

# Marginalising Christians

Instances of Christians being  
sidelined in modern Britain





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CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN A SECULAR WORLD

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# Foreword

When ‘diversity rules’ are used to justify suspending a nurse who offered to pray for a patient’s recovery, as happened to Caroline Petrie on 17 December 2008, something has gone very wrong in modern Britain. This report examines the growing marginalisation of Christians and catalogues cases of discrimination.

In January 2009 a poll showed that more than four out of five churchgoers (84 per cent) think that religious freedoms, of speech and action, are at risk in the UK. A similar proportion (82 per cent) feel it is becoming more difficult to live as a Christian in an increasingly secular country.<sup>1</sup>

This growing sense of intolerance felt by Christians is made all the worse when they face hostility in the name of ‘equality and diversity’. Christians wonder why they are not being treated equally and why diversity does not include them. They feel that a hierarchy of rights has sprung up which leaves them bottom of the pile. This has led to a growing feeling that ‘equality and diversity’ is code for marginalising Christian beliefs.

In July 2009 a senior Anglican Bishop wrote that mounting equality laws have made Britain a “‘cold’ place for Christians”. The Bishop of Winchester wrote: “The sad fact is that Britain – which owes so much to its Christian heritage – is increasingly becoming

a ‘cold’ place for Christians which, as any reflection on the fruit of Christian good works will demonstrate, is not in the general interest of society.” The Rt Revd Michael Scott Joynt reportedly said there appeared to be a concerted attack on the rights of Christians and when there were clashes, the rights of other groups triumphed.<sup>2</sup>

This concerted attack is largely based on the view that atheism is benevolently neutral whilst faith is merely a private eccentricity. But as the Attorney General and Labour Peer, Baroness Scotland, said in June 2009: “Faith isn’t an optional extra or something like you put on, like a hat on Sundays, and take off for the rest of the week. It goes through you like writing on a stick of rock. It is reflected in what you are and what you do.”<sup>3</sup> Discrimination against people because of their Christian faith is discrimination against their core identity. A failure to understand this is what lies behind much of the marginalisation of Christians.

This document catalogues cases of intolerance towards Christians over recent years. The nature of the cases, and their sheer number, should leave no one in any doubt that the freedoms of Christians are being swiftly eroded.

The Christian Institute works to defend the religious liberty of Christians and has set up a Legal Defence Fund that helps to finance legal cases of national significance. If you have experienced harassment or unlawful discrimination because you are a Christian, please contact us and tell us your story.

I would like to thank the staff of The Christian Institute for their work in producing this important publication.

*Mike Judge*

Head of Communications  
The Christian Institute  
December 2009





# Education

Christians pioneered education for the underprivileged. Most education is now in the hands of the state, but Christian churches remain actively involved in the provision of education. By law, state school assemblies must be mainly Christian in character. Church schools are extremely popular with parents and are firmly backed by the Government. Yet, despite these advantages, there is an undercurrent of hostility towards Christianity in education. Children are bullied because of their faith; a head teacher was pilloried for saying Christians get a rough ride when they stand up for marriage; children are being reprimanded for manifesting their beliefs at school; and a concerted campaign has been mounted to close down all faith schools.

## **Calls for head teacher to be suspended for defending a Christian view of marriage<sup>4</sup>**

In 2002 a highly respected comprehensive school head teacher, Bill Beales, faced calls for his suspension after he told pupils that Christians were being “placed on trial” for defending their beliefs on marriage. Mr Beales was attacked in the press by the National

Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers Cymru (NASUWTC). The leader of the local council called for his suspension pending an investigation.

Defending his comments, Mr Beales cited the legal requirement for schools to provide Christian assemblies. In his assembly, Mr Beales had simply pointed out how Christians who express mainstream Christian views on moral issues, such as divorce, homosexuality and single parenthood, are discriminated against and declared to be bigots. Mr Beales' headship saw dramatic improvements in the performance of Cwmcarn High School in South Wales. He went on to be named Headteacher of the Year in a Secondary School in Wales in 2008.

### **Boys given detention for refusing to pray to Allah<sup>5</sup>**

In July 2008, two schoolboys from Stoke-on-Trent were punished by their comprehensive school teacher for refusing to pray to Allah. The boys, from Alsager High School in Cheshire, were given detention after they said they didn't wish to take part in the Muslim prayer as part of their Religious Education class. The boys' RE teacher gave out prayer mats and told the Year Seven class (eleven to twelve-year-olds) to kneel down in prayer to the Muslim deity. They were also told to wear Muslim headgear during the lesson.

A parent of one of the boys said: "This isn't right, it's taking things too far. I understand that they have to learn about other religions. I can live with that but it is taking it a step too far to be punished because they wouldn't join in Muslim prayer. Making them pray to Allah, who isn't who they worship, is wrong and what got me is that they were told they were being disrespectful."

## **Yorkshire college removes Christmas and Easter from staff calendar<sup>6</sup>**

In September 2008 it was reported that a college in Yorkshire had removed Christmas and Easter from its staff calendar in order to avoid offending ethnic minorities. Instead, senior managers at Yorkshire Coast College in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, said the holidays would be referred to as “End of Term Breaks” in order to ‘increase inclusion and diversity’. A spokesman said: “All employees at Yorkshire Coast College are encouraged to closely follow guidelines set out by Ofsted for the promotion of equality and diversity. We constantly review the ways in which we communicate, to ensure that we do not discriminate.”

## **Five-year-old reprimanded for stating ‘faith as fact’<sup>7</sup>**

In January 2009 a five-year-old girl from Devon was left in tears after her teacher reprimanded her for discussing her faith at school. When Jennie Cain went to pick up her children from Landscore Primary School in Crediton, Devon, her five-year-old daughter, Jasmine, burst into tears. She told her mother that she had been told off by her teacher for talking about God and heaven and hell and had been warned not to do so again. Jasmine’s conversation had occurred more than three months earlier and was brought to the school’s attention by another parent.

In an interview with the local BBC TV news programme, Spotlight, the head teacher at the school, Gary Read, attempted to justify the decision to reprimand five-year-old Jasmine by saying she should prefix her religious remarks with the words “I believe...” but should never state her faith as fact. The girl’s mother, who works part time at the school, was investigated for professional misconduct because she sent an email to friends asking them to pray about the matter (see page 44 in the section on “Employment” later in this booklet).

## **Opponents target faith schools for closure<sup>8</sup>**

A coalition of teachers' groups and think-tanks launched a campaign against faith schools in September 2008, arguing they should be forced to open their doors to pupils and staff who do not sign up to their ethos. The new coalition, Accord, says that faith schools – which often out-perform other schools – should not be able to 'discriminate' against students and teachers on the grounds of their beliefs. Members of the group include the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the think-tank Ekklesia, and the British Humanist Association.

On its launch, the coalition pledged to run "targeted campaigns" to encourage policy-makers to eliminate the rights of faith schools to use religious belief as a criterion for selection. Faith schools point out that their powers of selection are already limited, and argue that if these are taken away completely the religious ethos that makes the schools so successful will disappear altogether.

## **Schools axing Easter holiday<sup>9</sup>**

Traditionally, English schools have moved the date of their spring break to coincide with Easter. But now thousands of schools are adopting a standardised spring break for the sake of convenience. A survey by The Daily Telegraph newspaper found that schools in a third of local authority areas have adopted or are about to adopt a fixed two-week break. Teachers and education officials say fixing the date of the holiday helps simplify school timetables and makes it easier for families to plan holidays. Religious leaders have criticised the move for downplaying the significance of Easter.

### **Parents ‘face action’ for withdrawing their children from gay lessons<sup>10</sup>**

In March 2009 a group of Christian and Muslim parents who kept their children away from controversial lessons about homosexuality were reportedly facing legal action by the council involved. The lessons – part of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) History Month – used books such as *King and King*, lauded by homosexual activists for promoting homosexual relationships to children. Around 30 children were withdrawn from the week of lessons at George Tomlinson Primary School in Waltham Forest, East London.

A Waltham Forest Council spokesman confirmed that the withdrawals were being treated as “unauthorised absences” and that “action has been taken”. Although the Council refused to say how they planned to punish parents, the Council website said that parents of truant children can be asked to sign a contract, fined on the spot or taken to court.

### **Christian girls forced to attend LGBT assembly<sup>11</sup>**

In 2007, a group of Christian Year Nine girls at a school in Stoke Newington were forced to remain in an LGBT History Month assembly despite their parents’ wishes that they should not attend. Parents with objections to Christian assemblies are permitted to withdraw their children. Teachers are also permitted to opt out.



## Violence and crime

Churches are often situated in deprived areas and church ministers and their congregations can be actively involved in many local projects. They do their work because they are motivated by Christian love and compassion. But their visibility and their contact with social problems can sometimes expose churches and church workers to the risk of crime and violence. Some twelve per cent of clergy have been violently attacked, according to one academic study. An initiative linked to an ecclesiastical insurance group has warned ministers to avoid wearing their dog collars when alone because wearing one may increase the risk of violent attack. Many church buildings have been vandalised and some have been firebombed. A number of these incidents of crime and violence are motivated by hostility to the Christian religion.

### **Vicars who wear dog collars 'risk attack'**<sup>12</sup>

In October 2007 members of the clergy were advised to take off their dog collars when they are on their own, to reduce the risk of being attacked. National Churchwatch, sponsored by Ecclesiastical

Insurance, says vicars are attacked more often than professions such as GPs and probation officers. The group also produces security advice for all UK churches and church workers. In the ten years prior to 2007, five vicars were murdered. A 2001 academic study also found that twelve per cent of clergy had suffered some form of violence. In a survey of 90 London clergy carried out in 2006, nearly half said they had been attacked in the previous twelve months. One vicar, from Willesden, North West London, said his vicarage had been machine-gunned, but still did not believe he had experienced violence.

