

Intolerant Secularisation

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Probably no concept has more currency in our politically-correct culture than the notion of tolerance. However, we are in danger in Great Britain of one of the noblest of virtues becoming so distorted that it ends up as a vice.

There's one word that can stop you in your tracks, get you suspended from work, dismissed at work, or side-lined, and that word is 'intolerant.'

In today's society, the tolerant person allegedly occupies neutral ground, a place of complete impartiality where each person is permitted to decide for himself - no judgments allowed, no 'forcing' of personal views.

That all views are equally valid is one of the most entrenched assumptions of a society committed to relativism. And it's a myth! It doesn't work. It leads to Equality and Diversity chaos.

For all their confident bluster, the relativists' appeal actually asserts two truths, one rational and one moral. The first is the rational 'truth' that there is no truth, a clear conflict. The second is the moral truth that one ought to tolerate everyone else's viewpoints.

This stand serves as a warning that the modern notion of tolerance is seriously misguided. True tolerance presupposes disagreement, whereas the new definition of tolerance does not, for this modern definition of tolerance turns the classical formula for tolerance on its head. It says:

Be egalitarian regarding ideas. Be elitist regarding persons.

If you reject another's ideas, you're automatically accused of disrespecting the person. On this new view of tolerance, no idea or behaviour can be opposed - even if done graciously - without inviting the charge of incivility.

To say I'm *intolerant* of the person because I disagree with his ideas is confused. It also leads to this notion that all ideas must be equally valid, but this clearly can't be right.

Ironically, this kind of tolerance results in *elitism* regarding other people. It leads to the sort of philosophy that says:

If I think my ideas are better than another's, I can be ill-treated as a person, publicly marginalized and verbally abused as bigoted, disrespectful, ignorant, indecent and intolerant.

Where it next leads is to the possibility of being sued, punished by law, or forced to attend re-education programs.

Tolerance has thus gone topsy-turvy: in other words, tolerate most beliefs, but don't tolerate (show respect for) those who take exception with those beliefs. Contrary opinions are labelled as 'imposing your view on others' and quickly silenced.

True tolerance involves three elements:

1. permitting or allowing
2. a conduct or point of view that one disagrees with
3. whilst respecting the person in the process.

This essential element of true tolerance - disagreement - has been completely lost in the modern distortion of the concept. Nowadays if you think someone is wrong, you're called intolerant no matter how you treat him. The shift has led to a radical alteration in the moral basis of Western Society and civilisation.

This redefining of the notion of tolerance has been led by the secularists and post-modernists and is fundamentally intolerant of Christianity and of moral values derived from the Bible. Hard secularism may be distinct in the way that it presents itself versus soft secularism. However, the out-workings of both strands of the ideology lead to intolerance.

Soft secularism uses language calling for religious impartiality of the state and civil society. But the presupposition is that secularism is neutral and truly tolerant and what should hold the public ring.

In many countries, including our own, governments have bought into this philosophy and where they once might have viewed Christianity as a beneficial and cohesive factor in society, they increasingly see it as potentially harmful and something that should be kept out of the public square.

Medicine and science

As society becomes increasingly secular, it is considered irrational, even intellectually suicidal, to refer to the spiritual and supernatural as a means of explaining the world and humanity's place in it. Science and technology have become the dominant tools for exploring and explaining the universe. Many people even believe that science is competent to pronounce authoritatively on questions of philosophy and morality, the meaning of life and ultimate origins.

Scientific materialism, often advocated by the secularists as neutral, is a philosophy that denies the reality of anything that cannot be verified or falsified by observation. (distinct from science itself which make no such claim).

Thus humans are conceived in such a philosophy as mere matter controlling their own life and destiny. The implications of this are now being evidenced in moral issues including sexual ethics, abortion and assisted dying.

'If all I amount to is a collection of atoms, then I can do what I want with my body'.

