

The oppression of Christians in the West

A solemn warning

We need to wake up to what is going on in western society. There has been a huge transformation in the last 20 years. We now live in the Me First, My Rights society, which demands great respect for the rights of the individual. There are, of course, good aspects of this. People's rights should be respected, including those who have been oppressed in the past. But there are also serious dangers in it. *Someone who is demanding respect for their rights can fall into the error of undermining other people's rights.*

The area of sexuality is an important issue in the My Rights society. We are becoming a society where people can choose how they fulfil their sexual desires in much more radical ways than was the case some 20-30 years ago. People can be overtly homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, etc., and they demand to be fully accepted by society. In fact, regarding gender, some 30 different labels are currently in use.

However, there are significant dangers in all this. There have already been serious attacks on freedom of speech and freedom of religion for those with a traditional view of sexuality which includes many Christians. Ironically, some of those who were oppressed over their sexuality in the past have fallen into oppressing traditional Christians.

The whole issue of "hate speech" has come to the fore. In the My Rights society, disapproving of someone's sexual behaviour is seen as 'hating' that person. The old saying "Hate the sin, love the sinner" is still relevant to Christianity. We Christians should love all our neighbours, including our homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, transgender neighbours. If we don't, we are in serious error. But that does not mean we have to accept their sexual behaviour. It is quite possible to love someone whilst disapproving of their behaviour, as any good parent knows. But there are many pressures in today's society and in the church for Christians to accept a person's behaviour when it contradicts biblical teaching.

So, to affirm biblical teaching about gender, sexuality and marriage is threatened. Yet Scripture is God's Word and, therefore not optional to a truly committed Christian. Scripture teaches that sexual expression is for heterosexual couples in the context of marriage. Freedom to voice that, as well as freedom to disagree with it must be preserved. It is very clear that freedom to express biblical views of sexuality is under serious threat.

This concern isn't just over sexuality. It covers other religious belief. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the only Saviour. That means there is no eternal salvation in any other religion. To say that publicly nowadays could be deemed "hate speech" towards those of other religions. But it isn't (so long as it is communicated respectfully), as it is integral to the belief of traditional Christians. Other religions have the right to say that Jesus isn't the only Saviour or that there is no eternal salvation in Christianity. That right must be preserved in each religion.

A related danger is over Christians proclaiming God's judgment and Hell. The Bible, and Jesus in particular, clearly, teaches about judgment and Hell. Obviously, it needs to be conveyed sensitively, but a committed Christian would feel he or she is very serious failing other people if, at an appropriate time and in a sensitive way, they don't warn people about this grave danger.

So, there is a profound danger that the huge number of Christians who accept the Bible's teaching on many issues, including sexuality, Jesus being the only Saviour, judgment and Hell, etc., will face real oppression if they express those views. It has already started.

We need to see what is going on at the spiritual level:

- **The Me First/My Rights culture is alien to Christianity which is a God First/God's Word culture.**
- **The extreme definition of "Hate Speech" and its legal enforcement:**
 - **undermines the basic and crucial truth of Christianity that Jesus died for our sins and so we need to encourage one another to repent of them – calling sin "sin" – because we are all answerable to God for our sins.**
 - **undermines the basic, crucial truth Christians must proclaim, that Jesus is the only Saviour.**

What is really going on in our society is a serious undermining of traditional Christianity.

It is true that there have been some moves by politicians and courts against the oppression of Christians. But the dangers are still there.

- Present laws may give some protection to Christians. But governments can change the law when a majority support them, and an increasing number of people are supporting moving away from biblical standards on sexuality and marriage. A new 2022 British law has been seriously criticised as oppressive (not just by Christians).
- Some Christians may have been exonerated by courts for upholding biblical views. But others haven't. Not all court cases are won by Christians

We need to be on the alert.

One serious danger is that, sadly, the church is in the process of compromising over homosexual practice and transgenderism. This strengthens those secularists who are pressing for an end to free speech and freedom of religion over this matter. Also, to trust that there will always be a majority of politicians in favour of freedom of speech and religion over sexual and gender issues is very naïve.