### **Revd assaulted after clashing with Muslims<sup>13</sup>**

In March 2009, a Christian minister was brutally attacked in London by three men who ripped off his cross, stole his Bible and threatened to break his legs. Metropolitan Police treated the case as a ‘faith hate’ assault. The Reverend Noble Samuel, who presents a Christian television show, said he had been challenged by Muslims phoning in during the weeks leading up to the attack. Revd Samuel was driving to the TV studio when a car pulled up in front of him and a man approached him to ask directions in Urdu. The man and two accomplices then attacked him. Revd Samuel, who was educated by Christian missionaries in Pakistan and moved to the UK 15 years ago, said he, his wife Louisa, and his son Naveed, 19, now fear for their safety. The police have now given the family panic alarms and Revd Samuel described himself as “frightened and depressed”.

### **Vicar beaten up by yobs in ‘faith hate’ attack<sup>14</sup>**

In May 2008, a parish priest was beaten up by three youths who hurled religious abuse during the attack. The assault took place in the churchyard of St Matthew’s Church in Bethnal Green, East London. Reverend Kevin Scully was left with two black eyes and a

cut nose, and only escaped more serious injury because a member of the public intervened.

### **Kirk minister battered on Christmas Day<sup>15</sup>**

A Church of Scotland minister was attacked by a gang of youths on Christmas Day 2008. Reverend Gordon MacKenzie was taking a walk when he was jumped from behind by a trio of youths he had just passed. He was knocked to the ground by initial blows about the head and body, then kicked and punched as he was lying on the floor. Revd MacKenzie required hospital treatment for a broken nose, a broken tooth and various injuries to the hand, face and body.

### **Boys knifed and beaten as they offer Christian flyers<sup>16</sup>**

Police investigating the brutal assault of two teenage boys in Canterbury in November 2009 say they may have been attacked because they were delivering Christian leaflets. The pair, aged 17 and 18, were delivering the leaflets when they were attacked by three men at 7.30 in the evening. Both boys, who are Afghans living in Canterbury, were taken to hospital for treatment. The younger suffered slash wounds on his chest and arms which were thought to require surgery. The elder boy had his arm broken with a piece of wood.

Kent Police announced that one of their lines of inquiry is that the teenagers were attacked because they were delivering Christian flyers.

### **More than 20 arson attacks on churches in a year<sup>17</sup>**

More than 20 arson attacks on UK churches were reported in the press between May 2008 and May 2009. The severity of an attack against Westcotes United Reformed Church in Leicester led to

the church hall having to be demolished. Only two months before the blaze, the building had been renovated at a cost of £30,000. St Marie's Roman Catholic Church in Rugby was attacked during a church service. The congregation discovered burning sheet music in an adjacent meeting room shortly after the service ended. An arson attack against St Mary's Church in Heworth, near Newcastle upon Tyne, was just one of a string of crimes committed against the church in the first three months of 2009. The cost of stepping up security measures meant important maintenance work could not be completed.

### **Vandals attack Welsh church<sup>18</sup>**

St Gwynour's church in Penclawdd, South Wales, was targeted in August 2009 by thugs hurling rocks. The damage included the destruction of stained glass windows which had recently been renovated at a cost of around £2,000. Church members were left "devastated" by the attack, with several older members bursting into tears.

The church has previously been attacked with air guns fired at windows and damage to trees planted in memory of Penclawdd men who died in military service.

### **Dead rabbit pinned to church door as part of year-long pagan campaign<sup>19</sup>**

A church in Scotland has been on the receiving end of a series of pagan messages, including one which involved a dead rabbit being pinned to the front door of the church building. The rabbit was found by church deacon Bob Fishwick on 25 February 2009, and was just one of many incidents the church has had to endure. Throughout a year-long campaign, red felt-tip pen notes have been left on the church door. These have included verses and a drawing of the "all-seeing" pagan symbol, an eye floating above a pyramid.

## **Good Samaritan church vandalised<sup>20</sup>**

When Romanian immigrant families were hounded out of their homes by racist thugs in Belfast, they found sanctuary at a local evangelical church. Just days later the pastor arrived at the church building to find several windows and the main glass doorway smashed.

Pastor Malcolm Morgan said the building had never been attacked in such a way before, making it easy to conclude that it was linked to the church's work with the Romanians. He said: "If it is, I think that is very sad. We had nothing but positive comments all last week — so many emails and local folk thanking us — so it was quite a surprise this morning".

When asked if he regretted the decision to shelter the Romanians Pastor Morgan said: "Absolutely not. I was just thrilled we, as a church, were able to respond last week and we would do the same tomorrow."

Northern Ireland Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie said the attack on the church was "outrageous", adding: "This church community was the first to extend the hand of friendship and that makes it doubly disgraceful that it should be attacked."

## **Vicar becomes victim of 'faith hate' assault<sup>21</sup>**

In March 2008 an Anglican priest was beaten up and insulted in what was described at the time as a 'faith hate' assault. Canon Michael Ainsworth received cuts, bruises and two black eyes when he was attacked in his own churchyard by three youths. They swore at him during the course of the assault and made direct, profane references to his clerical profession. Canon Ainsworth, of St George-in-the-East Church in Shadwell, East London, was clearly identifiable as a cleric from his dog collar. He was hospitalised for twelve days.

## **Oxford churches targeted to 'make**

### **a point' against Church of England<sup>22</sup>**

Between 15 and 24 February 2009 two churches in the Oxford area were broken into and highly symbolic religious items were desecrated. Local police officers thought the two incidents were linked and were possibly religiously motivated attacks to make a point against the Church of England. In both incidents safes containing communion bread at the churches were forced open, but nothing was taken in either case. It is estimated that there was £3,000 worth of damage at St James the Great, in West Hanney, and St Nicholas Church, in East Challow.

### **Christian Party office vandalised after publishing ad<sup>23</sup>**

In February 2009 the Christian Party office was vandalised days after the party launched a bus advertising campaign with the slogan, "There definitely is a God. So join the Christian party and enjoy your life." The ad was a response to high profile atheist ads which carried the slogan, "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." The Metropolitan Police investigated the vandalism as a 'religious hate crime'.

### **Youth gang attacks church pastor in Rochdale<sup>24</sup>**

In February 2009 the pastor of Zion Baptist Church in Rochdale was attacked by a gang of up to 20 youths. Pastor Dennis Rigg and his brother were making preparations in the church building for their father's funeral when the group attacked the pastor and shouted out abuse relating to their Christian faith.

### **Vicar attacked as mob tries to burn down church<sup>25</sup>**

In November 2001, 60 youths threw stones at an Anglican vicar in Bradford as he attempted to stop his Victorian church being burnt down. The group kicked the door of the church open and

let fireworks off inside. These set fire to a chair and burned the altar cloth. Prayer books were also scattered around the building. Reverend Tony Tooby said the church could have burnt down if he had not intervened.

As Revd Tooby retreated to his car to ring 999 the gang appeared behind him and smashed his car's rear window with stones. He drove off to flee the scene. This was not the first attack against the church. Previously a wall had been smashed down, and stained glass windows shattered.

### **Convert suffers decade of persecution<sup>26</sup>**

Nissar and Qubra Hussein converted to Christianity from Islam in 1996. Following this, Mr Hussein – a hospital nurse from Bradford – and his family suffered a decade of persecution. The Husseins' five children (all aged under ten) were sworn at and spat at, while Mrs Hussein was held hostage inside their home for two hours. Mr Hussein claims that when he complained to police, an officer told him: "Stop being a crusader."

The couple's Bradford home was vandalised, their car was set on fire, and in 2001 one man threatened to burn down their house. When the threat was reported, a police officer said that if they were so concerned they should move. A few nights later, the Hussein family awoke to find that the unoccupied house next door was on fire. The family eventually moved out of their home.



## The media

In general Christians and Christianity are negatively portrayed in the media. A range of factors from clumsy stereotypes in popular dramas to outright discrimination in broadcast licensing law mean that the public is presented with a skewed view of the Christian faith. The Archbishops of Canterbury and of York have both raised concerns about the BBC's treatment of Christianity. Top journalists and presenters have admitted that Christians get a rough ride in news coverage. In dramas Christians are often depicted as objects of ridicule, moral hypocrites or cultish brain-washers. In two extraordinary recent instances, TV dramas featured Christians as violent extremists. Criticism of religion, including the Christian faith, must be part of a healthy free society but when the public are only ever presented with a prejudiced representation of Christianity it serves to entrench the discrimination suffered by Christians. Meanwhile the sensitivity shown towards other religious groups is a common cause of frustration for Christians.

## **BBC boss admits bias against Christianity<sup>27</sup>**

The head of the BBC said in October 2008 that Christianity ought to get rougher treatment than other religions like Islam. He said minority religions are often associated with an ethnic identity and are less integrated. Director General Mark Thompson was speaking at an event organised by the religious think-tank Theos.

Asked whether it was correct that the BBC “let vicar gags pass but not imam gags”, he said that there is a difference between Christians and “people for whom their religion is also associated with an ethnic identity which has not been fully integrated.” Mr Thompson continued: “There’s no reason why any religion should be immune from discussion, but I don’t want to say that all religions are the same. To be a minority, I think, puts a slightly different outlook on it.”

## **GP Taylor claims BBC dumped him for being ‘too Christian’<sup>28</sup>**

GP Taylor, the successful children’s author, claimed in 2008 that he was refused appearances on the BBC because it couldn’t be “seen to be promoting Jesus”. Mr Taylor’s first novel, *Shadowmancer*, spent 15 weeks at the top of the British book charts in 2003. His second book, *Wormwood*, sold 22,000 copies in one day. Yet the author claims that invitations for appearances on the BBC stopped once producers found out he was a Christian.

“I had good relations with them until they realised that there were religious allegories in my stories,” Mr Taylor told *The Sunday Telegraph*. “Once they had decided that I was promoting Christianity in my books I found the door firmly shut.” Mr Taylor said his faith meant that he was not welcome on children’s programmes like *Blue Peter*. He said: “A BBC producer told me ‘off the record’ that it was a matter of my faith and the fact that I was an Anglican priest. ‘We can’t be seen to be promoting Jesus’, he said with a laugh.” The broadcaster denies the allegation.