The role of the media

Much of British media portrays Christianity in a negative light. Christians are often depicted as narrow-minded, ignorant and bigoted. Christianity, Christians and Christian beliefs are scorned, ridiculed and mocked and Christian morality is attacked, with Christians being denigrated as 'fundamentalists' and thus as a danger that needs to be countered. Prejudicial stereotypes, offensive language and unpleasant representations of God, Christ and biblical characters are offered to the public.

Such disinformation and ridicule creates mistrust and paves the way for outright discrimination. Consequently, we see the removal of Christianity to the margins of society and *the gradual removal of Christian symbols from public places and institutions*. In Britain various councils have banned Christmas on the ground that it might be offensive to people of other faiths.

The case of nurse Shirley Chaplin, April 2010

Shirley Chaplin was faced with disciplinary action after being told that she was no longer permitted to wear her cross while at work. The Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust indicated that they would permit exemptions in their uniform policy for religious and cultural symbols that were 'mandatory' within the religion. However, they claimed that the Cross did not qualify under this exemption, whereas the hijab *did* qualify (even though wearing a hijab is not compulsory in Islam).

The NHS Trust suggested that the cross and chain would cause harm to Shirley Chaplin or to a patient if it was pulled by the patient. Shirley Chaplin offered to wear a chain with a magnetic clasp so that if the necklace was pulled it would fall away. The Trust stated that the cross could not be worn because it might scratch somebody.

Shirley Chaplin had worn her cross for 38 years in front line nursing without mishap. She took the Trust to an employment tribunal but did not win. Nor is hers an isolated case. We are currently dealing with another nurse, Anne O'Doherty, similarly required by her employers to remove her cross for health and safety risks, even though such risks so far remain unidentified. The Christian Legal Centre is supporting Ms O'Doherty's attempt to resolve the issue without having to hide her faith.

We are also currently dealing with a Council worker threatened with disciplinary action for displaying cross in his car at work, having done so for the last 15 years. At Wandsworth Council a learning support officer was ordered to take down her Christian calendar. We see local Councils being challenged for opening their meetings with a Christian prayer. We have staff prayers groups in hospitals not allowed to us hospital rooms but having to go off premises. In schools we see Christian ideas and symbols being systematically eroded. The secular education establishment opposes the dissemination of any value or belief remotely linked to the bible while promoting non-Christian values in sex education.

At some universities in the UK, Christian Unions are being restricted or not allowed to meet on campus because they do not accept non-Christians as members.

In 2007 Exeter University suspended the 50-year-old Christian Union from the Campus and froze its bank account. The CU was also banned from the free use of students' guild premises and from advertising events within Guild facilities. There followed a claim by the Guild that the CU constitution and activities did not conform to its Equal Opportunities standards.

Following the threat of high court action and detailed negotiations, the CU was relisted on the Guild's official list of societies, its bank account was reactivated and its right to require all officers and members to sign a statement of belief was recognised.

Hard Secularism and post-modernism have succeeded in weakening the influence of Christianity in the UK and in reducing the space given to it in the public square.

In theory these philosophies are no more sympathetic to Islam, especially in its most political and radical forms. But in practice, Islam has not been affected in the same way, perhaps because of the widespread desire to protect and promote the interests of religious minorities or because of the latent fear of an Islamist backlash against any attempt to restrict Islamic practice.

The current legal framework

In response to secularist, post-modernist ideology, a range of laws have been passed in the last decade whose stated purpose is to promote tolerance and fight discrimination but whose effect has in fact been to become a weapon of attack on Christianity.

I will now list key pieces of legislation:

Human Rights Act 1998

Introduced into the UK, the fundamental rights and freedoms contained in the European Convention on Human Rights include the right to life, liberty, respect for private and family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right not to be discriminated against in respect of these rights and freedoms.

Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999

These seek to prevent discrimination relating to gender reassignment. This clarifies the law for transgendered people regarding marriage, equal pay and treatment in employment and training.

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Protects against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment, vocational training, working conditions

Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

Protects against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment, vocational training, promotion and working conditions.

Gender Recognition Act 2004

Provides transsexual people with legal recognition in their acquired gender. Legal recognition follows from the issue of a full gender recognition certificate by a gender recognition panel.

