

SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

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**Is the tide turning on
transgenderism?**

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

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Is the tide turning on transgenderism?

By James Mildred

The conversation around transgenderism and its impact on society seems like it's reaching a pivotal moment. With mounting concerns about the medical practices employed over the last decade, a significant turning point appears to be on the horizon. The Cass Review, led by Dame Hilary Cass,¹ has brought to light critical insights that challenge the prevailing cultural narratives surrounding gender dysphoria and its treatment. As the public and policymakers grapple with these findings, the question arises: is the tide truly turning on transgenderism, or is this just a temporary ripple in a much larger cultural and ideological struggle?

My hope with this introductory article to this Social Issues Bulletin is to whet your appetite for what will follow. While I ask the question, 'Is the tide turning?', Carys Mosely and Lizzie Harewood give a much more in-depth overview of the Cass Review and James Kennedy from the Christian Institute provides a helpful update on where we are with legislation around so-called conversion therapy.

What did the Cass Review conclude?

It was a devastating final report. In a controlled, clear, and systematic way, the Cass Review dismantled the last decade of medical practice and tore strips from the Gender Identity Delivery Service (GIDS), particularly for how it used experimental treatments on children despite the lack of supporting evidence.

In a summary article for The Gospel Coalition, Rebecca McGloughlin provided four key headlines.²

Firstly, it debunked the whole idea that adolescent gender dysphoria predicts adult identification. It is often claimed that being trans is innate to a person. However, the report showed that a large number of people who experience gender dysphoria in childhood will no longer do so in adulthood.

Secondly, the report showed that puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones are definitely not life-saving medicines. In fact, what little evidence does exist points in the very opposite direction. According to a 2011 study, puberty blockers can worsen people's mental health.

Thirdly, contrary to what is claimed, puberty blockers do not buy time to think. The majority of people who start on these experimental and powerful drugs go on to masculinising/feminising hormones.

Finally, the report destroyed the lie that the massive rise in trans identity in recent years is explained by greater societal acceptance. Instead, it is more likely to be explained by peer pressure and the connection between social media use and mental health challenges.

¹ Available online: <https://cass.independent-review.uk/home/publications/final-report/>

² See online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/transgender-meds-kids/>

Government response

After this review was published, the UK Government said it would implement the recommendations in full. The Labour Party said it would do the same. Not long afterwards, the Government issued new guidance for schools saying they should stop teaching gender ideology.

All of this led to celebration among Christians and others, and for no small reason. The Cass Review is a hugely significant moment in the history of how we treat people with gender dysphoria. It highlighted massive shortcomings and failures. It showed that the medical profession used dodgy evidence to support a mass experiment on children and young people, which is sickening and tragic.

Has the tide turned?

In light of this, some people began to argue that the tide has now turned. The argument goes that we've reached peak-trans and, from now on, common sense will reassert itself. I only wish I shared this optimism. Yet, I remain both cautious and perhaps slightly cynical about what comes next. Let me explain why.

Timing and implementation of the Cass Review

Firstly, the timing of the recent UK General Election means the Cass Review has not yet been implemented. While both of the main parties have said they will do so, neither has specified a timetable.

Moreover, both parties seem wedded to the misguided idea of a so-called conversion therapy ban that includes 'trans-identities'. This could easily take priority over implementing Cass. In my experience, it is a long way from making a verbal commitment to actually seeing it through. For example, at CARE, we've been campaigning for age checks on online porn for nearly a decade. It has still not been implemented despite cross-party support and being voted through in the Online Safety Act.

Persistence of gender ideology proponents

Secondly, do we really think proponents of gender ideology have been vanquished? They've suffered a defeat and lost a key battle, but I wouldn't say they have lost the war. Far from it! They are still going into schools and teaching young people lies and misinformation. Their tactics may have to change again, but we must not underestimate the determination of their zealotry.

Theological perspective

Thirdly, and this is a more theological point, the doctrine of sin makes me sceptical about whether the tide is turning. One powerful report does not equal a mass revival or a turning of the tide – Regan King writes a cautiously optimistic article about the potential for a broader spiritual awakening in the UK later in this Issue.

The Bible is clear that all humans are impacted by the Fall. Every faculty of a person is affected, from their mind to their desires and their hearts. Sin is not only lawlessness (1 John 3:4); it is also an enslaving power. We are so ruined by it that when the law that should give life comes, it actually produces more sin in us (Rom 7:10). While humans have a knowledge of God's law on their hearts (Rom 2:14-15), and while God's common grace restrains sin, we must recognise that, without Christ, people are spiritually blind and unable to see the whole truth.

Moving forward

The Cass Review will not put a total end to prescribing puberty blockers or granting medical procedures to help people change their genitalia – these dangerous operations will continue. The report is a corrective, rather than something that will put an end to such practices.

Let's get real. In the Christian worldview, anyone struggling with gender dysphoria should be treated with love and real, genuine compassion. What a difficult condition to deal with. But what is loving? To indulge their feelings? Or to firmly and graciously help people to live in their God-assigned biological sex?

Christian response

What, then, is the answer? In the years ahead, Christians must continue to advocate for good outcomes for people struggling with gender dysphoria. We need to work with other groups in society to point out the lies of trans ideology and point its victims towards support. People often 'detransition' – and they need specialist help when they do. Campaigning for change in parliament, education, and healthcare is also part of loving our neighbours on this issue.

Ultimately, the answer is the same answer that God gave in Genesis 3. We need a deliverer and a Saviour. We need a solution that goes deeper than our sin and brokenness. And of course, that Saviour is God himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. His grace super-abounds over our sin (Rom 5:20-21). His saving power can deal with the power of sin and our record of wrongs. It is new birth and conversion that our nation needs!

In other words, the tide will truly turn when there is a great awakening and revival, when men and women repent and turn back to God. When this happens, we will start to see unrighteous laws reversed and new ones passed that uphold the laws God specifically wants civil governments to uphold.

I hope this article sobers us, but it should not leave us in despair. Like the watchmen posted by God in Isaiah 62:6-7, our job is to speak out in love and to pray unceasingly until the earth is filled with the knowledge of God's glory as the waters cover the sea.

James Mildred is the Director of Communications and Engagement at Christian Action, Research, and Education (CARE).

An in-depth analysis of the Cass Review and gender identity

Edited by Lizzie Harewood

This article combines previous works by Dr Carys Mosely, written for Christian Concern,¹ and Lizzie Harewood, and has been edited by Lizzie Harewood to provide an overview of the topic.

Few subjects evoke as much emotional response as the care for young people grappling with their gender identity. It's been the subject of much debate – particularly during the recent UK General Election, with questions such as 'What is a woman?' taking centre stage in hustings. There's evidence to suggest a 'sea change' in the zeitgeist around issues of gender and sexuality as discussed by James Mildred in his opening article of this Social Issues Bulletin. I saw James' caution on whether the tide is actually changing, tempered by the knowledge that this is probably only the beginning of a journey away from ideologies that have become embedded within our society, healthcare, and educational institutions.

The Cass Review: A watershed moment

In April, the review led by Dr Hilary Cass, former president of the UK's Royal College of Paediatrics, was published, creating what some are calling a 'watershed moment'. It's a report that will be of great interest to many Christian teachers, parents, and others concerned about healthcare and education. As the leader of the Association of Christian Teachers – an organisation helping Christians in education to live for Christ as they lead in the classroom – I've kept a close watch on transgender issues in schools, which, with few guidelines to support professionals supporting confused kids, seem to have spiralled completely out of control. For some years now, materials teaching concepts of gender identity in schools have been a significant concern.

The need for the Review

The Cass Review offers a sobering critique of the care provided to vulnerable individuals, highlighting multiple areas of concern and calling for a more cautious, evidence-based approach. Many Christian campaigners will feel this report validates their stance on this topic. But why was this review necessary? How did the UK – and much of Western society – reach a point where so many children feel uncomfortable with their sex?

The catalyst for a comprehensive review came from a notable surge in referrals to the UK's Gender Identity Services for children and young people questioning their gender, and the lack of authoritative treatment frameworks to support patients seeking help. Referrals rose from under 250 in 2011-12 to over 5,000 by 2021-22, with a significant shift in demographics from prepubescent boys to mostly adolescent girls seeking help. The increase in the number of referrals has had a parallel in other countries; there was a marked increase from 2014 onwards elsewhere too.

¹ Dr Carys Mosely wrote a series of articles for Christian Concern, the first (and subsequent articles) can be found online: <https://christianconcern.com/comment/cass-review-why-are-children-uncomfortable-with-their-sex/>

Defenders of the authenticity of trans identities in kids argue that the increased societal conversation around gender diversity and trans acceptance allowed teens with gender dysphoria to avoid ‘suffering in silence’ or facing severe backlash for coming out; in essence, they had always existed but had simply not been able to ‘be themselves’ because of social or cultural pressure. But others suggest that alongside children suffering from incredibly real gender incongruence, some teens might have been misinterpreting their mental or emotional distress as gender dysphoria, influenced by social media and their peers, and that adults were affirming these interpretations.

Whether due to smartphones, social contagion, increasingly liberal attitudes towards gender and sexuality, or a mix of these factors, there’s been an unprecedented rise in young people with gender concerns. Acceptance of trans identities alone can’t explain the rapid increase in numbers or the shift from predominantly biological males to females presenting with gender dysphoria – a change unlike any in history. The Cass Review notes, ‘Peer influence during this stage of life is very powerful.’²

Mental health and gender dysphoria

To explore the cohort in more detail, Dr Cass commissioned a systematic review of studies in the field, published in the British Medical Journal.³

Who are the patients?