## **Sky News journalist explains why Christians get a hard time<sup>29</sup>**

Christians face an “uphill struggle” for news coverage because journalists select the information they wish to report based on a largely anti-Christian ideology, David Blevins, a former Washington correspondent for Sky News, said in 2008.

When asked if the media in America and the UK understands evangelical Christians, he said: “Not at all. It’s important to remember that what appears in the newspapers is not an objective summary of the significant things that happened yesterday but an ideological selection based on the prejudices, agendas and assumptions of a relatively small group of people. Their ideology could be loosely defined as ‘progress will one day meet our needs.’ So as with other forms of thought that deviate from that ideological view, evangelical Christianity is either dismissed out of hand or reported in a manner that serves to reinforce the ideology! ‘Religion’ is viewed as obscure, life-denying and regressive. Organisations like Evangelical Alliance and the Christian Institute face an uphill struggle to change that perception.”

## **Jeremy Vine feels he can’t talk about his faith on air<sup>30</sup>**

BBC presenter Jeremy Vine told Reform Magazine in 2009 that he believes that Christ is who he says he is, but doesn’t think he could say so on his show. The Radio 2 host, who also fronts TV shows Panorama and Points of View, said society is becoming increasingly intolerant of Christian views.

He added that it has become “almost socially unacceptable to say you believe in God”. He said: “You can’t express views that were common currency 30 or 40 years ago. Arguably, the parameters of what you might call ‘right thinking’ are probably closing.” Mr Vine is a practising Anglican, but he says he is unable to discuss his faith on air. “One of the things that I think, which may sound bizarre, is

that Christ is who he said he was,” he said. “I don’t think I’d put that out on my show; I suppose there’s a bit of a firewall between thinking that and doing the job I do.”

### **BBC is anti-Christian and pro-Muslim according to ex-host<sup>31</sup>**

Former Radio 2 stalwart Don Maclean announced his dismay at the BBC’s appointment of a Muslim as head of religious programming, and claimed the broadcaster is biased against Christianity.

Mr Maclean, who hosted the Good Morning Sunday programme for 16 years, said the corporation was “keen on Islam” and “keen on programmes that attack the Christian church”. Referring to discussion of homosexual clergy and paedophilia scandals within programmes about Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, Mr Maclean said: “They seem to take the negative angle every time. They don’t do that if they’re doing programmes on Islam. Programmes on Islam are always supportive”.

### **Archbishop of York says Christians take more knocks from the BBC than others<sup>32</sup>**

In a newspaper interview in 2006 Dr John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York, said Christians “get more knocks” than other groups from the BBC. “They see themselves as holding the flag for Britain and that Britain is definitely secular and atheist,” he said. “I want them to have their say but not to lord it over the rest of us.” When asked about the reported anti-Christian bias of the BBC Dr Sentamu said: “We get more knocks, they can do to us what they dare not do to the Muslims. We are fair game because they can get away with it.”

### **BBC executives admit liberal bias<sup>33</sup>**

In 2006 the BBC’s bias against Christianity was exposed as details of a top-level meeting on impartiality were leaked. During the

meeting it was admitted that while the broadcaster would willingly show the Bible being thrown away, it would not do the same with the Koran.

Political journalist Andrew Marr said: “The BBC is not impartial or neutral. It’s a publicly-funded, urban organisation with an abnormally large number of young people, ethnic minorities and gay people. It has a liberal bias not so much a party-political bias. It is better expressed as a cultural liberal bias.”

### **‘Media elite’ hostile to faith<sup>34</sup>**

In October 2008 Roman Catholic composer James MacMillan, who conducts the BBC Philharmonic orchestra, urged religious people to resist “increasingly aggressive attempts to still their voices”. Mr MacMillan made his comments in a lecture celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Sandford St Martin Trust, which promotes radio and television programmes about religion. He said that only a fifth of those working in television describe themselves as religious, compared with seven in ten members of the public. “If this is the case with the TV industry, you can be sure it is the same for the metropolitan arts, cultural and media elites,” he said. “These are people who speak only to themselves and have convinced each other that the rest of the country thinks just like them. They are wrong.”

### **Stereotypical Christian characters in soaps<sup>35</sup>**

In 2002 a Roman Catholic group spoke out against prejudiced representations of churchgoers in soaps. The group said that churchgoers are often depicted as objects of ridicule or moral hypocrites. The religious beliefs of characters, such as EastEnders’ Dot Cotton and Mrs Mack from Take the High Road, are repeatedly made fun of. In other soaps, such as Brookside, religious characters have been introduced only into shocking storylines. For example,

the character Margaret Clemence, a nanny, ran off with Father Derek O'Farrell, a Roman Catholic priest. In another plot, a resident of the close, Simon, set up a shady religious cult which recruited regular characters Katie Rogers and Terry Sullivan.

### **Coronation Street's characterisation of Christianity<sup>36</sup>**

In April 2009 it was revealed that a 'born again' Christian character in Coronation Street was about to embark on a lesbian relationship. It was reported that TV bosses said they wanted to make the plot more reflective of modern Britain. It is believed the character may have a same-sex relationship with another female from her Bible study group. The story line has not yet taken place.

In the same month, dozens of viewers complained to the television regulator after an episode of Coronation Street, broadcast on Easter Sunday, featured a string of outbursts against Christianity from veteran character Ken Barlow. Barlow, played by actor Bill Roache, accused Christian believers of targeting vulnerable people, and claimed his grandson Simon was being "indoctrinated" by Christianity at church and at his primary school. When a friend admitted to finding church "comforting" when faced with bereavement, Barlow responded: "Well of course it's comforting; that's how they get their hooks into you when you're feeling vulnerable".

### **EastEnders ridicules 'out of touch' Christians<sup>37</sup>**

In 2008 the BBC received 150 complaints about an episode of EastEnders shown in October, in which the 'Christian' character Dot Cotton came across two men kissing on a park bench and asked them to stop. She was shown struggling to get to grips with an mp3 player, while the two male characters sniggered at her efforts to engage with modern technology. After seeing the men kiss she said: "Please remember, the Lord ain't the only one with eyes." The BBC

defended the scene, saying, “EastEnders aims to reflect real life”.

### **BBC treats Christianity like a ‘freak show’, say Bishops<sup>38</sup>**

In June the Church of England published a document for debate at General Synod outlining its concerns at the BBC’s treatment of religion. Supported by senior Bishops, the document was written shortly after the appointment of a Muslim as the BBC’s new Head of Religious Programming.

The document pointed out that regular BBC Television coverage of religion consists of just two programmes and added: “BBC 3 tackles religion rarely but does so from the angle of the freak show, and many of the Channel 4 programmes concerned with Christianity, in contrast to those featuring other faiths, seem to be of a sensationalist or unduly critical nature. From this point of view it is worrying that the Channel 4 religion and multicultural commissioning editor, Aaqil Ahmed, who is a Muslim, is soon to be responsible for all the religious output from the BBC.” The document’s author Nigel Holmes, a former BBC producer and member of the Synod, said that while at Channel 4 Mr Ahmed had been “involved with programmes that have tended to look at the fringes of Christianity where it can be brought into disrepute”.

The BBC’s religious coverage has fallen by nearly 15 per cent in the last 20 years, from 177 hours in 1988 to 155 in 2008, even though its total television output has doubled.

### **Drama casts religious pro-lifers as murderous terrorists<sup>39</sup>**

A BBC drama shown in 2009 and lauded for its ‘realism’ portrayed a group of pro-life campaigners as extremists who kidnapped and murdered a child in order to force the BBC to show one of its campaign videos. Pro-life groups protested that the programme had equated the pro-life cause with terrorism.

There were several strong similarities linking the fictional group

to real-life campaigners. The actress playing one of the killers bore a striking resemblance to real-life pro-life campaigner Josephine Quintavalle. Mrs Quintavalle fought a legal battle with the BBC in 1997 over its decision to censor a Pro-Life Alliance party political broadcast. According to press reports, writer Mike Ford aimed to make the drama “as accurate as possible”.

### **Drama portrays UK Christians beheading Muslim<sup>40</sup>**

In 2008 a BBC drama which featured a Christian character beheading a Muslim drew at least 100 complaints. The opening episode in the series – which the BBC claims is “based in fact” – featured an extremist evangelical Christian group that modelled its activities on the Crusades. One member of the group was shown using a sword to behead a Muslim man who tried to reason peacefully with him. A reviewer for The Observer, Andrew Anthony, wrote that “it wasn’t the absurdity of the storyline that buried Bonekickers so much as the BBC’s paint-by-numbers version of political correctness.”

### **Archbishop of Canterbury concerned by direction of religious programming<sup>41</sup>**

In March 2009 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, was reported to have met with BBC Director General Mark Thompson to warn him that the BBC must not ignore its Christian audience. Christina Rees of the Church of England’s Archbishops’ Council, said: “The vast majority of the population identifies itself as Christian and as the established Church in England we would be negligent not to take an active concern in the changes happening with the BBC’s religion and ethics department.”

The Churches’ Media Council, which represents various denominations, also spoke out about the BBC’s attitude to Christians. Its chairman Reverend Dr Joel Edwards said: “There’s no doubt that the BBC’s specific expertise in religion has been diminished over

the past few years as the TV side of the department has shrunk.” He urged the BBC to appoint staff and commission programmes to reflect the “vibrancy of Christianity” in the UK.

### **TV sends message that “Christians are nutters”<sup>42</sup>**

In April 2009 the religious correspondent of a national newspaper said that frequent television portrayals of Christians as absurd make it more difficult for believers to defend themselves. Storylines in a number of soaps have sent the clear message that “Christians are nutters”, The Daily Telegraph’s Jonathan Wynne-Jones said.

Mr Wynne-Jones referred to *Hollyoaks*, a soap popular with teenagers, where the ‘Christian’ in the show claims to have found an image of Jesus in a potato.

