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Standing firm in the faith

The Bible says lawmakers have a duty to restrain evil and promote good. It's a difficult job. We should pray for them. Sadly, across the political spectrum, they can be more eager to create new laws than to ensure the ones already on the statute book are properly enforced.

The latest plans to tackle extremism and the long-running debate over a new 'conversion therapy' law are good examples. Laws already exist to deal with violent extremism and to protect LGBT people from coercion and abuse. In both cases, new vaguely

worded proposals pose a grave threat to gospel freedom.

Society has seen rapid and radical change in recent years. Marriage and the family, biological reality, and the sanctity of human life have all been attacked. But the wonderful truths revealed in the Bible do not change and we must be ready to defend our freedom to make them known.

If we remain silent, we embolden those opposed to a biblical worldview to go even further in challenging God's good design for everyone.

Gove's new 'extremism' plan threatens religious freedom

Proposed changes to legislation on violent extremism could threaten rather than protect religious freedom, The Christian Institute has warned.

Following anti-Semitic protests, Michael Gove's Department for Communities is said to be working on a new definition of 'extremism', and renewing its focus on 'British values'.

Reports suggest the new definition could include groups and individuals whose behaviour helps 'create a climate conducive to hate crime', as well as terrorism.



Institute Director Colin Hart said: "Such sloppy wording is profoundly concerning" and would "fundamentally undermine democracy and free speech".

New laws on extremism, he warned, "must not inhibit

freedom to declare the Gospel, which people also call 'hateful'. That is the freedom we are currently privileged to enjoy and must be vigilant to defend."

Mr Hart's comments were echoed by the Government's Independent

Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, who warned of a "severe and unjustifiable intrusion on free expression".

Previous misguided attempts to target extremism prompted lengthy campaigns by the Institute to defend free speech from State censorship.

In 2015, 'British values' tests led to hostile Ofsted inspections of faith schools.

Christian pupils were asked if they knew anyone 'born in the wrong body'. Jewish schools were told to teach same-sex marriage or face closure.

Online Safety Bill becomes law

The Online Safety Bill has passed into law.

Ofcom intends to implement the Act's measures gradually, but it is already consulting on how to tackle illegal online content.

The Act requires social media and pornography websites to implement age-verification measures that are "highly effective at correctly determining whether or not a particular user is a child".

Following a lengthy campaign by The Christian Institute and others, the UK Government had already dropped the Bill's dangerous 'legal but harmful' clause, which threatened to restrict Christians' freedom of speech online.



“time to focus on making the law bite” Ciarán Kelly



Welcoming the Act's measures for protecting children, the Institute's Ciarán Kelly said "it is now time to focus on making the law bite".

"Effective enforcement will be crucial. Ofcom has a lot of ground to cover and

its track record on using existing powers has been poor.

"With so much at stake, especially for vulnerable young people, it's time for it to step up and ensure that tech firms do what the law requires them to do – protect children, and

protect free speech."

Ofcom's Chief Executive Dame Melanie Dawes claimed the watchdog would balance safety and free speech. She said: "We will set new standards online, making sure sites and apps are safer by design. Importantly, we'll also take full account of people's rights to privacy and freedom of expression."

'Biological sex is common sense' says Rishi in pushback on gender ideology

The Prime Minister has emphasised that biological sex is "common sense" as he pledged to stop Britons being "bullied into believing that people can be any sex they want".

Rishi Sunak spoke out at the Conservative Party Conference in October after the NHS announced that men who claim to be women will no longer be admitted to female-only wards.

He said patients should know when "hospitals are talking about men or women".

Around the same time, the Equality and Human Rights Commission axed guidance claiming that teachers in Great Britain who uphold a gender-confused pupil's biological sex and name are automatically breaking the law.

Meanwhile, the Office for National Statistics is still investigating evidence that the 2021 census

'significantly overestimated' the transgender population.