Nearly half of the studies reported depression and anxiety among patients, with a fifth reporting other mental health problems. Overall, children and young people referred to gender clinics had higher rates of anxiety, eating disorders, and depression than other children. Research from Finland showed younger cohorts of gender-distressed children had greater mental health needs than previous ones. The prevalence of neurodiversity and complex mental health presentations as well as childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse among patients seeking gender changes, was significant.

Social factors

Additionally, the report explored social factors contributing to the increasing desire for gender change among younger females. It points to a generation marked by anxiety, distress, and heavy digital consumption, including exposure to social media and online pornography, alongside lower self-esteem and increased body image concerns, particularly among young women and girls. Cass did not find solid evidence for biological causes for gender dysphoria in children but found that they often have multiple unmet needs and complex histories.

Evolution of ‘treatment’

The Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS), established in 1989 and operated by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust in London, initially took more of a ‘nuanced’ approach to distressed children and teenagers, using therapy to determine the best way to support them. Fast forward a few decades, amid the rocketing referral rates, the ‘gender-affirming’ approach seemed to become commonplace, with interventions like puberty blockers and hormone treatments being increasingly recommended..

2 Cass Review Final Report 8.56, 122. Accessed online: https://cass.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Cass-Review_Final.pdf

3 See: <https://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2024/04/09/archdischild-2023-326681.abstract>

However, concerns arose regarding the lack of evidence supporting the efficacy and long-term effects of these treatments, with whistleblowers raising alarm about the quality and consistency of care provided by the service.

The right way to treat

The most important question in this whole period of ‘reset’ – and especially for Christians whose mandate is to ‘Love our neighbour’ – is how can we most effectively support, and manage children and young people who present with gender incongruence and/or dysphoria?

The Cass Review’s Recommendations

i. Holistic approach to treatment

The Cass Review critiques the insufficient evidence supporting the medical pathway and advocates for a more holistic approach to treatment. The exclusive focus on gender for many young people meant that their other mental and behavioural problems were not considered alongside their gender distress. Of importance to schools, it raises concerns about social transitioning, urging that young children undergo therapy before pursuing such measures. Cass emphasises the importance of providing thorough, holistic, and therapeutic support, stressing the need for careful consideration of life-altering decisions in adulthood.

ii. Puberty blockers and hormone treatments

Cass warns that the maturation of the brain could be derailed for a time or permanently by puberty blockers, stressing their potential effect on bone density and height gain, underlining the need for long-term follow-up studies to find out whether bones recover their health fully in adulthood. The review also cites a lack of evidence that interventions such as puberty blockers or hormones either ‘buy time to think’ or reduce suicide risk, and recommends that they are withheld until individuals reach 18.

iii. Implementation of better treatment

How better treatment might be implemented remains unclear at present. Having run through various options for a new service model, in the Review, Cass describes the preferred one, which she terms ‘Clinical network plus’. In this, all patients would receive fundamentally the same treatment at all sites – consistency for all children going hand in hand with ensuring they do not just receive attention for gender distress.

To maintain care standards and access, Cass recommends that regional hubs form a National Provider Collaborative (NPC). This would set shared standards, update the patient assessment framework, develop referral criteria, discuss complex cases, and provide Continuing Professional Development.

Limitations of the Cass Review

Despite the important steps forward made by the Cass Review, we should not idealise it nor stay silent when it fails morally. Cass does not wholly oppose the practice of allowing children to live as if they were members of the opposite sex before puberty.

Concerning recommendations

Her comments on this regrettably represent a stunning lack of insight:

In reviewing cases put forward for puberty blockers, the MPRG noted that children who had socially transitioned early and completely were likely to approach puberty in a fearful and anxious state because of living ‘in stealth’.⁴

Shockingly, Cass states that there should be no lower age limit for children’s transition options:

Helping parents and families to ensure that options remain open and flexible for the child, whilst ensuring that the child is able to function well in school and socially is an important aspect of care provision and there should be no lower age limit for accessing such help and support.⁵

This recommendation seems odd given Cass’ advice to restrict puberty blockers to research programmes. She found that the reasons for prescribing puberty blockers had expanded over time and that these drugs do not provide the intended pause to consider gender distress, nor is there evidence that they reduce gender dysphoria. This frankly shows an attitude of not pursuing the causes of childhood gender dysphoria; specifically, not wanting to upset parents who deliberately try to change their own children. Despite our frustrations with these details, we must not overlook the positive impact and overall benefits of the report.

Political and public responses

Encouragingly, Dr Hilary Cass’ final report has received cross-party support, with both Labour and Conservative parties committed to implementing its recommendations to protect the interests of children questioning their gender identity. Politicians, such as Labour’s Wes Streeting and Education Secretary Gillian Keegan, publicly backtracked on previous statements and have endorsed the Review’s findings.

The cynic may suggest that politicians are motivated by the fear of losing voter support, influencing their responses to the Review. Campaigners’ support for politicians’ changes in stance may stem from a desire to ensure these recommendations are acted upon. Acceptance of their U-turns or apologies – even if they are opportunistic – is important in a democratic society, as it shows the need for flexibility in governance. There have been vocal critics, however, with organisations such as Mermaids and Stonewall UK expressing ‘concern’ over certain recommendations, stating they could prevent ‘children and young people from receiving the care they need.’⁶

Christian response

The Review underscores several key conclusions that are significant for Christians. We can give thanks that much (though not all) of the Review aligns with a Biblical understanding of sex and gender. We rejoice that secular research affirms the immutable biological distinctions between the sexes while

4 Cass Review Final Report 19.22, 223. Accessed online: https://cass.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CassReview_Final.pdf

5 Ibid

6 See: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/cass-review>

emphasising their equal worth and dignity. This ties into our conviction that God created humans in his image – distinctly male and female – and any attempt to blur these distinctions can create great confusion and distress. Biological sex matters and our understanding of this cannot be remoulded at will without significant implications.

But let's not 'seize victory' at this moment in time. This is a time of lament. Thousands of young people have been harmed irretrievably. They were fed a damaging lie that they may have been 'born in the wrong body'. They have been caught up in an ideological battle and Dr Cass herself said that children had been 'let down' by a failure to base care on evidence. Christians must pray for justice for those who have been misled or damaged.

We must pray that the recommendations are implemented and that there is adequate and timely support for those unsure about the next steps in treatment for themselves or their children. There are genuine concerns that these recommendations might end up left on a 'to-do' list without any sense of urgency. When it comes to the implications for the public sector, we must not be naïve and think it will be easy to roll back on what the media is calling the 'ideological capture' of the NHS or educational institutions. Christians who work in these sectors must build on this moment and use the momentum of the Review to further the calls for schools and other services to become 'Cass compliant' and for all lesson materials to be free from gender identity content.

And with a new government, we must ask if the political will is there. Labour's Bridget Phillipson said she opposes using 'partisan language' in school guidance on teaching gender identity. The Conservative's draft for schools which was set to become statutory guidance clearly proposed banning teaching on gender identity. However, Phillipson argued that 'there are trans people in society,' and thus, she would not support the ban as stated. Whatever our politics, this stance is concerning; it threatens to undo the progress made by the Cass Review and other reports highlighting the harm caused to children by the acceptance of gender ideology. We must pray that Labour keeps to its word that they will 'work to implement the expert recommendations of the Cass Review' and ensure coherence in the school curriculum too. However, we must not place our hope in politics alone.

Compassion and empathy

Let's remember that, as Christ's followers, our struggle is not against 'flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph 6:12). This truth frees us not to laud it over our 'enemies' or scorn those who make an about-turn on this matter. We were never really 'battling' them in the first place! A wise Christian will not make scornful remarks online, engage in vitriolic conversations or 'keep any receipts'. Forgiveness and grace should define us, setting us apart from the world. Welcoming back those who reconsider their stance in light of this review and extending grace to those who genuinely believed they were acting rightly may not be easy, but as Christians, building bridges for reconciliation and change is surely our mandate.

And all the while we must remember that hurting young people are at the heart of this issue. Recognising the genuine pain of gender dysphoria does not necessitate accepting that a trans-identifying boy is truly a girl, or vice versa. But it does require empathetic listening to students or patients expressing discomfort or despair about their identity or the Review's impact. Compassion and grace will be crucial as we navigate the aftermath in the coming weeks and months.

No longer can a Biblical view of identity or gender be nullified or demonised. But let's use this moment wisely by speaking graciously to medics or school leaders about policies of concern; explaining with detailed reference to the Review why we cannot in good conscience use alternate pronouns; and lobbying those in authority to confirm the importance of the Review in legally binding guidance for schools.

Let us grieve that this issue has impacted so many vulnerable and impressionable young people, but may we remember that gender issues were never the cause of their biggest problem, merely a symptom of their ultimate search for meaning and identity.. May Christians be sensitive to this and hold out the hope of an identity hidden with Christ in God to a generation of young people struggling to find security.

*Lizzie Harewood is the Executive Officer of the Association of Christian Teachers.
Dr Carys Mosely is a Public Policy Researcher at Christian Concern.*

Legislation on ‘Conversion Therapy’: What’s been happening?

By James Kennedy

We’ve been talking about legislation on ‘conversion therapy’ for far too long. And, I’m sorry, but it looks like we’ll have to keep talking about it for a while longer.

How it all began

The saga began back in 2017 when the UK Government carried out, for the first time, a ‘National LGBT Survey’. It was badly designed. It wasn’t representative. Whole crowds responded following recruitment campaigns at Pride parades and through Stonewall’s mailing list.