The rest of this paper:

- **shows the distance society has moved away from freedom of speech and respecting Christianity;**
- **looks at the serious trends towards oppression of biblical Christianity in the West and examples of it happening;**
- **looks at action required to counteract such oppression.**

It includes information about threats to freedom of speech:

- **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022**
- **Non-crime hate incidents**
- **Scottish Hate-Crime Bill**
- **Northern Ireland Hate-Crime legislation**
- **The On-Line Safety Bill 2022**
- **Explicit oppression of Christians**
- **Illiberal liberalism (including in universities)**

The evidence

Threats to freedom of speech

These threats apply to all citizens, including Christians.

1. Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

This new act, passed in April 2022, is very controversial. It includes regulation of the type of protest deemed acceptable or unacceptable by the state. It gives the police and Home Secretary more powers. The Home Secretary is allowed to make regulations about this without reference to Parliament. It includes reference to what is seen as "hate speech," and allegations of "hate speech" have been made against numerous Christians who were only expressing biblical views. It criminalises "serious annoyance," which is likely to cause unfair and oppressive action against free speech. It gives the police increased powers to restrict peaceful procession, assembly, and protest, and this could include religious events, e.g. festivals.

There has been strong criticism of the new law. Two former chief constables (Michael Barton of Durham and Peter Fahy of Manchester) have said the law threatens civil liberties. Former Home Secretary, David Blunkett called it an "anti-protest bill" which could make Britain look like Vladimir Putin's Russia. Liberty (formerly the National Council for Civil Liberties) said it "threatens protest."

Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights said the proposals are "oppressive and wrong". The CEO of Amnesty International UK said it "is part of a hugely worrying and widespread attack on human rights from across Government which will not only see basic rights reduced across the board, but will also strip people of the means to challenge or contest their treatment."

Greenpeace called it “one of the most oppressive pieces of legislation tabled by a UK government since the second world war” and added “these new laws give the government unprecedented sweeping powers to restrict everyone’s right to join together for what they believe.”

We can expect that Christians, expressing traditional biblical views, will be penalised under this law and by how the police interpret it. Also, former Prime Minister and former Home Secretary, Theresa May commented: “It is tempting when home secretary to think that giving powers to the home secretary is very reasonable – because we all think we’re reasonable. But, actually, future home secretaries may not be so reasonable.”

Another very worrying event took place in 2020. The Law Commission published its views that the threshold for hate crimes to be committed should be lowered in England and Wales and ‘hate speech’ should be criminalised even in the privacy of people’s homes. The group argue that the ‘dwelling defence’ which historically has protected conversations in homes from police interference, should be dropped. So biblical Christian views on marriage and sexuality could be criminalised even if discussed in private conversation at home. After a public consultation, the Commission withdrew its recommendations. However, it is a cause of deep concern that they ever made such recommendations. Also, we cannot relax our guard because, the way things are going in society, it is not impossible that such recommendations could be repeated.

Sadly, we cannot rely upon the effectiveness of statements made by judgments on non-crime hate incidents. Back in 1999 Lord Justice Sedley dealt with a situation where Merseyside police launched a bill board which stated “Being offensive is an offence” as part of a campaign against anti-LGBT “hate crimes.” He said “Free speech includes not only the inoffensive but the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative provided it does not tend to provoke violence. Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having.”

2. Non-crime hate incidents

In 2014, the College of Policing, decided that if a person's actions are perceived as motivated wholly or partly by hostility, then the incident should be recorded as a non-crime hate incident. This must be put on record by the police, even though it is not a crime, and will be included on a Disclosure and Barring (DBS) Check required when a person applies for a job. This could hinder or prevent that person from getting a job, and yet their action is not illegal, nor has it been tested in court.

Non-crime hate incidents apply to perceived racism. But, as the West Yorkshire Police put it, also to: “a person’s religion or perceived religion, or any religious group including those who have no faith; a person’s sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation, or any person’s sexual orientation; a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender, including people who are transsexual, transgender, cross dressers and those who hold a Gender Recognition Certificate under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.” By early 2021 the police had logged 120,000 non-crime hate incidents.

There is a great deal of evidence that Christians respectfully expressing traditional biblical views could easily be regarded by individuals as committing a non-crime hate incident.

