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Defending gospel freedom

We enjoy freedom to worship, to share the Gospel and to live out a faithful Christian life in public.

But this rich heritage of freedom was hard won by believers down the ages and many Christians elsewhere in the world do not share these blessings. For the sake of future generations we must guard our freedoms well.

An expansion of 'hate crime' laws could greatly restrict gospel freedom. So too could attempts to brand prayer, pastoral care and

preaching as 'conversion therapy'. The freedom to speak the truth on matters of sin, repentance, salvation and righteous living is at risk.

So we will continue to speak up for churches that resist pressure to abandon the Bible's teaching. We will continue to support Christians like Kenneth Ferguson whose careers have been damaged because of their beliefs. We must do all we can to defend gospel freedom. If Christians do not, no one else will.

Religious liberty at risk from hate crime judge's alarming proposals

The judge commissioned by the Stormont Executive to review hate crime in Northern Ireland has recommended major restrictions on free speech.

The 997-page review of hate crime laws by Judge Desmond Marrinan was published at the start of December. Among its numerous recommendations are new offences on 'stirring up hatred' covering religion, sexuality and gender identity.

Judge Marrinan claims that the existing offences – criticised by leading human rights



expert Ivan Hare QC as "extremely broad" – are too difficult to use. His proposals go even further than the controversial hate crime Bill currently under scrutiny in Scotland.

The vague offences would apply where it

is 'likely' that hatred would be 'stirred up' or 'fear aroused', regardless of whether this was intended or not. They carry a potential seven-year sentence and would even cover some conversations in the

home. Specific free speech clauses would be scrapped, including the existing safeguard protecting the freedom to disagree with same-sex marriage.

The Christian Institute's Simon Calvert said the report "should worry anyone who cares about freedom of speech".

"Given the huge controversy over the Hate Crime Bill in Scotland, you'd have thought Judge Marrinan would have been cautious with his recommendations. Unfortunately, he appears to have learnt nothing from Holyrood's experience".

We give thanks churches are open again; now they need to stay open

By Ciarán Kelly,
Deputy Director
(Staff and
Communications)

In November, The Christian Institute joined with millions of others in giving thanks at the news that church buildings in England and Wales could reopen for public worship.

Sadly, around the same time the NI Executive announced a fresh lockdown for churches in the Province. This 'circuit break' was not like the original lockdown. Daily life largely continued. Many kept going to work. Elite sports continued. Nurseries, schools, colleges, and



universities all stayed open. So too garden centres and even off licences. But not churches.

And yet churches are able to be more Covid-secure environments than any shop. The majority of churches in Northern Ireland – as elsewhere – have taken great

care to operate safely. In fact, senior Westminster scientists Sir Patrick Vallance and Professor Chris Whitty admitted that what little data existed to support church closures was "very weak". That is as true for Northern Ireland as for England.

We don't know what will happen next

year. Certainly, we should pray for our politicians as they try to address the challenges of Covid-19. There is every prospect of further lockdowns. Church buildings risk being closed again.

But public, gathered worship should not be treated as an optional leisure activity like going to the cinema or a restaurant. It is fundamental for Christians.

Throughout history the church has met together to call on the Lord, especially in times of national crisis. So any national closure of churches must have a clear justification. And there isn't one.

Institute defends churches who uphold biblical teaching on sexual relationships

The Christian Institute is working to protect churches who continue to faithfully teach biblical sexual ethics in the face of pressure from LGBT activists.

The Institute's Ciarán Kelly said, "The Bible is clear that all sexual acts outside of heterosexual marriage are sinful", and that upholding this truth is "to be commended".

Mr Kelly was responding to comments from Church of England General Synod member Jayne Ozanne (pictured right).

The LGBT activist accused the Oxford University Christian Union and local churches of 'homophobia' for affirming the Bible's teaching on sexual morality.

She said: "we can't allow this harmful practice of telling LGBT people who are in relationships that they are 'sinful' to continue".

Ozanne later compared "conservative communities of faith" to 'Holocaust deniers' and 'rapists'.

The Westminster Government is expected to consult soon on banning practices in Britain that seek to change someone's sexual orientation – so-called conversion therapy. There are also Stormont ministers who support a ban.