Out of the results, something rather surprising emerged. Two per cent of respondents said they had been through ‘conversion therapy’. That amounted to over two thousand people. Even LGBT campaigners were stumped. Hadn’t abusive practices like electro-shock therapy stopped decades ago?

Government promises and Christian concerns

Theresa May – then Prime Minister – promised LGBT activists that her Government would ‘end conversion therapy’. Assurances were sought by campaigners like ITV’s Paul Brand that a legislative ‘ban’ would be put in place. When Boris Johnson became PM, he gave his backing to the plan before any consultation and analysis had taken place.

In the UK, Christians were among the first to sound the alarm that politicians were being misled by a campaign that wants to criminalise those who refuse to affirm LGBT identities. In countries that already had legislation on the statute book, this was an increasing concern. No one here was able to give examples of genuinely abusive practices that were still legal; the discourse focused on prayer, pastoral care, and church teaching.

It wasn’t long before women’s groups and LGB (not T) groups joined Christians in raising concerns. The Government study hadn’t even defined its terms. Some of those claiming to have experienced ‘conversion therapy’ were not talking about actual abuse but about disagreements and other experiences which had upset them. Some may have been talking about historic practices thankfully long illegal in the UK, or practices which took place overseas. Another study by lobby group The Ozanne Foundation included people praying for themselves as an example. The problems were mounting.

Legal opinions and human rights concerns

The Christian Institute commissioned a legal opinion from eminent human rights expert, Jason Coppel KC. He looked at the wording of a ‘conversion therapy law’ in Victoria, Australia (which had just been

passed) and a Bill proposed in Canada, as well as the definition provided by the leading campaign group in the UK.

Would Christians be caught by a law like that? Yes – he said. Many aspects of the ordinary work of churches would be restricted by a new law of that sort. Prayer, pastoral care, preaching, evangelism, parenting, church membership, and communion could all be caught. But would such a law be viable in the UK? No – Mr Coppel explained that it would violate the European Convention on Human Rights on as many as four grounds.

The whole sorry thing has rumbled on since then. The Christian Institute has received eight more legal opinions, mostly on variations of proposed legislation in the UK. Every single proposal seen so far would restrict the gospel freedoms of ordinary believers.

Proposals in Westminster

The Conservative Government in Westminster said it was working on a ‘conversion therapy’ Bill for England and Wales throughout the last Parliament. A consultation was launched in late 2021 but failed to provide a definition of ‘conversion therapy’ and proposed using a stripped-down version of domestic abuse law as its basis. Multiple promises were made to protect religious freedom, but the proposals were far too vague to reassure. Boris Johnson decided to ditch the plans some months later, only to reinstate them that same evening, but with transgenderism removed. When Rishi Sunak became PM it seemed trans was back. Then the press said the plans were being ditched again. But then they were back on.

Private Members’ Bills and amendments

Parliament’s most strident campaigners for a new law decided to take measures into their own hands. Liberal Democrat Peer Baroness Burt of Solihull came out top of the Lords’ ballot for Private Members’ Bills. Her Bill on ‘conversion practices’ seemed to have been thrown together and fell apart at its first debate in the Lords in February. Twice as many Peers spoke against the Bill as for it, with Lord Forsyth of Drumlean beginning, ‘In nearly 40 years in Parliament, I have never seen a more badly drafted or dangerous piece of legislation’. Lady Burt was forced to admit on the floor of the House: ‘I accept that this Bill is not well drafted’.

Just three weeks later it was the turn of Labour MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle, who had also chosen to propose a Private Member’s Bill on ‘conversion practices’. It was widely acknowledged that he had put significant effort into the drafting; he had met with people on all sides in an attempt to write a Bill that could be supported by all. But, the wording of the Bill was shown to pose significant problems for human rights and religious freedom. Russell-Moyle needed a hundred MPs’ support to progress the Bill to the next stage. He fell short of that, despite a major letter-writing campaign from Stonewall.

Next was the Conservatives’ own Alicia Kearns MP. In quick succession, she tabled and withdrew seven amendments to the Government’s Criminal Justice Bill. What she was doing is anyone’s guess, but it was a total mess. At one point she even added wording to the amendment that made clear prayer would be considered a ‘conversion practice’. The whole farcical episode was derailed by the announcement of the General Election.

What's happening in Scotland?

At the same time, a separate campaign was underway in Scotland. First was an investigation by the Scottish Parliament's Equalities Committee into a petition calling for a conversion therapy law. Most of the Committee's members had previously signed a pledge backing the petition's aims, and the Committee gave almost no time to considering the views of those who raised concerns.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the Scottish Government then chose a panel of activists to form an 'Expert Advisory Group on Ending Conversion Practices'. Only one member had legal training. Advice to The Christian Institute from top lawyer Aidan O'Neill KC said the group had been appointed without any formal process and its recommendations did not 'give any account of what the existing (criminal and or civil) law might be in this area'.

Worse still, Aidan O'Neill said the recommendations were beyond the competency of the Scottish Government. A law of this sort would not be human rights compliant and trampled on areas of law reserved for Westminster. It would be the Gender Recognition Reform Bill fiasco all over again.

Negative headlines and government response

The press had by now cottoned on to the problems. When the Scottish Government launched its consultation in January, it was met with negative headlines in almost every mainstream paper. 'Scottish parents face jail if they stop children changing gender' read the Telegraph's front page. The Scottish Government is currently analysing responses to the consultation. The new First Minister in Holyrood could yet be persuaded to drop the plans but has so far said he won't.

What's happening in Northern Ireland?

In Northern Ireland, a motion was passed by Stormont in 2021 calling for a 'conversion therapy' Bill to be brought forward. That motion was proposed by the UUP and supported by Sinn Féin, Alliance, and the SDLP.

The then Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey MLA (Sinn Féin) progressed plans for a new law, but the proposals were never publicly announced, and a consultation was not launched. Alliance Party MLAs said they would table a Private Member's Bill if legislation was not forthcoming. In the end, Miss Hargey chose to fund a research project by LGBT campaigners in her last few days in office.

That report was published in May. It lacked any kind of academic rigour and should never provide a basis on which to legislate. It merely lists the personal stories of ten people, some of whom were 'through the researchers' networks'. The accounts begin with someone who had experienced 'prayer, Bible studies and teaching'. Another example of a 'conversion practice' was someone who said that while out shopping they'd had church members discourage them from gender 'transition'.

A new motion was brought to the Assembly weeks later, once again calling for the Communities Minister to bring forward legislation.¹ This time, UUP support for the motion had vanished, though an amendment clarifying that prayer and pastoral care were not 'conversion practices' was unsuccessful.

¹ See online: <https://letuspray.uk/news/inside-the-chamber-a-closer-look-at-the-conversion-therapy-debate-at-stormont>

NI Communities Minister's Statement

The new Communities Minister Gordon Lyons MLA (DUP) said:

The development of legislation to ban those practices will require careful analysis of all the elements that are involved. Indeed, if we do establish a definition of what conversion practices are, we also need to examine whether there is a gap in the law and how best we can fill that gap in a way that is compliant and consistent with human rights legislation.²

Republic of Ireland

A 'Prohibition of Conversion Therapies Bill' was tabled and debated in 2018. Though receiving broad support, the Bill appeared to stall after legal issues were raised by the Attorney General. The Government was advised that the Bill's wording was too unclear.

Since then, Equalities Minister Roderic O'Gorman has been working on a new Bill he hopes will this time be 'constitutionally secure'. He got official permission from the Coalition Government to commence drafting in June 2023, but despite being anticipated many months ago is yet to materialise.

What now following the UK General Election?

Conversion therapy was mentioned in various party manifestos (see below). It looks almost certain then, that the debate over laws on 'conversion therapy' is set to continue. Perhaps there will be a brief respite while everyone adjusts to the new arrangements in Westminster, but before long MPs will be clamouring to have their say.

We must continue to raise our concerns with those who are newly elected. And we must pray that new laws will not be brought forward that limit gospel freedom.

Extracts from Party Manifestos

Alliance

Alliance MPs will continue to advocate for: An immediate trans-inclusive ban on so-called Conversion Therapy, without loopholes, that extends to NI.

Conservatives

Attempts at so-called 'conversion therapy' are abhorrent. But legislation around conversion practices is a very complex issue, with existing criminal law already offering robust protections. The challenges involved can be seen, for example, with the SNP re-consulting for views on their proposals in Scotland and Sweden recently concluding that they will not be pursuing a similar ban. In light of the Cass Review Final Report, it is right that we take more time before reaching a final judgement on additional legislation in this area.

² Ibid

Labour

So-called conversion therapy is abuse – there is no other word for it – so Labour will finally deliver a full trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices, while protecting the freedom for people to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Liberal Democrats

Ban all forms of conversion therapies and practices.

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru would end so-called conversion therapy practices related to sexuality and gender identity.

Ulster Unionist Party

We support banning the practice of conversion therapy.

James Kennedy works in public affairs at The Christian Institute and is part of the Let Us Pray campaign.

Are we seeing signs of awakening in the United Kingdom?

