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Gospel freedom at risk

The UK has protected free speech and religious liberty for centuries. It is a blessing of God's common grace and one that we cannot take for granted.

The Online Safety Bill, a broad 'conversion therapy' ban and measures to tackle so called hate crimes all have worrying implications for gospel freedom. Mainstream Christian teaching is at risk – in the public square, in churches and now online. We need to remain vigilant.

Sometimes standing for biblical

truth requires legal action. That's why we took the now famous Ashers 'gay cake' case back in 2014. We thank God that after more than seven years it has finally concluded. The European Court refused to even hear the appeal against the UK Supreme Court's unanimous verdict in favour of the family-run bakery.

It is one of the many battles that, in his strength, we have won over the last 30 years. Sadly, this year there are more battles to come.

Online Safety Bill risks censorship of mainstream Christian teaching

The Christian Institute is warning that gospel freedom is threatened by the UK Government's push to clamp down on online content deemed 'harmful'.

The upcoming Online Safety Bill is set to bring in much tougher internet regulation. The 'harmful' content to be restricted will be defined by the Government, Ofcom and the commercial interests of tech giants such as Google and Facebook.

The Institute has welcomed the attempts to curtail content promoting violence, drugs, self-harm and suicide. It also called the requirement for



online porn sites to prevent access to children, 'great news – if overdue'.

But it is concerned that the Bill's vague wording could leave mainstream Christian teaching on sexual and medical ethics, gender, marriage and parenting, vulnerable to censorship

by 'Big Tech'.

Institute Director Colin Hart noted that the Bill contains only a "very weak and

ineffective" free speech duty. He said: "The Bill must be amended to include a presumption in favour of free speech. What is free to say on 'the street' must also remain free to say online."

Billionaire tech entrepreneur Peter Rex has warned that Big Tech "has little room for devout believers".

He told The Wall Street Journal the pressure means that many hide their beliefs, "fearing retaliation or blacklisting".



➤ Read our leaflet on the Online Safety Bill

🔗 the.ci/linesafetybriefing

Scots Equalities Committee proposes 'extreme' conversion therapy ban



📍 Scottish Parliament Building (Holyrood)

The Scottish Parliament's Equalities Committee has demanded what amounts to the most extreme legislation on conversion therapy in the Western world.

It issued a report calling for a ban to include talking to people about sex and sexuality in a way that is 'non-affirming'.

This would include religious teaching, prayer or other speech directed at an individual or group that does not affirm their chosen

gender identity or sexuality.

The Christian Institute had earlier warned the Scottish Parliament that it could face legal action if it passes ill-thought-out legislation based on the bias and inadequate scrutiny of the Committee.

The Institute raised concerns that the majority of MSPs on the Committee are "too close" to the End Conversion Therapy Scotland group. Seven members have signed a public pledge to

ban conversion therapy on the group's terms.

More than 2,500 church leaders signed an open letter urging the Westminster Government not to include everyday church activities in its proposed UK-wide conversion therapy ban.

The signatories warned Downing Street that they don't wish to break the law but are willing to be criminalised if an overly broad ban covering preaching, prayer and pastoral care is introduced.

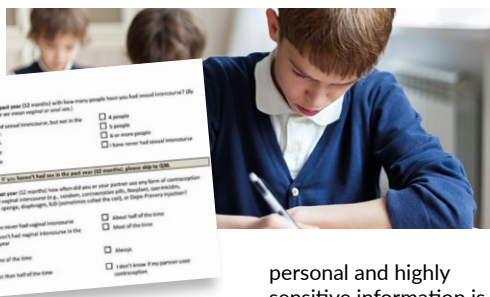


📍 Representatives of 2,500 church leaders at Number 10

CI slams Scot Govt's explicit teen sex census

The Christian Institute has criticised the Scottish Government for asking 15-year-old children explicit questions about their sexual experiences.

The 'Health and Wellbeing Census' asks pupils in years S4 and above about the number of people they have had sex with and whether they have engaged in a list of sex acts. Primary children are asked different intrusive questions about their home life.



