in damages to a homosexual couple denied a double room.

But the original trial judge allowed an appeal, accepting that his ruling does affect the Bulls' right to religious liberty and forces them to act against their sincerely-held Christian beliefs.

The case made international headlines, with two British



Appealing: Hazelmary and Peter Bull

newspapers saying the law had gone too far and calling on Parliament to take action.

The legal action was taken by Steven Preddy and Martyn Hall, bankrolled by the taxpayer-funded Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The commission will also fund Mr Preddy and Mr Hall's legal bills as they respond to the Bulls' appeal.

High Court to hear case against Bideford Council prayers

The case brought by the National Secular Society against Bideford Town Council for the saying of Christian prayers at the start of council meetings will be heard by the High Court later this year.

The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund will pay any cost order made against the council so that it will not be forced to concede due to lack of funds.



Equality Commission: courts have not done enough to defend religious liberty

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has said that courts should have done more to protect Christians affected by equality laws.

The commission says judges have interpreted laws too narrowly, and set the bar too high for Christians to prove discrimination.

It also thinks employers should do more to 'reasonably accommodate' employees with religious beliefs - just like they do with disabled staff.

The commission intends to intervene in four religious liberty legal cases heading for Europe, including the case of Lillian Ladele (pictured) - the Christian registrar disciplined



for her stance on homosexual civil partnerships.

Lillian Ladele's legal case is being financed by The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund.

The commission says its intervention will benefit religious people and others.

We welcome this announcement from the commission. It will help Christians have more confidence that their genuine concerns are being listened to.

Obviously, we await the precise details of the legal intervention by the commission, but we are encouraged by the tone of its announcement. It is a step in the right direction.

We certainly believe more could be done to allow for a reasonable accommodation of religious beliefs in the workplace, and we hope that the courts will adopt a more tolerant approach to protecting religious liberty.

When does human life begin?

The answer to the question of when human life begins shapes many big bioethical issues of the day such as abortion, embryonic stem cell research and cloning. The question therefore requires careful consideration.

There have been many suggestions and theories throughout history, but the Bible is clear that human life begins at conception. *When does human life begin?* is the latest publication from our Salt&Light series.

In this booklet Dr John Ling provides a wide-ranging explanation of biblical truth, the historical Christian perspective and evidence from modern science to support a biblical position on the sanctity of life from conception.



News video launched as we hit 500,000 YouTube views



We have launched a weekly five-minute video news bulletin, summarising some of the stories published on our website, **christian.org.uk**.

The bulletin is broadcast on our YouTube channel each Friday afternoon. It is embedded on our website and highlighted in our weekly email to supporters.

It has been very well received and is particularly useful for busy people who

want a quick rundown of the week's news on our issues.

Our YouTube videos recently passed a milestone of half a million views. The most popular video is the real-life footage of street preacher Dale Mcalpine being unlawfully arrested by Cumbria police.

Our videos also include Christian teaching, like lectures on the life of John Newton and what the Bible has to say about being a good citizen.

Christian doctor takes legal action over Government dismissal

A Christian drugs expert is heading to court to get his job back. He was dismissed from his role as a Government drugs adviser over past comments he made about homosexuality.

Funded by The Christian Institute, Dr Hans-Christian Raabe is taking legal action after he was dismissed from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs in February. He has launched a judicial

review in the High Court against Home Secretary Theresa May and is represented by human rights lawyer James Dingemans QC. A trial date has yet to be fixed.