It follows widespread concerns that the question on gender identity confused respondents whose main language was not English.



biological sex is "common sense"

Scotland could create abortion censorship zones

A Bill has been launched in Scotland to ban peaceful protests outside hospitals and abortion centres.

The legislation would create 200-metre censorship zones outside places where abortions take place.

This would make it illegal to 'influence' the decision of a woman getting an abortion, or cause "harassment, alarm or distress" to them.

The Government would also be able to extend a zone to any size, and those infringing it can face an unlimited fine.

Some pro-life activity on private property inside a zone – including churches – would also be criminalised.



Such zones were introduced across Northern Ireland in September. Within a week, two pro-lifers were arrested for continuing their prayer vigil.

In England, pro-life campaigner Isabel Vaughan-Spruce (above) was questioned for praying outside an abortion clinic, just a month after police dropped an investigation into her for the same 'offence'.



Isle of Man: Parliament and medics at odds on euthanasia

Manx politicians have backed plans to allow the island's doctors to prescribe or administer lethal drugs at the request of patients.

The House of Keys approved MHK Alex Allinson's Assisted Dying Bill for more detailed consideration.

The Bill would enable residents over the age of 18 who have mental capacity and are

not expected to live beyond six months to "be lawfully provided with assistance to end their life".

But local doctors oppose the move, with a recent survey finding nearly three quarters of respondents would refuse to help terminally ill people kill themselves.

A public consultation on the Bill also found more responses opposed

the removal of end-of-life protections than supported it.

Often held up as a model for assisted suicide, doctors in Canada directly killed over 13,200 people last year – up nearly a third on the year before.

Since it was first legalised in 2016, the country's Medical Assistance in Dying regime has killed 44,958 Canadians.



Cameron: 'Being a Christian wasn't welcome in the SNP'


SNP defector Dr Lisa Cameron has shared how former party colleagues opposed her selection because of her Christian views. She said she felt pressured to vote contrary to her beliefs.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, the now Conservative MP said she experienced similar issues to fellow Free Church of Scotland member Kate Forbes MSP. During the 2023 SNP leadership contest, Forbes was attacked for upholding biblical sexual ethics.

Dr Cameron voted against imposing a liberal abortion regime on Northern Ireland and legalising assisted suicide in England and Wales.

She said "being a Christian was something that was not welcome in the SNP".



 Lisa Cameron MP



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Miriam Cates: 'Marriage is the antidote to family breakdown'



Miriam Cates has urged the Government to promote the benefits of marriage to society in order to help tackle family breakdown.

The Christian MP said that although many politicians know "marriage

works", they have been "denigrating the importance of marriage" while the UK becomes the "family breakdown capital of the West".

Writing for The Daily Telegraph, Mrs Cates encouraged ministers to facilitate conditions

where marriage can flourish. She explained that it "often protects children from the harmful effects of family breakdown", and those who grow up living with both parents are more likely to have better outcomes.

Secularists rattled over Labour's firm support for faith schools

A Labour commitment to support faith schools has upset secular activists.

After Sir Keir Starmer commended faith schools and pledged that a Labour government "wouldn't tinker" with how they were run, the National Secular Society (NSS) launched a campaign urging its supporters to try and pressure him to "think again".

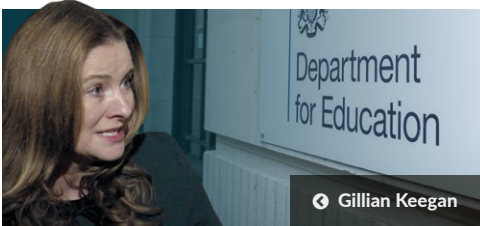
Speaking to Jewish News, Sir Keir claimed his party would "be even more supportive of faith schools" than the Conservative Government.



Following his widely reported remarks, the NSS issued a 'campaign alert' claiming faith schools were 'discriminatory'.



Parents have fundamental right to see sex ed materials



Parents in England need to be able to see what their children are being taught in Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) lessons, Education Secretary Gillian Keegan has said.

