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Upholding religious liberty in the UK

Religious liberty and free speech are at the forefront of our work. We can give thanks that we enjoy such vitally important freedoms in our country.

These days there are attempts to suppress views which don't conform to politically correct thinking. This is most readily seen with opposition to same-sex marriage and transgenderism. Such views might even be logged as 'hate incidents' by police. But encouragingly, people are starting to challenge this liberal orthodoxy. The law, and most people, still

treasure genuine tolerance.

We're very pleased that the Government has taken action to protect the freedom of people in Northern Ireland to disagree with same-sex marriage. More needs to be done.

We also welcome new gambling restrictions. We have campaigned for this for many years. But Christians will be rightly concerned about the impact on families of a new quickie divorce Bill, and of loving parents being criminalised for smacking their kids.

Parents who smack their kids set to be criminalised

The Welsh Government has voted to ban smacking. From 2022, parents who give their children a mild smack risk prosecution.

The Bill was passed despite huge opposition from the public and local councillors.

Two-thirds of individuals responding to last year's consultation opposed the Bill. A survey of more than 200 councillors also revealed more than 7 in 10 opposed a ban with 9 in 10 saying councils would not have the resources to cope.



Opposition was consistent across party lines. A majority of councillors who responded from each of the main parties said parents should still be

allowed to reasonably chastise their children.

The unpopular ban is expected to cost the taxpayer up to £8 million over the next five years.

The cost to police forces is estimated to be almost £1 million, while out-of-court alternatives could cost a further £2.5 million. The Welsh Government itself will be set back more than £3.3 million.

AMs rejected amendments put forward to mitigate the most damaging effects of the Bill.

These included requiring the Government to promote public awareness and to provide sufficient funding to local authorities and public bodies.

Govt acts to protect free speech on N Ireland same-sex marriage

Safeguards for free speech and religious liberty in Northern Ireland were in place in time for the first same-sex weddings there in February.

The Christian Institute had warned the Northern Ireland Office that it faced possible legal action if protections applying in the rest of the UK were not extended to the Province.

Former Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith confirmed a series of legal changes to coincide with the introduction of same-sex marriage.

Public order law was amended to underline that criticising it is not an offence. Equality law was also changed so that religious bodies



and staff cannot be sued for declining to take part in a blessing or other event marking a civil same-sex wedding.

A consultation on protections affecting religious ceremonies closed in February, but the results have not yet been published.

The Institute's Simon Calvert welcomed the news but warned: "We will be monitoring the situation very closely to ensure that the guidance needed to protect freedom of speech and conscience in schools and workplaces is suitably

clear and robust.

"It is also important that there is proper training and guidance for the police to ensure respect for freedom of speech on these issues. We don't want people using the police to try to punish those who believe in traditional marriage."

Parents could lose sex ed right of withdrawal



Parents in Wales will not be allowed to remove their children from lessons on sex or religion from 2022, if the Welsh Government succeeds in changing the law.

The Christian Institute called the right an "important backstop protection" and

said "parents must speak out to protect it".

Professor of Law at Bristol University, Sir Malcolm Evans, has warned the Government that removing this "useful and important safety valve" may contravene human rights law and lead to parents seeking

legal action.

New legislation is required to strip out the current parental right of withdrawal.

Ministers are pressing ahead despite their consultation finding that nine in ten members of the public who responded opposed the change.

Government and Royal College of GPs to uphold assisted suicide safeguards

The Lord Chancellor has confirmed the Government has no plans to review the law's current safeguards against assisted suicide in England and Wales.

Writing to pro-life group Care Not Killing, Robert Buckland QC also expressed his reservations about weakening the law, recognising that it would endanger vulnerable people.

Buckland said: "Personally, I have grave doubts about the ability of legislation to be watertight when it comes to the potential for abuse."

Care Not Killing CEO Dr Gordon Macdonald welcomed the news, saying: "The current law works well. It balances a strong deterrent against abuse whilst allowing a compassionate response to those who are in very distressing and difficult circumstances and experiencing terminal illness."

In February, the Royal College of General Practitioners opted to maintain its opposition to assisted suicide, following a survey of its members.

The independent survey of 6,674 members found that



47 per cent said the College should oppose a change in the law.

The Christian Institute's Ciarán Kelly said: "We welcome the news that GPs around the country have

chosen to uphold the sanctity of life".

The last time Parliament voted on legalising assisted suicide in 2015, it was rejected by a massive 330 votes to 118.

Would you like us to visit your church?



Every week we visit churches all over Wales to talk about the work of The Christian Institute.

If you would like your church to be one of them, contact gareth.edwards@christian.org.uk

Gambling on credit cards to be banned from April

The Christian Institute has welcomed a ban on using credit cards to place bets. It will come into force on 14 April.

The Gambling Commission's Chief Executive said the new measure should reduce the risk of people "gambling with money they do not have". Some are understood to have accumulated tens of thousands of pounds in debt.



Payment services such as PayPal will be included in the ban, but the National Lottery will be exempt.

The then Culture

Minister Helen Whately said there is more to be done: "We will be carrying out a review of the Gambling Act to ensure it is fit for the digital age".

UK firsts for 'marriage-lite'

The UK's first heterosexual civil partnerships have taken place following a change in the law on 31 December 2019.

The Supreme Court had ruled in June 2018 that civil partnerships should be available to opposite-sex couples.



◈ Civil partners Charles Keidan and Rebecca Steinfeld

Feeling left out at school counts as 'hate crime' says CPS

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has said that if a pupil believes they have been excluded from a friendship group because of their sexual orientation it could be a 'hate incident or crime'.

The new guidance for schools was written alongside LGBT activist groups. Other examples include "rejecting someone" and "not wanting to work with them".