In December 2021, Dame Victoria Sharp, a High Court Judge ruled: “the recording of non-crime hate incidents is plainly an interference with freedom of expression and knowledge that such matters are being recorded and stored in a police database is likely to have a serious ‘chilling effect’ on public debate.” She continued: “The net for ‘non-crime hate speech’ is an exceptionally wide one which is designed to capture speech which is perceived to be motivated by hostility” whether or not there is any evidence “that the speech is motivated by such hostility.” She added that “there is no provision for proportionality to be applied” to recording an incident and no obligation to notify someone that a so-called hate incident has been recorded against them.”

However, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act April 2022 accepted the police approach to non-crime hate incidents and only adds that “the Secretary of State may issue a code of practice about the processing by a relevant person of personal data relating to a hate incident.”

The College of Policing issued new guidance in July 2022, saying: “Non-crime hate incidents should not be recorded where they are trivial, irrational, or if there is no basis to conclude that an incident was motivated by hostility. Individuals who are commenting in a legitimate debate – for example, on political or social issues –

should not be stigmatised because someone is offended.” They added that non-crime hate incidents are not disclosed on a basic or standard Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). But they “can be disclosed on an enhanced DBS check – which is limited to high-risk positions like teachers and carers.”

So, despite these improvements, non-crime hate incidents can still be recognised by police, based on the opinion of the police concerned. And they still can be recorded on the DBS Check of people in “high-risk positions like teachers and carers,” which would, of course, apply to a lot of Christians. The improvements do not shut the door on the dangers to freedom of speech of the concept of “non-crime hate incidents.”

The Telegraph reported a Home Office source as saying: “These so-called ‘non-crime hate incidents’ have a chilling effect on free speech and potentially stop people expressing views legally and legitimately. If people are found to have done nothing wrong the police shouldn't punish them.”

Harry Miller, a former-police officer, who campaigns to reform the College of Policing's hate incident guidance said "The government should ditch the recording of non-hate crime incidents as they are fundamentally wrong and remove the presumption of innocence." Toby Young, General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, said: 'Non-Crime Hate Incidents are an invention of the College of Policing, an unelected body. They have never been approved by Parliament, members of the public have no right of appeal against them. Indeed, a member of the public can have a Non-Crime Hate Incident recorded against their name without ever being informed of the fact.'

3. Scottish Hate-Crime Bill

In 2020 the Scottish Government drafted a Hate-Crime Bill and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland expressed its fears that the “low threshold” for offence could render the Bible “inflammatory”.

Ian Stewart, convener of Atheist Scotland, welcomed the Bill which would criminalise hate-speech against “atheists, agnostics, apostates, sceptics, non-believers, women, trans people and homosexuals.” He was not alone in thinking that the Bible conveyed hate-speech and said "We fully intend to monitor all Holy Books, sermons in places of worship and the social media accounts of the various religions and report any hatred to Police Scotland for criminal investigation."

Both Catholic and Evangelical leaders said the Bill could find those who disagree with gender being fluid accused of "stirring up hatred."

Humza Yousaf, Scottish Justice Secretary, said that campaigning on the above issues, which was deemed by a court to be ‘deliberately provocative’ would be classed as an offence.

Nicola Sturgeon’s law professor, Alistair Bonnington, has been disciplined by the Open University after he warned of the Scottish Hate Crime Bill’s impact on those who maintain that men cannot become women, saying it posed a risk to freedom of speech.

Eventually, an improved version of the Bill was passed in 2021, But despite strong criticism, it still included the provision that private conversations in the home could still be counted as criminal, if it was deemed to be hate speech. That means that if you have a neighbour over and happen to criticise unbiblical sexual or gender activity this could lead to police investigation.

The Scottish government says that "stirring up hatred" will only be considered an offence if it is intentional. But assessment that a comment is intentionally stirring up hatred is open to being subjective.

Whatever the improvements, it is profoundly disturbing that a Bill could be drafted which could have led to the Bible being seen as criminal in its teaching on sexual behaviour and gender.