By Regan King

The current spiritual state of the nation³

The 2022 census revealed that a majority of people in Scotland (51%) now acknowledge that they do not follow any religion. Only a decade before, 54% checked the Christian box on the census; now only 38.8% make this claim.⁴ Even this number seems far too inflated when judged by the reality on the ground in terms of active church participants. Statistics from 2017 showed that only 7% of the population attended a church of any kind.⁵ After clarifying what percentage of that could meaningfully be called 'evangelical' you are left with about 1.5% of Scotland's population. On a cultural level, this has seen widespread closure of churches of all kinds. Just recently, The Church of Scotland announced that a hundred of its churches were being closed permanently and the buildings sold – some at incredibly low rates. The announcement led to one headline in *The Telegraph* saying '...UK turns away from Christianity'.⁶

In England and Wales, the big picture presents similarly. The 2021 census revealed that 46.2% of the population were happy to check the box describing themselves as Christian. While that may seem significant, it is down from 59% in a decade – a drop of 5.5 million. Oh, and only 5% care enough about whatever their type of 'Christianity' is to attend a church. Meanwhile, 37.2% actively self-identify as non-religious and in third place is Islam, which has grown from 4.9% of the population to 6.5% in the last decade. On a local level, I am privileged to live and serve in London's densest populated borough, Islington. Sadly, Islington has also been described as 'the borough with no religion' with a clear majority of residents (40.8%) identifying as having 'no religion'. While it seems encouraging that 34.7% identified as 'Christian', as with the national scene, church involvement is in single-digit percentages and evangelicals likely number around 2%.

Christianity on the fringe

With the UK being very firmly situated in the 'post-Christian' bracket, it should come as no surprise that some seem quite happy to see open Christians pushed to the fringe of public relevance. Kate Forbes, a leading light in the SNP in Scotland, has routinely been hounded for beliefs that are part and

3 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported significant findings from the 2021 Census, indicating a shift in religious identification in the United Kingdom. See: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

4 See online: Scotland's Census 2022 "Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion", [Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion | Scotland's Census](#)

5 See online: Evangelical Focus Europe, Church attendance in Scotland falls from 12% to 7% in fifteen years, Edinburgh, 28 April, 2017. [EDINBURGH, Church attendance in Scotland falls from 12% to 7% in fifteen years | Evangelical Focus.](#)

6 See online: Joe Wright, [Hundred of Scottish churches up for sale as UK turns away from Christianity \(msn.com\)](#)

parcel of her evangelical faith.⁷ Tim Farron expressed a similar experience following his resignation from Liberal Democrats leadership, and more recently, David Campanale was deselected from serving as a Liberal Democrat candidate over his own Christian beliefs. Anyone who receives regular updates from Christian Concern or The Christian Institute – or is a regular reader of this Bulletin – will know that these are not isolated experiences, nor are such elements of prejudice against Christians relegated only to the realm of frontline politics.

Revival, renewal, and awakening

Taking the above into consideration, one would be forgiven for thinking we have no ground at all to be thinking there are signs of awakening in the UK. And yet there is more that must be considered and prayed through before we arrive at a considered answer.

Understanding revival, renewal, and awakening

The terms revival, renewal, and awakening are often used interchangeably but signify distinct spiritual phenomena. They describe profound shifts in individuals, churches, and communities where people turn to God through repentance and faith in Jesus. Historically, these terms evoke seasons marked by visible and transformative works of the Holy Spirit, reviving spiritual life from states of spiritual emptiness or decline. Today, they acknowledge a current state of spiritual need and yearning for new, transformative realities empowered by the Holy Spirit. These concepts resonate deeply in evangelical circles through songs, prayer gatherings, and preaching, reflecting a widespread longing for spiritual renewal and awakening.

Revival, renewal, and awakening is all about God

Revival, renewal, and awakening are not synonymous, though they certainly do not operate in isolation from each other. Revival is when the Holy Spirit works in Christians and local churches, arousing them from a state of sinful spiritual sleep and sluggishness. True revival is all about God. It is of God, by God, and through God. It is not man-generated; it is Spirit-led and governed. Revival refocuses, reminds, and refreshes God's people on who he is and how he has revealed himself. When God revives his people, they recognise and appreciate his worth, they rediscover and value his word, they request and enact his will, and they continue in repentance and faith in his way.

In a revived recognition and appreciation of God's worth, Christ-followers see and take joy in the truths that God is merciful, loving, holy, all-knowing, just, judge, true, wise, powerful, able, saviour, praiseworthy, and good. How can we keep from singing his praise, crying out to him in prayer, and lifting holy hands? Appreciation of God's essence cannot be amputated from a revived rediscovery and valuing of his Word. In 2 Chronicles 34, the rediscovery and reading of the Torah, God's Law, sparks revival in Israel leading to repentance and restoration of pure worship. Revival sees people read and share God's word, searching out the depths of its wisdom while requesting and enacting his will therein. Through this revival, God's people will see that the change so desperately needed personally, culturally, nationally, and universally is found in repentance God's way, which in turn sees renewal that can lead to others being awakened to the gospel.

⁷ See online: Margaret Taylor, Kate Forbes: 'There's a complete illiteracy about faith and religion and what it means for someone who believes', [Kate Forbes: 'There's a complete illiteracy about religion and what it means for someone who believes' \(holyrood.com\)](http://holyrood.com)

True revival begins in the heart

In the Ketuvim, 'the writings' of the Old Testament, the chronicler records God's promise to Solomon upon completion of the Temple for the people's revival and subsequent renewal. He says, 'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Often when we pray for revival, renewal, and awakening we have the mentality of us and them. 'Lord save those people over there'. 'Lord change him'. 'Lord change her'. We hear Christians ask 'Where is the church? Why won't the church revive? Why won't the church stand up?' It is good and right to pray for others, of course. Yet praying for others to be revived when you are not, leads to nothing. Charles Spurgeon comments:

Careless professors are as much out of place as snow in harvest among truly living Christians. As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes are these sluggards. As well be bound to a dead body as forced into union with lifeless professors; they are a burden, a plague, and an abomination. You turn to one of these cold brethren after a graciously earnest prayer meeting, and say with holy joy, 'What a delightful meeting we have had!' 'Yes,' he says carelessly and deliberately, as if it were an effort to say so much, 'there was a good number of people.' How his frostbitten words grate on one's ear! You ask yourself, 'Where has the man been? Is he not conscious that the Holy Ghost has been with us?' Does not our Lord speak of these people as being cast out of his mouth, just because he himself is altogether in earnest, and consequently, when he meets with lukewarm people he will not endure them? He says, 'I would thou wert cold or hot,' either utterly averse to good or in earnest concerning it. It is easy to see his meaning. If you heard an ungodly man blaspheme after an earnest meeting, you would lament it, but you would feel that from such a man it was not a thing to make you vexed, for he has only spoken after his kind, but when you meet with a child of God who is lukewarm, how can you stand that? It is sickening, and makes the inmost spirit feel the horrors of mental nausea.⁸

Revival and its subsequent renewal is not about us and them. It doesn't begin with unbelievers; rather it is a work of the Creator in recreating our own hearts as his people individually. David cries out in desperation, 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.' (Psalm 51:10) National awakening begins with congregational revival and renewal among God's people, and congregational revival and renewal begins with personal revival and renewal, which then goes on to impact the church body. It is fundamentally God-elevating and self-humbling. It sees a work of humbling in the one seeking God where, like David, he says 'I am a transgressor. I am a sinner. I have done evil. I deserve God's righteous punishment. I am iniquitous. I am unclean. I am broken. I am wrong. I am blood guilty. I cannot accomplish my own salvation...MAKE ME NEW!'

And he does.

Revival restores true worship

The impact of revival sees a renewal of vibrant love for God in word and action. It sees God's people stirred up to love and good works not out of a spirit of legalistic duty, but genuine desire. It sees us

8 C.H. Spurgeon, "What Is a Revival?", *Sword and Trowel*, December 1866

present our lives selflessly and sacrificially for his cause, trusting him to broaden our horizons and expand our energy for his work. R. A. Torrey commented on the means through which revival and awakening come as centring on this restoration of individuals who then collectively and worshipfully pursue God while engaging the world with his message:⁹

First, let a few Christians (they need not be many) get thoroughly right with God themselves. This is the prime essential. If this is not done, the rest, I am sorry to say, will come to nothing! Second, let them bind themselves together to pray for a revival until God opens the heavens and comes down. Third, let them put themselves at the disposal of God to use them as He sees fit in winning others to Christ. That is all. This is sure to bring a revival to any church or community.

Any discussion about a spiritual awakening in Britain must begin by acknowledging the critical need for revival and renewal among individuals and congregations as followers of Jesus Christ. While desiring national change and transformation is commendable, it must align with the principles revealed in God's Word. This process starts with personal and collective reformation according to Scripture alone, abandoning outdated traditions and preferences to pursue purity and truth in both word and action.

This journey of renewal is often a gradual process. Consider King Josiah of Judah, who ascended to the throne at a young age amidst a history of corrupt leadership. Beginning his earnest pursuit of God at sixteen, he dismantled idols and restored the temple by his twenties, leading to a rediscovery of God's law and a widespread repentance towards pure worship. Despite subsequent challenges, later figures like Ezra and Nehemiah would further restore the nation's devotion to God, illustrating cycles of revival and renewal throughout biblical history.

Ezra 9 provides a testament to this renewal among God's people, affirming God's faithfulness even in times of slavery and exile, granting revival to rebuild and protect the temple in Judea and Jerusalem. Such revivals see individuals who once knew God's blessings calling upon Him anew (Psalm 80:18, 85:6). In the New Testament, this empowerment by the Holy Spirit enables believers to spread the Gospel to new regions, catalyzing awakening to God's salvation. Ultimately, revival leads to widespread renewal, as God's transformative work prompts countless to turn to him in repentance and faith.

So... Are we seeing signs of an awakening?

From about 1735 to 1740, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and others, the American colonies experienced a massive spiritual awakening which came to be known as the First Great Awakening. At a time when the secular rationalism of the Enlightenment was thriving, these pastors and others proclaimed the Biblical truths that God is holy, sin is serious, humanity is enslaved to sin, and needs the Holy Spirit to regenerate hearts so that people might repent, believe, and be saved by turning to Jesus Christ. God saw fit to use simple, straightforward, prayer-prepared gospel preaching to transform tens of thousands in such a way that had a long-lasting impact.