“Outspoken criticism of Christian beliefs should be expected, but the stealthy attempts to make believers look absurd is much more damaging,” he said. “Once faith has been made to look ridiculous, the attempts of believers to rebut the criticism will be met with deaf ears. And then the line between ridicule and persecution becomes even thinner.”



## The police

True Christians are law abiding, peaceful citizens who support the rule of law and the preservation of justice. But in recent years over-zealous police officers have started to clamp down on Christians who publicly express their beliefs on controversial issues such as sexual ethics or other religions. As a result there is a growing perception amongst Christians that their rights to free expression and religious liberty are being unfairly restricted by the actions of some police officers. This is often caused by a misapplication of public order offences and unbalanced guidance on dealing with 'hate incidents'. This injustice is made all the worse when Christians see police forces being overly sensitive to minority religions like Islam. It creates the impression that not all religions are being treated equally. Police forces must do more to train their officers about the rights of Christians to lawfully manifest their beliefs – especially when those beliefs are considered controversial by some.

### **ACPO guidance on 'hate incidents'<sup>43</sup>**

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has a hate incidents policy in which the safeguards for religious liberty are unsatisfactory. The ACPO guidance describes a homophobic incident as: “Any incident which is perceived to be homophobic by the victim or any other person.”

This definition, coupled with the pressure placed upon the authorities to respond to complaints, has caused significant problems. By emphasising the perception of the victim, or any other person, regardless of the context or content, any semblance of objective legal reasonableness is stripped away. The ACPO guidance effectively encourages the police, on hearing a complaint, to confront individuals over their views on homosexuality, even when no crime has been committed.

### **BBC report on pressures faced by Christian street preachers<sup>44</sup>**

On 23 August 2009 a report broadcast on BBC Radio 4 highlighted religious liberty issues, including police interference, faced by Christian street preachers. The report acknowledged Britain’s “long and honourable” tradition of street preaching and asked if street preachers were victims of “21st Century intolerance”. Reporter Trevor Barnes investigated recent examples of street preachers facing interference from police and public authorities, and said that hate crime legislation was “complicating the picture”.

The report included a recording of an incident where a street preacher was told by police officers that it is a criminal offence to identify homosexuality as a “sin”. The warning was directed at Open-Air Mission (OAM) evangelist Andy Robertson, even though he had not mentioned homosexuality in his preaching.

## **Gay Police Association ad claims Christians are responsible for bloodshed of homosexuals<sup>45</sup>**

In January 2006, leaders of the Gay Police Association (GPA) called for members of the Christian Police Association to be barred from the Metropolitan Police because of their beliefs on sexual ethics. Later that year the GPA placed an advertisement in *The Independent* newspaper showing a Bible next to a pool of blood. The text read: “In the name of the father. In the last 12 months, the Gay Police Association has recorded a 74 per cent increase in homophobic incidents, where the sole or primary motivating factor was the religious belief of the perpetrator.”

The GPA’s inference that Christian beliefs are responsible for bloodshed led to the ad being the most complained about in 2006, with 553 complaints according to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). When the ASA asked the GPA for evidence to support the claim, none was forthcoming. The ASA upheld the complaints ruling that the advert was offensive, untruthful and unsubstantiated. It is disconcerting that serving police officers could hold such prejudiced views against the Christian faith and think it acceptable to publish groundless and inflammatory accusations in a national newspaper.

## **Police quiz Christian grandmother over gay beliefs<sup>46</sup>**

Christian pensioner Pauline Howe, 67, was verbally abused at a gay pride parade but when she complained to her local council, the police investigated her for ‘homophobic hatred’. Mrs Howe wrote to the Chief Executive of Norwich City Council objecting to abuse she suffered while handing out Christian leaflets at the homosexual carnival, held in the city on 25 July 2009. In her letter she pointed out that she and other Christians protesting at the parade were “not attempting to prevent those who engage in this offensive behaviour from doing so in the privacy of their own homes”. Her letter also

used biblical language to describe homosexual practice, said it had contributed to the downfall of every empire and said that gay sex was a major cause of sexually transmitted infections.

In September she received a reply from the Deputy Chief Executive at the Council warning that she could face being charged with a criminal offence for expressing such views. Weeks later two police officers knocked on her door and interviewed her in her home. They said her letter was homophobic and may be treated as a ‘hate incident’. The police force defended the decision to send officers to Mrs Howe’s home, though Ben Summerskill, of gay lobby group Stonewall, criticised their reaction as “disproportionate”.

This case illustrates the common mistake of confusing disagreement with hatred. Christians are often accused of hate when all they are doing is disagreeing. The failure to understand this distinction often results in an infringement of free speech and religious liberty.

### **Elderly couple quizzed over views on homosexuality<sup>47</sup>**

In 2005 elderly Christians Joe and Helen Roberts, of Fleetwood in Lancashire, were subjected to 80 minutes of questioning by police officers. The police were sent to the couple’s home after the couple had telephoned the local council to express their disagreement with its ‘gay rights’ policy. There was never any accusation that the couple had been impolite in their tone. The two officers, from Lancashire Constabulary, told the Roberts they were responding to a reported “homophobic telephone call”. They said the couple were close to committing a ‘hate crime’ which carried a seven-year prison sentence and were “walking on eggshells”.

The Roberts lodged formal complaints but the police and the council refused to admit they had acted wrongly. The Roberts therefore began a legal action. In December 2006, in an out-of-court settlement, the police and council both admitted they were

wrong in how they treated the Roberts. They both paid costs and damages and said they would revise their procedures to avoid a repeat of the incident. In a free society, taxpaying citizens must be able to express their disapproval of public policy without fear of a knock at the door from the police.

### **Police tell Christians: ‘You can’t preach here, this is a Muslim area’<sup>748</sup>**

In February 2008 a police community support officer (PCSO) told two church workers in Birmingham, “you can’t preach here, this is a Muslim area”. The incident happened as Arthur Cunningham and Joseph Abraham handed out Christian tracts on Alum Rock Road. PCSO Naguthney told the Christians they were committing a hate crime by attempting to convert Muslims to Christianity and threatened to take them to the police station. Another officer, PC Loi, advised Mr Cunningham and Mr Abraham not to come back to the Alum Rock Road area. PCSO Naguthney said, “You have been warned. If you come back here and get beat up, well you have been warned.”

The two Christians subsequently made a formal complaint to West Midlands Police about the conduct of the officers, but no formal apology was given. It is understood that PCSO Naguthney has been given verbal advice for his pocket notebook and will receive training in understanding hate crime and communicating with the public. West Midlands Police issued a public statement saying “there are not any no-go areas in the West Midlands Police area”.

### **Police investigate leaflet advertising church’s Easter services**

In 2007 church worker Julian Hurst was handing out leaflets to the public in Manchester, inviting people to Easter services. The leaflet

featured a picture of a daffodil and said, “New Life, Fresh Hope”. A homosexual man complained to the police that he was offended, so officers took copies away for examination. The next day Mr Hurst was visited in his home by a PC from the Race and Hate Crime Unit. The officer confirmed that the leaflet was inoffensive and that Mr Hurst was within his rights to distribute it on public streets.

But the case illustrates that police feel duty bound to investigate any complaint made by a homosexual – no matter how spurious. Removing the opportunity for officers to use their common sense wastes police time, creates an incentive for complainants and generates a censorial atmosphere for legitimate Christian activity.

### **Manchester street preacher detained by police**

Miguel Hayworth, a Christian street preacher in Manchester, was silenced by police after publicly reading a passage from the Bible discussing homosexuality. Mr Hayworth had been reading from Romans 1:17-32 when a member of the public complained of ‘homophobic remarks’ and the police arrived. Mr Hayworth was then taken into the back of a police van, questioned and detained for over an hour. The officers later released Mr Hayworth and he was permitted to continue preaching.

### **Birmingham street preacher charged by police**

In summer 2008 Tony Rollins, a street preacher in Birmingham, was arrested after expressing the Bible’s teaching on same-sex relationships. An onlooker took offence and two police officers arrived at the scene. Mr Rollins, who suffers from Asperger Syndrome, was arrested under Section 5 of the Public Order Act, handcuffed and kept in a police cell for four hours. He was charged and was set to appear in court. After a number of submissions from members of the public and The Christian Institute, the

Crown Prosecution Service decided the case was not in the public interest.

### **The Bishop of Chester slated by Chief Constable<sup>49</sup>**

The Bishop of Chester was investigated by the Cheshire Constabulary in November 2003 after he told his local newspaper of research showing that some homosexuals reorientated to heterosexuality. The Rt Revd Dr Peter Forster was quoted as saying: “Some people who are primarily homosexual can reorientate themselves. I would encourage them to consider that as an option but I would not set myself up as a medical specialist on the subject – that’s in the area of psychiatric health.”

A complaint was made to the police who announced they were investigating the matter. Just days later the Chief Constable, Peter Fahy, attacked the Bishop publicly, saying: “All public leaders in Cheshire need to give clear leadership on the issue of diversity”. He also attempted to link the Bishop’s remarks with crimes against homosexuals “generated by hate and prejudice”. The police passed a file to the Crown Prosecution Service which decided not to prosecute. The police eventually admitted no crime had been committed.

### **Lynette Burrows contacted by police after BBC interview<sup>50</sup>**

In December 2005 Lynette Burrows, an author and family-values campaigner, took part in a BBC Radio 5 Live talk show. The show, hosted by Victoria Derbyshire, was looking at the issue of civil partnerships. During the course of the discussion Mrs Burrows said she did not believe that adoption by a homosexual couple was in the best interests of a child.

The following day, Mrs Burrows was shocked to receive a telephone call from the police who said a member of the public

had made a complaint about her ‘homophobic’ comments. Mrs Burrows says the police officer proceeded to read her a “lecture about homophobia” and told her that the incident would be noted on police records. Mrs Burrows felt intimidated by the phone call.

### **Iris Robinson MP investigated by police for using the Bible’s language about homosexuality<sup>51</sup>**

In 2008 the police investigated Northern Ireland MP Iris Robinson for expressing her religious beliefs about homosexuality on a BBC radio show. Officers from the ‘serious crime branch’ of the Police Service of Northern Ireland held interviews about the incident. As part of a BBC Radio Ulster debate, Mrs Robinson used the biblical word ‘abomination’ to describe homosexual practice. She also recommended that homosexuals seek counselling if they are struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction.