Ozanne and fellow LGBT activist Steve Chalke want the Government to act against any prayer, private conversation and preaching which does not affirm homosexual or transgender lifestyles.



Commons committee seeks to revive plan for much easier 'sex-swaps'

A House of Commons committee has begun another attempt to introduce legal sex changes on demand.

After extensive consultation dating back to 2018, the Government announced in September there would be no changes to the Gender Recognition Act and only minor changes to procedure.

But almost immediately, the Women and Equalities Committee announced its own call for evidence into how the law could be altered to make changing legal sex

easier. It also considers giving legal recognition to those who identify as neither male nor female.

The Committee has already held one inquiry into the Gender Recognition Act and the Government rejected the key proposals. The Christian Institute's Simon Calvert said it was going to have to accept it had "lost the argument".

The Government recently admitted that the trend away from single-sex toilets is placing "women at a significant disadvantage".



👤 Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP, Chair of the House of Commons' Women and Equalities Committee

This has triggered an investigation headed up by Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick into the harms caused.

But Deputy Labour Leader Angela Rayner backed plans to allow

people to change legal sex by self-declaration. At LGBT+ Labour's annual general meeting, Rayner signalled her support for men and women to legally change sex without any medical diagnosis.

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Down's syndrome abortion to be challenged at High Court

A woman with Down's syndrome has been given permission to challenge the current law on abortion at the High Court in London.

Heidi Crowter and fellow campaigner Máire Lea-Wilson say the law discriminates against unborn babies with the condition.

In the UK, abortion is permitted up to 24 weeks for most reasons, or up to birth if the child is deemed to have a disability such as Down's syndrome.

One mum recently revealed she was offered an abortion 15 times after her child was diagnosed with the condition.

The UK's Minister for Care Helen Whately has said

medics should not show "any bias towards abortion" if they suspect there may be a problem with a pregnancy.

The issue gained further coverage after it was revealed ITV would air a Down's syndrome abortion storyline on popular soap Emmerdale.

A petition to remove the storyline has received more than 31,500 signatures.



👤 Campaigner Heidi Crowter

Compulsory atheism lessons planned for Wales

The current framework for Religious Education in Wales is set to be scrapped.

A Bill put forward by Minister for Education Kirsty Williams absorbs Religious Education (RE) into a new mandatory subject called Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE).

All pupils will be required to study atheism or "non-religious" views, which could include Humanism and even Marxism. A committee of non-religious representatives in each council area will have a veto over any religious teaching in schools. Moreover, parents' existing right of withdrawal will be ended.

Williams is pressing ahead with the changes despite strong opposition from respondents to two Welsh Government consultations on the issue.

Institute Director Colin Hart warned that teaching about Christianity could be marginalised under the Bill.

He said: "Parents currently have a right of withdrawal on RE. But now that atheism is to go on the syllabus, the right of withdrawal is to be ended!"

"In practice, humanists will be handed control over religious teaching in schools."



High Court ruling protects children from trans drugs

Children will be protected from being given puberty blocking drugs following a major ruling at the High Court in December.

Three senior judges said it was "highly unlikely" children aged 13 and under could ever genuinely consent to hormone blockers, and "very doubtful" 14 and 15-year-olds could do so.

Given the "long-term consequences" and "experimental" nature of trans drugs, they added that clinicians may also wish to seek court authorisation before giving them to children aged 16 and over.

The judges said



Detransitioner Keira Bell outside the High Court

that youngsters had to understand "the limited evidence available" on the effects of the drugs, that the "vast majority" of children went on to use of cross-sex hormones and that they could have "life changing consequences".

In response, the NHS announced that it had "immediately

suspended new referrals for puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for the under-16s".

Detransitioner Keira Bell, 23, brought the case against the NHS Gender Identity Development Service after she was given hormone blockers and cross-sex hormones as a teenager.

Councillors hounded over stand against LGBT ideology

Two council officials who refused to endorse LGBT ideology have been hounded by opponents.

Christian councillor Mary Douglas (pictured) was forced to step down from her role at Wiltshire Council after she opposed the use of public funds to promote a 'gay pride' event.

Cllr Douglas was supported by the Christian Legal Centre. The council subsequently admitted that it was wrong to discipline her for expressing her views.