4. Northern Ireland Hate-Crime legislation

Judge Desmond Marrinan was asked to review the protection of free speech protected by the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, which states “Any discussion or criticism of marriage which concerns the sex of the parties to marriage is not to be taken of itself to be – (A) threatening, abusive or insulting or (B) intended to stir up hatred or arouse fear.” He recommended removing that protection for those who disagree with same-sex marriage.

5. The On-Line Safety Bill 2022

Early in 2022 the UK Government published a draft On-Line Safety Bill seeking to protect people, including children, from harmful communications on social media. Ex-government Minister David Davis condemned it as “dangerous” and “authoritarian.” He said it “could be the biggest accidental curtailment of free speech in modern history.” He was very concerned about the government’s opposition to material which they described as “legal but harmful.” He was also concerned that the bill could be changed by the Secretary of State with little accountability to Parliament. The good news is that at the end of 2022 the government improved the bill. But it is a cause of real concern that the government could produce the original version.

6. Attacks on free speech in universities

It is disturbing that universities have been repressing free speech. Professor Dame Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University stressed “the need to preserve academic freedom and freedom of speech” and added “I have been shaken by the level of threat and harassment experienced in recent years by some of our academics, especially female academics, and especially via social media.” In 2020 Oxford professor Selina Todd received threats for challenging the narrative that transgenderism has been prevalent throughout history.

Nottingham University rejected a Roman Catholic priest for a chaplaincy role after he called abortion the 'slaughter of unborn children' and assisted suicide as 'killing the vulnerable' on Twitter. The University later reversed its decision.

Felix Ngole, social work student at the University of Sheffield, was summoned to a disciplinary hearing, because a classmate had reported him for expressing his support for one-man, one-woman marriage.

In a poll by market research company Survation found that:

- Almost 25% of students don't share their true opinions because they clash with those promoted by their university.
- 10% of students hide their political opinions in fear that they clash with their university's views.
- 50% of students feel their peers will treat them differently if they express their true views about some issues important to them.
- 44% of students fear that lecturers will treat them differently if they express their true opinions on important issues.
- 40% of students stated that views held by speakers, and pressure from other student groups, has led more frequently to cancellation of events.
- 38% of students feel their careers would be adversely affected if they express their views about some issues important to them.
- 36% of students feel their university, student union or peers would judge them if they expressed their true values and opinions.
- Almost 50% of male students feel their careers would be adversely affected if they express their views about some issues important to them.

John Gray, an atheist political philosopher and retired professor, criticised universities for this. He said that the “metamorphosis in liberalism that has occurred over the past generation has played a role.” He added that instead of being tolerant, “it has become a persecutory orthodoxy that tolerates no view of the world other than its own.”

The Government drafted the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill to protect freedom of speech at universities because a growing number of students, staff and academics have been silenced or not platformed. The Labour Party criticised it as “legal protection for hate speech.”

7. Explicit oppression of Christians

In 2018 a Christian doctor, David Mackereth, was forced to leave his job as a medical assessor for the Department for Work and Pensions because he refused to identify clients by their chosen gender, instead of their biological sex. A judge ruled that the doctor's belief in Genesis 1:27 (God created humans male and female) was 'incompatible with human dignity', 'unworthy of respect in a democratic society' and 'mere opinion.' He added that it was not worthy of protection under the Equality Act. Later an Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) has ruled that Biblical

beliefs that don't affirm transgenderism are protected under the Equality Act. However, Christians who express those beliefs in the workplace aren't protected against losing their jobs.

It is interesting that Baroness Falkner of Margravine, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said more recently that many would find the belief that biological sex is fixed “entirely reasonable.” She added: “Someone can believe that people who self-identify as a different sex are not the different sex that they self-identify.”

There is some good news. In 2020, Billy Graham’s son Franklin was banned from hiring arenas in Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, Sheffield, Milton Keynes, Newcastle and Newport from holding evangelistic meetings there. The reason was that LGBT groups said he should be banned for calling same-sex marriage a sin. However, courts have ruled that belief that marriage is between one man and one woman is “worthy of respect in a democratic society” and thus protected by equality and human rights laws. At the end of 2022 Glasgow’s Hydro Arena was ordered to pay almost £100,000 to Franklin for breaching the Equality Act over this.