Despite the initial discouraging statistics mentioned at the beginning, there are grounds for optimism in the United Kingdom. The decline and closure of institutional liberal churches and legalistic

⁹ R. A. Torrey was a prominent American evangelist and pastor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, closely associated with D. L. Moody and involved in the early years of the Moody Bible Institute. He authored several books and was known for his emphasis on revival and evangelism.

congregations can be seen as a positive development. Reflecting on Matthew 5:13 ('If salt has lost its taste...'), it is evident that churches which merely bear a name but do not cherish and proclaim the Gospel are destined to fade away. This process echoes the warnings in the letters to the churches in Revelation, which foretell closure for those lacking genuine spiritual vitality, irrespective of their historical significance or material wealth.

John Stevens (Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches) has commented on several occasions on the decline of the Church of Scotland:¹⁰

The decline of denominations like the Church of Scotland, which have largely abandoned the gospel, is not the full story of UK Christianity. Evangelical churches that faithfully preach Christ are consistently seeing slow and steady growth overall – both conversions and transfer growth through migration.

The UK is not turning from Christianity but rejecting empty folk religion that was never true Christianity in the first place. The major decline is in allegiance to the Church of Scotland – and this is inevitable given that it is a liberal denomination that affirms same-sex marriage. Liberalism in the church proclaims its own irrelevance to the culture because it has nothing unique to offer that can't be better delivered elsewhere.

Across the UK, churches that have fallen into liberalism are failing. Indeed, progressive ideology, with its denial of Scripture's authority and sacred cow of same-sex marriage, seems to be the death knell for many congregations. Churches that are faithfully upholding the authority of the Bible and living it out are growing. This is statistically evident. John Hayward comments with accompanying analysis:

To date, no growing church has adopted same-sex marriage. All of these denominations hold firm to historic Christianity. Indeed, they are all evangelical in doctrine. Additionally, they have statements that affirm marriage as between a man and woman only – the historical and Biblical position. I propose that their confidence in the authority of Scripture enables them to stand against progressive ideology and drives their efforts in making disciples. They know what God requires of them in both behaviour and mission... Not all denominations are declining; there are growing ones: churches that stand on historic Christianity and against progressive ideology. Can they continue to stand? Will they go further and seek a greater empowerment of the Holy Spirit, taking revival seriously? Can they learn from the rapidly growing Christian movements in other parts of the world, those for whom discipleship and replication are church priorities?¹¹

While I see liberal (and on the flip side legalistic) churches declining around me, I am hearing from multiple pastors from across evangelical groupings, organisations, and ministries of greater interest and engagement in church life, including from those without any Christian background. John Stevens has said that 'within FIEC we have seen more growth, conversions, and baptisms after COVID than before.' In my own context as a pastor of a local church, we have seen around 60 credible professions of faith in baptism in The Angel Church in the past four years. In the years from 2007 to 2020, there were maybe 10. A sister church which we were involved in helping to plant – Wimbledon Baptist Church – has seen similar. Their pastor, Barry King, reports that 10 of the newly constituted church's 20 members have come to faith and been baptised in the church in the past two years. Reports of similar

10 See online: [Mainstream churches face extinction in the UK: "Liberalism has little to offer that cannot be found elsewhere" | Evangelical Focus.](#)

11 John Hayward, [UK Church Decline and Progressive Ideology - Church Growth Modelling \(churchmodel.org.uk\)](#), 20 May, 2022.

from across churches supported in their planting and revitalisation across England and Scotland by Grace Baptist Partnership abound.

Commission-affiliated pastor of Mosaic Multicultural Church (Elephant and Castle) and City Catalyst for The London Project, Alex Brito tells me his conviction that there is certainly 'a kind of Gospel renewal in London' and points to the significance and importance of missionaries and migrants – particularly from the Global South – coming to live in the UK where they are evangelising individual and multiple ethnic groups to great effect. Alex's conviction is backed up statistically – the number of congregations in London grew by 50% between 1979 and 2020, and its churches have been characterised more by growth than by decline in the decades since 1980, leading some to speculate that London could become the first 'desecularised city'.¹²

I believe it is far too early to say whether we are on the cusp of another 'Great Awakening' in the United Kingdom. In the common bipolarity of human emotion and thought, I sometimes feel that we are so far away from true spiritual awakening that the suggestion itself is bizarre, while on other occasions, I experience a tangible sense that we are on the brink of that awakening which many of us have longed and prayed for. The latter mostly comes as I experience revival and renewal personally and in my local church context. My prayer is that others are experiencing the same revival and renewal and that, perhaps, together we will all know and rejoice in en masse awakening for God's glory and the good of our land!

Regan King is the lead pastor at The Angel Church in Islington (London). He is married to Rachel and has two children. He also serves on the board of the Pregnancy Crisis Helpline, is an author and is a presenter for Revelation TV.

¹² See: David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper, *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 980 to the Present* (Routledge, 2020).

Current Bioethics Issues - June 2024

by Dr Calum MacKellar

European Court of Human Rights supports prohibition on export of sperm and embryos from the deceased for fertility treatment

In September 2023, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg decided (unanimously) that there had been no violation by France of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the *European Convention on Human Rights*, to stop the export of sperm and embryos from the deceased. The case of *Baret and Caballero v. France* concerned a woman wanting to export her deceased husband's sperm, and a second woman seeking to export an embryo, created with the help of her deceased husband, to Spain where posthumous medically assisted procreation is permitted.

The Court considered that the absolute nature of the prohibition on posthumous insemination in France was a political and social issue relating to moral or ethical considerations. Thus, the role of the domestic policy-maker had to be given special weight.¹

This decision contrasts with the case of a British woman, in 1996, who went to court to be allowed to be inseminated with her late husband's sperm so that she could have a baby. This caused an ethical storm which was debated in the UK courts, in the UK Parliament, and in the media. Because her husband had not given his written consent to use the sperm, the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which regulates the field on behalf of the UK Government, prevented her to be inseminated with his sperm in the UK. But it did eventually allow her to take the sperm abroad, and she conceived a child after treatment at a Belgian hospital.²

Plans to remove the 14-day limit for experimenting on human embryos in the UK

A major consultation, undertaken by the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), indicated that 97% of responses opposed a law change that would remove the 14-day limit for experimenting on human embryos. But, despite this result, the taxpayer-funded HFEA has proceeded to lobby the Government to go ahead with its plans, which include changes to legislation (as soon as the UK General Election is over) to pave the way for removing the 14-day limit.

As part of the consultation, the HFEA also outlined a desire to 'future proof' *the Human, Fertilisation and Embryology Act* so that it is more easily modified to permit changes, such as allowing individuals to generally modify their reproductive cells. Under the proposals, future changes to embryology laws would be demoted to secondary legislation, where scrutiny would be reduced, rather than be considered under primary legislation, where ethical considerations can be rigorously discussed in Parliament and MPs held accountable.

1 European Court of Human Rights, ECHR 260 (2023) 14.09.2023, <https://www.echr.coe.int/w/judgment-concerning-france-5>

2 Diane Blood has human rights success, BioNews No.197, 3 March 2003.

The HFEA has also ignored overwhelming opposition to enabling ‘embryo banking’ which would allow significantly more embryos to be donated to a research bank for future destructive research.

Independent Review of gender identity

A long-anticipated independent review of gender identity services for children and young people in the UK was published in April 2024. This was chaired by Prof. Hilary Cass OBE, a previous president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. It is the most thorough assessment that has yet been undertaken in the UK of the evidence for the medical treatment of young people who are distressed about their gender identity. The review commissioned an appraisal of international guidelines and a survey of international practice but did not take a position on what caused gender dysphoria or how it should be treated.

According to Prof. Cass, the majority of clinical guidelines had not followed international standards for guideline development. The review also indicated that the evidence for existing treatment was appallingly weak. In this regard, Prof. Cass indicated that she could not think of another area of paediatric care where young people were given a potentially irreversible treatment without any idea about what would happen to them in adulthood.

On the controversial issue of puberty blockers, which suppress the release of hormones that cause puberty and are often prescribed to children questioning their gender as a way of stopping physical changes, Prof. Cass indicated that the evidence was very limited. She explained that health professionals were really unclear about the reasons they were being used. It was also noted that most people who begin a puberty blocker pathway go on to a full medical transition. In other words, it does not seem to be buying time to think things through as originally intended.

The report indicated that for the majority of young people, a medical pathway may not be the best way to address their gender dysphoria while emphasising the need for a holistic approach, including psychotherapy. For those young people for whom a medical pathway may be clinically indicated, the report mentioned that it should also address any wider mental health and/or psychosocial challenges which may exist.

Following the publication of the Cass Review, both Scotland and England have paused prescriptions of puberty blockers for persons under 18 years of age except in very special circumstances.

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill tabled in the Scottish Parliament

The *Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill* was submitted to the Scottish Parliament by the Liberal Democrat MSP, Liam McArthur. It is expected to be discussed during the autumn and voted on in 2025. But the Scottish government has indicated that ministers and backbenchers will not be instructed how to vote, as the matter is an issue of individual conscience.

Under the proposals, patients could only request medical assistance to end their lives if they had a terminal illness and had been ruled mentally fit to make the decision by two doctors. In addition, patients must be aged 16 or over, resident of Scotland for at least 12 months, and must administer the life-ending medication themselves.