When the incident hit the headlines in June, Mrs Robinson pointed out that her criticism was directed at the practice of homosexuality, rather than homosexuals themselves. “I was very careful in saying that I have nothing against any homosexual,” she said. “I love them – that is what the Lord tells me, to love the sinner and not the sin.”

### **Police apologise for puppy that ‘could offend Muslims’<sup>52</sup>**

A Scottish police force apologised for using an image of a puppy in an advert, after warnings that it could offend Muslims. The image was used on postcards to advertise Tayside Police’s new non-emergency phone number. A local Tayside councillor, Mohammed Asif, said that the image of a puppy would not be welcomed by the area’s 3,000-strong Muslim community. The police force issued a swift apology, and investigated the possibility of pulling the postcards from circulation. A spokesman for Tayside Police said:

“We did not seek advice from the force’s diversity adviser prior to publishing and distributing the postcards. That was an oversight and we apologise for any offence caused.”

Traditionally, Islam teaches that dogs are unclean animals, but Muslim groups appeared puzzled by the force’s reaction. A spokesman for the Scottish-Islamic Foundation said: “There isn’t any Islamic basis for taking issue with a simple picture of a little puppy.”



# Employment

A number of high profile cases have left Christians feeling marginalised in the workplace, particularly in the public sector. The Archbishop of York spoke for many when he said in February 2009: “Asking someone to leave their belief in God at the door of their workplace is akin to asking them to remove their skin colour before coming into the office.” Although there are clear laws which protect religious believers in the workplace, these often play second fiddle when pitted against unbalanced diversity and equality codes which have little regard for religious conscience. Figures for the twelve months leading up to April 2008 showed 600 employees taking companies to a tribunal over religious discrimination – an increase from 486 cases two years earlier. This rise in the number of religious discrimination claims caused the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) to issue new guidance for employers, urging them to educate themselves on different religions and to “appreciate that there are differences”. CMI also advised managers to “harness diversity” and “understand differences without being biased”.<sup>53</sup>

### **Nurse suspended for prayer offer<sup>54</sup>**

Caroline Petrie, a Christian nurse from Somerset, was suspended on 17 December 2008 after she offered to pray for a patient. Although the patient was not upset by the prayer offer, she mentioned it to another nurse. The nurse reported Mrs Petrie who was subsequently accused of breaking nursing guidelines by failing to “demonstrate a personal and professional commitment to equality and diversity”. North Somerset Primary Care Trust invited Mrs Petrie back to work after widespread media coverage of her story.

### **School receptionist faces action over prayer email<sup>55</sup>**

In February 2009 Jennie Cain faced disciplinary proceedings because she asked friends to pray about a situation involving her daughter. Five-year-old Jasmine had been reprimanded by her teacher for discussing her faith at school (See page 11 in the “Education” section earlier in this booklet). Mrs Cain, from Crediton in Devon, works as a part-time receptionist at Landscore Primary School. After learning that her daughter had been told off for speaking about her faith, she sent an email from her home computer using her personal email account asking friends to pray about the matter. The email ended up in the hands of the head teacher, Gary Read. He commenced a misconduct investigation against Mrs Cain because of the email.

A panel of school governors decided to discipline Mrs Cain by issuing her a final written warning. This was reduced to a written warning on appeal. Lawyers representing Mrs Cain have lodged papers with Exeter Employment Tribunal claiming that the decision to discipline Mrs Cain is part of ongoing hostility to her Christian faith by her employers. A hearing is scheduled to begin on 22 March 2010.

## **Archbishop: Christians should not be forced to leave their faith at the workplace door<sup>56</sup>**

In February 2009 the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, wrote in a national newspaper: “Asking someone to leave their belief in God at the door of their workplace is akin to asking them to remove their skin colour before coming into the office. Faith in God is not an add-on or optional extra. For me, my trust in God is part of my DNA; it is central to who I am and defines my place in the world. It informs my whole life, not just a weekly service on a Sunday. It is the failure to grasp this basic understanding of what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ that lies at the heart of the problem of which these two cases [Caroline Petrie and Jennie Cain] are just symptoms.

“There is a deep irony at work here, and not simply because the first free schools and hospitals operating in this nation were run by the churches in our land. Those who display intolerance and ignorance, and would relegate the Christian faith to just another disposable lifestyle choice, argue that they operate in pursuit of policies based on the twin aims of ‘diversity and equality’. Yet in the minds of those charged with implementing such policies, ‘diversity’ apparently means every colour and creed except Christianity, the nominal religion of the white majority; and ‘equality’ seemingly excludes anyone, black or white, with a Christian belief in God.”

## **Get another career, MP tells public sector staff facing faith dilemmas<sup>57</sup>**

According to Liberal Democrat MP Lynne Featherstone, public sector workers with faith convictions should “make different choices about their careers”. Responding to another MP’s argument that the world is “a big enough place to allow people to abide by their religious beliefs and conscience” and that employers could accommodate this, Miss Featherstone said: “I totally disagree”.

The MP for Hornsey and Wood Green made her comments on her personal blog in June 2009 and was referring to her involvement in a Parliamentary committee scrutinising the Equality Bill. During the committee debate she said it was “important that we make it clear here and now that carrying out public services cannot be a matter of conscience” and that people with strong faith convictions “might ultimately make different choices about their careers”. Restating her opinion for the blog, she said: “In the delivery of public services - you have to do the job and if there are elements of the job that you cannot do in all conscience - then it isn't the job for you.”

### **Registrar faces dismissal over beliefs on marriage<sup>58</sup>**

A Christian registrar from London, Lillian Ladele, was threatened with the sack when she asked for her religious beliefs on same-sex unions to be accommodated. Before the Civil Partnerships Act came into effect in 2005 Miss Ladele approached her manager and explained that registering homosexual civil partnerships would conflict with her religious beliefs. She offered to swap shifts with registrars who had no such objections. She was subsequently disciplined by her employers at Islington Council, and other colleagues were allowed to refuse to work with her because of her beliefs.

In 2008 an Employment Tribunal ruled that Miss Ladele had been the victim of religious discrimination and harassment. Her lawyers said she had been subjected to a ‘witch hunt’. But the decision was overturned at a later Employment Appeal Tribunal. Miss Ladele’s case has now been heard by the Court of Appeal and judgment is pending.

### **Roman Catholic firemen punished for refusing to attend rally which mocked their beliefs<sup>59</sup>**

In 2006 a group of firemen from Glasgow, including several Roman Catholics, were punished by their employers for refusing to march in a ‘gay pride’ rally. In previous years the rally had mocked the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of participating in the event, the firemen handed out fire safety leaflets to members of the public on a nearby street. The men were consequently given written warnings and were ordered by their employer, Strathclyde Fire Board, to undergo ‘diversity’ training. Strathclyde Firemaster Brian Sweeney said at the time that the incident would be “placed on their personal record file” and could damage their careers.

One of the firemen, John Mitchell, sought to overturn the disciplinary decision. After several unsuccessful internal appeals, he took the matter to an Employment Tribunal. Days before the hearing was due, Strathclyde Fire Board admitted they had failed to take account of his religious beliefs. Mr Mitchell was awarded damages and received an apology from his employers.

### **British Airways worker told to hide cross<sup>60</sup>**

Nadia Eweida, a Christian and British Airways (BA) employee, brought a claim for religious discrimination after BA told her to conceal the small silver cross she wore around her neck. She argued that the policy was unfair to Christians, as Muslim employees were allowed to wear the hijab, and Sikh employees could wear Kara bangles.

After failing to reach an agreement with her managers, Miss Eweida was sent home from work in September 2006 and not allowed to return until February the following year, during which period she was not paid. Miss Eweida lost her claim, and is now appealing. However, BA did decide to change its uniform policy

allowing Christian employees to wear symbols of their faith in the same way as employees of other faiths.

### **Christian faces sack for chatting about beliefs<sup>61</sup>**

In March 2009 a Christian charity worker in Southampton was suspended under ‘diversity’ rules after answering a colleague’s questions about his beliefs on sexual ethics. David Booker has worked as a hostel support worker for four years. He was told that expressing his religious beliefs on same-sex unions broke the charity’s Culture and Diversity Code of Conduct.

The allegations followed a discussion with colleague Fiona Vardy during which Mr Booker answered questions about Christian teaching on same-sex relationships. The free-flowing conversation lasted 35 minutes, and Mr Booker answered his co-worker’s questions while making clear that he had homosexual friends and was not homophobic. However, the following day he was told he was being suspended. His employers say they took the decision to “safeguard both residents and staff” at the Southampton Street hostel.

### **Council worker sacked for discussing his faith<sup>62</sup>**

Wandsworth Council in London initially suspended Duke Amachree in January 2009 for suggesting to a terminally ill woman that she could seek help from God. He made the remarks in general conversation while working as a homelessness prevention officer. After further investigation the Council dismissed him for gross misconduct. According to Mr Amachree’s solicitor, during the investigation he was told it is inappropriate to ever talk about God in the workplace and that he could be disciplined even if he said “God bless” to clients.

A Council spokesman said Mr Amachree had given “wholly inappropriate, unprofessional and unacceptable” advice to a

member of the public, and insisted that Council policy does not ban employees from making references to God in the workplace.

### **Sidelined Christians feel the squeeze, poll reveals<sup>63</sup>**

The first survey asking Christians in Britain about persecution found that many are losing out on promotions and being hassled at work because of their beliefs. Conducted by ComRes in the wake of a series of public cases of Christians victimised at work, the poll results suggested growing intolerance towards Christianity in Britain.

Six per cent of the Christians surveyed said they had been reprimanded or cautioned for sharing their faith at work. Five per cent said they had been turned down for promotion due to their faith. More than half said they had suffered some form of persecution for being a Christian. This included 44 per cent mocked by friends, neighbours or colleagues for being a Christian, and 19 per cent ignored or excluded for the same reason.

