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Defending free speech

The Institute wants to ensure that churches and Christians are free to “preach the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

These days, the freedom to declare that God created mankind male and female is controversial. That’s why free speech safeguards in the hate crime Bill were so important. There have been improvements.

LGBT activists are seeking to exploit concerns over ‘conversion therapy’ to restrict preaching, pastoral care and prayer. For

some, simply sharing a Christian testimony is enough to be sacked.

But there is good news. Free speech is being championed by many – from women’s groups to Rowan Atkinson. Through the Free to Disagree campaign, the Institute remains at the important forefront of this work.

We thank God that he continues to provide us with the resources to equip Christians to be salt and light. Thank you too for standing with us.

Scottish Govt forced to bolster free speech safeguards in hate crime Bill

The Scottish Government has conceded several key changes to its hate crime Bill following unprecedented pressure from free speech campaigners – including Christian Institute supporters.

It comes after months of challenge from the Institute-backed Free to Disagree group, legal experts, the media and others.

The original Bill posed a major threat to free speech, including evangelism and Christian comment on sexual ethics. Importantly, the much-revised version now recognises the need to show ‘intent’ to stir



➤ Humza Yousaf MSP has championed the Bill.

up hatred. Previously, it caught anything deemed ‘likely’ to stir up hatred. Vague wording on what constituted ‘abuse’ has also been made more robust.

There are much stronger protections for religious debate and a section criminalising those in possession of ‘inflammatory materials’

has been removed. Critics noted that such vague wording could have included the Bible.

Wording to protect free speech concerning transgender ideology proved particularly contentious. Although welcomed by most, it angered trans activists who complained that protecting free speech

was to “legislate for transphobia”.

The protection was ditched, but then restored as part of a broader amendment following a last-minute public consultation. Crucially, the resulting compromise should still protect people who uphold the biological understanding of sex, or a traditional understanding of marriage, from facing criminal investigation.

However, the law’s existing ‘dwelling defence’ will be axed. Justice Minister Humza Yousaf refused to specifically protect conversations in the home from criminalisation.

Legal challenge to church closures

The Court of Session has heard a legal challenge to the Scottish Government's decision to ban public worship in churches in Scotland because of Covid-19 rules.

A 27-strong group of church leaders brought the case to challenge the restrictions announced by Nicola Sturgeon on 8 January. They are being backed by the Christian Legal Centre.

Government ministers refused their initial request for church buildings to be allowed to reopen, saying churches are compelled to 'comply with secular law' and had to remain closed.

Ahead of the hearing on 11-12 March, Revd Dr William Philip, senior



◀ Court of Session, Edinburgh



◀ William Philip

minister of The Tron Church in Glasgow and a Trustee of The Christian Institute, said, "Criminalising corporate worship is both damaging

and dangerous for Scotland".

He added: "At a time when we have been forcefully confronted with the fragility of mortal life, we have allowed the message of the eternal to be eclipsed entirely by the earthly in the national consciousness. There is an urgent need for a message of hope and

salvation. This is the calling of the Christian Church – especially in dark and difficult days: Jesus Christ is the only hope that dispels all fear, death included."

In early March, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that Scottish churches could reopen on 26 March with a maximum of 50 attendees.

LGBT activists demand sacking of NI official for sharing Christian testimony

LGBT activists have called for the Northern Ireland Education Authority to sack a board member who shared the testimony of a gay man who became a Christian.

Former DUP minister Nelson McCausland shared the testimony of Becket Cook, an American who lived a homosexual lifestyle until he came to faith in Christ.

Although the article plainly addresses Christian conversion, critics accused Mr McCausland of promoting "conversion therapy practices".



◀ Nelson McCausland

One activist who is also a local councillor tweeted that conversion therapy is "abuse" and that Mr McCausland "must resign". Others urged the Education Authority to remove him "with immediate effect".

But in an exclusive interview Mr McCausland told the Institute he 'is not intimidated' by those seeking to use controversy over so-called conversion therapy to restrict gospel freedom.

In England, Tory MP Alicia Kearns has called for any prayer inconsistent with LGBT theology to be included in a proposed 'conversion therapy' ban.