In Scotland, it is not illegal to attempt suicide but helping someone take their own life could lead to prosecution for crimes such as murder, culpable homicide or offences under the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1971*. In England and Wales, on the other hand, the *Suicide Act 1961* makes it an offence to encourage or assist the suicide or attempted suicide of another person.

Dr Calum MacKellar is affiliated to the Centre for Bioethics and Emerging Technologies at St Mary's University in Twickenham, London. He is also a member of the United Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Latest News of Significant Individual Cases

The following are summaries of the story so far in some of the significant recently-resolved or still unresolved cases involving Christians responding to a wide range of legal, police or disciplinary action against them. Seeking a remedy by means of litigation can be a lengthy process – sometimes taking several years for a closure to be reached. All these cases are being handled by the Christian Legal Centre.

Sudiksha

‘Labelled ‘deluded’ because she wanted to ‘die try to live.’

Sudiksha suffered from a rare genetic mitochondrial disease. Her condition causes chronic muscle weakness, loss of hearing and damage to her kidneys. She was dependent on regular dialysis and other intensive care, but the condition does not affect the functioning of her brain.

Despite her illness, she attended a regular school, achieved good GCSE results and was studying for her A-levels when her health deteriorated after catching Covid in August 2022. She remained intensive care unit until her death. Unlike most cases Sudiksha remained conscious throughout her time in intensive care.

In November 2022, Sudiksha issued lasting powers of attorney to authorise her parents to make decisions on her behalf in the future if she was to lose mental capacity in the future. In February 2023, the hospital asked the Court of Protection to set aside the document on the grounds that she did not have mental capacity to sign it. The hospital then made a further application to approve a palliative care plan which would mean she is no longer given dialysis and would die from kidney failure and was said to be in her best interests.

Sudiksha’s only hope of cure was the experimental treatment known as nucleotide therapy, which is only available abroad. Her family wanted to appeal to the public to raise funds to enable her to participate in a clinical trial which is expected to start in Canada later this year.

However, in March 2023, the court made a “Transparency Order”, at the request from the NHS, which imposed draconian restrictions on reporting any information which might lead to identification of Sudiksha, members of her family, or the hospital. This prevented Sudiksha and her parents from giving any media interviews or making an appeal for funds, which they sought to do.

Sudiksha’s parents did make an urgent application to reconsider the transparency order to enable them to raise funds for treatment in Canada, but court held three hearing since then but did not find time to consider the application until after her death.

Two psychiatric experts instructed by the hospital examined Sudiksha and have told the court that she is not suffering from any mental health illness and has the mental capacity to make decisions about her own medical treatment. She said she realised that the experimental treatment might still fail to save her, but in that case, she said that she “wanted to die trying to live”.

However, the hospital doctors argued that her refusal to trust the judgment of her doctors and to accept her immanent death is inevitable amounts to a “delusion”.

On the 25 August, Mrs Justice Roberts ruled that the decisions about Sudiksha’s life and death should be taken by the Court of Protection based on an assessment of her best interests, and that she lacked the capacity to have a say in the matter via her own lawyers. Rejecting the opinion of both psychiatric experts, the judge concluded that Sudiksha was mentally incapable of making decisions for herself because she did not believe what hospital doctors say about her condition.

Sudiksha died on 12 September 2023.

Reporting restrictions stopped Sudiksha and her family from being named publicly until they were lifted on 22 September 2023.

Despite her death, the family were determined to appeal Mr Justice Roberts’ capacity ruling.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, an appeal against the decision of Mrs Justice Roberts was submitted. On 16 November 2023 Lady Justice King of the Court of Appeal granted permission to pursue a posthumous appeal against the ruling that Sudiksha lacked mental capacity, saying:

There is a real prospect of an appeal succeeding and there are compelling reasons for these important issues to be considered by the Court of Appeal.

The Court of appeal hearing took place on 1 and 2 May 2024.

Their lawyers argued that it was legally impermissible for the Court to dismiss the unanimous view of psychiatric experts and to rely instead on the opinions of intensive care doctors with no expertise in mental health.

MIND, the mental health charity was granted permission to intervene in the case. MIND argued that in making a disagreement with doctors tantamount to mental illness, the ruling of Mrs Justice Roberts set a dangerous precedent.

We await the outcome of this hearing.

The Darlington Nurses

‘Nurses forced to share changing room with trans colleague’

26 nurses at the Darlington Memorial Hospital which comes under the control of County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust wrote to the Trust raising concerns about a male operating department practitioner, who says that he ‘identifies’ as a woman and is called ‘Rose’ using their single sex changing rooms.

Female nurses at the hospital, including vulnerable women who have experienced sexual abuse and international nurses who cannot get changed in front of men, are having panic attacks before working on wards after having to get undressed in front of a sexually active biological male.

The changing room does not have cubicles but staff lockers with a large open space where nurses change before and after working. The changing room in question clicks shut and has a lock system that makes it slow to get in and out of.

The nurses say that 'Rose' often spends a long-time walking around the female dressing room. On many occasions he wears only tight male boxer underpants, staring at and initiating conversations with female nurses as they are getting changed.

One nurse, who experienced sexual abuse as a child, spoke of her shock and horror when she was approached in the dressing room. Having never spoken to 'Rose' before, semi-naked and with genitalia visible, she was asked three times: 'Are you not getting changed yet?'

He has also openly declared that he does not take female hormones and is trying to get his girlfriend pregnant.

However, after raising their concerns to the Trust HR bosses said that they supported 'Rose' and that the nurses needed to get 'educated' and 'compromise'. They said that the mere fact that 'Rose' says he identifies as a woman means that he can use the female changing rooms.

'Rose' has reportedly offered to educate the nurses on the matter.

The nurses were 'threatened' and 'intimidated' during HR meetings at the hospital, and they fear for their jobs for speaking out, but believe they have no choice but to take a stand.

The nurses are calling for government scrutiny on the NHS changing room policies which they say are putting them and women across the country 'at risk'.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, a group of the nurses working at Darlington Memorial Hospital, have filed legal action against the Trust for sexual harassment and sex discrimination.

Anthony Stevens

Councillor faced police threats for free speech beliefs

Anthony Steven, 51, a Conservative councillor launched a formal complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) after officers threatened to storm a council building and arrest him if he attended a planning committee meeting.

On 8 August 2023, the police arrived unannounced at Cllr Stevens' home, searched him in front of his wife and children and told him he was under arrest for a public order offence under section 19 of the Public Order Act 1986.

Cllr Steven was detained at Kettering police station; he had his fingerprints and DNA taken and was placed in a police cell for 6 hours.

The focus of the police interview was about [Cllr King Lawal](#), another Conservative councillor in Northamptonshire, who had been suspended by the local Conservative group and cancelled from several organisations for saying on X that 'Pride is Sin' in July 2023.

Following news breaking in the media that Cllr Lawal intended to explore his legal options and was being investigated by CCHQ, Cllr Stevens retweeted a [petition](#) calling for him to be reinstated and commented: 'If you value free speech please sign and share'.

He also shared a video of Cllr Lawal, who has since been fully vindicated, being interviewed on GB News by Conservative MP, Jacob Rees-Mogg. Cllr Stevens tweeted: 'That is my friend, everyone has

a right to their beliefs, people can disagree as is their right but to ruin their standing because of them is wrong.’

Officers showed Cllr Stevens these posts and asked him why he supported the petition. Cllr Stevens stated that he is a free speech absolutist and that even if he does not agree with someone/something, he believes in their right to express their beliefs. Cllr Stevens was also questioned about two other historic posts he made on X between March and May 2023. The interview finished, his mobile phone was seized to be searched for further evidence and he was then released on police bail.

Cllr Stevens went to the media with his story Baroness Jacqueline Foster tweeted the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police, Nick Adderley, describing what had happened as an ‘appalling episode and breach of free speech’.

Following this, Cllr Stevens received a letter from Detective Inspector Mark Hopkinson from the Criminal Investigation department. The letter, which was also sent to other media outlets, aimed to prevent the media from covering the story any further. In response to this a letter was written to police, stating that the police had attempted to intimidate Cllr Steven and media organisations and stifling the legitimate criticism of police.

On 26 September 2023, in his role of Vice Chair of the Planning Committee at Wellingborough Town Council, Cllr Stevens attended the monthly committee meeting. following the meeting, which passed without incident, Cllr Ekins said that he received another call from DC Amelia Thompson.

She alleged that Cllr Stevens had breached his bail conditions by attending the meeting, as the Labour councillor, Cllr Tony Aslam, who had originally made the police report, was also in attendance and had complained.

Cllr Ekins relayed that Cllr Stevens had arrived at the meeting first and that the two men had not interacted in any way.

On 1 November 2023, Cllr Stevens’ bail conditions were extended and included him being unable to attend council committee meetings at the same time as Cllr Aslam.

Cllr Stevens challenged these conditions, accusing the police of ‘interfering with the democratic process of Wellingborough Town Council and the administration of my duties as an elected representative in particular.’

In December 2023, Cllr Stevens was contacted by police and told that the case against him was dropped on the advice of the CPS and that there would be no further action.

Northamptonshire Police, with no explanation or apology, put in an email: ‘I write to inform you that Mr Anthony STEVENS has been informed this evening of the Crown Prosecutions decision that there will be No Further Action in relation to his involved case.’

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre and backed by a long-standing local Conservative councillor in Northampton, Cllr Jonathan Ekins, Cllr Steven has launched a formal complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) into the police’s conduct, a public apology exonerating him from accusation of being a racist, and a written assurance that his DNA, fingerprints, and personal records will be destroyed.