Civil Partnerships Act 2004

Provides legal recognition and parity of treatment for same sex couples in a civil partnership, rights to foster/adopt (Adoption Act)/employment benefits and pension rights

Equality Act 2006 establishes the Commission for Equality and Human Rights

Equality Act 2010 brings together all existing anti-discrimination legislation.

But where has all of this led? One of the effects has been a *religious bar to office*. When the Islington registrars, Lillian Ladele and Theresa Davis refused to conduct same sex civil partnerships because of their conscientious objection they lost their positions.

Lord Neuberger, Master of the Rolls, the second most senior judge in England and Wales, ruled in the case of Lillian Ladele that *'the prohibition of discrimination by the 2007 Regulations takes precedence over any right which a person would otherwise have by virtue of his or her religious belief or faith, to practise discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation'*

This same reasoning applied to Gary McFarlane, the Relate Counsellor who, whilst training in psychosexual counselling, said he would have difficulty in conscience offering sex therapy to a homosexual couple.

Incredible and alarming statements about religious beliefs were made by Lord Justice Laws in his judgment given on 29th April 2010 as follows:

End of the judgment:

23. The general law may of course protect a particular social or moral position which is espoused by Christianity, not because of its religious imprimatur, but on the footing that in reason its merits commend themselves. So it is with core provisions of the criminal law: the prohibition of violence and dishonesty. The Judaeo-Christian tradition, stretching over many centuries, has no doubt exerted a profound influence upon the judgment of lawmakers as to the objective merits of this or that social policy. And the liturgy and practice of the established Church are to some extent prescribed by law. But the conferment of any legal protection or preference upon a particular substantive moral position on the ground only that it is espoused by the adherents of a particular faith, however long its tradition, however rich its culture, is

deeply unprincipled. It imposes compulsory law, not to advance the general good on objective grounds, but to give effect to the force of subjective opinion. This must be so, since in the eye of everyone save the believer religious faith is necessarily subjective, being incommunicable by any kind of proof or evidence. It may of course be true; but the ascertainment of such a truth lies beyond the means by which laws are made in a reasonable society. Therefore it lies only in the heart of the believer, who is alone bound by it. No one else is or can be so bound, unless by his own free choice he accepts its claims.

24. The promulgation of law for the protection of a position held purely on religious grounds cannot therefore be justified. It is irrational, as preferring the subjective over the objective. But it is also divisive, capricious and arbitrary. We do not live in a society where all the people share uniform religious beliefs. The precepts of any one religion – any belief system – cannot, by force of their religious origins, sound any louder in the general law than the precepts of any other. If they did, those out in the cold would be less than citizens; and our constitution would be on the way to a theocracy, which is of necessity autocratic. The law of a theocracy is dictated without option to the people, not made by their judges and governments. The individual conscience is free to accept such dictated law; but the State, if its people are to be free, has the burdensome duty of thinking for itself.

25. So it is that the law must firmly safeguard the right to hold and express religious belief; equally firmly, it must eschew any protection of such a belief's content in the name only of its religious credentials. Both principles are necessary conditions of a free and rational regime.

The case of Matthews v Northamptonshire County Council. July 2009 - present

Dr Sheila Matthews was removed from the position of medical adviser on an adoption panel because she refused to recommend the placement of children with homosexual couples. She had asked to abstain from voting on the very rare occasions when homosexual couples wanted to adopt children. As a Christian she believes that it is not in the best interests of the child to be placed with a same-sex couple. However, Northamptonshire County Council decided to remove her from her position.

Dr Dean Byrd, who is giving evidence in her case, comes with formidable qualifications. He is the President of the Thrasher Research Fund and Clinical Professor of Medicine, University of Utah School of Medicine with appointments in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine and in the Department of Psychiatry. In addition, He also holds an adjunct appointment in the Department of Family Studies and has served on the executive of an adoption agency. He is Vice President and standing psychologist to NARTH; the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, the foremost research body in the United States, on the subject matter of medical and societal study of homosexuality.