Liberals attack CofE after it affirms traditional marriage

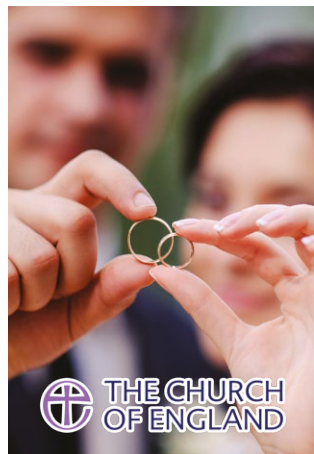
The Church of England has been attacked by LGBT campaigners, including one serving bishop, for restating the biblical position on sexual morality.

A statement from the House of Bishops in January said sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage "are regarded as falling short of God's purposes for human beings". But it admitted that the Church has a study underway which will "inform further deliberations".

Opponents claimed the statement "significantly damaged the mission of the church".

Following the controversy, the Church released a statement apologising for the timing but not the content of its statement.

In December, the new Archbishop of York was announced. Bishop Stephen Cottrell has advocated 'looking again' at biblical texts on sexuality "to see what they are



actually saying to our situation", claiming "for what we know now is not what was known then".

Bishop Cottrell also said there was "no reason" why thanksgiving prayers could not be offered for same-sex civil partnerships.

'Flawed' quickie divorce Bill revived by Prime Minister

Boris Johnson has revived plans to make divorce much quicker and easier.

Under the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill, spouses will be able to simply walk away from a marriage. They will not have to give a reason and their spouse will be unable to contest the decision.

A similar Bill ran out of time before the General Election.



The Christian Institute's Director Colin Hart said "making divorce easier and quicker will lead to more divorces and more broken families".

In a debate in the House of Lords,

Lord Farmer told his fellow Peers that the no-fault divorce Bill was "fundamentally flawed because it not only ignores the urgent need to strengthen families, but weakens them".



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Sunday trading opposed by Belfast shopworkers

Over 90 per cent of Belfast shopworkers are opposed to extending Sunday trading hours, a recent survey has revealed.

It was conducted by the trade union Usdaw, which said that allowing shops to open for longer would have a "negative impact" on workers, families and communities.



COMMENT

Identity politics undermines the fabric of our society



By Colin Hart,
Director

'Identity politics' has come to dominate public debate.

This divisive ideology fractures society into groups formed around characteristics such as gender, sexuality, or ethnicity, and pits people against one another in an arms race of victimhood.

Those deemed to be the 'most oppressed' are given the highest status. Everyone is expected to endorse their 'rights'. Questioning their demands is considered hateful. Failing to champion socially liberal views on transgenderism, homosexuality or abortion makes you unfit to take on public office or even take part in public debate.

Identity politics clearly

damages free speech and religious liberty. Christians and others with dissenting views have faced marginalisation and sometimes direct hostility for failing to conform. It also undermines social cohesion, making people intensely individualistic and unconcerned for society as a whole.

Mercifully, people are starting to wake up to the damage this does. Academics, journalists and commentators on the left and the right are increasingly speaking out against it.

As Christians we seek the good of all, not just some. We recognise that because human beings are made in the image of God, we have intrinsic and equal value rather than one based upon a hierarchy of characteristics. It's a belief that stands in marked contrast to the polarisation of identity politics.

Ex-transsexual takes NHS to court over gender ideology

Transgender ideology may be unquestioned in many areas of education and the mainstream media, but people directly affected by the issue are taking action.

One former transsexual is challenging the

NHS in court over its policy of giving drugs to gender-confused children. Keira Bell was given cross-sex hormones when she was a teenager, but has now returned to

living as a woman.

She said: "I do not believe that children and young people can consent to the use of powerful and experimental hormone drugs", adding they should not be offered to under-18s.



English council risks court over primary school sex ed policy

Lawyers acting on behalf of The Christian Institute have written to Warwickshire County Council over the catalogue of errors in its relationship and sex education policy for primary schools.

Given its serious legal flaws, failure to respond satisfactorily will see the Institute pursue a claim for judicial review.

The *All About Me* programme is used in over 200 Warwickshire primary schools. It contains assertions likely to mislead teachers and pupils, such as “transgender children have the right to use whichever toilet or changing room they feel



most comfortable using”. It also encourages schools not to inform parents if their children will be sharing rooms overnight with pupils of the opposite sex.

Materials designed for use in lessons promote LGBT issues and include gratuitously graphic

sexual images. But they make no reference to marriage – something required by law.

In Wales, Relationships and Sexuality Education lessons are expected to become compulsory for all pupils from 2022 ([more on page 2](#)).

Your legacy will help Christians to be salt and light

None of our work would be possible without the generosity of our supporters. Leaving a gift in your will to The Christian Institute will help us to continue working to preserve Christian freedoms for future generations.



☎ 0191 281 5664

✉ legacy@christian.org.uk

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MPs call on UK Government to close ‘abuse of trust’ loophole

A long-running child protection campaign from The Christian Institute received a boost in January.

A group of MPs called for a loophole that allows sports coaches and religious figures to have sexual relationships with 16 and 17-year-olds to be closed.

Current legislation protects them from being abused in this way by teachers, social workers and police officers but does not apply to sports coaches or church leaders. MPs called for a change to the Sexual Offences Act, as well as publicity to



highlight the move.

Addressing ‘abuse of trust’ has been an Institute campaign since 1999.

In 2017 the UK Government said it would change the law, but later backtracked.

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Registered office: The Christian Institute, Wilberforce House, 4 Park Road, Gosforth Business Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8DG
Tel: 0191 281 5664 Fax: 0191 281 4272 Email: info@christian.org.uk Website: www.christian.org.uk | Printed in March 2020
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