Nearly three out of four of those questioned said that religious freedom in the UK is more restricted now than 20 years ago, and one in five said persecution of Christians is worse in this country compared to other European nations.



## Local councils

Local councils wield significant power over the distribution of public money and they have considerable influence over the running of essential public welfare services. In a number of alarming cases, local councils have used this authority to discriminate against Christians, interfering with the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion. We are particularly concerned that local councils are seeking to limit the freedom of Christian individuals to share the Christian religion in public places. Several Christians have erroneously been told they need a licence from the local council before they can hand out Christian leaflets to members of the public. We are also concerned about over-sensitivity on religious issues which results in Christmas celebrations being toned down while celebrations of other faiths are given maximum prominence.

### **Foster carer struck off after Muslim girl converts to Christianity<sup>64</sup>**

In February 2009 it emerged that a Christian foster carer had been struck off the fostering register because she allowed a 16-year-old

Muslim girl in her care to convert to Christianity. Although the carer had made it clear to the girl when she arrived that she could continue to practice her Muslim faith if she wanted to, the girl wanted to explore Christianity, eventually asking to be baptised.

The foster carer, who has looked after over 80 children in ten years of fostering, had been open with social workers about the girl's church attendance and desire for baptism. No professionals had raised concerns. Yet Council officials said the carer had a duty to preserve the girl's religion and should have used her influence to prevent the baptism from going ahead. They said the girl should stay away from church for six months, and removed the carer from the fostering register. Neither the carer nor the girl can be named for legal reasons. The High Court has granted permission for a judicial review of the Council's actions.

### **Council tells Christian he needs their approval to hand out religious leaflets**

An official from Carlisle Council told Keith Bullock, a Christian evangelist with Open-Air Mission (OAM), that he could not hand out Christian literature in the city centre without the Council's permission. The Council claimed it was using powers in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 which is aimed at preventing litter caused by large numbers of handbills handed out by nightclubs and other businesses. However Carlisle Council was unaware that these laws do not apply to political or religious literature.

Director of OAM, Andy Banton, wrote to Carlisle Council explaining Mr Bullock's legal rights. He pointed out that religious literature was exempt and asked for confirmation that Mr Bullock could continue his work. The Council responded immediately with an unconditional apology. OAM have asked for the religious exemptions to be brought to the attention of other council officials so that the mistake is not repeated.

## **St Edmundsbury Borough Council attempts to ban tract distribution<sup>65</sup>**

Brian Dee had been preaching in the Bury St Edmunds Market Place on Wednesday afternoons for more than ten years, and handing out Christian tracts. In January 2008, officials from St Edmundsbury Borough Council told Mr Dee that distributing the leaflets was prohibited under a local by-law aimed at reducing litter.

Mr Dee's solicitors were concerned that the Council's actions threatened Mr Dee's rights under the Human Rights Act, which protects an individual's freedom of expression and religion. The solicitors informed the Council that if it continued to prevent Mr Dee from handing out the leaflets, Mr Dee would proceed with legal action. The Council has now admitted that there were no complaints or evidence that Mr Dee's leaflets were causing a littering problem, and has told Mr Dee that he can continue distributing them. The Council has also offered to review the by-law to see if it is inconsistent with human rights legislation.

## **Bible defaced for art exhibition<sup>66</sup>**

Obscene and offensive messages were scrawled over a Bible as part of a taxpayer-funded exhibition of art in Glasgow. The city's Gallery of Modern Art displayed a Bible with pens next to it and a notice reading: "Are there any gay people in the Bible? Out of the thousands of people who appear in the Old and New Testaments, there must have been." Visitors were asked: "If you feel you've been excluded from the Bible, please write your way back into it." A number of crude comments and angry remarks expressing hatred for the Bible's teaching were left.

George Reid, ex-Lord High Commissioner of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and a board member of the council-funded arts body behind the show, expressed disappointment. He said: "Defacing the Bible will not help to build

an inclusive and tolerant society. It is a sad form of sensationalism which will cause gross offence to believers of many faiths.” A spokesman for the Roman Catholic Church said: “One wonders whether the organisers would have been quite as willing to have the Koran defaced.”

### **Church faces closure after council bans ‘noisy’ hymns<sup>67</sup>**

Lambeth Council told a church in Kennington, South London, that they couldn’t amplify sound because the hymns were too loud. The Council said it was serving a noise abatement notice on the All Nations Centre in response to a complaint. The 600-strong congregation of the pentecostal church will now struggle to hear the music and the sermon. The Council introduced the restriction without warning in September 2009 and the decision has baffled church members.

The church say they have been meeting since the 1960s and noise has never been an issue before. They only began to notice opposition when news emerged of All Nations’ plans to turn a local disused school into a community centre. Victor Jibuike, an All Nations pastor, said: “The complaint against us has nothing to do with noise and everything to do with our faith,” adding, “It feels as if they’re trying to harass us and drive us out”.

### **Church silenced over Muslim neighbour’s noise complaint<sup>68</sup>**

A church in London has seen congregation numbers dwindle from 100 to 30 since the local council subjected it to noise restrictions following a complaint from a Muslim neighbour. In October 2009 Immanuel International Christian Centre lost a court appeal against the ban and is now only allowed to play music for 20 minutes on Sundays between 11.30am and 11.50am. Other neighbours say the noise is not a problem, but church leaders claim that a council

official told them “this is a Muslim borough, you have to tread carefully”.

The church spent £10,000 on sound reduction when it moved into its current premises in 2007. It received the OK from environmental officers and had no complaints until local resident Baha Uddin claimed that noise from the church prevented him from using his garden at weekends and disturbed his one-year-old daughter.

The church says a council environmental health enforcement officer informed the church pastor that “the church had to keep the noise down so as not to offend the Muslims living in the area”. Church premises are no longer hired out for events in case noise would aggravate Mr Uddin, a move which has cost the church additional revenue.

### **Council bans posters with words ‘God’ or ‘Christian’<sup>69</sup>**

Camden Council in North London told a Roman Catholic group that it could not advertise an event on religion and climate change unless it removed words like ‘Christian’ and ‘God’ from the text. The group, Our Lady Help of Christians in Kentish Town, wanted to put up posters for the event in local libraries. The posters advertised a talk entitled “Climate Change is a Christian Issue”, a visit from a member of the Christian Ecology Link and a performance by a local school choir. The request was rejected by the local libraries distribution service.

Camden Council said that while it was happy to promote events supporting green issues, it would not allow any posters promoting religion. Yet the Council provides inquirers with details of local mosques, Islamic study groups, and Muslim social groups.

### **Council bans phrase “singing from the same hymn sheet”<sup>70</sup>**

Staff at Salisbury Council were told not to use the phrase “singing from the same hymn sheet” when talking to people because the religious reference might offend atheists. The Council told staff, “Not everyone understands these phrases – some can actually cause offence (what would an atheist want with your hymn sheet?).”

The astonishing move was criticised as excessive political correctness, with even the head of the National Secular Society saying the Council had “gone far too far”.

The Dean of Southwark said the Council’s advice was “complete nonsense and yet another example of political correctness being dictated by someone who doesn’t understand religious faith”.

### **Oxford bans “Christmas” celebrations<sup>71</sup>**

Oxford council officials dropped “Christmas” from the title of the city centre’s 2008 celebrations. Instead of Christmas, the city celebrated the “Winter Light Festival”, decorating the historic city with a huge mobile of lanterns in the shape of the solar system to mark the start of International Year of Astronomy 2009. The idea was promoted by council-funded charity Oxford Inspires, which is responsible for culture in the city.

The charity made a concession that the two-month Winter Light Festival would include Christmas carol services but also had to accommodate Hindu Diwali and Jewish Hannukah festivals. The move was criticised by Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders who argued that Christmas should not be watered down. Local residents called for a return to tradition. Councillors distanced themselves from the decision, arguing that they were not “Christmas killers” and that the move was not intended to downgrade Christmas.

### **Council puts up Christmas lights in August to cater for all faiths<sup>72</sup>**

Residents of Milnrow, Lancashire, were surprised to see council workers installing Christmas lights in August 2009, 127 days before Christmas Day. Rochdale Borough Council said the lights would be used to celebrate a number of festivals, starting with the Muslim feast of Eid in September. Other ‘holy days’ over the period between August and Christmas include Hindu Diwali celebrations in October, the Jewish feast of Hanukkah in December and even Yule, the pagan celebration of the winter solstice.

The Council’s decision attracted derision from the national press and Milnrow residents. One local labelled the move “ludicrous” and said: “A worker told me they had to be up in time for all the religious festivals, but most of the lights refer to the Christian Christmas.”

### **Council backs Ramadan, but won’t do Christmas<sup>73</sup>**

Councillors in Tower Hamlets, East London, were asked not to eat or drink in town hall meetings during the Muslim month of Ramadan last year. But the same council renamed a staff Christmas party as a ‘festive lunch’. Special arrangements were also made to adjourn council meetings to allow for Muslim prayer.

The move has led to accusations that the local council is favouring one religion over others. One of the councillors, Stephanie Eaton, said she was “rather disconcerted” to see that the arrangements put in place for Ramadan, which she supports for Muslim colleagues, “have been imposed upon all councillors.” She added: “We object to the request that non-Muslim councillors observe the fasting rules for Ramadan. This sends out the wrong message to our community.”

## **Library refuses church craft fair poster<sup>74</sup>**

A Sunday School teacher was told she could not advertise a church children's event at her local library because it 'promotes religion'. Jacalyn Oghan's poster invited children of any faith to "come along and have fun" at the craft, singing and drama day at her church. But staff at Jubilee Library in Brighton banned the poster because of its religious content.

Mrs Oghan said: "Anyone in the community, of whatever faith, should be able to put up a poster in their local library so that people know what is going on." She added: "Many Christians in the community are already too frightened to speak up. I was made to feel as if my poster was somehow offensive or dangerous."