The evidence he has put before the Court is as follows: Research supporting the importance of dual gender parenting and child-rearing is extensive and clear in its singular conclusion: all variables considered, children are best served when reared

in a home with a married mother and father.¹ Mothers and fathers contribute in gender specific and in gender-complementary ways to the healthy development of children. Children reap unique developmental benefits when reared in a home with a married, reasonably harmonious union of their own biological mother and father. A Child Trends research brief provided the following scholarly summary: Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage... There is thus value for children in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents.²

Despite the level of research and conclusions this is ignored in our Courts. Currently, Dr Byrd's evidence is also being submitted to the High Court in the case of Eunice and Owen Johns. In a landmark case, the High Court is to be asked to rule on whether experienced Christians are 'fit people' to adopt or foster children – or whether they will be excluded from doing so due to the recognition of homosexual rights - regardless of the needs of the child.

Derby City Council and Eunice and Owen Johns' legal team have taken the unusual step of asking the Court to interpret the Sexual Orientation Regulations and the Equality Act because of a long-standing dispute the Council has with the Johns, who are both highly experienced foster carers, but whose traditional Christian views have left them penalized under legislation enacted by the former Government in the name of equality. However, this 'equality' in fact privileges homosexual rights over those of others.

As I outlined earlier, domestic and European law protects an individual's right to hold and manifest (with a few caveats) religious beliefs. However, we are witnessing an increasing number of cases where Christians who express their faith in some other way are being threatened with disciplinary action, suspended, and even sacked for their actions.

Caroline Petrie, a nurse from Weston-Super-Mare, was suspended without pay in 2009 for asking a patient whether she would like to be prayed for. Following intervention by the CLC and widespread media coverage, Mrs Petrie was reinstated.

Olive Jones was dismissed on the spot from her role as a supply teacher for giving her testimony and offering to pray for a child and her family.

In 2009, Duke Amachree, a homelessness prevention officer for Wandsworth Council, was dismissed for gross misconduct after suggesting to a client who was suffering from an incurable illness that doctors did not have all the answers and for asking her whether she had tried putting her faith in God.

Duke, Olive and Caroline all believed that addressing the spiritual needs of their patients would make a real difference. Thankfully, their views, though not respected culturally, are in line with those of General Medical Council when it published its

¹ Popenoe, D. 1996. *Life without father*. New York: Mark Kessler Books, The Free Press, p 176.

² Moore, K.A. et al. (2002). Marriage from a child's perspective: How does family structure affect children and what can we do about it? *Child Trends Research Brief* (Washington D.C.: Child Trends)(June)

definitive guidance on Personal Beliefs and Medical Practice March. The final guidance incorporated the important recognition that 'All doctors have personal beliefs which affect their day-to-day practice' and that it is not just those with religious faith who bring presuppositions, values and worldviews to every consultation.

The GMC welcomed the recognition that patients' beliefs should be acknowledged, and that they 'may be an important aspect of a holistic approach to their care'. Further, it acknowledged a growing evidence base reviewed in the British Medical Journal that faith helps health. Two important books published in the past decade have considered the relationship between faith and health: *Realized Religion - Research on the Relationship between Religion and Health*, by Theodore J. Chamberlain & Christopher A. Hall, and *The Handbook of Religion and Health*, by Koenig, McCullough and Larson

The Handbook of Religion and Health (over 700 pages) is a review and discussion of research that has examined the relationships between religion and a variety of mental and physical conditions; it covers the whole of medicine and is based on 1,200 research studies and 400 reviews. The two biggest sections of the book, each with ten chapters, are 'Research on religion and mental health' and 'Research on religion and physical disorders'.

The section on research and mental health discusses: religion and well-being, depression, suicide, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and other psychoses, alcohol and drug use, delinquency, marital instability, personality, and a summarising chapter on understanding religion's effects on mental health.