'Hannah'

Background

A Christian primary schoolteacher lost her job for questioning the advice from Stonewall and Mermaids to encourage a 'gender transition' of an 8-year-old pupil without any medical evidence.

Ahead of the new term in September 2021, the school where Hannah had worked without complaint for five years, had agreed to adopt extreme measures to affirm children with gender incongruity.

The child, who cannot be identified for legal reasons and is known only as 'Child X', believed she was born in a wrong body and wanted to be treated as a boy.

Based on the advice from trans rights organisations, the council instructed all school staff always to refer to the child by male pronouns and name and that she should use boys' toilets, dressing rooms and dormitories as requested.

Supported by Christian Legal Centre, the teacher known as 'Hannah' (not her real name) invoked the School's and the Council's whistleblowing procedure to argue that this approach was not based on medical evidence or compliance with the safeguarding procedures and was putting the child's health and welfare at risk. Hannah relied on several expert reports from scientists and doctors highlighting the dangers of encouraging 'gender transition' in young children.

After her concern was brushed aside, Hannah brought a claim for judicial review against the School and the Council.

In response to Hannah's legal action, the school summarily dismissed Hannah for divulging confidential information to her lawyers and to the Court.

The school reported Hannah to the Information Commissioner for a criminal offence under the Data Protection Act. The Information Commissioner has concluded there was no evidence of a criminal offence and decided to take no further action.

The school also reported Hannah to the professional regulator, Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA), for an alleged confidentiality breach. The TRA is currently investigating the case. If found guilty of professional misconduct, Hannah may face a lifelong ban from the profession.

Reporting Hannah to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), the school sought to bar her from teaching. The DBS, however, has declined to impose a ban pending further enquiries following an investigation.

After a life-long career as a professional teacher, Hannah has been forced to find a job in a sandwich bar.

With the support of the Christian Legal Centre, she brought a claim in Employment Tribunal against the school for victimising her for whistleblowing, unfair dismissal, and religious discrimination.

She has alleged that the school dismissed her, and reported her to a raft of regulators, for blowing the whistle on the school's practice which endangered the child's safety, health and welfare.

Employment Tribunal

Hannah's Employment Tribunal hearing began in March 2024 and was heard in front of Employment Judge Victoria Butler, and lay members, Mr Javed Akhtar and Mr Jed Purkis. However, on day 6 of the trial, new evidence came to light about Mr Purkis' from social media.

Recusal

On Mr Purkis' social media accounts, he described Conservatives as 'tumours' and said his social media timelines were 'clogged up with right wing nutjobs.'

In response to a comment that only atheists should be in public office, Mr Purkis said: 'Damn right, you won't catch us killing in the name of our non-god.'

In response to social media comments from a user that they find 'Christians worse than woke', Mr Purkis had said: 'If they are so f***ing super how comes there is so much s**t going on in the world', and added, 'I need no higher power to tell me the right way to treat people and behave.'

Mr Purkis also liked a post picturing Suella Braverman which said: "nowhere on God's green earth would you find a politician as evil, stupid and repulsive as this f*****g ghoul."

Furthermore, Mr Purkis had 'liked' posts questioning the existence of cancel culture which 'alt right cranks keep bleating about'.

Following the discovery of Mr Purkis' comments, Hannah's lawyer made an application for recusal on the basis of the legal test regarding the perception of bias i.e., looking at the post from an assumed standpoint of a fair-minded and informed observer. That observer needs to consider whether there is a possibility of bias, including subconscious bias.

Hannah's lawyer's highlighted that in this social media exchange Mr Purkis appears to agree with a view which expressly advocates for religious discrimination in public life.

It was argued it would not be sufficient only for Mr Purkis to step down, since the other two judges had presided over the trial together over 6 days and would be perceived as influenced by his view of the case.

Subsequently, Employment Judge Victoria Butler, and lay members, Mr Javed Akhtar and Mr Jed Purkis, all recused themselves in response to revelations of a social media post by Mr Purkis which was said to advocate for religious discrimination. The Tribunal acknowledging that 'doubt would arise in the mind of a fair-minded and informed observer' as to their impartiality in the case.

While stepping down, the panel made a reporting restriction order which prohibits naming the teacher (known only as "Hannah"), the school, or any of its staff.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:

This is the latest in a series of high-profile Christian cases where it has transpired that panel members have a vocal and active bias against Christians and about the key issues involved.

You cannot have a panel presiding over a serious case involving a Christian who has lost their career because of their beliefs, that includes panel members who appear to hold significant prejudice against Christians and conservative beliefs, and to lack any understanding of what it means to be a person of faith.

While we are pleased to have exposed this, justice delayed is justice denied, not just for Hannah but for vulnerable children who are being harmed by transgender ideology.

Aaron Edwards

Dr Aaron Edwards, 37, a Christian theology lecturer with five young children has been sacked and threatened with a counter-terrorism referral by a Methodist Bible college for a tweet on human sexuality that went viral.

On 19 February 2023, Dr Edwards posted: “Homosexuality is invading the Church. Evangelicals no longer see the severity of this b/c they’re busy apologising for their apparently barbaric homophobia, whether or not it’s true. This *is* a “Gospel issue”, by the way. If sin is no longer sin, we no longer need a Saviour.”

The tweet sparked a debate that went viral. There were users who posted in support of Dr Edwards and his message, but also many who harassed and abused him.

College bosses, however, were soon made aware of the post and contacted Dr Edwards asking him to take the tweet down as they believed it ‘contravened the College’s Staff Social Media Policy.’

On March 8, 2023, a disciplinary hearing was held where it was revealed that the college was considering referring Dr Edwards to Prevent, the government’s Counter-Terrorism watchdog.

Dr Edwards was threatened with being reported to Prevent, interrogated on how he would pray for same sex attracted students who approach him for prayer.

Following the disciplinary hearing, Dr Edwards was sacked and now believes he will no longer be able to work in higher education again.

He appealed this decision in March 2023 to a panel that has already raised complaints about the tweet, he argued that the decision to dismiss him was disproportionate and failed to balance his freedom to express his Christian beliefs. He will say that the disciplinary procedure that has led to his dismissal has lacked ‘requisite fairness’ and that the level of imbalance, exaggeration, and misrepresentation in the investigation was ‘astonishing’ for what was meant to be an unprejudiced investigation.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre Dr Edwards pursued a claim in the Employment Tribunal against the Methodist Bible college on the grounds of harassment, discrimination and unfair dismissal. His case was heard at the employment tribunal in Sheffield from 28 May – 5 June 2024.

Lawyers representing Dr Edwards argued that the college unlawfully interfered with his rights under Article 9 and/or Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). Dr Edwards will be seeking damages for unfair dismissal, and compensation under the Equality Act 2010.

During the hearing Dr Edwards spoke of how his sacking and “public ostracisation” by Cliff College led to: “life altering consequences and irreparable damage to my career and my family.”

He also spoke of how, in the wake of the X/Twitter storm and dismissal, he had to go to hospital with ‘heart abnormalities’ due to the stress caused.

Concluding his evidence, Dr Edwards stated that he believed how he was treated by the college not only breached his religious freedom but also his academic freedom.

Evidence was also heard from [Rev. Michaela Youngson](#), a former President of the Methodist Conference and senior member of the Methodist Church of Great Britain's Connexional Team who was brought in by Cliff College, to rule on Dr Edwards' appeal of his sacking. During the trial evidence was revealed that she is a leading founder of the [Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives](#) and has appeared [at gay pride London events](#). The Global Interfaith Commission was founded by LGBT activist and member of the Church of England's general synod, Jayne Ozanne.

His case reflects a growing issue in the Church, and society in general, that has led to the public expression of conservative Biblical beliefs on human sexuality being stamped out, often with severe consequences.

It is also microcosm of the fall out in the Methodist Church in Britain following a June 2021 decision by its governing body to allow same-sex marriages in places of worship.

We are awaiting judgment on this important case.

Joshua Sutcliffe

Joshua Sutcliffe, 32, is a maths teacher with an exemplary record.

In 2017, Joshua was suspended and dismissed for allegedly 'misgendering' a female student, 'Pupil A', that self-identified as a boy. He immediately apologised when he realised 'Pupil A' was in the group of female students he addressed. Supported by the Christian Legal Centre he took legal action against the school. The case was later settled out of court.

In 2019, Joshua was forced to resign from another school, over views he posted and talked about on his personal YouTube channel, critiquing Islam.

Joshua was subsequently reported to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA). Despite issues between Joshua and both schools being settled, the TRA has continued to pursue an investigation against him with a hearing taking place from 9 – 13 January 2023.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Joshua faced a series of allegations before the TRA's professional conduct panel in Coventry in January, which were: (1) misgendering, (2) criticism of Islam (3) comments on same-sex marriage (4) a lack of professionalism.

The professional conduct panel with the backing of Education Secretary Gillian Keegan, ruled that Joshua Sutcliffe was guilty of unprofessional conduct and has banned him from teaching in any capacity for at least two years and potentially indefinitely.

The panel described Mr Sutcliffe as "intolerant" and said that taken it was "satisfied that Mr. Sutcliffe was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute."

Despite Joshua's pleas for leniency and good character evidence from two parents, three lesson observations and one professional reference, the Chief Executive of the Teaching Regulation Agency,

Alan Meyrick, dismissed his positive contribution to teaching and “concluded that a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest” to maintain “confidence in the profession”.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, which has supported Joshua’s throughout his ordeal, said: “This ruling sends a clear message that Christian teachers can no longer express their beliefs in the teaching profession. If you are, you will be hounded out and barred from being in the classroom... Joshua will appeal, and we will stand with him for as long as it takes to get justice.”