She said the decision was particularly galling because the library shop sells sweets which poke fun at the Christian message. The Messiah Mints have a picture of Jesus on the tin and the slogan: "Here's that Jesus fella again – and this time he's spreading minty freshness into the mouths of the masses." Mrs Oghan commented: "How they can get away selling the mints in the shop when I'm not allowed to give out inoffensive leaflets I do not know."

## **Council faces secularist challenge over prayers<sup>75</sup>**

An atheist town councillor in the North of England sparked a row by threatening legal action over Kendal Town Council's tradition of opening meetings with a prayer time. Green Party councillor and National Secular Society member Enda Farrell claimed that holding Christian prayers in the meeting room before proceedings could make some people feel excluded. He demanded that prayers be scrapped or held in a different room.

In October 2009 the Council voted to move the prayers to five minutes before the official start of their meetings. Mayor John Bateson said this meant that "councillors who don't wish to be there don't have to be". However, Councillor Farrell said he was "bitterly

disappointed” by the resolution, objecting that “there are going to be prayer groups in the chamber where the council meetings are going to be held.” He added: “I think that it is not good practice for other councillors to have to wait in the hallway waiting for the meeting to finish. I believe that if they want to pray they should do it on their way to the meeting or in a different room.”

Councillor Farrell has said he will explore legal challenges to the decision and would consider resigning as a councillor over the issue.

### **Wrong advice says council can be sued over prayers<sup>76</sup>**

In 2008 a town council in Devon was advised to stop opening its meetings with Christian prayers, because the practice could infringe race discrimination and human rights laws. Traditionally, Bideford Town Council has opened its meetings with short Christian prayers. The practice is followed by other town councils up and down the land. Parliament also follows the tradition.

Following a request by one councillor to end the custom, Bideford’s town clerk applied to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) for guidance. In its response, the NALC told the Council to consider discontinuing the tradition in case members of the public attending the meetings felt that the prayers were an infringement of their human right to practise any religion. However, a spokesman for the Equality and Human Rights Commission said the Human Rights Act had not been breached by the prayers.



# Public funding

For hundreds of years, Britain has benefited from faith-based social projects which serve the public. Christians pioneered hospitals, schools, orphanages and adoption work. The Christian values of charity, compassion and care lay at the heart of these ground breaking initiatives. Their success cannot be separated from the Christian ethos which fuelled them. But today, there is growing pressure to marginalise Christian groups which receive public funding. A number of projects in receipt of public funds have been pressurised to lay aside aspects of their religious ethos or risk losing Government finance. Government ministers have told Christian groups that they are welcome to apply for grants as long as they don't try to promote their faith. Christians pay taxes too and should have equal access to public funding for projects which benefit the public.

## **Christian elderly care home loses funding because of its religious ethos<sup>77</sup>**

Pilgrim Homes is a 200-year-old Christian charity set up by William Wilberforce and others which provides residential care for

elderly Christians, meeting their spiritual as well as physical needs. To maintain the religious ethos of the homes, all residents must be personally committed to the Protestant Christian faith. Pilgrim Homes runs ten homes in the UK, including one in Brighton. The Brighton home's current residents are all over 80 and include retired missionaries and a retired church minister. The home in Brighton receives a £13,000 annual grant from the local council to support the costs of a warden.

In 2007 Brighton Council demanded that Pilgrim Homes should question elderly residents every three months about their sexual orientation; use images of LGBT couples in its promotional literature; publicise LGBT events to elderly residents; and force staff to attend a Stonewall presentation on LGBT issues. Pilgrim Homes notified the Council that the home would not comply with its demands because to do so would unduly distress the elderly residents and undermine the home's religious ethos. The Council pulled the £13,000 grant and accused the home of "institutionalised homophobia" using the Macpherson definition of institutional discrimination. Despite attempts to resolve the matter over an 18-month period, Pilgrim Homes eventually felt they were left with no other option than to take legal action against the Council. Before the matter reached court, Brighton Council agreed to restore the funding and withdraw its demands and its accusation of institutionalised homophobia.

### **Faith groups can't do social work if they evangelise<sup>78</sup>**

In 2008 Hazel Blears, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, outlined Government plans to commission public services from faith-based groups in a White Paper entitled 'Communities in control – real people, real power'. However, during a Commons debate on the issue, Miss Blears said that this will come with strings attached. Although she recognised that faith

does motivate many people to do “great acts of social good” she also said that she was “concerned to ensure that if faith groups become involved, they do so on a proper footing – not by evangelising or proselytising, but by providing services in a non-discriminatory way to the whole community”. Miss Blears said that she planned to draft a charter for Christian groups. Many are concerned that this amounts to a gagging order, with the Government wanting to use the services provided by Christian organisations while preventing them from articulating their faith.

### **Christians facing funding bias<sup>79</sup>**

In September 2008, Archbishop of York Dr John Sentamu spoke at a Youth for Christ event about Government “intolerance” against Christian groups when it comes to funding community initiatives. He told the audience that faith is a key motivation for charitable and voluntary work in Britain, yet faith groups appear to be viewed as “tainted and unsuitable for receipt of funding” by public bodies.

Dr Sentamu said there are 22,000 religious charities helping people in England and Wales, while churchgoers contribute more than 23 million hours of voluntary service each year. Many are working with the elderly, children and the disabled. The Archbishop described Christians as working “at the coalface of pastoral care and social practice”. But he warned of “a chill wind that blows around grant makers and managers of funds” when considering faith groups. He said: “Rather, there should be a recognition of the valuable work being carried out by groups motivated to serve the common good by a belief in dignity of all of God’s creatures”.

### **Secular group calls on NHS to stop funding chaplains<sup>80</sup>**

In April 2009 the National Secular Society urged the Government to cease funding NHS chaplaincy services because they are religious. Earlier in the year the group supported the decision to suspend

NHS nurse Caroline Petrie, who offered to pray for a patient. The group calculates that £40 million is spent meeting the spiritual needs of patients. If the figure is accurate, it would mean that for every £10,000 the NHS spent in 2008, £4 was spent on chaplaincy services.

A Church of England spokesman said: “Spiritual healthcare has long been acknowledged, by both medical practitioners and the churches, to be an intrinsic part of caring for people in hospital. NHS Trusts pay for chaplaincies because they see them as part of their duty of care to patients, not because the churches force them to.”

### **Humanists call for faith funding cuts<sup>81</sup>**

Devon County Council came under criticism from humanists in July 2009 because they object to faith consultations. The Devon Humanists group claimed that religion is no longer important to most people and therefore public money should not be spent on consulting a “minority”.

Devon Humanists spokesman Keith Denby said: “The county council funds a body called Devon Faiths Forum and tries to use it to consult about religion and belief issues. Unfortunately, by its very name, it excludes all those in Devon who have no religious faith.”

### **Atheists paid to produce religion guidance<sup>82</sup>**

In March 2008 the anti-religious British Humanist Association (BHA) was given £35,000 by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to run a ‘religion or belief’ equality project. This has included seminars on religious tolerance with prominent atheists giving keynote speeches, and the publication of new equality guidance for employers. The guidance claims that Christians who evangelise at work could be breaking the law. It says attempts by

religious believers to proselytise “are highly likely to amount to harassment of their colleagues”. Legal experts have condemned the BHA’s claims as “nonsense”, and Christian groups have dubbed them “propaganda”.

### **Scottish Christians get crumbs from equality fund<sup>83</sup>**

In March 2009 it was revealed that Islamic organisations receive more public funding for ‘equality’ than all other religious groups put together in Scotland. Almost 60 per cent of all grants given out by the Scottish Equality Unit has gone to just five Muslim groups. The groups were awarded £1.5 million of public money, dwarfing the £137,500 given to Christian charities and the £110,000 given to Jewish organisations. Muslims make up less than one per cent of Scotland’s population but two thirds of Scots identify themselves as Christians. Organisations promoting equality between religions such as the Inter Faith Council and the Edinburgh Inter Faith Association received £586,160 and £219,800 respectively.

Critics are concerned about the imbalance of funding and fear it will antagonise other religious groups. Labour backbench MSP George Foulkes said: “I’ve had representatives from other faiths raise this and they are deeply concerned at the imbalance in the grant allocation.” He warned: “They say not only is it unfair but it’s dangerous.” Murdo Fraser MSP, Deputy Leader of the Scottish Conservatives, stated there was nothing wrong with giving grants to different religious groups but underlined that it had to be “proportionate”. Mr Fraser said: “It would be legitimate to ask why the Government is so focussed on giving such large sums to Muslim groups at the expense of other faith communities”.

### **Charity drops ‘church’ name to get public funding<sup>84</sup>**

In August 2009 it emerged that a charity in Scotland was planning to drop the word church from its title, saying that it creates

## **Marginalising Christians**

“unnecessary barriers” to accessing public funding. The chairman of Perth-based Churches Action for the Homeless (CATH) said he had been told “off the record” that their perceived religious identity made it more difficult for them to receive grants. Trustees asked the charity’s supporters to suggest a new “fully inclusive” name for the group.

## Goods and services

Laws which prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services are relatively new. Regulations which apply these laws to the ground of sexual orientation are even newer. Yet, there have already been a number of instances where the Sexual Orientation Regulations have clashed with religious rights. Roman Catholic adoption agencies that have a policy of placing children for joint adoption by married heterosexual couples have been hit hard. The Christian owners of a Cornish guesthouse are being sued because they have a long-established, well-advertised policy of allowing only married couples to stay in double rooms. Similar laws apply to religion and would allow a Muslim group to sue a Jewish printer who refused to print Muslim literature against the state of Israel. These laws assume that faith is a private matter and should not be allowed to influence how an individual or a group provides goods, facilities and services. Not only does this marginalise religion from the public sphere, but it has also resulted in some Christians being faced with an ultimatum: dump core elements of your faith or get out of the market place. Far from promoting harmony, these laws have polarised the situation by creating an incentive to litigate.