Answers are traceable, despite being billed as confidential by the Government.

The Institute's Ciarán Kelly, said: "Parents are rightly appalled. Detailed,

personal and highly sensitive information is being harvested about the sex lives and family experiences of many thousands of children while parents are being left in the dark."

Many local authorities have

refused to roll out the survey and Scotland's Children and Young People's Commissioner has also called on the Scottish Government to pull back due to privacy concerns.

However, despite the widespread opposition, Holyrood officials have refused to withdraw the material.

Pupils are not required to take part in the survey, which also includes questions such as "How often do you enjoy being with the people you live with?"

Outrage as Scot Govt launches 'choose your own sex' Bill

The Scottish Government has introduced a draft Bill to make changing legal sex much easier.

Social Justice Secretary Shona Robison tabled the proposals despite widespread concern that a self-ID system would trample on women's rights.

The Bill seeks to sweep away current safeguards – removing the need for any medical evidence, reducing the two-year waiting period to six months and extending legal 'sex swaps' to 16-year-olds.

In response, the Institute's Ciarán Kelly said: "This 'choose your



own sex' Bill wants to expand the legal fiction that it is possible to change your biological sex. You can't."

Women's groups are threatening legal action, fearing that it gives men "a passport to enter women's single-sex spaces".

Dr Nicola Williams, Director of Fair Play for Women, warned: "This is unlawful and will

need to be fought, once again, in the courts. I will not stand by as women's sex-based rights are eroded."

Advice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that the "established legal concept of sex" gives the "correct balanced legal framework that protects everyone" has been ignored.

A majority of Scottish adults oppose radical changes to the existing law.

A Panelbase poll of over 1,000 people found that 71 per cent believed people wishing to change legal sex should be assessed by a medical professional first, with only 29 per cent in favour of self-identification.

Choosing life: 'Proof there is always hope'

Cassy Gray refused abortion when her unborn baby was diagnosed with a rare brain condition and doctors said she was "incompatible with life".

Cassy from Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, gave birth to Megan, who was able to breathe on her own despite doctors' expectations and after her first birthday uttered the word "Mum". Cassy said her story proves "there is always hope".

Police Scotland 'check thinking' of domestic abuse charity boss

In February, the founder of a domestic abuse charity for pregnant women was questioned by police officers wanting to 'check her thinking' after she sent tweets upholding the reality of biological sex.

Nicola Murray raised concerns after the transgender

CEO of the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre said victims of sexual violence should expect to be "challenged on their prejudices" if they express concerns about men. But she was left "shocked and panicky" after police turned up asking her to explain the remarks.

In 2020, the High Court in London ruled that former police officer Harry Miller's free speech had been unlawfully interfered with by police.

Officers had left Miller with the impression he could be prosecuted for a 'transphobic' tweet he had made.





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Stonewall handed £2m in public money

Stonewall

Controversial lobby group Stonewall received almost £2m in Government grants between September 2019 and March 2021 - £1 in every £6 of its total income for that period.

Fees for its discredited 'Diversity Champions' scheme and 'LGBT-friendly training' were

not detailed in its accounts, meaning the actual amount public bodies paid to Stonewall was even higher.

In February, the House of Lords became the latest high-profile organisation to withdraw from the embattled scheme.

Peers reportedly became aware that Stonewall advised

organisations to replace the word 'mother' with 'parent who has given birth'.

More than 400 nurses and midwives have also urged the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council to quit the programme and abandon Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index.

'From harm to hope': Government sets out strategy to tackle drugs

The UK Government has published its ten-year drugs strategy 'From harm to hope'.

The plan focuses on breaking drug supply chains, reducing demand for illegal drugs and investing a further £780 million into treatment services.

One commitment involves replacing the prescribing of methadone for heroin addiction in prisons with "abstinence-based methods" to assist recovery.

Minister for Crime and Policing Kit Malthouse said: "We want to see a generational shift in our society's attitude towards drugs".