In January 2024, with the support of Christian Legal Centre, Joshua’s lawyers had appealed the TRA ruling by pursuing a Judicial Review of the decision to ban him.

This came after the government announced its draft transgender guidance for schools in December 2023. The new guidance says that teachers should not be compelled to go against their conscience and use a pupils’ preferred pronouns which are contrary to their biological sex.

The appeal took place on 1 May 2024 at the High Court in London, where his lawyers argued the following:

- a. That the decisions made by the TRA and Secretary of State were ‘perverse’ and made in the absence of any authority – legal, psychological otherwise,
- b. That the findings against Mr Sutcliffe, that he was compelled Pupil A’s preferred pronouns, were an unjustified interference with his Article 9 and/or Article 10 ECHR rights
- c. Mr Sutcliffe’s case concerns fundamental constitutional rights protected by the Common Law and by the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).
- d. The appeal will also seek to overturn a number of other erroneous decisions used by the TRA to justify the ban.

The case highlights the TRA’s two-tiered approach to such issues in the classroom. Last year, at a school in south London, a teacher was recorded aggressively promoting LGBTQI+ rights in a lesson, telling pupils they would be ‘dealt with severely’ for rejecting LGBTQI+ beliefs and that they had ‘no choice’ but to learn about it. The teacher was referred to the TRA. The TRA took no action.

We await the outcome of the appeal.

Stephen Green

Stephen Green, 72, A Christian preacher and campaigner from South Wales, was prosecuted by Ealing Council under section 67 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 for holding the sign outside of an MSI Reproductive Choices clinic in Mattock Lane, West London, on 6 February 2023.

The sign said: *‘Psalm 139:13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.’*

He left the area before the police arrived. Nonetheless, staff at the clinic relayed to the police what had happened and seven months after the event, Mr Green received a prosecution notice from Ealing Council.

It was alleged to have broken a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), which, including prayer, criminalises 'protesting, namely engaging in an act of approval/disapproval, with respect to issues related to abortion services'.

If found guilty, Green could be sent to prison for six months and/or fined £1,000.

Mr Green was supported by the Christian Legal Centre at his hearing on Tuesday 17 October 2023. at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court, London. He pleaded not guilty, and a subsequent trial was heard in February 2024.

At the hearing, at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court in West London, District Judge Kathryn Verghis said: "The extract of the Psalm mentioning 'my mother's womb'...was an act of protest of abortion. There were less controversial verses you could have chosen to display. I can come to no other conclusion that [the verse] was an act of disapproval [of abortion services].. an act prohibited [by the PSPO].

Whilst admitting that the PSPO was "a significant interference" of Mr Green's rights under articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention, she said those rights had to be weighed against individuals accessing abortion services.

She concluded that, Mr Green's: "Protest was peaceful...but your actions were not proportionate....I find you guilty as summoned."

Mr Green, who is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre, said he will appeal the conviction to the Crown Court, saying: "As a Christian I should be able to preach freely all over the land. Psalm 139 is about how we all belong to God from conception."

Book Review: Challenging Leaders

Preventing and Investigating Allegations of Pastoral Malpractice

Edited by Graham Nicholls

Christian Focus Publications, 2023 (£10.13, 10ofthose)

Challenging Leaders is aimed at those who want to understand and address abuses of power within Christian contexts. And with the growing list of scandals in our evangelical constituency alone, it is certainly a necessary book for our times.

We are desperate for leaders who, like Jesus, are characterised by servant-heartedness, loving strength and a complete dependence on our heavenly Father. We do not want leaders who run roughshod over their staff and congregations – nor do we want ones who are so paralysed by fear of mistakes that they refrain from doing anything at all. We need leaders with the wisdom and confidence to help shape ‘communities where the gospel is lived out’ and where ‘the love of Christ [is reflected] more and more’ (p. 31). We need our churches and parachurch organisations to be places where abuse does not take place – or, when it does, is dealt with promptly and appropriately. We need them to be places where both survivors and abusers can find the support that they need.

Challenging Leaders cannot, of course, achieve all or any of this by itself. Those kinds of changes need time, commitment and, above all, the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts. What this book *can* do is to help us understand the issues involved so that we have the knowledge necessary to make changes.

I could commend *Challenging Leaders* to you for all sorts of reasons. One is that it provides a variety of case studies and diagnostic questions which help readers to translate the discussion from the abstract to the concrete. Another reason is that *Challenging Leaders* is comprehensible to those of us who aren’t specialists. There’s no need to have a background in psychology, psychiatry or sociology to find it beneficial. Nor do you need to memorise a dictionary of acronyms in order to make sense of any given chapter. And so I could go on. But my most compelling reason for recommending you read *Challenging Leaders* is personal. I have been incredibly blessed by evangelicals at their best. But I also have PTSD and I have been deeply scarred by evangelicals who have got things badly, badly wrong. In *Challenging Leaders*’ nuanced portrayals of survivors, helpers and abusers, I recognised the different players in my life.

One of the most profound moments of recognition was the statement that ‘someone who has been deeply hurt by the church ... may initially make a few light and even flippant comments about their experience’ (p. 75). Yes. Oh yes. I don’t make light of the darkness because I find it amusing. My flippancy arises partly from my own lack of understanding about how truly horrific my experiences have been. But the main cause of my flippancy – as the authors go on to explain – is my desire to scope out my listener’s trustworthiness. I want to know whether she or he is generally inclined to deal well with hurting people. More specifically, I want to know whether they are able to deal well with me *today*. Even with those I love most, I may still be flippant or vague while I try to figure out whether they have the wherewithal to listen to me right now. Here and elsewhere, *Challenging Leaders* does a fantastic job of capturing the trauma mindset. It helps its readers understand the extent of trauma sufferers’ hypervigilance and the different ways in which that relentless alertness can manifest itself.

The example above might be one of the points in *Challenging Leaders* when readers feel overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the problem. But the authors never leave us there. Instead, they suggest manageable ways to approach the situation and/or the sufferer. For instance, following

its warning against interpreting trauma responses as a personal affront or ‘as being of great spiritual significance’ (p. 72), *Challenging Leaders* suggests a better way to approach the sufferer. The suggestion is a very simple one – acknowledge the sufferer’s very real distress (p. 73). And that’s something we can all do. Perhaps it might have been helpful here to include some concrete examples of some simple phrases which could help. (For instance, I’ve found it helpful just to hear a friend say, ‘I’m so sorry that you’re going through this’ or ‘That sounds horrific’). Even so, by recognising the restorative value of small things, *Challenging Leaders* provides steps to help us shed our paralysis and be a helping hand for those in need.

Challenging Leaders also provides helpful explorations of the biblical framework and theological principles which underpin these pastoral nuances. The first chapter (‘Spiritual Abuse and Scripture’) highlights the Bible’s condemnation of leaders who have mistreated their charges (pp. 21-23). A later chapter (‘Developing Healthy Procedures’) briefly explores our Lord’s heart for justice (pp. 98-99). Neither of these things should be revelations to the reader. And yet, it’s vital to have them included. As *Challenging Leaders* points out elsewhere, it’s easy – for a powerful leader, vulnerable members and everyone in between – to make the mistake of thinking that ‘because a church leader is gifted or widely used in their ministry ... they could never be abusive.’ (p. 46) Given that leaders have (usually) had extensive theological training and the fact that their roles tend to involve their expounding the Bible, it is also easy to become persuaded (or be led to believe) that ‘to question the church or the leader is to question God.’ (p. 58) These beliefs can subtly infiltrate and then dominate our thinking. And that makes it essential for books like *Challenging Leaders* to keep on restating this simple truth: ‘God’s heart of justice upholds the rights of the poor, the vulnerable and oppressed.’ (p. 98) Survivors may believe that their needs don’t matter, but the Lord never will.

It’s worth noting that we can easily fall into the parallel trap of assuming that only leaders can be abusers. As *Challenging Leaders* points out, leaders might themselves be abused by those in their churches or organisations. An abusive culture can ‘develop through a dominant family, a group or an individual’ (p. 47) as they ‘become over-critical, falsely accuse and even persecute those in leadership’ (p. 7). Leaders may find themselves facing false allegations or unsubstantiated complaints (as in the example scenario on pp. 121-122). They may also have scars of their own from difficult past experiences. All these things make it essential that we heed *Challenging Leaders*’ call for every member to play their part – ‘no matter how small we feel that may be’ (p. 35) – in creating a gospel-centred culture. And, equally importantly, that culture must be as keen to allow potential victims to speak (p. 98) as it is to ensure that the innocent are not wrongly punished (pp. 99-100).

It’s true that *Challenging Leaders* can be a difficult book to read. None of us want to confront challenges like these. But if we want to recognise and prevent abuse in churches – let alone if we want to help the hurting – then we need the reminder that each of us has the potential to bring immense pain into other people’s lives. We must stop turning a blind eye to the harm that Christians (and perhaps we ourselves) have done to others. But we also need *Challenging Leaders*’ reminder that each of us can, in the Lord’s kindness, be part of a survivor’s healing and restoration. Even more than that, we need the encouragement that we can all help create communities where real unity enables every person to flourish. For those looking in, that kind of unity can provide ‘a very powerful witness and testimony to God’s character’ (p. 40). So even as *Challenging Leaders* calls us to recognise the awful shadowlands of abuse, it also paints an irresistible portrait of our God and how he would have his people be. For that kind of joy, I’d say that the discomfort is well worth enduring.

The above review was submitted by an independent, bona fide contributor, who, for personal reasons, has asked to remain anonymous. We are happy to agree to this request.

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