The authors are extremely cautious in drawing conclusions but the results are overwhelming, and if the factor being studied were smoking or stem cell research, then the media would have taken them up as front-page news. To quote from the book:

In the majority of studies, religious involvement is correlated with:

- Well-being, happiness and life satisfaction
- Hope and optimism
- Purpose and meaning in life
- Higher self-esteem
- Adaptation to bereavement
- Greater social support and less loneliness
- Lower rates of depression and faster recovery from depression
- Lower rates of suicide and fewer positive attitudes towards suicide
- Less anxiety
- Less psychosis and fewer psychotic tendencies
- Lower rates of alcohol and drug use and abuse
- Less delinquency and criminal activity
- Greater marital stability and satisfaction

The authors concluded that, for the vast majority of people, the apparent benefit of devout religious belief and practice probably outweigh the risks.

Correlations between religious belief and greater well-being 'typically equal or exceed correlations between well-being and other psychosocial variables, such as social support'. This is a massive assertion, comprehensively attested to by a large volume of evidence.

In Brown's studies on the social origins of depression, various types of social support were the most powerful protective factors against depression and the research showed that religious belief was at least as protective.

Factors correlating religious belief and practice with better health outcomes (measured and assessed epidemiologically) are evidenced by:

- 80% or more of the studies reporting an association between religious involvement and greater hope or optimism about the future
- 15 out of 16 studies reporting a statistically significant association between greater religious involvement and a greater sense of purpose or meaning in life
- 19 out of 20 studies reported at least one statistically significant relationship between a religious variable and greater social support.

Of 93 cross-sectional or prospective studies of the relationship between religious involvement and depression, 60 (65%) reported a significant positive relationship between a measure of religious involvement and lower rates of depression; 13 studies reported no association; four reported greater depression among the more religious; and 16 studies gave mixed findings.

Religious belief proved beneficial in more than 80% of studies. This is despite few of these studies having been initially designed to examine the effect of religious involvement on health.

The authors developed a model for how and why religious belief and practice might influence mental health. They concluded there were direct beneficial effects upon mental health, such as better cognitive appraisal and coping behaviour in response to stressful life experiences. They also acknowledged indirect effects, such as developmental factors and even genetic and biological factors.

It seems to me to be extraordinary that with this level of medical research, our governing authorities treat Caroline's offer of prayer, or Olive and Duke's acts of compassion as somehow dangerous.

In conclusion:

True tolerance exists in understanding that we can agree to disagree. Secularism and post modernism don't tolerate, they dictate - they tell you what to believe and eliminate, discriminate or marginalise those who deviate from the norm. It is undemocratic, dangerous and deadening. Society needs diversity, freedom and ideas.

As a Christian, I personally believe that societies built on the Christian foundations are the most tolerant, just and forgiving that we, as broken people, can create. I also believe that Christian ideas are good ideas that work best for the whole of society and for the well-being of individuals as evidenced by the research I have quoted.

As we abandon Christian principles and are guided by a secular majority the concern is we are left with mob rule, where the mob inevitably drifts into a controlling orthodoxy and eventually a state backed ideology which fails and deadens its people.

For me, true spirituality found in the hope of Jesus Christ is what brings life and hope as opposed to death and oppression - good news for individuals, good news for communities and good news for societies.

Only with the God who is the unchangeable source of life in all its fullness can we recognise life as more 'real' than death, as triumphing over death. Only through recognising Him can we have a solid basis for embracing life and being a culture of life; rather than embracing death and the culture of death. Only as we recognise the God who promises life and triumphs over death do we have a basis for helping individuals to discover true meaning and purpose in life, and for whole communities to discover hope and meaningful, co-operative endeavour, achieving great ends and creativity. Only as we recognise the God who distinguishes right from wrong, from the vantage point of infinite and perfect knowledge and wisdom, do we have a basis for personal morality and for a framework of justice that provides appropriate boundaries and allows the many to flourish, not at the expense of the individual but hand in hand with the individual. Only as we recognise the God who offers forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration do we have a basis for lasting healing for individuals - but also for whole communities and society. Only as we recognise the God who offers life and restoration at the cost of His only Son and who is generous and merciful beyond measure do we have a basis for freeing people from the captivity of isolation, self-provision, greed and anxiety, and of providing motivation and power to serve others sacrificially, putting the needs of others ahead of our own - a vital ingredient for a healthy society.