### **Stonewall wants tax hit for Earl over civil partnerships<sup>85</sup>**

The Earl of Devon, a Christian, did not wish to allow homosexual civil partnership ceremonies at his family home, Powderham Castle, which is one of the oldest family houses in England. The castle held a licence for hosting civil ceremonies with Devon County Council. After receiving a complaint from a gay couple who were refused their civil partnership ceremony at the castle, the Council described the Earl's stance as "discrimination" and said it had "no option but to revoke the licence for the castle". No civil marriage ceremonies, whether they involve gay couples or not, will now be allowed at the castle. The decision will cost the historic estate up to £200,000 a year in lost income.

But homosexual lobby group Stonewall also wanted the Earl to be penalised by the Treasury, calling for the Earl's castle to be slammed with a huge inheritance tax bill. The castle had an exemption from inheritance tax because it was open to the public but Stonewall claimed that Lord Devon's refusal to allow civil partnership ceremonies at the castle meant he should lose this exemption.

### **Roman Catholic adoption agencies<sup>86</sup>**

In 2007 the Government introduced the Sexual Orientation Regulations which outlaw discrimination against homosexuals in the provision of goods, facilities and services. Faith-based adoption agencies wanted an exemption to be included in the Regulations which would allow them to continue their longstanding policy of placing children with married couples in accordance with their religious ethos.

However, in January 2007 the Government announced there would be no such exemptions. Instead the Government said faith-based adoption agencies would have until the end of 2008 to change their practice or face the prospect of legal action. These agencies have

played a key role for many years in finding homes for hard-to-place children. Yet because the Regulations made no accommodation for religious beliefs on sexual ethics most have either ceased operating or cut ties with the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Government failing to support Christian charities<sup>87</sup>**

In June 2009 the Evangelical Alliance's Head of Public Affairs told Third Sector magazine that ministerial pledges of support for religious charities had so far come to nothing. In contrast to public pronouncements, Don Horrocks said that new measures such as the Equality Bill displayed prejudice towards Christian groups.

Mr Horrocks said he had seen no real evidence of Government support for faith-based charities, which it needs to help deliver services. Instead he pointed to the Equality Bill which "could potentially force Christian groups, by threat of legal action, to effectively have their faith identities emasculated so they are prevented from delivering their services in a Christian way".

### **Christian owners of guesthouse sued over double rooms policy<sup>88</sup>**

In 2009 the Christian owners of a Cornish guesthouse were sued by a homosexual couple because the establishment had a policy of allowing only married couples to book double rooms. Peter and Hazelmary Bull have had the policy since buying the business in 1986 and have applied it consistently to heterosexual and homosexual couples. It is a well-advertised policy.

When Steven Preddy booked a double room by telephone in September 2008, Mrs Bull assumed he would be staying with his wife. But when two men arrived, the guesthouse's manager said it could not accommodate them. Mr Preddy and his homosexual civil partner, Martyn Hall, said the manager was breaking the law and went away to inform the police even though it was a civil matter.

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The previous month the Bulls had received a letter from homosexual lobby group Stonewall claiming that their marriage policy was against the law. Mr Hall and Mr Preddy are now alleging direct discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and are each seeking up to £5,000 in damages.

# Conclusion

In the public square atheism is held out to be neutral, whilst Christians are told to keep their beliefs private and not to bring them into public life. They are being told to keep their Christianity at home or at church and never bring it to the workplace, the public street, the school, or the market place. There seems to be a preconception that Christianity ought to be treated as a private eccentricity, an optional extra. This fails to appreciate that genuine faith affects a person's entire life and cannot be turned on and off like a tap. As the Archbishop of York said, a Christian man can no more take off his faith than a black man can take off his skin.

Never have there been more 'equality and diversity' laws. Yet the marginalisation faced by Christians is increasing at an alarming rate. In many instances equality and diversity laws are actually being used as a sword to attack Christians rather than a shield to protect them.

In education, despite the historic influence of Christianity, there is an increasing undercurrent of intolerance in the system. This is evidenced by children being reprimanded for expressing their faith to classmates, punished for refusing to pray to Allah during an RE class, and forced to attend LGBT events against their will. Much of this is done in the name of equality. It is inconceivable that this

would happen to children of another faith group.

Christians are often victims of crime and violence, either directly because of their faith or indirectly because their faith-based social action places them in vulnerable situations. Some twelve per cent of clergy have suffered some form of violence. In several cases Christians have been brutally assaulted while their attackers shouted anti-Christian abuse. Scores of churches have been firebombed or vandalised, with 20 arson attacks reported in the press in a twelve month period beginning in May 2008. Many will be surprised at these statistics and wonder why there isn't more awareness of the problem. Perhaps it is because hatred against Christians is treated less seriously than it ought to be.

Clumsy and prejudiced stereotypes of Christians pervade the entertainment media. Dramas often depict Christians as objects of ridicule, or moral hypocrites, or cultish brain-washers. The freedom to criticise and mock beliefs must be allowed in a healthy democracy, but when the public is shown such a biased portrayal of Christians it fosters a culture of increasing intolerance, while the sensitivity shown by the media to other religious groups compounds this injustice.

In several worrying cases Christians have been detained by police officers for expressing their faith in a public place. This is often caused by a misapplication of public order laws and unbalanced guidance on 'hate incidents'. The situation has become so severe that a church worker in Manchester was challenged by five police officers and his literature was investigated by the Hate Crimes Unit because he handed out leaflets inviting members of the public to a church Easter service. It turned out that a complainant merely objected to the presence of evangelical Christians, but the knee-jerk reaction of the police is troubling. Christians are also frustrated when they perceive that other religious minorities are being treated more sensitively. They wonder why Christian street preachers are

being carted off into police vans for talking about sexual ethics, while officers stand by watching extremist Muslims hold up placards calling for their opponents to be beheaded. Police forces must do more to train their officers about laws that protect freedom of expression and religion.

In employment there has been a sharp rise in religious discrimination cases coming before employment tribunals. Polling data reveals that many Christians have been disciplined at work or turned down for promotion because of their faith. Although in theory the law protects Christians from harassment and discrimination in the workplace, these rights are often trumped by equality and diversity codes that have little regard for religious conscience. When Christians have been asked to perform new duties that conflict with their sincerely held religious beliefs, their objections are ignored. In some cases those very objections are treated as grounds for disciplinary action. This reveals a prejudiced attitude towards faith, one which assumes faith is a private thing that should be left at the factory gate or the office door.

Local authorities have displayed an astonishing level of intolerance against Christians. Several councils have inaccurately told Christian evangelists that they need a licence from the council to hand out free Christian literature to the public. Other councils have sought to stop street preachers lawfully expressing their faith in public places. Council-run services, like libraries, have refused to display church notices because of equality rules – even though those same councils advertise events by other religious and minority groups. Some over-sensitive councils have removed references to Christmas during festive celebrations.

Christian groups face huge barriers when trying to access public funds. One charity decided to remove the word “church” from its name because it was causing problems in applying for grants. The Archbishop of York has spoken about a “chill wind” which blows against Christian groups seeking public money. A care home for elderly Christians had

its funding withdrawn because it would not agree to quiz its residents about their sexual orientation every three months.

In the provision of goods and services Christians are being penalised for attempting to act in a manner that is consistent with their core religious beliefs. A Christian couple who run a guesthouse in Cornwall are being sued under equality laws because they have a well-advertised policy of allowing only married couples to book double rooms. Faith-based adoption agencies are faced with the choice of either closing down or abandoning their religious ethos – all because they say children should be placed with a married mother and father. A tolerant society ought to allow Christians to trade in the market place without forcing them to drop their faith to do so. Yet this is what is happening because goods and services equality laws do not take proper account of religious belief.

When it comes to applying equality and diversity laws, Christians seem to be the first to be punished and the last to be protected. This prejudice and intolerance must end.





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- <sup>82</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 2009; British Humanist Association, *Guidance on Equality of 'Religion or Belief'*, 2009, page 8; British Humanist Association, *Equality Project and Resources*, see <http://www.humanism.org.uk/campaigns/equalities/equalityproject> as at 1 December 2009
- <sup>83</sup> *The Sunday Post*, 8 March 2009
- <sup>84</sup> *The Courier*, 4 August 2009
- <sup>85</sup> *Express and Echo*, 30 May 2008; *BBC News Online*, 30 May 2008, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/7427585.stm> as at 3 June 2009
- <sup>86</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 January 2007; *The Observer*, 21 December 2008; *The Catholic Herald*, 28 November 2008
- <sup>87</sup> *Third Sector*, 22 June 2009

## **Marginalising Christians**

<sup>88</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 March 2009; *The Mail on Sunday*, 22 March 2009



# Marginalising Christians



Instances of Christians being sidelined in modern Britain

When 'diversity rules' are used to justify suspending a nurse who offered to pray for a patient's recovery, as happened to Caroline Petrie on 17 December 2008, something has gone very wrong in modern Britain. This report examines the growing marginalisation of Christians and catalogues cases of discrimination.

The growing sense of intolerance felt by Christians is made all the worse when they face hostility in the name of 'equality and diversity'. Christians wonder why they are not being treated equally and why diversity does not include them. They feel that a hierarchy of rights has sprung up which leaves them bottom of the pile. This has led to a growing feeling that 'equality and diversity' is code for marginalising Christian beliefs.



*"Faith isn't an optional extra or something like you put on, like a hat on Sundays, and take off for the rest of the week. It goes through you like writing on a stick of rock. It is reflected in what you are and what you do."*

**Attorney General, Baroness Scotland**, 8 June 2009



*"Those who display intolerance and ignorance, and would relegate the Christian faith to just another disposable lifestyle choice, argue that they operate in pursuit of policies based on the twin aims of 'diversity and equality'. Yet in the minds of those charged with implementing such policies, 'diversity' apparently means every colour and creed except Christianity."*

**Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu**, 13 February 2009



*"It's an agenda driven by the political-elite, who have hijacked the pursuit of 'equality' by demanding a dumbing down of faith. It's no wonder that this leads to accusations in the media that our country's Christian culture is being downgraded."*

**Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion, Baroness Warsi**, 5 October 2009

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