However, it would be very unwise to think that this is an end to discrimination against Christians against this and certain other subjects. Politicians vary in their views and the government is not always clear in its approach. The pressure from the LGBT groups is still strong, as is Christian support for them in some cases.

For example, the former Evangelical Minister, Steve Chalke, warned churches against proclaiming traditional biblical sexual ethics. He said they risk prosecution. He said that such teaching “only contributes to the already high levels of mental health issues reported among people from the LGBT+ community.” He added that praying for people with unwanted same-sex attraction or gender confusion is “psychologically abusive.”

In 2015 the government commissioned the Casey Review which proposed that religious views should be required to be in line with the views of mainstream society. It stated: “Extremism ... is generally taken to mean the holding of an extreme view or taking an extreme action, usually associated with a political or religious ideology, which is at odds with the views of mainstream society.” It included “views around Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people that are at odds with mainstream modern British values and laws.”

Ben Bradshaw, the MP for Exeter said recently that the Church of England must embrace same-sex marriage or face mounting questions in parliament about its role as the established church of the country. He added that the church was “actively pursuing a campaign of discrimination” against lesbian and gay people that was incompatible with its role as a church for England. “Without change, I think we might see growing calls for disestablishment.”

In recent years there have been a large number of arrests of Christian street preachers for alleged hate speech, who have been exonerated by the courts

In December 2017, Lord Pearson asked the following question in the House of Lords: “My Lords, will the Government ... confirm unequivocally that a Christian who says that Jesus is the only Son of the one true God cannot be arrested for hate crime or any other offence, however much it may offend a Muslim or anyone of any other religion?” The government whip refused to comment.

In February 2017 a Crown Prosecution Service lawyer told Bristol magistrates court that publicly quoting from the King James Bible “in the context of modern British society, must be considered to be abusive and is a criminal matter.” He added “To say to someone that Jesus is the only God is not a matter of truth. To the extent that they are saying that the only way to God is through Jesus, that cannot be a truth.”

These comments are dangerous. However, in December 2022, Lord Stewart, speaking on behalf of the government in response to a question, said: “The Wessex Area of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has undertaken a post-case review and acknowledges that the statement was inappropriate.”

Prince Charles said at the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in July 2022 “The right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” He added that religious liberty protects communities from the threat of totalitarianism.

In April 2022, Fiona Bruce, the UK’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, told the House of Commons: “Respecting freedom of religion or belief is important because it is so closely connected to other human

rights, such as free speech, the right to assemble, the right to work and even the right to life itself. “When freedom of religion or belief is not respected by those in authority, all too often, other rights crumble, too.”

8. Illiberal liberalism

The agenda of many liberals is clear:

- a. They defend their views, some of which are contrary to biblical Christian values and beliefs.
- b. Then many campaign for the acceptance of humanist values and beliefs by community and political leaders as equally important to Christian values and beliefs.
- c. Then they ridicule and degrade Christian values and beliefs.
- d. Then they press for Christian values and beliefs to be made illegal.

This is clearly illiberal.

Recently, an open letter on illiberal liberalism was signed by more than 150 high-profile writers, public intellectuals, journalists and academics including JK Rowling, Noam Chomsky, Margaret Atwood and Salman Rushdie. It stated: “The free exchange of information and ideas, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted.” Robert Boyers, a literature professor at Skidmore College, commented that liberalism as he knew it in the past has “hardened into a warped authoritarian moral superiority movement.”

Broadcaster Piers Morgan commented: “Liberals have become utterly, pathetically illiberal. And it’s a massive problem ... What’s the point of calling yourself a liberal if you don’t allow anyone else to have a different view?”

Judge Mr Justice Robin Knowles commented recently: “Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having.”

9. Conclusion

All this evidence is certainly discouraging some Christians from speaking out because they don't want the upset of action being taken against them, even if that action is unsuccessful. The fact that it is not clear what amounts to hate speech, is discouraging Christian witness in important areas.

Whatever the current legal successes of some Christians, there is a strong, illiberal movement in society towards oppressing Christians, and who knows how the law will change in the future as a result of this, when we consider the radical changes in society in the last 25 years or so.