New research has found that teenagers who smoke cannabis are six times more likely to develop schizophrenia than their non-cannabis smoking peers.

In Scotland, hospital admissions resulting from using the Class B drug reached an all-time high in 2021.



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Assisted suicide: right to die quickly becomes a duty to die

The Christian Institute has warned politicians not to give in to pressure to legalise assisted suicide.

Holyrood is set to consider Liam McArthur MSP's proposals in the coming months, whilst Baroness Meacher's assisted suicide Bill is currently in the House of Lords.

The Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care said the term 'assisted dying' in Liam McArthur's Bill confuses palliative care with assisted suicide. More than 30 junior doctors also signed a letter telling



MSPs that they would refuse to participate in the practice if the law was changed.

The choice to die very quickly becomes a duty to die. So-called safeguards in other jurisdictions have evaporated, often staggeringly quickly.

And the drugs given to people to kill themselves can cause intense suffering.

Writing in The Times, Lord McColl hit out at the "growing obsession with death as a solution" for "those who are fighting to live".

Palliative care expert Baroness Finlay of Llandaff highlighted that legalising assisted suicide would hinder proper care.

In February the Government paid tribute to Lady Finlay's work, as it announced its backing for her Health and Care Bill amendment requiring every part of England to provide specialist palliative care.

In March, the House of Lords rejected Lord Forsyth's amendment to require the Government to bring forward a draft assisted suicide Bill within twelve months.

Meet the CI



Nigel Kenny,
Scotland Officer

We have over 60,000 supporters and visit over 300 churches a year to talk about our work.

If you would like your church to be one of them, email us at:
scotland@christian.org.uk

Women still at risk from DIY 'emergency' abortion scheme

England and Wales have made permanent their 'emergency' schemes for unsupervised DIY abortions. Both schemes had originally been set to end in March.

The Welsh Government announced the change in February. The Westminster Government planned to let 'pills by post' continue until 29 August, but, following

lobbying from pro-abortion activists, Parliament voted for it to continue indefinitely.

Women were first allowed to take both pills required for a chemical abortion at home in March 2020. Since then, at least 10,000 women

from around the UK are estimated to have attended hospital suffering from serious side effects.

A Scottish Government consultation on making the temporary rules permanent closed in January 2021.



Challenge to Ashers ruling dismissed by European Court

The European Court of Human Rights has thrown out an attempt to challenge the landmark ruling on Ashers Baking Company.

In 2018, the UK Supreme Court agreed unanimously that Ashers should not be required to promote political views its owners disagree with.

Lawyers for Gareth Lee, the LGBT campaigner who took the family-run bakery to court, tried to argue that this decision interfered with his human rights.



The case was taken against the UK, rather than the McArthur family who own and run the bakery. However, both they and The Christian Institute were given permission to present submissions to Strasbourg.

The Court accepted the substance of those arguments and ruled Mr Lee's legal challenge "inadmissible". It said that Lee was asking the Court "to usurp the role of the domestic courts". The decision is final.

The Institute's Simon

"good news for Christians"

Calvert, called it "the right result".

"I'm surprised anyone would want to overturn a ruling that protects gay business owners from being forced to promote views they don't share, just as much as it protects Christian business owners.

"This is good news for free speech, good news for Christians, and good news for the McArthurs."

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Christian CEO thanks God after battle with The Robertson Trust

The Christian CEO unfairly dismissed by Scotland's largest grant-making trust over his church's opposition to same-sex marriage has expressed his gratitude to God for helping him through the ordeal.

Kenneth Ferguson had been CEO of The

Robertson Trust for almost ten years. He was sacked after its Chairwoman objected to Stirling Free Church, where he is an elder, renting Trust premises.

Backed by The Christian Institute, he successfully sued for wrongful dismissal. He later

said: "Praise God for the way that he has enabled me to really hold fast to the truth that is in his Scriptures. To say 'Don't worry, this battle is not yours. Stand and you will see the deliverance of the Lord.'"

WATCH

📺 the.ci/ferguson



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