And recently in Victoria, Australia, pastoral advice and prayer which upholds the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics was criminalised after being branded 'conversion therapy'.

CI slams schools' trans resource which saw parents reported to social services

Schools across Scotland have been reporting parents to local authorities if they are unsupportive of their child's desire to 'swap gender'.

The Sunday Times reported that dozens of referrals have been made on the back of a publicly-funded resource produced by pro-trans lobby group LGBT Youth Scotland.

The Scottish Government distanced itself from the controversial materials in 2019 after The Christian Institute issued a legal letter describing it as 'incorrect, misleading and misguided'.

A revised version of the material says teachers should not tell parents if their child changes gender at school. If parents are "struggling" with their child's new identity, staff can consider raising this with the local authority.

The Institute's Simon Calvert said: "These activists have proved they are not a reliable guide to the law. I cannot understand why schools are paying any attention to them when it comes to the balancing of transgender rights and parental rights."



🗨️ A pro-trans lobby group authored the material.

Clackmannanshire, West Lothian, Orkney, North Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire councils were among those who confirmed parents or guardians had been referred.

More positively, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's health board has dropped its

'Gender Reassignment Policy'. It had branded women who do not want to share a ward with a biological man "transphobic", and compared them to racists.

Following severe criticism, the policy has been "shelved indefinitely".

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Ofcom chief compares gender critics to racists

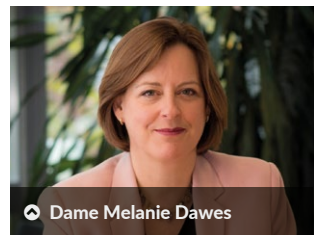
Ofcom's Chief Executive has compared people who disagree with transgender ideology to racists, during a discussion about BBC impartiality.

Dame Melanie Dawes told the House of Commons culture committee it would be "extremely inappropriate" for those who recognise biological sex cannot be changed to be included in TV or radio debates on transgenderism. She likened it to giving a platform to "people saying that racism is OK".

Under questioning, the head of the communications regulator repeatedly stated that Ofcom had been taking advice from

pro-trans lobby group Stonewall on how to bring 'balance' to debates on transgenderism.

Committee member Damian Green MP criticised Dame Melanie's remarks and suggested that the views were "inappropriate" for a senior regulator.



🗨️ Dame Melanie Dawes

Paralympic legend: 'Ditch blanket DNRs'

Paralympic legend and disability campaigner Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson has spoken out against people with disabilities being given blanket Do Not Resuscitate orders without their knowledge.

The eleven-time gold-medallist told the BBC: "There shouldn't be a blanket Do Not Resuscitate purely because of somebody's level of impairment.

It's got to be on a more one-to-one level than that."



Rowan Atkinson blasts social media 'cancel culture'

Comedy veteran Rowan Atkinson has blasted online 'cancel culture' in an impassioned defence of free speech. He called it "the digital equivalent of the medieval mob roaming the streets looking for someone to burn".

Atkinson has spoken out repeatedly on the importance of free speech, most notably in 2012 for the Institute-spearheaded 'Reform Section 5' campaign.



COMMENT

Keeping Scotland free to disagree



By **Simon Calvert**,
Deputy Director
(Public Affairs)



When The Christian Institute first mobilised supporters to fight plans for new hate crime laws in Scotland, few people were aware of them. Thankfully that's no longer true.

The Scottish Government's hate crime Bill has been dubbed, ironically, the 'most hated' ever to come before the Parliament. 'Tackling hatred' sounds a noble cause. But rhetoric and reality are not the same thing. The original Bill was so broad it could

have seen people prosecuted simply for explaining Christian sexual ethics.

Christians weren't the only ones concerned. So, under the banner of our Free to Disagree campaign, we forged strong working relationships with think tanks, secularists, Sikhs and others, helping propel the plans from obscurity to front page news. The Scottish Government came under unprecedented pressure and was forced to concede several key changes to its plans.

If you were one of those who took action: thank you. Free speech in Scotland is safer because of you.

Coming soon...

