

SOCIAL & ETHICAL ISSUES GROUP

FREEDOM UNDER THREAT

This newsletter has always sought to present a positive perspective on the role of Christians in society.

This month we feel obliged to highlight a number of recent incidents where the freedoms of Christians, and others, are being challenged, undermined, and even victimised by an unbending secular worldview.

Cornerstone Adoption and Fostering Service

In 2007 there were 14 Christian-based adoption and fostering agencies in the UK, most of them Roman Catholic. These agencies based their practices on the principles of their faith, for example only placing children into homes where parents were married. Equality legislation introduced a few years later disqualified adoption and fostering agencies from 'discriminating' in favour of one group. As a result agencies were forced to close or compromise on their principles.

Cornerstone, based in the North East of England, was the only agency to survive by successfully arguing that the exemptions offered to faith organisations in the equality legislation justified its continued existence. A few months ago Ofsted, the Government agency which inspects adoption and fostering agencies, again challenged Cornerstone's ethos of only recruiting evangelical Christian couples as potential parents. Cornerstone have challenged Ofsted's stand in a recent court hearing. The outcome is expected shortly.

Scottish Hate Crime Bill

The Scottish Government has just launched its proposals on hate crime. One of the premises of the proposed bill is that the vague and subjective definition of 'likely to stir up hatred' would become a criminal offence. Christian organisations have suggested that this would limit the freedom of Christians to share biblical truths, for example in advocating traditional marriage, lest it was perceived by others to be offensive to them.

It's not only Christians who have highlighted the vagueness and inconsistencies in the legislation; the National Secular Society, normally not bedfellows with Christians, have also claimed that it would limit free speech. Writing in The Herald Stuart Waiton, a university sociology lecturer, points out that the bill admits that it "will result in interferences with the right to manifest religion under Article 9 of the Human Rights Convention". In other words, freedom of religion will be illegal in certain circumstances.



Abortion in Northern Ireland

Until recently Northern Ireland had different abortion law from the rest of the UK; unless under exceptional circumstances abortion was not readily available. Late last year the House of Commons voted to overrule Northern Ireland's abortion legislation and replace it with permissive procedures which went much further than what is currently allowed in England, Scotland and Wales. As the Northern Ireland Assembly was not sitting at that point there was no opportunity for the people of Northern Ireland to be consulted; the new regulations were dumped on Northern Ireland. The most conservative part of the UK, with the highest church attendance, is now threatened with some of the most liberal abortion laws in Europe. Votes are due in the Commons and the Lords by mid-June to affirm these new regulations. If these new regulations are implemented in Northern Ireland there will be pressure to liberalise abortion legislation in the rest of the UK.

Coalition for Marriage Speaker Ejected

Coalition for Marriage (C4M) is an umbrella organisation of individuals and organisations that supports traditional marriage and seeks to be represented in debates in public policy on the issue of marriage. It has supporters who are Christians as well as those of other faiths, and of no religious belief.

Continued overleaf/

Freedom under threat (contd)

Late last year a C4M speaker was addressing a meeting in a hotel in Northern Ireland. One visitor to the hotel objected to the hotel management that they were hosting a C4M speaker. As a result of this complaint the hotel management interrupted the meeting and demanded that it be terminated. Fifty-five people attending the meeting were asked to leave. No further explanation, or compensation, has been offered to the meeting organisers.

Other incidents of this nature recently include an anti-social behaviour injunction issued against a group protesting in MP Stella Creasey's constituency against her political activities in seeking to liberalise abortion. The graphic images of aborted children were considered to be upsetting to passing pedestrians.

Please do pray for these issues, that where there are groups or individuals putting forward a Christian viewpoint that they would have wisdom as to how to engage effectively in grace and truth with the authorities, with government or with those who are putting forward a different viewpoint.

More information on these topics can be found at:

Cornerstone: support from the Evangelical Alliance can be seen [here](#) and background information from the Christian Institute [here](#).

Scottish Hate Crime Bill: Stuart Waiton's article in The Herald can be read [here](#), and an article by Murdo Fraser MSP in The Scotsman [here](#).

Abortion in Northern Ireland: CARE have background information on the issue [here](#), with a request to write to your MP asking him/her to vote against the imposition of abortion on NI. Stirling's new MP is very much pro-choice, so the argument which might be most effective with him is that it is undemocratic for this imposition to happen: that Scottish politicians would be unhappy to have legislation dumped on them without consultation, so why should this happen to NI.

Right to Life have up to date comment [here](#).

Coalition for Marriage web site is <https://www.c4m.org.uk/>

CORONA VIRUS VIEWPOINTS



A number of Christian organisations have produced resources reflecting on the significance of the epidemic for the church and for society.

The Jubilee Centre has an [article](#) thinking about the relevance of Balshazzar's feast (Daniel 5) to the present situation.



Peter Saunders, CEO of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association has a thought-provoking and wide-ranging [article](#) entitled 'What does the Bible say about epidemics? Some uncomfortable truths.'

Prayer resources to guide us through these times are available from:

London Institute for Contemporary Christianity: [Presence, Pressure, Purpose](#)

CARE: [ten ways to pray about coronavirus](#)

Evangelical Alliance: [Prayer, petition and intercession](#)