Addressing concerns that some schools are denying access to materials

from external providers on copyright grounds, Keegan told parents, “you have a fundamental right to know”.

She also declared any existing copyright agreements between schools and third-party groups to be “void and unenforceable”.

Miriam Cates MP, backed by scores of her Conservative colleagues, is seeking to make it a legal requirement for schools to provide parents with access to all materials used in RSE.

A Christian parent-governor removed from her role at a Gateshead primary school for challenging pro-trans RSE content urged schools to check their RSE policies for unlawful trans ideology.

‘Susan’, who was only reinstated following a legal challenge by The Christian Institute,

called on governors “to inspect their school’s RSE policies very carefully”.

In Northern Ireland, a consultation on new Relationships and Sexuality Education regulations closed in November.

The regulations, imposed by Westminster in June, push schools to teach post-primary pupils about abortion and contraception. However, key decisions are yet to be made on how it is implemented in schools.

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CofE Synod narrowly backs trial services for same-sex blessings

The Church of England has been urged to hold fast to the Gospel, after its General Synod narrowly backed trial “standalone services” for blessing those in same-sex partnerships.

Synod backed a proposal to fast-track trial services using an amendment that only required a simple majority to pass. It succeeded in the House of Laity by just one vote.

While Bishops decide how to implement the services, clergy are expected to be able to use ‘prayers of blessing’ in existing services as early as December.

The Anglican Network in Europe lamented the majority’s decision to “continue to travel along a road that arrogantly rejects the authority of scripture”, but promised to stand in prayer with those faithful to God’s word.

Following the Synod’s decision, the Church of England Evangelical Council has announced a series of temporary provisions to support orthodox evangelicals within the Church.



'Conversion therapy': KC confirms Bill threat to parents and churches

A "notably broad" Private Member's Bill on 'conversion therapy' threatens the basic freedoms of parents and churches, a top human rights lawyer has warned in a legal opinion for The Christian Institute.

Jason Coppel KC said Baroness Burt's proposal would restrict the ability of "religious organisations to express their beliefs" and parents "to counsel and bring up children in the way they believe to be right".

Anyone deemed to offer "any practice" that assumes "any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to another" and intends to "change" or "suppress" either, would face an unlimited fine.

He concluded: "It is very difficult to see how the wide-ranging interference with fundamental rights contemplated by the Bill could be justified."

Shortly after she presented her

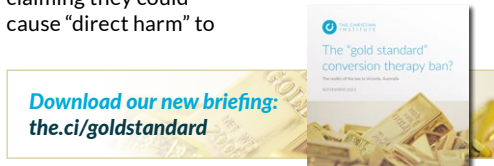
Bill, Humanists UK announced the appointment of Lady Burt as one of its patrons.

The anti-faith group has called on the Government to outlaw practices such as repentance, confession, fasting and "attendance on religious courses", claiming they could cause "direct harm" to

LGBT people.

A separate Private Member's Bill has been tabled in the House of Commons by Labour MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle.

Such Bills rarely become law, but could be used to influence the Government's own plans for a draft Bill.



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Tom Ellis Snr (1955-2023) A man of courage and conviction

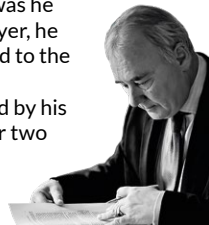
It was with deep sadness that we marked the passing of solicitor Tom Ellis in October.

Tom was a long-time friend of the Institute who worked with us on many of our most significant religious liberty cases. Street preachers, B&B owners and Christian organisations are among those who benefitted from his legal skills. He was also involved in our case against Google, which resulted in the tech giant agreeing to change its advertising policy on abortion worldwide.

The Institute's Solicitor Advocate Sam Webster, who worked very closely with Tom over a 15-year period, paid tribute to him as a man of "courage and conviction".

"Tom was humble and generous, he always put the cause of Christ first in his work. Not only was he an excellent lawyer, he was a good friend to the Institute."

He is survived by his wife Norah, their two children and six grandchildren.



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