Week of prayer – spring 2021

SUN 25 APRIL – MON 1 MAY

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Scottish Election 2021

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Scots kids will still be given puberty blocking drugs

Sandyford



Sexual Health Services for Greater Glasgow & Clyde

Children in Scotland will still be prescribed puberty blockers after an NHS gender clinic said it will continue recommending the experimental treatment.

The decision ignores a recent High Court judgment for England and Wales.

In December, judges ruled that children cannot generally give their consent for the drugs. As a result,

London's Tavistock and Portman Trust immediately suspended new referrals for puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for all under-16s.

But NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde called the ruling "an English decision" and said Sandyford's Sexual Health Clinic's practice "will remain as is".

Last year, the clinic was forced to apologise after failing to correct a

leaflet that stated puberty blockers were fully reversible.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon told the Scottish Parliament that the clinic was operating within current guidelines. But Murdo Fraser MSP said that it "would simply be unacceptable if young people here were not to have the same protections as those applicable south of the border".

Abortion the main cause of death in 2020

Abortion accounted for the most deaths worldwide in 2020 – around 55 per cent of all deaths.

The number exceeds fatalities from coronavirus, cancer and heart disease combined.

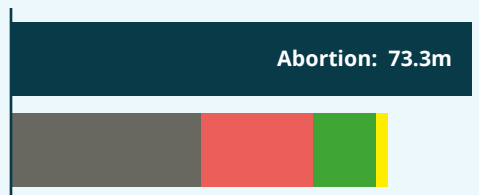
According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), around 73.3 million abortions take place every year. Estimated



deaths from all other causes totalled almost 60m globally last year.

In the UK, abortions became even easier to obtain. DIY home abortions were introduced in Great Britain and a liberal abortion regime imposed on N Ireland.

CAUSES OF DEATH IN 2020 (WORLDWIDE)



- Cardiovascular diseases: ~18m
- Cancers: ~10m | Covid-19: 1.8m
- Other: ~30m

SOURCES: the.ci/deaths2020

Robertson Trust disciplinary hearing a “sham”, tribunal told

A multimillion-pound charitable trust has been accused of conducting a “sham” disciplinary hearing before dismissing its CEO over his beliefs on marriage.

Kenneth Ferguson is suing the Glasgow-based Robertson Trust. He was sacked when chairwoman Shonaig Macpherson objected to Stirling Free Church renting premises owned by the Trust.

Mr Ferguson is an elder of the church but declared his interests in advance and recused himself from all negotiations.

But Macpherson was reported to be “incandescent” when she learned of the church’s £6,500 agreement to use the



◁ Kenneth Ferguson

Trust’s conference space in Stirling for its Sunday services, because it does not believe in same-sex marriage.

The Trust’s former Head of Social Investment Katie Campbell told the tribunal that Macpherson was “clearly very angry”

and that her “voice was audibly shaking” after making the discovery.

Mr Ferguson’s lawyer Thomas Cordrey pointed out that prior to the disciplinary hearing, Macpherson told a trustee Mr Ferguson’s action “equals gross misconduct leading to dismissal”.

Cordrey said: “It was all a sham, wasn’t it? You were just ticking boxes to get you to the position you needed to be in to get rid of Mr Ferguson.”

Kenneth Ferguson is being supported by The Christian Institute. The hearing will resume on 10 May.



Hear from the CI



◁ Nigel Kenny, Scotland Officer

If you would like your church to hear more about our work [online](#) or [in person](#)* contact: scotland@christian.org.uk

*Subject to Covid restrictions

BBC pulls ‘100 genders’ video for children after new complaints

The BBC has removed a resource for children aged nine to twelve which told them there are over 100 ‘gender identities’.

After new complaints, the corporation pulled ‘Understanding Sexual and Gender Identities’ from its BBC Teach website. It claimed that gender is “who you are inside”, but that sex is whether you are born a boy or a girl.

In the video, a teacher said: “So we know we’ve got male and female, but there are over 100, if not more, gender identities now.”



The Christian Institute’s John Denning said the BBC should not have used its teaching materials “to peddle controversial, evidence-free theories as if they were objective facts”.



◁ John Denning

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