Cambridge City councillor Kevin Price chose to resign



rather than vote for a motion that stated: "Trans women are women. Trans men are men. Non-binary individuals are non-binary." Students subsequently called for him to be dismissed from his job as a college porter.



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Govt pledges special envoy for religious freedom

The UK Government has reaffirmed its “unwavering commitment” to freedom of religion or belief. It made the pledge as it announced a new special envoy for the issue would be appointed shortly.

The position was made permanent last year following an independent review on persecuted Christians by the Bishop of Truro. The Government promised to adopt his recommendations “in full”.

Public bodies pay thousands for Stonewall award scheme



Approximately 250 public bodies are paying thousands of pounds each to join Stonewall’s ‘Diversity Champions’ programme.

Government departments, police forces and local councils have joined the lobby group’s scheme which gives awards to employers who promote LGBT ideology inside and outside of the workplace.

According to Freedom of Information requests, the Crown Prosecution Service is paying the lobby group £6,000 a year for two subscriptions covering its staff in both England and Wales. The Scottish Government

paid £9,144 to Stonewall in 2019, including £7,200 for membership.

The subscription fee depends on the organisation’s size but starts at £2,500 plus VAT. The cost to the taxpayer has been estimated as at least £600,000.

Tracy Shaw, spokeswoman for the Safe Schools Alliance UK, questioned the impact of the scheme on public policy.

“How can you be impartial when you are part of a champion programme which compels you to do certain things and behave in a certain way that contravenes women’s and girls’ rights to safe spaces?”

Palliative care experts expose assisted suicide ‘pain myth’

Leading experts in palliative care are countering the myth that assisted suicide is required to avoid dying in unbearable pain.

Dr Davis, lead consultant in palliative medicine at University Hospital Southampton, and Baroness Finlay (pictured), a professor of palliative medicine at Cardiff University School of Medicine, set out their arguments in The Times.



“It is high time that the argument that ‘assisted dying’ is necessary to avoid a painful death is exposed as a fallacy”, they wrote.

Dr Davis also said many doctors were simply not prepared to administer lethal drugs and she criticised those who deliberately confuse assisted suicide and palliative care.

CI helps church sue multimillion pound Scots trust for religious discrimination

The Christian Institute is helping a Scottish church take legal action against a multimillion pound charitable trust for religious discrimination.

The Robertson Trust gave Stirling Free Church notice to quit shortly after Chairwoman Shonaig Macpherson discovered it was renting premises owned by the Trust.

She was said to be “incandescent with anger” and reportedly exclaimed “definitely not the Free Church, anyone but the Free Church, they don’t believe in same-sex marriage”.

Within days, the church was kicked out of the building, being told their use of it did “not



comply with Trust policy”. The Trust claims the policy prevents rentals for activities promoting religion, however lawyers for the church have discovered no such policy exists.

Kenneth Ferguson, the Trust’s former CEO and an elder at the church, was subsequently sacked. With the Institute’s

support, he is also taking legal action for discrimination and unfair dismissal.

Mr Ferguson was blamed, despite having declared his involvement in the church on the Trust’s register of interests and recusing himself from all negotiations about the rental.

Before being dismissed for vague ‘performance issues’, Mr Ferguson had received glowing appraisals, with the Trust growing substantially under his leadership.

The Institute’s Simon Calvert said the Trust’s actions suggested “somebody there has a problem with people who have orthodox religious beliefs”.

Hear from the CI



Callum Webster,
Northern Ireland Officer

If you would like your church to hear more about our work **in person*** or **online** email sandra.mackay@christian.org.uk or call **028 9094 1667**.

**Subject to Covid restrictions*

Billy Graham group sues UK venues over cancellations

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) has launched legal proceedings against venues in Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool, Newcastle and Glasgow for discrimination and breach of contract.

BGEA acted after the venues cancelled its gospel events because they oppose the organisation’s biblical stance on sexual ethics.

Franklin Graham (pictured) said it was because “we preach a message of God’s love, stand uncompromisingly on traditional biblical beliefs about human sexuality, and share

with all people that Jesus Christ is the only way they can be forgiven of sin and have a right relationship with God.”

But he vowed: “I will never sit back quietly and let the government—or any other power—silence the church and prevent the preaching of God’s Word”.



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