



## INSIDE

- Widespread opposition to broad conversion therapy ban
- Church in Wales moves towards same-sex marriage
- Smacking ban: Welsh Govt admits 'parents will be criminalised'

## 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/online-safety-briefing](https://the.ci/online-safety-briefing)

# Widespread opposition to broad conversion therapy ban

In February, church leaders presented a letter to Downing Street urging the Government not to include everyday church activities in its proposed conversion therapy ban.

The signatories warned the Government that they are prepared to be criminalised if an overly broad ban covering preaching, prayer and pastoral care is introduced.

The letter was signed by more than 2,500 Christian ministers and pastoral workers. In response, LGBT activists publicly shared their names and church details on social media, and warned people not to attend those churches claiming they could be “unsafe”. One of the most prominent activists, Jayne Ozanne, even publicly accused them of abusing LGBT people.

A catch-all ban has also been opposed by the Association



of Christian Teachers. It wrote to the Education Secretary concerned that teachers and school counsellors would be left exposed to criminal prosecution for speaking with children about gender and sexuality.

A group of Conservative MPs warned the Prime Minister against rushing the legislation, saying it could criminalise parents seeking to help confused children.

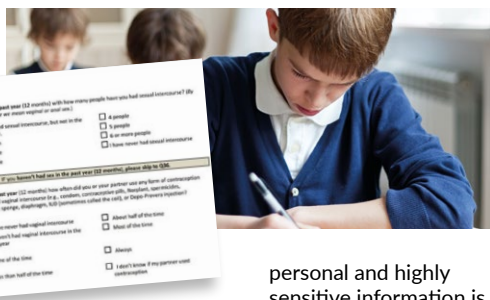
Despite widespread calls for caution, Humanists UK have demanded a ban on repentance claiming it could cause “direct harm” to LGBT people.



## 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?”

## Police guidance on 'non-crime hate incidents' was unlawful

The Court of Appeal has ruled that police guidance on recording 'non-crime hate incidents' disproportionately interfered with free speech.

Former police officer Harry Miller (below) had challenged the College of Policing over the guidance.

It had stated that when someone claims they have been a victim of hatred, officers must keep a record against the name of the accused person even where no crime was actually committed. No investigation of the claims was required.

A total of 119,934 non-crime incidents were recorded by 34 police forces in England and Wales between 2014, when the guidance was introduced, and 2019.

The Court said that recording perceived offences in a police database was likely to have had a serious "chilling effect" on public debate.

Following the decision, Home Secretary Priti Patel said she would instruct police to investigate real crimes, rather than "hurt feelings".

Mr Miller welcomed the Home Secretary's pledge, and said he would write to her asking for all such records to be deleted from police databases.



## Church in Wales moves towards same-sex marriage



The Church in Wales has told evangelicals that it is "of one mind" in its plan to introduce a same-sex marriage Bill into its constitution,

possibly within the next five years.

In response, the Evangelical Fellowship of the Church in Wales warned the Bench of Bishops that the move was "contrary to God's revelation". But it later shared that it had received "little assurance or guarantee" that

biblical views on marriage would be allowed to thrive within the Church.

The December announcement came after the Church's Governing Body voted overwhelmingly to allow same-sex blessings from a willing minister in September last year.



## Smacking ban: Welsh Govt admits 'parents will be criminalised'

Parents do risk being prosecuted if they give their child a mild smack, the Welsh Government has confirmed.

The controversial law removing the legal defence of reasonable chastisement came into effect on 21 March.

Contrary to previous assurances, new guidance issued in January told those working with children to call the police or social services if they see or suspect a parent has smacked their child.

Be Reasonable, the pro-parent campaign backed by The Christian Institute, said good mums and dads will soon be criminalised for "tapping their toddler on the back of the hand".

In February, activist members of the Stormont

Assembly failed in their attempt to introduce a smacking ban to Northern Ireland.







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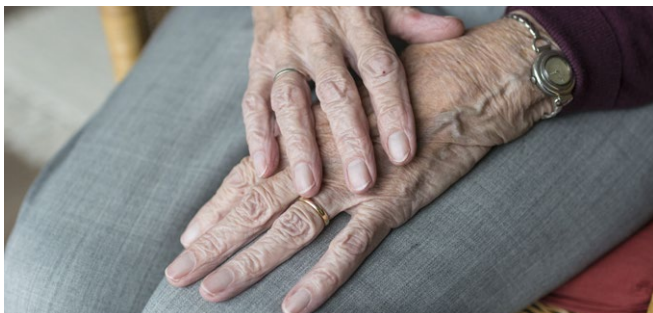


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## CPS aims to make it harder to prosecute mercy killings



The Christian Institute has said that Crown Prosecution Service proposals to make prosecutions for so-called mercy killings less likely will endanger vulnerable people.

Currently, guidance states that "prosecution is almost certainly required" when there is sufficient evidence that someone has killed a sick or

infirm friend or relative.

But the new proposals say that a prosecution should be less likely if it is believed a suspect was "wholly motivated by compassion".



The Institute's Ciarán Kelly warned that:

"There is a real risk that 'compassion' becomes a 'get out of jail free card' that undermines protections for vulnerable people."

## '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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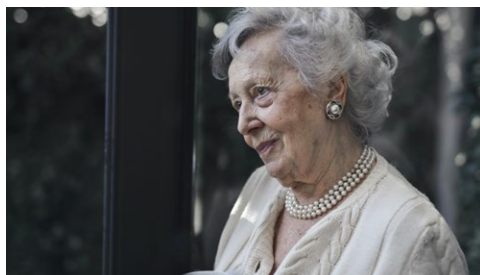


# Assisted suicide: Right to die quickly becomes a duty to die

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

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

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.

In Scotland, 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.

## Meet the CI



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If you would like your church to be one of them, email us at: [wales@christian.org.uk](mailto:wales@christian.org.uk)

## 'Emergency' DIY abortion scheme made permanent

In February, the Welsh Government made the temporary scheme allowing unsupervised abortions at home into a permanent arrangement.

When it was introduced, DIY abortion was billed as an 'emergency' measure and was supposed to stop at the end of March.

The Institute's Ciarán Kelly branded the U-turn

"a tragedy" for women and the unborn, but Health Minister Eluned Morgan heralded it as "a progressive step".

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 similar 'emergency' system will also continue on a permanent basis in England.



# 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](https://the.ci/ferguson)



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